

## **Together and by Association: The Legacy of James Luther Adams and the Future of Religious Colleges and Universities**

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*Abstract: Catholic higher education faces a crisis of identity as members of the founding religious communities continue to diminish in numbers in virtually all of these institutions. Critical to facing this challenge is the commitment of lay faculty and others to the future of Catholic education. Eliciting this commitment requires the transmission of a body of knowledge about Catholic culture and intellectual life as well as the heritage of the founding group. This essay assesses James Luther Adams' contribution to Catholic colleges and universities. A Unitarian Universalist theologian and professor of Christian ethics at Harvard Divinity School, James Luther Adams thought with great deliberation about the importance and longevity of what he terms voluntary associations. What advice would Adams offer Catholic university presidents and others committed to the continuance of these institutions as Catholic? In answering that question the author uses the Catholic university [an umbrella term inclusive of colleges] as the case study of a voluntary association, but much of what is written applies equally to universities sponsored by mainline denominations and evangelical Christian institutions.*

### **Overview**

This essay assesses James Luther Adams' contribution to Catholic colleges and universities. A Unitarian Universalist theologian and professor of Christian ethics at Harvard Divinity School, James Luther Adams thought with great deliberation about the importance and longevity of what he terms voluntary associations. What advice would Adams offer Catholic university presidents and others committed to the continuance of these institutions as Catholic? In answering that question I will use the Catholic university [an umbrella term inclusive of colleges] as the case study of a voluntary association, but much of what I write will apply equally to universities sponsored by mainline denominations and evangelical Christian institutions.

The student body casts a long shadow over this work. Any suggestions made here are for their intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and civic growth. Ultimately, I believe their experience at a Catholic college or university should lead to significant contributions to civic life and the human flourishing of their families, their neighborhood, city, country, and the world.

However, this is not an academic exercise. It is the outcome of my own deeply held, passionate belief that these universities must take a more comprehensive approach to ensure that they will not only maintain their Catholicity, but also enhance it. They must become increasingly proactive in nurturing what they are as Catholic institutions endowed with the legacy of religious congregations. Presidents, administrators, faculty, and staff must do so in order to carry out their distinctive mission, a mission of bringing a counter-cultural world view, a transcendent horizon or referent for temporal existence and human flourishing, to bear on all dimensions of university life, especially in the classroom and always for the students.

Religious congregations in the Catholic Church have been the drivers of Catholic culture and the guardians of their own religious heritage, one that is nourished by the prophetic voices of the Hebrew prophets and the visionaries and saints within Catholic history. In the great majority of cases, the congregations were the founders, leaders, and guardians of Catholic education from kindergarten through college in the United States. That is not the case today from K through 16. As we shall see, the congregations are no longer a dominant presence. Therefore, they are not the drivers of Catholic culture and the religious heritage.

Having written previously about the theology and social ethics of James Luther Adams, I wish to show how his understanding of voluntary associations makes an important contribution to guaranteeing the future of religious universities. Furthermore, “Together and by Association” is a term that is of great significance to the Lasallian Higher Education Movement, a world-wide group of seventy-four institutions of higher learning, in all parts of the world, including Manhattan College where I teach. [Note: the universities are part of the greater Lasallian Education Movement with over 900 schools or related institutions with 2,117 active brothers out of a total of 4,883, alongside 76,310 Lasallian lay people teaching 857,819 students in over 80 countries.<sup>1</sup>] Lasallian describes all educational programs under the patronage of St. John Baptist de La Salle (1651—1719), who founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools, sponsors of these global programs. I believe that “Together and by Association” will be the unique characteristic of Lasallian Universities as they move through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1691 and 1694, De La Salle and his brothers made a vow of Association, “the foundation event” or “center of gravity” of the Christian Brothers.<sup>2</sup> While association is the cornerstone of the Lasallian Education Movement, I hope to show that it is the cornerstone of all Catholic higher education.

### ***Introduction***

Why did James Luther Adams attract my interest as a graduate student in 1969 and why does he continue to do so today? Let me present several reasons that will provide entrée into the central theme of this essay.

First, my interest in community and voluntary associations predated my graduate studies at UTS. I was a member of a religious congregation in the Catholic Church, the Marist Brothers, from my entrance into the “juniorate” [a high school seminary] in 1953 through my departure in 1973. I came to believe that community was the cornerstone of religious life and this at a time in the mid to late 1960s when a period of great change and experimentation had begun, combined with the beginnings of a massive departure of vowed religious priests, brothers, and sisters from virtually all congregations. [See table below.] I was one of those who left a congregation as did my wife, Suzanne, a Religious of the Sacred Heart. We both agreed only recently that if there had not been such roiling change and what seems in retrospect the collapse of community life and the daily schedule, neither one of us might have departed. This view is, of course, in retrospect and neither of us is pointing fingers at our respective congregations. But having left, each of us independently and both of us together have sought to build community “at home” and in the world. As a result, Adams’ insights into voluntary associations and questions about the future of religious life were objects of my attention during the late 1960’s and 1970’s.

**TABLE 1. Frequently requested church statistics**

	1965	1975	1985	1995	2000	2005	2011
Total priests	58,632	58,909	57,317	49,054	45,699	42,839	39,466
Diocesan priests	35,925	36,005	35,052	32,349	30,607	28,702	26,837
Religious priests	22,707	22,904	22,265	16,705	15,092	14,137	12,629
Priestly ordinations	994	771	533	511	442	454	467
Graduate-level seminarians	8,325	5,279	4,063	3,172	3,474	3,308	3,608
Permanent deacons	na	898	7,204	10,932	12,378	14,574	16,921
Religious brothers	12,271	8,625	7,544	6,535	5,662	5,451	4,606
Religious sisters	179,954	135,225	115,386	90,809	79,814	68,634	55,944
Parishes	17,637	18,515	19,244	19,331	19,236	18,891	17,782
Without a resident priest pastor	549	702	1,051	2,161	2,843	3,251	3,249
Where a bishop has entrusted the pastoral care of the parish to a deacon, religious sister or brother, or other lay person (Canon 517.2)	na	na	93	314	447	553	469
Catholic population ( <i>The Official Catholic Directory</i> )	45.6m	48.7m	52.3m	57.4m	59.9m	64.8m	65.4m
Catholic population (self-identified, survey-based)	48.5m	54.5m	59.5m	65.7m	71.7m	74.0m	77.7m
Catholic elementary schools	--	8,414	7,764	6,964	6,793	6,122	5,774*
Students in Catholic elementary schools	--	2.557m	2.005m	1.815m	1.800m	1.559m	1.489m*
Catholic secondary schools	--	1,624	1,425	1,280	1,297	1,325	1,206*
Students in Catholic secondary schools	--	884,181	774,216	638,440	653,723	653,226	576,466*
Mass Attendance <u>CARA Catholic Poll (CCP): Percentage of U.S. adult Catholics who say they attended Mass once a week or more (i.e., those attending every week).</u> <u>For more background information on measurement, see: The Nuances of Accurately Measuring Mass Attendance.</u>	--	--	--	--	22%	23%	22%

\*Most recent estimates of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). School data for previous years is from the ASE.

*Note:* The chart displays comparative statistics from 1965—2010. Generally, these data reflect the situation at the beginning of the calendar year listed. The sources for this information include The Official Catholic Directory (OCD), the Vatican's *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae* (ASE), and other CARA [Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate] research and databases. All data are cross checked as much as possible. For the U.S., the numbers reported here include only figures for those 195 dioceses or eparchies that belong to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This includes the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands and all U.S. military personnel stationed overseas.

Second, I was a history major in college. The history courses and later sociology of religion courses with Dorothy Dohen at Fordham and C. Eric Lincoln at UTS left me with a deep interest in the role culture plays in society. Among the seminal texts influencing my thinking and that of Adams before me were Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, his critic R.W. Tawny's, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Durkheim's *On Suicide*, Tonnies' *Community and Society*, and Troeltsch's *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, to name a few.

Third, I discovered D.B. Robertson's *festschrift* for Adams when the latter retired from Harvard Divinity School in 1966.<sup>3</sup> Robertson's *Voluntary Associations: A Study of Groups in Free Societies* convinced me of the importance of both Adams and voluntary associations.

Fourth, and most importantly in terms of Adams' influence on me, are the challenges that Catholic higher education currently faces. I believe that Adams offers significant insights into achieving a dynamic future for Catholic higher education through his emphasis on voluntary associations. This paper will demonstrate why I believe this to be so. But first, some background on James Luther Adams.

### ***Who Is James Luther Adams?***

Although this essay does not address the many facets of James Luther Adams' life and thought, I think I can speak for all of us who knew him that he was an endearing friend and not simply the topic of a dissertation. Please remember that as you read this essay. His sensitivity, warmth, smile, and ability to draw one into the world of church and society were truly remarkable. I believe I can say that everyone who met Jim Adams was a better person for it.

Adams was born in 1901 in Ritzville, WA, to James Carey Adams, a Baptist country preacher, premillennialist, and member of the Plymouth Brethren, and to Letta Barrett Adams, a devout believer.<sup>4</sup> Although he spurned his parents' religion while attending the University of Minnesota, he ultimately entered Harvard Divinity School in 1924. Unitarianism, pluralism and the historical critical method, as well as the field of sociology were influential forces in his life. He rejected the "individual psychology of self-culture," but was drawn to Marxism and Anglo-Catholicism with their emphasis on community.

The world crashed in on him when he spent the summer of 1927 in Europe and came into direct contact with the National Socialist movement in Nuremberg. This experience became significant during his return to Germany in 1935—36, when he had close contact with the Confessing Church—an underground movement. Later in his graduate years at Harvard in the 1930s, Adams stated that he "wondered if I [Adams] was not a spiritual parasite, one who was willing to trade on the costly spiritual heritage of Christianity, but who was perhaps doing very little to keep that heritage alive."<sup>5</sup> He concluded that "one who takes time seriously, however, must do more than

talk about it. He must learn somehow to take time by the forelock. He must learn to act as a Christian and a citizen through socially effective institutions....”<sup>6</sup>

One of the reasons that Adams has had a longstanding influence on me was his early involvement in a community of Unitarian ministers [1927], eventually called the Greenfield Group in 1934. They thought of themselves as “a study group for the purpose of working out together a critique of liberalism and also of searching for a remedy.”<sup>7</sup> Daily personal and communal disciplines, the works of the church, communal readings—all became an integral part of the members’ lives. The Greenfield Group brought Adams to the intersection between his personal life and his academic and theological pursuits. Thus, personal identity became interrelated with a concern for group participation, responsibility, and discipline.

For this reason, Adams also joined a group of Unitarian ministers committed to the development of devotional life. Adams notes that the group, the Brothers of the Way, “included within its disciplines weekly visits of mercy to the needy, a ‘general’ discipline of active participation in some secular organization of socially prophetic significance, and an annual retreat where,” he notes, “we participated in discussions of social issues and in the sacraments of silence and of the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>8</sup>

Spending the years 1935-36 in Europe led Adams to a convergence of what he studied and what he was becoming as a person because of his involvement in the unfolding events in Nazi Germany during that time. I note his developing spirituality during this period. Adams demonstrated his interest in Catholicism by studying at the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris [where the John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, studied for the priesthood some 300 years earlier] and by consulting a priest for spiritual direction. He also investigated the liturgical movement at the Benedictine monastery of Maria Laach in Germany and studied liturgy at the University of Strasbourg. In Germany he studied the relation of religion to fascism and democracy, interviewing Nazi and anti-Nazi leaders and observed the underground movements. Jumping ahead, I also want to note Adams’ status as an ecumenical observer at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

Likewise, the Depression had an impact on his pastoral work in Wellesley Hills, MA. Unemployment, strikes, the growth of labor unions “conspired to develop a social concern, both theoretical and practical.” He became aware of what he called “the fissiparous individualism [fiercely independent individualism] and the unprophetic character of conventional middle-class humanitarian religious liberalism [which] served to increase my concern for the nature and mission of the church....” He viewed “the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* [little church within the church] as indispensable for the achievement of significant and costing consensus relevant to the historical situation.”<sup>9</sup> I also note Gary Dorrien’s observation that Adams “appreciated the realist core of the Catholic doctrine of original sin,”<sup>10</sup> a doctrine which underscored the human tendency toward rank individualism. The antidote to this egoism in both Catholic social thought and in Adams’ writings is the primacy of the community or the common good. Other Catholic influences came from the writings of Friedrich von Hugel, and “taught him to respect Catholic mysticism and sacramentalism.”<sup>11</sup>

When he returned from Europe in 1936, he began a long teaching career at Meadville Seminary, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University. After his official retirement in 1966, he never stopped teaching, whether in classrooms or seminars, through lectures and letters, or advocating “salvation by bibliography.” Throughout his life, Adams held his class notes in one hand and his calendar of association meetings in the other. This dialectical approach to ministry, Christian ethics, and social activism had been for Adams the means whereby “the Christian can carry back to the church experience, significant fact, informed concern, [and] insight demanding interpretation at the hands of the koinia” [sharing in common, communion].<sup>12</sup>

Adams is identified as a religious liberal because of his life-long quest to establish a dialogue between the Christian tradition and modern thought. He saw liberalism as the middle ground between “unconditioned heteronymous authority” and the skepticism of the sophisticated relativist. His liberalism is founded in a commitment to diversity, self-criticism, and openness. Revelation is never sealed for the liberal whose mission stands in contrast to the pseudo-orthodox. Revelation is “the task of achieving relevance in a new situation—a mass society that corrupts the church.”<sup>13</sup>

Adams’ liberalism is based on four principles: humankind’s incompleteness; the dignity of human nature and the primacy of mutual consent; community; and the ontological foundation of mutuality. Each of these principles presumes the underlying presupposition that humanity is socially grounded.<sup>14</sup> Dorrien notes that “Adams called his religious ideal ‘faith for the free...’ Divine reality finds its ‘richest focus’ when human beings cooperate for the common good.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, “freedom in community cannot be achieved without ‘the power of organization and the organization of power.’” Dorrien also concludes: “Adams admonished that genuinely free religion is always about life-giving community and necessarily takes place within one....”<sup>16</sup>

Emphasizing the fundamental relationship between faith and community, Adams declares that “A faith that creates no community of faith and a faith that assumes no definite form is not only a protection against any explicit faith, it is probably also a protection for a hidden idolatry of blood or state or economic interest, a protection for some kind of tyranny.”<sup>17</sup>

Dorrien elaborates on Adams’ view of faith and community. Adams argued that early Christianity was the wellspring of voluntary associations: “the early church prefigured the modern voluntary association by dispersing power and responsibility, transcending the ethnic boundaries of Judaism, welcoming people of all social classes, raising the status of women, and giving common people the opportunity to learn organizational skills.”<sup>18</sup>

In sum, Adams’ vision of and commitment to voluntary associations in democratic societies, whether they be the church, intentional communities, or civic groups, are central to his theology and social ethics. He was no spiritual parasite, but a professor and minister with a deep sense of responsibility for the spiritual heritage of Christianity. He asked himself: “what am I *doing* in relation to my ideas and the role I play within Christianity?” Today, the heritage of his theology and activism challenge us in a similar way. “What are we *doing* in relation to our ideas about the Catholic university and the role we play in it ‘together and by association’?”

### *The Catholic University in Context*

I turn now to the Catholic university, providing a context that will enable the reader to evaluate Adams' contribution to the founding university system in Western civilization and respond to the hypothetical question I raised earlier: "What advice would James Luther Adams offer these universities to assure their future?"

Until roughly 1980, the Catholic culture of the institutions had largely been taken for granted because of the pervasive presence of the founding congregations. One regional accrediting agency, for a short period of time in the 1930s, called the religious congregations a "living endowment" because the typical Catholic university at that time had few financial resources, but was rich in the people power of its vowed congregational members. Things began to change in the 1960s. While founding congregations staffed universities in significant numbers, the need for financial stability led to retrenchment from their roots. For instance, in accepting the so-called "Bundy" money from New York State in the 1970s, a number of Catholic universities overreached in their efforts to qualify for the funds. As a result of the impetus to qualify, the New York State institutions diluted their Catholic character to such an extent that they were no longer recognizably Catholic to some people. During the same period, virtually all universities sponsored by religious congregations turned control of the university and ownership of the institution over to a majority lay board. This move took its impetus from the Second Vatican Council that urged greater lay participation in the life of the Church. There was also no doubt that alienation of property and lay control would demonstrate important similarities with independent secular institutions.

Be aware that I have collapsed a complicated history of Catholic universities, leaving out nuance, and presenting a snapshot. For instance, I will not dwell on the embrace of the "professional model" by Catholic educators: that is, hiring the best credentialed faculty, those heavily committed to scholarly activity, an administration focused on professional accreditation, fundraising and catering to the student-as-consumer. My purpose here is to examine the strengths and opportunities of these institutions, along with the challenges they need to address.

There is truth in the claim that some universities were deliberate in downplaying their Catholicity, but these institutions, certainly in the 1980s and 1990s, realized the apparent disconnect from their roots and began a long process of renewal in terms of Catholic culture, the heritage of the religious congregation, and ties with the Catholic Church, none of which had ever completely disappeared. The challenge now is addressing the tension between the "professional model" and the newly revived "mission model."

However, the group I will call the secularists, professors and, in some cases, administrators in Catholic universities wanted no institutional ties to Catholicism. The universities had crossed their Rubicon in the late 1960s and 1970s. In the view of some secularists there could be no meaningful reformulation of what it means to be Catholic and to be sponsored by a religious congregation. To be truly Catholic in their eyes, the university would need to revert to an idealized past wherein the propagation of religious faith was central to the mission; teachers were required to adhere to or promote religious tenets; a religious order exercised control over the hiring, firing and day-to-day operations; and teachers were not given academic freedom.<sup>19</sup>

Fortunately, that ideological drumbeat has been taken seriously by only a handful of Catholic universities in the United States.

No one will doubt that there is great value in having “back benchers,” the secularists, in Catholic education. Their critique of the universities offers a perspective that those who are deeply committed to Catholic education may not see with clarity. Those leading Catholic higher education must take seriously the question of what it means to be a Catholic university and how such an understanding should be the guiding spirit of the mission. Fortunately, the secularists have been challenged by many institutional initiatives, symbolized by the appointment of mission officers and the development of robust campus-ministry programs charged with keeping the institution true to its Catholic roots. The first mission officer received a senior level appointment in 1980. There are, as of 2010, more than 140 mission officers at the 212 members of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. The publication of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in 1990 also became a catalyst and guide for this ongoing revitalization of Catholic culture as a defining characteristic of the universities.

### ***Catholic Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

Many cultural, pedagogical, and religious/theological changes have reshaped Catholic institutions since the first heady days of change and transformation in the 1960s. As a result, the Catholic university of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is different from that same university prior to the Second Vatican Council. The student population, for one, is diversified with 65% of the students Catholic, compared to 90-95% fifty to sixty years ago. Courses in Catholic theology and philosophy are offered along with a wide range of topics dealing with world religions and related issues. The faculty is likewise diverse and there is no religious “test” in hiring, except in some institutions that mandate a cleric or member of a religious congregation fill the presidency. This stipulation is fast eroding as in the hiring of the first lay president of Seton Hall University. None of these changes were accidental. In the *aggiornamento* [bringing up to date] that followed Vatican II, the universities sought diversity of faculty and students. They also sought a much more relevant, encompassing, and theologically grounded approach to the study of religion.

What may have been called proselytizing in the past, primarily took the form of enculturation of all students in a Catholic culture. You could say that it was “an unintended side effect or consequence” of attending a Catholic university. Moreover, “‘proselytism’ often has the negative connotation of enticing converts from one religion or denomination to another.”<sup>20</sup> Prior to the Council, if you were not Catholic, you certainly knew you were in a Catholic institution, surrounded by clerical or congregational role models, and Catholic student organizations. As noted in the overview, the pervasive presence of the role models and Catholic organizations has all but disappeared. From my perspective, this fact, above all, is the central issue as the universities move through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The challenging concern is who will be the new role models who will take the place of the religious congregations? This essay addresses that question.

The religious congregation was, in effect, a homogeneous voluntary association, characterized by a period of intense formation leading to admission into an intentional association to which the members vowed permanence through the perpetual vows of consecrated life: poverty, chastity, and obedience. The members were the administration and the faculty for the most part and they

were and are the guarantors or guardians of the Catholic culture and the idiosyncratic religious character or charism of their founder.

***What does it mean to be a Catholic University?***

In concluding this section, I would like to address “what it means to be a Catholic university” by raising a series of “outcomes-assessment” questions. They require us to think hard and long about what it means to be a Catholic university, because “Catholic” means many things to many people, particularly within the Church itself. These are queries that an assessment team might ask about summative outcomes at the point of graduation:

What does the university expect the graduates to value in Catholicism when they graduate—that is all graduates, whether Roman Catholic or other?

Does a Jew who graduates from Manhattan College have a deeper appreciation for Judaism; would he or she say each is a better Jew because of the educational experience? The same applies to Buddhists, Protestants, Muslims and Catholics, among others. In other words, does Catholicism and Catholic higher education, taken seriously, reinforce one’s own belief system or challenge it?

Are all the students more reflective and critical about the role of religion in their own lives and in society?

How do they translate religious conviction into life in the public square?

Are they aware of Catholic social teaching, its application, and its complementarity with other religious or humanist traditions?

Did they have opportunities to apply Catholic social teaching through service-learning programs?

If they are secular humanists have they confronted what this way of life means in their own lives?

All of the students should have at least asked the great questions about the universe: who are they, who are all these others, and how do I relate to them and nature itself, what is life’s meaning, and what value does my education and future work have?

Do the graduates prize individualism over community and the common good?

Is there a distinctively Catholic way of viewing reality and how does the Catholic horizon affect one’s epistemology or world view and trajectory in life?

Is the Catholic intellectual life known and understood by the faculty? Does it have an impact across the curriculum?

Are the professional schools Catholic professional schools or are they professional schools that happen to be in a Catholic university?

Does “virtue ethics” pervade the curriculum and does the university embrace academic integrity as the most immediate ethical challenge that the students embrace? Are they given deeply philosophical and religious reasons why plagiarism and cheating are moral reprehensible and consequential for their professional lives?

Do the graduates understand and respect a distinctive Catholic way of thinking? This does not mean converting to Catholicism but realizing that there is an approach to living that offers a way of thinking and being that is a search for truth and human flourishing, all without necessarily being part of an explicitly Catholic community.

Do the graduates leave with a profound respect for the dignity of all persons, every species, and all of nature because they lived on or commuted to a Catholic campus?

Do they understand spirituality and its relationship to religion? Have they engaged the faculty on this question inside and outside of class?

These are the foundational questions and challenges for the curriculum and campus life of a Catholic institution, raising other difficult and perhaps more crucial issues:

1. Will the faculty accept a Catholic vision of higher education and integrate that vision into the curriculum?
2. Will the administration commit resources to make this vision understood and a reality?
3. How will the university know it has achieved its goals as a Catholic institution?

Many of the challenges confronting Catholic education find parallels in universities sponsored in the mainline Christian denominations. I would also include the evangelical universities, but I hesitate to do so without a more thorough investigation.

### ***James Luther Adams and the Future of Catholic Universities:***

I will now discuss the sociological/theological connection between Adam’s thinking and the evolution of the religious university today. Although Jim Adams was not alone in this belief, he held the firm conviction that the future of any democratic society is in a direct relationship to the presence of voluntary associations, the focus of which is the common good of society or the good of a particular group that transcended the needs of the individuals in the voluntary association.

These associations are the bulwark of democracy because they stand midway between individuals and families on the one hand and the power of the state on the other. Their role is to protect the vulnerable from overreach by the state. These are not single-issue advocacy associations such as the National Rifle Association or “K Street” lobbying groups. Although an environmental-public-interest advocacy group may seem to parallel the NRA, the former is committed to the common good of global society now and in the future. The NRA has no such interest. Adams often noted that the absence of voluntary associations in the 1920s and 1930s allowed for the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. How relevant his insights are today.

In *The New York Times*, February 27, 2011, Neil Mac Farquhar's lead article, "The Vacuum after Qaddafi," notes the fear of civil chaos, "not least because Colonel Qaddafi spent the last 40 years hollowing out every single institution that might challenge his authority. It has no Parliament, no trade unions, no political parties, no civil society, no nongovernmental agencies."

Although Adams assessed voluntary associations in a variety of sectors in the public square, I believe his view of voluntary associations makes an important contribution to contemporary Catholic higher education. I noted above that the fast disappearing presence of religious men and women from the sponsoring congregations is the most critical challenge the universities face. How could the universities continue as Catholic institutions without groups such as the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Marianists, the Dominican and Benedictine sisters, or the Jesuit and Franciscan clergy who have, along with many other congregations, been the guarantors of all things Catholic, that "living endowment?"

### ***Retaining for Mission and the Mission Community***

I am convinced that a "new living endowment" composed of the congregational members and the lay people, who lead, teach, and support the work of the university will guide Catholic higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the formation of and participation in a voluntary association, what I would call the Mission Community. The latter will be neither dependent on a few unorganized individuals nor on the vagaries of commitment on the part of administrators.

A new understanding of leadership in the Catholic Church and its universities is the foundation of my belief. The new understanding places confidence in a group of lay people, who for a multitude of reasons have chosen to work at a Catholic university. An invitation to all members of this diverse group of administrators, faculty, and staff, as well as members of the founding congregation, is in order at these crossroads in the Catholic educational mission. It is an invitation to safeguard and enhance the mission of the Catholic university by joining or starting a Mission Community. I further believe that the invitation will result in many individuals coming forward and that they will have the wisdom to make the invitation a lived reality. Mission communities are not a new force on Catholic campuses. Many are already in existence and I believe, for instance, that there are individuals on this campus who would support the formation of such a community.

The project I envision here, the Mission Community as the New Living Endowment, asks much more of faculty than they bargained for when they signed their first contract or received tenure and promotion in rank. While the university "hired for excellence," there is a second imperative, "retain for mission." I owe a debt of gratitude to James Fleming, SJ, Boston College for articulating the dual imperative.

Faculty, administrators, and staff who are already committed to Catholic higher education and who have been through programs that bring them to this commitment are candidates for taking on this project. The program for new hires—retaining for Mission—that I will describe is also a resource to be used by any and all groups on campus to enhance their understanding of the Catholic culture and religious heritage of the founding congregation. New faculty hires, in particular, are the heirs to the Catholic heritage but also the creators of the Catholic university of the future and I will focus on this group.

Retaining for Mission seeks to create a culture of hospitality, a sense of comfort and belonging, an environment of respect and listening, and one in which responses to questions take place quickly and the resolution of problems is achieved promptly. The program conveys a message about the type of community a Catholic university seeks to create. RFM is conducted over the hire's first year as a condition of employment, with new faculty participating in three, two-hour discussion sessions in both the fall and spring semesters.

Retaining for Mission is neither a means of indoctrinating nor of proselytizing. The program has two goals. The first is to initiate new faculty fully into the life and mission of the university; it is *not* an effort to initiate any person into the Catholic Church. The second goal is the development of a Mission Community composed of new hires who, along with other faculty, administrators, staff, and members of the founding congregation respond to an invitation to join those already committed to preserving and enhancing the Catholic culture and religious heritage of the founding congregation as the university continues its journey through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

If a “retaining-for-mission” program is to work it needs the commitment of the president, along with support at the cabinet and decanal levels, and most importantly, support by the faculty. As a result, extensive conversations are necessary before the program takes off. A retention program that maintains a high level of knowledge about the history and mission of the founding congregation and provides a structure for continuity into the future will reinforce presidential commitment to the mission of Catholic education. An added benefit is that regional accrediting associations will be favorably disposed to initiatives that bolster the mission of a Catholic university. This is the case because the accrediting groups use the institutional self-study as the basis of the visit. If a university says it is Catholic and that its mission is based on Catholicism and the heritage of the founders, the visiting team will want evidence of this. A Mission Community would fit the request.

Beyond administrative support, Retaining for Mission will be successful if there is an organizational structure (the Mission Community) that itself has a vision, mission, goals, a regular schedule of meetings, prayer, presentations, and engagement with the larger university community, much as Adams' described his intentional communities: the Brothers of the Way and the Greenfield Group. The effectiveness of the group, however, will depend on a solid foundation or, what is called in Catholic parlance, formation. I believe that a retaining-for-mission program is mandatory will provide the needed background for making a commitment to a Mission Community on the part of new faculty.

### ***Orientation: The Faculty Learning Community***

The program I have developed begins with an orientation that takes place during the first month of teaching. I call it “The Faculty Learning Community” or FLC for shorthand. FLC is a secular term widely used in K-12 and in tertiary education. To give this phrase a religious title—The Mission Community—would convey the impression that it is a religiously oriented program. According to Milton Cox: [FLCs] develop empathy among members; operate by consensus, not majority, develop their own culture, openness, and trust; engage complex problems; energize and empower participants; have the potential of transforming institutions into learning organization; and are holistic in approach.<sup>21</sup>

As noted, the group will meet three times each semester for two hours, followed by dinner, a community builder if there ever was one. During this time, the many challenges they have encountered will be addressed, and the teaching, research, and service opportunities they have available to them will be explained. The new faculty will be introduced to a group of experienced colleagues who have volunteered to be mentors, from among whom the hires will be expected to choose a professor to work with over the next few years. They will become knowledgeable about the oldest higher education system in the West and one that today is global in its outreach—the Catholic university, and they will be invited to view things Catholic from the point of view fostered by their own disciplines.

Interest in the Faculty Learning Community can best be stirred by appealing to the scholarly interests and curricular concerns of the new faculty. To implement the program successfully, leaders must be highly sensitive to the new hire's personal life journey and the world in which the professor lives. By utilizing the wealth of knowledge among new hires and the tenured faculty as mentors, many individuals will be able to contribute substantially to the quality of the program. The more the group finds that each person is held in deep regard, that the program is consonant with his or her interests, that participants own the program, the more successful it will be.

One colleague observed, in reading an earlier draft of this paper,

The crux of the issue is to broaden the scope of learning for new hires beyond the present bounds of their training, their sense of themselves as scholars, as teachers, as members of a community. Retaining for Mission and the Mission Community is about broadening a sense of identity as a standard-bearer of Catholic education.

