

The Impact of the Lilly-funded Research on Catholic Campuses

by Alice Gallin

Trying to estimate the impact of Lilly Endowment funding on Catholic college and university campuses over the last decade is like trying to pin down the descendants generated by the proverbial mustard seed. From an initial impulse of the Endowment to fund projects on religion and higher education have come many scholarly articles, books, seminars and reports on the nature of church-related identity and what can be done to maintain it in the 21st century. In concentric circles we see the impact on individuals, on institutions, and on the relationships between the colleges and the churches that founded them. The awards totaled 15.6 million dollars to 45 projects. (See the study done by Kathleen A. Mahoney, John Schmalzbauer, and James Youniss, [*Revitalizing Religion in the Academy*](#)). In addition, one can credit Lilly's initiatives for encouraging some proposals made by scholars to other foundations for further assistance in doing research and sponsoring conferences on church-related education, e.g. the funding by the Olin Foundation for the Conference on “The Future of Religious Colleges,” held October 6-7, 2000 under the auspices of Harvard University.

The timing of these awards coincided with a discussion within Catholic higher education generated by a papal document entitled [*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*](#). In that letter, Pope John Paul II called Catholic Universities to a renewal of their mission which he defined as mediating faith to cultures. The question that remained was “How to be a Catholic university in the multi-cultured world of today?” What, in fact, did it mean to be a Catholic college or university? Scholars were needed who would explore this issue, but it was not the kind of research that received support from government agencies nor from most private foundations. They were able to turn to the Lilly Endowment's program on Religion and Higher Education for grants on three levels: 1) individual scholars in history, philosophy and theology who wanted to do research in this area; 2) institutions that wished to educate new faculty to the heritage and

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traditions of the founding religious communities; and 3) creative efforts to communicate the Catholic intellectual tradition to a new generation of students and/or to promote a philosophy of student affairs based on a religious understanding of the values needed by women and men in contemporary society.

The list of publications funded are listed in [Revitalizing Religion in the Academy](#). They suggest concentric circles of study. Beginning with histories of the Catholic colleges such as those provided by Philip Gleason ([Contending with Modernity](#)) and Alice Gallin, ([Negotiating Identity](#)), we move to the specific elements of the current spectrum of “Catholic” characteristics as explored by many authors in dealing with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* such as David O’Brian’s *From the Heart of the American Church*,¹ William Shea, [Trying Times](#), and [Catholic Women’s Colleges in America](#) edited by Tracy Schier and Cynthia Russet, and then move from their work to a multiplicity of seminars and assemblies designed for faculty, administrators, and trustees. The materials produced by the funded researchers is constantly being used by those who design such programs. To implement some of the proposals for enhancing the Catholic identity two particular summer programs, [Collegium](#) and [Institute for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges](#), have been presented over the past five years.

The results of these publications and seminars are obvious to those who visit campuses where they have been initiated. In the last ten years the questions related to Catholic identity of colleges and universities have become matter for acceptable discourse on campus. Being sponsored by the Lilly Endowment has given such concerns an aura of respectability that was lacking previously. Also, the utilization of materials produced by scholars in institutions of other traditions than Catholic has enabled the discussion to avoid parochialism. The work by Richard Hughes, [Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-first Century](#), although basically intended for Protestant institutions, awakened creative ideas among faculty in Catholic circles while the inclusion of representatives of Catholic universities in the [Lilly Fellows program](#) at Valparaiso and in the “getting acquainted” conferences at

¹ David J. O’Brian, *From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

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Pepperdine University identified areas of common concern among all church-related colleges.

Another benefit has been the inter-disciplinary nature of the gatherings. Earlier attempts to interest faculty in inter-disciplinary work were often thwarted because budget lines were drawn within departments and political arguments often erupted over faculty teaching loads. With grant money, some institutions have been able to develop consortia with other church-related colleges thereby widening the base of participation and possibly identifying more faculty with inter-disciplinary interests. Books such as Tom Landy's *As Leaven in the World*² and *Enhancing Religious Identity*³ edited by John Wilcox and Irene King show some new ways of focusing attention on the Catholic character of colleges and universities. They highlight the role of lay men and women who are more and more the responsible agents for carrying out the institution's mission and thus the persons most in need of education in its history and heritage.

In the last ten years an impressive number of colleges have begun Catholic Studies programs. Faulted by some critics as simply an admission that the curriculum itself has little reference to the Catholic intellectual tradition, they nevertheless are moving in a good direction. At a meeting at the University of St. Thomas (MN), colleges in the forefront of efforts to introduce programs in Catholic Studies in 1997 shared the way in which faculty and students could be involved. Curriculum changes and liturgical life at places like John Carroll University, University of Dayton, College of the Holy Cross show the influence of Lilly grants in the establishment of such programs. Lilly grants to consortia, such as that to Rivier, St. Mary of the Woods, Incarnate Word, Episcopalian St. Paul's, and the Christian Reformed Dordt College have enabled smaller institutions to join forces in studying certain aspects of their curriculum. In this case the focus was on the role of service within curriculum and religious mission at church-related institutions.

2 Thomas M. Landy, ed. *As Leaven in the World: Catholic perspectives on faith, vocation and the intellectual life* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2001).

3 John R. Wilcox and Irene H. King, eds. *Enhancing Religious Identity: Best Practices from Catholic Campuses* (Baltimore, MD: Georgetown University Press, 2000).

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From these various Catholic Studies programs have come new publications; of particular note are *Prism* (John Carroll University), and *Logos* and *Perspectives* (University of St. Thomas). In these publications as well as in the journal of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* and in its Newsletter, *Update*, there is a wealth of information about activities connected with Catholic Identity. While not all of them are funded by the Lilly Endowment, the widespread dissemination of materials developed by authors and programs that were funded by Lilly is one more concentric circle of influence.

A major factor, however, in designing programs of Catholic studies is the need to consider that a number of students come to campus with little or no earlier exposure to the history of Catholicism nor familial experience of living as active members of the church. In addition, many students come from other Christian denominations, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism and while they may be curious about the Catholic heritage of the college they have no experience of it. A new work by Conrad Cherry [*Religion on Campus*](#) sheds a great deal of light on the religious commitments or lack thereof among both students and faculty. Added to that is the enormous cultural diversity that exists in faculties as a result of hiring policies in the last thirty years. The work done by Stephen Haynes, *Professing in the Postmodern Academy*,⁴ testifies to the divergent worldviews of faculty members on Catholic as well as non-Catholic campuses. While this can be a rich resource for conversations on questions at the root of significant personal and communal decisions, it can also make the development of a clear and strong mission for the institution next to impossible.

A balance is needed between the desire to be “inculturated” in American life and the equally strong desire to remain identifiably “Catholic.” This is not something that can be settled once and for all; it will remain a tension that must be recognized by all who engage in the conversation. When an institution assesses itself, its strengths and weaknesses, its integrity and its

⁴ Stephen Haynes, *Professing in the Postmodern Academy: Faculty and the Future of the Church-Related College* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2002).

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vision, the perspective of Christian faith must be considered Catholic colleges and universities cannot honestly present themselves as distinctive in their admissions office materials unless they can articulate the ways in which that distinctive character is manifested in the curriculum and in the culture of the campus. Authenticity is extremely important in a world where experience counts for so much. The dialogue between faith and cultures, recommended so highly by John Paul II, presupposes accurate information about the religious traditions engaging in the conversation. Unearthing and presenting that is the work of scholars. In addition, the commitment to each tradition must be evident in the positions argued by the participants while at the same time genuine respect for the others will be the context for discussion. It seems to me that there has been great progress in this regard.

One of the things that need further study is the extent to which the institution itself is willing to support the efforts begun with the help of the Lilly Endowment. Seed money is not intended to become perpetual endowment and the need for matching grants or, at least, for promise of continuity after the grant has been exhausted is very important. Naming priorities and/or publishing strategic plans that place emphasis on the Catholic heritage of the institution should go hand in hand with reordered budget allocations. Are we sincere in naming our priorities? Catholic colleges have already experienced something of this problem in the work for Peace and Justice programs. The institution favors them but does little to support them and they remain marginal to the curriculum unless there is some ownership of them by significant faculty members who are willing to spearhead experimental courses before institutional funding is awarded. Perhaps the broader character of “Catholic Studies” will lend itself more effectively to achieving administrative support when budget time comes around.

As with all investments, the funding provided by the Lilly Endowment in support of Religion in Higher Education will bear fruit in the future in ways not yet evident to us. In my opinion, the seeds have been planted, are being nourished and watered, and continue to need faculty and institutional commitment.