

Catholic Universities and Religious Liberty

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SINCE THE 1960S, OFFICIAL CATHOLIC teaching has embraced the notion of religious liberty as a fundamental component of respect for persons. At the Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae* made the revolutionary argument that “the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person” and affirmed that all people should be immune from legal or psychological coercion in religious matters. Drawing heavily on the thought of John Courtney Murray, the document clearly rejected the notion that “error has no rights,” insisting instead that even a person who possesses erroneous beliefs retains their dignity. Indeed, all humans have a duty to seek the truth, and Christians have a duty to testify to the truth in Christ. But no government authority should use its authority to impose an established religion, because such an imposition would “clearly transgress the limits set to its power, were it to presume to command or inhibit acts that are religious” (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 3).

Discussions about religious liberty are nearly always focused on the role (and the appropriate limitations of that role) of government authorities. Far less attention has been paid to what *Dignitatis Humanae* might require of other, intermediate institutions in society; surely its profound articulation of human dignity and freedom has implications that go far beyond simply questions of church and state. As Catholic universities increasingly enroll and employ significant numbers of non-Catholics, they must seriously consider how this document should shape their own identity and praxis. Catholic universities and other entities possess significant institutional power and must exercise that power in ethical ways, respecting the human dignity of all of their members. Because such respect for human dignity requires careful attention to context, this study will examine a particular case: Muslims at US Catholic universities. A set of interviews with a wide range of students, faculty, and administrators at these universities illustrates the complexity of respecting the dignity of all members of a diverse university community. By reflecting upon the experiences that emerge from these interviews, this essay will begin to outline some of the theological and practical challenges that universities must face in order to live up to that ethical duty. Yet as these interviews also show,

when Catholic universities embrace these challenges, they have an opportunity to create hospitable communities that can promote the spiritual and intellectual flourishing of all of their members.

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE ABOUT RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

In the decades since *Dignitatis Humanae*, the discussion about religious liberty has developed in a variety of ways. A recent document from the International Theological Commission entitled “Religious Liberty for the Good of All” seeks to update *Dignitatis Humanae* in light of the contemporary challenges of fundamentalism, religious terrorism, militant secularism, and mass migrations.¹ In particular, it notes the importance of protecting religious liberty as a way to promote the common good and peaceful coexistence in pluralist societies. This is particularly interesting in light of the contemporary situation in the United States, where religious liberty claims have become rather divisive tools in the culture war.

The U.S. Catholic bishops’ “Fortnight for Freedom”—a campaign for religious liberty and conscience protections for health care workers—has been at the forefront of their public discourse about religious liberty. The passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (also referred to as Obamacare) led to a series of lawsuits that ultimately made their way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court decided in favor of the religious order, the Little Sisters of the Poor, that objected to mandates that health insurance plans provide contraceptives.² The legalization of gay marriage in the US also raised religious liberty concerns for the U.S. bishops. In particular, some Catholic bishops maintain that religious liberty requires that they be permitted to fire employees who marry same-sex spouses, without being subject to resulting discrimination lawsuits. In a recent decision, the Supreme Court agreed.³ While members of other religious traditions may share these concerns, it is important to note that this engagement by the U.S. bishops has appeared to be almost exclusively in favor of religious liberty for Catholics. Rarely have they been vocal about the current importance of religious liberty for non-Catholics. One important exception was a recent occasion on which the U.S. Catholic bishops

¹ Commissione Teologica Internazionale, Sottocommissione Libertà Religiosa, *La Libertà Religiosa Per Il Bene Di Tutti: Approccio Teologico Alle Sfide Contemporanee*, April 26, 2019, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20190426_liberta-religiosa_it.html.

² Adam Liptak, “Supreme Court Upholds Trump Administration Regulation Letting Employers Opt Out of Birth Control Coverage,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/us/supreme-court-birth-control-obamacare.html.

³ Adam Liptak, “Job Bias Laws Do Not Protect Teachers in Catholic Schools, Supreme Court Rules,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/us/job-bias-catholic-schools-supreme-court.html.

spoke out about the fact that a Muslim man on death row was denied the services of his imam before his execution.⁴

The current climate of political polarization in the United States poses a real danger to public support for religious liberty, as Douglas Laycock has pointed out.⁵ When the US Catholic bishops advocate for their religious liberty to maintain a principled stand against contraception or gay marriage, others in society may see these efforts as merely a power play and an attempt at unjust discrimination. Thus, it is particularly important for Catholics to publicly support religious liberty for non-Catholics as well. Advocating for religious liberty for Muslims, a population that faces significant unjust discrimination within the US, is a particularly powerful way for Catholics to demonstrate that their commitment to religious liberty is a principled stand—a genuine effort to promote the common good and justice for all in society—and not merely an effort to gain license to discriminate. Furthermore, if religious liberty is undermined for one group in society, it is ultimately at risk for all religious groups in society; thus, it is in the interest of all religious people to ensure support for the free exercise of religion—whether that means Muslims’ right to wear hijab at work,⁶ or Unitarians’ right to provide water for migrants in the Arizona desert.⁷ Threats to religious liberty ultimately affect us all—as *Dignitatis Humanae* pointed out decades ago.

Religious liberty within Catholic universities

Given the debates about how religious liberty should be respected in American public life, Catholic universities must give careful consideration to the question of how they can enact the teachings of *Dignitatis Humanae* in their own institutions. The pursuit of truth and freedom from compulsion in religious matters are not only virtues in

⁴ “US Bishops’ Chairmen Condemn Decision Preventing Muslim Man from Receiving Appropriate Spiritual Care at Execution,” February 8, 2019, www.usccb.org/news/2019/19-034.cfm.

⁵ Douglas Laycock, “Religious Liberty and the Culture Wars,” *University of Illinois Law Review* 2014, no. 3 (2014): 839-880. This danger was also discussed by David Hollenbach in an unpublished paper: “Challenges to Religious Freedom in the US: Some Lessons from Global Crises,” presented at the Society of Christian Ethics Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, January 10, 2020.

⁶ Adam Liptak, “Muslim Woman Denied Job Over Head Scarf Wins in Supreme Court,” *New York Times*, June 1, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/06/02/us/supreme-court-rules-in-samantha-clauf-abercrombie-fitch-case.html.

