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## The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

### Scholarship, Faith, and Higher Education

Edited by John O’Keefe, Gina Merys, and Bridget Keegan

## Beyond Books and Benevolence

### Reflections on Civic Engagement in Catholic Universities

Sue E. S. Crawford, Creighton University

#### Introduction

[1] The Catholic Intellectual Tradition assumes the necessity of reconciling faith and the search for truth in its many forms. To leave either pursuit fallow weakens the other as does pursuing either in isolation of the other. As is evident throughout all of the essays in this collection, this emphasis on the creative tension between faith and reason serves as a significant contribution of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition to scholarly wisdom. A similar challenge now exists to reconcile a clear call to justice in the Catholic tradition with a continued commitment to open inquiry and pursuit of truth in various disciplines in Catholic universities. Just as the Catholic Intellectual Tradition has over many years developed to reconcile faith and reason, even while it still struggles to do so, so now the intellectual

tradition wrestles to reconcile the pursuit of justice with the pursuit of open inquiry and knowledge. Civic engagement, if pursued with this tension in mind, offers one tool to contribute to reconciling the pursuit of justice and open inquiry in Catholic universities. However, efforts to push civic engagement, or any other justice-oriented initiative, without sufficient attention to this tension have the potential to instead push students and faculty towards polarizing camps where all fare worse for not learning from each other.

[2] Civic engagement has garnered a great deal of attention from popular and academic presses in the past decade after many years of inattention (Berger). However, Ben Berger argues that very little consensus exists over what constitutes civic engagement. For the purpose of this essay, the term refers to activities that involve joining with others to address some community problem or opportunity, where the community could be local, statewide, national, or global. This essay focuses more specifically on civic engagement that brings academic rigor to those efforts. Civic engagement of most interest here, then, involves activities like: conducting and sharing research on key issues with the broader public (e.g., public meetings, public websites, flyers, letters to the editor, peer presentations, and magazine articles); developing research and scholarly-informed proposals with community members; proposing alternatives to elected officials and fellow citizens; sending research information to elected officials; informing peers to prepare them to testify or prepare communications to elected officials; attending public meetings to learn and share information; and participating in organizations that focus on political issues or community betterment.

[3] This essay does not present a neat blueprint for civic engagement in Catholic universities that allows students and faculty to reconcile the pursuit of justice, faith, and reason. To assume that some single blueprint exists belies a truth that much work in civic engagement reveals: it is only in rigorous study combined with reflection and communication that humans develop ways of working together that allow those involved to reach their full potential. Instead, this essay discusses justifications for going through the work of developing and strengthening civic engagement initiatives and concludes with some initial design principle ideas. Since Catholic universities are both “Catholic” and “University,” the discussion bridges justifications rooted in the Catholic tradition with justifications rooted in the broader academic tradition in the United States.

[4] The discussion of justifications and design principles in this essay offers only a starting point for the rigorous discussions and studies that hopefully will follow as others develop, test, refine, and revise design principles for civic engagement in Catholic universities. With that said, let me stress that even getting to the point of being able to articulate justifications for civic engagement and design principles for civic engagement in Catholic universities, as primitive as they may be in this present form, has only been possible through investments in my work by my own Catholic university. The challenge of writing this essay itself was instigated by an investment from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in a Catholic Intellectual Tradition conference, and the investment of my colleagues in making the conference happen. The invitation to present at the conference and write this essay put me to the task of reading more broadly and reflecting more carefully than I otherwise would have on these topics. The ideas that follow also come from much reading and much discussion with others over the years through various Creighton opportunities such as a year

long faculty development program sponsored by Cardoner, a service-learning faculty development seminar; Heartland Delta faculty conversations, a Jesuit mission faculty seminar series; various other discussions sponsored by Campus Ministries; and discussions with many colleagues from Creighton and elsewhere. I mention these debts not just to give credit to these specific influences, but also to highlight the importance of intentional efforts that provide time and incentives for faculty to reflect on mission and identity questions in order for the Catholic Intellectual Tradition to inform scholarly wisdom.

### **Justifications for Civic Engagement**

[5] This essay discusses four justifications for civic engagement in Catholic universities. The first two focus on justifications that weigh in on the “university” side while the last two stress justifications more specifically on the “Catholic” side. These four justifications by no means exhaust the arguments for civic engagement. Rather, they provide an initial overview of a few justifications while at the same time illustrating ways in which striving for academic excellence and faithfulness to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition coincide.

#### *Civic Engagement to Educate Citizens for Democracy*

[6] Catholic universities wrestle with the challenge to balance a commitment to justice with open inquiry in an American university context with increasing calls for all universities to better prepare students for citizenship (Colby; Colby et al. 2003; Colby et al. 2007; Ehrlich; Schneider). These calls in turn occur within a context of studies that brought attention to decreasing levels of citizen engagement in various forms of public life in America (Barber; Putnam 1995, 2000; Macedo; Skocpol and Fiorina), and evidence of the poor and weakening impact of college education on political engagement, political knowledge, and political interest (Carpani and Keeter; Colby). These studies, and various task forces and discussions inspired by these studies, echo recurrent themes that education for citizenship was, and should continue to be, a central function of higher education. They also reveal mounting evidence suggesting that colleges have been failing to meet this objective, and that this failure threatens the viability of democracy and of universities, perhaps particularly public universities whose *raison d’être* (and funding) require justifying their service to the public at large (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt; Ehrlich).

[7] Russell J. Dalton, in his study of citizenship argues that hand wringing over declining engagement is overstated and that civic engagement is not declining as much as it is taking new forms. Cliff Zukin et al., also using extensive survey data, come to a similar conclusion that civic engagement is shifting rather than declining. Both studies note declining levels of some traditional kinds of engagement such as voting, political party activism, and newspaper reading, but both find evidence of increases in other kinds of engagement such as protest mobilization and community service.

[8] Dalton offers convincing evidence that even traditional forms of political participation have not declined much since the 1950s (63). While it is clearly the case that only a small percentage of Americans step up to participate actively in campaigns beyond voting, that percent does not trend down and actually ticks up (Dalton’s research does not include the

2008 elections).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, earlier studies show that about 30% of citizens participated in community activities in 1967, and more recent studies show levels of this kind of community engagement between 34 and 38% (Dalton: 63-64).

[9] Dalton points to new evidence of internet involvement, such as viewing political websites and forwarding email petitions and notes. The level of engagement using these methods in 2005 exceeds the levels of several other kinds of traditional campaign methods such as campaign contributions and displaying campaign materials. A more recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 55% of all Americans used the internet in some way to learn about or participate in the 2008 election, while 75% of internet users did the same (Smith). This same study finds that about 20% of internet users posted a comment with political content, while almost thirty percent (28%) of internet users report forwarding political writing or commentary and nearly 20% report forwarding political audio or video (Smith).

[10] The Pew numbers only reflect internet engagement explicitly related to elections, so they do not capture the levels of broader dialogue and civic engagement using the internet, such as interacting on a local politics blog, or sending web-generated emails to elected officials on issues such as abortion policies or the crisis in Darfur. The most widely used source of political participation data in the United States in the political science discipline, the American Election Studies, includes just one question on the 2008 study that gets at non-electoral internet participation. The question asks about internet petitions, and the results indicate that about 25% of Americans have signed an internet petition at some time. This compares to 56% who report ever signing a paper petition (American National Election Studies).

[11] Three important cautions are in order before assuming that all is well for democracy and thus no justification for bolstering civic engagement in college education exists. First and foremost, the absence of precipitous decline does not mean that civic engagement is at healthy levels; rather it means it is not worsening. More importantly, the figures above all report overall levels of participation. Evidence exists that while overall numbers of citizens engaging in democracy may be holding relatively steady, serious and growing inequalities exist in terms of *who* is participating (American Political Science Association). The inequality gap in participation translates into measurably significant differences in the responsiveness of members of Congress to those with resources. Wealthier citizens exert three times the influence on senate votes than poorer citizens (American Political Science Association: 14). Various changes in election campaigns, social life, and interest groups have made it much more difficult for working class individuals to mobilize and get their voice heard, while at the same time party organizations and interest groups have tailored their strategies towards mobilizing the connected and affluent (American Political Science Association; Skocpol and Fiorina). At the same time, citizen trust in democratic institutions and processes has dropped substantially (American Political Science Association). Finally, the findings on relatively steady levels of participation report on quantities of engagement; they do not address the

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<sup>1</sup> Published research on levels of participation in the 2008 election is still mostly in the pipeline at the time of the writing of this essay.

quality of the content of that participation. Practice in civic engagement matters not just for the sake of encouraging students to become engaged citizens, but for the sake of helping our students apply their specialized knowledge, their commitment to justice, and their critical thinking skills and creativity in order to raise the level of civic discourse in their communities. In his study of blogs and internet discussion groups, Richard Davis finds mostly poor dialogue rife with flaming and venting. So, while more internet participation may be happening, much may remain to be done to educate citizens on how to participate more effectively.

[12] While university education does not appear to hold a smoking gun over the death or precipitous decline of civic engagement, it does not exactly get high marks either. Although the level of engagement may not be declining as sharply as some imagine in overall numbers, for civic engagement to decline at all or even stay steady in light of the growth in numbers of students attending college over time suggests that college education is not strengthening civic engagement. The growth in service-learning has increased the number of students who have the opportunity to link academic work to engagement in their communities, but the evidence indicates that college students have far fewer of these opportunities than high school students (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt), that very few service-learning programs involve students in efforts to influence political choices (Colby et al. 2003; Eyler and Giles; Robinson), and that many students do not connect service-learning to civic engagement or see civic engagement as relevant to their college education (Colby; Schneider; Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt). In a review of 600 service-learning initiatives on different campuses Tony Robinson found that only one percent of them involved students in activities that moved beyond direct service to individuals or technical assistance, into broader forms of civic engagement.

[13] The link between service and civic engagement does not happen automatically or easily, it takes an intentional focus. Anne Colby has noted that we have seen great strides in commitment to service and experience in service that have come out of intentional efforts by schools and universities to encourage and/or require students to be involved in service. She and others (Colby; Eyler and Giles; Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt) note that education for citizenship serves often as a core justification for service-learning, but that service-learning does not lead to civic engagement learning outcomes in the absence of intentional reflection and design that helps students to make that link. Many of these studies focus on public universities. Whether the results would be different in a study of Catholic universities is a fair question, but one that unfortunately does not yet appear to have been rigorously answered. Anecdotally it is easy to see great examples of civic engagement in some programs and courses at Creighton. For example, the Center for Service and Justice involves students in mentoring other students on how to be involved in advocacy and has weekly meetings for students to discuss and learn about various political issues. While these examples and others may be exemplars of the intersection of faith and reason in the service of justice, the breadth of exposure of Creighton students, and students at Catholic universities in general, to civic engagement experiences remains a question.

[14] The apparent inattention to civic engagement on many campuses stands in stark contrast to the purported importance of civic engagement in many university education learning goals and mission statements (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt). Statements of

learning goals or visions for college education often include explicit references to citizenship or civic engagement. For example, a recent statement by the American Council on Education, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Association of Community Colleges, Association of American Universities, National Association of Independent Colleges and University, and National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges argues that “[t]he most basic goals of an undergraduate education remain the ability to think, write, and speak clearly; to reason critically; to solve problems; to work collaboratively; to acquire field-specific knowledge; and to acquire the judgment, analytic capability, and independence of thought to support continued, self-driving, lifelong learning and engaged citizenship” (cited in Colby et al. 2007: 3). Notice that in addition to the explicit reference to citizenship, the learning goals of writing and speaking clearly, solving problems, and working collaboratively would be developed by practice in civic engagement during college and would in turn improve civic engagement by college graduates.

[15] The strategic plan for our own Catholic university also explicitly mentions citizenship: “Creighton University will be a national leader in preparing students in a faith-based setting for responsible leadership, professional distinction, and committed citizenship” (Creighton University). No doubt many other mission statements or vision statements for Catholic universities have similar statements. Above and beyond the rationale for educated citizenship that Catholic universities share with all other universities, the explicit call for Catholic institutions to take justice seriously offers a rationale for Catholic universities to take civic engagement seriously. Efforts to identify and tackle injustice usually involve some form of civic engagement. Quite often such efforts explicitly involve individuals organizing with others to change government policies.

#### *Civic Engagement to Improve Learning*

[16] Research in education and cognitive science reinforce the importance of pedagogies that stress learning through action, such as learning through civic engagement. Actually, it may take the act of doing to even get students to the point of being open to learning (Dewey). Even students sufficiently motivated to excel in exams may not “learn” the material in the deeper sense that they know how to use it outside of the context of scoring a good grade in a course. One often cited example that demonstrates how students can do well on course work but lack deeper learning for problem solving comes from a study of physics students. The study shows that students demonstrate an understanding of Newtonian physics in course work, but then fall right back into pre-Newtonian assumptions when placed in a situation that required problem solving (National Research Council Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning; Hallon and Hestenes). Perkins and Simmons find more broadly that students tend to come into a new subject with “naïve theories.” Students can learn a theory that conflicts with one of their initial “naïve theories” for the purpose of doing well in a class, but then tend to fall back to the naïve theory when facing a problem or question later. Findings like these fuel calls for connected learning or deep learning: learning that sticks and can be applied in problem solving later. In addition to knowing how a theory applies to a problem, students need to also recognize the relevance of the theories to complex problems that are likely to come their way. To consider a physics theory in the

context of a physics class is one thing, to recall and apply a physics theory later outside of class is another.

[17] One way to foster this kind of learning is to have students practice applying learning to problem solving in situations outside of the classroom through civic engagement. The civic engagement project already puts the course work in contact with a “real-world” problem in all of its complexity. In some cases a problem or partnership for the civic engagement exercise may be chosen because the faculty member knows that it will provide practice in a particular theory or skill linked to a class. In many cases, however, civic engagement provides the added challenge of helping students figure out what theories and skills apply. If students have the opportunity to do this with guidance that helps them move beyond naïve theories, they may then be better able to diagnose problems and apply their learning in future situations.

[18] At the very least, studies such as these make it clear that we cannot assume that learning well enough to excel in traditional coursework means that the student will recognize how to use that information and apply it later. When asked about a health care dilemma in the context of a philosophy exam, the student may be able to recall and apply an ethical principle. That does not necessarily mean that when facing a very similar dilemma the year after graduation the student will reference the ethical principle learned in philosophy. Recent studies in cognitive science reinforce Perkins and Simmons argument that if a student had a “naïve theory” prior to the class it is quite likely that the student, when faced with a dilemma later on will return back to that naïve theory. Likewise, a new ethical principle will not likely stick unless it is already consistent with the way the student understands the world (Lakoff). The new ethical principle (or new math principle or zoology theory) will only stick if it makes sense in light of the way the student thinks already or if that new principle is practiced until new neural connections form, which are strong enough to override the naïve theory connections that may have been built over a long time. As Margaret Polski argues in her book on the intersection of political economy and neuroscience, “we cannot change our world without changing our brains” (32).

[19] Consistent with the theme of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as a source of scholarly wisdom, notice how these educational and cognitive science findings confirm the Jesuit pedagogy principle of having students reflect on their own experiences and connect new learning to what they already understand from their own experiences. This reflection pedagogy links new learning to neural connections a student already has, and provides a way for new learning to “stick” because it is consistent with something that has already stuck.

[20] Professors at Catholic universities are not unique in being called to step up efforts to prepare students for engagement in the broader world by addressing tough issues of the day, nor are they unique in being willing to step up to that challenge. Carol Geary Schneider notes that a “civic momentum” is building with hundreds of universities joining various efforts to foster the connection of learning and civic engagement such as Campus Compact and the American Democracy Project (135). As John O’Keefe argues in the first essay of this collection, educational emphases that come similarly from humanism or academia in general should not be mistaken as marks of Catholic identity or the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. It does not mean that these emphases lack importance in a Catholic undergraduate education,

but it does suggest that we need to dig deeper to consider the contributions of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. We share the task of educating students for citizenship and learning with other universities, which leads to the question of what Catholic universities and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition bring to the table.

*Civic Engagement to Reconcile Faith, Reason, and Justice*

[21] As has been stressed by many authors in this collection, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition emphasizes the compatibility of faith and reason. More recently the tradition explicitly argues that faith and reason must also be reconciled with justice. This “more recent” emphasis in Catholic statements that I stress in this essay, however, falls into a much longer tradition at the heart of Christianity that has opened minds and hearts to the injustices of victimization and of dehumanizing institutions for centuries (e.g., Bailie; Eisenstein; Rolheiser 2006). Despite the fact that at times Christian churches succumb themselves to these same injustices, Gil Bailie argues that the strength of the Christian gospel is that the gospel itself helps to pull Christian institutions out of injustice even when the injustices themselves were initially defended by the same scriptures. Rohlheiser captures the essence of his argument: “we didn’t stop burning witches because we stopped reading the bible, we stopped burning witches because we kept reading the bible.”

[22] Before turning to the more recent post-Vatican II statements from Catholic church teachings and Catholic thinking on justice, consider just two historic examples of Creighton faculty that illustrate bringing faith, reason, and justice to bear on problems of the day prior to this more recent period. In 1910 Rev. William F. Riggie, S.J., an astronomy professor, used mathematics to establish the time of day of a photograph that discredited testimony against a political enemy of the powerful Omaha political boss mayor Cowboy Tom Dennison. Despite visits by Dennison and the chief of detectives to sway Riggie from his scientifically derived testimony, Riggie continued to stand by his calculations. Riggie brought this event, and the use of science for justice, to life for his students each year by taking them to the site where they took a picture at the same time, and practiced calculating the time of the picture from the shadows. In 1930, a young science and math professor, Rev. John P. Markoe, S.J., started a long history of working for civil rights by establishing the Creighton Colored Cooperative Club to help minority students obtain housing. After working to integrate St. Louis University, he returned to Creighton in 1946 and set to work to serve students and work for justice again. In 1947, Markoe and black and white students began the De Porres club and preceded to fight racial discrimination in Omaha well before the Civil Rights movement was in full swing. Although Markoe’s work did not apply his math and science expertise as directly, he clearly used his broader education in organizing and writing to change public and private policies in Omaha, and mobilized students to do the same. These stories offer examples of civic engagement in Creighton’s own Catholic tradition prior to recent Catholic statements that put greater emphasis on justice in Catholic institutions, including higher education.<sup>2</sup>

[23] To give a sense of the justifications in the Catholic tradition for bringing justice to bear on faith and reason the following paragraphs cite several statements, most of which come

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to David Crawford, Creighton University Archivist, for historic information on Riggie and Markoe.

from, or are cited by, Michael J. Buckley, S.J. in his book, *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections on a Jesuit Idiom*. His book explores the justification for emphasizing justice and the tensions between this call and the need for the university to be a place of open inquiry and rigorous study much more fully than can be done in this essay.

[24] Buckley points to statements by Pope Paul IV in 1667 (On the Development of Peoples) and by the Synod of Bishops in 1971 as key statements concerning the call of Catholic Universities to take justice seriously. However, at the beginning of his encyclical, Pope Paul IV recognizes that the call to justice is not new, but resonates through previous statements by other popes starting with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* dating back to 1891, which clarifies that a concern for justice has a longstanding place in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. The 1667 encyclical identifies a concern for justice as a core element of education and maturity by stating that, "A responsiveness to human sorrow and exploitation and a consequent passion for social justice are simply part of what it means to be a developed human being" (Paul IV "On the Development of Peoples" cited by Buckley: 119). The Synod of Bishops in 1971 likewise stressed justice as a core principle in the Catholic tradition by stating that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel" (cited in Buckley: 106).

[25] In 2000, Rev. Peter-Hans Kovenbach, speaking as Superior General of the Society of Jesus at Santa Clara University stressed the connection between justice and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in Jesuit university education by arguing that graduates should obtain a *well-educated solidarity*: "We must raise our Jesuit educational standard to form a 'whole person of solidarity' for the real world." Buckley, a fellow Jesuit, eloquently sums up an educational standard much like "well-educated solidarity" as a core component of what it means to be a product of liberal education in the twenty-first century.

As one would never say that an indifference to beautiful poetry, to sound history, to a well-reasoned argument and to the advances of science are consonant with a liberal education, so insensitivity to human pain and sorrow, isolation from the international experiences of exploitation and misery and indifference to the great questions of economic justice and human rights must mark a human being a savage in the twenty-first century, whatever his or her humanistic conquests in terms of literary skills and refined taste (Buckley: 119).

[26] Various educational experiences, including, but not limited to civic engagement, can serve as parts of a "well-educated solidarity" curriculum. Experiences abroad, on service trips, and through service and advocacy activities with student services, can all be a part of this enterprise. However, for it to be a "well-educated solidarity" suggests that the awareness of human suffering gets connected in substantive ways to rigorous study and the creation of new research questions, new artistic expressions, or new applications of academic learning. As Buckley states, "Deep care without concomitant skills and knowledge leads only into enthusiasms. From this appreciation must come an educated awareness of what these students can do with their lives and with their education to better the human condition" (122).

[27] Helping students to see the world beyond their everyday experiences and challenging them to ask hard ethical questions can develop “deep care,” but without an understanding of how “being a person for others” relates to chemistry, literature, or accounting, and the communities in which students live and work, “deep care” may just be understood as college enthusiasms to be dismissed when its time to get to “the real world.” Careful attention by faculty to find ways to engage students in projects related to coursework and to ask questions that help students see connections between their service work and course work on the one hand and careful attention by student services to encourage students to talk about the relevance of their academic studies to service and civic projects can help students practice moving beyond enthusiasms to action.

[28] Much of academic discussion focuses on critique and questioning, as it well should. It is critical for students to question and seek answers to new questions, and for students to critique and to be open to critique. However, students may need more encouragement and guidance in moving to action. These efforts need to go beyond just complaining about government or just arguing that the “government should do something about this problem.” The same people who profit from an injustice often also have inordinate political power, so attention has to be given to the best avenues and strategies to change those situations. We can encourage students to apply their research skills to learn about what governments and other community groups are already doing and to critically reflect on possible changes with attention to feasibility and complex ethical trade-offs like liberty, equality, and security. In courses with a focus on Catholic social teaching, students can be asked to consider how the values of Catholic social teaching inform strategies to reduce the problem. One does not need to be a political scientist to tackle these questions, just a well-educated citizen. Dalton’s research on generational shifts in citizenship suggests that this kind of problem-based engagement lines up well with students’ current understandings of citizenship.

[29] A key challenge in courses and programs is to push students to tackle these kinds of political questions with keen attention to open inquiry and critical questioning, but also with attention to developing confidence in students to commit and act. Colby et al. (2007) and Buckley all stress the important challenge of helping students to develop their abilities to confidently act on convictions while at the same time remaining open to critical questions and listening to those who disagree.

[30] Applying questions of science and humanities to common problems and working with others to develop solutions that involve government and/or community organizations puts well-educated solidarity into action and allows students to practice reconciling faith, reason, and justice in messy real world settings. Moving beyond academic questions to community action, though, particularly action that may involve advocating for changes in government policy, brings politics to the fore. This may raise concerns about being too political or concerns about leading students to some particular political ideology. This gets at the heart of concerns by some that a justice focus serves as a guise for politically liberal ideological indoctrination.

[31] Buckley argues to the contrary, that

[t]o bring the students to such a developed sensitivity that human pain and social injustice speak to their lives – and speak so effectively that they draw

the students to further specialized studies and consequent action – is neither indoctrination nor partisan pleading. It is a humanistic education whose produce is a sensibility, as set of skills, and a knowledge that is profoundly humane. It is part of what Paul VI called the ‘search for a new humanism’ that will enable human beings to find themselves again (119).

It is the drawing of students to further study and consequent action that is key to this justice focus, not drawing students to any particular ideology that defines what that action should be. Even if a faculty member models a development of ideas informed by a particular ideology, through commitment to open inquiry discussions he or she can and should encourage students to challenge ideas from liberal, conservative, and even Catholic social teaching ideologies. If the project is one that requires all students or multiple students to agree on a solution, then that becomes a situation in which students can wrestle with developing solutions that are informed by multiple ideologies – or gain practice in seeing the strengths and weaknesses of solutions based in a particular ideology.

[32] David Cochran’s essay on Catholic voters illustrates a core strength of American Catholic universities as a setting for open discussions about ideology and justice. Catholic social teaching and Catholics as individuals cut across party and ideological lines. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition can inform scholarly wisdom concerning the core question of what justice is with principles that challenge all ideologies. Given ideological dominance in many fields (liberals in humanities and conservatives in economics, for example) academic discussions in an academic field may easily fall into narrow ideological ruts. Attention to speaking to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition requires explicit attention to ideological openness beyond these disciplinary ruts. To the extent that Catholic university courses or programs simplify “justice” to mean only economic redistribution or simplify “justice and peace” so that only students who already have politically liberal positions find their place, we likely are not yet wrestling sufficiently with how to work with students to reconcile faith, reason, and justice.

[33] One does not have to assume that a Catholic focus leads to more ideological openness to know that students of various ideological stripes benefit from civic engagement in higher education. Recent results from research about civic engagement projects in a wide variety of universities alleviates concern surrounding ideological indoctrination in civic engagement curriculum and programs at the university level. The study of 21 courses and projects in a variety of universities shows that students involved in these civic engagement projects increased their political interest and knowledge, but did not change their political ideology or party affiliation (Colby et al. 2007; Colby). This does not necessarily mean that they did not change their understanding of the world or their sense of their responsibilities in the world, but that those new understandings still fit, for most students, within their sense of their original political affiliation and party affiliation.

[34] From the perspective of “well-educated solidarity,” the fundamental concern is that students not remain in a state of blissful individualistic apathy without awareness or concern about injustice. Research on the political engagement programs in various universities demonstrates the effectiveness of civic engagement in moving students from indifferent apathy, even for students who start with low levels of political interest. Those students with

low levels of political interest increased in all types of political skills measured, and increased in political interest even more than those who entered a civic engagement program with higher political interest (Colby et al. 2007).

[35] At a very basic level, Catholic universities and other Christian universities share a task of witnessing to the academic world and to their own students that Christian faith can be consistent with learning and consistent with advancing human justice. The messy reality of problem solving in civic engagement lends itself to discussions that bring together questions of empirical science and normative inquiry. When civic engagement is done with attention to issues of faith and the experiences of people in religious institutions, it provides opportunities for discussions of science, philosophical ethical principles, and faith-driven principles and practices.

[36] In a Creighton class I teach called Faith in Political Action, students work in partnership with faith-based organizations on projects that allow them to use research and communication skills to work on projects that involve working for justice in some way (e.g., reducing predatory lending, working against the death penalty, reducing gun violence, improving affordable housing, tackling issues related to immigration). The course covers some research and communication skills related to policy analysis and policy advocacy, and students are encouraged to use their expertise from their major studies as much as possible. Students learn to work with one another and a faith-based community partner in ways that allow them to see how to put skills and knowledge from their undergraduate education to use. In this case, questions of how faith, reason, and justice come together flow fairly easily from discussions of their projects and what they see in their work with their faith-based partners, especially since the readings in the course also relate to issues of how faith influences the ways that individuals and organizations understand their civic responsibilities. This course, because of its design as a capstone course that specifically focuses on faith and citizenship is perhaps an unfairly easy example. However, similar questions can easily be raised with a wide range of courses. How can I use my science and humanities training in service to a community? When and why would I do that? What are the ethical issues that need to be considered when stepping into these situations? What does this kind of involvement have to do with ethics and my faith? How are others in the community modeling service through use of expertise and reasoning in civic engagement?

[37] A Catholic model of balancing faith, reason, and justice in a university not only assists Catholic students, but also students and faculty of other faiths to more explicitly reflect on the balance of faith and reason in their own traditions. The point is not to indoctrinate a “Catholic” perspective, or any particular narrow “justice” perspective, but to help students see the need to remain open to ways in which to work with others in their communities in order to reduce injustices and improve the lives of individuals in communities.

#### *Civic Engagement to Experience Catholic Community*

[38] In addition to providing a means through which students, faculty, and staff can wrestle with the creative tension of balancing faith with reason and justice, civic engagement opportunities with Catholic partners can also provide opportunities for students to experience Catholic community in a broader and richer sense. For example, a policy class I taught worked on a civic education project with an eighth grade class in a local Catholic

elementary school. In addition to learning about policy topics, policy research, and the lives of families in an inner city area, the students also had the opportunity to learn about the Catholic elementary school experience. The experience encouraged students who had attended a Catholic elementary school to talk about their experiences and those students who did not have that experience to talk about how the Catholic elementary school compared to their own elementary school experiences. So, in addition to the project allowing a Creighton university class to serve a fellow Catholic academic institution (consistent with *Ex Corde Ecclesia*), the project also allowed Creighton students, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, to understand Catholic experiences in a deeper way.

[39] In the Faith in Political Action class, students have worked with partners in the archdiocese to develop and present parish educational materials on various political issues such as poverty and the death penalty. This provides the students with experiences in a variety of Catholic parishes, giving them a sense of Catholic community in addition to what they learn from the individuals with whom they interact and from their research and civic experiences.

[40] One of the assets of American Catholicism is its institutional richness. The development of parallel institutions (schools, hospitals, social organizations, mutual aid societies, orders, etc.) remains a legacy of the founding work of Catholic orders, discrimination against Catholics in many established organizations years ago, and the continuing commitment of religious and lay Catholics to building and maintaining these institutions. Civic engagement projects that provide experiences for students in these kinds of organizations provide a way for the educational experience to be in “an academic institution in which Catholicism is vitally present and operative” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 14).

[41] While partnering with Catholic institutions provides these Catholic experiences, partnerships with other kinds of community organizations also provide opportunities for students to understand Catholic community. In the Faith and Political Action class student comparisons between the statements and actions of institutions from various faith traditions often helps students better understand and articulate what is distinct (and not distinct) about the Catholic institutions. Creating opportunities across the curriculum and through student services for students to work with a wide range of community partners also helps the students to see the ways in which Catholic institutions work closely with secular institutions and other faith-based institutions on shared concerns. Moreover, civic engagement initiatives on Catholic campuses that work with non-Catholic partners extend the tradition of Catholic institutions into communities being willing to collaborate with others. It is a vitally Catholic expression also, consistent with the call in *Ex Corde Ecclesia* that a Catholic university be “open to all human experience” and “ready to dialogue with and learn from any culture,” while at the same time “offering the rich experience of the Church’s own culture” (43).

[42] Students can also experience a sense of Catholic communion through civic engagement projects that connect students to broader Catholic movements going on in many Catholic universities. For example, students attending one of the annual Jesuit teach-in sessions at the former School of Americas can experience being part of a larger community that shares a sense of taking responsibility for learning about experiences of injustice and taking some action to stand against it. This occurs in a setting with many other Catholics and a setting

that also ties into an important Catholic story about the killing of Jesuits working for justice in Central America.

[43] Civic engagement opportunities, then, open the door for Catholic students to enrich their sense of Catholic identity. However, civic engagement partnerships also open opportunities for non-Catholic students to experience Catholic community in a deeper way and to further build dialogue and partnerships between leaders of different faiths.

### **Design Principles**

[44] This essay concludes with some initial design principles for civic engagement in Catholic universities. These principles are offered in the spirit of this collection to share reflections on our current understandings of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and to spur others to join in the discussion.

#### *Commit to Ideological Openness*

[45] A key question I ask myself is whether a Republican, or conservative, student would feel engaged and connected for any particular civic component of a course. One example of expressing openness at the beginning is to stress from the outset that civic engagement may be designed to reverse or reduce government involvement in an area; that the core goal of civic engagement for social change is not necessarily to increase government involvement. In an introductory class that draws mostly non-majors I check the average score for papers with conservative positions as compared to the scores for papers with liberal positions and happily I have always been able to report a percentage point or less difference in the two sets. This check not only helps me to check myself, but it gives me a story to tell in other classes to assure students that I am serious about wanting them to be honest and critically explore different ideas.

[46] In some classes the bigger ideological openness challenge for students is to move beyond an assumption that governments can simply put the principles of Catholic social teaching in place, and that any exceptions from Catholic social teaching, or more narrowly, any deviations from political positions taken by Catholic leaders, is simply intentional immorality or ignorance. Working as citizens with others in pluralistic democratic settings requires attention to various perspectives as well as constitutional and political limitations. Ideally, civic engagement projects help students to practice developing ideas that build on ethical principles while also accommodating different perspectives and limitations.

#### *Build on Catholic Institutional Richness*

[47] In many communities numerous Catholic institutions can be civic engagement partners. As discussed earlier, introducing students to these expressions of Catholic community through civic engagement can be a part of strengthening the Catholic identity of a university.

#### *Build on the Heritage of the University*

[48] More than likely all Catholic universities have stories of faculty and student engagement that can encourage and inspire students to step forward and apply scholarship to civic activities. Some of these may be stories from years ago, such as the stories of Riggie and Markoe at Creighton. Attention to uncovering and celebrating these stories can help to

foster a sense of the long-standing Catholic tradition of putting research in service of justice. In some cases the stories may be about university efforts to initially silence or stop the justice advocates. However, even those stories offer important lessons about the challenges of social change and hopefully about universities being able to eventually move to a deeper level of ethical understanding. These kinds of stories may help students gain perspective when they feel that their current efforts are only meeting resistance from their own university.

[49] Similarly, students and faculty will benefit from a stronger sense of recent civic engagement experiences from others in the university. Efforts to share those stories will help students and faculty to imagine ways in which they can step forward to use various types of research and coursework in civic activism.

#### *Embrace Ambiguity and the Learning Curve*

[50] Loeb, in his book on citizenship encourages readers to move beyond the paralysis that comes from thinking that one has to be an expert before jumping into the civic foray. As a faculty member the ambiguity and complexity of civic engagement efforts in the classroom can be quite challenging. If you are a political science faculty member, students will ask questions assuming that you know the details of all existing policies and players in any particular state or community. Continuously turning the questions back to students and encouraging them to learn how to find the answers is a key challenge, but one that is perhaps made easier by the fact that faculty will not know many of the answers at the outset. Political science faculty is no more likely than an English or Chemistry faculty member to have learned this kind of detailed information in their graduate training. Most political science textbooks for students focus on national-level policies and players rather than on the local and state level players who are central to many political issues, so most standard textbooks for political science classes will not suffice. In a notable exception, Larry Gerston offers a textbook for civic engagement that helps students work through the process of learning the ropes for any particular policy issue and of getting involved starting at the local level. Political science faculty, just like faculty from other disciplines, will be learning along with students, the political landscape of a particular community, state, or policy area. Faculty openness about the challenge of learning the landscape can help students recognize that this kind of legwork will need to be done wherever they land, in order to be an engaged citizen. The learning curve will be steep the first time into a new community or new policy area. However, contacts made and lessons learned will make the next foray easier. Similarly, sharing between faculty members eases the process by sharing contacts and valuable information for a particular location or policy area.

