

# Theodore M. Hesburgh, Theologian: Revisiting Land O'Lakes Fifty Years Later

Theological Studies  
2017, Vol. 78(4) 930–959  
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DOI: 10.1177/0040563917731748  
journals.sagepub.com/home/tsj



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## Abstract

Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, was the driving force behind the 1967 Land O'Lakes Statement—a watershed document that affirmed both the distinctive identity of Catholic universities and the “true autonomy and academic freedom” they needed to excel. This article explores the prominent role of theology in the Land O'Lakes Statement by means of an examination of Hesburgh's specifically theological commitments. Attending first to the status of Catholic theology in the early twentieth century, the article considers Hesburgh's neo-Scholastic formation, his early work on the theology of the laity, and the evolution of his thinking as president of the University of Notre Dame. It concludes that the category of mediation, present in Hesburgh's earliest work, would come to ground the dialogical role he thought theology had to play to ensure the nature and mission of the contemporary Catholic university.

## Keywords

Catholic identity, Catholic university, faculty unionization, Land O'Lakes, Theodore Hesburgh, theology

**F**ifty years ago, a small group of Catholic leaders, meeting at the University of Notre Dame's retreat center in northern Wisconsin, produced a short study document that would mark a defining moment in the history of Catholic higher education in the United States. The Land O'Lakes Statement had as its driving force Notre Dame's

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president, Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, who convened the meeting in his capacity as head of the International Federation of Catholic Universities. Although it was meant to serve as a preparatory text for an upcoming international conference, the statement quickly “took on a life of its own as a symbolic manifesto.”<sup>1</sup> Its very first lines challenged Catholic institutions to become universities “in the full modern sense of the word” with a driving commitment to academic excellence. To achieve its ends, the statement continued, the Catholic university “must have a true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself.”<sup>2</sup> Wrapped up in the revolutionary moment that was the summer of 1967—the summer of Monterey Pop and Haight-Ashbury, surging antiwar sentiment and racially charged riots—these words were in their own way a revolution. For many Catholic educators, emboldened by post-conciliar changes and new university governing structures, Land O’Lakes’ opening salvo rang like a “declaration of independence” from the church and its hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1967, Land O’Lakes has served as a contentious touchstone in the ongoing debates over the identity of Catholic colleges and universities—a cipher into which commentators pour their own greatest hopes or worst fears.<sup>4</sup> The statement’s emphasis on autonomy is uncompromising and unapologetic. At the same time, the bulk of the text stresses how Catholicism is to be “perceptively present and effectively operative” in the life of the university. What strikes a first-time reader today is the amount of attention the statement gives to the role of theology in fostering the institution’s identity. This reflects a distinctly Catholic approach. David O’Brien contrasts Land O’Lakes with the earlier history of Protestant universities in the United States. According to O’Brien, those schools made peace with modern methods of scientific inquiry by redefining religion as a matter of personal belief, reserving it to seminary education. “Instead of shunting theology to the seminary, the Catholic reformers insisted that it not only belonged on campus but that theology provided the defining element of Catholic university identity.”<sup>5</sup>

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1. Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), 317.
  2. “Land O’Lakes Statement: The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University,” in *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents, 1967–1990*, ed. Alice Gallin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1992), 7–12 at 7.
  3. Neil G. McCluskey, “Introduction: This is How It Happened,” in *The Catholic University: A Modern Appraisal*, ed. Neil G. McCluskey (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1970), 1–28 at 7. See Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 317.
  4. David O’Connell, former president of the Catholic University of America, blamed Land O’Lakes for introducing “confusion” into higher education. Notre Dame’s president, John Jenkins, sees in it “a bold, hopeful vision informed by Vatican II.” John I. Jenkins, “The Document that Changed Catholic Education Forever,” *America*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/07/11/document-changed-catholic-education-forever>.
  5. David J. O’Brien, “The Land O’Lakes Statement,” *Boston College Magazine*, Winter 1998, <http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/mission/pdf1/cu7.pdf>. For context, see George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University, 1994) and James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

The following explores why Land O'Lakes talked about theology the way that it did, and what that might mean for Catholic universities today. It does so through an analysis of the thinking of the person most responsible for its vision. Theodore M. Hesburgh (1917–2015) is rightly remembered as one of the leading public figures of twentieth-century America. A charter member (and later chair) of the US Civil Rights Commission, Hesburgh accepted sixteen presidential appointments over the course of his life. He worked on racial justice, nuclear non-proliferation, Third World development, immigration reform, education, and a host of other social issues—in addition to serving thirty-five years as president of the University of Notre Dame. Despite his long and distinguished record in public service, Hesburgh always said that his primary vocation was to be a priest. And he began his career as a theologian. Given the important role he played at Land O'Lakes, understanding Hesburgh's theological commitments sheds light on what that gathering had to say. In particular, it was the category of mediation, which Hesburgh employed in his early work on the laity, that would ground Land O'Lakes' vision of the fundamentally dialogical role theology had to play in the modern Catholic university.

In describing Hesburgh as a theologian, I do not mean to suggest that he was a professional academic who spent his career researching, writing, and teaching. Although he was trained in the neo-Scholastic theology of his day, earned a doctorate in theology, and spoke often about the importance of theology at a Catholic university, Hesburgh made no significant contribution to the theological literature. Thus, the value of examining his early theological work (from 1937, when he began studies at the Gregorian University in Rome, to 1967, the year of Land O'Lakes) lies not in the originality of his insights, but rather in the way Hesburgh illustrates the larger intellectual currents that made Land O'Lakes possible. It goes without saying that these currents were shaped by seismic shifts in the social, cultural, and religious landscape of American Catholicism. (The decades covered include World War II and the rise of the Cold War, the post-war boom, with its GI Bill and rapid suburbanization, the election of the first Catholic president, Vietnam, and the Second Vatican Council, to name just a few of the tectonic plates.) Although I will allude to these broader contexts, the focus here is on the evolution of Hesburgh's thinking. Thus the article proceeds, first, with a brief survey of the state of theology prior to 1937. This is followed by consideration of Hesburgh's earliest academic work from the 1940s, his speeches as president in the 1950s and early 1960s, and his involvement and interpretation of what happened at Land O'Lakes in 1967. The article concludes by asking how the mediatorial function of the Catholic university envisioned by Hesburgh and articulated at Land O'Lakes might inform one recent debate that has become increasingly prominent on Catholic campuses: the unionization of part-time, non-tenure-track faculty teaching in departments of theology.

## **Theology and the University**

After issuing its call for institutional autonomy and academic freedom, the Land O'Lakes Statement affirmed that the Catholic university must be a place where Catholicism is present and operative:

In the Catholic university this operative presence is effectively achieved first of all and distinctively by the presence of a group of scholars in all branches of theology. The disciplines represented by this theological group are recognized in the Catholic university, not only as legitimate intellectual disciplines, but as ones essential to the integrity of a university.<sup>6</sup>

If, fifty years later, faculty and administrators find these words surprising, fifty years before Land O'Lakes, Catholic educators would have found them practically incomprehensible.

From the beginning of their existence, Catholic colleges in the United States offered religious instruction, but this was universally seen as part of the broader religious formation of students. Lumped together with Mass attendance, moral exhortations, devotional practices, and an annual retreat, religious instruction was distinct from the academic pursuits that made up the curriculum. For example, Georgetown University in the 1820s mandated only a half hour of catechism lessons once a week (at the end of the afternoon on Saturdays, no less).<sup>7</sup> By the turn of the century, this had evolved into daily lessons in apologetics, reflecting a nascent desire to give more intellectual heft to the subject. However, no one would have confused these courses in "Christian Doctrine" or "Evidences of Religion" with theology proper, a title that was reserved to the discipline taught to future priests in seminaries. Moreover, for decades, these courses remained marginal to the overall college curriculum, bearing no credit and usually taught by priest-professors with other responsibilities. The first full-time teacher of religion at Georgetown was appointed in 1943. Five years later, Eugene B. Gallagher would report (without complaint) that the Department of Religion still had no office space, no clerical help, no budget, and that "the only equipment needed is library books."<sup>8</sup>

An exception to this state of affairs was at the Catholic University of America, where John Montgomery Cooper began teaching religion to undergraduates in 1909. Patrick Carey argues that it was through Cooper's work that college theology first emerged as a self-conscious discipline—by which he means "an explicit attempt to separate religious instruction at the college level from religious instruction in catechetical and seminary programs."<sup>9</sup> Cooper was a progressive educator, influenced by recent developments in psychology that encouraged more holistic and student-centered approaches to learning. Thus, his emphasis was less on intellectual comprehension of the faith than on

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6. "Land O'Lakes Statement: The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University," 7–8.

7. William C. McFadden, "'Catechism at 4 for All the Schools': Religious Instruction at Georgetown," in *Georgetown at Two Hundred: Faculty Reflections on the University's Future*, ed. William C. McFadden (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1990), 143–68 at 144.

8. Cited in McFadden, "'Catechism at 4 for All the Schools,'" 153. This state of affairs was common. Religion teachers at Notre Dame did not organize into a department until the mid-1920s. Marquette had no secretaries, no office, and no budget until the 1950s. See Patrick W. Carey, "College Theology in Historical Perspective," in *American Catholic Traditions: Resources for Renewal*, eds. Sandra Yocum Mize and William L. Portier (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 242–71 at 254.

9. Carey, "College Theology in Historical Perspective," 243.

spiritual growth, character development, and connecting faith to the lived experience of students. He called his subject “religion” in order to distinguish what he was doing from the rationalistic, deductive “theology” taught in seminaries. By the 1920s, Cooper’s work had evolved into the influential Department of Religious Education at Catholic University, and for years his course outlines served as the standard model for high school and college religion classes.<sup>10</sup> However, it was precisely what was innovative about Cooper’s program, namely, its affective, pragmatic, and life-oriented approach, that led later critics (and many students) to complain about a lack of academic rigor in college religion classes.

