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Republican donors' gift to Catholic university comes under fire

by Joshua J. McElwee

Washington — A group of nearly 50 academics, including several former staffers of the U.S. bishops' conference, released a letter Monday criticizing the bishops' national university for accepting a \$1 million gift from a conservative group known for funding efforts to oppose workers' rights.

Acceptance of the gift from the Charles Koch Foundation by The Catholic University of America, the academics say, sends a signal of "stark contrast" between the church's long support of workers' attempts to unionize and the foundation's public policy objectives.

Catholic university, which is located in Washington and is the only U.S. college or university founded by the nation's bishops, announced last month that it had received the gift from the Koch foundation to support research into "principled entrepreneurship" at its business school.

The grant, the university said in a release Nov. 12, will allow for the school to hire three new visiting professors and one expert from the business world to teach and conduct research.

In their letter Monday, addressed to Catholic University's president John Garvey and business school dean Andrew Abela, the academics allege that the Koch foundation has "an ideological agenda when it comes to shaping the national debate over economics and politics that is not simply academic in nature."

"The Koch brothers are billionaire industrialists who fund organizations that advance public policies that directly contradict Catholic teaching on a range of moral issues from economic justice to environmental stewardship," the academics continue.

"We are concerned that by accepting such a donation you send a confusing message to Catholic students

and other faithful Catholics that the Koch brothers' anti-government, Tea Party ideology has the blessing of a university sanctioned by Catholic bishops."

The Charles Koch foundation is one of several headed by the sons of Fred C. Koch, a deceased Texas chemist who founded an oil and gas conglomerate that is now the second-largest private company in the U.S.

David and Charles, Fred's sons, have grabbed headlines in recent years for their support of Republican causes, particularly Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's efforts to hamper the ability of unions to bargain collectively in that state.

"We must not ignore the stark contrast between the Koch brothers' public policy agenda and our Church's traditional social justice teachings," the academics' letter states.

Mentioning the Catholic church's long support for the rights of unions, the letter cites the 1986 pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops, "Economic Justice for All," which stated that the church "fully supports the rights of workers to form unions and other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working conditions."

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The letter also addresses the growing income gap between the world's wealthiest and most impoverished, citing from Pope Francis' remarks in his recent apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel") that the gap is "the result of ideologies ? which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation."

"It is this 'absolute autonomy of the marketplace' that Charles and David Koch are working to achieve," the letter writers conclude.

"Our Catholic intellectual and social tradition offers an important critique of this vision," they state. "We look forward to a productive and civil dialogue with you ? on how we can protect the integrity of our Church's consistent ethic of life teachings."

Among signers' of the academics letter are four Catholic university faculty members, three former senior staffers at the U.S. bishops' conference, two former presidents of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the president of the Jesuit-run University of San Francisco.

Also signing onto the effort are Miguel Diaz, a theologian at the University of Dayton who served as U.S. ambassador to the Holy See from 2009-12; and David McLoughlin, a former president of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain.

Included among the former bishops' staffers are Jesuit Fr. Drew Christiansen, who headed from 1991-98 the U.S. bishops' office of international justice and peace; and Francis X. Doyle, associate general secretary for the conference in the 1980s and 90s.

While it is unclear exactly how much money the Koch brothers gave to Walker's 2010 campaign and then his successful effort in 2011 to fight a recall election, it is known that Koch industries' political action committee gave at least \$1 million to the Republican Governors Association in 2010.

Americans for Prosperity, a right-wing political advocacy group backed by the brothers, is also estimated

to have donated some \$3 million to Walker.

Catholic University's business school, formally known as its School of Business and Economics, was created in January from a department formerly housed in the university's department of arts and sciences.

In a release announcing the new formation of the school, the university said it wanted the new venture to focus specifically on three areas: Practical formation of new business leaders, research efforts "oriented to the common good," and integrating "morality and a sense of service" into each of the university's business courses.

Along with the donation from the Charles Koch Foundation, the university also announced in November a \$500,000 gift to its business school by the Busch Family Foundation. The university said it is also still seeking an additional \$5 million in funds for the new school.

More: University: Koch grant 'fully consonant' with Catholic teaching

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* national correspondent. He is a graduate of The Catholic University of America. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: @joshjmac.]

Following is the letter from the academics to Catholic University, released Monday morning.

Academics' letter to The Catholic University of America opposing donation from Charles Koch Foundation. by [joshua_mac8430](#)

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