⁷ Elana Schor, “Religious Freedom Law Plays Key Role in Migrant-aid Case,” *Associated Press*, November 26, 2019, apnews.com/1c894dedcb744e4f82ad925dbbc8042f.

the broader society, but also virtues that must be upheld within Catholic institutions. *Dignitatis Humanae* itself notes that protecting religious liberty is not merely the job of government but something for which the entire society is responsible: “Therefore the care of the right to religious freedom devolves upon the whole citizenry, upon social groups, upon government, and upon the Church and other religious communities, in virtue of the duty of all toward the common welfare, and in the manner proper to each” (no. 6).

What does it mean, then, for the Catholic Church and its associated institutions to live out the principle of respect for religious liberty? Universities must practice what they preach; a mismatch between teaching and practice can only add to the public mistrust and undermine Catholic attempts to promote human dignity in the broader society. At many Catholic universities in the U.S., non-Catholic students and employees are now the majority, so the question of how to respect their religious liberty is an acute one. This provides a unique opportunity to model a genuine respect for difference that arises from, rather than undermines, Catholic institutions’ core values.

This task is not simple, however. Not many decades have passed since official Catholic teaching moved from a begrudging acceptance of democracy and religious liberty as necessary evils to active support for both ideas. Furthermore, many Catholic universities struggle with questions about how to uphold and cultivate their Catholic identity as members of their founding religious orders die off and their student bodies are increasingly made up of religious “nones.” These issues often provoke anxiety (especially among those prone to a “fortress” mentality) about how Catholic identity can be preserved against the forces of secularism. And as even professed Catholic students arrive on campus having experienced very little in the way of catechism, departments of theology face pressure to fill in those gaps while also teaching academic theology.

The recent document from the International Theological Commission aptly describes the tensions that arise for religious institutions seeking to maintain their own integrity while also promoting religious liberty in multi-religious societies. Administrators and faculty at Catholic universities can certainly see themselves in the challenges it notes; balancing a genuine care for the intellectual liberty of students with the pastoral duties of the *cura personalis* is not simple:

Seeking a full commitment to the truth of one’s own religion, and a genuine attitude of respect for other religions, can generate tensions within the conscience of an individual, and within a religious community....The capacity to hold together a care for the integrity of one’s faith, respect for conflicts of conscience, and a commitment to nurture

peace in society—this calls for personal maturity and shared wisdom, which must be earnestly requested as a gift of grace from on high.⁸

Seeing this updated and nuanced description of the challenge is particularly heartening, because the decades-old *Dignitatis Humanae* does not offer a great deal of guidance for university leaders. In its practical applications, that document is focused primarily on the importance of limiting the power of the state so that it does not exceed its rightful duty to simply preserve public order—an emphasis emerging from the experience of totalitarian regimes. The power of a university need not be quite so limited, however; in fact, a Catholic university has a much broader duty than just the preservation of public order. To the extent that a Catholic university is responsible for the *cura personalis*, that means playing a more significant role in the lives of its members than a government might rightfully play in the lives of its citizens. It is critical, then, that a university use that power justly.

Dignitatis Humanae is helpful when one considers the other side of its argument: the duty of all to pursue the truth and the importance that the pursuit be free from coercion. Universities, of course, have a very strong duty to the promotion of truth. To fulfill that duty, they use forms of power and coercion, for example, by assigning grades based on the accuracy of students' work. Another way in which Catholic (and other) universities promote truth rather coercively is by means of course or distribution requirements. There has been some controversy recently about required theology courses in particular. As universities like Notre Dame and the University of St. Thomas have reduced the number of required theology courses, this has raised serious concerns that this represents a decline in Catholic identity.⁹ How can a Catholic university maintain its "institutional witness" without a commitment to the study of theology? These concerns are certainly

⁸ "La ricerca di una piena adesione alla verità della propria religione e di un convinto atteggiamento di rispetto nei confronti delle altre religioni, può generare tensione all'interno della coscienza individuale, come anche della comunità religiosa...La capacità di tenere insieme la cura dell'integrità della fede comune, il rispetto per il conflitto di coscienza, l'impegno per la tutela della pace sociale chiedono la mediazione di una maturità personale e di una saggezza condivisa che devono essere sinceramente chieste come una grazia e un dono dall'Alto," Commissione Teologica Internazionale, Sottocommissione Libertà Religiosa, *La Libertà Religiosa Per Il Bene Di Tutti: Approccio Teologico Alle Sfide Contemporanee*, no. 80, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20190426_liberta-religiosa_it.html. Above translation in text by the author.

⁹ See, for example, Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Why Notre Dame's Curriculum Review Raises Far-Reaching Catholic Identity Questions," *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/02/17/notre-dame-is-reviewing-its-curriculum-which-could-have-far-reaching-effects.

well-placed, particularly inasmuch as the reduction of theology course requirements may be a misguided capitulation to market and accreditation pressures. Still, the question of how many courses should be required is a complex one, even if one is committed to the idea of theology as a foundation for the encounter with all forms of truth or knowledge. There is a danger that requiring non-Catholic students to take multiple specialized courses in Catholic theology or scripture can begin to appear unduly coercive. Many Catholic universities have dealt with this issue by, instead, requiring courses in religious studies, which may or may not deal with Catholic theology. Yet this can mean that students graduate from a Catholic university without ever having been introduced to the intellectual foundations of their university. However, much of this debate is beside the point; the more important question is *how* theology courses can be taught in a way that truly respects the intellectual freedom of the students.

The question of how Catholic universities should teach theology is an enormous one, though, and beyond the scope of this discussion. This paper, instead, will focus primarily on other ways that respect for religious liberty is part of the ethical duty of a university, particularly a Catholic university. This paper will elucidate some of them by examining a particular issue: US Catholic universities' treatment of their Muslim students. Because Muslims face significant prejudice in American life, they provide a useful test case for institutions' commitment to upholding the principle of religious liberty. How Catholic universities relate to Islam—both theologically and practically—is a test of their institutional ethics and has real implications for broader American society and religious life.

Catholics and Muslims in the United States

American society as a whole is profoundly ambivalent about Islam. Many Americans see Muslim identity and American identity as fundamentally incompatible and Islam as an existential threat to Christianity. According to reports by Jordan Duffner at Georgetown University, U.S. Catholics are just as likely as other Americans to hold negative views about Islam and Muslims.¹⁰ Duffner found, among other things, that over half of all U.S. Catholics cannot name any similarities between Catholicism and Islam, and the more Catholic media they consume, the more likely they are to have negative attitudes towards Muslims. Thus, it is clear that the problem of Islamophobia in the U.S. is a problem that implicates Catholics. Observers outside the U.S.

