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Panel looks at impact of 'Gaudium et Spes' on Catholic higher education

Katherine Talalas Catholic News Service | Feb. 5, 2014
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Few documents of the Second Vatican Council have impacted Catholic education as greatly as *Gaudium et Spes* , said a panel of speakers Sunday.

"No other document gives us the crucial role of Catholic higher education in the church," said Massimo Faggioli, an assistant professor of theology at the Center for Catholic Studies at St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minn.

Faggioli was one of three speakers on a panel that addressed the topic "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Advancing the Insights of 'Gaudium et Spes.' " He was joined by Maryann Cusimano Love, associate professor of international relations at The Catholic University of America in Washington, and Fr. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA.

The panel discussion came on the second day of the annual conference of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, held Feb. 1-3 in Washington. "Living the Vision of 'Gaudium et Spes' " in Catholic higher education was the overall theme of the meeting.

Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, was the last document of Vatican II to be promulgated, in December 1965.

The document, whose Latin title means "joy and hope," was intended to lay out the church's relationship to a rapidly changing society. According to the panel it has a great deal to teach Catholic educators.

In fact, "the document reads as if it could have been written yesterday by Pope Francis," said Cusimano Love.

So what insights does the document have to offer Catholic universities?

Firstly, *Gaudium et Spes* can be implemented in the personal vocations of professors and academics. Cusimano Love encouraged educators to be what she called " 'pracademics,' bringing the practice of the Catholic church into (their) research and teaching practices."

Secondly, *Gaudium et Spes* calls for civic engagement and advocacy by universities, which are considered political actors. "If we are not in the public square, there is a huge voice that is missing," Snyder said.

Lastly, *Gaudium et Spes* asks universities to produce graduates who can "interpret the signs of the times," as described in Chapter 16, Verse 3 of the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Faggioli, who teaches the history of modern Christianity at St. Thomas, said that colleges can do so by "having more courses in history and literature." Though there has been a trend in recent years among Catholic

universities in recent to focus on job-specific training, Faggioli believes this should not be done at the expense of a liberal arts education.

"If we are only trained to do a job, we will be enslaved by signs of the times," he said.

In his remarks during the panel discussion and afterward to Catholic News Service, Faggioli said a broad Catholic education should not be limited to undergraduate formation.

"Catholic colleges and universities should be more emphatic in helping students pursue their vocations as scholars," he explained.

"Higher education is being enslaved to the idea that every student is just there to become a professional," he reiterated. "That is not education, that is training. And that is fundamentally different from the Catholic understanding of the human person."

Speaking of the Catholic responsibility for developing conscience, he said if educators fail in this with their students, then "after us, there is nothing."

While in Washington, Faggioli delivered this year's Hecker Lecture at St. Paul's College. His Jan. 31 address was titled "The 'Social Message' of the Liturgical Reform of Vatican II." The lecture series is named after the founder of the Paulist religious order, Fr. Isaac T. Hecker.

Among the books and articles he has written, Faggioli's book *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* was published by Paulist Press in 2012.

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