

“I want to begin a conversation with you. The Catholic nature of this institution is a matter that requires ongoing dialogue. I have never considered this a question just for the Jesuits or for Catholic faculty members, although both groups certainly have a profound interest in it. I use the word conversation for several reasons, not least because a wide variety of participants is necessary to assure a lively and productive exchange. Like friendship, a good conversation continues. There may be stops and starts and interruptions, but a healthy conversation changes and matures as people sympathetically engage with the concerns and insights of other parties. I want to say something about [this university] as a Catholic institution. I do not in any way propose a last or definitive word on the subject. But I do want to say that I consider the subject enormously important — an essential ingredient of our distinctiveness and character as an institution in a world where so many large institutions may easily take on a kind of dreary sameness. Such a conversation requires cultivation because the richness of the Catholic tradition, the intricacies and pressures of American society, and the evolution of the American university require us constantly to reflect on who we are, how we can best respond to a rapidly changing world, and what the relevance of our tradition may be for the new challenges of each successive generation.”

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