

Christian Brothers of Saint Mary's College. "How Can the College Continue to Develop Itself as a Catholic Institution of Higher Learning and Contribute to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?" *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 2, no. 1 (2011).

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## **How Can the College Continue to Develop Itself as a Catholic Institution of Higher Learning and Contribute to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?**

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We Brothers believe that the high calling of a Catholic college is nothing less than the evangelization of the intellect. All of Christian life can be seen under the saving light of revelation and when this light is cast on the pursuit of knowledge both its unity and its embrace of the totality of humanity are perceived. Pope Benedict XVI addressed the Gospel value of education in his speech to American university representatives on 17 April 2008 when he declared, "Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth."

The union of Christian faith and intellectual pursuit was present in Saint Paul who interpreted the faith for Greek and Jew alike with reasoning and eloquence. This same tradition continued through the Patristic Era, as exemplified in the writings of Saint Augustine, then became the inheritance of monastic and cathedral schools and was followed in the twelfth century by the rise of the European universities.

At the new universities of Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Salamanca, Coimbra, and elsewhere throughout Europe, the best Catholic minds strove to understand their faith and their world in light of their belief in Christ (through the Word of God in Sacred Scripture and Tradition) and strove to express their beliefs and understandings in terms of using the best thinking of educated persons of their times. Their striving was best expressed by Saint Anselm of Canterbury as "faith seeking understanding." The awareness that a complete intellectual grasp of the object of their striving would ultimately be beyond their ability to achieve produced in the university masters a method for moving, by means of rational propositions, from doubt to greater certainty.

Seeing truth ultimately as one and unafraid of any seeming contradictions between faith and the sciences (mainly theology, philosophy, law and medicine), the scholars of the new universities also grappled with the challenges of their day, especially innovations in social structures, urban growth, commerce, navigation and politics. They applied themselves, moreover, to problems of warfare both home and abroad and the establishment of contracts with the peoples of the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Where scientific thought led legitimately to a multiplicity of conclusions, some of which were at odds with Christian doctrine, university thinkers acknowledged the validity of reasoning while allowing the more perfect light of faith to guide their conclusions. Humanism and a renewed study of nature brought new emphases to the university curriculum including history, eloquence, ethics, and the empirical sciences. Gradually universities within the Catholic orbit recovered from the setback to scientific inquiry caused by the Galileo controversy. The Enlightenment and new historical thinking challenged and eventually strengthened the intellectual dialogue between faith and contemporary learning.

Academics continue to this day to grapple with real questions and current problems from the standpoint of faith and lead others in this same search for the advancement of truth as it relates to contemporary questions and problems. At Saint Mary's College, this interdisciplinary interplay of ideas continues, and should be evident in all of its programs and fields of study, as well as in the contemporary areas of discourse that its community of scholars and students can address: the sciences; social institutions; culture; economics; politics; ecclesial developments; and questions of gender, sexuality, and human reproduction. The Catholic intellectual tradition and its accumulated wisdom have much to say about the particular problems within these broad areas of study, such as immigration; war and peace; capital punishment; women's rights; men's issues; just wage; poverty and the distribution of goods; other themes of the papal social encyclicals; church ministry and leadership; sexuality, gender and identity questions; abortion, and stem-cell research. In its pursuit of the answers to these and many more questions, there is at a Catholic college a spirit of study that is guided by a tradition that honors the free pursuit of the sciences and always examines the results of that pursuit in light of Christian doctrine.

In order to insure the vibrancy and pervasiveness of the Catholic intellectual tradition, Saint Mary's College must always have in mind the degree of understanding of that tradition among its community of scholars. The catalysts of our academic programs need always be attentive to building up the Catholic faculty and staff so that they might continue to be sources of formation in the tradition for the whole community. While difficult and extremely sensitive, the question of the number of Catholics on the faculty cannot be avoided. Its urgency stems from the needs of our students. Without a strong presence of Catholic scholars, broadly defined as men and women who are well-versed in and committed to this intellectual tradition and whose *curricula vitae* show evidence of interest in it, the College cannot meet the legitimate expectation of its students to engage intellectuals and mentors who live the tradition, nor can it fulfill its many opportunities for service to the Church and society. A Catholic college is where the Church does its thinking. This ecclesial gift cannot be given without a substantial number of Catholic scholars. Pope John Paul II, in *Ex corde ecclesiae*, thought that the *major part* of educators at a Catholic college should be Catholic. We understand that achieving such a goal as this would be the work of at least a generation here. The time is ripe, however, to renew our efforts at hiring for the Catholic intellectual tradition. We believe that the College and its administration must be committed to building up the number of educators well-versed in this tradition.

By taking this action now, we can continue to create an environment in which Christianity is not only studied but lived; celebrated in the liturgy, served by Mission and Ministry and the Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action, and sustained by faith-filled witness. This environment is served also by those whose lives are shaped by other traditions, for they contribute importantly to the atmosphere of open discussion which is essential both for a liberal education and for students to make the Catholic intellectual tradition genuinely their own.

**Editor's Note:** This article was written in and unanimously approved, on Sunday, November 14, 2010, by:

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