

**Sacred Heart University**

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**From the Selected Works of Brian Stiltner**

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# Catholic Higher Education for the Common Good

Brian Stiltner, *Sacred Heart University*



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## ***Catholic Higher Education for the Common Good***

Brian Stiltner

Saint Anselm College symposium in honor of Father Jonathan DeFelice, April 4, 2013

### **Introduction**

My sincere thanks go to the social committee—Professors McKenna, Fogg, and Thorn—for inviting me to speak here today. It is a very great honor to be included in the events celebrating the presidency of Fr. Jonathan DeFelice. Under your leadership, Father, St. Anselm College has enhanced its strengths in liberal arts education while developing programs so that your students are prepared to make their contributions at work and in society. Sacred Heart University was not alone in looking to St. Anselm for inspiration in setting up a core curriculum. That is a testimony to work that your whole community has done with Fr. Jonathan's guidance. St. Anselm's impact has been made possible because the institution and its leadership are engaged in conversations and collaborations throughout higher education. Fr. Jonathan has served on boards and held leadership positions in networks of Catholic higher education; he has done the same in regional networks. The programs and institutes you've developed at St. Anselm enable your students to contribute to the civic community during their college education and to develop skills and tough-minded empathy that prepare them for lives of generous service.

St. Anselm College is just one of many examples of Catholicism's inestimable contributions to society through education down the centuries. Our institutions remain vital, but like all colleges and universities today, we face great challenges. As we continually go back to our font, what can we learn from the Catholic tradition—its theological,

intellectual, educational, and social traditions—to address these challenges and keep our institutions vital? The primary font I will draw from in this talk is the Catholic concept of the common good.

I come to you as a 15-year faculty member of a Catholic university, one of your sister schools in New England, whose basic educational mission, commitment to the Catholic intellectual tradition, student demographics, and range of undergraduate programs is much like yours. The differences are that Sacred Heart is larger and a comprehensive masters institution. You advertise yourselves as the 2<sup>nd</sup> *oldest* Catholic college in New England and we advertise ourselves as the 2<sup>nd</sup> *largest* Catholic college in New England—and logically speaking, only we could possibly overtake BC on our criterion! As you heard in the introduction, I'm a theological ethicist who has been inspired and helped by the wisdom of the Catholic tradition as it applies to education. Of course, if I could answer in compelling detail the challenges facing Catholic higher education that I'll talk about, someone would make me a Catholic college president tomorrow! I am not even close to that. There are no easy answers to any of these challenges, while the answers to some consist largely in our continually addressing them.

There are three parts to my talk. In Part One, I will lay out one view of the crisis of the humanities, that of philosopher Martha Nussbaum. In Part Two, spurred by Nussbaum, I will ask us to think through some of the challenges facing Catholic higher education. In Part Three, I will give an account of the Catholic philosophy of higher education for the common good, featuring Jacques Maritain's educational and political philosophy. In the conclusion, I will only have time left to revisit the challenges briefly. Yet I'll rely on you in the discussion period to share ideas about how our institutions are meeting and could

better meet the challenges. So my aim is not to lay out detailed plans but to articulate some elements of a Catholic philosophy of education that sustains our work.

### **I. The Crisis of the Humanities**

Martha Nussbaum, the well-known scholar of Greek philosophy who has ranged into many areas as a public intellectual, wrote *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* in 2010. She begins this short book, a manifesto, by naming a “silent crisis”:

We are in the midst of a crisis of massive proportions and grave global significance...

Radical changes are occurring in what democratic societies teach the young, and these changes have not been well thought through.... What are these radical changes? The humanities and the arts are being cut away, in both

primary/secondary and college/university education, in virtually every nation of the world. Seen by policy-makers as useless frills, at a time when nations must cut away all useless things in order to stay competitive in the global market, they are rapidly losing their place in curricula, and also in the minds and hearts of parents and children. Indeed, what we might call the humanistic aspects of science and social science—the imaginative, creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought—are also losing ground as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit by the cultivation of the useful and highly applied shoes suited to profit-making (2).

What are the stakes? To quote her again:

Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their education systems, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If the trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines,

rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's suffering and achievements. The future of the world's democracies hangs in the balance (2).

