

THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED CATHOLIC STUDIES



April 2, 2001

Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk
Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Fax: 513-421-7537

Dear Dan,

Attached is a copy of what I would send to the CDF concerning the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies. I have little understanding of what should be sent. I am counting on your experience with these sorts of things (I trust that it is not that extensive) to provide the editing needed to make the most effective response. I have numbered the paragraphs. The last one, about me, might not be appropriate to include—but again, I don't know about these things.

I have also FAXed to you a copy of a letter that Fr. Joe Komonchak of Catholic University wrote to the editors of the National Catholic Register, a newspaper owned then and now by the Legionnaires of Christ. At first, they refused to publish it; I called the editor and told him that if they did not publish it in its entirety in their very next issue, I would have a copy of the letter on every US bishop's desk within 24 hours. He finally relented, but then, in that next issue, added his own commentary to try to blunt the effect of having so many of their distortions and outright errors about the Institute exposed by Komonchak's letter. This letter will give you a better idea of the kind of irresponsible criticism we got from the right (the NCR has been relatively quiet since then). I also believe that the folks who have contributed to these articles (including Fr. Matthew Lamb of Boston College, a confidant of Cardinal Law) are likely to be the same ones who more recently have brought their complaints directly to the CDF.

On another matter, the board of the IACS met this last Friday in DC. Among the issues we discussed was the presentation we are to make on the 16th of May to the Board of Argidius in Amsterdam. While they all appreciate immensely your thoughtful support of the Institute, they and I do not think it necessary that you fly to Holland for the meeting. We think that a 3-5 minute video from you would be both sufficient and very helpful. I want to wait a little longer before I make any suggestions to you as to what you might say in the video. In another week or so, I will be hearing from a member of the family who will be talking with some members of the Board; I will learn from him some of the points that might most fruitfully be pressed by you and will get in touch with you then.

I have submitted my article on our meeting here with you to the other NCR, the National Catholic Reporter, but haven't heard anything from them yet.

In the meantime, let us continue to work together for the sake of the kingdom.

Sincerely,

James L. Heft, S.M.
Chairman: Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies

**Draft of Response Written by James Heft, S.M., for
Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk to CDF's Inquiry about
the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies**

(1) I believe that the proposed Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies will be of great benefit to the Church and the Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, as well as in other parts of the world. Those who are leading this effort have identified a great need in the Church today: the development of a deeper understanding of the wisdom of the Catholic intellectual tradition among Catholic scholars from a variety of academic disciplines. They plan to work not only at the intellectual level; they will also include an on-going spiritual formation for scholars as well. For too long, scholars have suffered a type of schizophrenia between their intellectual work and their spiritual life. The Institute will be a place where the intellectual dimension will be rooted in Catholicism's deep and broad traditions, and the spiritual dimension will be celebrated through the ministrations of a full-time chaplain who understands both the intellectual and the spiritual life, and their integral relationship. The Institute, therefore, will have not only a library, but also a chapel; not only scholars, but also a chaplain.

(2) The attached Prospectus explains why this Institute is needed. We are all painfully aware that in North America and Europe the number of priests and religious is rapidly declining. In the United States, most of its over 200 Catholic colleges and universities were founded by religious communities. Now, few of those communities are numerous enough to lead much less staff these institutions. Lay persons are increasingly teaching and leading these institutions, but in many instances are doing so with only a superficial understanding of Catholicism and what the mission of a Catholic university should be. The leading Catholic universities in the United States run the greatest risk of becoming secular, while the majority of the rest, many of them quite small and with limited resources, run the risk either of going out of business or of requiring teachers to do so much teaching that serious scholarship is nearly impossible. In the cases of both, the leading and the struggling universities, serious development of Catholic intellectual life is to a large extent missing. There is a great need, therefore, for a different kind of institution, a research institute, whose sole purpose is to provide scholars with the time and financial support to develop a deeper sense of what the Catholic intellectual tradition can offer to their lives as professors at Catholic colleges and universities.

