

## **The Benedictine Wisdom Tradition Meets the Catholic Intellectual Tradition**

### **Shall We Gather at the Altar?**

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My task, as I understand it, is to stimulate your on-going reflection on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and its centrality for Benedictine higher education. I have entitled my presentation “The Benedictine Wisdom Tradition Meets the Catholic Intellectual Tradition,” and subtitled it “Shall We Gather at the Altar?” a question that is also an invitation. The subtitle is a play on the early American hymn title “Shall We Gather at the River” – not the Missouri but that river “that flows by the throne of God.” The question-invitation means to acknowledge that the Catholic intellectual tradition – an integral and apparently benign part of our educational heritage – has periodically generated contention, putting Catholic believer in opposition to one another for longer or shorter periods of time. Why this is so is something we need to understand if we are to appreciate the challenges and possibilities the Catholic intellectual tradition creates for the Benedictine mission to higher education.

Institutional administrators – presidents, abbots, prioresses – may be forgiven for wanting to put a lid on contention in the ranks. Yet suppression of difference is not congruent with the intellectual life and its contribution to the Church and to higher education. Catholic intellectuals’ enduring contribution to western culture has been their capacity to engage both faith and reason – faith seeking understanding - in their explorations of human existence, human purpose, and human destiny.

The Catholic intellectual life advances with the emergence of new questions. Yet new questions and their accompanying uncertainty about good answers or right answers can be unsettling. At crucial

moments in this engagement of new questions arising from unprecedented cultural developments, leaders and members have often become confused or frightened by uncertainty. Church history records how and why believers rioted in the streets during the 5<sup>th</sup> century Council of Chalcedon. When the new questions are real questions, it is not surprising that believers seeking understanding do not achieve immediate consensus. Unable to see the way forward, believers past and present have too often reverted to mutual recrimination and accusations of bad faith, power plays, even condemnation of the brother or sister whose thinking subverts the then-known world.

The questions raised by new scientific knowledge have required creative thinking on the part of the Church's best mind, thinking that continues to be expanded even today, as we get used to the notion of an expanding universe. Whenever believers try to address new questions by latching onto "either / or" solutions – either faith or science - they deny the tradition, for the Catholic intellectual tradition embraces "both / and" - both faith and reason.

My subtitle proposes that the Catholic intellectual tradition exists only because of our shared faith in Christ and our trust in the Creator's gift of human reason. Admittedly, human reason is prone to mistakes in our trial and error search for understanding. Yet Catholic intellectual history shows that creative and faith-filled thinking has consistently served the Church well in troubled times.

The first part of this presentation will rehearse something of the disruptive dynamics of the Catholic intellectual tradition as faith and reason abrade and then engage. The second and longest part will look at the peculiar stresses in the vitality of the Catholic intellectual tradition resulting from contemporary Catholic ambivalence about the culture of modernity. This will involve telling some "family stories." The third and briefest part will suggest that Benedictine institutions of higher education have deep resources within our wisdom tradition that can model a way to proceed. We have every possibility of making our Benedictine institutions hospitable to vital Catholic intellectual life in

difficult times. This is the significance of title: the Benedictine wisdom tradition meets the Catholic intellectual tradition.

## I. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition: The Deep Pool and the Rapids

As one outcome of your earlier conversations on Catholic identity you noted that the phrase “Catholic intellectual tradition” refers to a complex phenomenon. As you pointed out, from one perspective, the Catholic intellectual tradition can be equated with the creative works of eminent Catholics. Imagine this as “the deep pool” of the Catholic intellectual tradition, a pool that looks tranquil on the surface. From an alternative perspective, you said that the Catholic intellectual tradition can be considered by looking at the intellectual activity of the creative thinkers. Imagine this as “the rapids, a place of turbulence. The “deep pool” and “the rapids” are two parts of a single flowing river of human creativity in response gifts of God to our believing humankind.

It is the activity in “the rapids” that has produced the classics of Catholic thought that are part of the “deep pool.” The churning of cultural waters around communities that believed in the mystery of Christ has consistently stirred the minds, hearts, and imaginations of Catholic thinkers for two millennia. Creative thinkers have ventured into the rapids, struggled to hold on to faith and to reason, and have made it through. Their hard-won gifts for the rest of us are the creative works that we cherish and hand on from generation to generation as the achievements of Catholic intellectual tradition. The achievers – often called saints - are identified as fathers and doctors of the church. These are the men – and even a few women – who helped the Church negotiate “the rapids.” They conceptualized and reconceptualized biblical faith and developing doctrine, and continue to do so. Many, but not all, Catholic intellectuals have been theologians and catechists. Many others were mystics or artists, philosophers, musicians or architects, poets, economists or novelists. What they all had in common in successive generations was

confidence to trust the gift of faith but to trust also that their God-given good and creative minds could and must explore the questions and uncertainties that their times presented. Because they believed, they faced the turbulence around them concerning matters of life and death, belief and doubt in the human community; they asked questions and imagined possibilities. They also endured the mistrust of many of their contemporaries.

