



We Were, Are, and Will Be: Catholic

With the announcement this week that the Brothers of Christian Instruction have successfully completed their mission in North Canton, Ohio, one might be wondering, will Walsh remain a Catholic institution without the Founders?

The spirit of the Brothers has been infused into the fabric of our culture. Brother Farrell, our first President, called for the Brothers “to plant and nurture the seed for future greatness of Walsh College.” Separating the stalks from the seeds is just not possible ... this is the truth of nature. But what of this question, this technical question, of retaining the ability to call ourselves, “Catholic?” We shall examine this question, firstly, by considering how the Catholic Church historically governs and then, secondarily, the unique American experience in the Catholic higher education domain. Bringing these together, we will better understand how Walsh University will remain Catholic without our founding sponsors directly participating in our mission.

Governance

Since the founding of the Catholic Church by Jesus Christ, it has been administrative praxis to record and share procedures as the faith spread, and since the earliest of days these measures were called, canons. On July 21, 429, Pope Celestine references in a letter to the Bishops of Apulia and Calabria, that “no priest can be ignorant of the canons.” It wasn’t until the mid-12th Century that a Catholic monk, Gratian, began to amass the collections of edicts that had emanated from the various ecumenical and papal councils and decrees. Another six centuries passed before the Church Fathers, in preparing for First Vatican Council, recognized the need for a single collection of laws. Eventually, St Pope Pius X focused his pontificate on this enormous effort and first-ever Code of Canon Law for the Latin, or Western, Church took effect in May 1918.

In the wake of Second Vatican Council, the Code of Canon Law for the Western Church was revisited and eventually revised by St Pope John Paul II in 1983. Further, in fulfilling the vision of the Church Fathers at Second Vatican Council, in 1990 St Pope John Paul also promulgated a separate, but parallel, first-ever Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches that governs the Eastern Catholic churches. The current Code of Canon Law is organized into seven books, with Book III focusing on the role of education in the Church. Fully recognized in international and civil law, the right to freedom in education is well established. The Catholic Church, in particular, views education as necessary “for its divine mission of helping all to arrive at the fullness of Christian life.” Canons 807-814 address Catholic higher education directly. In particular, Canon 808 tells us that a university may not bear the name “Catholic” in its title without approval from either the Holy See or the local bishop. In totality, canon law serves as the essential constituent matter for the internal governance of the world’s largest Christian church.

Historical roots

Catholic higher education was invented by the Catholic Church, or, said another way by St Pope John Paul II, “born out of the heart of the Church.” The Church’s involvement in the archetype of university life dating back to medieval times has actively promoted the preservation of human knowledge—a balance between faith and reason. Further, the environment to support the furtherance of knowledge at Catholic universities has historically been distinctively Catholic in tradition and operation. For instance, the medieval University of Bologna, established in 1088, was known to begin each academic year with a Mass of the Holy Ghost – as we do at Walsh University today! In fact, all of the original European universities, which serve as the archetypes of American Catholic Colleges and University’s (CCUs), were Catholic. However, what began during the Protestant Reformation and firmly took hold following the French Revolution soon strained the relationship between the Catholic Church and university life. The language shifted and for the first time “Catholic university” emerged to differentiate from “Protestant university.” After the nationalization of education occurred in the 19th century, “Catholic university” was used to narrowly identify those institutions that aligned with the Holy See – unlike State universities. By the late 19th century, American universities were established for the purpose of building an advanced society, and the founders were heavily influenced to do so in a nonsectarian way; thus, universities moved away from their religious roots and adopted purely secular educational principles.

Historically, the American bishops were concerned with the religious education of men and concentrated on the establishment of seminaries to support the consecrated life. This was not unusual within the American academy; Harvard, William & Mary, and Yale are among the earliest, and they were also created for religious purposes. For example, the Harvard seal formerly included the motto Pro Christo et Ecclesia (For Christ and for Church). As this institution moved away from its religious heritage, those four words were removed. What was unusual, however, was that Catholic higher education expanded over time to accommodate the education of the non-religious under the administration of religious communities such as the Benedictines, Brothers of Christian Instruction, Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits, Sisters of Mercy, Ursulines, and Vincentians. Rather than abandon the religious educational mission, they collectively focused on the common goal of moral formation for all students with the integration of faith and reason as the context for learning as they created the Catholic higher education infrastructure in the United States. An exception: Catholic University of America is the only higher education institution founded by the US Bishops. Thus, Catholic identity was “baked into” all of Catholic higher education. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Catholics opposed much of the secularism and materialism in American society and intentionally fostered separation with others. Philip Gleason, Professor Emeritus at Notre Dame University, captures the essence of the times this way, “so long as Catholics continued to constitute that kind of distinctive religious subculture, the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges would not emerge as a problem.” This did not last long.

Conclusion

During the past six decades, American Catholic colleges and universities have significantly changed philosophically, demographically, legally, and financially. The influence of St Pope John XXIII's 1963 *Pacem in Terris* encyclical, shifting attitudes resulting from the Second Vatican Council, the 1967 declaration *The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University* signed at Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, changing cultural norms in society, the 27-year pontificate of St Pope John Paul II that included a revised Code of Canon Law in 1983, and the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in 2000, have all had an impact on both the process and the product of Catholic higher education. The demographics on a CCU campus are also different in both the evanescence of religious faculty and administrators as religious orders suffered dramatic reductions in vocations.

Today, we find nearly all colleges and universities are governed by lay – not religious – Boards. Nearly all CCU Presidents are from the laity. And we even find college and universities that are neither diocesan nor sponsored by any religious order, such as Ave Maria University, Christendom College, and Wyoming Catholic College. In the United States, the decision to designate an institution as “Catholic” is recognized under the authority of the Catholic bishops – stemming from Canon 808, that requires only the approval of a competent ecclesiastical authority.

Walsh University has always enjoyed the support of the Diocese of Youngstown. We would not be here today without that unexpectant invitation from the diocese in 1957.

Bishop Walsh was instrumental in acquiring the land for the Brothers in support of their mission in Stark County. We host the annual diocesan Faith and Family Festival on our campus. And, of course, the Bishop of Youngstown serves on our Board of Directors.

Will Walsh remain a Catholic institution without the Founders?

Yes ... and absolutely.

And now you know!



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