All of this was taking place within the widespread reconfiguration of American higher education that stretched from the Civil War to the First World War. By the start of the twentieth century, both the effects of the Morrill Act (which established land-grant institutions) and the influence of the German research model (which transformed American colleges into universities) were already being felt. This meant, among other things, an expanding student body, clearer demarcation between secondary and collegiate education, the rise of the elective system, standardized professional education and graduate programs, preference for original research and scientific inquiry over mastering the classics, and diminution of religious identity. Catholic schools—especially the Jesuit schools, with their confidence in the *Ratio Studiorum*—held back the tide longer than most.<sup>11</sup> But change was inevitable. With the explosive growth of the 1920s, the dike broke. Rapid modernization following World War I brought with it increased standardization (in the form of accreditation), specialization (a faculty divided by departments), quantification (the credit-hour system), and commodification (reduced requirements, expanded electives). These departures from the traditional liberal arts program created a sense of fragmentation, and prompted growing concerns about curricular integration among Catholics and non-Catholics alike.<sup>12</sup> What—academics asked with increasing anxiety—held the whole thing together?

Here, Catholics pressed their advantage over non-Catholic peers. For this was the beginning of a Catholic renaissance in the United States, when post-war vitality at home welcomed intellectual and spiritual currents from abroad to produce a comprehensive and coherent vision of human flourishing. Liturgical renewal, Catholic Action, mystical body spirituality, neo-Gothic architecture, and neo-Scholastic philosophy—these coalesced into an organic whole, offering a confident alternative to the disintegration that

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10. In 1923 Cooper published a four-article series in *The Catholic Educational Review* explaining the moral, apologetic, historical, and ascetic content of the “Advanced Religion Course.” Studies conducted in the 1940s and 1950s revealed that approximately half of Catholic colleges surveyed used one or more of Cooper’s outlines. See the discussion in Sandra Yocum Mize, *Joining the Revolution in Theology: The College Theology Society, 1954–2004* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 31–32.

11. See James O’Toole, “Class Warfare,” *Boston College Magazine*, Winter 2012, [http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/winter\\_2012/features/class-warfare.html](http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/winter_2012/features/class-warfare.html).

12. See Jon H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000), 83–93.

marked modern secularization. Within Catholic higher education, this preoccupation with unity found expression in “a near obsession with curricular integration.”<sup>13</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, Catholic educators simply took it for granted that neo-Scholastic philosophy offered the unifying basis of the entire university enterprise. The Thomistic revival, bolstered by Leo XIII’s 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, hit the United States with full force in the 1920s.<sup>14</sup> With its confidence in objective truth, its integration of faith and reason, its social vision and attention to virtue, the thought of Thomas Aquinas would define Catholic philosophy during this period, providing the intellectual foundation for the whole Catholic educational project. Philosophy, unlike religion, had the advantage of being available to all rational persons regardless of personal belief. Its universal appeal and unitary vision provided the theoretical foundation for a university education.<sup>15</sup> James A. Burns, CSC, Notre Dame president from 1919 to 1922, and a leading educational reformer, articulated a widespread consensus when he said: “Philosophy with all its branches is the most important study in the college and deserves first consideration in the arranging of the curriculum, the practical control of the various educative factors at work, and above all, the selection of teachers.”<sup>16</sup> In 1929, the dean of the graduate school at Marquette University listed philosophy first among the university disciplines that “should have precedence ... from the viewpoint of [creating] a Catholic civilization in America.” In listing several essential Catholic subjects, he never mentioned religion or theology.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 246. Catholic schools were not alone. In 1939, the chairman of one national study committee observed that, “Every program of general education designed to date stresses the *need for integration*.” Although the term “integration” had become the victim of “endless repetition and overuse,” he concluded that its very prominence “signalized a *quest* for some sort of *unity* now lacking in educational matters.” Cited in Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 250–51 (italics in original).
  14. The American Catholic Philosophical Association was formed in 1926 and launched its journal, *The New Scholasticism*, the following year. Jesuits in philosophy at St. Louis University began publishing *The Modern Schoolman* in 1925.
  15. Scholasticism had appeal for non-Catholics as well. Maurice de Wulf was teaching the history of medieval philosophy at Harvard and lecturing at Princeton in the 1920s. Étienne Gilson also taught for a time at Harvard, delivering the William James Lectures there in 1936. At the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins, a proud advocate of Aristotle and Aquinas, hired the medievalist Mortimer Adler in 1930. Together they would go on to found the famed Great Books program.
  16. James A. Burns, “Position and Prospects of the Catholic College,” *Bulletin of the National Catholic Educational Association* 24 (1927): 128–40.
  17. The list of subjects, in order, were: (1) Scholastic philosophy, (2) classical languages, (3) education, (4) sociology, (5) biology, and (6) history. Edward A. Fitzpatrick, “Lay Cooperation in the Financial Administration of Catholic Colleges,” *Bulletin of the National Catholic Educational Association* 26 (1929): 124–36 at 134–35, cited in Philip Gleason, “In Search of Unity: American Catholic Thought 1920–1960,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 65 (1979): 185–205 at 194.

## Student of Catholic Action

It was only in the 1940s that theology began to vie with philosophy for preeminence in the Catholic curriculum—at the very same time that Hesburgh’s own theological commitments were taking shape. Theodore (“Ted”) Hesburgh was introduced to neo-Scholastic philosophy and theology at Notre Dame’s Moreau Seminary (1934–37) and continued his studies at the Gregorian University in Rome (1937–40). Called home because of the war, Hesburgh completed his training at Holy Cross College in Washington, DC (1940–43), and at The Catholic University of America (1943–45), where he received a doctorate in dogmatic theology. Looking back, Hesburgh admitted that his theological education left a lot to be desired. He described the rigid and unimaginative neo-Scholasticism of the time as a “controlled theology” that had a “deadening influence” on his intellectual formation: “I was mainly asked to memorize during those seven years, and much that I memorized is no longer good theology after Vatican Council II.”<sup>18</sup> Despite these obvious limitations, Hesburgh acknowledged that his theological education had nevertheless instilled in him academic discipline and a solid grounding in classical Scholasticism, which provided a secure intellectual home from which to explore new ideas.<sup>19</sup>

With the exception of two early theological monographs and two late autobiographical volumes, Hesburgh’s publications consist entirely of short, occasional pieces—popular articles, volume forewords, introductions, reports, and, above all, published versions of his talks. Hesburgh’s earliest publication, a first-hand account of events in Rome following the election of Pope Pius XII, was written for popular consumption.<sup>20</sup> Two years later, in 1942, Hesburgh typed up and printed his “notes” on a book in French by the medievalist Palémon Glorieux, titled *The Mystical Body and the Apostolate*. These thirteen single-spaced pages offer a glimpse into Hesburgh’s interest in the topic that would become his doctoral dissertation—the lay apostolate.<sup>21</sup> That dissertation was published in 1946 under the title *The Theology of Catholic Action*. In

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18. Theodore M. Hesburgh to Gabriel Cardinal Garrone, May 17, 1971, 3, Item 98/11, Theodore M. Hesburgh Papers: Manuscripts (CPHS), University of Notre Dame Archives.
  19. Theodore M. Hesburgh with Jerry Reedy, *God, Country, Notre Dame* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 33.
  20. Theodore M. Hesburgh, “Election of Pius XII,” *Ave Maria*, August 10, 1940, 175–76. For a comprehensive catalog of works by and about Hesburgh through the 1980s, see Charlotte A. Ames, *Theodore M. Hesburgh: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).
  21. Theodore M. Hesburgh, *The Mystical Body and the Apostolate: Notes Adapted from “Corps Mystique et Apostolat” of Chanoine P. Glorieux* (Notre Dame: C.A.S. Editions, 1942), Item 21/11, Theodore M. Hesburgh Papers: Printed Material (PPHS), University of Notre Dame Archives. See P. Glorieux, *Corps mystique et apostolate au centre de notre enseignement* (Paris: Librairie de al Jeunesse Ouvrière, 1934). Teaching at the seminary in Lille, Glorieux was connected to the “nouvelle théologie” of the nearby Dominican school at Le Saulchoir.

the very topic chosen, we discover a young mind alive to new theological currents and concerned with their practical implications. The term “Catholic Action” (*Azione Cattolica*) first emerged in relation to associations of lay Catholics in Europe who organized for various forms of apostolic activity. In the United States, the term was used much more expansively, at times seeming to apply to any faith-inspired action undertaken by a layperson.<sup>22</sup> When Hesburgh proposed writing a dissertation on Catholic Action, his advisor, Eugene Burke, CSP, warned him that he would never get it approved, the subject was “much too practical.”<sup>23</sup> So Hesburgh reframed the topic according to the neo-Scholastic categories then available, winning approval for a thesis titled, “The Relation of the Sacramental Characters of Baptism and Confirmation to the Lay Apostolate.”

If the topic Hesburgh chose for his doctoral dissertation was unusual, the conclusions he reached were not. His basic thesis could already be found in the official teaching of Pius XI. Because at the time Hesburgh understood theology to be “an authoritative science based on authoritative sources,” he saw his role as simply explicating the deeper meaning of this doctrinal affirmation.<sup>24</sup> Thus the real value of the dissertation is not what it discovered about the laity, but what it reveals about Hesburgh’s own theological convictions. These convictions take shape in the three claims that make up his argument: (1) The problem of modern secularism is that it has separated humanity from God; (2) the best solution to this problem is the mediating work of the lay apostolate; and (3) this apostolate is theologically grounded in the identity of the lay person as a baptized and confirmed Christian.

The opening chapter of the dissertation reflects the countercultural triumphalism of 1940s American Catholicism, which saw a godless secularism as the root of all evils plaguing the modern world. According to Hesburgh, what began as a legitimate theological distinction between nature and grace had ended in divorce, a stark separation between the temporal and the spiritual realms. That divide was at the heart of modern secularism. Hesburgh believed that the best hope for overcoming this split between God and humanity was the Christian layperson. Having a foot in both the world and the church, the layperson was “a perfect bridge” between the two.<sup>25</sup>

In the image of the bridge we see the first appearance of a concept that would become one of the guiding principles of Hesburgh’s life—*mediation*, the bringing

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22. For historical case studies in the United States, see Jeremy Bonner, Christopher D. Denny, and Mary Beth Fraser Connolly, eds., *Empowering the People of God: Catholic Action Before and After Vatican II* (New York: Fordham University, 2014).

23. Hesburgh, *God, Country, Notre Dame*, 45.

24. Theodore M. Hesburgh, *The Theology of Catholic Action* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1946), 19.