The successive generators of the Catholic intellectual tradition were not afraid of disagreeing with one another as they explored differing paths forward; in fact they were occasionally also quite disagreeable personalities. We do our intellectual tradition a disservice if we try to smooth out all the unevenness in it, trying to harmonize all the partial insights that come with efforts to understand.

Disagreements rooted in the Catholic past persist and still influence the present. Let me offer you a concrete example. The Catholic intellectual tradition values the Augustinian school of thought reaching back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. We value also the Thomist 13<sup>th</sup> century school of thought, and we affirm them both as fully Catholic. But affirmation does not preclude disagreements about their significance and their adequacy. Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, is distinctively Augustinian in his thinking. He is not a Thomist. This makes him a contrarian of sorts, for he was educated in an era when successive popes had promoted Thomism as the most reliable perspective in the tradition. Yet Joseph Ratzinger has been uneasy with the Thomism of the most of the theologians of the Second Vatican Council. Why? At the risk of oversimplifying, let me try to explain.

The Augustinian heritage in the church has focused on the radical sinfulness of human nature, our fallen condition that required the gift of divine redemption in Christ. Human sinfulness is the given. Look around; the evidence is everywhere. All human achievement is illusory; the city of Man is not and never will be the city of God. Reformation era Augustinians like Martin Luther have characterized the human condition as “the depravity of man.” In our time, Augustinians like Pope Benedict XVI judge that

the work of the recent Council was naïve given the evidence of human evil in the modern world. In his judgment the Council Fathers assumed, against the evidence, that the Church could dialogue safely with the modern world without losing its soul. Augustinians of many shades have been and are revered and valued in the Catholic intellectual tradition.

But so are those who thought is informed by the thinking of Thomas Aquinas. His philosophy and theology emphasize the fundamental goodness of creation, the work of the divine creative Word. Every creature is an image of the Creator. The confidence in human possibility is strengthened by the mystery of the Incarnation. Catholics believe that the divine Word became human and lived among us and has even called us to become One Body in Christ. Yes, our humankind is finite and mortal and imperfect, yet we participate – share in - in the goodness of the God who made us. The fundamental goodness of the human race remains despite sin. We live with trust that the reign of God is slowly breaking through. As the Greek fathers of the Church expressed it, “God became human so that we might become divine.” One might find a confident Thomist starting point in an the mid-twentieth century Pope John XXIII, who announced and convened the Second Vatican Council, noting as he did so that “the prophets of doom” in the Church ought not be the only voices heard.

Why do I tell you this? Starting points are important, and there are multiple points of entry into the Catholic intellectual tradition. Different starting points – fallen human nature and the fundamental goodness of all creation – arise from different biblical narratives, differing prophetic oracles of consolation and condemnation, different New Testament reflections on the mystery of Christ, different cultural experiences. No course of exploration exhausts the whole of the living faith of the church, because the mystery that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ remains inexhaustible mystery. Thomists and Augustinians need each other, even when they are contentious and contrary in the ways they address cultural issues that vex the Church. Ours is a “both / and tradition,” – faith and reason, sin and grace, the mysterious beauty and the tragic fallibility of human creativity.

One further point on this topic. Understanding the Catholic intellectual tradition in this way certainly has consequences for hiring and curriculum development. The “best of the best” from the depository or pool of past intellectual achievement can show up in classes in philosophy and theology, in political theory, literature, the sciences and the arts. To be well taught, students ought to be exposed to the breadth of Catholic thought and imagination, not just a single perspective.

Competent teachers will not censor the tradition. They will open it up both positively and critically, even though they will have their own predilections about what they find intellectually congenial. They will introduce the students to the life situations, controversies, and cultural conversations that gave rise to conflicts and to original thinking. But they will also teach students to go beyond valuing past achievements, to venture to do some thinking of their own. A single anecdote from my own teaching can illustrate the challenge to which students can and will respond.