¹⁰ Jordan Denari Duffner, "American Catholic Public Opinion: and Portrayals of Islam." Report by the Bridge Initiative, Georgetown University, September 12, 2016, bridge.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Bridge_CathReport_Single-1.pdf.

would agree; not long after the election of Donald Trump and the attempts to institute a “Muslim ban,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* published an article that was critical of the “Islamophobic vision” that has infected the U.S. Catholic Church. The article argued that this is a vision that reflects the influence of American evangelicalism, in what the article calls an “ecumenism of hate.”¹¹

It is disturbing to find such attitudes towards Muslims among American Catholics more than fifty years after the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* endorsed a completely different approach. In that document, we read that

The Church regards with esteem... Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God...this sacred synod urges all ...to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom (no. 3).

Though ordinary Catholics are often unaware that official Catholic teaching includes such a clear statement of respect for Muslims, the document has certainly been examined a great deal by theologians and those writing on the philosophy of religion. Yet few Catholic moral theologians have seriously examined what “esteem” for Muslims might require in practice. What ethical duties might arise from such esteem? How might Catholics live out such esteem in the US and other multireligious societies? And what does it mean for Catholic institutions, including universities?

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

At Catholic universities, John Henry Newman’s *The Idea of a University* has enjoyed a revival of interest in recent years as a resource for leaders struggling to articulate their mission and identity in changing context.¹² However, it is striking for a modern reader to realize that Newman had no conception of non-Catholic students attending his proposed university, much less being taught by non-Catholic faculty.

¹¹ Antonio Spadaro and Marcelo Figueroa, “Evangelical Fundamentalism and Catholic Integralism: A Surprising Ecumenism,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 13 July 2017, www.laciviltacattolica.it/articolo/evangelical-fundamentalism-and-catholic-integralism-in-the-usa-a-surprising-ecumenism.

¹² John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

That is no longer the case for the 1967 Land O'Lakes document, written by a group of North American Catholic university leaders. The document envisions and welcomes non-Catholics to the Catholic university: "The presence of and active participation by persons who are not Catholics in the Catholic university community are most desirable and, indeed, even necessary to bring authentic universality to the Catholic university itself."¹³ However, the authors essentially throw up their hands when it comes to articulating how this "active participation" will work in practice. The preamble acknowledges that "[this document], however, makes no attempt to describe herein how this desirable participation of others than Catholics can be integrated with the Catholic community of learners as described in this document."¹⁴

Ex Corde Ecclesiae (1990) provides more detail by not only acknowledging the possibility of non-Catholics being present at a Catholic university but also outlining ideas about what their presence involves. First, it explains that "The university community of many Catholic institutions includes members of other Churches, ecclesial communities and religions, and also those who profess no religious belief" (no. 26). Envisioning non-Catholic professors, it continues:

Christians among the teachers are called to be witnesses and educators of authentic Christian life, which evidences attained integration between faith and life, and between professional competence and Christian wisdom. All teachers are to be inspired by academic ideals and by the principles of an authentically human life (no. 22).

Notably, it states later that "the number of non-Catholic teachers should not be allowed to constitute a majority within the Institution, which is and must remain Catholic" (nos. 4 and 4).¹⁵

What message might *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* send to a prospective applicant to a Catholic university about the reception (s)he might find, especially if (s)he is a member of a non-Catholic minority? At times, the document seems to assume that every student will be a Catholic or at least will convert as a result of attending a Catholic university:

[A Catholic university education]...enables them to acquire or, if they have already done so, to deepen a Christian way of life that is authentic. They should realize the responsibility of their professional life, the

¹³ "Statement on the Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University," Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, July 23, 1967, archives.nd.edu/episodes/visitors/101/idea.htm.

¹⁴ "Statement on the Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University," Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, July 23, 1967, archives.nd.edu/episodes/visitors/101/idea.htm.

¹⁵ Such a stipulation poses a challenge, particularly given that US nondiscrimination law forbids asking prospective employees about their religious affiliation.

enthusiasm of being the trained ‘leaders’ of tomorrow, of being witnesses to Christ in whatever place they may exercise their profession (no. 23).

Reading such a statement, our hypothetical young college applicant might become anxious about the prospect of facing a degree of proselytism that may or may not be compatible with respect for intellectual and religious liberty. Yet on the other hand, the statement states clearly that “when the academic community includes members of other...religions, their initiatives for reflection and prayer in accordance with their own beliefs are to be respected” (no. 39). Depending upon his or her background, a young student might also take comfort in the fact that the document expresses a strong sense that a Catholic university must seek to make education accessible to the marginalized in society (no. 34). Yet the most intriguing passage comes later: “A Catholic University is to promote the pastoral care of all members of the university community...” (Art. 6.1). This striking statement bears serious reflection. To be sure, the document continues in a more predictable fashion: “...and to be especially attentive to the spiritual development of those who are Catholics.” Still, it is an explicit statement that a Catholic university has *pastoral* duties towards the non-Catholics in its community even if they remain outside the Catholic faith. Not only must a Catholic university refrain from disrespecting the religious liberty of its members, then, but it must also consider what it means to help them to develop in their own faith and practice, as they remain members of their own, separate religious community.

Muslims at US Catholic universities

What does it mean in practice for Catholic Universities in the US to live out respect for religious liberty and to provide pastoral care for those who are not Catholic? The presence of Muslims at Catholic universities provides an excellent test case. The number of Muslims at Catholic universities has been growing significantly in recent years, for a variety of reasons.¹⁶ Some universities, especially those belonging to the Jesuits, have devoted significant resources to the academic

¹⁶ See, for example, William Wan, “Enrollment of Muslim Students is Growing at Catholic Colleges in US,” *The Washington Post*, December 20, 2010, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/19/AR2010121904265.html; Ted Gregory, “Small Catholic University, Big Muslim Enrollment Try to Build Bridges,” *The Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 2017, www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-benedictine-university-muslims-met-20170115-story.html; Alexandra Svokos, “Practicing Islam

study of Islam. Georgetown University has a highly influential Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding.¹⁷ Many institutions, such as University of Detroit Mercy and Loyola University Chicago, offer academic programs in Islamic Studies. The University of Notre Dame recently made headlines when they received a major gift from Muslim donors to establish the Rafat and Zoreen Ansari Institute for Global Engagement with Religion.¹⁸ On the other hand, some universities show little academic interest in Islam, but have actively recruited Muslim international students (especially Saudis) because these students pay full tuition, helping with the bottom line. Still other Catholic universities have seen growing Muslim populations for different reasons, from mere geographic coincidence to their single-sex dorms. Some Muslim students choose Catholic universities because they appreciate Catholic institutions' respect for religious commitment in general.¹⁹

An ethical response to religious diversity at Catholic universities encompasses a wide range of issues and practices. To understand the scope of these issues, the author and student research assistants embarked upon a project to examine the concrete experiences of both Muslims and non-Muslims at U.S. Catholic universities. We interviewed a range of students, faculty, and administrators at twenty different U.S. institutions.²⁰ The interviews revealed both promising

At a Catholic University," *Huffington Post*, April 7, 2015, www.huffpost.com/entry/muslim-at-boston-college_n_6788026; Richard Pérez-Peña, "Muslims From Abroad Are Thriving in Catholic Colleges," *New York Times*, Sept. 12, 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/09/03/education/muslims-enroll-at-catholic-colleges-in-growing-numbers.html.

