

bruising basketball team. "It's really possible," says Rob Kroll, a major in the top-flight school of foreign service, "for a senior to go four years here and never feel a significant Catholic influence."

No matter what academicians think about the Curran case, it has made public their questions about just how Catholic their schools should be. "Into the '60s," says Notre Dame history Prof. J. Phillip Gleason, "Catholic identity was like the presence of autumn leaves in the fall and the coming of snow in the wintertime. It was just there." But as the religious ranks thinned, governance of the schools was turned over to autonomous lay boards, and the universities became mirrors of American pluralism as much as of Catholic faith. Now the church is reasserting itself. "This pope feels he has a mandate to clarify the Catholic identity," says theologian Avery Dulles of CU.

Theologians push at the edges of what we believe in order to help us get a wider understanding of our faith. Very often they are wrong, but sometimes they are right. And sometimes we don't realize they are right until 10 years down the line.

—Father Theodore Hesburgh, Notre Dame president

Curran's longtime employer differs in kind from other Catholic colleges. As the only pontifical university in the United States, CU maintains close ties to Rome, and theologians must be "licensed" by the Vatican. Many Catholic teachers elsewhere draw comfort from those distinctions. "The Curran case has been blown out of proportion," argues Boston College archivist Father Paul Fitzgerald, who feels no tremors rocking his flourishing campus. Others, however, see a direct link between the Curran case and a Vatican proposal last year to extend similar control over every Catholic college. That idea elicited strong protest from the U.S. Catholic hierarchy. The violation of the mandate in the First Amendment of the Constitution for separation of church and state, they argued, would cost Catholic colleges state accreditation and precious federal grants and loans—effectively killing the schools off.

Celebrated hoopsters:
Georgetown's basketball coach, John Thompson, with player Charles Smith during the 1985-86 season

Since the protest, little has been heard of that "schema." But to Catholic liberals, its symbolism is troubling enough. "Things like this discredit the lead-

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In limbo: When theologian Charles Curran deviated from doctrine, Rome ordered him barred from teaching

ership of the church in this country and embarrass American Catholics," says priest-author Andrew Greeley. "The basic problem is that Rome can't understand the mentality of a free society." Father Gerald P. Fogarty, professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, agrees, but adds a corollary. "The American church doesn't understand Rome," he says. "It's a hard concept for Americans to swallow, but Rome has the right to punish what it considers to be errors in moral teaching."

Thus the delicate balancing act continues: how to be American (and therefore attentive to the Constitution), Catholic (and therefore obedient to Vatican doctrine) and a university (and therefore committed to intellectual freedom) all at the same time. According to Curran, the soul-searching itself is extremely worthwhile. "Catholic theology means faith seeking understanding and understanding seeking faith," he says. "I have to hold that there's no incompatibility there, and that it depends on free inquiry." And so he waits for his hearing before Archbishop James A. Hickey, chancellor of CU, and for the publication this month of his 17th book. Its title: "Faithful Dissent."

DANIEL PEDERSEN with PAT WINGERT and TODD BARRETT in Washington, D.C., DAVID BARBOZA in Boston, and KEITH HARRISON in South Bend



The question is how to be American, Catholic and a university all at the same time