

# Where Does the School of Theology and Ministry Belong in the University?

DEAN'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS<sup>1</sup>

October 21, 2008

by Richard J. Clifford, S.J.

Cardinal O'Malley, President Leahy, distinguished guests and friends of the School, colleagues, and students.

Welcome and thank you for attending the celebration of a new professional school at Boston College, the first since 1952. The School of Theology and Ministry is unique in American Catholic higher education in its combination of strengths: a faculty of twenty-four educates clergy and lay people together for ministry; it offers the whole range of theology courses including religious education and faith formation; it provides a comprehensive formation program for all students; Jesuit tradition and spirituality is represented by ten Jesuit faculty members, all within a Catholic and Jesuit University. Unusual, too, are further Boston College resources – the Theology Department, which will continue to reside in the School of Arts and Sciences to serve doctoral and undergraduate students, and the professional schools with which the School is already allied – the Schools of Education, Nursing, Social Work and Management. Another rich resource is the Boston Theological Institute (BTI), a consortium of eight theology schools or departments, comprising the largest array of theology professors, students and libraries in North America.

Though brand new, the School incorporates distinguished educational institutions. The Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (IREPM) founded at BC in 1971, has truly lived up to its name by its theological research and preparation of pastoral ministers. It brings seven full-time professors, a dedicated staff, 125 academic-year students and 350 Summer Institute students. Weston Jesuit, its first forty years spent in Weston and its most recent forty in Cambridge, crosses the Charles River with seventeen professors, 220 students, the indispensable journal *New Testament Abstracts*, a substantial endowment for its 336 students, and a library of 90,000 volumes that will form the basis of the Theology and Ministry Library of 250,000 volumes. Alums of the IREPM and Weston Jesuit need not worry that their *alma maters* will disappear, for they will continue as departments in the School, operating as a single faculty. Joining both departments is C21 Online, which provides non-credit programs in theology and spirituality to at least 10,000 constituents worldwide.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge and thank the force behind the new School: Father William Leahy, SJ, the President of Boston College. It was he who saw *the need* (a strong school of divinity for Boston College and the Church), *the resources* (IREPM, Weston Jesuit, and C21 Online), and *the right time* (newly available property), and made the decision. The School is now a major piece in the Boston College Strategic Plan supported by the Capital Campaign, *Light the World*. Other people, of course, were involved as well: the late Father Robert Manning, SJ, President of Weston Jesuit, the faculty and administrators of the three institutions who embraced the difficult task of change, and their counterparts all over Boston College who very early “caught the spirit.” Such willingness to cooperate in a common work is surely “a sign of the times.”

Any school made up of three independent units has to pay close attention to its mission statement. And I can assure you there was sufficient *Sturm und Drang* in drafting the statement to guarantee that it represented the *real* sentiments of the faculty.<sup>2</sup> Here are key elements:

*The School's mission:* “the fostering of Christian faith and the promotion of justice and reconciliation”;

*Its students:* “Jesuits and other candidates approved for ordination studies, women and men for lay ecclesial ministries and for service rooted in faith”;

*Its commitments:* “the Catholic theological tradition, rigorous academic inquiry, interdisciplinary study, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and the engagement of faith and culture,” and permeating these, “a community that is contemplative, critical, and collaborative”;

*Its inspiration:* the Ignation tradition and the rich diversity of its students and faculty communities.

A school comes to life in its relationships, especially a school of theology and ministry, which by its nature must sustain relationships in two realms, the university and the Church.

## **I. The relationship to the University**

From the beginning of Europe's universities in the Middle Ages, theology played an important part, not only as a discipline but also as a component of ministerial education. Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan has described how these dual aspects came to raise “special problems.”<sup>3</sup> One challenge was late medieval scholasticism's conceptualizing of theology as a “science” and its neglect of the sources of theology. To critics, this approach seemed ill suited for preparing practitioners whose role it would be to preach and to serve in parishes. And so the Church adapted: in the mid-sixteenth century the Council of Trent set up free-standing seminaries devoted to priestly formation and Catholic theology (as opposed to Lutheran or Reformed versions).

Later, in America, Protestant churches learned to adapt, too. Young men trained for ministry during the 17th and 18th centuries in independent liberal arts institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Brown.<sup>4</sup> But the long-term consequences for Protestant ministerial preparation were mixed, as these schools grew more complex: “Faculties of divinity were often retained in universities of this kind; but historically some of these could be dismissed as professional schools without any role within the university as defined by the arts and sciences, whereas others achieved such a role in the university at the cost of their Christian particularity and of their professional mission as schools for the ministers of the Church.”<sup>5</sup>

Are such losses – of a “role within the university,” of “Christian particularity,” and of “professional mission as schools for the ministers of the Church,” inevitable for a Catholic school of ministry today? I do not believe so. STM faculty members, administrators and students desire to remain united with their Catholic congregations. In its commitment to serve the *Catholic Church* through the scholarly preparation of priests and lay ministers, the School will indeed differ from other divinity schools in the United States,<sup>6</sup> but the School embraces its Catholic identity precisely to be whole-heartedly

ecumenical and wide open to others. This is in keeping with the University's own mission statement, which affirms "different religious traditions and value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life." The conviction flows from the Jesuit tradition of finding God in all things, which means that God is present in other religious expressions. Dialogue with different traditions enables one to see more clearly how God is in one's own; at Boston College, the School community will converse with Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other religious adherents.

The fact remains, however, that this new School's Weston Jesuit Department is an *ecclesiastical faculty*, canonically established by the Holy See (the Vatican). Its purpose is to "foster and teach sacred doctrine and the sciences connected therewith" as the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* states,<sup>7</sup> and its right to confer academic degrees – the bachelor's, licentiate, and doctorate – comes from the Holy See. Weston School of Theology, the parent of Weston Jesuit, was established as an ecclesiastical faculty in 1932 and retains that status as it becomes a part of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. Now a department in the STM, Weston Jesuit is one of approximately 134 such faculties throughout the world (six in the United States), which are headed variously by clergy, sisters, and lay men and women. Among the more celebrated worldwide are those at Tübingen and Louvain, the Institute Catholique in Paris, Heythrop College at the University of London, the Gregorian University in Rome, and The Catholic University in Washington, DC, and our sister school Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley.<sup>8</sup> Weston Jesuit locates the School in an international network of stunning breadth, and linking the local community to an international one is a Jesuit value and fully in keeping with the Boston College mission of preparing its students for "service leadership in a global society."

The question now must be asked: Does STM's particular commitment to Catholic doctrine and morals adversely affect the academic freedom justly prized by the University? Let me first say that in Catholic tradition, *all* Catholic professors of theology, no matter where they teach, are presumed to be exploring and developing for the people of the Church an authoritative tradition handed down from apostolic times. For this reason, all Catholic theology professors – not only those on an ecclesiastical faculty – are in some way responsible to Church authorities when they work on the tradition. All of us rightly demand accountability of any authority, be it civil, university, or ecclesiastical. Theologians should likewise deem themselves accountable when they work on the Catholic theological tradition. In interpreting a community's tradition, scholars have to take seriously past interpreters and current interpretations, especially official ones.

The teaching office of the Catholic Church, the magisterium, normally deals with specific doctrinal and ethical teaching still under development – in our time this would include the validity of non-Christian religions, the distinctiveness of priestly ordination in relation to lay ecclesial ministry and baptismal vocation, and issues of sexuality – and with restatements of traditional formulations. What draws scrutiny is not so much *where* one is teaching (e.g., an ecclesiastical faculty) but *what* one is teaching (the topics mentioned above).

Some tension is inevitable. As the late Georgetown University theologian Monika Hellwig pointed out, the Church has in a sense "institutionalized its own opposition by recognition of Catholic

universities. “Sooner or later,” she wrote,” scholarly investigation of sources will . . . raise questions about some commonly held assumptions and interpretations of Catholic teaching and practice.<sup>9</sup> I prefer to put the idea differently: the Church recognizes that informed conversation is absolutely necessary in order to be, on the one hand, completely faithful to its tradition and, on the other, fully responsive to the present generation. The Dominican scholar Herbert McCabe puts it memorably: “It is a great function of debate to clean each other’s glasses, that is why hard thinking has to be a communal affair and why argument, even apart from the courtesies of debate, is itself an act of fraternal charity.”<sup>10</sup>

But, as history teaches, not everybody wants their glasses cleaned. Some theologians have not been willing to explain themselves, and some Church officials have indiscriminately taken action against new ideas. A sad example of the latter was the wholesale suppression of the modernist movement at the turn of the twentieth century, which deferred essential debate on Catholicism and modernity for decades, and sidelined perhaps “the greatest generation” of theologians in modern times, people like Yves Congar, Karl Rahner and John Courtney Murray. Examples of the proper use of authority are more numerous though less often celebrated, so I will mention one close to my heart: the way that well considered encyclicals and documents since the 1940s have modeled the integration of modern and traditional biblical interpretation.

Put succinctly, Church authorities’ criticisms and requests for clarifications, so long as they are part of a back-and-forth, should be accepted as casting light on the great tradition.

## **II. The School’s relationship to the Church**

How is the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry to serve the global and local Church? It will do so less by giving concise answers to contemporary problems than by suggesting new possibilities. I see four contemporary challenges that particularly invite imaginative interpretation, centered around the Church’s young people, its women, its new immigrants, and its clergy.

*(1) The challenge of assisting ministers in gaining trust, intelligibility, and competence.* These qualities have been singled out by Father J. Bryan Hehir, Harvard professor and Secretary for Health Care and Social Services in the Boston Archdiocese,<sup>11</sup> as essential for priests and their lay ministerial colleagues. Alas, in many places, those qualities must be recovered, and trust restored in the aftermath of scandal. As the Bible – and common experience – tell us, a preacher must believe the message and serve others with unselfish simplicity. Only then is the message intelligible and the minister’s authority established. The best institutional route for advancing this ideal is a comprehensive formation program, and the School of Theology and Ministry runs one in accord with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ directives as set out in two documents, the *Program for Priestly Formation*<sup>12</sup> and *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: Resources for the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*.<sup>13</sup> The Capuchins (of the Franciscan family) and Jesuits at the School run formation programs for their own men (7 Franciscan and 55 Jesuit students), and one of the distinctive features of the School is the influence upon the entire School community of Jesuit spirituality under the leadership of the Rector of the Jesuit community.

(2) *The challenge of handing on the faith to the next generation.* Last June, James Davidson, a sociologist at Purdue University, delivered the keynote address at the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America in Miami. He argued that the greatest determinant of one's religious values is neither race nor gender nor class, but the generation into which one was born. Connect that understanding with surveys conducted by Dean Hoge of Catholic University showing that Catholics of every generation prize highly "their relationship with God," but that those born after 1961 (48 per cent of U.S. Catholics), unlike their parents, place way down on the list their "relationship to the Church," the actual community of believers.

It is hard to find parents today who are not worried about their children's seeming indifference to their religious inheritance. Cardinal Avery Dulles has surveyed modern religious education practices and concluded that the method called "shared Christian praxis"—rooted in experience and reflection, aligned with Scripture and tradition, and designed for action—was the most balanced and effective.<sup>14</sup> I am happy to say that the model was developed by Professor Thomas Groome at Boston College's IREPM; it is taught in our classrooms and disseminated through workshops and publications.

(3) *The challenges of helping women to exercise their gifts and of supporting lay ecclesial ministry (the two endeavors are inseparable).* The three major monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—took shape in a world where men generally had the public roles and women the domestic ones. Today the Catholic Church, like these other religions, struggles to adapt to a world where women enjoy public roles and offer their talents to the community. The percentage of Catholics in parish ministry who are women is growing: from 44 % in 1990, 54% in 1997 and 64% in 2005.<sup>15</sup>

How are we to view this development? I cannot give a concise answer but can suggest a framework for discussion: the veritable explosion of lay ecclesial ministry (the bishops' preferred term) in the Catholic Church. In his widely used, even standard account, *Theology of Ministry*,<sup>16</sup> Thomas O'Meara concluded, contrary to what one might infer from the declining number of clergy, that the Catholic Church is actually experiencing an unparalleled surge in ministerial energy, a phenomenon that began even before Vatican II. Lay ministry has risen so naturally and quietly from the grass roots that only relatively recently has it become the object of explicit reflection. But lay ecclesial ministry is more and more recognized as a profound renewal, and it is changing forever the face of ministry in the Catholic Church. One can compare similar energy bursts in history: the martyrs in the early Church, the monasteries in the Middle Ages, mendicant orders and lay men's and women's communities in the thirteenth century, missionary orders in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, lay people's and sisters' administering of Church institutions in Europe in the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. At present, I suggest, that energy seems to be entering the Church through lay ecclesial ministry, and it seems to me to recover the multiple charisms of the early Church.

Historically, such bursts have not killed off other growths, but made them grow too. Hence, we can expect that clergy, whether diocesan or an order, will draw vitality from lay ministry. The STM, with its two departments' long experience in forming and educating priests and lay men and women for

ministry, can further this work of the Spirit to the benefit of all. Patience is needed, but so is the confidence that gifts are given to benefit the whole community, not the individual alone.

*(4) The challenge of enabling the rapidly increasing U.S. Hispanic Catholic community to flourish and share its gifts.* From 1990 to 2005, the Hispanic population in the US grew from 22.3 million to 42.7 million, and now constitutes 14% of the total population of the nation. On average younger than the non-Hispanic population, their numbers can be expected to swell in the coming years. 70% of Hispanics self-identify as Catholics. Of the Catholics born between 1961 and 1982, one in five is Hispanic. Of those born since 1983, two in five are Hispanic,<sup>17</sup> and within twenty years, some demographers predict, well over half of US Catholics will be Hispanic.

The U.S. bishops have responded to Hispanics differently than to immigrant ethnic groups in the past. They did not allow separate Hispanic parishes, but instead added Spanish masses and services in non-Hispanic parishes, preferring integration to separate structures. The result has been unsettling transitions, as priests from Latin America try to accommodate to a new culture, their U.S. congregations try to adjust to them, and Hispanic members of a parish try to work with non-Hispanic parishioners.

The STM is unusually well positioned to help address this situation and prepare pastoral leadership for the new communities. It has two professors of Hispanic theology and ministry as well as a Hispanic Ministry Program with thirty-two students and the promise of more through special recruitment efforts. What the School has already accomplished is impressive; this was brought home to me in a conversation with the recruitment director at a major divinity school that, despite serious effort, has not succeeded in recruiting or retaining Hispanic students. We can look forward confidently to the growth of this program, and to the enrichment it will provide to the STM, Boston College and the Church in the United States.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry is young. Yet because the school's components – IREPM, Weston Jesuit, and C21 Online – have accomplished much already as separate entities, there is every indication they will achieve more as they work together.

Before closing, I want to express the hope that contemplation be the wellspring of our study and our practice as ministers. Key meditations in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, one strand in the spirituality of the School, lay great stress on “savoring” the Divine Presence even as they direct one toward service in the world. The Jesuit phrase “contemplation in action” originated in one such meditation. I hope such prayerfulness will take hold both in the preparation and practice of ministry. May the busyness of our School life not snuff out repose, and may people have time for silence and wonder at the Source of all things! The mention of contemplation and of silence seems a good point to end this address and listen to others. I thank you for your attendance at our celebration.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup>For their suggestions on this talk, I wish to thank the late Robert E. Manning, S.J., President of Weston Jesuit School of Theology from 1996-2007, Professors Thomas Groome and J. Randall Sachs, SJ, chairs of the two departments in the School of Theology and Ministry, and Anna Marie Murphy, Deputy Editor, Office of Marketing Communications, Boston College. Needless to say, responsibility for the talk is entirely mine.

<sup>2</sup> [*The complete Mission Statement*] The Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (STM) is an international theological center that serves the Church's mission in the world as part of a Catholic and Jesuit university. Through the fostering of Christian faith and the promotion of justice and reconciliation, the School prepares its students for ministries that are as diverse as the composition of the student body – Jesuits and other candidates approved for ordination studies, women and men for lay ecclesial ministries and for service rooted in faith. The STM is committed to the Catholic theological tradition, rigorous academic inquiry, interdisciplinary study, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and the engagement of faith and culture.

Through Weston Jesuit and the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, the STM offers graduate programs, including civil and ecclesiastical degrees in theology and ministry that integrate intellectual, spiritual, pastoral and personal formation. To form a community that is contemplative, critical and collaborative, it draws on the Ignatian tradition and the rich diversity of its students and faculty who are lay, ordained and members of religious communities. Theological research, reflection and pastoral practice are integral to the STM's life and mission. The STM reaches out to larger theological and pastoral communities through C21 Online learning resources, the publication of New Testament Abstracts, and timely continuing education programs.

<sup>3</sup> *The Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 260.

<sup>4</sup> *The Melody of Theology*, 262.

<sup>5</sup> *The Melody of Theology*, 263. For an Evangelical warning to Catholics, see George M. Marsden, "What Can Catholic Universities Learn from Protestant Examples?" in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University* (ed. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.; Notre Dame, IN.; University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) 187-98.

<sup>6</sup> I suspect that this danger is not unique to divinity schools, for any professional school can become cut off from the profession it serves and dismiss practice as unimportant. It goes without saying, of course, that a professional school, especially a school of theology, should not merely reflect the ethos of congregations. It must challenge and critique as well as console and reinforce.

<sup>7</sup> *Sapientia Christiana* (Article 2). *Sapientia Christiana* is the apostolic constitution governing ecclesiastical faculties, promulgated in 1979.

<sup>8</sup> *Annuario pontificio 2007* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice vaticana, 2007) pp. 1774-1813.

<sup>9</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "Thoughts on Hunger Strikes," in *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987) 199.

<sup>11</sup> J. Bryan Hehir, "The Views of American Catholics and Opinion Leaders on Issues Regarding the Catholic Church," on web site of Ethics and Public Policy Center, posted: Thursday, November 13, 2003; available at [www.eppc.org/printVersion/print\\_pubasp?pubID=1930](http://www.eppc.org/printVersion/print_pubasp?pubID=1930). Adapted for keynote address to Weston Jesuit Community, Sept 20, 2008.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Program for Priestly Formation*, fifth edition (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006)

<sup>13</sup> *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: Resources for the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005)

<sup>14</sup> “Historical Models of Catechesis,” *Origins* 37.22 (Oct. 11, 2007) pp. 347-352. The assessment of Groome is on p. 351.

<sup>15</sup> David DeLambo, “Executive Summary from the forthcoming survey Lay Parish Ministers: A Study of Emerging Leadership,” *Church Ministries: A Parish Guide* (New York: National Pastoral Life Center, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Theology of Ministry*, revised edition (Paulist Press, 1999)

<sup>17</sup> William V. D’Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Church* (A Sheed and Ward Book; New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 165-171. They draw on research of the Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate (CARA).