(3) Besides scholars in Catholic colleges and universities, another group of scholars will, I believe, benefit a great deal from the proposed Institute: those who teach in secular universities. It is unfortunate that some of the most respected Catholic scholars have chosen, for a variety of reasons, not to teach in Catholic universities. They too need to be brought together with other scholars committed to studying the Catholic intellectual tradition so that they might be able to bring into open conversation both their intellectual work and their spiritual life—precisely something they are unable to do at their secular campuses. I believe that such an integrated experience will lead at least some of them to join faculties at Catholic colleges and universities.

(4) Finally, it is important to realize what this Institute is not. It is neither a college nor a university. It will not have any students, nor will it teach any courses. It is neither a theological

nor a philosophical institute. It will not, as an Institute for advanced Catholic studies, take positions itself on matters in the Church or on theological questions. Its purpose, rather, is to provide twenty to twenty-five scholars from different disciplines an opportunity to focus for a full academic year on their research as it relates to the Catholic tradition. The aim is that these scholars will then return to their respective institutions renewed and filled with a deeper understanding of what Catholicism means for their discipline, for the Church and for modern society. They will also have formed an intellectual community that strengthens them in their conviction that Catholicism offers a distinctive and rich vision of the intellectual life.

(5) I realize that the Institute has received some criticism. I believe, however, that such criticism has been misplaced. Part of the confusion is due to a coincidence. Just when the Institute went public two years ago with its effort to raise money for its endowment, the media, both secular and Catholic, depicted in a highly polarized fashion the discussions of the final stages of the implementation of Ex corde ecclesiae. As a consequence of this coincidence in timing, the Institute appeared to some like a reaction against the implementation of Ex corde when in fact the planning for it had begun long before.

(6) Some people also apparently believe that the Institute will become, in its desire to be "independent", a very sophisticated platform for dissident theologians. Early in 1997, it formed a Commission on Catholic Scholarship composed of 25 Catholic scholars and leaders in Catholic higher education. The Commission's task was to develop the concept of the Institute; the completion of its task was the writing of the Prospectus. One or two members of that Commission, dissolved since late 1998, were described by reporters of the National Catholic Register to be dissident theologians.

(7) Nevertheless, the Institute does want to be independent--not from the guidance and influence of the Church, but rather from the internecine competition that too frequently characterizes US Catholic colleges and universities. Standing apart from Catholic college and universities, the Institute can have its greatest impact upon them. To insure that their independence nevertheless remains sensitive to the needs of the Church, I and another archbishop have been invited to be members of its Academic Advisory Board, and once it begins to expand its own governing Board, bishops will be invited to be members of it as well.

(8) Concerning the Institute's impact on Catholic theology, I think it should be quite positive. It is likely that among the 20 to 25 scholars who come each year, several will be theologians. Scholarship will be done at the highest level. My experience tells me that most of our trouble with theologians arises when they become captive of various movements and trends, be they feminist or liberationist or restorationist. Being in sustained conversation with excellent scholars in other disciplines will broaden theologians' horizons and provide especially fertile ground for the dialogue between faith and culture. Second, it will also require theologians to work at a high level of excellence, and at a more faithful and creative appropriation of the tradition. Third and finally, it should help us to bridge some of the ideological divides that exist among theologians, especially in the United States.

(9) Finally, I have known for nearly twenty-five years Fr. James Heft, S.M., who is

leading this effort. He is an orthodox Catholic theologian who has done much in my archdiocese and throughout the United States to provide sane and prudent guidance to many students and teachers on a wide range of issues. In the first published review of his doctoral thesis on the historical origins of papal infallibility, the late Yves Congar wrote that his understanding of infallibility was "exact." Recently, Fr. Hefst wrote an article encouraging Catholic theologians in the United States to accept the mandatum. He is also a leader in Catholic higher education, having served recently as the chair of the Board of Directors of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. His leadership is still another reason why I am confident that the Institute will be a great asset for the Church and Catholic higher education, not only in this country, but elsewhere in the world as well.

April 1, 2001

Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk