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Fidelity & Freedom: “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” at Twenty-Five

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**Review: *Fidelity & Freedom:*
“Ex Corde Ecclesiae” at Twenty-Five,
edited by Stephen M. Hildebrand and Sean O. Sheridan, TOR**

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Fidelity & Freedom: “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” at Twenty-Five. Edited by Stephen M. Hildebrand and Sean O. Sheridan, TOR. Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 2018. 314 pages. \$34.95 (paper).

Within Catholic higher education an often cited and debated document is the apostolic constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Promulgated in August 1990 by Saint Pope John Paul II, the document’s title translates to “From the Heart of the Church.” In two parts, the document reflects first on the nature and purpose of Catholic higher education, and second, provides General Norms, the rules and guidelines in accordance with Canon Law, which institutions of Catholic higher education across the globe are to follow. Over the course of the past 25 years, the document has been a source of much discussion for those invested in Catholic higher education with countless texts written on the topic. Published in 2018, and edited by Stephen Hildebrand and Sean Sheridan, TOR, *Fidelity and Freedom: “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” at Twenty-Five* adds to this literature.

The text is a collection of edited essays originally presented at three symposia held at Franciscan University of Steubenville between November 2014 and March 2015 in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. This celebration of the silver anniversary of the document grounds the aim of the book as the authors seek to begin “a conversation about the role and identity of Catholic universities in our time” (13). The text is composed of thirteen chapters divided into three parts: Part I, “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*,” Part II, “Academic and Cultural Questions,” and Part III, “Pastoral and Practical Reflections.” It opens with a forward and introduction, and closes with an appendix and afterward. A review of all 13 chapters as well as these additional texts is not within the confines of this review; however several chapters merit particular attention for their contributions to the book.

The first chapter, “The Message and Drafting Process of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*,” makes up the entirety of Part I. Here, editor Sean O. Sheridan, TOR, contextualizes the book with a helpful review of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* itself. The chapter, however, goes beyond this introduction to provide an overview of how the document was drafted. Sheridan skillfully synthesizes large amounts of history that scholars like Alice Gallin, OSU, have written volumes on. He provides the reader with a concise, informative overview of how *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* came to be, highlighting the multitude of voices consulted in the writing of the document. This chapter would serve as a good addition to introductory reading lists for those unfamiliar with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

Part II turns toward essays that consider topics *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* addresses and their implications for Catholic higher education, including academic freedom, the role of the new evangelization, service to the Church, and canonical issues. In chapter five, Susan K. Wood, SCL, addresses an additional issue, that of the perceived tension between faith and reason. Rather than see faith and reason as oppositional, Wood instead proposes a dialogue between the two with Catholic colleges and universities as the privileged place of this engagement. She points to several reasons as to why Catholic higher education has recently struggled to integrate faith and reason, including increasingly specialized disciplines that are divided into silos and the commercialization of higher education as a whole. Drawing on the work of George Dennis O’Brien and Michael Himes, Wood argues for a sacramental model whereby the Catholic college or university not only promotes a dialogue between faith and reason, but also actively engages a Catholic intellectual life

whereby faith is “part of the public communal discourse of the academic community” (128). Doing so, she notes, requires “structures for sustained dialogue,” structures she leaves to others to discuss (128).

Essays in Part III are written by several university presidents and bishops who reflect upon how *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* has influenced their own work within their institutions of higher education or dioceses, respectively. Rev. Jeffrey Monforton, Bishop of the Diocese of Steubenville, begins this section in chapter nine with a reflection on the relationship between the local bishop or ordinary and a Catholic college or university, a relationship he argues should be cultivated through dialogue and cooperation. Monforton recognizes the “complementary yet distinct roles of the bishop and the Catholic university” but argues that through this relationship, both may “best serve the universal call to evangelize” (188). The chapter highlights the specific roles and responsibilities of the bishop and the university and then moves to how a relationship between the two should function. Throughout his chapter, Monforton references specific initiatives that he and the Franciscan University of Steubenville have engaged in to demonstrate specifically how Monforton envisions this relationship between bishop and the Catholic university.

Overall, the organizational structure and chapters within *Fidelity & Freedom* provide the reader with a balance between more academically focused questions in Part II with a turn toward the practical in Part III. This allows the reader to see how the questions of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* have been wrestled with and implemented by a select group of bishops and presidents. Several themes emerge from the text, including the institutional Church’s relationship to individual institutions of Catholic higher education, particularly seen in the focus on questions of academic freedom, and the changed landscape of Catholic higher education from *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*’s original writing more than 25 years ago. An additional theme prominent throughout the text includes concerns over the Catholic identity of institutions of Catholic higher education and how, through implementing and adhering to *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, institutions may protect and promote this identity.

There are two main critiques of the book. First, of the 13 different contributing authors, four come from the Franciscan University of Steubenville, the host site for the symposia, seven are vowed religious, and only two are women, and none are individuals of color. Unfortunately, this lack of diversity among the contributors results in an overall lack of diversity in points of view presented in the text. For example, while the conversations from the three university presidents as to how they have each applied *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* are helpful in that they are practical examples of how institutions have examined *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and what that means for their particular campus, all three institutions are small and predominately undergraduate focused. Additionally, of the 13 authors, at least 10 have a background in theological or canon law studies. Perspectives from a wider range of individuals, such as from presidents of larger institutions of Catholic higher education and the bishops who engage with them, and authors from other academic disciplines, are not included in the text. In failing to include these voices, the conversation the text seeks to create about *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and Catholic higher education’s current context is limited and narrow. This lack of diversity among perspectives presented in the text may make it less persuasive or engaging to a wider audience of readers.

A second critique regards the limited nature of the topics covered in the text. For example, three chapters by Peter F. Ryan, S.J., Reinhard Hütter, and Terrence W. Tilley, are dedicated to the discussion of academic freedom. Each chapter approaches the topic in a slightly different manner. Though academic freedom is an important topic and one that *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* speaks to, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is a rich text with many other areas rife for reflection after twenty-five years that are missed. While several chapters engage in other topics such as the new evangelization, the discussion of faith and reason, and questions of canon law, other areas that could have been incorporated in the text include questions of how institutions of Catholic higher education are to form lay people, whom the future of Catholic higher education depends on, according to *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and how Catholic higher education promotes interdisciplinary work in an environment that prizes specialized, siloed academic disciplines. Additional questions that

could be addressed in a work such as this include questions of how Catholic campuses are to prioritize both pastoral ministry and cultural dialogue when an increasing number of students claim “none” for their religious preferences or background, and so on.

Though limited in scope and breadth, overall *Fidelity & Freedom* provides a contribution to the literature on the lasting impact of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Regardless of one’s own perspective on *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and its implications for Catholic higher education, those committed to Catholic higher education who seek to seriously engage in the discussion around this important papal document will find in this volume insight into perspectives and priorities from the authors at hand. HJE