

Hate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Catholic Leadership on the Academic Study of Hate

Abstract 2419

## Introduction

The Catholic university is committed to the wholeness of knowledge, the perpetual search for the truth, and the service of humankind. These commitments create an atmosphere of free, intellectual inquiry where modern day challenges can be met through the university's support for progressive human development. In the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (in Gallin, 1992, p. 423, #32) it is stated that Catholic universities and colleges must engage in research “to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.” They can also diagnose the nature of societal ills and prescribe remedies without the restrictions which secular institutions place on themselves (Miscamble, 1994, p. 212). One of the contemporary challenges is the issue of hate and its expression in the forms of individual acts, structural and institutional oppression, hate crimes, terrorism, war, ethnviolence, and mass murder. Catholic institutions of higher education bring a unique perspective to this issue that will stimulate student commitment to confronting and addressing the issues of hate in their complexity and through a Christian tradition unencumbered by the restrictions of secular institutions.

Catholic colleges and universities have a long history of connecting the faith to different academic disciplines and research. The Land O'Lakes statement asserted that the Catholic university will “promote basic research in all university fields, but, in addition, it will be prepared to undertake by preference, though not exclusively, such research as will deal with problems of greater human urgency or greater Christian concern” (cited in Gallin, 1992, p. 9). The problem of hate is one such issue that is in need of being researched through a Catholic perspective.

The field of Hate Studies provides us a framework for incorporating Catholic thought and faith into the study of hate in a way that demonstrates the relevance of such thought to the problems of the world. The field can challenge our students to look critically at the

world to determine how their actions, employers, families, friends, and others are impacting those at the margins of society while giving the students the tools and skills needed to transform society. The teaching and research priorities of a hate studies curriculum connect our students to the work of promoting justice and standing with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. For these reasons, I believe that Catholic institutions of higher education have a vital and needed role in developing a Hate Studies curriculum.

This paper provides an overview of the field of Hate Studies and how Catholic teachings can add deeper and more meaningful reflections on the research located within the field. Catholic colleges and universities bring four unique components to the study of hate involving the Church's traditions of the: a) Gospels, b) engagement with civil society, c) educational endeavor, and d) universal faith journey. These four components or strengths can intellectually and spiritually engage students in the study of hate in an approach that is very different from other universities and colleges. Catholic educational settings have the opportunity to take the lead on developing the content and structure of this new field's curriculum in a way that reflects the Catholic commitment to the marginalized and oppressed.

#### Overview of Hate Studies

To determine how Catholic teachings can meaningfully add to the discussions of a field of Hate Studies, it is first necessary to understand the purpose and the limitations of the field as originally proposed. The field consists of "inquiries into the human capacity to define, and then dehumanize or demonize an 'other,' and the processes which inform and give expression to, or can curtail, control, or combat, that capacity" (Stern, 2004, p. 11). It explores questions such as: How does hate manifest itself? What are the roles of culture, history, economics, and social conditions on the formation of hate? Is hate ever good? What motivates an individual or society to challenge hateful

acts? These are just a few of the countless questions that could be researched.

The field of Hate Studies provides the comprehensive framework that is necessary for researching, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting on the questions of hate (Blitzer, 2006). It places the study of hate into “the context of the larger study of systems of oppression that generate hate” (Berlet, 2003/04, p. 145). Since hate is often studied in isolation in the different disciplines of psychology, sociology, communications, history, theology, anthropology, political science, and other areas, this new field provides a method to integrate these studies to create a more meaningful and rich understanding of hate. Through this deeper understanding, we can “identify testable rather than gut-instinct and ‘feel-good’ remedies,” (Stern, 2003/04, p. 7) leading to the development of new, innovative, and creative solutions to such pressing issues as terrorism, hate crimes, and ethnviolence.

Though building the connections between the different disciplines studying hate is important, I believe the field contains the more radical possibilities for manifesting personal and community transformation. While the Hate Studies curriculum must connect the dots of the different disciplines, it also presents us with the opportunity to encourage students to challenge injustice and oppressive tendencies within themselves, others, and the community. It can prepare students to meet these challenges by being active participants in the political process, which the American Catholic Bishops have called a moral obligation (*A Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, 2003, p.4).

Through the educational practices of a Hate Studies curriculum influenced by Catholic social justice teachings, students are prepared as citizens who understand, appreciate, and acknowledge their role as social change agents. “The faith that does not remake society is the faith that confirms the present social arrangement,” (Marstin, 1979, p. 86) and when that social arrangement maintains and propagates hate, oppression,

and injustice, students are called to create a new arrangement that considers all people. For if students do not become change agents through the study of hate then their faith and their new understanding of hate are not part of the universal faith tradition and they become tolerant of injustice allowing it to remain unchallenged. As the study of hate is influenced by Catholic educational traditions and theology, the true transformative nature of the field is revealed.

### Catholic Leadership

The heritage of Catholic education, developed over centuries, has the authority, knowledge, flexibility, and capacity to create innovative curricular designs to meet the challenges of the twenty first century. This leadership has been demonstrated throughout the history of Catholic institutions of higher learning in the United States. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic institutions had to either adapt to the new educational environment happening in the United States or become irrelevant in terms of educating students. The colleges and universities recognized that change was necessary and they began the difficult task of meeting the demands of modernity (Gleason, 1995; Leahy, 1991).

Catholic universities and colleges were concerned with raising the educational level of Catholics and producing new leaders for society (Kelly, 1973, p. xiii). From 1900 to 1925, they added professional programs to form such leaders. They developed medical and law schools followed by the establishment of schools of commerce, finance, and business. Soon they offered programs in sociology, social work, music, engineering, and teacher education (Gleason, 1995, p. 96-97). During the last half of the century, Catholic universities and colleges expanded their graduate departments and awarded an increasing number of doctorates (p. 220). In the teaching and research components of each of these fields, Catholic institutions of higher education considered the moral dimension as critical to teach to students as the technical practices of each

profession (Tavis, 1994).

### Catholic Strengths in the Field of Hate Studies

Catholic universities and colleges are called to contribute their unique insight, discoveries, and perspectives to the academic study of the disciplines. The study of each profession is greatly enhanced by the inclusion of the moral, ethical, and theological study provided by Catholic educational institutions. These institutions also serve as a place in which students can, through intellectual inquiry, find and apply “the relevance of the Christian message to all of the problems and opportunities that face us and our complex world” (Hesburgh, 1994, p. 4). It is these contributions that can enlighten the Hate Studies curriculum, creating a more holistic and humane approach to the study of hate.

Catholic institutions of higher learning can use the field to help students make connections between the Catholic position on the different forms of oppressions and the personal and societal transformations that are needed to challenge oppression. However, the exchange between this new field and Catholic thought is not a one way street. The field also provides a way for the universities and colleges to genuinely reflect on oppressive acts, structures, and systems within Catholic thought, teachings, and actions, and to create meaningful responses and changes based on those reflections.

I believe Catholic colleges and universities bring four strengths, rooted in the Catholic faith, to the development of the Hate Studies curriculum including: the Gospels, engagement in civil society, commitment to the educational endeavor, and the universal faith journey. These strengths have connected the Catholic Church and her colleges and universities to challenging oppressive societal norms that disadvantage marginalized groups.

#### *Gospel*

Students must be prepared to play an active role in transforming the values,

attitudes, and behaviors found in this world (Biondi, 1988, p. 99). The Gospels and Catholic social teachings can provide the necessary guidance to students on the meaning and structure of such transformations. Since Catholic educational projects are inspired by the Gospels (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, # 10), Catholic colleges and universities can bring the Gospels' transformative message to the study of hate.

Catholic universities and colleges are called to examine social problems and moral issues in the light of the Gospel and of the Christian heritage so students can justify or modify their own moral behavior to better serve the world (Rome Statement in Gallin, 1992). Gospel holiness is a significant element of an education for justice (Catholic Higher Education in Gallin, 1992, p. 143) and the Catholic Church remains true to the Gospel faith when she proclaims that all races are children of God (Griffin, 2002). It is this Gospel belief that Catholic institutions of higher education can connect to the field of Hate Studies.

The field of Hate Studies researches hate, its expression, and the ways to combat it. The bedrock principle of Catholic social teaching is that every human being is created in the image of God and worthy of respect. "Every person – regardless of race, sex, age, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, employment or economic status, health, intelligence, achievement or any other differentiating characteristic – is worthy of respect" (Byron, 2002, p. 178). These teachings on human dignity inject a needed moral and ethical dimension into the research of hate. By recognizing the human dignity of each person, students are challenged to think deeply about how individual attitudes, social structures, and our participation in those structures continue to violate the Gospel call to honor every person. As Paul taught, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Ga 3:28-29).

As students come to understand the Gospel teachings of the Church and that the Gospel calls us to transform the power, economic, and justice orders of the day, they will seek out the process of how they can create change. Recognizing one's own biases and prejudices is an important part of the personal experience that happens within a curriculum of Hate Studies but the learning cannot stop there. Personal change will not transform the world on its own. Students will need to take their new learning and get involved in civil society to work for the common good of all people. As the American Bishops argued, "Christians are obliged to seek justice and peace in the world. Catholics individually and collectively should join wherever possible with all persons of good will in the effort to solve social problems in ways which consistently reflect Gospel values" (as cited in O'Brien, 1995, p. 34 – 35). A Hate Studies curriculum helps students learn how to engage in such individual and collective action to change the world based on Gospel values.

### *Engagement in Civil Society*

Catholic universities and colleges are called to serve the communities in which they exist and they do this by preparing civil servants or engaging in research of high priority for society (Rome Statement, 1992, p. 19). Through engagement with, rather than separation from, the secular state, students learn that faith serves not only a private role but an important community function (Bernardin, 2002). Catholic institutions of higher learning must prepare graduates who can participate "in the continual development of every sector of our pluralistic society, especially in the achievement of social justice" (Kinshasa Statement in Gallin, 1992, p. 14).

As the institutions prepare students for their future roles as leaders, it is important for the Catholic teachings to not be affiliated with the policies or perspectives of any political party. Catholic educational institutions do not give political contributions, rather they raise questions, "seeking to help lift up the moral and human dimensions of the

choices facing voters and candidates” (A Faithful Citizenship, 2003, p. 2). It is this outsider status as the cultural critic and question raiser that Catholic universities and colleges can bring to the field of Hate Studies. The study of hate cannot be aligned with just one political solution, party, or perspective. This study must be infused with multiple perspectives so students learn how to see the oppressive and unjust structures, policies, and politics that keep people marginalized and disadvantaged. The students must learn to be critical of all perspectives and avoid the constant fluctuations of politics, otherwise they risk being blind to their own oppressive attitudes and thoughts.

As students learn about hate and Catholic teachings, they are challenged to recognize that they must not only make a personal conversion from prejudice but must also be willing to share power and influence with the marginalized (Griffin, 2002). By demonstrating a willingness to share power and to shed the privileges that come by being in the majority, students demonstrate their commitment to challenging injustice. Making such a commitment involves tremendous personal sacrifice that many students may initially think is too difficult to make. However, the Catholic faith and its mature development provide the intellectual, spiritual, and moral support that students need if they are to become actively engaged in transforming the world.

#### *Universal Faith Journey*

Catholic universities and colleges “bring faith and reason into an intellectually disciplined and constructive encounter” (Catholic Higher Education, 1992, p. 135). By creating an atmosphere for such an encounter, a student’s faith development moves from a self-centered approach focused on the needs of the self to a broader vision that seeks to build a community inclusive of all, including the oppressed. (Marstin, 1979). Through this faith development, students transform from having a concern for just their own community to a genuine concern for all communities of the world. Their faith becomes one that is concerned with creating a world built on the concept of justice.

Only through this growth, will they achieve the universal faith the Catholic tradition teaches and only then will the students understand their connection and responsibility to the wider world.

“Catholic social teaching is a central and essential element of our faith,” and “the social demands of the Gospel and Catholic tradition” must be shared more effectively and clearly (Sharing Catholic Social Teaching, 1998, p. 2-3). A Hate Studies curriculum at Catholic institutions of higher learning provides a structure and a strategy for bringing the theological discussions and intellectual traditions of the Church together with the contemporary problems of hate. By bringing together these two areas, students will have the opportunity to develop a mature and universal faith, rooted in the Catholic social justice tradition, and to apply that faith to the struggle against injustice and hate. For when faith is put at the service of the study of hate, it inspires a deeper understanding of the topic and recognition that there is a larger vision to studying hate than just its worldly manifestations.

### *Educational Heritage*

The Catholic educational heritage reflects a commitment to establishing schools that are for the human person and are of human persons (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997, # 9). According to the Ex Corde Ecclesiae (in Gallin, 1992, #15, p. 418), this educational heritage and the research associated with it includes (a) the search for an integration of knowledge, (b) a dialogue between faith and reason, (c) an ethical concern, and (d) a theological perspective.” These four components of the educational heritage can bring Catholic institutions of higher learning to the forefront of developing a powerful and deeply meaningful curriculum of Hate Studies.

Along with these four components, the preferential option for the poor is a theological and philosophical vision of the world that challenges Catholic institutions of

higher learning to take the lead on helping students understand the systemic causes of poverty and oppression and to teach them how they can engage with the world in a manner that challenges these systems and leads towards liberation (Resier, 1995). This vision also provides Catholic institutions of higher learning with a unique perspective and lens to examine hate and to demonstrate to students how they can work with the marginalized to create a just world.

DeAngelis (1994) commented that the preferential option for the poor focuses our attention on the economically and politically oppressed and that three areas of curriculum development could address these issues within Catholic universities and colleges. He suggested: a) having general course offerings that deal with issues of poverty and disenfranchisement, b) increasing the emphasis on experiential learning, and c) developing ethics programs that reach across the disciplines (pp. 119-120). I suggest that the purposeful study of hate serves as another curricular development that helps meet the challenges that the preferential option for the poor brings to Catholic institutions of higher learning.

Understanding hate and its expression in individual and cultural attitudes and in its perpetuation through social norms cannot simply be an academic exercise. The question of whether the lives of the oppressed and marginalized are finding expression within the university structure is important to the educational mission of the colleges and universities, and to the development of a Hate Studies curriculum. If their lives are not incorporated into the education of our students, then these institutions are failing to live up to their responsibility to teach the social justice traditions of the Church, to meet the demands of the faith, and to demonstrate the transformative power of the Gospel. This inclusion can happen in a variety of ways, including the development of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary Hate Studies curriculum.

Beyond the Walls of the Institution

The Catholic educational heritage recognizes that students must be engaged in their learning and connected to the real world. For this reason, Catholic institutions provide strong service learning components to their curricula and this experience will benefit the study of hate. Students need to fully understand that hate and injustice are not abstract concepts but are very real parts of the every day lives of millions of people throughout the world. O'Brien quoted the American Bishops as saying, "Those who enjoy the benefits of Catholic higher education have the obligation to provide our society with leadership on matters of justice and human rights" (p. 35). Education about and connections with the poor and oppressed cannot be left to the province of extracurricular activities, but must also take place in the classroom (Morton, 1994) through service learning techniques. I believe a Hate Studies curriculum helps to directly connect students with the lives and experiences of the poor and oppressed through curricular and co-curricular strategies.

To develop a deep understanding of the marginalized and oppressed, students must be taken out of their comfort zone. Those who are privileged by society may find it difficult to challenge the system that bestows those privileges even though receiving these benefits is based on an unjust system. Some individuals may feel the challenges of transforming the world are too great but it is unacceptable for people to abdicate their responsibility to social justice because they feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of reform (Higgins, 2002). It is not enough to say that one is committed to the common good but then refuse to challenge the very institutions that perpetuate injustice. There are many excuses as to why individuals decide to surrender their responsibility to social justice but none of these excuses are acceptable (Higgins, 2002). To help students learn how to challenge this type of system and to avoid surrendering to excuses, we cannot retreat behind enclosed academic walls to evade facing some of the hard questions of how we

bring about transcendence while we are complicit in the structures that keep people oppressed (Rodes, 1994, p. 309).

A Hate Studies curriculum engages students in not just the study of the world but a study of the faith and how to bring together reason and faith in dialogue so the world can be transformed. The curriculum must help students become actively engaged with the world, not just observers or critics of it. The world has enough critics; we need social change agents who seek to challenge oppressive structures and to remake the world on the basis of peace and justice.

Catholic teachings can provide guidance for students on their faith journey to make society welcoming of the marginalized. As the commencement speaker at Canisius College in Buffalo, Jerez Garcia challenged the graduates on whether they would use their knowledge for the furtherance of justice or to just live the good life while remaining unconcerned about the fight for justice and liberty (O'Brien, 1995, pp. 36-37). For students to learn how to engage in this fight, they need to understand how the world appears from the perspective of the poor and oppressed (DeAngelis, 1995). Catholic educational institutions can, through the four strengths outlined in this article, help students develop this perspective. It is a perspective that can only be gained through the students' active engagement in the world and the development of understanding reality through the eyes of those who live on the margins of society.

### Conclusion

Hate is not a new problem, but today we have new opportunities for understanding and challenging it. Catholic universities and colleges have a choice, either acquiesce the research and teaching about hate to others or take the lead, infusing a spiritual and moral world view to the questions of hate that are not possible at other academic institutions. The study of hate is not a simple academic exercise meant to keep students busy for four years until they graduate to get comfortable jobs in which

they forget their role in working for the transformation of our culture to be respectful of the human dignity of all people. It is meant to push our students to a deeper understanding of themselves, how they operate in the world, how oppression expresses itself in varied forms, and how they can make a difference.

As O'Brien (1995) discussed, those of us who work in Catholic institutions of higher learning need to think through the responsibility of research and learning along with our students. It is our responsibility to think how we help students see the connections between the essential teachings of Catholic theology and the different disciplines. "At every level the Catholic Church has become ever more insistent that its educational mission cannot be confined to matters of personal morality and eternal salvation, but must be tested by its contribution to peace, justice, and human liberation." (O'Brien, 1995, p. 34). Through the field of hate studies, we can contribute to these ideals by assisting students in learning how they can live in a manner consistent with helping the oppressed and disadvantaged no matter what their future career entails.

Catholic colleges and universities provide the necessary vision of students standing in solidarity with the oppressed to work together to transform society for the liberation of all people. Catholic thought provides the rationale and ability for moving students who may often stay within privileged bounds to the outskirts to live, feel, and see as the oppressed. By leaving behind their isolation, and by moving purposefully into contact with the oppressed, students experiencing a Hate Studies curriculum will come to listen to the call of the Gospels to challenge oppressive structures, attitudes, and cultures. However, challenging these structures and attitudes is not enough, for they must be replaced with something new. The Catholic university provides the intellectual, spiritual, and moral framework for constructing a Hate Studies curriculum that not only makes our students cultural critics but builders of a new inclusive community that God calls us to build.

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