This is strong stuff. Some people might feel the claims are hyperbolic. Ever since the times of Socrates and Confucius, each age has its prophets warning that education is in decline, becoming more instrumentalist and more individualistic. But while it may be good to take a deep breath and realize that the grass of the past always seems greener, it would be wrong to ignore Nussbaum's warning. Her account of the severe pressures on humanistic education are supported with data, stories, social scientific literature, and philosophical reasoning. Bear in mind that her scope is global and her examination of educational contexts reaches from kindergarten through the university level. When she is focusing on Europe, China, and India—India being the primary nation she examines in addition to the United States—her worries are amply borne out.

Nussbaum believes that liberal arts education is valuable for many reasons, but her main emphasis is that it helps citizens take a full role in democracy. Here are a few of the connections she makes. First, democracy requires critical thinking, in large part to counteract the potential misuse of power by the state and by elites. She writes, "cultivated capacities for critical thinking and reflection are crucial in keeping democracies alive and wide awake. The ability to think well about a wide range of cultures, groups, and nations in the context of a grasp of the global economy and of the history of many national and group interactions is crucial in order to enable democracies to deal responsibly with the problems we currently face as members of an interdependent world" (10). Second, humanistic education develops the empathy that is necessary for a diverse citizenry to maintain the

social fabric. Some of her key tasks for schools are to “develop students’ capacity to see the world from the viewpoint of other people, particularly those whom their society tends to portray as lesser, as ‘mere objects’”; to “teach attitudes toward human weakness and helplessness that suggest that weakness is not shameful and the need for others not unmanly;” and to “develop the capacity for genuine concern for others, both near and distant” (45). Third, liberal education challenges the narrowly economic understandings of the public welfare and of the purposes of government. “The ability to think and argue for oneself looks to many people like something dispensable if what we want are marketable outputs of a quantifiable nature” (47). She aims to undo the assumption that the humanities are not relevant to economic growth, by articulating, as a secondary argument, how students trained in the liberal arts are more effective business practitioners. Clearly she believes, though she does not make a direct argument for in this book, that there is more we *should* want in public life than marketable outputs.

Nussbaum is more sanguine about the state of the humanities in the U.S. than in most of the rest of the world. Even if there are economic and political pressures toward the growth-model justification for education, she believes that there are committed teachers and leaders and alumni who are fighting the good cause. and even more so after writing the book. She writes in an afterword, “The first response I have to... experiences [of travelling around the U.S., talking about the book] is hope and gratitude. I remain deeply worried about the future of the humanities, but I’ve met so many people in all walks of life who care passionately about that future and who are investing great energy in shaping it that I now feel less pessimism” (145). Still, there are still “many signs of strain” (150) and a need for all those concerned about liberal arts education to remain vigilant. Moreover, our task is

hardly complete if we are securing in what our own institutions are providing. We need to be in a position to help spread the promise of humanistic education for the common good both *downward* in our domestic educational system and *outward* to the rest of the world.

## **Part II. Four Specific Challenges**

Now let me bring Nussbaum's concerns and some others to the doorsteps of our institutions. Consider these four—but there are surely more! First, the three “As” of access, affordability, and accountability; second, the digital revolution; third, questions about the relevance of a undergraduate liberal arts education; and fourth, internal and external challenges to the solidity of our institutional missions. These are huge topics, so my questions and considerations are only about a piece of each. These challenges are live ones for all colleges and universities; they have specific dimensions at Catholic institutions.

Regarding access and affordability, one of the features of Catholic institutions that preserves the distinctiveness of what they provide in a liberal arts general education integrating the Catholic intellectual tradition is their status as *private* institutions. But that feature brings with it a high cost of tuition, especially in the current economic downturn and especially for younger institutions, such as mine, that are rely heavily on tuition for their budgets. How to provide what we consider vital for any educated American, when the cost makes it possible for only some to attend? When we have our class admitted, have they been drawn from diverse economic and social backgrounds? Those who are from more underprivileged circumstances may be at greater risk to drop out before completing college; they may fall back to the community colleges and the state schools, where the courses in the CIT that we had them take are just chalked up to general humanities elective,

if they transfer at all. We face difficult realities as to how a more diverse student body is prepared for college, but we know we want to do more than simply accept only students from well-off families.

Accountability follows closely on the heels of these questions. In the eyes of society and government, is our private education worth the cost? Is private education with a liberal arts and Catholic core of such value that the government will keep supporting loan programs for students to access it? We believe in its value, but as Nussbaum warns, in trends are concerning. She offers President Obama's speeches as evidence. "In his speeches on education, the president rightly emphasizes the issue of equality, talking about the importance of making all Americans capable of pursuing the 'American Dream.' But the pursuit of a dream requires dreamers: educated minds that can think critically about alternatives and imagine an ambitious goal—preferably not involving only personal or even national wealth, but involving human dignity and democratic debate as well. Instead of such important and generous goals, however, President Obama has so far focused on individual income and national economic progress, arguing that the sort of education we need is the sort that serves these two goals" (137).

The second concern I named is the digital revolution. As with any challenge, there is both danger and opportunity in this one. As a parent of a 12-year-old, struggling on how to set appropriate limits to screen time and often making the ineffectual plea, "why don't you go read for a bit?" and as a professor who for the first time in over a decade actually yelled at a student this semester, for texting under the desk, I know that one danger in the digital revolution is the distraction. Do the liberal arts work when students don't have the same leisure to read and think as was taken for granted when we were undergraduates

(admittedly, often for all kinds of good and necessary reasons, such as work, sports, and clubs). Do the liberal arts work when students don't take advantage of the leisure to read, to mark up a book, to ponder? One colleague said to me this year that as he sees students file out of class into the hallways and immediately check their phones, he wonders if any of them know the experience he sometimes used to have as a student—of leaving the class pondering the last train of discussion or the parting words of the professor.

Now, it's a commonplace that the digital revolution has made all kinds of information accessible—out of print books and the latest research, without needing the resources of the humongous libraries at Yale and Harvard. It's a commonplace that in this digital age, colleges and universities can deliver the educational experience anywhere in the world and can facilitate the education of those who work many hours at their jobs. And seeing the potential democratizing and connecting power of the social media, there are all sorts of efforts afoot to expand the conversation of higher education outside the walls and time constraints of a traditional classroom.

There are some great experiments taking place and excellent teaching and learning occurs online, but this sector moves so fast (another commonplace) that to move cautiously is to risk atrophying. Yet just to offer more courses and more programs online to match our competitors is risky, if we don't *think through* both vision and strategy carefully, and make the effort to bring our distinctive approach to education to this modality. Catholic universities are getting on the digital superhighway with everyone else... but do we know why? What are we doing that is different, that is bringing human meaning? We certainly don't want to contribute to the creation of two-tiered educational system: quality in-class education with full-time faculty for some students, and MOOCs for everyone else.

My third area is connected to the previous two. Given perceived and/or real devaluation of the undergraduate degree in a time of great economic uncertainty, given the shrinking size of the traditional college-aged population, and given the ability to deliver educational programs online, it is increasingly asked how relevant an undergraduate liberal arts education is. On the one side, some people are wondering about the cost of college itself being worth it, about the empty promise of “college for all” that is the mantra of progressive economists such as Joseph Stiglitz. On the other hand, comprehensive universities such as mine are rapidly expanding masters programs and online programs. It’s not that these programs directly take away from the liberal arts, but the understandable trend toward masters programs may well reinforce the prevalent assumption that the undergraduate liberal arts are not all that valuable after all. The online setting presents its own challenges for teaching sophisticated conversation and thinking critically on one’s feet.

Finally, a clear, agreed-upon mission and a compelling vision are vital for any organization. We need to have good answers to the questions “why do we exist?”, “why are we doing this?”, and “what else should we be doing?”, if we are to serve our students and other stakeholders effectively, and if we are to make a persuasive case for financial support, whether it’s from students and parents, alumni and donors, or governments and businesses. But a college’s mission can at any time be subject to internal and external challenge. Let me give just one slice of each type of challenge.

Internally, the mission statement of a Catholic college is an important document, but it doesn’t solve all our problems, even if it was created with extensive participation by the college community and even if it is actively employed in planning. Mission statements are

necessarily broad and they always sound nice. When a college faces bigger decisions in a context of limited resources—when core curricula are revised, when budgets are set, when certain new programs are given major start-up funds, when a decision is made to invest in online programs—these are among the moments when the mission keeps us on the right playing field but doesn’t tell us the best way to the goal or how to score. Of course, that’s why we have strategic plans, leaders, decision making bodies, and procedures. But these moments sometimes bring out that as a community we are not entirely clear or agreed on what the mission means.

To show what I mean, I’ll briefly describe a recent exchange on my campus, which is backing into a conversation about the shape of our core curriculum. I say “backing in” because we didn’t start the year planning to do so. A committee has been discussing proposals for a modest update of our 12-credit common core, but as more faculty have become aware of the committee, more and more people want to know what’s going on and whether they can make proposals to the committee. Recently, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, who chairs the revision committee, and the president of the university governance body, who is a faculty member in Business, touched on the question of mission in the midst of a brief but spirited interchange in a public meeting. One side the exchange was this: Doesn’t Sacred Heart University promote the Catholic intellectual and the liberal arts traditions? That’s what our mission statement says. This central value should guide any revision of the core. On the other side of the exchange: Isn’t Sacred Heart a comprehensive institution? Our mission statement describes us in that way, which suggests that a main purpose of our curriculum is to prepare students for a career. Should that fact influence the revision of the core? Now, *both* descriptions are accurate and must be

accounted for. It's not a zero-sum game between the liberal arts and professional preparation, but in a context of limited resources, limited time, and all the strains described by Nussbaum, it's not surprising that we are tempted to cast the issue as struggle between more time for the liberal arts or more time for the professional majors. We would in vain look to the mission statement for a resolution, and even our strategic plan doesn't tell us how to resolve the debate. But such moments of potential crisis can be turned into opportunity, so I will return to that in the third part of my talk.

Finally, there are external challenges. Why should a pluralistic society and generally less-religious youth cohort care about a Catholic college education? In a recent *New York Times* column (2-17-2013, Sunday Review p. 11), Ross Douthat bemoaned "the end of a Catholic moment." The Catholic moment was a term coined by the late Father Richard John Neuhaus in the 1980s to express the significant role of Catholic thought in public life. As Douthat puts it, "The fact that the Second Vatican Council had left the church internally divided limited Catholic influence in some ways but magnified it in others. Because the church's divisions often mirrored the country's, a politician who captured the typical Catholic voter was probably well on his way to victory, and so would-be leaders of both parties had every incentive to frame their positions in Catholic-friendly terms. The church might not always be speaking with one voice, but both left and right tried to borrow its language." Now, says Douthat, politicians of both parties are losing interest in the Church's ideas. "Whereas eight years ago, a Catholic view of economics and culture represented a center that both parties hoped to claim, today's Republicans are more likely to channel Ayn Rand than Thomas Aquinas, and a strident social liberalism holds the whip hand in the Democratic Party." This is well put, and we can expand his claim beyond politicians. Are

citizens and organizations in our culture very interested in the Church's ideas? Are the days over when U.S. Bishops letters on war and on the economy make a major impact on public debate?

The signs are perhaps not encouraging, but Douthat ends his column this way: "If there is another Catholic moment waiting in our nation's future, it can only be made by Americans themselves." There are no institutions more important for the revival of a Catholic moment, or anything approaching it, than Catholic colleges. We can do a great deal, but if we are not involved, Catholic ideas and values will surely be more and more marginalized from public life.

So those are some challenges: the three A's, the digital revolution, relevance, mission. Can a Catholic philosophy of education for the common good sharpen our thinking about them and guide proactive institutional and responses?

### **Part III. Catholic Philosophy of Education for the Common Good**

Now, in Part Three, I will revisit Jacques Maritain's primary book on educational philosophy, *Education at the Crossroads*, now in its 70<sup>th</sup> year of publication. Maritain is valuable for examining Catholic higher education because his understanding of the educational process is humane and catholic in the sense of universal. He draws upon the best resources of the western liberal arts tradition and is open to new educational theories and methods without being led astray by fads. His philosophy of education is grounded in the dignity of human persons, honors the social and civic responsibilities of education, and is oriented toward abiding truths while respecting rights of conscience and the importance of pluralism. Maritain's defense of the liberal arts and his vision of humanistic education

from childhood through university has many similarities to Nussbaum's. In one key regard—the Christian inspiration for a humanistic education and the role of theology in it—Maritain differs significantly from Nussbaum, and that difference will be relevant for our institutions.

A prefatory remark: I'm hesitant to call this *the* Catholic philosophy of education, because I don't have enough time here and I'm not sure I have enough competence in educational philosophy to lay out a comprehensive account. Right now, I'm laying out *a* philosophy (mine, inspired by Maritain) and really just the part having to do with social ethics and political philosophy. There is also the question of diversity. There's a very acceptable sense in which there various Catholic philosophies of education: the distinctive styles associated with spiritual traditions within Catholicism, such as the Jesuit attempt to develop contemplatives in action; the Benedictines' communal pursuit of love, prayer, wisdom, and service; and my university's charism of lay leadership and lay spirituality. More controversial are the different styles of being a Catholic university that run a traditionalist to progressive gamut. In this aspect, we experience struggles within our institutions and we are the object of debates from outside. An example is when the University of Notre Dame invited President Obama as a commencement speaker or permitted a student group to stage a controversial play. The internal and external debates that explode at moments such as these are important to have, but we can't hold these debates very well unless we know what we think about the foundations of Catholic education. In the context of contemporary higher education, what Catholic universities bring—or should bring—is a distinctive vision. So, Catholic universities should embrace *the*

Catholic philosophy of education, which does not erase but in fact informs their distinctive traditions, their varying missions, and their internal pluralism.

