

# Armchair College Fair

Special Section of the Catholic Courier

## Theologian: Make campuses more Catholic

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The Catholic character of a Catholic university ought to be a pervasive, palpable part of campus life, according to theologian Monika K. Hellwig.

She expressed concern that younger Catholic scholars in the sciences, social sciences and humanities lack the necessary formation in their Catholic heritage to contribute effectively to a much-needed dialogue of Catholic theology with culture.

A university's Catholic identity should come through clearly not only in its academic program or theology curriculum, but in the whole "shape of life on a Catholic campus," she said.

Hellwig, a professor of theology at Georgetown University, spoke at The Catholic University of America Feb. 22 on the future of Catholic universities in light of the 1990 papal document *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* on Catholic higher education.

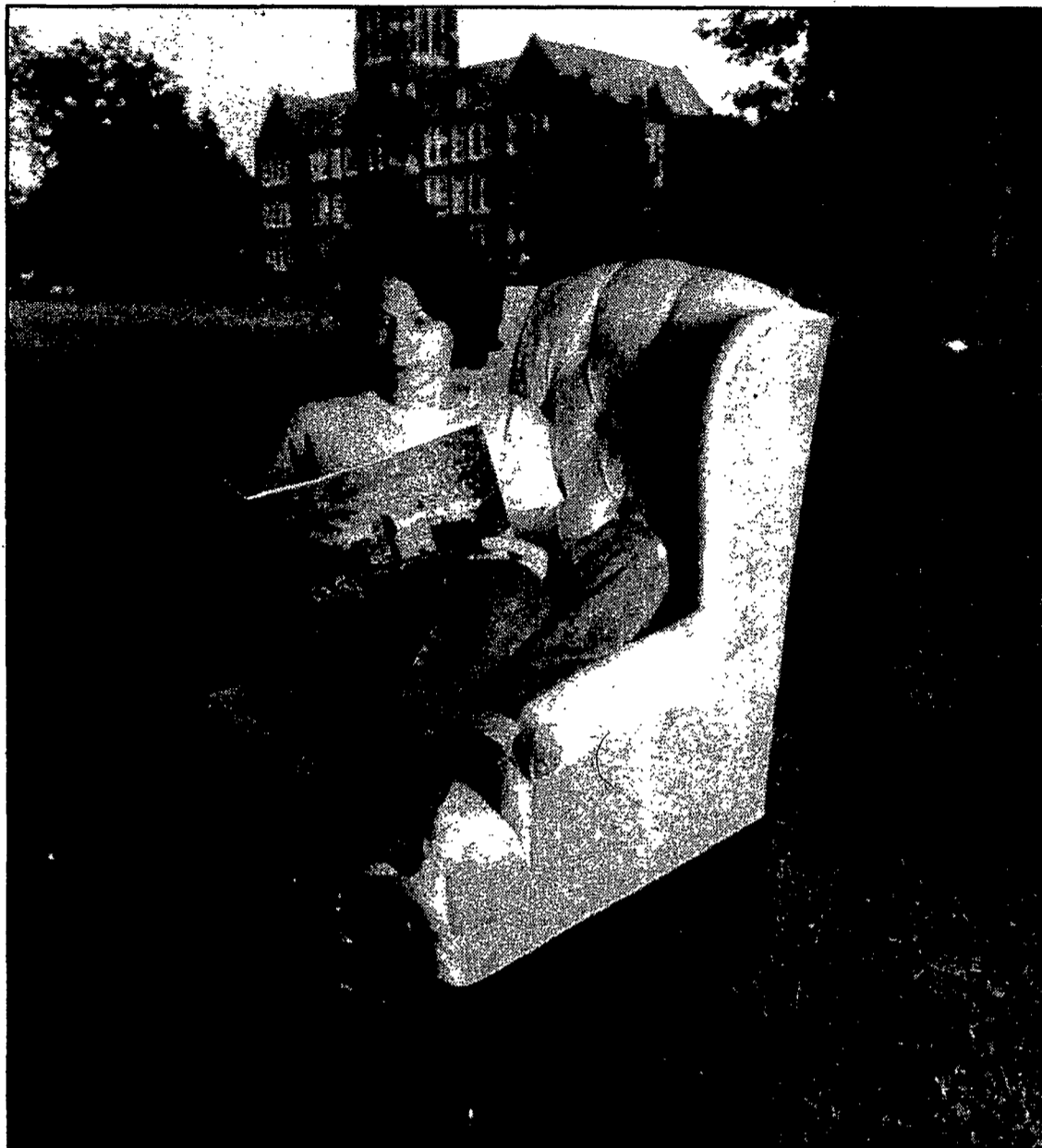
Important elements of Catholic identity on campus, she said, include:

- "Visible worship ... worship that is clearly recognizable as part of the life of the university."
- "The internal life of the (university) calendar ... that the calendar ought to assert patterns of the church's year."
- "The architectural composition of the campus, that its focus should be toward a place of worship."

• "A strong sense of community, sharing, belonging."

While she focused most of her talk on the academic, intellectual and cultural challenges facing Catholic institutions of higher learning today, Hellwig said those other elements also need emphasis.

"The whole character of the institution is conveyed subliminally to everybody who works in it and everybody who comes to it by these kinds of constitutive factors," she said. "The very pattern of a university in its spacial, temporal and associational aspects ought to be a public witness to its particular character as a Catholic university."



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A Catholic campus ought to have a strong communal character, she said, "because I think it is of the essence of the Good News that the many things that divide us and make our lives problematic can be overcome, and I think it is of the essence of the particular Catholic path of Christianity to emphasize the communal, corporate dimension of the Redemption and of Christian life."

In terms of the intellectual life of a Catholic university, she stressed its role in "exploring Catholic culture" and "the gathering of the resources from the past for a Catholic culture."

It ought to be a place where

those who want to gain access to Catholic culture can find the resources and tools to do so, she said.

"A student who comes to a Catholic university to study anything whatsoever ought to become more knowledgeable, more sophisticated, more independent and more critically aware of that student's own faith," she said.

"It would be a sad thing," she added, "for Catholic students, students with a Catholic family background, to come to a Catholic university and leave it with the same naive, childhood perception of the faith, usually

dominating way."

Many responded by shifting from a single, required core-religious curriculum to offering students a choice among numerous courses — "various approaches to the treasury of the tradition" — with the idea students had different needs and each should find his or her own best way, she said.

But she found that inadequate.


"I would like to make a plea," she said, "that we aren't only accountable to the student, that in the conduct of a Catholic university we are accountable to the church and the tradition, accountable to hand on the tradition, accountable to explore the tradition, accountable to provide an intelligent — faithfully intelligent, intelligently faithful, intelligent in the faith — Catholic lay leadership."

She said one of the things Pope John Paul II stressed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* was the need for "an encounter of serious theological thought" with the ways of thinking that emerge from the sciences and "our increasingly mechanized, automated, technological society."

But she said increasingly she finds that nearly all the scientists and scholars in other fields on campus able to carry on that serious dialogue with theology "have recently retired or are going to retire very soon. The younger scholars coming up in those fields don't have that breadth, don't have that sense of the intellectual heritage of their own religious tradition."

During a question-answer session following her talk, Hellwig praised the work of the U.S. bishops' committee that is developing the U.S. implementation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

She said she hopes that the committee's implementation proposals, introduced to the bishops at their general meeting last November and strongly endorsed by Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington, will be adopted by the bishops. A vote on a final version of the proposals is expected at the bishops' meeting this coming November.



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