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ANNOTATION

Newton, Robert R., ed. *American Catholic Higher Education in the 21st Century: Critical Challenges*. Chestnut Hill, MA.: Linden Lane Press at Boston College, 2015.

In October 2013, fifteen presidents of Catholic colleges and universities met for a three-day seminar as part of Boston College's sesquicentennial celebrations. The topic was the future of Catholic higher education in the United States, and discussion focused on practical responses to four "critical challenges" identified in a 2012 survey of presidents co-sponsored by Boston College and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities: 1. assuring that the Catholic intellectual tradition is vitally present throughout the institution; 2. supporting the personal and religious formation of students; 3. clarifying the university-Church relationship; 4. preparing future leaders. Joining the conversation were the authors of five "background papers"—one on each of these challenges, and a fifth, written by David O'Brien, providing historical context. The present volume is a collection of those papers, presented with an introduction and conclusion by Boston College president William P. Leahy, S.J. and an appendix by Jessica A. Greene's summarizing the 2012 survey.

The result is an extraordinarily useful volume for anyone seeking to sustain and strengthen the "Catholic dimension" of his or her own institution. The essays are written by some of the most distinguished contributors to the national conversation on these issues over the past quarter century, and their treatment of the four well-chosen topics makes the book, brief as it is, remarkably comprehensive.

David O'Brien's historical essay does a superb job placing Catholic higher education firmly within the broader context of the Church and of American experience and aspiration, asserting that "[a]rguments about the Catholic identity of American Catholic colleges and universities are simply one chapter in a larger and very important story of Catholicism and the American future" (2). For O'Brien, it is time to move beyond narratives in which the post-Vatican II period is seen as a decline from a golden age. For better or worse, he argues, the Catholic university is embedded in American secular culture. The question now is what our Catholic inspiration and commitments call us to do in and through that culture.

Whether or not all of the authors of the remaining four essays entirely subscribe to O'Brien's view, each shares his essential hopefulness. Each also shares his preference for emphasizing what the Catholic university *does* and *can do* over what its critics or apologists say it should do or used to do. This interest in practice—on the "how" as well as the "what" of the "Catholic dimension" is rooted in the authors' deep respect for the particularity and diversity of individual institutions and is among the chief virtues of the collection as a whole.

In "The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Integral Humanism," Michael J. Himes presents as accessible an account as one could want of the profound theological insights that ground the Catholic university's commitment to the full range of liberal arts education. The Catholic

intellectual tradition seeks first and foremost not “the acquisition of knowledge,” but to promote “awed delight in being.” In light of the doctrines of Incarnation and Creation, humanity is God’s most powerful self-communication; therefore, to seek the full truth of the human in all of its complexity and mystery is also to seek God. “Education,” Himes writes, “taken in its richest sense as the formation of the human person in the full and harmonious exercise of all his or her capacities, is a religious act for those who believe that humanity is what they and God have in common” (25). In such a view, not only is pluralism not to be feared; it is to be embraced as necessary to insight into the “absoluteness of the mystery” that the human, as image and likeness of God, embodies.

J. A. Appleyard, S.J. further develops the idea of education as “formation” in “Student Formation in Catholic Colleges and Universities.” In addition to providing a useful history of the development of formation programs in American higher education in general, Appleyard argues that Catholic universities have an especially strong foundation on which to build distinctive programs. Appleyard employs Himes’s view of “integral humanism” in emphasizing the holistic development of students—intellectually, socially, and spiritually—and offers specific recommendations about how leaders can work strategically to encourage greater integration and effectiveness in what he calls the “parallel curriculum,” the core curriculum, and in the various majors. Also important is his emphasis, repeated in several of the essays in the book, on the crucial importance of attention to these issues in the hiring and development of faculty, as well as in the process of identifying and supporting future leaders of the institution.

While O’Brien may be correct that the pre-Vatican II era was not a golden age from which Catholic higher education has declined, it is certainly true that the university-Church relationship in that era was much more straightforward than it is today. In “‘Catholic’ as Descriptive of a University: A Canonical Perspective,” Robert J. Kaslyn, S.J., dean of the School of Canon Law at the Catholic University of America, presents an overview of important and still unresolved legal questions raised by the increasing laicization of Catholic institutions since the 1970s. Kaslyn calls for institutions to clarify their canonical status, to identify the ecclesiastical authority enabling the institution to describe itself as Catholic, to settle any questions of the ownership of assets and liabilities; and, most importantly, to decide whether the use of the word “Catholic” is primarily descriptive of an historical relationship or of a current and vital reality.

Taking up the fourth “critical challenge”—leadership—is James L. Heft, S.M., who draws on John Henry Newman in arguing that the two chief issues for leaders of Catholic universities in the 21st century are, or should be: 1. understanding and strengthening the “Catholic dimension” in the intellectual life of the institution and throughout the disciplines; 2. Hiring and providing faculty development for those who will promote the distinctive intellectual mission of the institution. Heft offers examples of programs (many of which he created or supported directly) that have been effective in fostering the kind of thought and conversations required for faculty to understand their disciplines in the context of Newman’s vision of an integrated search for truth.

All of the authors included in this book would agree that Catholic higher education continues to be a strong and vibrant force in American society and in the life of the Church. At the same time, and as the use of the adjective “critical” suggests, all see an urgent need for action. The clear call here is for a concerted and intentional approach to promoting the Catholic intellectual

tradition and to helping students to develop their full potential—intellectual, social, moral, and spiritual. For such work truly to flourish it must be undertaken in the context of full communion with the Church, led by those for whom the “Catholic dimension” is the heart of the matter.