Religion, the Professoriate, and the Work of Collegium

“Religiosity and American College and University Professors,” a scholarly article by Neal Gross and Solon Simmons in the summer 2009 issue of Sociology of Religion, gives new insight not only about the basic religiosity of faculty, but also about the work of Collegium. The article expands on some preliminary data reported here a few years ago.

The article draws on data from a 2006 national survey, the Politics of the American Professoriate Survey, which included questions about many issues, including religion. It examines data for faculty teaching in the twenty most popular undergraduate disciplinary fields (hence it excludes, e.g., those in medicine and law).

The few questions in this large survey don’t allow us to look at faculty religiosity in much depth, but we do get some idea about belief in God (respondents could choose any of six responses ranging from “I don’t believe in God” to “I know God exists and I have no doubt about it.”

The survey suggests that less than a quarter of faculty in the U.S. describe themselves as nonbelievers. While that number is larger than the general population, it is smaller than most people assume.

Professors at elite doctoral institutions are less likely than other faculty to be religious believers. 36.5% in those schools are atheists or agnostics, but even there, a solid majority at least believes in a “higher power.” 22% of faculty at four-year BA granting institutions, and 22.7% at nonelite doctoral institutions are atheists or agnostics. Surprisingly, 20.4% of the elite doctoral faculty have no doubt about God, compared to 38.5% at BA granting institutions. In a multivariate analysis, the authors find evidence that having a research orienta-

Continued on page 2
tion (perhaps more than being at an elite institution) has a negative correlation with religiosity.

The results showed wide variations in relatively cognate fields. 50% of psychologists identify as atheists (“I don’t believe in God”), compared to 27.5% of biologists, and 17.9% of sociologists or 23.3% of economists. 7.4% of accountants or 8.6% of finance faculty are atheists, compared to 20.9% of marketing faculty. 2.4% of electrical engineers showed up as atheist, and 33.3% as agnostics. Mechanical engineers were more sure of themselves: 44.1% were atheists, with only 2.9% agnostic.

Overall, 37.9% indicated affiliation with Protestant denominations, or simply identified as “Christian.” 31.2% identified as “none,” 15.9% as Catholic, 5.4% as Jewish. All other religious groups counted for less than 3% each.

The authors’ analysis is where the study gets most interesting for me. While some might see the university as a key force of secularization in society, most students are apparently taught by faculty who are sympathetic to religion.

As Gross and Simmons see it, the “problem” of religion and higher education is not as one might say, all those secularists in the academy. Rather, the academy seems to have plenty of people who are religious, thought perhaps less traditionally religious than the national norms. The authors find that “half of American professors…say that the term “spiritual person” describes them at least moderately well.” Thus, “the hypothesis that the university is a secular institution because of the irreligious tendencies of the faculty does not withstand empirical scrutiny: it is a secular institution despite the fact that most of its key personnel are themselves religious believers.”

Gross and Simmons see a challenge for sociologists of religion: “an important and neglected topic for the sociology of academic life is to understand how the many professors who are religious straddle their religious and scientific or intellectual value commitments: the nature of the epistemic cultures they inhabit that allow them to do so, the practices they have learned to keep the two strands of their identity separate, and the ways in which they may attempt to bring them together and thereby be influenced in their work lives by their personal religiosity.”

In a less formal way, this gets to the heart of what Collegium tries to do on a more personal basis— to explore where the divisions set up in their own fields might be costly, where they are necessary, and how to live whole and healthy intellectual and spiritual lives for the sake of ourselves, our families, our students, and the common good.

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Do Catholic Colleges Make Their Students More Catholic?

Collegium alums of the last several years may well have discussed in small groups a 2003 study by the Cardinal Newman Society (CNS) that looked at Catholic college students’ beliefs and suggested that declines in practice and assent to a number of church teachings was evidence that Catholic colleges were failing in their religious mission.