As a Catholic thinker, Maritain is best remembered for contributing to the renaissance of Thomistic philosophy. Though he saw himself as a transmitter of Aquinas's original meaning, he offered not a classical but, we might say, an existentialist reading of Aquinas. As a political philosopher, his significant achievement was to articulate a Catholic vision of a pluralist, democratic society. Maritain's work was greatly shaped by the Second World War. Encouraging Europe to remain courageous against fascism and communism during the war, Maritain positioned the Catholic tradition in the great contest for the human spirit among the ideologies of the day. In the midst of writing his great political-philosophy books from this era—*The Rights of Man and Natural Law* in 1942, *Christianity and Democracy* in 1943, and *The Person and the Common Good* in 1947—Maritain gave the Terry Lectures at Yale University in 1942, and these were published as *Education at the Crossroads* the following year. Keep in mind that in 1942–43, the future of the free world was in question; if the fate of education is bound up with the fate of society itself, then the crisis for education was stark and existential.

So while one of my favorite passages in the book might sound important in any context, the generality of the words might lead us to miss the, cultural, political, and moral urgency with which Maritain said them:

Education must remove the rift between the social claim and the individual claim within man himself. It must therefore develop both the sense of freedom and the sense of responsibility, human rights and human obligations, the courage to take risks and exert authority for the general welfare and the respect for the humanity of

each individual person. The education of tomorrow must also bring to an end the cleavage between religious inspiration and secular activity in man.... [T]he education of tomorrow must bring to an end, too, the cleavage between work or useful activity and the blossoming of spiritual life and disinterested joy in knowledge and beauty (89).

Maritain was aware that democracy required this risk-taking—the bravery of citizens who practiced what he called “heroic humanism” and who stood up for the truth about human dignity. He directly addressed the fact that education was corrupted and misused in promoting Nazism. “To heal reason which has been disintegrated by the collective delirium and by the Nazi and racist cancer is not an easy matter” (108), he wrote. The task was going to be not only one of rebuilding the educational system in the Axis nations, but a task of soul-searching in every nation. He said, “Democracies are aware today of their long carelessness in failing to defend and stress their own principles, their own intellectual and moral roots, in their own schools. They do not need to borrow totalitarian methods in order to remedy this lack. The great thing is that the democratic state itself have its own philosophy of life and society, and have faith in it” (102).

Let’s now consider two key principles in Maritain’s educational philosophy: human flourishing and the common good. As for human flourishing, Maritain’s vision of education is rooted in his Catholic personalism. Personalism is sometimes presented as a distinctive school of thought but is better regarded as an influential trend in 20<sup>th</sup> century and current Catholic thought that emphasizes the interiority of experience and the self-determining nature of humans as the foundational movement in theological and philosophical reflection. The related socio-ethical movements are to emphasize human dignity in all spheres of

social life and the responsibility of all institutions to protect persons and to foster their freedom and holistic development. Most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's great Catholic philosophers and theologians contributed something to personalism, in a process of sorting out the abiding value from the flawed interpretations. Maritain was a central figure in the maturation of personalism, which in turn found expression in official Catholic teaching through the phenomenology of Karol Wojtyła and his writings as Pope John Paul II.

Maritain frames *Education at the Crossroads* from the early pages with phrasing that would keep popping up in his books through the 1940s: "From the philosophical point of view... the main concept to be stressed... is the concept of human personality. Man is a person, who holds himself in hand by his intelligence and will. He does not merely exist as a physical being. There is in him a richer and nobler existence; he has spiritual superexistence through knowledge and love. He is thus, in some way, a whole, not merely a part; he is a universe unto himself.... And through love he can give himself freely to beings who are to him, as it were, other selves; and for this relationship no equivalent can be found in the natural world" (7–8).