25. *Ibid.*, 3–4. On the notion of the layperson as mediator between the spiritual and the temporal, Hesburgh cited John Courtney Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman: The Problem of Its Finality,” *Theological Studies* 5 (1944): 43–75 at 71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056394400500103>, who in turn cited Alfred De Soras, *Action catholique et action temporelle* (Paris: Spes, 1938), 68.

together of two separated realities. Hesburgh understood that his role as a priest was to serve as a mediator between God and man. Such a view reflected the common inheritance of a millennium of Catholic teaching and priestly spirituality. It imbued the Catholic universe of Hesburgh's day.<sup>26</sup> What was relatively new was extending this mediatorial role from the clergy to the laity, widening it from the ordained priesthood to the priesthood of the faithful. This biblical notion—reclaimed forcefully by Martin Luther and the Protestant reformers—was held suspect by generations of Counter-Reformation theologians. It was only in the twentieth century that Catholics began their own hesitant recovery. However, given the polemics of the past, neo-Scholastics seeking to claim the priesthood of the faithful turned not to Scripture but to medieval theology; they cited not the New Testament, but Thomas Aquinas.

Hesburgh dedicated the central chapters of his dissertation to Aquinas's treatment of the mediatorial function of Christ's priesthood. To be a mediator is to stand in the middle (*medius*) between two separated realities in order to somehow bridge the gap, to unite what is apart. For Aquinas, the priest was such a mediator, and the priesthood of Christ was the ultimate mediation, the ultimate bridge between God and people: "*Habemus pontificem ... Jesum Filium Dei.*"<sup>27</sup> What neo-Scholastic commentators—Hesburgh included—tended to obscure was that, for Aquinas, this mediation was not the linking of two opposed realities that did not belong together. Instead, the priestly mediation of Christ implied a fundamental unity of the two, a non-competitive union of the human and the divine. This conception of mediation followed not only from the doctrine of the Incarnation, but also from Aquinas's conception of human nature as graced from the start. In his earlier reference to the "legitimate distinction" that had become a separation between nature and grace, Hesburgh seemed to be aware of this deeper unity.<sup>28</sup> But his language was ambiguous. In his earliest writings, Hesburgh often adopted uncritically the oppositional language that characterized his neo-Scholastic sources. Thus, he expounded on the necessity of Christ in light of his earlier assessment of a fallen world given way to secularism: "What extremes could be more separated than an all Holy God and sinful humanity?"<sup>29</sup> Still, the Incarnation

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26. The pervasiveness of mediation language found prominent expression in Pius XII's encyclicals on the church and liturgy: *Mystici Corporis* (1943) and *Mediator Dei* (1947).

27. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3, q. 22, a. 1, cited in Hesburgh, *Theology of Catholic Action*, 53. Hesburgh says of this phrase, "that in five words portrays the most momentous picture in the history of mankind."

28. Later Hesburgh wrote, "At the very heart of human history is the story of men created to the natural and supernatural likeness of God, and then separated from God by the sin of the first head of all humanity." *Ibid.*, 64. Hesburgh grounded this fundamental unity on a kind of straightforward Chalcedonian Thomism. He seemed unaware, for example, of the "Blondelian Shift" that would have such a decisive influence on twentieth-century notions of nature and grace. See William L. Portier, "Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology and the Triumph of Maurice Blondel," *Communio* 38 (2011): 103–37, <http://www.communio-icr.com/articles/view/twentieth-century-catholic-theology>.

29. Hesburgh, *Theology of Catholic Action*, 55.

served as a constant reminder that mediation means unity. “Thus for St. Thomas,” Hesburgh concluded, “the key to Christ’s priesthood is mediation, the new union of men and God through Christ. The ultimate explanation of this mediation lies in the divine plan to effect this new union primarily by the Incarnation, and to prolong the effects of this substantial prototype of all union through the priestly mediatorial act of redemption.”<sup>30</sup>

## Teaching Theology

Theology, previously reserved for the seminary, began to make appearances on college campuses around this time. The moment was made ready by the surge of interest in religious education that accompanied the revival of the 1920s and 1930s. These decades were marked not only by the influential work of John Montgomery Cooper, and his successor, William Russell, at Catholic University, but also by a bevy of books on educational theory and methodology, new textbook series for elementary, high school, and college students, and popular presentations of the faith written for lay people.<sup>31</sup> Catholic colleges began granting academic credit to courses in religion in the mid-1920s; however, it was not until a 1939 symposium sponsored by the National Catholic Alumni Federation that we find the first coordinated effort to frame this religious instruction in terms of “theology.”<sup>32</sup> At that gathering, organizers issued a plea “for the inclusion of the formal teaching of the science of theology” in Catholic colleges.<sup>33</sup> The word “science” was used in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense; and it was used deliberately. Two of the speakers underscored a thoroughly neo-Scholastic approach. Gerald B. Phelan argued that “religion” appealed to the will, whereas “theology” appealed to the intellect—which was the proper arena of university education. Francis J. Connell agreed, but stressed the need for an apologetic orientation so that the laity would be equipped “to discuss religious problems intelligently with others.”<sup>34</sup> In retrospect, a preference for theology over religion (a terminological choice that had methodological and pedagogical implications) was bound to surface, particularly when seen against the backdrop of the broader Thomistic revival. The priests teaching religion courses had all been trained in the theology of Aquinas. If their students were being asked to study the Angelic Doctor’s philosophy, why should they not be asked to study his theology as well?<sup>35</sup>

30. *Ibid.*, 57.

31. See William J. McGucken, “The Renaissance of Religion Teaching in American Catholic Schools,” in *Essays on Catholic Education in the United States*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1942), 329–51.

32. Proceedings were published as *Man and Modern Secularism: Essays on the Conflict of Two Cultures* (New York: Trinity Press, 1940).

33. Cited in McGucken, “The Renaissance of Religion Teaching,” 346.

34. Francis J. Connell, “Theology in Catholic Colleges as an Aid to the Lay Apostolate,” in *Man and Modern Secularism*, 143–51 at 145.

35. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 164.

Following the presentations by Phelan and Connell, a response was offered by a young Jesuit from Woodstock College, John Courtney Murray. Murray affirmed that theology belonged in Catholic colleges; however, he pointed out that the theology taught in seminaries was ill-suited for the task. Rather than aim at the “demonstrability of the truth from the revealed Word of God,” college theology should aim at the “livability of the Word of God.” Theology should be relevant to Catholic action in the world; it should serve the lay apostolate and be “wholly orientated towards life.”<sup>36</sup> Murray agreed that the religion courses then taught in Catholic colleges were inadequate; however, his approach shared many of the same goals promoted by Cooper’s Department of Religious Education. Supporters of the Cooper approach thus claimed Murray as their own, even though they continued to call what they did “religion” instead of “theology.” Murray laid out his argument more fully in a pair of widely-cited articles that appeared in 1944; and his framework was soon adopted as the basis for curricular revisions at Georgetown, Loyola of Baltimore, Fordham, and Le Moyne College.<sup>37</sup> But by then Murray had moved on to other things, leaving behind a seemingly inexhaustible debate between *religion* (emphasizing personal transformation, piety, and religious practice) and *theology* (stressing intellectual mastery of the faith, leading to divine wisdom) that lasted for the next twenty years.<sup>38</sup>

On completion of his doctoral studies, Hesburgh was assigned to the Religion Department at the University of Notre Dame, where he began teaching in 1945. For all the energy spent debating college religious education, the results on the ground were mixed. According to Hesburgh’s recollection, the Religion Department at the time was one of the weakest at the university, with the “worst-taught courses” offering students “a painful choice” of options, with one course “as boring or as confusing as another.”<sup>39</sup> Things improved with the arrival of several Holy Cross priests who, like Hesburgh, had earned doctorates in theology. Within a few years, they rechristened themselves the “Theology Department” and collaborated on a textbook series, basing the books on their lecture notes. Hesburgh’s 1950 contribution was an introduction to dogmatic

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36. John Courtney Murray, “Necessary Adjustments to Overcome Practical Difficulties,” in *Man and Modern Secularism*, 152–57 at 154.

37. Carey, “College Theology in Historical Perspective,” 256. See Murray, “Towards a Theology for the Layman: The Problem of Its Finality,” and “Towards a Theology for the Layman: The Pedagogical Problem,” *Theological Studies* 5 (1944): 340–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056394400500303>. A symbol of the “rise” of theology at this time, the journal *Theological Studies* was founded by the Jesuits in 1940, who had already established the *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* in 1938.

38. Carey, “College Theology in Historical Perspective,” 255. The lack of agreement between teachers of religion and teachers of theology led the organizers of a new professional association in 1953 to steer clear of either term, instead calling themselves the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine. In 1967, it became the College Theology Society. Incidentally, the association’s first president was Eugene Burke, Hesburgh’s dissertation advisor at Catholic University. See Yocum Mize, *Joining the Revolution in Theology*, 9–13, 64–67.

39. Hesburgh, *God, Country, Notre Dame*, 46–47.

theology for college students, titled *God and the World of Man*.<sup>40</sup> This volume located Hesburgh squarely in the Phelan/Connell line of Thomistic theology—underscoring his conviction that the study of Christian doctrine was first and foremost an intellectual pursuit.<sup>41</sup> Following the standard outline of seminary manuals, *God and the World of Man* moves deductively from premises about faith to demonstrate the truth of Catholic doctrines concerning God, creation, the fall, and the redemption of humanity. The text is demanding in its attention to Scholastic definitions and distinctions; however, it is written in an accessible style, marked by references to recent *Time* magazine articles, battlefield vignettes, vivid illustrations, and glimpses of humor. Hesburgh the theologian was writing for the young men who were his students—former GIs and rising professionals. He appealed to their faith and their idealism, trying to show them “the wisdom that really matters, that teaches to live rather than merely to make a living.”<sup>42</sup>

In order to cultivate that wisdom, theology had a defining role to play in a university education. Indeed, for Hesburgh, theology was essential to the very nature and mission of the university itself. This point is important in illustrating a remarkable shift that took place in Catholic higher education during the 1940s: theology unseated philosophy as the reigning discipline of integration within the curriculum. It seems that once theology was recognized as a legitimate academic discipline proper to a university, it did not take long to ask why it had to play second fiddle to philosophy. After all, Hesburgh argued, philosophy considers only human wisdom, but theology treats both human *and* divine wisdom. Thus, theology rightfully claims “the first place among all the varied branches of knowledge at a University.”<sup>43</sup> The broader shift in emphasis from philosophy to theology is significant, particularly in terms of understanding Land O’Lakes’ focus on the latter, but the shift should not be overdrawn. Philip Gleason points out that the distinction between the two disciplines was blurred, particularly for non-specialists “by a growing emphasis on ‘the Thomistic synthesis,’ which was understood to bring everything together in a harmonious unity.”<sup>44</sup> Still, for Hesburgh, it was theology that would “impregnate” the whole field of teaching and

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40. Theodore M. Hesburgh, *God and the World of Man* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1950). A second edition of *God and the World of Man*, published in 1960, included extensive revisions to the chapter on creation by John Dunne, CSC.

41. Although Hesburgh was trained at Catholic University, it was not in Cooper’s Department of Religious Education, but rather in the Department of Theology, whose faculty adamantly opposed Cooper’s project. See Joseph Clifford Fenton, “Theology and Religion,” *American Ecclesiastical Review* 112 (1945): 447–63. Connell was one of the professors who assisted with Hesburgh’s dissertation.

42. Hesburgh, *God and the World of Man*, 6.

43. *Ibid.*, 4.

44. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 165. Hesburgh himself reflects this Thomistic tendency. While theology always held first place, during the 1940s and 1950s Hesburgh could not seem to imagine it apart from philosophy, evidenced by his habit of stringing the two terms together.

learning, serving as the integrating force for the different subjects that constitute a student's course of study: "In Catholic education, the various truths are united in reference to the ultimate truths of theology ... All things are seen in relation to man's last end and first beginning which is God."<sup>45</sup>

## The University President and Christian Wisdom

At the age of thirty-five, with a total of four years of administrative experience under his belt, Hesburgh was appointed the fifteenth president of the University of Notre Dame. In the fall of 1952, he gave his first presidential address to the faculty, choosing a theme that he, as a theologian, felt qualified to address: Christian wisdom. He took the term in its classic Thomistic sense, speaking of both the world's need for wisdom and the university's mission to inculcate it. Wisdom concerns an understanding of the whole; and *Christian* wisdom understands the whole of creation in relationship to God, who is both source and destiny of all things. This Christian wisdom "unites all that is true."<sup>46</sup> It provides an "ordered view of the world and of man," offers a hierarchical division of the disciplines, and gives a pattern of ordered education for the student.<sup>47</sup>

Although he never mentioned theology, Hesburgh clearly understood it to play an indispensable role in cultivating this wisdom. In other speeches from the early 1950s, Hesburgh was more explicit. Here he drew liberally from John Henry Newman's classic nineteenth-century text, *The Idea of a University*, which was enjoying a resurgence of interest among American educators.<sup>48</sup> Hesburgh was particularly drawn to Newman's ideas about theology. Newman argued that theology was necessary in the university because a university, by its very nature, professes to teach all knowledge. Were it not to teach the knowledge of God—theology—it would not be teaching *all* knowledge, and thus it would not be a university in the full and true sense. Moreover, because all knowledge—human and divine—is ultimately one, theology is essential for "completing, integrating and correcting" all other disciplines.<sup>49</sup>

Although *The Idea of a University* was ubiquitous at the time, Hesburgh's reading of Newman was influenced by Leo R. Ward, CSC—Holy Cross priest, poet, and Professor of Moral Philosophy at Notre Dame from 1929 to 1962. Ward's 1949

45. Hesburgh, *God and the World of Man*, 6–7.

46. Theodore M. Hesburgh, "Wisdom and Education (1952)," in *Patterns for Educational Growth* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1958), 1–9 at 8.

47. Hesburgh, "Wisdom and Education," 6.

48. Philip Gleason, "Newman's *Idea* in the Minds of American Educators," in *Building the Church in America*, eds. Joseph C. Linck and Raymond J. Kupke (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1999), 113–39.

49. Theodore M. Hesburgh, "The Function of Theology in the University," n.d., probably 1950, 9, CPHS 141/01, University of Notre Dame Archives. See also id., "Teaching Theology to the Layman," n.d., probably 1951, CPHS 141/01, University of Notre Dame Archives.

volume, *Blueprint for a Catholic University*, appeared often in Hesburgh's early speeches.<sup>50</sup> Ward argued that theology served as the hub of a wheel whose spokes reach out to touch all other disciplines. A Catholic university "is achieved only by a particular relationship of other disciplines to theology, which must itself be a developing science."<sup>51</sup> Such a framework demands that "Catholic theology be given the primacy and be allowed and encouraged to specify this university."<sup>52</sup> Theology—as an activity of the mind—marks the intellect as Catholic, ensuring the "adequacy of knowledge" that Ward called the best phrase to describe the aim and ideal of the Catholic university. It was a phrase he was happy to see Hesburgh adopt.<sup>53</sup>

In his early years as president, Hesburgh accepted a common Catholic narrative: powerful intellectual currents flowing out of the Reformation and the Enlightenment made "the ordered flow of knowledge a swirling, churning vortex of conflicting assertions and denials."<sup>54</sup> Amidst this disarray, only the Catholic university could bring order to the human quest for understanding. "Here is an apostolate that no secular university today can undertake—for they are largely cut off from the tradition of adequate knowledge which comes only through faith in the mind and faith in God, the highest wisdom of Christian philosophy and Catholic theology."<sup>55</sup> Because of its commitment to theology, Hesburgh believed, the Catholic university was uniquely positioned to meet the need for integration. However, that did not mean that Catholics had

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50. Hesburgh recalled meeting Ward—who was "already a legend"—after returning to Notre Dame from his novitiate in 1936. He later acknowledged, "When I had to give my first talk on a Catholic university, it was to his book, *Blueprint for a Catholic University*, that I returned, and his message that I preached." Theodore M. Hesburgh, "Preface," in *My Fifty Years at Notre Dame*, by Leo R. Ward (unpublished manuscript, 1978), University of Notre Dame Archives, <http://archives.nd.edu/ward/ward13.htm>. See also Ryan D. Dye, "Leo R. Ward, CSC: Irish America's Rural Man of Letters," *American Catholic Studies* 118 (2007): 19–35.
51. Leo R. Ward, *Blueprint for a Catholic University* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1949), 17.
52. *Ibid.*, 97.
53. Ward borrows his interpretation of "adequate knowledge" from Dietrich von Hildebrand. See *ibid.*, 102–3. Ward's work reflects a tendency among Catholics, beginning with the 1939 symposium, to talk about the "return" of theology to the university—giving the mistaken impression that theology was once enshrined in the curriculum. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University, 1983).
54. Theodore M. Hesburgh, "The Mission of a Catholic University (1954)," in *Patterns for Educational Growth*, 21–32 at 26. Gleason notes at least ten major studies on the connection between Catholicism and curricular integration that were published in the 1940s and early 1950s (*Contending with Modernity*, 394n64). For Hesburgh, an important influence was William F. Cunningham, CSC, who founded Notre Dame's education department and, from 1937–1957, served as vice-president of the National Catholic Educational Association. See Cunningham, *General Education and the Liberal College* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1953).
55. Hesburgh, "The Mission of a Catholic University," 31.

risen to the challenge. “But it is nothing short of wishful thinking or vincible ignorance to claim that we are anywhere near accomplishing the true function of theology in most of our own universities.”<sup>56</sup> Therein lies the opportunity, the new president would argue, not only for building a great theology department but also for building a great university.

For twenty years, university educators across the spectrum had been searching for that elusive holy grail, integration. Catholics felt they had it—at least in theory—in a “Scholastic synthesis” built around philosophy and theology, and oriented toward Christian wisdom. Thus, the cohesive vision of Hesburgh’s inaugural address, though articulated with unusual clarity and conviction, was not controversial. A few months after his inauguration, Hesburgh launched a massive self-study of the liberal arts curriculum at Notre Dame. The final report began with the assumption that neo-Scholastic theology, along with philosophy in its “subsidiary” role, was the key to integration at the university. The 300-page report that followed never questioned this basic premise, but instead sought only to clarify (a) how theology and philosophy were related to each other and (b) how they would guide the rest of the college program. Indeed, one of the methods the review team used to gather data for the report was a series of inter-departmental colloquia in which faculty from each of the sixteen departments that taught required courses were expected to discuss how theology and philosophy related to their work!<sup>57</sup> A revised curriculum based on the report was implemented in the fall of 1953.<sup>58</sup>

## Quest for Excellence

Gleason notes that Hesburgh’s attempt “to reorder liberal education at the best-known Catholic university in the country may be taken as the symbolic climax of the curricular reforms inspired by the drive for integration.”<sup>59</sup> Almost as soon as the new curriculum was put into place, the conversation in Catholic higher education shifted from “integration” to “excellence.”

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56. Hesburgh, “The Function of Theology in the University,” 11. Pius XII’s 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis* would have a chilling effect on Catholic theology for the rest of the decade.

57. The lead author of the self-study report was the neo-Scholastic philosopher Vincent E. Smith. See “Curriculum of a Catholic Liberal Arts College: A Report on the College of Arts and Letters at the UND,” 1953, 2, 3, 5, Notre Dame Printed and Reference Material Dropfiles (PNDP) 91-Ar-1, University of Notre Dame Archives.

58. The introduction to the new curriculum in the college bulletin stated unapologetically, “Naturally, Christian theology and philosophy are seen and studied not only as areas of knowledge profoundly important in themselves but also as furnishing the liberally disciplined mind with certain governing principles for the unification of knowledge and life.” See “Liberal Education at Notre Dame: The Idea and the Design,” in *Bulletin of the College of Arts and Letters 1954–1955*, 21, PNDP 1211-5, University of Notre Dame Archives.

59. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 255.

