

FROM ORTHODOXY TO HERESY: The Secularizing of Catholic Universities

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Forty years ago the major Catholic universities in the U.S. decided that the Catholic Church needed to reform her teachings, especially that of sexual morality, to conform to the times, and that they should lead that reform. In 1967, at Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, they declared their independence from the Church, exchanged the faith of their founders for an evolutionary heresy, proclaimed themselves to be an alternate magisterium, and transferred control from their founding religious orders to secular boards of trustees. Not coincidentally, by these actions they qualified themselves for lucrative financial grants from foundations controlled by leaders of the Culture of Death.

For forty years the true nature and intent of this revolution has been disguised. As a result, generations of Catholic students and graduates have been and are being ill formed and misled in their faith, or have lost it altogether.

It is time for the story to be told.

Beginnings

The last half of the 19th century saw two currents of intellectual thought advancing contemporaneously. With the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* in 1871, the eugenics movement became the darling of the sophisticated elite of England and the U.S. Around the same time, reformers within the Catholic Church argued that traditional moral teachings must be modernized to conform to modern science and sociology. Both of these viewpoints directly contradicted Church teachings. However, in less than a century, American Catholic universities would accept and unite both of them.

Heresy

In his January 1899 apostolic letter *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae*, Pope Leo XIII warned the U.S. bishops of a heresy sprouting in Catholic hearts in this predominately Protestant country. The heresy asserts that Christianity is a philosophy that has evolved over time and must continue to do so, that truth is relative, and that individual conscience is supreme in establishing one's standards of faith and morals. Because this heresy resonated so strongly in the U.S., Pope Leo called it "Americanism."

Pope Leo's warning went largely unheeded. Only eight years later that heresy had matured and spread throughout Europe as well as the U.S., generating another more profound and more urgent warning from the Holy See. *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, Pope St. Pius X's September 1907 encyclical, was an in-depth explanation of the heresy, its underlying philosophy, and the deceit by which it was promoted. The encyclical made clear that all of the various heretical views are interrelated and "solidly joined so that it is not possible to admit one without admitting all" (#39). At its core, the heresy holds that religion is a subjective "sentiment" arising solely from an individual's perceived need for a god, which he then creates and which he "knows" only through his subjective experience. From this root, a number of other errors follow: Truth is relative; Jesus is not divine; Scripture is neither divinely inspired nor

true; "faith" has no place in man's search for knowledge. Pope Pius described this heresy as "the synthesis of all heresies," naming it "Modernism." It also goes under the name "evolutionary theology," and is the root of moral relativism.

What anguished Pope Pius and created the urgency of his warning was not that the Church was being attacked, but that this attack was coming from within the Church. The betrayers, the Pope said, are prominent members of the clergy and the laity, men whom the Pope branded "the most pernicious" of the "enemies of the Church" because they are so difficult to detect, like the "wolves in the sheepfold" of which Christ Himself warned. They are industrious, intelligent men, knowledgeable about the Church and possessed with a mania for reform. Disguised as orthodox Catholics, the Pope warned, "they seize upon chairs in the seminaries and universities," from which they "scatter" the "seeds of their doctrines" through "books, newspapers, [and] reviews" (#42).

Although the Pope's warning somewhat attenuated the visible growth of modernism in the American Church for several decades, the heresy did not die. As the Pope had feared, the wolves had clothed themselves like the sheep and remained in the sheepfold, in faculty positions in Catholic universities, where they quietly nourished and advanced the cancer.

The Eugenics Movement

Following the publication of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories in *The Origin of Species* in 1859, and his application of those theories to mankind in *The Descent of Man* in 1871, the evolutionary philosophy he advocated became the cause célèbre of the wealthy sophisticates of England and the U.S., where it caught the attention of John D. Rockefeller. Reduced to its essentials, Darwin's philosophy holds that man, who has naturally evolved from lower life forms, has now attained the ability to control and accelerate his further evolution into a more perfect species through controlled breeding, just as he has done with cattle and plants. The name given to this proudly atheistic movement was "eugenics." Darwin and his disciples proposed to achieve this "noble" aspiration in two ways -- first, by applying Darwin's rule of "survival of the fittest" to eliminate the weak, disabled, and undesirables; second, by creating stronger, more intelligent humans through controlled breeding and manipulation of genetics. The means to these ends were to be contraception and abortion, forced sterilization, euthanasia, and genetic manipulation, to be accomplished by "education" if possible, but by compulsion if necessary.

The eugenics cause captured the attention of John D. Rockefeller when he was seeking a philanthropic identity. His son, John D. Rockefeller Jr., became a zealot for the cause, which he promoted by creating and funding hundreds of trusts, foundations, bureaus, and institutes devoted to eugenics. He lavished funds on universities for eugenics research, on eugenics advocates such as Margaret Sanger, and on German eugenicists and institutions that built the labs used in the Holocaust. He drew Protestantism into his camp by creating and funding the Federal Council of Churches, which later merged into the National Council of Churches.

