

The Virtue of Teaching Theological Ethics

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This essay discusses the pedagogical aims of college courses in theological ethics. Is historical representation of the ideas, debates, and ecclesial controversies that found Christian thought satisfactory in teaching moral theology or social ethics, or does there need to be a more practical focus, such as making an authentically Christian decision? The pragmatism of my students leans me to the latter, while my own love for the controversy and power of an idea motivates the former. In this essay, I propose that there is a certain “doing” of Christian ethics—a *praxis*—that is essential to grasping the substance of Christian ethics. Indeed, I will argue that the theological good that grounds Christian ethics necessarily transports the student beyond a narrow view of self and world to become amazed by the mystery of human existence. While knowledge of church teaching (i.e., its historical rationale and ethical import), good moral reasoning, and moral development might well increase through a course in moral theology, the heart of Christian ethics lies in the encounter of conscience that comes by engaging the gospel, creed, and liturgies of the Church, what Dennis O’Brien calls the “Christian icons of salvation.”¹ This is what teaching Christian ethics is ultimately all about.

My inquiry is in relation to the core curriculum at Catholic institutions of higher education. The core enjoys a distinctive pride of place at the Catholic school.² Since Vatican II, the aspiration of Catholic educational institutions has been “to envision, anticipate, and assist in bringing about a new human family”—not, however, by making the world the Church, but by striving “to be a budding forth of the future wholeness that God intends for all peoples.”³ I view the teaching of theological ethics against the background of this aspiration, which itself is a direct consequence of “the light and love that come from faith [that] constitute[s] the originating value of the Church’s institutions.”⁴ The aim of teaching theological ethics in the core curriculum of a Catholic institution of higher learning is not to “make Catholics” or strengthen the faith lives of Christians, though such may well happen and, if it does, reflects the activity of grace. The aim is rather to examine human agency in view of God, i.e., the theological good, which calls students to engage the struggle of authentic belief and freedom. What this kind of teaching requires of a teacher is to moderate this encounter with self through the Christian icons of salvation in a way that respects the freedom and intellectual pilgrimage of the individual learner.

Teaching Christian Ethics in the Economy of Love and Truth

In *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II observes that the human person is not only “one who seeks the truth [but] is also the one who lives by belief.”⁵ What John Paul is ultimately asking us to consider with this observation is the centrality of conscience in the moral life. In Catholic moral

theology, conscience is that integrative capacity of the soul to grasp the *good*. The quest for the *good that is to be performed*, which is the subject of ethics, is properly understood as a quest for “a free and rightly tuned will,” whereby one’s desire is rightly ordered to truth and one’s choices and actions conform to this truth. For this reason, the study of Catholic ethics is closer to learning the violin or playing baseball— i.e., being rightly tuned and practiced to play well as though it were second nature—than it is to the memorization and direct application of doctrine. It aims at being true to self, a most excellent moral self, “not by turning in on oneself” in subjective autonomy, “but by opening oneself to apprehend that truth even at levels which transcend the person.”⁶ Moral excellence lies in opening to the truth of God.

Crucial to Christian ethics, then, is understanding the relationship of the *good to be performed* and the *good who is God*. Faith summons the Christian to ask how an action complies with the will of God, who is the truth of things and the mystery at the center of all things. John Paul in *Fides et Ratio* indicates that this relationship (and thus the Christian’s moral question) reflects a fundamental human experience, specifically “reason’s capacity to rise beyond what is contingent and set out toward the infinite.”⁷ The very desire to know and “discover for ourselves, beyond mere opinions, how things really are,” he says, indicates how natural the quest for truth is for the human person.⁸ As the questions of life’s meaning and of purposeful action show, it is both natural and reasonable to want to link the *good to be performed* with the truth of things, even “a supreme value, which refers to nothing beyond itself and which puts an end to all questioning.”⁹ Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle said as much. This is, of course, no easy or direct link because “the search for truth...is not always so transparent nor does it always produce such results.”¹⁰ And sometimes, the search for truth can be displaced “in a welter of other concerns,” which can seem more pressing in their immediacy. It is also true that in coming to know the *good to be performed* “people can even run from the truth as soon as they glimpse it because they are afraid of its demands.”¹¹ There is a social and even domestic reality to the quest for practical truth that implicates the knowing and doing of the *good*.

