In Memoriam: 
Father Michael Scanlan, TOR (1931–2017) 
Kevin Schmiesing and Stephen M. Krason

Millions of Catholics around the world mourned the death on January 7, 2017, of one of the giants of twentieth-century American Catholicism, Fr. Michael Scanlan. “Fr. Mike,” as he was called by all who knew him, was the president *emeritus* of Franciscan University of Steubenville (he had served for twenty-six years as its president), and universally credited with primary responsibility for transforming it into a center of—as he put it—“dynamic orthodoxy.”

Fr. Mike was well-known in many circles, including the charismatic renewal and Catholic media such as EWTN. His most enduring influence may well be in the reform and renewal of Catholic higher education in the United States in the late twentieth century. In response to the effective declaration of independence from the magisterium issued by many Catholic colleges and universities in the 1960s and 1970s, courageous and visionary leaders such as Warren Carroll and Msgr. George Kelly formed institutions and organizations such as Christendom College and the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars. Fr. Mike’s path was different but equally influential as a counter to the dominant trends. When he took the reins at the College of Steubenville in 1974, his immediate goal was not to create a university that would self-consciously buck the trend of secularization; it was instead to save a college on the verge of collapse. Yet, a key part of that project—which reflects both the genius and the holiness of Fr. Mike—was *spiritual* renewal. That spiritual renewal, beginning but not ending with a reform of student life, would be the catalyst behind increasing enrollment, increasing academic achievement, and ultimately, increasing impact on the Church and society in the United States and beyond.

As an alumnus and a faculty member of Franciscan University, our appreciation extends beyond recognition of Fr. Mike’s prominence in American Catholic history. Fr. Mike’s status within the Franciscan University community is difficult to articulate but it is shared and widely understood by faculty, staff, alumni, and Franciscan confreres. To these, he was variously a leader, an idol, a mentor, a counselor, a father, and a brother. Notwithstanding his stature as a religious celebrity and university president, he remained accessible to his university family, including undergraduate students. To the academically serious but spiritually lethargic among faculty and students, the Harvard-trained, rhetorically adroit ex-attorney was

a magnet, gently pulling them toward recognition of the indispensability of moral conduct and Catholic doctrine in the search for truth. For the spiritually enthusiastic but intellectually apathetic, the devout and charismatic Franciscan friar similarly exerted a pull toward recognition that the purpose of a Catholic university was not merely piety but also cultivation of the intellect. He embodied *fides et ratio*, and his leadership of Franciscan University reflected that commitment.

Fr. Mike always gave strong and deeply appreciated support to the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. He welcomed its formation in 1992; opened the door to our making the university its headquarters (where it has remained all these years); made available to the SCSS the use of university facilities and staff that was indispensable to our making our apostolate successful, provided financial assistance to enable us to launch *The Catholic Social Science Review* and keep it going so as to contribute in a profound way to the rebuilding of Catholic social science scholarship; served on our Board of Advisors from the beginning; and made clear in no uncertain terms how important he believed it was for the university to support our apostolate. It is hard to explain just how vital the support of Franciscan University has been to the success of the SCSS—and Fr. Mike more than anyone else made that support possible. The SCSS could never give him enough thanks. In a small way, we expressed this—but also did so representing the larger constellation of persons working to restore faithful, orthodox Catholic higher education and scholarship—when years back we presented him with a special award for his contributions to Catholic higher education.

In light of the outpouring on social media following Fr. Mike’s death in January, we were obviously not alone in the primary sentiment we felt upon learning of his passing: gratitude. Countless colleagues and friends believed that it was a privilege to have known and worked with him. Countless alumni were thankful for the vision and labor that helped to make Franciscan University the place that provided them with a formative—in some cases, transformative—personal, cultural, and intellectual experience.

The true measure of such a man can only be seen in hindsight; Catholic scholars of the future will be better able to weigh Fr. Mike’s impact than we. Yet, even now, it is not too much to call him a great man, a visionary leader, and an exemplar of holiness in the religious life and in Catholic higher education. His legacy will be deep and wide. We are, humbly and gratefully, one small part of it.

We, along with many, many others, will certainly miss Fr. Mike. May he rest in peace.