

implications that call for further investigation along these and other lines.

*Retrieving the Natural Law* is written for a college-level readership and should be of interest not only to professional scholars but to the intelligent laity with interest in natural law and its theological, ethical, political, and cultural implications. The author's style is elegantly free of arcane terminology, the

book is well-organized, and sections typically conclude with helpful summaries. The volume would lend itself nicely to classroom use and is highly recommended.

PHILIP BLOSSER

*Philip Blosser, Ph.D., is a professor of philosophy in the College of Liberal Arts at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit.*

---

***Status Envy:  
The Politics of Catholic Higher Education***

**by Anne Hendershott**

Transaction Publishers, 2009, hardcover \$39.95

256 pages with bibliographic notes and index, ISBN 978-1-4128-0817-0

It is fortuitous that Anne Hendershott's excellent monograph, *Status Envy: The Politics of Catholic Higher Education*, was published in 2009. Its appearance occurred the very year in which Rev. John Jenkins, University of Notre Dame President, announced that this institution was eager to award an honorary degree, in law, to Barack Obama, newly elected President of the United States. Despite the fact that Obama's political agenda was clearly at variance with the moral teachings of the Church, Jenkins and his board of directors had judged the untested President a worthy recipient of this honor.

Why, some Catholics asked, did officials of a widely regarded Catholic university believe it appropriate to reward a man whose social agenda contradicted—even violated—their religious convictions, especially those regarding the protection of the dignity of every person, born and unborn? Why was this Catholic institution so ready to ignore the distress experienced by these Catholics? As a solid interpretation of the transformation of Catholic higher education in the twentieth century, Hendershott's book provides a persuasive answer to such questions.

The action taken by University of Notre Dame officials had, indeed, brought into the open ideological perspectives that have been threatening to divide not only the academic Catholic community but American Catholics

for several decades. Now in particular, from his ivory tower, President Jenkins had unleashed what soon would become an uproar within the Catholic community at large and signal a change of Catholic attitudes. As the situation continued to receive almost daily coverage among certain Catholic media, the university issued a rationale to clarify the reason for its invitation. Notre Dame, or any Catholic institution of higher education for that matter, the president argued, was simply being guided by the principles of academic freedom as these were first articulated in the celebrated 1967 Land O'Lakes Statement—a position coincidentally given strong support at that time by Father Theodore Hesburgh, then President of Notre Dame. The statement asserts that

to perform its teaching and research functions effectively 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. To say this is simply to assert that institutional autonomy and academic freedom are essential conditions of life and growth and indeed of survival for Catholic universities as for all universities.

President Jenkins suggested that the choice of President Obama as commencement speaker and honorary award receiver was a valid

expression of the teaching role to which Catholic universities had been entitled, especially since the enunciation of the statement.

Most Catholic college administrators gave silent assent to Notre Dame's explanation regarding academic freedom. But a minority of Catholic college faculty and personnel, as well as hundreds of thousands of Catholic laity and several dozen Catholic bishops, were not, under these special circumstances, satisfied with the defense. Instead of congratulations that netted the university a public relations coup because of Obama's ready acceptance, a torrent of protest poured down on the university—and, by association, on Catholic *academia* itself. The "silent majority" of Catholics, it appeared, had finally found their voice. They made it clear that they had taken umbrage over what higher education institutions were finding socially and politically acceptable on Catholic campuses. Their question was clear: how was Catholic identity being safeguarded by Notre Dame's unilateral decision? To the surprise of Jenkins, as well as many other Catholic intellectuals, the faithful did not want to fall in line with this decision. They were not convinced by the justification provided by the president of the university.

Anne Hendershott's monograph provides not only the background that made this scenario inevitable but also shows why Notre Dame officials believed their invitation to be not only a logical but also a correct path for higher educational institutions to follow. Their willingness to use criteria and standards closely related to the choices made in secular higher educational circles had begun in the early decades of the twentieth century.