Reason’s capacity to rise out of itself, consider how things really are, and seek “a final explanation” of things¹²—despite the messiness—is what leads John Paul to note a dimension of the quest for the *good to be performed* typically overlooked or undervalued by empirical and philosophical modes of truth, i.e., the dynamism of belief in the quest for truth that begins with the way one learns to speak and understand the world as a child. We enter life being given “a language and a cultural formation but also a range of truths in which [we] believe almost instinctively.”¹³ Adulthood, of course, is typified by awareness of this *entrusting*, questioning and evaluating these instinctive beliefs, and determining what one will hold as true based upon “the experience of life or by dint of further reasoning.”¹⁴ Still, despite this important self-examination, there is for every human being, even the most self-reflective of persons, “many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification.”¹⁵ It is impossible for any one of us to validate for ourselves every finding of science or the flow of information in the cyber world. The human is “the one who lives by belief,” who entrusts.¹⁶

Implicit, then, in the pursuit of the *good to be performed* is “not only a person’s capacity to know,” i.e., one’s effective use of reason, “but also the deeper capacity to entrust oneself to others,” i.e., one’s effective determination of whom or what to believe.¹⁷ The pope’s language here is no doubt intentional: the act of believing, implicit in the act of knowing, is interpersonal and thus a matter of entrusting; it thereby reflects, to greater and lesser degrees, the activity of love. We humans tend to trust more the people we love. Nonetheless, what one is seeking here—i.e., whether to trust the beliefs of one’s parent, a lover’s admission of love, a researcher’s theory, or a teacher’s lecture—is “the truth of the person,” whether I should put my trust in this person, given that I cannot wholly verify what he or she says. Is this person’s testimony, whether of religion or science or politics or media, credible? The act of believing in each of these examples is to entrust oneself “to the truth which the other declares,” and this might very well be the truth of Christian faith that a parent or priest declares. Thus, the pope remarks that “human perfection” for every person, i.e., moral goodness, “consists not simply in acquiring an abstract knowledge of the truth” that comes from the important habits of critical thinking. It also comes “in a dynamic relationship of faithful self-giving with others.”¹⁸ There is a trusting of the other, whether it be another’s presentation of the facts or interpretation of the situation or understanding of the truth of life, that is always happening in the effort at practical truth. In making this point, the pope reiterates an ancient idea that friendship is “one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical inquiry.”¹⁹ The way to truth is made better when done in the context of trust. Truth and trust are two sides of the same coin. One should not, then, neglect the interpersonal reality of truth-seeking. We need to have an ethic of belief to accompany the pursuit of abstract truth, an ethic rooted in “faithful self-giving” that authentically assures “a fullness of certainty and security,” or authentic trust.²⁰ Put directly, a pursuit of the *good to be performed* that ignores the dynamics of relationship and belief does so at great peril of ignoring the truth of existence.

Christian ethics is accordingly a matter of faith and reason. The good decision is never simply a matter of gut-instinct, overpowering feeling, confidence of doctrine, or application of abstract principle. It is rather the fruit of a rightly formed (faith) and informed (reason) conscience. Conscience is this integrative capacity of the soul that unites intellect and feeling to will, and seeks a free and rightly tuned will, a will attuned to the mystery of God present in all things. The pursuit of the *good to be performed* through the well-formed conscience thus requires a distinctive learning context or economy of love and truth. Pope Benedict XVI puts the point as follows: “Truth needs to be sought, found and expressed within the ‘economy’ of charity, but charity in its turn needs to be understood, confirmed and practiced in the light of truth.”²¹

If the substance of moral theology is the free and rightly-tuned will in the economy of love and truth, what does this mean for the teaching of Christian ethics in the college classroom? When I first started teaching theological ethics, I presented and led students in evaluating interesting Christian ideas about the moral life as a disinterested dispenser of the tradition. Much in the way I was taught, we compared ideas, showing strengths and weaknesses, and, in a good semester, I even required students to demonstrate the meaning and power of an idea with an assignment rooted in moral application. But I stayed on the level of ideas and did not challenge

their “experiential timidity before the *good*” or the ethics of their belief.²² I was reluctant, outside the presentation of ideas, to get too involved, not wanting to show or force my own religious enthusiasm and belief. But I was also naïve about the workings of the human intellect, thinking that the solid presentation of a good idea was not only all that was due in the teaching of Christian ethics, but also all that is needed to act well. Once convinced of the idea, one simply changes one’s mind and, as it were, acts rightly. But such an approach altogether misses the dynamic of conscience in Catholic moral theology. I was not being just or true to the economy of truth and love intrinsic to Catholic ethics.

There is an alternative to positivism (as I will call such an approach), on the one hand, and evangelization, on the other. Properly understood, theological ethics focuses on “the truth of the human world of life and desire, passion and pride, good and evil.” It shares this focus with artistic truth, but proceeds through what Dennis O’Brien calls “iconic knowing.”²³ It goes beyond the individual experience of the artist and takes the student-participant through the Christian icons of salvation into the mystery of human experience. To this “doing of Christian ethics” in the college classroom I now turn, with an eye to the critical encounter of conscience with the truth of God that defines moral excellence in the Christian life.

Christian Ethics as Icon

When Christians are discerning right action and look toward the *good*, they obviously look for God. And according to the Christian revelation, they should expect to meet God. The quest “for the truth and... a person to whom [human beings] might entrust themselves” is “a search which can reach its end only in reaching the absolute.”²⁴ Christians come to believe that the interior restlessness of the human soul, that “unquenchable fire that renders us incapable in this life of ever coming to full peace,”²⁵ is the “desire and nostalgia for God.”²⁶ This is Christian faith, which comes to meet them (a helpful expression by Pope John Paul II) amidst the discernment of right thinking and acting. “Moving beyond the stage of simple believing,” Pope John Paul II says in *Fides et Ratio*, “Christian faith immerses human beings in the order of grace, which enables them to share in the mystery of Christ, which in turn offers them a true and coherent knowledge of the Triune God.”²⁷

It is helpful to consider how one might teach this aspect of Christian ethics, i.e., the silent and hidden reality of grace, how Christian faith (i.e., God) “comes to meet” the believer in the activity of conscience. There is a gorgeous last supper scene in the film *Of Gods and Men* (2010) whose symbolic reference to the gospel is hard to miss. It is a scene that well characterizes the *coming* of Christian faith. It also helps to represent what I mean by Christian ethics as icon.

The movie is based upon a true story about Cistercian monks from the Monastery of Atlas in Tibhirine, Algeria over the years 1993–1996. There is civil war in the country, and the small community of eight monks is caught in the politics of the region. Christians are a small minority in the predominantly Muslim country, and these monks are affectionate friends with the Muslims of their neighborhood. The monks provide health care and some jobs for the neighbors, and go to the market and trade and buy like any other. But these good relations and common life are upset

in 1993 when a group of foreign workers is massacred by an Islamic fundamentalist group. Fear enters the land, and foreigners are warned to leave, as are these monks of French nationality, but the monks, after much conscientious discernment, determine to stay. The film beautifully portrays the human fear and terror that faced these holy men: the shameful hiding of one monk in the bowels of the monastery upon a night visit from rebels, doubt about the monastic vocation in the midst of war. It shows the gentle, nonviolent love of Christian faith. It also demonstrates the monks' discernment amidst the Christian icons of salvation. Led by a wise abbot, the monks resolutely refuse to take a side in the civil war, boldly standing alongside their neighbors, and reject the offers of protection from both the government and the rebel group, which would have put them on a side. The film powerfully portrays the human, moral, and theological drama, even if it only loosely narrates the actual story. By story's end, six of these monks, and one visiting monk, are captured and led to a tragic death.