In a report released in Feb 2010, Georgetown’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) revisited the issue to test the CNS assertions. The CARA study uses 2004-2007 data from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA (CNS used HERI data from 1997-2001) to ask, as the Newman Society study does, whether Catholic colleges and universities help students “move closer… to Christ, and… toward the Catholic faith than secular colleges do.”

By using HERI data, the authors of both studies were limited to the specific questions asked by the HERI study. Readers can decide if the topics they covered do an adequate job of capturing whether students “move closer… to Christ, and… toward the Catholic faith than secular colleges do.” I’m actually a bit skeptical that these do capture this, though the outcome of the questions themselves remain interesting.

HERI allowed them to test some “beliefs and attitudes about social and political issues (e.g., abortion, death penalty, same-sex marriage, reducing pain and suffering in the world)… [and] religious behavior (e.g., frequency of attendance at religious services, prayer, reading of religious texts and publications).” To take one example, though, the latter questions about religious behavior don’t tell me whether the students are attending Unitarian services and reading the Bhagavad Gita. Whatever the value of those things, they don’t really answer the study’s core question.

The CARA study reported that at the Catholic colleges in the HERI survey, 65% of students described themselves as Catholic as first year students in 2004, and 61% identified as Catholic during junior year, 2007. 4% of students in the 2007 survey said they’d become Catholic at college, while 8% said they’d left Catholicism. Of those who’d left, only 13% moved to another faith. The majority moved to “none.”

While the majority of Catholic students’ attitudes towards abortion is unchanged in college, 31% of students move to a more pro-choice stance, and 16% towards a more pro-life one. That 15% net change is 2-4 points lower than at public, other religious, and private nonsectarian colleges. On death penalty issues, Catholic students at Catholic colleges show a 10% net shift towards the Church’s anti-death penalty stance, compared, e.g. to a 3% shift towards the death penalty at other private colleges.

On other social issues, Catholic students at Catholic colleges show a 23% net increase in their responsibility to reduce pain and suffering in the world (slightly more change than other college students). In terms of recognizing an obligation to improve the human condition, Catholic students at Catholic colleges showed a net gain of 18%, while publics showed a 17% gain, and private non-sectarians a 2% decrease.

Catholic Juniors at Catholic colleges were much less likely to agree that military spending ought to increase (20+ fewer agreed than did when they were first year students). That’s better than the 9% change at public schools, but smaller than the private, non-sectarian schools (31% change). Catholic Juniors at Catholic colleges showed a small decrease in support for affirmative action in College admissions, were less likely by a 20% margin to approve of more military spending, they were slightly more in favor of gun control, and like most college students moved significantly in favor of same-sex marriage.

In terms of religious practice, there was a net 25% drop in Mass attendance, though this was notably less than among Catholic students at all other colleges. Prayer showed a 3% drop, again less than other places. Reading sacred texts increased slightly, though reading about “religion and spirituality” dropped. In both those cases, the news was less bad at the Catholic schools than elsewhere.

What does this add up to? As the authors note, they cannot find evidence that, as CNS stated, Catholic colleges make students less Catholic. At the same time, the figures aren’t the sort of good news most colleges would want to put in a press release. As plenty of other studies have indicated, the aggregate data on how colleges and universities affect students’ values continues to suggest that compared to a control group of students in the same age group who don’t attend college, colleges themselves don’t change students as much as most of us hope (see the three volumes by Pascarella & Terenzini, How College Affects Students.) Students go through life cycle changes during college, but it’s difficult to say that colleges are the causal factor.

When you put the CNS and CARA studies side by side, perhaps the most interesting thing is that the studies suggest that students were changing less in college in 2007 than they were in 2001, on abortion, death penalty same-sex marriage, casual sex, and even Mass attendance.