In a sense, every university has a moral obligation to introduce new hires to an educational institution where he or she may spend many years. Creating community and facilitating acculturation are invaluable to first-year faculty who often find themselves isolated or lacking in knowledge that experienced individuals take for granted. Of course, the first-year class of hires will have many needs that differ greatly from those in later years. While many of these “new-hire” challenges can be dealt with in a FAQ book or by email, phone calls, or individual meetings, these issues also provide an unique opportunity to engage seasoned faculty as problem solvers for the new comers, if not as outright mentors for them. There are many frequently overlooked challenges that new people face on a daily basis.

I also recommend that these learning communities participate in a “24 hour retreat” at the end of the first year. Ideally, the retreat should take place off campus, beginning at noon and ending at noon the following day, but much depends on budgetary constraints. This overnight stay presents a proven venue for reviewing the past year at the university and in the program. I have found this retreat experience to be very important for new hires at Manhattan College. In addition to bringing the orientation year to a close with an experience of substance, it also helps to bond this learning community more closely together. A positive response to retention rests to a great extent on the new faculty's assessment of the past year's program. They are more likely to continue if their first year's experience has been well-planned and implemented, if they have been made to feel like welcomed and important members of the university's community.

### ***Subject Matter: Sessions Two through Six***

In the subsequent meetings, the template for the first session will be followed. The topics are: the Catholic culture of the university, profile of the contemporary Catholic college student and the spiritual journey; the Catholic intellectual life; the heritage of the founding religious congregation; and, the new living endowment: an invitation to join the Mission Community

A discussion of the spiritual journey provides a framework for a subject that, according to Alexander Astin's recent study on faculty spirituality, is of great significance in the academy. Integration of personal spirituality into the program early on will provide a structure for understanding the emphasis on the universal search for transcendent meaning in life presented in succeeding sessions. Returning to this important subject should be part of each month's program. Having a role in the future of Catholic education is visionary and a challenge for lay faculty, but that role and vision speak to the universal search for transcendent purpose and meaning in life.

### ***Characteristics of the Mission Community: Transparency, Diversity, Hospitality, Responsibility, Socially Just***

In those universities that have a Mission Community, **transparency** and a rolling invitation to everyone in the community should characterize its identity. A Mission Community is not an elite group whose members have an inside track on tenure, promotion, or leverage. Transparency is critical because the Mission Community is open to the entire university and is ultimately for the common good. Without openness engendered by a commitment to transparency, a cloud of suspicion would hang over the Mission Community and work against its best efforts to guide the university. Possible venues for transparency might include a blog available for perusal by all who work at the university, social events where people can talk informally about mission, and publication of minutes from various meetings.

Catholic universities welcome **multi-ethnic, multi-religious** hires who will take their place alongside similarly **diverse** members of the community. This is not by accident or by force of circumstances. A Catholic university seeks such a community as the best means to remain a vibrant and dynamic Catholic institution in a globalized society. In the search for truth that characterizes higher education, a contemporary Catholic university would search in vain if it consisted of a parochial, homogeneous community, especially in its vision, teaching, and research. In other words, toleration is not the standard for hiring nor is diversity seen as a "second-best" option. All persons who work at a Catholic university are embraced because of a distinctive belief: they are all children of God and wellsprings of wisdom made in the image and likeness of the Creator.

Retaining for Mission and the Mission Community address the value-added dimension of Catholic education, in particular the **hospitality** shown to new hires. That characteristic mirrors the personal attention Catholic universities aspire to give to all sectors of the community and is a Catholic characteristic going back to the first monasteries where every guest was regarded as Christ. The program demonstrates a deep sense of **responsibility** for learning by educating faculty so that they are better prepared to teach the students and to lead a Catholic university. The **social justice** principle of giving primacy to the **common good** and to the community, especially through the Faculty Learning Community, is also evident in the Retaining for Mission program as a whole.

At the same time, monthly meetings, especially the first one, will speak to the issues that many new faculty inevitably face: childcare, curriculum development, mentoring availability, scholarly opportunities, conference participation, and information-technology questions, among a number of others that are difficult to anticipate. Attentive listening and effective communication will be the underlying methodology, coupled with an educational component that informs the mind concerning Catholic education. Thus, method, content, and care will speak volumes about respect for the dignity of the person and the value of teaching, learning, and research in Catholic education.

### ***The Mission Community***

While an educated faculty is one significant outcome of Retaining for Mission, the more important outcome, and by far the more challenging one, is to have new hires personally accept a role in the Mission Community made up of faculty and others who are supportive of the university's mission and committed to preserving and enhancing the institution's Catholic culture and religious heritage. Finally and most importantly, given the mission of Catholic higher education in our time, I would like to emphasize that those who join this community need not (and should not) all be Catholic.

A Mission Community (MC) is not only a vision to which the university should aspire; it is an action plan to engage new-hires now, not at some distant time in the future. Mission Communities are made up of members of the faculty, administrators, and staff who have become immersed in the knowledge and spirit of the university and its mission. As a result, it becomes a dynamic "living endowment" of the founding congregation and lay partners committed to the university. It is a group that people join voluntarily, and it is made up of people from all the diverse groups within the faculty, administration, and staff.

A most important point is the place and role of the Mission Community in the university structure. Here again I am deeply indebted to Adams' insights on voluntary associations and his experiences in prewar Germany. Should the Mission Community be a formally recognized committee of the Mission Office, an ad hoc committee called together by the president, or a loosely connected group which can be called upon at need? Influenced by Adams, I believe the Mission Community should be a free-standing entity within the university, not an arm of the administration, the mission office, or the university senate. As an independent group whose membership is drawn from administration, faculty, and staff, and the founding congregation, the Mission Community has a sacred trust: to preserve and enhance the Catholic culture and religious heritage of the founding group. In this work, it should not be subject to the vagaries of new administrators or university senates, or even the board of trustees.

If there is a sponsorship covenant between the university and the congregation, the independence of the Mission Community should be protected by the covenant. In other words, administrative dissolution of the community would be tantamount to breaking the covenant with the sponsoring community and renouncing any relationship with Catholicism. I realize that many will find this plan controversial. As a voluntary group, the Mission Community should be characterized by moral authority and an abundance of social capital. It is not a "latent" board of trustees. Being the institutional memory and conscience of the university, the Mission Community is a prophetic force bringing Catholicism and its embodiment in a religious congregation to bear on the mission

and direction of the university. In the history of the Catholic Church, many religious congregations themselves were founded to play this prophetic role by challenging the Church in times of laxity and corruption. While in communion with the Church, the congregations have existed and continue to do so at a distance from the Church structure itself. In fact, they are exemplary models of James Luther Adams's voluntary associations for the common good.

To answer the question, "Who guards the guardians of this Mission Community?" I respond that it is primarily the religious congregation, which presumably works closely with the Mission Community and whose members are integral to it. Moreover, I do not want to give you the impression that the Mission Community is in an adversarial relationship with the administration or with the faculty. In Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc's recent book, *The Heart of Higher Education* (Jossey-Bass, 2010), the authors affirm that any call to renewal in higher education comes about through "collegial conversation." Conversation among the constituents of the university is a key to the success of the Mission Community, the path to credibility, and a relationship of trust with the university as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I look back on my life as a member of a religious congregation of brothers, the Marist Brothers, a graduate student at Union Theological Seminary, as a teacher with another religious congregation of brothers, the Brothers of the Christian Schools; as a husband and father, and now directing my energy to help ensure the future of Catholic higher education by means of a new voluntary association, the Mission Community. In these reminiscences, I feel I have truly come full circle. And I thank James Luther Adams for guiding my steps.

### **Notes**

1. Brothers of the Christian Schools, "Associated for the Lasallian Mission...an act of HOPE," Circular 461: 18-19, accessed November 20, 2011, [http://www.fscdena.org/pdfs/programs/cil/circular461\\_association.pdf](http://www.fscdena.org/pdfs/programs/cil/circular461_association.pdf).
2. Antonio Botana, *Thematic Vocabulary of Lasallian Association* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2008), 51.
3. D.B. Robertson, ed., *Voluntary Associations, a Study of Groups in Free Societies; Essays in Honor of James Luther Adams* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966).
4. John R. Wilcox, *Taking Time Seriously: James Luther Adams* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978) *Note*: The biographical material in this section is taken from this text; Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity 1950-2005* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 134-143 *Note*: I am also indebted to Gary Dorrien for further insights into Adams' life and thought.
5. James Luther Adams, "Taking Time Seriously," in *The Prophethood of All Believers*, ed. George K. Beach (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 37.

6. Ibid., 41.
7. Ibid., 38.
8. Ibid., 39.
9. James Luther Adams, "The Evolution of My Social Concern," *The Unitarian Universalist Christian* 32, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 1977): 13.
10. Dorrien, *American Liberal Theology*, 135.
11. Ibid., 136.
12. Adams, "Evolution," 22.
13. James Luther Adams, "The Ages of Liberalism," *The Journal of Religious Thought* XIV, no. 2 (1957): 117.
14. Wilcox, *Taking Time Seriously*, 34.
15. Dorrien, *American Liberal Theology*, 140.
16. Ibid., 140.
17. Adams, James Luther, "A Faith for the Free," in *The Prophethood of All Believers*, ed. by George K. Beach (Boston: Beacon Press 1986), 54.
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19. Katzive & Simon, LLP, "Employer Post-Hearing Memorandum," Case No. 2-RC-23543: 3, accessed November 22, 2011, [http://www.manhattan.edu/inside/union\\_drive/Employer%27s%20Post-Hearing%20Memorandum.pdf](http://www.manhattan.edu/inside/union_drive/Employer%27s%20Post-Hearing%20Memorandum.pdf). *Note*: See USA NLRB in the Matter of Manhattan College and Manhattan College Adjunct Faculty Union: Employer's Request for Review of a Decision of the Regional Director.
20. John T. Ford, *Glossary of Theological Terms* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2006), 16.
21. Milton D. Cox, *Faculty Learning Community Program Director's and Facilitator's Handbook, Fifth Edition* (Oxford, OH: Miami University, 2008), 22-23.