Spiritual writer Henri Nouwen says that "icons try to give us a glimpse of heaven." "Icons are painted to lead us into the inner room of prayer and bring us close the heart of God." "An icon is like a window looking out upon eternity."²⁸ The scene I wish to describe from *Of Gods and Men* does just this. It evokes encounter with the "mystery of existence" and involves the viewer inside the pain and suffering of the monks' dilemma in Algeria, the implications of their decision to remain, and the Christian narrative, creed, and liturgy that brought them to this moment of direct confrontation with "the splendid waste of life" brought on by hatred and civil war.

The scene begins with the monks gathered at a U-shaped table with Father Christian, the abbot, routinely blessing the meal. In walks the elderly Brother Luc carrying in each hand a bottle of wine. An obviously-confused abbot slows the pace of his prayer, staccato and almost to a halt, and as the monks' "Amen" resounds, Luc puts on the tape recorder an exquisite piece of music that plays throughout the scene, artfully reflecting the changing emotion of the monks, from fraternal smile to distant and fearful look, from laughter to tears, to faithful, confident joy. Luc slowly brings the bottles to the table and proceeds to shuffle to his place. No other words are spoken in this scene as the camera pans from face to face and back again, several times; the rugged and wrinkled faces of devout and hardworking men, furry eye-brows and all; as each sips wine or hold backs, recalling the "cup that I shall drink you shall drink" of the gospel; as each monk (at least to my mind) recalls the life given and chosen and given up, as though knowing, like Christ in the gospels, that the betrayer's work had been done. The scene is iconic. It invites involvement and empathy, even tears, as the word of faith is about to become flesh. The very next scene comes on suddenly and with cacophonous sound, and shows the caravan procession of the enemy to the monastery in the dark of night, at which time seven monks will be captured.

In describing iconic truth, Dennis O'Brien says that "reading a depiction," like this last supper scene, "*iconically* is not something that occurs automatically.... One can always retreat to an aesthetic distance."²⁹ We can opt out, as it were, and treat an icon, both in this form or in the traditional form of painting, simply as art, i.e., a pleasing, indifferent, or even repulsive experience. There is an element of choice here as to how one will engage. But an icon aims, to recall Nouwen, to take us outside or beyond ourselves to the "really real" whom Christians know

to be God. Every icon depicts an aspect of God and summons both meditation and participation. O'Brien refers to this phenomenon as "the truth of presence that is present in iconic art, which goes beyond the shaping hand of the artist toward the very presence of the thing depicted," i.e., the mystery of existence who is God.³⁰ Christians like O'Brien will call this "really real" *God*, but of course not all people experience the mystery of existence as God, and this represents a second moment of freedom, the choice as to how to name mystery. Put directly, in the encounter with the truth of presence, the participant must measure commitment to engagement and determine categories of understanding.

Iconic knowing is then both a matter of intellect and will. To engage something as icon, "one must come to the 'depiction' as *a possible participant in the history made present*."³¹ Again Nouwen is helpful to explain the dynamic of encounter and helps to draw out the free choice that is involved:

Icons are not easy to "see." They do not immediately speak to our senses. They do not excite, fascinate, stir our emotions, or stimulate our imagination. At first, they even seem somewhat rigid, lifeless, schematic and dull. They do not reveal themselves to us at first sight. It is only gradually, after a patient, prayerful presence that they start speaking to us. And as they speak, they speak more to our inner than to our outer senses. They speak to the heart that searches for God. It has taken me a long time to *see*....³²

The condition to see iconically is a free will characterized by "patient, prayerful presence." Authentic participation is a matter of spiritual exercise. I will return to the idea of participation below, but I first want to show why Christian ethics is well served by iconic knowing.

For an icon to work, "there must be some realization of a still 'present' reality and possibility that I might be a victim (or perpetrator) of [the] events" evoked by the icon.³³ It must throw the viewer into the truth of his or her own struggle with the mystery of existence. What makes *Of Gods and Men* work, or even John Kiser's book *The Monks of Tibhirine* upon which the movie is based, is that the situation is only too real, for all of us have our "creeds, liturgies, and meditations" by which we try "to transcend, face up to, or evade the 'splendid waste' of life."³⁴ The reality that the film exposes is the human struggle to live truly and meaningfully, the implications of our intellectual commitments, the hopes and dreams manifest in these commitments, the potential loss and abandonment of these beliefs, and how human wickedness can force itself on us and ask for further commitment and integrity. Sometimes, our big-picture beliefs, as with the Incarnation for the monks of Atlas, summon us to give our very lives. Iconic knowing taps self-awareness.

What makes *Of Gods and Men* particularly relevant to Christian ethics is that, amidst conscientious contemplation of self and world, it also demonstrates how the theological virtue of Christian faith "comes to meet" the believer and transforms the already-virtuous living of these eight monks. One sees their hope in the promises of God. One experiences their love of God and neighbor. One can also see prudence, justice, temperance, and courage reaffirmed, transformed, and reformed by grace. One witnesses how the central Christian belief (*fides quae*), i.e., the Incarnation, *perfects* the way the monks search for truth and for one in whom to entrust their

lives (*fides qua*). They reveal Jesus as the way and the truth of how they love to the end. One sees how gospel verses and psalm chants become real and then manifest in the way the monks stay, love to the end, and die. One can nearly participate in the displacement of the Son of God, in love and through love, from heavenly bliss to human suffering, revealed at the last supper. Iconic knowing has room to explain hidden human things like grace.

The book and especially the film represent the contemplation and discernment of conscience explored by Catholic moral theology. *Of Gods and Men* is an effective icon of conscience. It has the potential to carry the viewer inside the discernment of the monks and involve the viewer in a personal question of conscience. It has the capacity to take away both distance from the situation of the monks and a naïve attitude towards one's own life. But, more critically to my argument here, it represents the truth of presence, i.e., the awakening to a more expansive sense of self and world, that a college course in Christian ethics must facilitate to be true to the Catholic understanding of conscience as an encounter with the truth of God and the discernment of the law of love written on the human heart.

Christian ethics necessarily engages the idea that “all people are born into the existential dilemmas and religious responses of humankind.”³⁵ In turn, the duty of the human being is to discern, for the sake of the personal and common good, both the mystery of existence and how best to name it. A course in Christian ethics true to the Catholic moral tradition must invite student-apprentices to face “the real,” to come to terms with their own beliefs and struggle for the *good*, to seek the truth, to understand the religious concerns of the human race, to consider the doctrines, liturgies, and mediations of Christianity, and to recognize themselves as conscientious participants in the tragic history of the human race and the struggle for goodness. As Dennis O'Brien says, “If one faces directly the mystery of existence, one can still question whether the Gospel or Eucharist is iconic of that mystery.”³⁶ Indeed one can and should, as a matter of personal freedom, and a course in Christian ethics must attend to the freedom of the student-apprentice to choose well. For the teaching of Christian ethics cannot ignore the interpersonal and integrative nature of authentic belief.

Personal Freedom in Teaching Christian Ethics

The abbot of Atlas, Father Christian, said that “contemplation is either a form of continual searching or it is nothing at all. Here on this earth, it is a journey, a tension, a permanent exodus, the invitation to Abraham, ‘Come, follow me.’”³⁷ He was speaking of monastic contemplation. His point captures well the dynamic of Catholic conscience, which is more a *waiting for* and a *welcoming of* something altogether *new*, i.e., the action of God called grace. In this way, Christian ethics is always spiritual exercise. Christian identity, Father Christian also said, is “always in the process of being born” as Christians face new, modern horizons. Of course, Father Christian was speaking about monastic identity in the Islamic context of Algeria. “With this perspective in mind,” he said, “it is becoming obvious that a monastic community cannot be established with prefabricated beliefs, because the contemplative life requires engaging the customs, history, and religious traditions, and real-life conditions in those lands of which we

seek to be a part.”³⁸ The abbot is depicting the interface of the big-picture beliefs of Christian faith and real circumstance, the critical nexus of Christian ethics. He also indicates the ongoing and developmental nature of Christian identity, being grounded in tradition yet open to otherness. I want to use this insight into contemplative identity—perhaps a radical vocation but a nonetheless normative posturing of the Christian in relation to the world—to explain a final point about participating freely inside iconic encounter.

Christian ethics always examines the moral teaching of Jesus. To teach Christian ethics as icon is to invite the student “to be a participant in some way in the story of Jesus.”³⁹ There are different ways and levels of participation. For the practicing Christian, this participation is built on the claim that “Jesus is Lord and Messiah.” Others might encounter Jesus as a great prophet, or an important historical figure. What Christians come to know and believe through their moral existence, by virtue of reason and revelation, is that the human good sought in ethical inquiry is not something abstract or impersonal, but homecoming. The *good* which we desire and at which we aim our actions is a Father of love, who sent his Son into the world who suffered, died, and rose from the dead. This Father of love gives of his own Spirit, and chiefly as faith, hope, and love amidst authentic moral choosing. The fullness of Christian moral living is to be in the world as Jesus: that is, to possess a spirit of love and cooperation, and to give oneself freely to others in hiddenness and compassion.⁴⁰ The Christian moral life is in this way *being led* by the *good who is God*, who is making all things new. To encounter oneself through the Christian icons of salvation in the study of Christian ethics is to be invited into the mystery of existence but also to encounter the viability and vibrancy of this theological good. The question that must finally be asked, then, concerns professorial duty to the personal freedom of the student, whether believer, Muslim, atheist, or one altogether unsure of any big-picture belief. How should “participation” be conceived in a course built on iconic knowing? The answer, I think, lies in Father Christian’s definition of contemplation as “a permanent exodus.”

My point is a simple one. One need not be a believer to participate in the Jesus story. Nor is the believer always the best participant in iconic participation. Believers can be dogmatic and refuse the economy of love and truth. But shouldn’t the student at a college built on his teachings at least meet Jesus? Shouldn’t believers find their religious beliefs challenged and honed? The key is how to introduce Jesus in a way that is true to Christian ethics and fair to authentic belief, which must be freely chosen. Iconic knowing is this way as it summons an encounter of self with the truth of presence through Christian icons. The duty of the professor is to teach these icons well, facilitate encounter beyond self, and assure the self-awareness and free choice of the student at every stage of the academic journey. The professor cannot be evangelical or dispassionate but must be virtuously involved, as one “further ahead,” in the way of Socrates. The classroom must be “a form of apprenticeship in which teacher and learner are being called forth by the *good* they are pursuing.”⁴¹ Christian ethics, taught in the economy of love and truth, is an ongoing “dialogic encounter in response to the *good*.”⁴² There must be some experience of real discernment, or conscientious contemplation, in the teaching of Catholic moral theology.

But it is also true, and important to note, that the *good* that Christians pursue is defined as *God*, simply, the *theological good*. In view of this, David Burrell has argued that Christian liturgy and prayer, such as the monastic practice of *lectio divina*, represent an “intensified” form of Socratic dialogue. These icons reflect the vertical (self and God) and horizontal relationship (self and others) to the *good* of Socratic encounter.⁴³ “The rules of engagement” are intensified, however, because Christians are being “called to a radical ‘unknowing’ in the face of the offer of divine friendship extended to us” by Jesus.⁴⁴ One is being invited to encounter God, who is by definition beyond reason. This encounter with the theological good grounds Christian ethics. Jesus has revealed, however, that the theological good *comes to us*, is personal, and responds to human longing. The encounter then feels like *homecoming*, to use again my earlier term. It is the surprise of something new that has always been there, God’s outreach, in the thick of human existence.

Every student arrives in the classroom with some prefabricated set of beliefs. It could be the *Animal House* narrative, a prejudice against religion, timidity before the good, even religious certainty. Narratives abound. Christian ethics in the core of the Catholic institution aims here, summoning an encounter with the presence of truth and the truth of presence. If grace is the heart of conscientious contemplation, and grace is God’s action, the course in Christian ethics cannot and ought not demand belief in Christ, for faith is a gift. But it should make clear what the tradition means by the theological good. In so doing, by being a dialogic encounter in response to the *good*, Christian ethics invites to a permanent exodus, always asking students to leave a secure homeland and be led by the *good* into the “unknown more.” But, as the tradition of the theological good makes clear, this experience might well be, as it was for Abraham, the voice of the God of love, saying, “Come, follow me.” This, however, is for the apprentice to determine according to the promptings of the heart induced by free participation in the Christian icons of salvation. In fairness to authentic belief and Christian ethics, the professor must always encourage religious and moral self-awareness in the student, and be true to the economy of love and truth: that is, the dialogic pursuit of the *good* as friends.

Notes

1. O’Brien 2002. See chapter four. He refers specifically to the gospel, creed, and liturgies of the Church. O’Brien’s book is critical to my argument.
2. The Catholic university has a unique approach grounded in philosophy and theology. By saying that the core has a “pride of place” at Catholic colleges and universities, I refer to how Catholic higher education privileges the core curriculum as a way to express its distinctive academic heritage, i.e., the Catholic intellectual tradition. The core at Catholic colleges and universities also aims for “catholicity.” By catholicity, I mean the aim of the core curriculum to reflect fundamental habits of learning and knowledge that everyone at the institution should have—that is, that should be had universally.

3. Haughey 2009, 14–15. Haughey, like Dennis O’Brien, is responding to a discussion in Catholic higher education about the mission and identity of the Catholic university as initiated by Pope John Paul II in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990).
4. Haughey 2009, 14.
5. John Paul II 1998, #31.
6. John Paul II 1998, #25.
7. John Paul II 1998, #24.
8. John Paul II 1998, #25.
9. John Paul II 1998, #27.
10. John Paul II 1998, #28.
11. John Paul II 1998, #28.
12. John Paul II 1998, #27.
13. John Paul II 1998, #31.
14. John Paul II 1998, #31.
15. John Paul II 1998, #31.
16. John Paul II 1998, #31.
17. John Paul II 1998, #32.
18. John Paul II 1998, #32.
19. John Paul II 1998, #33. I return to this idea below.
20. John Paul II 1998, #32.
21. Benedict XVI 2009, #2.
22. Benedict XVI 2008.
23. See O’Brien 2002, 46. O’Brien distinguishes between scientific, artistic, and iconic truth, noting how scientific truth is the dominant view of knowledge in the academy. It makes room for art. Iconic truth, however, is ignored. He provides a strong argument as to why it is both fitting and necessary for a Catholic university to attend to this nonscientific knowledge.
24. John Paul II 1998, #33.
25. Rolheiser 1999, 3.

26. John Paul II 1998, #24.
27. John Paul II 1998, #33.
28. Nouwen 1987, 14–15.
29. O'Brien 2002, 82. Italics are mine.
30. O'Brien 2002, 80.
31. O'Brien 2002, 82.
32. Nouwen 1987, 14–15.
33. O'Brien 2002, 83.
34. O'Brien 2002, 84.
35. O'Brien 2002, 84.
36. O'Brien 2002, 86.
37. Kiser 2002, 132.
38. Kiser 2002, 134.
39. O'Brien 2002, 83. In view of what I have already said, about the aspiration of Catholic higher education in modernity and O'Brien's argument as to the duty of the modern Catholic university to iconic knowing, it seems only fitting that every student at a Catholic institution should meet Jesus. I offer the idea of "participate in the Jesus story" as a way to clarify what this encounter should mean in terms of curriculum. There are many ways to meet Jesus, and the critical point is not to force faith but facilitate encounter.
40. See Nouwen 1983. Nouwen et al. define discipleship as voluntary displacement understood as hiddenness and compassion.
41. Burrell 2000, 29–30.
42. Burrell 2000, 30.
43. Burrell 2000, chapter two.
44. Burrell 2000, 33.

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