According to Hendershott, the first acquiescence within Catholic higher education to such perspectives came in the first decades of the twentieth century when Harvard President Charles W. Eliot announced the revamping of that university's classical curricula and the introduction of an elective system. At this point, many Catholic institutions of higher education opted to reconsider their own courses of study. This rethinking gradually led to questioning the degree to which Catho-

lic institutions should maintain their authentically Catholic religious and intellectual character. Operating in an environment that had always taken its cues from respected Ivy League universities, many Catholic colleges and universities fell in line and initiated academic policies that broadened curricula at the expense of studies that they had traditionally treasured—courses that championed ancient classical studies and were proudly built on medieval intellectual achievements.

This trend toward dropping core philosophical and theological subjects intensified during the second half of the twentieth century. The results were a gradual but complete capitulation to progressive educational thinking that was given great support through the convincing arguments of newly engaged lay trustees. In fact, the infusion of business-oriented lay leaders clearly prompted sometimes resistant Catholic college personnel to revise their thinking about traditional educational values and concentrate instead on competitive marketing strategies, thus diverting some of the most prominent Catholic colleges from their original classical educational goals. Furthermore, it easily led to the exacerbating of the "culture of relativism" that had begun to invade these institutions.

In the first chapters of her monograph, Hendershott delineates the effects of these fundamental changes. She points out the consequences of these policies, especially after the Second Vatican Council, when some faculty began to interpret Catholic teaching within a relativistic perspective and to explain their personal need for "academic freedom" as a means of performing their teaching and research functions effectively. In fact, for all too many professors in Catholic universities, the reforms of Vatican Council II became opportunities to reinterpret Catholic dogma rather than reexamine it. The author points to Charles Curran's successful victory over Catholic University's move to censure some of his theological positions in the late 1960s as one example of this trend; this led to further politicization and spilled over onto Catholic colleges across the nation. Courses that once helped students strive for excellence and virtue now encour-

aged them to value merely secular success as their preeminent goal, and aimed at developing marketable skills rather than promoting ways to help students live better lives.

Much of the remainder of Hendershott's book documents the downward trend that accelerated after the mid-twentieth century. On important issues of student life and governance, the Land O'Lakes Statement had taken on new meaning. Although seen by some as a "symbolic manifesto" (noted historian Philip Gleason described it as such), the statement was consistently invoked to support the premise that Catholic universities and colleges "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." As the author points out, this belief continued to allow the broader interpretations of social mores and, in the process, built a barrier between the Church, especially its bishops, and academic officials. It also stood as a proof of the divide that was widening within the larger Catholic community. Hendershott illustrates this reality by examples of activities, including curriculum development, that belied their identity as belonging to the Church. In every case, the changes came with the cooperation and even encouragement of college administrators. Confusion over the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges mounted.

Hendershott also shows how the civil rights and women's rights movements, and even the ecological and anti-war movements, have also affected Catholic colleges since Vatican II. Her chapter on the role of women who received advanced degrees at schools of theology is particularly insightful. Especially at women's colleges, but even at major co-educational facilities, proponents of feminist theology introduced a "hermeneutic of suspicion" that characterized magisterial teaching as misogynist and oppressive. As a result, the focus of theological debate at many Catholic colleges was severely tested, and serious theological discourse was stymied.

Theological studies took another new direction when alternative lifestyles became a topic of popular interest. Hendershott devotes a chapter to the ramifications of

this development, as gay-friendly Catholic hosted festivals, parades, and performances to celebrate these lifestyles and introduced courses meant to support the acceptability of such choices. The abdication of critical thinking on these topics, Hendershott points out, contributed to confusion among students and further obscured the traditional purposes of Catholic education. With the support of faculty, discussions supportive of common ground, civil rights, and social justice—but not critical of the potential of these approaches to mislead—have trumped approaches of the great philosophers, theologians, and literary figures. No longer are studies regarding religious principles the foundation of a Catholic education. One by one, most colleges have unmoored themselves from traditional beliefs. Forty years of academic wandering have led to this sorry result.

Hendershott does not shy away from naming and describing the activities of the Catholic institutions that led the way on this path of curriculum deconstruction and secularization. Controversial decisions made since the 1970s at the University of Notre Dame, Georgetown University, the University of San Diego, and DePaul University each receive substantial coverage. Because the Jesuits sponsor the greatest number of Catholic universities, the policies of their universities come under particular scrutiny. But the author does not ignore many of the smaller colleges, including women's colleges, that also followed these trends. All who are familiar with Catholic colleges today can only nod agreement. As Hendershott indicates, fundamental Catholic education has, for the most part, been drowned in a sea of relativity. Envy of the status of secular universities, abetted by flawed understandings of the meaning of Vatican II and of participatory democracy, has all too often created undesirable results. According to the author, the sin of pride and the desire to achieve and maintain power seem to be at the heart of the matter.

Hendershott takes pains, however, to note that some Catholic colleges and universities have steadfastly steered another course. While she documents the scandalous dismantling of an academic system that once

celebrated the preeminence of classical theological and philosophic discourse, she also names those colleges that honor the greatness of such learning along with the more recent twentieth century developments that have encouraged its return. As Hendershott observes, such ventures within the academic world prove the resilience of Catholic truth in the face of its critics. As the final chapters of her book detail, there are powerful signs of renewed life among more than twenty Catholic colleges where the rich treasure of the Catholic Church remains strong. Besides, a handful of states today boast powerful examples of both well-established and newly emerging colleges that have defied the easy drift away from the essentials of Catholic teaching. Think, for example, of the endeavors of Providence College in Rhode Island, Thomas Aquinas College and John Paul the Great University in California, Thomas More College in New Hampshire, the University of Dallas and the College of St. Thomas More in Texas, Christendom College in Virginia, Gonzaga University in Washington, and Wyoming Catholic College, to name just a few that have begun to fight the trend.

Hendershott's story thus ends on an optimistic note. Yet she leaves us with a disturbing question. Given today's "culture of dissent," which has divided Catholics, how will it be possible for a few colleges to make

a difference? How, too, will the silent majority of American Catholics find their voice and support in their desire to remain loyal to the Church? How will those colleges that are faithful to the magisterium maintain and advance the place within Church and society that they rightfully deserve? What is to be done now, we must ask, since Notre Dame has drawn the line in the sand?

This is a book that may be largely ignored and, most probably, dismissed by many in Catholic academia. This would be a tragedy. Hendershott's painstakingly honest assessment of the present predicament is worthy of serious consideration. The aim of her monograph is obvious. Her approach, moreover, is not an angry exposé but a compelling attempt to raise questions and provide perspective about what has been happening in Catholic higher education. All who worry about the future of Catholic higher education need to read the book with good will. We teach our students that constructive criticism is a wonderful antidote to hubris. Isn't this the appropriate time for leaders of academia to consider Hendershott's thesis and respond?

SR. DOLORES LIPTAK, R.S.M.

*Sister Dolores Liptak, R.S.M., Ph.D., is an adjunct professor of Church history at Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut.*

---

***Living the Love Story:  
Catholic Morality in the Modern World***

**by Christopher P. Klofft**

Society of St. Paul/Alba House, 2008, paperback, \$19.95  
253 pages, bibliographic notes and index, ISBN 978-8189-1263-4

Today's culture could be radically transformed if this book were read and its wisdom heeded. In *Living the Love Story: Catholic Morality in the Modern World*, Christopher Klofft, S.T.D., presents a well-crafted and thought-provoking synthesis of Catholic moral teaching in a way that is appealing to both the scholar and the novice.

The reader's attention is immediately captured in the introduction by the description of the elements that make a love story appealing: "the power of love to triumph over adversity," finding hope in the fact that love can prevail over all odds, and the belief deep in the human heart that "there are some things worth fighting for, some things