The early 1950s were years of unprecedented achievement for American Catholics. The GI Bill transformed places like Notre Dame seemingly overnight, bringing to campus an army of new students and launching them into the professional class. The Catholic population grew, moved out to the suburbs, and embraced the rising prosperity of an affluent society.<sup>60</sup> Always “other” in Protestant America, Catholics had proven their patriotism in the Second World War and continued to demonstrate loyalty through their fierce anti-communism. Although still seen by many as clannish and divisive, Catholics had begun to move into the mainstream. Catholic distinctiveness even had a kind of broad cultural appeal.<sup>61</sup> And Catholics benefited from the surge in religiosity that marked the height of the Cold War.<sup>62</sup> Catholics had their own parishes and schools, hospitals and orphanages, credit unions and colleges; but amidst the anxieties of the atomic age, they were admitted into a larger (and frankly nationalistic) “Judeo-Christian tradition” that served as both a bulwark against atheistic communism and a foundation for “the American way of life.”<sup>63</sup>

Cultural recognition and institutional strength gave Catholics the confidence needed to engage in self-criticism, particularly in the academic realm. An emblem of this era was an explosive 1955 article by John Tracy Ellis, titled, “American Catholics and the Intellectual Life.”<sup>64</sup> Ellis was not the first to argue that Catholic scholars had long lagged behind their Protestant and Jewish peers, but his article unleashed a torrent of pent-up Catholic self-criticism that lasted nearly a decade. In 1957, John J. Cavanaugh, CSC, Hesburgh’s mentor and predecessor as president of Notre Dame, was widely quoted for asking, “Where are the Catholic Salks, Oppenheims, Einsteins?”<sup>65</sup> His

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60. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).

61. The year of Hesburgh’s inauguration, 1952, saw the publication of Flannery O’Connor’s first novel, *Wise Blood*, and Dorothy Day’s autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*—which was inspired by Thomas Merton’s 1948 sensation, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. 1952 was also the year Fulton Sheen made his television debut. See Paul Elie, *The Life You Save May Be Your Own: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

62. In a review of Will Herberg’s famous 1955 study, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, the Jesuit Gustave Weigel agreed: “There may have been moments when religion was more intensive in the United States, but never a time when it was so extensive.” Gustave Weigel, “Americans Believe That Religion is a Good Thing,” *America*, November 5, 1955, 150–54 at 150.

63. See Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University, 2011).

64. John Tracy Ellis, “American Catholics and the Intellectual Life,” *Thought* 30 (1955): 351–88, <https://doi.org/10.5840/thought195530331>. For Ellis’s own reflections on this debate see Ellis, “The American Catholic College, 1939–59: Contrasts and Prospects,” in *Perspectives in American Catholicism* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963), 231–42.

65. Cavanaugh’s talk, never published, was given to the Carroll Club of Washington, DC, on December 15, 1957. A story about the talk appeared on the front page of the *Washington Post* the next day with the headline, “Cavanaugh Hits Mental ‘Mediocrity.’” See Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 407n50.

question came just two months after the launch of Sputnik, and was followed the next year by the National Defense Education Act and the influential Rockefeller Fund report, *The Pursuit of Excellence: Education and the Future of America*. The psychological trauma of falling behind in the space race—and, by implication, falling behind in math, science, and education in general—spurred soul-searching not just for Catholics, but for anyone involved in American higher education.

Hesburgh, who served on the Rockefeller task force that wrote *The Pursuit of Excellence*, had sounded these themes from the earliest days of his presidency. In a 1961 address to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), he called out Catholic parochialism and the failures of its educational institutions to confront the pressing challenges of the modern world—from scientific advances to race relations. His remarks caused an uproar at the convention, with observers calling for a moratorium on this Catholic self-criticism.<sup>66</sup> “But, let us admit it frankly,” Hesburgh argued: “much failure has been our own fault: of persons and institutions, often enough through laziness, lack of vision or the mercenary spirit, sometimes through abysmal mediocrity and just plain bad teaching and bad learning.”<sup>67</sup>

A 1962 issue of *Time*—which featured Hesburgh on the cover—asked the question, “Where are the Catholic intellectuals?” The feature article profiled Notre Dame and its young president. It highlighted the spectacular growth of the institution, but also noted a persistent inferiority complex. Overall, “Catholic colleges weigh light on the U.S. academic scales. There is no Catholic equivalent of Amherst, Oberlin, Reed or Swarthmore, let alone Harvard, Yale or Princeton. Notre Dame itself is not yet among the top schools.”<sup>68</sup> Singling out one department in particular, the author wrote, “Ironically, Notre Dame’s theology department, theoretically the core of the school, is regarded by all students and most faculty members as the worst department on campus. Staffed entirely by 24 priests, it offers no major—for fear nobody will seek it.”<sup>69</sup> Hesburgh was undeterred. Displaying his Catholic confidence in the harmony of faith and reason, he argued that the rigor of scientific investigation is not hampered by Notre Dame’s Catholic commitments: “There is no conflict between science and theology except where there is bad science or bad theology.”<sup>70</sup>

As we have seen, Hesburgh was convinced that it was precisely the ability to hold together both natural and supernatural truths that marked the distinctive contribution of a Catholic university. Throughout the 1950s, he continued to emphasize the role of theology in integrating the entire educational enterprise. However, one of the

66. Michael O’Brien, *Hesburgh: A Biography* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1998), 93.

67. Theodore M. Hesburgh, “Catholic Higher Education in Twentieth Century America” (address delivered at the 58th annual convention of the National Catholic Educational Association, April 4, 1961), CPHS 141/16, University of Notre Dame Archives. Excerpts published as “Catholics and the Present,” *Commonweal*, May 12, 1961, 178–79.

68. “God & Man at Notre Dame,” *Time*, February 9, 1962, 48–54 at 48.

69. *Ibid.*, 54.

70. *Ibid.*, 48.

unintended consequences of his quest for greatness was a certain fragmentation of the earlier vision. Increasing emphasis on academic excellence meant, among other things, an excellent faculty, who demanded the same kind of academic freedom and disciplinary autonomy found at other institutions. The concern for synthesis had been replaced by a drive toward specialization.<sup>71</sup> By the time Notre Dame launched a second curricular review in 1961, the world had changed. The five members of the review committee found a lack of consensus on what had been simply taken for granted in the earlier study. Their report pointed to a simmering conflict “between the official ideal of curricular integration and the faculty’s desire for greater departmental autonomy.”<sup>72</sup> Although the committee acknowledged that the integration of knowledge might be a laudable goal for the individual learner, “as a principle of curricular organization it is an illusion.”<sup>73</sup> Unable to find common ground in the face of faculty expectations, the committee concluded its work by leaving in place this paradox.

### Mediation as the Idea of a Catholic University

The Notre Dame curriculum report represented just one example of the challenges faced by Catholic universities in light of what Gleason calls “the splintering of the Scholastic synthesis.”<sup>74</sup> The reasons for this breakup are complex, and largely came out of internal dissatisfaction with the synthesis itself. By the end of the 1950s, the list of complaints had become commonplace: college courses in theology and philosophy were dry, overly abstract, ahistorical, and largely concerned with memorization—a “deadening form of indoctrination,” creating a hermetically sealed universe cut off from all other intellectual currents and irrelevant to life in the modern world.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the budding respect for religious diversity that marked “tri-faith America” tempered the universalistic claims on which Scholasticism was built.<sup>76</sup> And the growing recognition

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71. On the influence of the German research model, the rise of the “academic profession,” the triumph of the graduate school, and the impact on undergraduate education, see Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968).

72. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 296.

73. “College of Arts and Letters: Progress Report Prepared for the Dean and Faculty by the Special Committee, October 16, 1961, 145, PNDP 91-Ar-2, University of Notre Dame Archives.

74. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 297–304.

75. James Collins, “Thomism in the Colleges,” *America*, April 12, 1958, 50–54 at 50. Collins was responding to a stinging critique issued by Gustave Weigel at the 1957 meeting of the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs. See Gustave Weigel, “American Catholic Intellectualism: A Theologian’s Reflections,” *The Review of Politics* 19 (1957): 275–307, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0034670500012006>.

76. See Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, and Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1997).

among Catholic scholars of the pluralism *within* Scholasticism undercut the notion of a single unitary system.<sup>77</sup>

It was precisely at this time that the theme of integration virtually disappeared from Hesburgh's speeches and articles. His writing reflected an awareness of a shift underway and an attempt to feel out different ways of talking about the unique contribution of a Catholic university. In a 1958 presentation at Johns Hopkins University, Hesburgh gave a revised version of his 1950 talk on "The Function of Theology in the University." However, rather than plead for a more robust theology to serve at the heart of the university's integration, as he had in those earlier remarks, Hesburgh acknowledged, "We might be deceiving ourselves, however, to believe that what is being done to recognize theology in the university is the complete and effective answer to the problem of our times, since theology and religion suffer from the same fragmentation that afflicts all areas of knowledge in the university."<sup>78</sup> Instead of being the center of integration, theology would have to serve what Hesburgh began to describe as the key task of the Catholic university: *mediation*.

Hesburgh first made this claim in his controversial 1961 NCEA address. In a broad critique of Catholic philosophy and theology, Hesburgh accused Catholic scholars of being so preoccupied with yesterday that they were neglecting the world of today. "This is no day in which to nit pick among the problems of the past." We live "in the most exciting age of science," but "philosophize mainly about Aristotle's physics." We live under the threat of nuclear destruction, but theologize about war "as though the spear had not been superseded by the ICBM." What a Catholic university must do, according to Hesburgh, was two-fold: "One, we must understand the present day world in which we live, with all of the forces and realities that make it what it is; and, two, those two best and most unique assets we have, philosophy and theology, must begin to be more relevant to the agonizing, very real, and monumental problems of our times."<sup>79</sup> The word for this two-fold work is *mediation*, "a good and priestly word," Hesburgh explained, rooted in the Incarnation and serving to bring together the various separated and antagonistic elements of contemporary society.

Although it was by no means an abrupt turn, this presentation did mark a kind of breakthrough moment in the evolution of Hesburgh's thinking. If in his earlier speeches, Hesburgh conjured up a world of fragmentation and disorder brought on by

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77. Essential for understanding the intellectual history are the two volumes by Gerald A. McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury, 1977) and *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University, 1988).