¹⁷ The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, acmcu.georgetown.edu.

¹⁸ Paul Sullivan, "An Unorthodox Gift to Notre Dame from Muslim Philanthropists," *New York Times*, March 17, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/your-money/nortedame-muslim-philanthropists.html.

¹⁹ William Wan, "Enrollment of Muslim Students is Growing at Catholic Colleges in US."

²⁰ Primarily in 2017, the author conducted open-ended, conversational phone interviews of approximately one-hour with faculty and staff; student research assistants interviewed students, in person, by phone, or by responses to email. Faculty and staff interviews are here identified with letters of the alphabet (A through K); student interviews are numbered (1 through 54). Many interviewees were known to the author or to the student researchers; some interviews were conducted by phone after emailing university officials listed on websites. Although no attempt was made to arrive at an unbiased sample of either institutions or individuals, we did interview roughly equal numbers of Catholic and Muslim students. (Faculty/staff interviewees included only two Muslims.) After consultation, we did not pursue IRB approval because the interviews were intended to be illustrative rather than systematic and were focused more on institutional practices than on individual persons. Questions covered the student body, academic programs related to theology, campus ministry offerings, campus climate, Catholic identity, and attitudes toward Muslim students and practices. All inter-

practices and substantial challenges. They also illustrated that true respect for religious liberty requires careful attention to context.

A variety of common themes emerged in the interviews, but most notable was a preoccupation with *identity*. The behavior of both universities and of individuals is, of course, profoundly shaped by their own self-understanding. The growing presence of Muslim students at Catholic universities often provokes questions about identity; how universities respond to those identity issues then shapes their responses to the ethical challenges. For students, in turn, there are questions about whether their identity as Muslims is actually welcome. We also encountered some profound reflections on how encountering the others' religious experience can deepen religious identity for both Muslims and Catholics.

One key issue emerged about Catholic identity: is it zero-sum? Some institutions fear that acknowledging or making space for the practice of other religions, including Islam, is a de facto threat to Catholic identity. At one university with a significant Muslim student population, a Muslim chaplain was hired, but the administration insisted that the chaplain could not be called a chaplain. Instead, the administrator insisted on calling the position a "spiritual advisor" to avoid intimating that Catholicism and Islam were in any way equivalent.²¹ Catholic University in Washington, DC, has a significant population of Muslim students, but according to reports in the media, the students are not permitted to establish a Muslim Students' Association, because that would imply the promotion of Islam, an activity seen as incompatible with the Catholic mission.²² A faculty member at another school said, "Having students form a Muslim student association is kind of like having them form a LGBTQ group... I mean, we want to support them as individuals, but when they form a group that stands

viewees were told that their names and institutional affiliations would not be disclosed. No audio-recordings were made; the researchers took written notes during the phone and in-person interviews. Future research efforts by social scientists to more systematically understand the experiences of Muslim and non-Muslim students at Catholic universities would be very valuable and would enhance the more theologically-focused approach taken by our research.

²¹ Interview "J," August 2016.

²² William Wan, "Enrollment of Muslim Students is Growing at Catholic Colleges in US." Catholic University has, however, allowed students to form a "Saudi Students Association"—which essentially functions as a Muslim student association that is not entirely welcoming to the few non-Saudi Muslims on campus, according to Interview "H," March 2017.

for something that conflicts with Catholicism...that's kind of a problem [for our administration]."²³

A perception that Muslims' public presence on campus necessarily poses a threat to Catholic identity is troubling from a theological perspective. It became clear through our interviews that many on Catholic campuses, from the leaders to the students, appear to be unaware of *Nostra Aetate's* teaching that the Church regards the faith of Muslims with *esteem*. Rather than showing the strength of their Catholic identity, some university leaders take an impoverished, zero-sum approach to Catholic identity. As one interviewee, a professor of theology, said passionately, "If only our school was more *Catholic*. If we were truly Catholic, we would know that it is our duty to show hospitality towards Muslims. But we're just not Catholic enough."²⁴

Seeing and respecting communal presence

A reluctance to allow public acknowledgement of Islam on campus, however, is not only a problem from the perspective of the theology of religions. It also neglects a key aspect of regard for religious liberty. *Dignitatis Humanae* makes clear that religious liberty is not merely a right that exists for individuals; the rights of religious *communities* must also be respected:

The freedom or immunity from coercion in matters religious which is the endowment of persons as individuals is also to be recognized as their right when they act in community. Religious communities are a requirement of the social nature both of man and of religion itself.... In addition, it comes within the meaning of religious freedom that religious communities should not be prohibited from freely undertaking to show the special value of their doctrine in what concerns the organization of society and the inspiration of the whole of human activity. Finally, the social nature of man and the very nature of religion afford the foundation of the right of men freely to hold meetings and to establish educational, cultural, charitable and social organizations, under the impulse of their own religious sense (no. 4).

In other words, *Dignitatis Humanae* clearly points out that both the social nature of the person and the character of religion itself mean that religious practice cannot be regarded as a solely private matter without implications for the larger community. Thus, when Catholic universities include non-Catholics in their community, they cannot assume that the non-Catholics' collective religious identities should be invisible on campus.

²³ Interview "C," February 2017.

²⁴ Interview "C."

A corollary of this communal right to religious liberty is the human desire for acknowledgment of one's collective presence. In our interviews with Muslims students, we often heard the expression of a felt need to be "seen" by their institution. There are a variety of ways that this could happen; one mentioned repeatedly was the importance of acknowledging Muslim religious holidays in official university publications or offering public well-wishes on these occasions. Another important issue is how university administrations respond to particular events that affect Muslim students. For instance, President Trump's attempts to institute a "Muslim ban" shortly after his election provoked a great deal of tension and anxiety on campuses. A number of students that we interviewed mentioned that their universities had attempted to respond by issuing public statements. But one university president actually invited the members of the Muslim student association to come and meet with him so that he could assure them of his support. This personal touch meant a great deal to the students. On the other hand, Catholic University was criticized for being rather tone-deaf in handling an incident when a suspicious person was observed on campus. A janitor described the person as "Middle-eastern looking," and that description was shared widely, while the entire campus was put on lockdown.²⁵ The suspicious individual was never located. Afterwards, some of the Saudi students were quite upset and felt targeted by the description; some were stopped and questioned.²⁶ While they understood the need for caution, they were dismayed that there was no acknowledgment from the administration that circulating such an ambiguous description of a suspicious person could potentially lead to racial profiling. This incident reinforces the importance of having university administrators understand how public statements are perceived by various groups on campus—including religious minorities.

The question of groups feeling "seen" on campus is challenging, however, because of the subtle dynamics. One non-Muslim student, when asked how Muslims are treated on campus, replied, "I don't think there's any blatant hatred or bias or fear, even, but there's kind of a sense of apathy or ignorance. We have a lot of exchange students

²⁵ Martin Weil, "Lockdown Lifted at Catholic University After Report of Possible Gunman," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 8, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/catholic-university-searched-for-possible-gunman-students-in-doors/2015/12/08/1c7b5d64-9d77-11e5-8728-1af6af208198_story.html.

²⁶ Interview "H."

from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim-majority countries, and the campus climate kind of just *ignores their presence* in a lot of ways.”²⁷ Another student said simply, “Our school is welcoming to all types of people, but a lack of understanding of Muslim culture creates a certain type of separation.”²⁸ Of course, these challenges are often a reflection of issues in the broader U.S. culture. One student explained this very effectively when asked whether or not she had ever requested or received accommodations from a professor for Muslim holidays, fasting during Ramadan, etc.:

As a Muslim student attending a Catholic institution, I feel that I lack a voice... the idea of merely requesting change does not cross my mind. I think this stems from a lack of confidence and, at times, fear of not being accepted in society as Muslims. The negative social/political pressure *along with* the social exclusion of older generations (parents/grandparents) prevents the younger Muslim generation from feeling that they do, in fact, belong in this country regardless of the number of years spent here.²⁹

This sense of social exclusion illustrates precisely why Catholic universities have a particular responsibility to acknowledge and welcome the presence of Muslims on campus, particularly given *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*'s mandate to welcome marginalized groups. By recognizing and normalizing the inclusion of Muslim students, universities can begin to model good practices for the rest of society as well.

Some Catholic universities have little hesitation about welcoming the public presence of Muslims on campus. The University of Scranton, a Jesuit institution, has had a university mosque for twenty years which serves not only the students but also the surrounding community. The imam is a professor at the university. Georgetown University hosts both the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and the more outward-facing Bridge Initiative, which seeks “to inform the general public about Islamophobia.”³⁰ In addition, Georgetown was the first US university to hire a full-time Muslim chaplain, in 1999. A chaplain at the time described the event in this way:

“Georgetown is a Jesuit and Catholic university,” Father Bunnell said, “and we want to keep that as our major identity.” But, in explaining Mr. Hendi’s appointment, the priest added that the university also

²⁷ Student 5, July 2017.

²⁸ Student 17, July 2017.

²⁹ Student 55, July 2017.

³⁰ Bridge—a Georgetown University Initiative, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/about-us>.

wanted to be “catholic with a small ‘c’,” and to bring all its staff and students “into the family, rather than have them ministered to on the fringe.”³¹

The idea that Muslims are part of the university *family* is also key at Benedictine University in Chicago, where nearly 30 percent of the students are Muslim. Public events involving Muslim-Christian dialogue are frequent occurrences, and during Ramadan the university has hosted iftar meals to which all students were invited, both Muslim and non-Muslim.³² Finally, the University of San Francisco hosted a major conference in 2015 entitled “Islam at US Jesuit Colleges and Universities” in order to “address concerns of diversity, interreligious engagement, institutional mission and identity, scholarship, and teaching in relation to the growth of Islamic studies and Muslim populations at Jesuit institutions.”³³

In general, universities associated with a religious order seem to have an advantage over diocesan ones in articulating how the presence of Muslims or other groups on campus relates to their Catholic identities. Jesuit universities have a long tradition of studying Islam and engaging with Muslims globally. Franciscans recall the visit of St. Francis to Sultan al-Malik as inspiration for interreligious dialogue and peacemaking.³⁴ At Benedictine University, the tradition of Benedictine hospitality has been very helpful as a framework for action. Clearly, drawing on their own particular charisms is an important way for Catholic organizations to respond to the challenge of religious diversity.

Pastoral care and religious diversity

Many Catholic universities have made significant efforts in recent years to support the spiritual life of their non-Catholic students. Inter-faith chapels have become increasingly common, halal meat is sometimes available in cafeterias, and campus ministry offices increasingly

³¹ “Georgetown University Names First Muslim Chaplain,” *The New York Times*, August 28, 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/28/us/religion-journal-georgetown-u-names-first-muslim-chaplain.html>.

³² Interview “J,” August 2016.

³³ The conference papers are available as: Aysha Hidayatullah and Erin Brigham, ed., *Islam at Jesuit Colleges and Universities* (San Francisco: University of San Francisco Press, 2016).

³⁴ Paul Moses provides a helpful overview of the historical sources for this event and of its modern significance for Franciscans in “Men of Peace: What We Can Learn from St. Francis & the Sultan,” *Commonweal*, October 3, 2019, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/men-peace>.

are coming to include non-Catholic staff or chaplains. Some universities have publicly announced procedures for accommodating students who are fasting, or must miss class due to religious holidays.

Like all pastoral ministry, however, ministry to Muslim students requires careful attention to context, which often proves complex. The pastoral and psychological needs of Muslim students vary widely, depending upon whether they are international or U.S.-based students.³⁵ Those who have been born in the U.S. or are permanent immigrants often face challenges in reconciling their Muslim identity with their American identity, particularly in this age of Islamophobia. For international students who plan to return home, those issues are far less relevant. Refugee students, in turn, may face additional issues, including serious trauma in their own or their families' lives.