Maritain goes on to draw a distinction between individuality and personality. Though he addresses this in the *Education* book, I am going to take the next few quotations from *The Person and the Common Good*. Here's one: "The human being is caught between two poles; a material pole, which, in reality, does not concern the true person but rather the shadow of personality or what, in the strict sense, is called individuality, and a spiritual pole, which does concern true personality" (33). The human being is not dichotomized, however. We humans are individuals by virtue of having determinate, individual bodies. We are persons by virtue of having souls, the deepest reality of ourselves as intelligent and

loving creatures. This unity of the soul and body makes us persons who are free, self-possessed, and able to act and communicate. Personality is the dynamic power of human beings that enables us to have a common good. Having a soul makes persons whole, interior, and open: persons are not divided in themselves; they are self-aware and open to others. Personality requires communication, dialogue, relationality, and friendship. To quote again from the *Common Good* book: “By the very fact that each of us is a person and expresses himself to himself, each of us requires communication with the other and with others in the order of knowledge and love. Personality, of its essence, asks for a dialogue in which souls really communicate” (41–2).

That terrific last sentence—“Personality, of its essence, asks for a dialogue in which souls really communicate”—leads us to back to education, to which I’ll make three connections. First, education, like all human activities, is best when it is relational and dialogic. Maritain was quite forward-looking in talking about the dynamics of education even for very young children. The spontaneity, curiosity, and freedom of the child is the primary driving agent of education; he understands the teacher as a wise guide, like a doctor, who guides the child’s natural potentialities so that there is a “true freeing of personality.”

Second, all the members of the school community—faculty, staff, and administrators—should approach the common work through genuine dialogue. As I said earlier, sometimes we discover that we are not all agreed on mission or strategy. Having the time to talk through the issues, or even the first principles, is important and can’t be bypassed. Attention to process and making sure everyone is informed about opportunities to participate is crucial. As our institutions face more complex, faster moving issues, I hear

with increasing frequency statements such as: “Who made that decision? When was that talked about? That conversation is going on over there but do they know about our conversation over here? Why are we getting a new computer program when we just learned this one? *And*: That was on global email? I didn’t see it!” At my university, this issue of effective communication across departments and divisions is on the agenda of a high-level Committee on Innovation commissioned by our president. It should go without saying that the virtues necessary for genuine dialogue must be practiced by all members of the community. It’s not that we don’t believe that, but it’s easy to rationalize that the real problem is that the other person is not really listening to me. But when we are finally talking productively, issues can’t be talked to death. So the key task for academic leaders is to set up and make full use of processes for communication that have the best chance of generating decisions that everyone can respect, even if not everyone agrees.

Third, education is meant to help us live well in a full, distinctively human way. The distinction between individuality and personality comes into play. Each student has both dimensions; education must attend to both. Insofar as we are individual, education addresses the students’ material and practical needs, including preparation for a job. The individual dimension also justifies discipline: insofar as they are individuals, students can be required to give up some of their wants and claims for the good of whole—the good of the class, the college, and society. Without this subordination, there would be no stability. For this reason I was right to criticize my student for texting and to confiscate her cell phone (though not to yell). For this reason we have deadlines and lateness penalties.

But insofar as students are persons, the common good must “flow back” over them, to use Maritain’s image. The common good “must be redistributed among persons and . . .

aid their development” (RMNL, 95), he says. In the same spirit, the U.S. Bishops and Pope John Paul II stated in letters on economic justice: every social institution must serve the person. While there are many ways our colleges do this well, we must guard against the danger of ignoring this when it matters most. As an unhappy example, I think of this week’s scandal of basketball coach Mike Rice at Rutgers. The disturbing tape of his abusive treatment of the student athletes makes everyone ask: how was this guy not fired right from the beginning? What I want to point to is a statement by the athletic director when he was interviewed on the radio Tuesday. While he seemed fairly admirable in speaking directly about how and why the decision not to fire the coach was made, he said twice that his most important consideration at the time and going forward was the reputation of Rutgers and to protect Rutgers, because many good things are going on there. What he did not say—yet what seems obvious to me—is that his overarching responsibility instead is protect his student athletes players and to aid their development. This shift to projection of the institution and then to covering one’s butt—as the president of Rutgers is now doing—is the dangerous demotion of the service of the human person as the first principle. It led to the flawed decision not to fire this coach; it led to the Penn State’s decision not to report Jerry Sandusky; it contributed to the persistence of sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church.

The second principle from Maritain was the common good; I’ve already been addressing this, because his whole program flows together, so I can be brief. The modern Catholic social tradition holds that a political society can pursue a substantial common good, defined by the Second Vatican Council as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready

access to their own fulfillment.” For Maritain, it is the shared good life of a community of free human persons. The many particular goods that fulfill human life in its material, relational, intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions are shared with others in the social whole, both because these goods are intrinsically communicative, and because the shared common good is the foundation for the fulfillment of persons. The common good is intrinsically moral, since persons are moral: “It is not only something useful, an ensemble of advantages and profits, it is essentially something good in itself. . . . Justice and civic friendship are its cement” (“End,” 142–43). So the common good requires both justice and virtue, which working together to establish the social dynamic in which good people are doing good and enjoying the benefits of their civic friendship.