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Opportunities and Symposiums

Institute for Administrators in Catholic Higher Education

Each July, the Institute for Administrators in Catholic Higher Education hosts a five-day seminar providing a singular opportunity for administrators and leaders at Catholic colleges and universities around the globe to interact with some of the nation's most outstanding scholars and practitioners as they address issues that Catholic higher education faces on a daily basis. A sample of issues the seminar strives to address are:

- What does it mean to be a Catholic college or university in the 21st century?
- How do we create a campus culture that is Catholic?
- How does the Catholic intellectual tradition affect the curriculum at your institution?
- How does the Catholic college or university work within the larger context of the Church?
- What are the implications of the increase in lay leadership in Catholic colleges and universities?
- What is the place of Catholic social and moral teaching in the curriculum and campus activities?
- How do we assess mission and effective practices on our campuses?

The seminar is designed to serve administrative leaders such as presidents, provosts, vice-presidents, deans, mission officers, major program directors, and others in positions responsible for institutional mission and identity.

In its first nine years the Institute has attracted administrators from Catholic colleges and universities across the U.S., Belize, Canada, Taiwan, Guatemala, the Philippines, and South Africa.

Click here to see the July 12-16, 2010 Institute schedule of speakers, presentations, and events.

Contact:
Dr. Michael James, Coordinator
617.552.0763
michael.james.1@bc.edu

Mission on Action

Mount Mary College will sponsor a “Mission in Action” Symposium to be held at the College October 7-9, 2010. Presentations and panels from all fields of study (academic and administrative) will explore and share ways of integrating a college's mission statement into the college more creatively and effectively in both curricular and co-curricular programming. Author, activist, and founder of Volunteer Missionary Movement, Edwina Gateley (edwinagateley.com), will give the Symposium's keynote address.

Papers and panels will connect their institution's mission statement to current concerns in their fields: ethics, globalization, social justice, cultural ideals, and sustainability.

For more information about the Mission in Action Symposium, contact Dr. Wendy A. Weaver at 414-256-1486, sym2010@mtmary.edu, or visit http://www.mtmary.edu/sym2010.htm.

STUDIUM: Scholars-in-Residence

Do you need some time away in a place where thinking and writing are nurtured and supported and you can start today where you left off yesterday and where other people are working too and will stay out of your way if you need them to but are available for conversation if that’s what you want? If so, the Visiting Scholars Program at Studium may be just what you're looking for. Go to www.sbm.osb.org/studium to find out more, and apply for a period of anywhere from a week to four months.
Alumni News

Nicholas M. Creary (G’01) is now teaching in the Department of History at Ohio University, Athens, OH.

Christopher M. Duncan (F’03) is the new dean of the McAnulty College of Liberal Arts at Duquesne University.

Dawn Marie Hayes (F’01) and her husband, Joseph announce the birth of their son, Adriano Nicola Costantino, on May 13, 2009. He was welcomed by brothers Joseph and Aidan and sisters Anastasia, Madeleine and Alessandra. Dawn is now Associate Professor of History at Montclair State University, where she received tenure in fall 2008.

Matthew Leingang (G’98) who joined the faculty of the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences at NYU in July, 2008 has been awarded a grant from the Educational Advancement Foundation (http://www.educationaladvancementfoundation.org/) to develop Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) materials for undergraduate instructors. Inquiry-Based Learning moves away from unidirectional techniques, such as lecturing, towards styles which actively engage students in their learning.

James McCartin (G’98, F’05), Associate Director, Center for Catholic Studies at Seton Hall University, was recently tenured. His new book titled: Prayers of the Faithful: The Shifting Spiritual Life of American Catholics was published March 2010 by Harvard University Press.

Brian Pavlac (F’99) is Chair of the History Department at King’s College and was just ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church.

Jerome Wolbert O.F.M. (G’95) was transferred at the end of 2009 from parish work to the Holy Dormition Friary in Sybertsville, PA to do retreat work and help out at Byzantine Catholic parishes.