78. Theodore M. Hesburgh, "Theology in the University," March 19, 1958, 11, CPHS 141/12, University of Notre Dame Archives. Around this time, Hesburgh began to distance himself from Newman; see Hesburgh, "Looking Back at Newman," *America*, March 3, 1962, 720–21.

79. Hesburgh, "Catholic Higher Education in Twentieth Century America," 4. On the day of Hesburgh's address, April 4, 1961, Kennedy approved the Bay of Pigs invasion. A week later, the Russian Yuri Gagarin would become the first man in space.

the secularism of modernity, by 1961 he would describe this world—with all its challenges and confusions—as a site of vitality and growth. Just as the church had much to teach the world, so the world had much to teach the church. This is particularly evident in Hesburgh's comments on science and technology. Although they cannot provide the ultimate meaning, direction, and significance required for human flourishing, he acknowledged, scientific advances can help human beings achieve those basic conditions necessary for a life “worthy of man's inner and God-given dignity.”<sup>80</sup> Hesburgh's growing concern for engagement with the world was no doubt affected by his own experiences off-campus. In 1961, Hesburgh had already served several years on the National Science Board and the International Atomic Energy Agency. He was well into the public hearings, field investigations, and formal reports of the Civil Rights Commission, and was busy helping the newly elected Catholic president launch a pilot Peace Corps program in Chile. At the same time, it is hard to miss the underlying continuity between these remarks and his earliest theological commitments.

Later that year, Hesburgh published an article in *Commonweal* as a follow-up to his NCEA address, which, he acknowledged, “was less than a complete success.”<sup>81</sup> Hesburgh began with a question, “Certainly, we have Catholic universities in America today, but does their intellectual life really turn round the mistress science of theology?” He conceded, “I think not.” This failure, he argued, was “the central challenge which faces Catholic higher learning in America today.”<sup>82</sup> The proper response, however, was not returning to the Middle Ages, but engaging the modern world. The goal was not primarily integration, but mediation. In words that could have come directly from his doctoral dissertation, Hesburgh cited Aquinas's notion of the priesthood of Christ—the mediator who joins “the greatest of all separated entities: the all-holy God and sinful humanity.” Here, Hesburgh's early ambiguity concerning mediation reappears, giving the impression that the university's task is simply to link up what had become uncoupled: “We are men committed to Truth, living in a world where most academic endeavor concerns only natural truth, as much separated from supernatural truth, the divine wisdom of theology, as sinful man was separated from God before the Incarnation.” However, that separation was *before* the Incarnation. The two realms cannot, finally, be in opposition because the “ultimate pattern” is the unity of the Incarnation—the non-competitive, personal union of full humanity and full divinity. Thus: “The mediator, the university or the university person, must somehow join in his person the full reality of the two extremes that are separated. This means that we must somehow match secular or state universities in their comprehension of a vast spectrum of natural truths in the arts and sciences, while at the same time we must be in full possession of our own true heritage of theological wisdom.”<sup>83</sup>

The eminently Catholic conviction that there is an underlying unity to all truth, combined with an incarnational commitment to a world in which God is present,

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80. *Ibid.*, 6.

81. Theodore M. Hesburgh, “The Work of Mediation,” *Commonweal*, October 6, 1961, 33–35 at 34.

82. *Ibid.*, 33.

83. *Ibid.*, 34.

would ground Hesburgh's increasing calls for theology to explore contemporary challenges, and, just as important, his conviction that other disciplines could not avoid asking ultimate questions. From this point forward, Hesburgh argued that theology was essential to the identity and mission of the Catholic university not because it served as a synthesizing force, colonizing all aspects of the university curriculum; rather, its essential role was to enter into dialogue with all realms of knowledge. In this role, theology made it possible for the Catholic university to fulfill its proper mission, namely, to be a *mediator* facilitating a sorely needed exchange between Christian wisdom and the world's most pressing problems.

## The Second Vatican Council

"A new Ecumenical Council looms before us," Hesburgh told his audience of Catholic educators in 1961. In anticipation of that great event, he noted the importance of dialogue between Protestant and Catholic theologians in Europe, and then asked, "Why have we been so timid here in our American institutions of higher learning? Must we always be the last to initiate anything imaginative and intellectual?"<sup>84</sup>

On the eve of Vatican II, Hesburgh saw the ecumenical implications of Pope John's council. He had read Hans Küng's bestseller, *The Council, Reform and Reunion*, and shared most of the young Swiss theologian's hopes for greater Christian unity.<sup>85</sup> But like many Catholics at the time, Hesburgh did not anticipate the torrent of change that would come. In the early 1960s, Hesburgh was preoccupied with his many commitments off campus, in addition to spearheading an unprecedented fundraising drive at Notre Dame. However, he followed the meetings in Rome with interest, and was caught up in the council's theological renewal through two projects: helping Paul VI establish a permanent ecumenical center outside of Jerusalem, and hosting a major post-conciliar theological conference at Notre Dame.<sup>86</sup> He later summed up the Second Vatican Council in a single word: "openness."<sup>87</sup> The pre-conciliar period was that of a "closed church," a church that "had all the answers to every conceivable question and the answers were always black and white. We were right and everyone else was wrong."<sup>88</sup> After the council, Hesburgh argued, the church was not necessarily more

84. Hesburgh, "Catholic Higher Education in Twentieth Century America," 5.

85. Theodore M. Hesburgh, "What Were Your Hopes For, and Vision Of, the Church in 1961?" *The Critic* 34 (1975): 14–24 at 23. See Hans Küng, *The Council, Reform and Reunion*, trans. Cecily Hastings (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961).

86. The weeklong conference in March 1966 boasted an impressive list of speakers, including Godfrey Diekmann, Henri de Lubac, Gerard Philips, Yves Congar, George Lindbeck, Bernard Häring, Thomas Stransky, Robert McAfee Brown, John Courtney Murray, and Karl Rahner, among others. See John H. Miller, ed., *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966).

87. In this, he drew sympathetically on Michael Novak's *The Open Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1964). See Theodore M. Hesburgh, "The Post-Vatican II Church," in *The Hesburgh Papers: Higher Values in Higher Education* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1979), 177–89 at 178–79.

88. Hesburgh, "The Post-Vatican II Church," 179.

secure, safer, or more orderly, “but it is more modest and less triumphant; more Christlike and less worldly and wealthy; more conscious of its central apostolic mission ... more totally dedicated to Christ and his Kingdom; more open to the Spirit—the most fundamental openness of all.”<sup>89</sup> Openness was particularly important for a university. Hesburgh criticized the “repressive measures that creative theologians like Congar, de Lubac, and Murray” had to endure before Vatican II; and he celebrated the freedom of inquiry encouraged by the council.<sup>90</sup>

In many ways, Land O’Lakes emerged out of the council’s spirit of openness and engagement, its affirmation of the laity, and its call for renewal. But the Wisconsin gathering also reflected what was happening on the ground in the United States, for at that time a series of debates over academic freedom began to burst out on Catholic campuses. In 1963, the rector of The Catholic University of America barred four progressive theologians from speaking on campus—sparking widespread publicity and protest in both the Catholic and secular press.<sup>91</sup> That same year, the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities quietly issued a decree that all honorary degrees awarded by Catholic universities had to be approved by the Holy See, which prompted an impassioned defense of institutional autonomy by none other than Cardinal Spellman of New York.<sup>92</sup> Faculty at various institutions grew increasingly frustrated with the perpetuation of an older, paternalistic model of administration. In December 1965, St. John’s University in New York abruptly fired thirty-one professors (clerical and lay) in the name of preserving the institution’s basic religious character—a violation of academic due process that set off a faculty strike. Shortly after, a philosophy professor at the University of Dayton charged members of his department with heresy, drawing an initially reluctant Archbishop Karl Alter into the fray. And at Catholic University, academic life ground to a halt in 1967 when faculty and students united to protest the board of trustees’ decision to terminate the appointment of Charles Curran.<sup>93</sup>

Hesburgh had his own battles over academic freedom. In 1954, he refused to submit to Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani’s demand that Notre Dame withdraw a volume of conference proceedings that featured an article by John Courtney Murray. Hesburgh threatened to resign rather than compromise the academic freedom of the university.<sup>94</sup> A decade later,

89. *Ibid.*, 184–85.

90. Hesburgh, “What Were Your Hopes,” 23.

91. The theologians banned—John Courtney Murray, Gustave Weigel, Godfrey Diekmann, and Hans Küng—were influential figures at the Vatican council then underway. See Joseph Nuesse, *The Catholic University of America: A Centennial History* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1990), 395.

92. The debate between Spellman and the Congregation lasted over two years, until the Vatican Secretary of State, Archbishop Cicognanni, referred the matter to Pope Paul VI, which effectively killed the decree. See Alice Gallin, *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education Since 1960* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2000), 17–20.

93. This skirmish was a portent of the widespread battle over academic freedom that would follow in the wake of Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. On the “contagion of liberty” see Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 305–14.

94. Hesburgh, *God, Country, Notre Dame*, 224–27.

Hesburgh's election as president of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) was challenged by the Vatican's Congregation for Seminaries and Universities. At a tense meeting in Rome, Hesburgh objected strenuously. He saw this obstructionism as an example of the Vatican's excessive interference in the internal affairs of the Federation. The issue was only finally resolved when Paul VI intervened, confirming the results of the election and affirming the Federation's independence from the congregation. At the IFCU's 1965 meeting in Tokyo, the first under Hesburgh's leadership, the Federation took up the question of institutional autonomy directly, and then turned to a more fundamental set of issues. Inspired by Vatican II's call for renewal, the organization would focus its next international conference (to take place in 1968 in Kinshasa) on the question: What is the nature and role of the Catholic university in the modern world?

### Leader at Land O'Lakes

In preparation for Kinshasa, seminars were to be held in each of the four regions of the IFCU.<sup>95</sup> In March of 1967—the same month that Notre Dame's six Holy Cross trustees formally voted to reorganize governance of the university around a new, predominantly lay, board of trustees—a planning committee of representatives from IFCU's North American region met at the University of Notre Dame to discuss their approach. They decided to hold an invitational seminar at Notre Dame's retreat center in Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, in order to craft a statement. That July, twenty-six men came together, including Hesburgh as host; the Holy Cross Superior General, Germaine Lalande, CSC, and Provincial, Howard Kenna, CSC; Notre Dame's Academic Vice President, John E. Walsh, CSC; Neil McClusky of the education department; and the lay chair of Notre Dame's new board of trustees, Edmund Stephan. Also present were Paul Reinert SJ, president of St. Louis University and a key ally of Hesburgh, and Reinert's board chair, Daniel L. Schlafly; along with the presidents of Georgetown, Boston College, Fordham, Laval University, the Pontifical University of Peru, and the Catholic University of Puerto Rico (a young Theodore E. McCarrick). The Assistant General of the Jesuits also participated, as did two bishops, including the chair of the US bishops' committee on higher education. Notably absent was William J. McDonald, rector of the Catholic University of America, who sent a dean, Roy Deferrari, in his place. Although the group was self-selected and made up entirely of men, Gleason argues that it was nevertheless "fairly representative of the leading sector of American Catholic higher education" at the time.<sup>96</sup>

It was an inauspicious time to meet. This was, after all, supposed to be the "Summer of Love." Tens of thousands of young people flocked to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, with its psychedelic, drug-induced counter-culture a source of

95. McCluskey, "Introduction: This is How It Happened," 3–7.

96. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 317. David O'Brien comments that the stated focus of the discussion was not colleges, but universities—research institutions—none of which had a female president at the time. Yet, the distinction was artificial, "because the institutions represented at Land O'Lakes devoted almost all of their resources to undergraduate instruction, not research." O'Brien, "The Land O'Lakes Statement," 2.

nationwide fascination.<sup>97</sup> But the war ground on in Vietnam, and protests gained momentum. That spring, Muhammad Ali had been arrested for refusing the draft. On April 4, Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his most prophetic antiwar pronouncement to date, exactly one year before he would be assassinated—his hopeful “I Have a Dream” speech already receding into history. Land O’Lakes began on July 20, 1967, less than a week after racially charged riots had burnt through Newark. The meeting ended on July 23, the same day the 12th Street Riot broke out in Detroit, one of the worst in American history, leaving behind 43 dead and over 7,000 arrested, the vast majority of whom were black.<sup>98</sup>

Compared to the turmoil of the times, the statement produced at Land O’Lakes was relatively serene. It was much more a product of the optimistic years leading up to 1967 than it was a portent of the pessimism to come. It reflected the confidence of a cultural Catholicism that had finally arrived. Catholic universities were to be universities “in the full and modern sense of the word.” In this light, recent controversies over academic freedom were an embarrassment, a parochial mentality was unacceptable, and the language of dialogue—so championed at Vatican II—was the new *modus operandi*. All of this required genuine independence and institutional autonomy, which these university leaders asserted and then set out to institutionalize through new, collaborative governance structures.

While it was the statement’s opening words claiming independence that got all the headlines, our interest lies in the paragraphs that follow. For after declaring autonomy, the drafters had a good deal to say about identity. In the sections that treat the distinctive characteristics of a Catholic university, we should not be surprised to find deep continuity with Hesburgh’s own vision, which gave pride of place to theology in fostering the Catholic identity of the institution. In order for Catholicism to be “perceptibly present and effectively operative,” theology must not only be recognized as a legitimate discipline, it must also be seen as “essential to the integrity of a university.”<sup>99</sup> However, theology can no longer serve as an integrating force: “There must be no theological or philosophical imperialism.”<sup>100</sup> Each of the university disciplines enjoys its own internal autonomy and its own distinctive approaches and methodologies, which need to be respected. Rather than synthesis or integration, the authors recommended dialogue—“interdisciplinary discussion”—that moves in two

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97. Emblematic of an almost voyeuristic interest was *Time*’s July 7, 1967, cover story, “The Hippies: Philosophy of a Subculture,” *Time*, July 7, 1967, 18–22. See Robert S. Ellwood, “1967: The Year of the Avatars,” in *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening: American Religion Moving from Modern to Postmodern* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1994), 176–233.

98. Bill McGraw, “Detroit ‘67,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 23, 2017, <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2017/07/23/detroit-riots-blind-pig/487920001/>.

99. “Land O’Lakes Statement: The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University,” 7–8. See David J. O’Brien, *From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 48–50.

100. “Land O’Lakes Statement: The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University,” 8.

directions. First, theologians must confront “all the rest of modern culture and all the areas of intellectual study which it includes.” Second, scholars in other disciplines need to be open to recognizing that “there is a philosophical and theological dimension to most intellectual subjects when they are pursued far enough.” This dialogue will demand “Christian scholars who are not only interested in and competent in their own fields, but also have a personal interest in the cross-disciplinary confrontation.”<sup>101</sup> Drawing together theological insight and contemporary knowledge is as important to students as it is to faculty. Alongside Catholic practices such as liturgy and Christian service, the “effective intellectual presence of the theological disciplines will affect the education and life of the students in ways distinctive of a Catholic university.”<sup>102</sup>

The gathering at Land O’Lakes helped to solidify what we might call Hesburgh’s mature vision of the Catholic university, a vision that he articulated with particular force on December 9, 1967, at a convocation marking Notre Dame’s 125th anniversary. He later described this speech as “the most important talk I have ever written,” and he returned to its themes for the rest of his career.<sup>103</sup> Echoing the Land O’Lakes Statement, Hesburgh asserted that a Catholic university “must first and foremost be a university.”<sup>104</sup> To be a university is to be a place “where all the relevant questions are asked and where answers are elaborated in an atmosphere of freedom and responsible inquiry.”<sup>105</sup> Thus a university cannot and should not be ruled by any authority external to the university itself. “The best and only traditional authority in the university is intellectual competence: this is the coin of the realm.”<sup>106</sup>

A great Catholic university must be a great university, but it must be something more. For Hesburgh, *catholic* means universal, and a *Catholic* university implies a universality of knowledge. Returning to themes he had sounded for years—themes that resonated strongly at Land O’Lakes—Hesburgh argued that such a universality of knowledge demands the presence of philosophy and theology in the university. These central disciplines cannot serve simply as window dressing or placeholders, nor can they control everything else. Theology, in particular, must be engaged “on the highest level of intellectual inquiry” so that it can be “in living dialogue with all the other disciplines in the university.” This dialogue is a two-way street, which Hesburgh captured in the phrase: *intellectus quaerens fidem et fides quaerens intellectum*. On the one hand, Anselm’s classic definition of theology as “faith seeking understanding” calls the theologian, rooted in faith, to seek understanding in every disciplinary corner the modern university provides. On the other hand, the scientist, the engineer, the poet, and all those living the intellectual life seek “faith”—that is, they seek “a deeper meaning” running through their various

101. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

102. *Ibid.*, 10.

103. Theodore M. Hesburgh, “Foreword,” in *Thoughts IV: Five Addresses Delivered During 1967*, n.p. Compare, for example, his 1967 speech to the introduction Hesburgh wrote for a 1994 collection of essays that he edited, *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994), 1–12.

104. Hesburgh, “The Vision of a Great Catholic University,” in *Thoughts IV*, 1–16 at 5.

105. *Ibid.*, 9.

106. *Ibid.*, 8.

pursuits. Life cannot be simply “negation and despair.” There must be something more. Hesburgh describes a faith expressed both in concrete Christian terms, and in broader reference to that gift “that sets the mind of man to soaring beyond the limits of human intelligence, on the level of divine intelligence, into the realm of the beyond.”<sup>107</sup> Both tasks are essential. Theology must engage the insights discovered through the secular disciplines; the secular disciplines must engage those ultimate questions that preoccupy theology. Faith seeks understanding; understanding seeks faith.

In fostering this dialogue, the university fulfills its mediatorial function. The Catholic university can do what others cannot: “give living vital witness to the wholeness of truth from all sources, both human and divine, while recognizing the inner sacredness of all truth from whatever source, and the validity and autonomy of all paths to truth.”<sup>108</sup> Such a confident claim follows from a robust incarnational and sacramental vision. To serve as mediator does not mean that the Catholic university functions as a value-free arbiter. “The mediator stands in the middle, but he stands for something, else he is a mighty poor mediator.” What does the Catholic university stand for? Here Hesburgh is unambiguous: “We know that God has spoken to man and we think this important enough to be reckoned with in all else we know, or believe we know, from whatever source.”<sup>109</sup> To stand “between” the realm of human knowledge and the saving message of Christ is to make a claim for the transcendent. Thus, the Catholic university needs theology, for theology “completes the total field of inquiry, raises additional and ultimate questions, moves every scholar to look beyond his immediate field of vision to the total landscape of God and man and the universe.”<sup>110</sup> Hesburgh concluded his 1967 address with a troika of metaphors that he would repeat for the rest of his life. They provide concrete images illustrating different aspects of the abstract notion of mediation. A great Catholic university is a *beacon* shining with the light of its commitment to reason illuminated by faith. It is a *bridge* stretching across the many chasms that separate people, disciplines, and ideas from one other. Finally, it is a *crossroads* where all the intellectual and moral currents of the contemporary world meet.

Land O’Lakes was a watershed moment in a watershed year—a pivotal year in a decade of revolutionary change for all Americans, including those Americans invested in Catholic higher education. Indeed, given the tumult of the times, what is remarkable is how successfully most Catholic colleges and universities—as institutions—weathered the storm. And yet, as Philip Gleason argues, just as they grew in size and influence, the “ideological structure”—the intellectual framework on which these institutions were built—was “swept away entirely.” The neo-Scholastic synthesis no longer held, leaving behind an identity crisis for Catholic higher education that, Gleason concludes, the universities have yet to overcome.<sup>111</sup>

107. *Ibid.*, 12.

108. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

109. Hesburgh, “The Challenge Ahead,” in *Thoughts IV*, 17–28 at 21–22.

110. Hesburgh, “The Vision of a Great Catholic University,” 10.

111. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 305. Gleason notes that by the end of the 1960s the “crisis of identity” had become so cliché that “Catholic students at Harvard reportedly posted signs announcing when and where their next identity crisis would be held” (320).

Whatever one makes of this as a general claim, Gleason's conclusion cannot be applied to Hesburgh himself. It was precisely Hesburgh's "ideological structure"—his theological convictions—that allowed him to navigate this period of institutional transition. Hesburgh's appeal to the category of mediation offered the theoretical foundation for the kind of practical engagement with society and with broader intellectual currents that he believed was essential to the flourishing of a modern Catholic university. His appreciation for the world and for humanity—graced from the beginning, united to God in the Incarnation—moved Hesburgh beyond mid-century Catholic tropes about "Godless secularism" toward a more positive call for dialogue between secular learning and theological insight.

## Conclusion

If we mark the start of Hesburgh's academic career in 1937, the year he began theological studies in Rome, then the first thirty years of that career saw a profound transformation of his field. College theology began this period as a set of marginal courses in religion, bearing no credit, and taught "on the side" by priests and religious instructors. It would rise to become (at least in theory) the apex of all disciplines and the integrating center of the entire curriculum. This moment of prominence quickly passed, giving way to the new pluralism that followed the decline of neo-Scholasticism. After 1967, this pluralism would proliferate on Catholic campuses—driven, in large part, by the disciplinary specialization demanded by the modern research university.

Within theology, new methods of historical inquiry and novel engagement with modern philosophies prepared the way for an explosion of diversity following the council, soon taking shape in various liberation, feminist, contextual, aesthetic, and comparative theologies. Creative work shifted wholesale from seminaries to universities (whether connected to seminaries or not), where more lay faculty taught and an ecumenical/interreligious spirit thrived. Anxious to establish themselves as "academic," some theology departments changed their name to religious studies. Electives became the norm, as core courses began to cater to non-Catholic (and marginally Catholic) students. The pastoral and catechetical functions associated with religion courses in an earlier era were handed over to newly created campus ministry programs. Before long, offices of "mission and identity" appeared, operating independently and often apart from departments of theology and religious studies. At the same time, post-Land O'Lakes dialogue with Rome, which culminated in John Paul II's *Ex Corde Ecclesia* and its application to the United States, got hung up on juridical markers of identity.<sup>112</sup> The requirement that Catholics teaching theology receive a *mandatum* from their bishop pushed many theologians to reassert their independence from hierarchical control. The

112. The Land O'Lakes Statement was ultimately incorporated into the IFCU's 1968 Kinshasa statement, "The Catholic University in the Modern World," but without its clear affirmation of autonomy and academic freedom. Following Kinshasa, Cardinal Garrone, the new Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, initiated a series of constructive meetings with IFCU representatives that took place in 1969, 1971, and 1972, culminating in the 1973 document, also titled "The Catholic University in the Modern World."

cumulative effect of these developments has been to firmly establish theology as an academic discipline alongside all other disciplines within the Catholic university.<sup>113</sup> What remains less clear is whether theology has any distinctive role to play in fostering the Catholic mission of the university, and if so, what that role would be.

The difficulty of delineating theology's role surfaced recently in an unexpected place. On March 16, 2017, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that part-time, non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty at Loyola University Chicago had the right to unionize. The ruling applied to all the faculty members under consideration, except for those in the Department of Theology. What was the reason for this exception? According to the NLRB, the theology faculty, and the theology faculty alone, contributed to the religious mission of the university. Thus, on First Amendment grounds, they were beyond the jurisdiction of the board.<sup>114</sup>

In response to this ruling, a number of NTT theology faculty at Loyola signed a letter asking the administration to ignore this exemption and voluntarily include them in union negotiations. The theologians explained that they should not have been excluded in the first place, because they do not see themselves performing the specifically "religious/catechetical" duties imagined by the NLRB.<sup>115</sup>

It should be noted that Loyola had not requested this particular exemption; rather, the university was challenging an earlier decision pertaining to *all* NTT faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. Loyola had cited religious liberty concerns to argue that the NLRB had no jurisdiction whatsoever to enforce collective bargaining between the university and its faculty. A January 2016 ruling of the regional board disagreed, stating that the NLRB did in fact have jurisdiction because Loyola does not hold out faculty members in the college as "performing a specific role in creating or maintaining the University's religious educational environment." In response, Loyola filed a request for review with the national board, which led to the March 16 decision. Citing similar cases at Seattle University and Saint Xavier University as precedent, the review panel majority argued, "As in those cases, a reasonable prospective applicant for a

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The 1973 document was well received in the United States because it affirmed autonomy and academic freedom, recognized various ways in which an institution could be considered Catholic, and contained no juridical norms. It was this final point, the question of juridical norms, that would become the most neuralgic issue in the relationship between the Vatican and universities from 1973 forward. See Alice Gallin, "Toward a Universal Statement of the Nature of the Catholic University, 1965–1973," in *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents*, 6; Theodore M. Hesburgh, "The Vatican and American Catholic Higher Education," *America*, November 1, 1986, 247–50, 263.

113. See Patrick W. Carey, "Changing Conceptions of Catholic Theology/Religious Studies: 1965–1995," in *Trying Times: Essays on Catholic Higher Education in the 20th Century*, ed. William M. Shea (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 65–83 at 72–73.
114. Rulings are filed under *Loyola University of Chicago*, NLRB case n. 13-RC-164618 (2017), <https://www.nlr.gov/case/13-RC-164618>.
115. The university denied this request. Adam Hankins, email message to author, July 13, 2017. See also Julie Whitehair, "Theology Department Excluded from Faculty Union Ruling," *Loyola Phoenix*, April 5, 2017, <http://loyolaphoenix.com/2017/04/theology-department-excluded-faculty-union-ruling/>.

position in the University's Department of Theology would expect that the performance of their responsibilities would require furtherance of the University's religious mission."<sup>116</sup> The same would not be expected of faculty in any of the other departments under consideration.

The unfolding of events at Loyola has led to a strange scenario in which a university claims that all faculty contribute to its religious mission; a group of theology faculty insist that they do not; and the NLRB cannot seem to agree with either.

The NLRB decision is problematic on a number of levels. It raises a host of complicated legal issues that I do not pretend to resolve.<sup>117</sup> Nor will I elaborate on the most obvious irony of this case, and similar cases at other schools—namely, that in opposing faculty unions, the leaders at several Catholic universities have appealed to their religious tradition precisely in order to violate their religious tradition. Catholic Social Teaching recognizes the right to unionize as among “the basic rights of the human person.” This teaching applies to Catholic institutions. Thus the right to unionize belongs to persons working in Catholic institutions, including Catholic institutions of higher education.<sup>118</sup> Rather than enter into the legal debate or rehearse the arguments of others, I conclude with two brief observations about Hesburgh's vision that I hope suggest the continued relevance of what he accomplished at Land O'Lakes.

First, the religious (i.e., Catholic) mission of a Catholic university cannot be reduced to a narrowly confessional or catechetical task. In this, the Loyola theology faculty demanding recognition are correct. To single out the Department of Theology as the faculty group solely responsible for the institution's religious mission, as the NLRB has done, not only misconstrues what theology faculty actually do, but it also narrows the university's religious mission to the point that it becomes unrecognizable to the university itself. Here, the fundamental unity behind Hesburgh's notion of mediation is helpful. Standing between church and academy, the Catholic university is not divided into “religious” content, courses, and professors, on the one hand, and “secular” content,

116. “Decision on Review and Order,” *Loyola University of Chicago*, NLRB case n. 13-RC-164618.

117. For context, see the arguments laid out in *Pacific Lutheran University*, NLRB case n. 19-RC-102521 (2014), <https://www.nlr.gov/case/19-RC-102521>. For background see Susan J. Stabile, “Blame It on Catholic Bishops: The Question of NLRB Jurisdiction over Religious Colleges and Universities,” *Pepperdine Law Review* 39 (2013): 1317–46, <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/plr/vol39/iss5/13/>.

118. The quotation is from *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 68 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), cited in Gerald J. Beyer, “Labor Unions, Adjuncts, and the Mission and Identity of Catholic Universities,” *Horizons* 42 (2015): 1–37 at 2, <https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2015.46>. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops affirmed the right to unionize at Catholic hospitals in *Respecting the Just Rights of Workers: Guidance and Options for Catholic Health Care and Unions* (2009), <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/labor-employment/>. See Paul Moses, “Which Side Are They On?” *Commonweal*, May 20, 2011, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/which-side-are-they>.

courses, and professors, on the other. The Catholic university is not a mix, but a mediator. Its religious mission *is* its mission—a mission that includes, among other things, witnessing to and working for the “basic rights of the human person,” including the rights of its own members. This mission, which is much larger than what the NLRB construes as “religious,” is not identical to the mission of the church. The Catholic university is neither simply church, nor simply academy, but rather a bridge between the two, with a foot in each, enabling exchange between the “wisdom of theology” and the “vast spectrum of natural truths.”<sup>119</sup>

Second, the religious (i.e., Catholic) mission of a Catholic university is a responsibility of the entire faculty. In this, the Loyola administration is correct. If theology is to play a fundamentally dialogical role within the university, it cannot do so alone. Not only must theology engage the other disciplines; the other disciplines must engage theology. Hesburgh captured this sentiment with the phrase *fides quaerens intellectum et intellectus quaerens fidem*. Faith seeks understanding and understanding seeks faith. The dialogue between theological insight and contemporary thought envisioned at Land O’Lakes requires mutuality. It not only needs theologians who can transcend their specializations and foster rigorous interdisciplinary work around Catholic mission and identity, but it also requires scholars across the disciplines who are willing and capable of engaging in this work. In the fifty years since Land O’Lakes, sustaining such a conversation has not been easy.<sup>120</sup> But in the face of administrative decisions so clearly at odds with the Catholic mission of our universities, it has never been more important.<sup>121</sup>

### Author biography

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119. Hesburgh, “The Work of Mediation,” 34. Lieven Boeve argues that the “marginal” status of theology—existing in, but not fully a part of, church, academy, and society—indicates its distinctive contribution to our postmodern context. See Lieven Boeve, *Theology at the Crossroads of University, Church and Society: Dialogue, Difference and Catholic Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

120. The point was made recently by Notre Dame’s current president. See Jenkins, “Land O’Lakes 50 Years On,” 33.

121. I would like to acknowledge the University of Notre Dame’s Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism for providing funding to support this project, and to thank W. Kevin Cawley, who helped identify archival sources, and Robert Krieg, Sandra Yocum, David O’Brien, and the two anonymous reviewers, who all read earlier drafts of this article and provided very useful feedback.