The implications for education are many more than I can develop here. Education throughout the lifespan is a major resource that citizens need if society is to flourish. People need skills, knowledge, and character development. They need skills for the work world, the ability to innovate and think critically, and so forth; they need humanistic learning to enrich the mind and spirit, to integrate knowledge and think about the human condition; they need education in civic responsibility and they need moral development. Nussbaum’s stress is on how humanistic education enables us to be good citizens, and that’s very important. What she doesn’t say as well or as directly as Maritain is this, from him: “The essence of education does not consist in adapting a potential citizen to the conditions and interactions of social life, but first in *making a man*, and by this very fact in preparing a citizen” (15).

Part of what good education should do is help students turn their concerns outward toward the common good of the nation and the global community, help them understand

threats to the common good, give them skills to analyze social problems, encourage them to develop the habit of service to that the act in spirit of solidarity throughout the rest of their lives. With Maritain, I would say that this effect is intrinsic to education, no matter how education is qualified—but it's certainly intrinsic to liberal arts education and *a fortiori* to Catholic education. Catholic colleges and university pretty obviously make a major impact here. We're not the only institutions that value community service, service learning, philanthropic education, education for peace and justice, but these purposes are strong at every Catholic college I am aware of, and it's impossible to imagine our institutions without them. How do we continue to be leaders in higher education in this regard? I think both of our institutions, St. Anselm and Sacred Heart, have done much. For instance, your leadership in Campus Compact. At my school, we host an impressive, growing set of alternative spring break service trips; we've made deep commitments to a sister community El Salvador, to Habitat for Humanity, and to neighborhoods in Bridgeport, where our Nursing department runs a community wellness center based in a Catholic parish; and we've counted up that our students and staff donated 45,000 hours of service to the community last year. The only bloom I take off that rose is to say that any such set of impressive commitments requires staffing and resources; not matter what good work is being done at a university, it will always seemed that we are a little strapped, and sometimes it might be the case that we don't put enough of our money where our mouth is. I state this only in a general way because it's a common and ongoing challenge for any institution: to align our resources with our mission when resources are limited.

We can handle the internal challenge well enough. A bigger challenge lies in our political culture. When the vision of the common good is so fragile in society, how do we

serve it? That question is a lecture for another day. What I can say is that part of educational task as Catholic universities is to keep trying to shape society's vision, and to keep striving to develop educated persons who have a sense of commitment to the common good.

### **Conclusion**

I come to my conclusion. I repeat my disclaimer from earlier, that I don't really know how to solve these problems! My hope has been to suggest how Catholic common-good thinking could steer our thinking on these issues. Responses to any and all challenges have to be guided in the first instance by mission and vision. Why are we doing what we're doing?

And this would be a time to say something which is vitally important for our Catholic institutions, which I know I have not done justice to in this lecture: the final goal of Catholic education, as a complete process over the course of a lifetime, is to enable persons to abide in love and to be in relation with God. As my colleague in philosophy, Edward Papa, wrote in an unpublished manuscript, "the Catholic educational tradition is opposed to both the classical ideal of *paideia* and the modern ideal of liberal education. Contrary to the classical ideal, the Catholic educational tradition regards personality (not the *polis*) as the highest good; contrary to the modern ideal, the Catholic educational tradition acknowledges a highest good for individual persons (the vision and love of God)—rather than leaving the good indeterminate and incommensurable." He says that in this tradition, "the realization of human nature moves beyond achievement of moral personality toward the ultimate reunification with God," as expressed in Augustine's famous line, "You have

made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” Maritain has some poignant words on love near the end of *Education at the Crossroads* that make a similar point, and unfortunately the passage is a little too long to get into. But discussion of the dynamic of love has echoes of what Pope Benedict’s account in his encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*. So God, Christ, and love are where all of Catholic education in some way points us—in some way, because what this means in the family and in the church and in the primary school is different from the university.