Collegium Board News

Our thanks to board members whose terms expire June 30:

Jody Ziegler, Professor of Visual Arts, College of the Holy Cross
Karen Eifler, Associate Professor, School of Education, University of Portland
Brice Wachterhauser, Provost, Saint Joseph’s University
Richard Yanikoski, President and Executive Director, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

New board members are:
Thomas Greene, Associate Provost & Dean, Graduate School, University of Portland
David Bollert, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Manhattan College
Theresa Jeevanjee, Chair and Professor of Mathematics, Fontbonne University
Michael Galligan-Stierle, President elect, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice surveys the terrain of Catholic Colleges and Universities today, acknowledging the gains of developments since we ‘opened the windows’ and ‘let in some fresh air’ at Vatican II, while also acknowledging some of the losses that came with the erosion of the Catholic subculture in place before Vatican II that, for all its faults, was nevertheless quite effective in transmitting the culture of Catholicism. Rausch’s overarching question in this volume is “Where are we today?” and “What can we do realistically, in our present milieu, to transmit this culture?” The volume offers highly readable and instructive chapters on the demographics of the majority of young adult Catholics today, while also examining the curious phenomenon of younger Catholics who find themselves attracted to earlier expressions of what it meant to be Catholic, expressions that those of us who came of age during or after Vatican II have largely abandoned. What is it, Rausch asks, in these earlier cultural forms that younger Catholics find attractive, and that so many of us who have labored hard for the gains of the post Vatican II church sometimes find threatening? His conclusion, in a word, is that these forms offer a kind of cultural distinctiveness that younger people, in our highly pluralistic milieu, crave. In other chapters, Rausch examines what has come to be labeled in the literature as ‘The Catholic Imagination’. What is it about the Catholic gestalt, the Catholic way of putting it all together, that makes Catholics distinct? His chart on page 34 is a great conversation-starter. While I think it would have been helpful to find labels for the two divergent ways of seeing the world other than ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’, the chart captures something about the Catholic vision of reality that is highly instructive. The labels ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ are not particularly helpful only in that they reinforce a binary oppositional way of thinking about these two approaches to Christianity that is no longer useful. Instead, the categories identified in the chart exist along a continuum, with some expressions of Catholicism not always living up to the best of the Catholic imagination, and with some expressions of Protestantism capturing and expressing important elements of that same imagination. In future editions of the work, it might be helpful to consider using labels such as ‘analogue’ vs. ‘dialectical’ instead.

In other important chapters, Rausch discusses the importance of the ‘Domestic Church’, the notion, shared especially with our Jewish sisters and brothers, that the seed of faith is first planted in the home, and that it must be nurtured there if Catholic colleges and universities are to have anything to work with by the time the young adult reaches college age. Finally, perhaps the most valuable chapter for readers of this newsletter is the chapter on Catholic colleges and universities. In it, Rausch describes the move toward greater professionalism in these institutions, a move that has brought gains but also losses in that it encourages us to hire solely on the basis of criteria that we might share with any peer institution, rather than on the basis of mission. If our institutions are going to retain even a semblance of the distinctiveness that has historically set them apart in the marketplace of higher education, then some way forward must be found that balances a legitimate concern for professionalism with the necessity of hiring for mission. One does not have to trump the other. Rausch also provides highly informative discussions of other strategies for enhancing mission, such as Catholic Studies Programs, curricular initiatives that seek to embed the Catholic intellectual tradition in the broader curriculum of the institution, and residence life initiatives that seek to bring Catholic values to bear on the ethos of our residence halls.

In a review for the next issue of the newsletter, I will look at Father Rausch’s more recent book referenced above, Educating for Faith and Justice: Catholic Higher Education Today.

Father Rausch has made an important contribution to the discussion around mission in Catholic higher education. His books are well worth the effort and those of us concerned with mission owe him a debt of gratitude.

-Dave Gentry-Akin
Saint Mary’s College of California
Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults

Christian Smith, with Patricia Snell

The last issue of Collegium News reviewed Christian Smith’s Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers about a national study of 13-17 year olds. Soul Searching covered the first phase of the National Study of Youth and Religion, a major, multiphase study of teens’ and young adults’ religious worlds.