In the 1930s his son, John D. Rockefeller III, dedicated his entire philanthropic life and his millions to the promotion of birth control, which he pursued with such fervor that he became known as "Mr. Population." Predictably, the Rockefellers' money and influence attracted other influential names to the cause so that, by the early 1950s, the trustees, directors, and advisors of the Rockefellers' vast network of trusts, foundations, and institutes included top executives of the nation's largest media outlets, banks, industries, and government. Later, this list would include the name of the president of one of the nation's most visible Catholic universities.

After World War II, when the horror of Germany's "eugenics-oriented" society was exposed, the eugenicists changed their marketing strategy: The term "eugenics" was dropped. In 1952 Rockefeller III established "The Population Council" to promote birth control under the euphemism of "population control." With religious fervor, population control was promoted as an "environmental" issue essential to the preservation of mankind, under the alarmist banner that the earth had neither the space nor the resources to sustain the growing human population.

By the end of the 1950s, the campaign had persuaded the major Protestant denominations to accept contraception as a moral practice. But the Catholic Church stood her ground. In those days, faithful bishops courageously proclaimed Catholic truth -- and Catholics listened.

The Alliance

By the early 1950s, both the evolutionary theories of eugenics and the heresy of evolutionary theology were prominent in American culture. In those postwar years, secular universities were growing in wealth, power, and reputation, largely through funds from foundations controlled by members of the American Eugenics Society. Catholic universities, because they were Catholic, were excluded from this cornucopia. In 1961 that changed.

Within many Catholic universities were prominent faculty who publicly criticized Church teaching on sexual morality and advocated their "reform" to conform to the times. These dissident voices, coupled with their universities' yearning for a place at the table of foundation funding, gave Rockefeller the opportunity to neutralize the Church's opposition to his eugenics agenda. The initial gesture came, unexpectedly, from the University of Notre Dame.

Among Notre Dame's vocal dissenting theologians was Fr. John A. O'Brien, C.S.C. When Rockefeller's Population Council and Planned Parenthood invited him to a conference to discuss ways to promote contraception, the invitation was answered from the assistant to Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, Notre Dame's president, who offered Notre Dame's campus as the venue for the conference, provided it was funded by a foundation grant. Rockefeller agreed to the funding on condition that only Catholics who believed as Rockefeller did were to be invited, a condition to which Notre Dame brass readily agreed. Notre Dame went further, arranging that the conference be unpublicized to avoid opposition from the bishop and loyal Catholics. Planned Parenthood's list of Catholics with acceptable views on contraception included Fr. Hesburgh, who chaired the first conference. Two follow-up conferences were held expressly to formulate a document justifying a reform of Church teaching on contraception which would then be widely published. All the conferences were held on Notre Dame's campus and all were funded by foundation grants.

In the summer of 1965, after the conferences had ended but before the preordained report was finalized, Fr. Hesburgh arranged a private audience for Rockefeller with Pope Paul VI in an unsuccessful effort to sell the Pope on the value of contraception and his newly perfected IUD, after which Rockefeller arrogantly offered to draft a papal encyclical on the subject -- an offer which the Pope, of course, declined.

That fall, seven months after the Population Council conferences had concluded, the hand-picked conferees signed and publicized a proclamation attacking the Church's teaching on contraception. Popularly called "The Notre Dame Statement," the document declared that the Church's teaching was out of date and inconsistent with modern psychology and sociology, and that the morality of

contraception was not based on divine law but solely on one's opinion. The Statement asserted that it was wrong to teach that contraception was objectively sinful, and that Catholics who so believed had no moral right to impose that view on others. Thus was inaugurated the "personally opposed, but..." philosophy.

The Notre Dame Statement was a direct attack on the Magisterium of the Church. To accept it is to accept moral relativism and to deny that the Catholic Church teaches divine truth. Nevertheless, the Notre Dame Statement was enthusiastically endorsed by both the secular and the Catholic media. It did not matter that, in December 1965, the Second Vatican Council concluded without making the reforms called for by Rockefeller and the Notre Dame Statement. All that mattered was that some prominent theologians and academics had issued the Statement, which Catholic colleges and universities immediately embraced and began to teach as an acceptable moral code for Catholics. Thus was "Cafeteria Catholicism" legitimized.

Notre Dame demonstrated that a Catholic university willing to compromise its principles could qualify for lucrative foundation grants, for which its president was rewarded with a position on the Rockefeller Foundation Board of Trustees (he would later serve as its chairman).

The Land O'Lakes Statement

The heretical seeds of modernism that had long been nurtured in U.S. colleges and universities broke ground with the Notre Dame Statement. Only two years later, the bitter fruit was produced. On July 23, 1967, at Notre Dame's retreat center in Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, the executives of the major Catholic universities in the U.S. and their sponsoring religious orders met, signed, and adopted a revolutionary document entitled "The Land O'Lakes Statement: The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University," which has subsequently been referred to simply as "The Land O'Lakes Statement." The signing universities were Notre Dame, Georgetown, Boston College, Seton Hall, Catholic University, St. Louis University, Fordham, the University of Puerto Rico, Pontifical University of Peru, LaValle University, and the University of Sherbrooke, Canada. Significantly, the Land O' Lakes Statement was also signed by the Assistant General of the Society of Jesus and the Superior General of the Congregation of Holy Cross, both of whom were based in Rome. Signing the document for the University of Puerto Rico was the Rt. Rev. Theodore E. McCarrick, later to become Cardinal Archbishop of Washington, D.C.

Contrary to the disinformation from its apologists, the focus of the Land O'Lakes Statement was not academic freedom. Its focus was solely and exclusively the manner in which Catholic universities would deal with questions to which "science" was incapable of providing answers; questions of faith and morals; questions traditionally addressed by philosophy and theology; questions ultimately involving the relationship between faith and reason. In these contexts, the Land O'Lakes Statement declared the universities' independence from the teaching authority of the Church, which put them in schism, and replaced Catholic theology with heretical modernism as their governing doctrine.

Land O'Lakes as Schism

The Land O'Lakes Statement declared the universities' independence from the Church in its first paragraph, which states that "the catholic university must have a true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself " (emphasis added). The reference to "lay" authority is disingenuous. In forty years of application, no

university has ever claimed "autonomy" from "lay authority," least of all from the "lay authority" of foundations that impose anti-Catholic conditions on financial grants. The only yoke of authority these rebellious institutions intended to cast off was the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. In his book *Contending With Modernity: Catholic Education in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), Philip Gleason wrote that the Land O'Lakes Statement was never intended to be anything other than "a declaration of independence from the hierarchy" of the Church.

Land O'Lakes stated that "the critical reflective intelligence" of the Church is now found, not in the Magisterium of the Church, but in the "modern catholic university," in which is vested the duty to judge Church teachings and promote their reform. In "University Identity Crisis," a 1996 analysis of Land O'Lakes published in *Crisis* magazine, Kenneth D. Whitehead put it bluntly: The essence of Land O'Lakes, he wrote, is "a decision not to be Catholic.... These Catholic colleges and universities are in effect declaring that they simply decline to be Catholic as the Church defines that term." Under Land O'Lakes, he said, "it is the Catholic university itself that now is to decide what is, and what is not, 'Catholic.'" Fr. Hesburgh, to whom the primary authorship of the Land O'Lakes Statement is attributed, boldly admitted as much when he wrote in *America* magazine in 1986 that a true university cannot allow the Vatican to define what is and what is not authentic Catholic teaching.

In Church parlance, the word historically used to describe such a broken relationship with the Church is "schism." Feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether openly applied this term to Land O'Lakes, writing in a 1980 article in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* that Land O'Lakes created "an internal schism.... between two magisteria, the magisterium of the professors and the magisterium of the pope and the hierarchy." Msgr. George Kelly, an apologist for the Church, agrees with her. Msgr. Kelly wrote in *The Catholic World Report* in 1995 that Land O'Lakes has "largely succeeded in creating a two-headed church," rooted in Catholic colleges and universities, one of which is "an anti-church...in which the definitive teaching of the magisterium can be, and often is, contradicted, doubted or explained away. This 'second magisterium,' as it has sometimes been called, has its base in the Church's college system."

Land O'Lakes as Heresy

The "contemporary catholic university," as defined by Land O'Lakes, is neither contemporary nor Catholic. The Land O'Lakes Statement is nothing more than an acceptance of the tenets of modernism as described by two popes a century ago.

Students of the Land O'Lakes Statement and its effects are in agreement that the intent of Land O'Lakes was to replace orthodox Catholicism with liberal modernism as the defining philosophy of Catholic higher education. As Gleason put it, the intent of Land O'Lakes was to make clear that "the Church's cold war with modernity was definitely over." David O'Brien, in a 1998 analysis of Land O'Lakes in *Boston College Magazine*, wrote that Fr. Hesburgh and his colleagues believed that the time had come for Catholic educators to accept modernism instead of challenging it, as the Church has historically done.

Land O'Lakes declared, "There must be no theological or philosophical imperialism." Theological imperialism refers to the belief that the Catholic Church is the true Church through which the fullness of God's Truth is revealed and proclaimed. According to O'Brien, the framers of Land O'Lakes believed that the religious principles of their universities' founders were out of date. Their intent was to give "learning" priority over "growth in faith and morals," and to downgrade theology to just another academic discipline without special emphasis or status. This is why courses in Catholic apologetics are

no longer offered on most Catholic campuses.

