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The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

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The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

Scholarship, Faith, and Higher Education

Edited by John J. O'Keefe, Gina Merys, and Bridget Keegan

Conclusion

Continuing the Tradition through Extended Intellectual Dialogue

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[1] As the physical presence of vowed Religious within academe dwindles, the role of lay intellectuals continues to grow, making the focus on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition more important if we truly wish to continue and develop it for the good of all intellectual activities. As each essay in this collection shows, it is only in the context of the whole of the Tradition, faith and reason, that each part remains viable. In other words, to end where we began in the introduction to this collection, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition unites "existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 1). In "The Task of a Christian University," Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J. reminds us that a Christian university "has to do with culture, with knowledge, the use of the intellect . . . it must be concerned with social reality – precisely because a

university is inescapably a social force: it must transform and enlighten the society in which it lives" (149). As we have seen throughout this collection, this move toward transformation and enlightenment can most often, and most easily, be seen in the constant tension between faith, reason, and, as Crawford points out, justice. Each author notes this tension and sees how their own disciplines, and those of others, constantly engage that tension by enriching it with experience and dialogue. They use their own disciplinary knowledge and curiosity to "analyze causes; use imagination and creativity together to discover remedies; communicate to our constituencies a consciousness that inspires the freedom of self-determination; educate professionals with a conscience, who continually hone an educational institution that is academically excellent and ethically oriented" (Ellacuría: 149). These are the daily rites that academics and non-academics in all of our colleges, departments, programs, fields, and sub-fields contribute to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. In these ways, and so many more, we continually (re)commit to finding the connections among faith, reason, and justice. "Mission and Identity" committees and offices can only remind us of what our goals are meant to be; it is in the hands of our scholarship and our teaching to do the joyful work of uniting these orders of reality, devoting ourselves to the work of our disciplines while maintaining an eye on the "fount of truth."

[2] Throughout this collection we see a consistent thread of reflection, discussion, and action as the primary modes in continuing the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Thus, in order for the perpetuation and even the growth of such a tradition, we must create spaces to engage interdisciplinary partnerships that challenge and promote how each discipline connects to its own scholarly pursuits in light of the Tradition. Collections such as this one should be just the beginning to renewing our commitment to the life of the Catholic intellectual where faith and scholarship comingle to create new knowledge in every field. For many disciplines, such as Chemistry or Economics, this connection between our scholarly work and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition may seem loose and secondary. What we need to do to attend to the tradition, however, is to begin reminding ourselves and training our students to let this connection of faith and reason lead their research. By switching the order of our thought processes, we begin to be mindful of the ways in which we grow and continue the tradition. Certainly, I do not suggest that we narrow our focus so much that we conduct our research wearing blinders, but as Cherney shows us, sometimes we need to expect to find something before we can find it, expect to see something before we see it. If there is a connection between the research conducted in Physics, English, Political Science, or Law and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, then why should we not begin with those connections as we form our research questions? Certainly the rapid expansion of knowledge in all fields calls for the type of reflection and thought on our intellectual advances that has been the hallmark of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition for centuries. In the words of Pope John Paul II,

> In the world today, characterized by such rapid developments in science and technology, the tasks of a Catholic University assume an ever greater importance and urgency. Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the correspondingly necessary search for meaning in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of

> human society as a whole . . . its Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 7).

[3] Our job, then, as Catholic intellectuals is to give special care exploring both the hows and the whys of our findings; it is to not stop at discovery, but to move through reflection as well. If a greater understanding of truth is our aim, the heart of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the heart of our research is the same; that connection should be at the forefront of how we frame our scholarship.

[4] But the dialogue does not end with the intellectual life of faculty. Curricular change for students to engage and continue the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is just as, if not more, important to the survival of the Catholic university. As mentioned especially in Cochran's essay, university students often find engagement with the surrounding communities through service. Whether this move to service is sparked by a move toward alleviating suffering, by a commitment to humanity, by a notion of doing one's part to help others, or through a particular notion of good citizenship, it is a move that is mostly disconnected from the student's intellectual pursuits. If, however, a student ties his or her commitment to service with an understanding of underlying societal, political, economic, and scientific issues that create situations that end in a need for service, and a reflective process that provides space for that student to understand the larger systems at work as well as his or her own role in those systems, that student learns a broader, deeper, and more nuanced approach to intellectual pursuits in all areas of his or her study. Not only does this type of rigorous study link students into the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, but also it assists students into becoming more aware of the consequences of all types of actions as well as into becoming more knowledgeable and action-oriented citizens. As Buckley states, "Deep care without concomitant skills and knowledge leads only into enthusiasms. From this appreciation must come an educated awareness of what these students can do with their lives and with their education to better the human condition" (122). Thus, while any university may give some time and effort to service and community based work, it is the duty of a Catholic university to link this service with the greater search for truth. Moreover, students continuing in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition must engage in the "joy" of searching for the Truth in all of their academic work as well. Again looking to the wisdom of John Paul II,

> [w]hile each discipline is taught systematically and according to its own methods, interdisciplinary studies, assisted by a careful and through study of philosophy and theology, enable students to acquire an organic vision of reality and to develop a continuing desire for intellectual progress. In the communication of knowledge, emphasis is then placed on how human reason in its reflection opens to increasingly broader questions, and how the complete answer to them can only come from above through faith (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 20).

[5] It is the work of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition that creates circumstances in which the trained intellectual (professor) and the intellectual-in-training (student) work together to discover new instances of the Truth in the world and in the classroom. Thus, by relying on the liberal arts foundation of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition we provide a scaffolding for inquiry at all levels to engage in the discussions necessary for the knowledge from many

fields of study to comingle and create new knowledge and new relationships between faith, reason, and justice.

[6] Just as we understand the Church is not simply a building but instead the people who live its teachings, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is not just something within the physical space of a university or a classroom, but it is truly in the minds and hearts of the people who continually search for Truth in all that they learn. This longing for the "fount of truth" that can make the full connection between all that we know is the breath of life that continues to develop for the future our Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

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