Souls in Transition, the next volume in the series, revisits the same youth as they move into the 18-23 year age range, a period of “emerging” adulthood. Interviewees include both college students and the even larger number of persons that age who are not in college. The dataset includes interviews and results from a large national survey.

The study’s quantitative results showed some decline in practice and belief compared to the last time he surveyed this group, as 13-17 year olds. In the years since the earlier study, 25% fewer of the youth still identified as Catholic, 13% fewer as Protestant, and 27% fewer as Jews. The number identifying as nonreligious jumped 93% (105).

Smith and Snell’s charts drawing from GSS data suggest long term declines in both institutional affiliation and daily prayer. Survey data and the interviews don’t suggest that these youths’ religion is simply becoming more privatized or less institutionalized (as we might argue is the case for their parents), but that it is really becoming thinner and more generic. These aren’t youth who skip religious organizations but still pray alone.

Data about decline in religiosity during this age period were hardly a surprise. What was more interesting to me was in the interviews—how these “emerging adults” think about the world, religion and morality.

Smith and Snell suggest as a rough guide, “no more than 15 percent” of emerging adults (most of these being black Protestants, white conservative Protestants, and Mormons) are “committed traditionalists,” “perhaps 30 percent” are “selective adherents;” 15% are “spiritually open,” i.e. “not personally very committed to a religious faith but at least mildly interested;” 25% are “religiously indifferent;” 5% are “religiously disconnected,” having “little to no exposure or connection to religious people, ideas, or organizations;” and 10% are openly skeptical or derogatory (167-8).

A few of the dominant themes:

*The authors report that the generation they spoke with were “As a group some of the most optimistic people we have ever encountered….at least when it comes to their own personal lives and futures….their eyes are firmly set on the future….good things are anticipated….cynical, weary, jaded, despondent, defeated and the like are words that describe very few emerging adults in America” (36-37). Emerging adults have seen failure around them, and know it is possible, so keep their face forward. They report good and improving relations with parents.

*When reporting how they’ve changed since high school, subjects say that they value having become more open-minded and accepting of others’ lives. They value education primarily in terms of its instrumental value, rather than as a good in itself. Their relationships are “necessarily amorphous,” given that they see themselves as too young to be serious. “Voices critical of mass consumerism, materialistic values, or the environmental or social costs of a consumer-driven economy were nearly non-existent among emerging adults….Very many of those interviewed simply could not even understand the issue the interviewers were asking them about” (67).

“Religion is a good thing.” Emerging adults approve of, rather than rebel from religion. They have disagreements with some aspects, and are certainly selective about what they buy into. They believe in “religion” more than any particular faith, approving of it whenever it is about vague notions of being good, but not when particularity (and hence exclusion) gets in the way. “None of what is distinctive about any given religious tradition, history, worldview, worship style, or so on matters that much to emerging adults” (81). No particular religion can be judged to be better than any other.

*The main purpose of religion is to help people to be good. One doesn’t need religion to know what is good, but religion is good because it helps communicate to us what’s good. A person can be good without religion, but religion is a great way for learning goodness.

*Morally, emerging adults talk in terms that are radically relativist. The authors report that their subjects were repeatedly hesitant to draw moral conclusions about what others should do, because “everybody’s different,” so nobody can really be judged by uniform standards. Morality appears to them to be something that is self-evident, and doesn’t require much thought or education. In this moral intuitive framework, appeals to rational traditions are unimportant. Morality is simply about not hurting others. If you don’t obey that, karma will catch up to you. As the authors describe it, “helping others is an optional personal choice….If you want to do it, good. If you don’t want, that’s up to you….Nobody can blame people who won’t help others.”

Subjects did not report doing much in terms of volunteering, since they already had to do so much to get themselves started in the world. Volunteering was a good idea for later in life, when they were established. They don’t expect to change the world anyway, so are better off focusing on their own problems.