Many Muslim students in the U.S. come from Saudi Arabia, mainly because of their government's generous scholarship funding. But Muslims at Catholic universities are quite diverse; at some institutions there are significant Somali-American or Pakistani-American populations because those communities are concentrated in the local area. As a result, there exist wide variations in cultural background and religious practices among Muslims at Catholic institutions. This variation can cause tensions within the Muslim student population, particularly regarding already fraught issues like wearing hijab (a veil). And like students of all religious traditions, Muslim students vary widely in how observant they wish to be, particularly given that college is a time of exploration for many young people. One issue for many Muslim students is whether to observe the traditional Islamic prohibition against drinking alcohol. Given the prevalence of drinking culture on American college campuses, abstaining from alcohol can be an alienating experience for some students. Yet the issue also offers an opportunity for colleges—supporting Muslim students by offering alternative social opportunities could ultimately benefit all students at a university by discouraging binge drinking.

The diversity *within* Muslim student populations poses a challenge. For instance, if a Muslim chaplain is hired, how can a university ensure that he or she will be a good match for their particular student population? A Turkish Sufi, for example, might have trouble gaining credibility at a university where most Muslims are Arabic-speaking Saudi students. Or, if a university makes a prayer space available for Muslim students, how can it ensure that a Shiite student feels welcome if most of the other students are Sunni? In addition to avoiding any religious coercion on the part of Catholics, universities must seek to cultivate respect for religious liberty *within and between* other religious communities. For example, if a prayer space is meant to be an

³⁵ I am particularly grateful for the insights of Interview "D," July 2016, on these issues.

interfaith space, it can be a challenge to ensure that students of all religions feel welcome there. At one university, the interfaith chapel is perceived by most students as the Muslim prayer space, and non-Muslim students do not feel that they are welcome. This is particularly a problem when the Muslim students leave up a partition that they use to create a gender division during their prayer. Other students see the partition up and assume that the space is not available to them. In this case, then, pastoral care must also include some gentle accountability—an admittedly difficult balance to strike.

At some Catholic universities, most of these issues do not arise because there is essentially no pastoral programming or support that is not explicitly Catholic in nature—despite the mandate from *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* that universities provide pastoral care for non-Catholics. One staff member at a university with a significant Muslim student population explained their lack of a Muslim chaplain by simply saying, “Well, the best way we can support the spiritual development of Muslim students is by showing what it means to live authentically Catholic lives.”³⁶ While this is true, it also reveals a disappointingly constrained notion of what it means to “live authentically Catholic lives.” A theology professor at another university explained his dilemma about pastoral care for Muslims as follows:

It is important to help [Muslims] to be the best that they can be in their own faith; this will help them move closer to the truth of Christianity—there is a real possibility of that happening. But there is also a danger of a failure of charity in affirming false religion. . . . Charity has to pull in two directions. Their souls are potentially in danger. But their souls could also be endangered by imprudent rebukes. So, what actually serves the goal of evangelization here?³⁷

One can appreciate the honest struggle of this professor, and his desire to help Muslims to “be the best that they can be in their own faith” is a lovely way of interpreting the implications of Catholic doctrine. But the implication that an “imprudent rebuke” might endanger the soul of a non-Catholic could be seen as verging on the presumptuous. After all, Catholics’ commitment to religious liberty is ultimately rooted in a deep sense of trust that the fate of others’ souls is finally in God’s hands. A better expression of what Christian witness looks like in the context of genuine respect for religious liberty might be found in this professor’s response instead:

³⁶ Interview “A,” February 2017.

³⁷ Interview “K,” July 2017.

[Pastoral care for a Muslim at a Catholic university]...holds the space for the student to become their vision of who they want to be, while also offering ourselves as witnesses to what human flourishing looks like in our book, and the wisdom of our tradition about that.³⁸

Such a response offers a vision of how *cura personalis* can occur even in the context of genuine theological disagreement.

Overall, our research found a wide range of attitudes and practices regarding pastoral care for Muslim students. Much of the variation was due to differences in resources available at smaller versus larger universities—or differences in the numbers of Muslim students on campus. But there is also a key theological question shaping institutional responses: the question of whether it is a *good* thing for Muslims to practice their religion. Where there is a focus on Islam as “false religion” or as somehow morally neutral, there will be, of course, far less inclination to make provisions for Muslims to practice their faith. Therefore, university leaders and pastoral ministers must be able to explain why supporting Muslims’ practice of their own religion is, in fact, a Catholic duty.

One question in the interviews attempted to evoke underlying theological assumptions, simply asking: do you think it is a *good* thing for Muslims to pray? To fast? In general, we found that few respondents felt prepared to answer in detail. It is, therefore, an important question for further theological reflection. For some respondents, there was a fairly immediate affirmative response; they often referred to the fact that prayer and fasting are practices that Catholics share with Muslims. But some noted that this would be a controversial question for many leaders at their institutions. At one institution, Muslim students were using a Catholic chapel to pray while Mass was being celebrated, making some of the Catholic participants in Mass uncomfortable. That school clarified that while anyone was welcome to pray in the chapel at other times, they should not do so *during* Mass.³⁹ This is an understandable response; Muslim prayer involves significant physical movement that may have been distracting. Still, one wonders if a pastoral response to the Mass participants might have invited them to see prayer to the God of Abraham as something to be welcomed in, rather than excluded from, a holy space.

Overall, universities that seek to uphold the ethical requirements of respect for religious liberty and pastoral care for all should, at least, remind their community members that regardless of their beliefs about the value of others’ religious practices, it is clearly wrong, in most cases, to discourage or inhibit such practices. On the contrary, as *Dig-*

³⁸ Interview “C,” February 2017.

³⁹ Interview “J.”

nitatis Humanae explains, governments, universities, and other societal institutions have a responsibility “to help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life, in order that the people may be truly enabled to exercise their religious rights and to fulfill their religious duties” (no. 6). Thus, finding ways to support Muslims’ religious practices on campus is clearly a duty for Catholic universities.

Religious diversity at Catholic universities—a good thing?

Besides the key question of whether it is a good thing for Muslims to practice their religion, another important question that shapes institutional ethics is this: is it a *good* thing for there to be religious diversity at Catholic universities? This is a complicated question, because it relates to broader theological questions about whether the diversity of human religions is willed by God. The challenge is evident in the recent debate over the “Document on Human Fraternity” that Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar signed together at Abu Dhabi. The document asserted the importance of religious liberty in the following way:

Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. *The pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom*, through which He created human beings. This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives. Therefore, the fact that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture must be rejected....⁴⁰

The assertion that God has willed there to be a diversity of human religions might be familiar to readers of the Quran,⁴¹ but it is not an idea that has previously appeared in official Catholic teaching on religious liberty. Criticisms quickly emerged that Pope Francis was undermining the uniqueness of the Catholic faith by signing this document.⁴² Yet such a statement is in many ways a logical consequence of the decades-old assertion in *Nostra Aetate* that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy” in other religions. In any case,

⁴⁰ “Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to The United Arab Emirates: A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” February 3-5, 2019, www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html, emphasis added.

⁴¹ See Quran 5:48.

⁴² Gabriel Said Reynolds provides a helpful summary of the reactions in “After Abu Dhabi: Pope Francis & the ‘Document on Human Fraternity,’” *Commonweal*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/after-abu-dhabi>.

this broader theological debate is also clearly playing out on the ground of university campuses, as Catholic institutions themselves wrestle with the question of whether or not religious diversity is a good thing.

Most U.S. Catholic universities were founded in a context not entirely unlike John Henry Newman's and served almost entirely Catholic students at the beginning.⁴³ The context is quite different today. Recently, some trustees visiting a Catholic university were surprised to learn that the veiled young women they saw walking across campus were Muslims, not nuns.⁴⁴ For some institutions, enrolling a diverse and international student body is a mark of their prestige—a sign that they can compete with the Ivy League. For others, it is simply a response to a shifting local population and to financial exigencies. Each change poses its own ethical risks. Some universities risk compromising their Catholic identity by capitulating to a secular notion of academic excellence. Others risk compromising their mission by treating international students as cash cows, without making adequate provision to really meet their academic and spiritual needs. But in all cases, they risk creating an atmosphere of grudging tolerance, rather than genuine hospitality and respect for human dignity in its many and varied forms. What is a Catholic vision of diversity? What is a Catholic vision of academic excellence? These are the things that Catholic leaders must articulate.

It is helpful to attend to some real-life experiences to explain why diversity is a *good* thing for Catholic universities. Many of our interviewees, both Muslim and Catholic, described the experience of a shared campus life as extremely positive. For instance, one Catholic student wrote that,

I've come to see that Catholicism and Islam come from the same roots and traditions and region and share the same God. For a history so inextricably linked, I think it is impossible to truly know Catholicism without understanding Islam and vice versa. Knowing that our histories (ancient and contemporary) are not so different is important and can create empathy through understanding.⁴⁵

Faculty members often echoed this student, with their descriptions of how having Muslim and non-Muslim students together in the class-

⁴³ Many Catholic universities were founded precisely because Catholics did not enjoy religious liberty at Protestant institutions and faced discrimination at or outright exclusion from those universities. See, e.g., Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ Interview "J."

⁴⁵ Student 47, July 2017.

room has been a positive learning experience. Some theology professors noted—with a bit of dismay—that their Muslim students are often more enthusiastic about studying Catholic theology than their Catholic students. One said,

My Muslim students have a theological astuteness that our western students just don't have; they take their religious texts very seriously... there's a refreshing openness there.... Several Muslims have gifted me Qurans, as if to say, thank you for sharing your book, now I'd like to share mine.⁴⁶

While there can certainly be moments of confusion and tension, in general, theology faculty seem to find it very helpful and fruitful to have Muslim students in the classroom. They also usually find Muslim students to be open and willing to take theology classes, even those with a very Catholic focus.

The Muslim students who responded to our interview questions tended to be positive about the experience of attending a Catholic university but also acknowledged some of the real challenges that diversity poses. When asked if they felt safe and included on campus, they responded:

I'm a Muslim in Greek Life and other clubs, so I'm slightly different in terms of inclusivity. I keep my brown life and my social life separate. [My university] isn't safe in general to be honest.⁴⁷

Safe, yes. Included, not really. Some people don't like talking to Muslims. Such is life.⁴⁸

Our university stresses inclusivity and unity...and I don't think most students (and certainly not the administration) would tolerate anti-Islamic actions. That said, subtle xenophobia and Islamophobia definitely show up on campus sometimes and I think that the university could be a little more intentional about blending US and foreign students in student affairs, development and housing, especially with the large number of Arabic students on campus.⁴⁹

One Muslim student wrote at length about how a religion course ultimately helped her to deal with the Islamophobia that she faces on a regular basis as a hijabi (veiled) woman:

⁴⁶ Interview "D," July 2016.

⁴⁷ Student 41, July 2017.

⁴⁸ Student 54, July 2017.

⁴⁹ Student 10, July 2017.

I learned a great deal from the theology course I took on War, Peace and Religion. It allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how religion is used by some to inspire violence and how the same religious beliefs can also inspire peace. By learning about how other groups of people experience/ have experienced discrimination historically, such as Catholics in early American history, I was able to gain a well-rounded understanding of discrimination and injustice in a context that does not relate directly to my personal identity and experiences, thereby allowing me to grow into developing a strong belief in the necessity for justice and understanding regardless of religion.... This has allowed me to grow spiritually as I was able to approach differences with less criticism of differences in practices and, instead, understand the whys of the exact same practices.⁵⁰

For Catholic students, it can be challenging to face questions about Christianity from fellow students who are Muslim. In some cases, such questioning leads to a desire to know more about their own tradition. Many students, especially white students who are accustomed to being in the majority, must deepen their understanding of what it means to tolerate diversity when they are confronted with the presence of Muslim peers. As one professor put it,

My Christian students come in thinking, “Oh, I’m tolerant, I accept diversity.” But not until junior or senior year do they really begin to understand what diversity is. That’s when they start to get past “you’re ok—I’m ok – we can love one another but just stay over there” and move towards understanding what real community requires.⁵¹

Creating genuine community, where all individuals’ human dignity is genuinely respected, is never simple, of course. One professor’s comment shows how difficult it can be to strike the right balance:

One Saudi student thanked me for being open to him. I felt like he was saying, “Thank you for treating me like a normal human being” instead of what he’s used to: either extra, awkward attention from liberals, or being told he’s going to hell by conservatives.⁵²

To the extent that they are able to articulate their identities in ways that are both authentic and expansive, Catholic universities may enjoy some advantages in their ability to respect religious liberty and welcome diversity. As the rise of the “nones” makes religion appear irrelevant to many, and culture warriors paint religion as damaging and discriminatory, Catholic universities testify to the value of religion as

⁵⁰ Student 1.

⁵¹ Interview “D.”

⁵² Interview “C.”

vital to human flourishing. Tamiya R. Zaman, a professor at the University of San Francisco, provides an eloquent testimony:

Writing as a Muslim professor who teaches at a Jesuit Catholic university, I have found that the religious commitments of the University of San Francisco, for example, provide for an atmosphere more tolerant of the practice of my faith than I have found at secular institutions.... In an atmosphere where faith is part of an admissible institutional vocabulary, the multiplicity of religious expression does not cause the ruptures that it does elsewhere. Instead, the presence of a diverse body of Muslims...at Catholic universities is a promising area in which institutional commitments to religious practice enhance religious dialogue and education.... the ability that such schools have to do this is one that has not been given the attention it deserves precisely because it is the conflicts between Muslims and secular institutions that make national news.⁵³

Indeed, a Catholic university should be a place “where faith is part of an admissible institutional vocabulary” and where the door is open to more genuine diversity than may be present at supposedly neutral secular institutions. It is clear from Zaman’s testimony—and many others among our interviewees—that this is indeed occurring at Catholic universities, and it is much to the benefit of the entire university community.

CONCLUSION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY LEADERS

The experience of conducting interviews with a wide range of community members at Catholic universities was fascinating and enlightening. Though these interviews were merely impressionistic and qualitative rather than quantitative, they did offer some key ethical insights for Catholic universities. They also showed the importance of developing and sharing a theology of religions to help ordinary Catholics navigate the tensions between their faith commitments and respect for the faith of others, and to help Catholic institutions navigate the tensions between their institutional witness and their ethical duties to a religiously diverse constituency.

First, it is important for Catholic universities to support their students, including making provision for their religious practice as appropriate. For universities whose communities include Muslims, this support may mean providing halal food, prayer spaces for both daily

⁵³ Tamiya R. Zaman, “Muslims, Jews, and Religious Visibility on American College Campuses,” in Reza Aslan and Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, eds., *Muslims and Jews in America: Commonalities, Contentions, and Complexities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 101.


prayers and larger Friday gatherings, and pastoral care from a chaplain who is well-suited for the particular student body. All these efforts must be sensitive to religious diversity within the Muslim population and the university community as a whole. Providing such pastoral support to students can be complex, particularly when challenging issues arise such as conversion to Islam or to Catholicism. In those cases, it is usually best to urge students to dig deeply into their own traditions and seek advice from those within their faith. This is easiest to facilitate when there are strong relationships between staff members of different religions, who can then refer students to each other. As challenging pastoral issues arise, there is no substitute for ongoing learning and dialogue among both staff and students, and so a strong and open campus community is essential.

Second, it is important to consider how the public face of the university appears to religious minorities on campus. This can mean including religious holidays on university calendars and having a procedure to excuse students and staff who may be observing these holidays. In addition, it is important for university administrators to be prepared to respond to current events and to do so in ways that go beyond public statements in order to include personal touches. For example, hosting and supporting student organizations that serve Muslim students can provide a natural way for university leadership to connect to those students, which is particularly important when challenging events occur. And to the extent that a university provides diversity training for its staff, it is important that this includes attention to *religious* diversity.

Finally, it is important for universities to consider Islam—and other religions—in relation to their educational mission. Muslims and Christians have a fraught history, and peace in many parts of the world today depends upon their coexistence. U.S. society and politics are deeply affected by inaccurate perceptions of Islam, and this disconnect resonates in dangerous ways throughout the world. Cardinal Bo of Myanmar recently pointed out the ways that the West’s conflicts with Islam have led to negative consequences for Christians and Muslims in Asia and Africa.⁵⁴ Thus, it is vital to provide opportunities for learning about Islam and also about Catholic views of Islam. This educational task is especially important when there are incidents of anti-Muslim bias or bullying on campus. It is important that these be treated not only as disciplinary issues but also as an opportunity to educate the offending students and the broader campus *about* Islam and a Catholic perspective on it. This means that those responsible for

⁵⁴ Nirmala Carvalho, “Myanmar Cardinal Says West’s Conflicts with Islam Punish Christians in Asia, Africa,” *Crux*, May 31, 2019, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-asia/2019/05/myanmar-cardinal-says-west-s-conflicts-with-islam-punish-christians-in-asia-africa>.

disciplinary processes may need to invite staff members from Campus Ministry or from theology departments to become involved as well. Universities can provide spaces for genuine engagement and interreligious dialogue in a way that is rare in the broader society.

As Catholic universities navigate the challenging task of re-envisioning their mission and identity in a fast-moving world, it is clear that religious pluralism is a major question. By attending carefully to both the challenges and opportunities in seeking an ethical response to religious diversity, one hopes that universities find ways to articulate their Catholic identity in ways that are not zero-sum. Instead, identities can be additive: supporting the faith development of Muslim students does not detract from the Catholic identity of an institution but, in fact, enhances it. Such an understanding of Catholic identity and mission will also permit universities to arrive at more nuanced and fruitful ways of understanding what institutional ethics require in a complex world. In turn, Muslim members of Catholic universities can help those institutions in their efforts to become an oasis for all those who seek to integrate faith and the intellectual life, identity, and community. Few spaces exist in society for genuine interreligious dialogue about how “to hold together a care for the integrity of one’s faith, respect for conflicts of conscience, and a commitment to nurture peace in society.”⁵⁵ By creating such spaces, Catholic universities can make a vital contribution to the common good. It is by truly embracing the “other” that Catholic universities can cultivate “men and women for others” and help to show a divided world that in God’s eyes, no one is “other.” 

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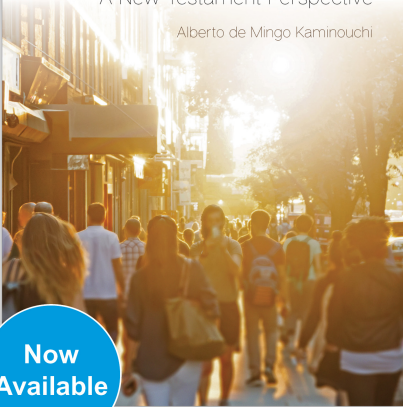
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⁵⁵ Commissione Teologica Internazionale, Sottocommissione Libertà Religiosa, *La Libertà Religiosa Per Il Bene Di Tutti: Approccio Teologico Alle Sfide Contemporanee*, no. 80, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20190426_liberta-religiosa_it.html. My translation.

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