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The discussion regarding the nature and purpose of university education has a distinguished and complex history. Within recent memory, the 1987 publication of Alan Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind—a work that earned him enthusiastic admirers and ardent critics—gave rise to a spirited debate regarding general versus specialized education, the implications of knowing and learning, and the intellectual, social, civic, and moral health of university students. While affirming the value of knowing and learning as legitimate ends in themselves, the Catholic intellectual tradition also honors the integral relationship among knowing, learning, and becoming. In ultimate terms, Catholic education has a telos, an end—one that is related to the student as a person.

In its document “Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice,” the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus highlighted the relationship between faith and justice as a preeminent feature of Jesuit identity, one that marks Jesuit educational institutions as well. These essays attest to the attention paid in such universities to the service of faith and the promotion of justice. And while the title of this book does not include “faith,” there is no doubt that the thread of faith, in consort with justice, is interwoven through the tapestry of these essays, as expressed in “Encuentro Dominicano,” by Tom Kelly: “The key to the transformational process is a commitment to academic rigor in the context of community-based learning, and an emphasis on building relationships and spiritual reflection through commitment to faith that does justice” (54).

All too often, Catholic educators are quick to confirm that their tradition of education pays particular attention to the education of the whole person, but they rarely provide an accompanying analysis of how this is realized in the school or university. (It must be recognized, of course, that the education of the whole person is a perennial process). It is refreshing to see that these essays are attentive to some of the deeper matters that pertain to the education of the whole person; they deliberate on what is required and necessary for such an education. And while the essays view the educational task through the lens of justice, a sufficient edifice is constructed to declare that while the education of the whole person includes intellectual knowledge and knowing, it is also a process of becoming, one that is both internally transformative and liberating and externally caring and responsible. In good Catholic tradition, one is warned of the corrosive danger of individualism and selfishness, whereby there is no longer a “common good, only my individual good” (64). Catholic education must be ever vigilant to avoid straying from the truth that education, to paraphrase Jacques Maritain, is not simply a stuffy and disconnected shuffling of ideas, an intellectual snobbery unrelated to the being and becoming of the person and the world. Thinking and feeling, justice and action, the spiritual life and community, learning and choosing, and knowing and evaluating are all indispensable elements of the education of the whole person. With such pillars in place, students are called “to use [their] intellectual gifts and studies to understand the reality of the world” (277). If education is ultimately about freedom, then it is also about transformation; without both elements, education fails to take place. Education must sow the seeds for recurrent growth from being to becoming. These essays, in one way or another, all look on education and learning as potentially transformative, which is surely one of the distinguishing features of the education of the whole person.