Papa would criticize Nussbaum, despite all her good words about the humanities, for being too captive to the modern liberal idea. He has his finger on something, which was also expressed in the harshest review of Nussbaum that I found. Daniel Ritchie, writing in *Academic Questions*, charges that Nussbaum shows an instinctive dismissal of tradition and religion. Here is a wry quote: “The best she can say for traditions is that they usually contain sufficient resources that can be used by critics to criticize their own culture. True, but it reminds me of some friends whose marriage vows included a pledge to criticize each other. They’re divorced.” Ritchie challenges us with the idea that if the liberal arts tradition—and, for us, the Catholic intellectual tradition—is not something we see as “a needed companion on life’s journey,” then our education will become increasingly subject to instrumental rationality and our traditions will wither and die.

Your institution and mine make the effort to keep our traditions vital and living partners in our education. That’s my general sense and my hopeful belief. I know it’s not easy; I know not every member of our communities place the same emphasis on it and perhaps some undermine it. I cannot really speak about your institution, but I know that Sacred Heart University is, on balance, a place where the Catholic intellectual tradition is

taken seriously. We have our lay-led model, with its strengths and weaknesses, but in all cases the work has to be self-conscious, freely undertaken, supported by dialogue, and embodied in courses, programs, and activities. This is possible at any Catholic college, and I believe you are one of them.

In terms of my four challenges, the move I've just made is to take up mission first and say that it's the resource for answers to the other three. And I've claimed that Catholic education has a theocentric focus and a Christological leaven. At the college/university level, these dimensions are made available in various ways, from campus ministry to volunteer programs to the context of various programs and courses, some required, some optional. That's all I can say, but we know we could fill in many examples. Can mission help us address the remaining challenges?

And I see that my time is up! Honestly, it is difficult to know how to conclude this paper, because the challenges are daunting and a college's mission has to be worked out day by day. What I can leave you with is my theme: Catholic higher education serves the common good. If we take Vatican II's definition of the common good—it is the sum of social conditions that allow persons and communities relatively ready and thorough access to their flourishing—that gives us a start on what we should be looking to improve the conditions for the flourishing of our universities and of society. The common good must be our mission. In light of that, let me say just a few more words relating this fourth of my topics back to the other three.

As for the three A's: If expanding access to students with weaker indications of success is just bringing in money, that's not vision-guided. But if access has something to do with populations whom we're in a position to help or to whom we have a relationship,

that's different. If we truly believe that we can help all students succeed and do our best to Catholic colleges believe—rightly—in the value of the liberal arts. But we need to be making this argument more consistently in our own institutions and in public forums. Nussbaum's manifesto is one model. And to our accrediting agencies, we need to show that we can use the methods of assessment to articulate the learning and skills that we expect students to master, that we are able gather information on how well the students are learning and developing skills, and that we are able to refine both individual classes and programs to strengthen this learning.

As for the digital revolution, using technology and media as tools is fine and can enrich education. But our bigger challenge is to help our student think about why and how they are using these tools. Perhaps the Catholic traditions of fasting and contemplating can be incorporated into some classes or other contexts. Fasting from social media and screens can be liberating and provide critical distance for reflections. Catholic higher education has a lot of experience for helping students be critical and temperate users of media.

As for relevance, while there will always be a place for institutions that are solely or largely undergraduate-focused and face-to-face, the broad trend will not be reversed. The challenge, then, will be how to deeply, meaningfully connect the skills and knowledge learned in core curricula to all the successive programs that a student participates in. That requires a great deal of cooperative within and even among institutions. It requires being rooted in mission. So an excellent note on which to conclude is to note how our mission can speak to the possibility of connecting the college's common good and society's common good. Therefore, let me quote in closing from the Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities' statement on "Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition":

Benedictine monastic community is rooted in a particular place in which mutual service, especially in the mundane areas of everyday life, is demanded of all with no expectation of individual reward. It is a challenge to contribute to a living, flesh and blood community on such terms. The qualities of character that are required are nurtured by the individual community's sense of its mission, the witness of monastic forebears and the broader communion of saints across the ages. The imagination to persevere and thrive in such a life is enriched through the example of communities across the world—monastic and non-monastic, Christian and non-Christian, religious and non-religious—that make sustained practical efforts to foster human well-being, often in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Though directly grounded in a particular place, the commitments and aspirations of Benedictine life can only bear fruit if they stretch to horizons that are truly universal.

This approach, which comes from the specific charism of Benedictine colleges and universities, can speak to all Catholic colleges and universities. It is an approach that Saint Anselm College has strive to exemplify, under Father De Felice's leadership and with all of your essential contributions. May the College continue to thrive. Thank you very much for allowing me to share these thoughts with you today.