#### *Practice Justice*

[51] Recall the American Political Science Association's finding discussed earlier that civic engagement slants heavily to those with greater resources. Many of our students are the resourced individuals that parties and interest groups now heavily target. To simply make them more effective at voicing their own interests has the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities in civic engagement. Students with an educated solidarity may counter this problem to some extent. However, at least some civic engagement efforts can be designed to

involve and bring university education resources to those who otherwise might not have access to them. In this way the civic engagement academic exercise itself attempts to reduce injustice in its very practice. Last semester, for example, students in a policy analysis class worked with junior high students from a Catholic elementary school that enrolls many students from lower-income families. As part of the project the junior high students had the opportunity to work with college-aged mentors and to develop and present policy proposals to local leaders. The Creighton students learned from the experiences of developing and leading policy projects and from the life experiences of the junior high students, while the junior high students had access to tailored civic education curriculum and an opportunity to visit the campus and present ideas with the college students.

*Put Civic Engagement in Perspective*

[52] The point of this essay is not to argue that every class or every faculty member employ civic engagement projects. Rather, the point of the essay is to encourage consideration of the ways in which civic engagement in some courses and programs can enhance connections between the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and scholarly wisdom as understood and practiced by students and faculty. To put civic engagement in perspective means discerning when and where it makes sense to encourage it on any particular campus. Another component of putting civic engagement in perspective is to intentionally link the civic engagement to academic pursuits, particularly civic engagement that occurs as part of course projects. A key challenge is to consider how the science, art, or humanities studied as part of a class relates to contemporary challenges and potential civic partners. Faculty who have few community connections or little experience venturing into civic engagement may be surprised at the breadth of ideas that can come from discussions with other faculty and with student service staff who have extensive knowledge of organizations and projects in the community.

[53] The growth in Internet engagement offers new opportunities to connect learning to civic engagement in ways that reach students and that, frankly, make engagement easier and more instantly rewarding. A key challenge will be to help students raise the level of critical thinking and careful analysis in these discussions. What can we do to better prepare students to be effective in raising and improving dialogue in settings that often fall into partisan polarization and knee jerk reactions? Critical thinking and communication skills provide tools, but students may not see the connection or learn how to practice them in civic settings without guided experience.

[54] Finally putting civic engagement in perspective means recognizing that it is not just for political science courses or majors. The list below contains just a few ideas, almost all of which relate to actual activities by Creighton faculty or Creighton courses. Photography and photojournalism can be used to document injustices and to humanize an issue and mobilize civic responses. Interviewing skills such as those learned in journalism or anthropology can be used as research to better understand how people in a particular neighborhood see a particular problem and how they understand their roles in addressing it. Science students can test water samples and help develop water purification proposals. Health science students can develop proposals for public school policies that will improve the health of students based on their experience working with students in clinics. Research design classes in social

sciences can be used to design and conduct needs assessment or asset-assessment for community planning. Basic secondary source research and writing skills (such as those taught in writing composition) can be used to develop background papers that clarify academic understandings of an issue and that discuss how that issue applies to a particular community. Service-learning resources in various disciplines can trigger ideas for civic engagement. A recent Jesuit reader (Traub) includes chapters on applying mission principles in business, art history, and the hard sciences, which can also be useful for generating ideas.

[55] When considering the possible place of civic engagement in a course or major, one place to start is to ask how the content or skills from a particular course or major relate to problems facing the community. My first civic engagement efforts in classes involved asking students to each develop a particular community problem focus for the semester (Crawford). Students each picked their own focus in earlier classes. In later classes the problem focus for a student group or the entire class came out of a discussion with a community partner. For example, one student group tackled predatory lending in collaboration with a United Way partner while another group in the same class examined the coordination of care to reduce homelessness in Omaha for a homeless coalition partner. The student's assignments over the semester challenged them to conduct their own readings and an interview with a community stakeholder, and to connect what they learned in the course with what they learned from their community-based research to develop proposals for addressing the problem. These courses still often fell short of actual advocacy for the proposals. Usually a written assignment required an advocacy plan that asked students to identify the steps they would take next to move into that phase. In other classes students develop testimony statements or letters and have practiced sharing advocacy flyers, presenting information to public officials, and persuading fellow students to sign petitions or letters.

[56] I hope that these reflections on civic engagement as it relates to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition encourage others to step into new experiments in civic engagement, to share their experiences, and to conduct more rigorous analysis of civic engagement learning outcomes in Catholic universities. I again want to stress that my development in these areas owes a great deal to intentional faculty development initiatives and that providing these kinds of opportunities will be an important part of making it possible for faculty to enhance civic engagement education for students. Training in teaching for civic engagement is simply not a part of graduate training for most faculty. Considering the connections between public applications of research and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is even less likely to be any part of our training. Stewardship of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition requires engagement by faculty and administrators to work together to develop institutional opportunities and incentives that foster appropriate attention to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in various ways. Increased attention to civic engagement that moves students beyond books and benevolence is just one strategy among others to be developed on particular Catholic campuses. The need to work together to develop such strategies offers a civic engagement exercise within Catholic universities themselves.

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