Given how close many youth are to their parents, it’s perhaps not surprising that rebellion does not emerge as a major theme around religion, as it had more than a generation before. These kids respected their parents’ choices – while they may not hold them as dearly, they seldom rebel against them.

Smith knows that what will probably change these emerging adults’ religious attitudes toward religion more than anything else is parenthood. For now, though, religion is not as important, especially for youth who “talk repeatedly about how busy they are.”

The catch with emerging adults’ version of religion in general, is that it’s not a bad thing, but not something you’d want to put a lot of time into. It’s something you can learn as a young person, but like arithmetic, don’t need to keep devoting yourself to as an adult. Smith does find plenty of evidence that many youth find religion to be a means to help them put their lives together after crises, but it seems to be less relevant in the absence of crises.

Smith shows what sociologists have recognized for a decade, whether happily or reluctantly – that liberal denominations are having the hardest time retaining or recruiting emerging adults.

Souls in Transition is well-worth reading for any group that wants to discuss the religious and educational needs of contemporary young adults. These students do make me aware that the students I encounter in my work at Holy Cross are more exceptional than I had realized. At the same time some of the same students, having recently heard Smith speak on these findings at Holy Cross, were delighted to hear exactly how precisely he captured their generation, contradictions and all.

Persons who would like to hear Smith summarize his work can do so online of by podcast at http://www.holycross.edu/crec/listen_learn/
Book Notes

Brian A Pavlac (F ’99)

Witch Hunts in the Western World: Persecution and Punishment from the Inquisition through the Salem Trials

This comprehensive resource explores the intersection of religion, politics, and the supernatural that spawned the notorious witch hunts in Europe and the New World. Witch Hunts in the Western World: Persecution and Punishment from the Inquisition through the Salem Trials traces the evolution of western attitudes towards magic, demons, and religious nonconformity from the Roman Empire through the Age of Enlightenment, placing these chilling events into a wider social and historical context. Witch hunts are discussed in eight narrative chapters by region, highlighting the cultural differences of the people who incited them as well as the key reforms, social upheavals, and intellectual debates that shaped European thought. Vivid accounts of trials and excerpts from the writings of both witch hunters and defenders throughout the Holy Roman Empire, France, the British Isles and colonies, Southern Europe, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe bring to life one of the most intriguing and shocking periods in Western history. The book includes a complete glossary of terms, timeline of major events, recommended reading selections, index, and black and white illustrations.

(From the publisher)

Francis Vanderwall (F’08)

THE ENDURING QUEST
- A Christian’s attempt to explain other Religions, Jesus, and Christian practices through the ages: A textbook

There can only be peace on earth when there is peace between religions and their adherents. By reaching out to the young thinkers who have yet to allow their faith to evolve into prejudices that govern their lives, The Enduring Quest encourages tolerance and understanding between the various religions of the world.

In non-technical language, Author Francis W. Vanderwall explores the central beliefs of the world’s major religions while providing a Christian connection to those beliefs when possible. By focusing on the dreams common to all rather than issues that divide, The Enduring Quest attempts to bring the people of the world together again.

- (From the publisher)

Francis W. Vanderwall is a college professor. He also leads retreats/workshops and has been a spiritual director for over thirty years. Raised in Sri Lanka with friends who were Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and various Christian denominations, he has a unique understanding and experience of the world’s religions.

Collegium
2010/2011/2012
University of Portland
June 4-11, 2010
College of the Holy Cross
June 17-24, 2011
Saint John’s University
June 8-15, 2012
Help Shape Collegium News!

Do you have any ideas about contributions you’d like to make to Collegium News? Are you willing to help with Book Reviews?

Please let us know if there are articles you would be interested in contributing, or subject areas where you could review books relevant to Collegium’s readership and mission.

We are interested in finding qualified reviewers for any of the following books, and are eager to hear about other types of books you’d like to draw to the attention of Collegium alumni/ae:
