

Holy Cross urged to stress Catholicism

McFarland defends college's curriculum

By Emilie Astell
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WORCESTER — A group of College of the Holy Cross alumni hope to change curriculum requirements to include more instruction in theology and philosophy in keeping with what they believe to be the Catholic school's mission.

The alumni group, organized under the national Cardinal Newman Society, also would like more Catholics on the faculty to meet the society's goal of strengthening the college's commitment to Catholicism.

"The point is that Holy Cross is not following the official definition of a Catholic college," said Victor J. Melfa, an organizer of the campus chapter of the Cardinal Newman Society and a 1957 graduate of Holy Cross.

Mr. Melfa said he believes the college is not adhering to a document known as *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, developed years ago by the Vatican, that refers to Catholic teachings in Catholic colleges. The document was a catalyst for developing actions that can be taken by U.S. bishops when dealing with local Catholic colleges and universities.

The plan will be discussed at a forum sponsored by the Holy Cross chapter of the Newman society from 2 to 4 p.m. June 7 at the Hogan Campus Center. The event coincides with a gathering the same weekend of alumni who graduated 30 or more years ago.

The Rev. Michael C. McFarland, Holy Cross president, objected to Mr. Melfa's characterizations yesterday, saying the alumni have no authority or background to decide what is Catholic and what is not.

"He misuses *Ex corde Ecclesiae*," Rev. McFarland said. "We are achieving what it says Catholic schools should achieve."

The work chaplains do with liturgies and retreats, for instance, are ways the college meets those goals, he said, as well as running the Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture.

Holy Cross also has a strong Catholic theology faculty, he said, and the Catholic value of a commitment to justice runs through the curriculum. In addition, the college follows standards established by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Holy Cross also has the endorsement of top administrators of the Jesuit order, the Society of Jesus, Rev. McFarland said.

As for complaints that college students of three or more decades ago received more thorough instruction in philosophy and religion, Rev. McFarland said the curriculum has evolved to meet the challenges students face today as compared to their counterparts from earlier generations.

"We're preparing them for the 21st century, not the 19th," he said.

While the college is willing to talk with concerned alumni, the idea of adhering to the Cardinal Newman Society's view of Catholic colleges is less palatable.

Professor David J. O'Brien, director of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture, said that if Holy Cross followed the sectarian ideas of the Newman society, it would be in lock step with the life of the church.

That would mean, for example, that the college would have to conform to the idea that homosexuality is a disorder. If a mandate from the society were implemented, he continued, it is conceivable that a monitor would take notes in class and send offensive remarks made by faculty to the Vatican.

"This should be opposed," Mr. O'Brien said. "It's not a good thing."

A Shrewsbury businessman, Mr. Melfa said the Newman society chapter was formed this year because of a new awareness on the part of older HC alumni of how far the college had drifted from its strong Catholic moorings. Among the group's objectives are to promote discussion and understanding of the nature and value of Catholic education at the college.

Earlier this year, Mr. Melfa objected to a campus production of "The Vagina Monologues," saying it crossed the line of decency and illustrated a series of decisions by college administrators to move the school toward a more secular approach.

Alumnus Edward P. Kirby of Whitman, class of 1949, agreed with Mr. Melfa. He said he also objects to a curriculum that allows students to fulfill religion requirements with one three-hour course in Islam or Buddhism rather than Catholicism. Students are required to take only one philosophy course, he said, whereas his instruction ran the gamut from logic to rhetoric to epistemology.

"In my day, you sat down the night before the class to study," Mr. Kirby said. "It was abstract, but it got you thinking. You would internalize it, go to class and internalize it some more. It was stern, but you learned something."