Land O'Lakes describes in some detail how a "contemporary catholic university" is to facilitate the "experience" of religion. Basically, anything and everything goes -- except, of course, "theological imperialism," which is absolutely prohibited. Nothing is to be "outlawed," and there are to be "no boundaries and no barriers." The university's primary characteristic is that it be "modern" in the "full sense of the word"; its mission is to provide an "education geared to modern society." Students learn to "understand the actual world" by being exposed to all aspects of it, free from doctrinal moral constraints. Religion is experimental and experiential: Students will "find the meaning of the sacraments for themselves." They will "express [their] Christianity in a variety of ways and live it experientially and experimentally," and will discover for themselves "new forms of Christian living." Tinkering with Catholic liturgy is encouraged. Land O'Lakes proclaims that the "best" liturgies are those that are "creatively contemporary and experimental."

And so, at the "contemporary catholic university" described in Land O'Lakes, moral relativism is the rule; individual conscience is the determinant of "right" and "wrong"; religion is a subjective sentiment; God is known through one's experience; faith and reason are separate and distinct; faith adds nothing to reason.

One cannot exaggerate the destructive impact of this culture of relativism on the transmission of the Catholic faith, a culture that has been deliberately cultivated by the Land O'Lakes Statement. Twenty-eight years after Land O'Lakes became the article of faith for Catholic universities and colleges, Msgr. Kelly observed that, at most of them, "the most serious and fundamental teachings about the divinity of Christ, the virginity of Mary, the nature of the Church, the priesthood and the Eucharist" are disparaged and reduced to "optional theological opinion." Is it any wonder, then, that the results of recent surveys of graduating seniors at Notre Dame, published in 2004 in Notre Dame's Scholastic magazine, disclosed that the students who lost some or all of their faith while at Notre Dame (37 percent) outnumbered those who grew in their faith (16 percent) by more than two to one, or that for the overwhelming plurality (46 percent) the "Catholic identity" of that institution was simply irrelevant. There is no reason to believe that similar surveys at other "contemporary catholic universities" would be more positive.

The Growth of Land O'Lakes

The Land O'Lakes Statement was implemented immediately. Within six months of its drafting, the religious orders that owned Notre Dame and St. Louis University had given away governance of those universities to self-perpetuating boards of trustees, the majority of whom are lay men and women over whom the religious orders have no control. By 1972 nearly all Catholic colleges and universities had followed suit. This is why appeals to fundamentals of the Catholic faith are largely ineffective; they do not affect the bottom line. However, the name "Catholic" is still a positive asset that attracts money and students from those who still believe that the university stands for Catholic truth.

The Vatican has never approved the Land O'Lakes Statement -- not that it matters. In 1976 the Land O'Lakes Statement was formally adopted by the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), which purported to represent 223 Catholic colleges and universities.

In 1990 Pope John Paul II promulgated *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (ECE), his apostolic constitution on Catholic universities, which defined the nature and purpose of a Catholic university and established

measurable standards such a university was to follow. It was dead on arrival in the U.S. Vigorously opposed by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, the College Theology Society, the liberal Catholic media, and the universities themselves, ECE has had no impact on the corporate owners of the rebellious colleges and universities that have prospered under the Land O'Lakes philosophy. After eighteen years, the U.S. bishops who have the responsibility to enforce ECE have yet to summon the courage to do so.

Conclusion

With the Land O'Lakes Statement in 1967, which sprang from an alliance with the Culture of Death, the major Catholic universities in America discarded orthodox Catholic teaching as their *raison d'être* and replaced it with heresy. Since that time, two generations of Catholics have graduated from America's Catholic institutions of higher learning without knowledge or understanding of their faith, believing that one can be Catholic while disbelieving or even opposing Church teaching. Yet these generations of ill-formed, sometimes disbelieving, and often rebellious Catholic graduates are touted as the leadership and the future of the Catholic Church in the U.S. Small wonder, then, that the Church in the U.S. is experiencing a crisis of faith. Laity are uncatechized, clergy are unwilling to instruct them, and quisling bishops are afraid to proclaim the Gospel. A case can be made that a substantial factor causing all of this was, and continues to be, the betrayal of the faith by Catholic academics with the Land O'Lakes Statement in 1967, which has metastasized like cancer throughout the Church ever since.

As Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Nebraska, has noted, heresy is cured by "obedience and repentance." The sooner the history and causal relationship between Land O'Lakes and the secularization of Catholic universities is known and accepted, the sooner this cure can be applied by attentive Catholics, concerned alumni, and courageous bishops.