I was teaching a course on Women in the Christian Tradition to upper level students at Catholic University in Washington. To complete the unit that looked at medieval thinking about women – much of it negative, as we recall Thomas Aquinas’s position that the human female was a “misbegotten male” conceived in a climate of unhealthy warm winds - the students were asked to produce a paper in which they imaginatively engaged in a respectful conversation with one particular Catholic intellectual whose writings we had examined. How they might set up the conversation was theirs to devise. I wanted them to engage with the author by affirming what they could agree with and by raising questions and offering their own informed judgments where they disagreed.

An imaginative and intellectually vital paper came from a student who actually rode the train home to North Carolina for the weekend. In her paper’s introduction she noted that she had hoped to have a seat for herself, but she had to share it with a portly gentleman, who turned out to be Thomas Aquinas. The paper was the fruit of her five-hour interaction with Thomas’s thinking about women.

Two believers united in one Catholic faith were separated by many differences in perspective because of the faith as they had received it, cultural knowledge available to them, and the cultural questions they had to face.

As I read her essay I was grateful that I had been able to hand on to her what I had learned from my own Benedictine professor of ancient and modern philosophy: never dismiss, criticize, ridicule or attack the thinking of another until you understand how those ideas took shape. Once you understand, then raise whatever questions and objections and additional information seem necessary in order to discern the truth more clearly. Any real question is a good question, even if it has no available answer. Censoring student's questions and objections does not honor the best of the Catholic intellectual tradition. The classics of the tradition deserve the honor of being examined critically, and the students deserve teachers who guide them in critical thinking. This is always difficult in times of rapid cultural change.

A final point is about introducing students to both "the deep pool" and "the rapids." Recently the Jesuit Michael Buckley wrote in the *Boston College Magazine* an article about the intellectual tradition and Catholic colleges. He introduced a distinction between those that understood themselves to be "custodial institutions" and those that were true universities. In context, the mission of custodial institutions would put the emphasis primarily on mediating elements of the tradition to successive generations of students, as a way of giving them the Catholic identity they were looking for. In custodial institutions, faculty and administrators looked into the "deep pool" of classics of the Catholic intellectual tradition and selected what they judged to be suitable to students' need to know. What Buckley called the "true university" was the institution of higher education that understood its mission to be to prepare Catholic students to face "the rapids" of life in the modern world, where questions would come from every direction. Note that Buckley is not asking whether an institution meets accreditation agencies' criteria for "college" or "university." He is focusing on the intellectual climate past and

present within which the institution identifies and pursues its mission. This is a question with a distinctive American history, and so in my next section – before returning to the Catholic intellectual tradition in our day - I want to recall two parts of our distinctive story as American Benedictine institutions of higher education.

## II. How American Anti-Intellectualism and Catholic Ambivalence Regarding the Culture of Modernity “R Us”

The U.S. Catholic church took shape under the immigrant experience, especially the mass immigrations of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most who came were European peasants and industrial workers seeking a better life. Relatively few were professionals or university-educated intellectuals. Almost all the higher and the lower clergy, the bishops and priests who led the church, shared the life circumstances of their flocks. They were the sons of peasants and laborers.

The Irish came to dominate the hierarchy and the seminaries the Irish bishops founded and presided over reflected the harsh circumstances and intellectual poverty of their origins. They were not seed beds for germinating intellectuals in the tradition of high medieval Europe. Fortunately or unfortunately, nobody was feeling any great need for intellectuals. The 19<sup>th</sup> century church, like the nation, valued leaders who were builders and administrators, not men given to speculative thinking. The immigrant church readily embraced the know-how and can-do spirit of the practical American culture, and they were esteemed precisely for this. We are the beneficiaries of their work. Yet we have also inherited the consequences of the intellectual poverty of our origins as a national Catholic community.

Fifty years ago the American Catholic historian Monsignor John Tracy Ellis published an article on “American Catholics and the Intellectual Life.”<sup>i</sup> In it he surveyed the impact of our non-intellectual

ecclesiastical culture on U.S. Catholic institutions of higher education. He found this reality documented in mid-century studies of the intellectual productivity of American colleges and universities.

On the basis of the data reported, Monsignor Ellis underscores the “absence of a love of scholarship for its own sake among American Catholics – even among too large a number of Catholics who are engaged in higher education.” He notes also how “prevailing Catholic attitudes in education” overemphasize Catholic schools [at every level] as “agencies of moral development with insufficient stress on the role of the school as an instrument for fostering intellectual excellence.” Further, he says that while “the inculcation of moral virtue is one of the principle reasons for having Catholic schools . . . that goals should never overshadow the fact that the schools must maintain a strong emphasis on the cultivation of intellectual excellence.”

Let it be noted, in the face of this sober assessment of the weak commitment of the American Catholic hierarchy and even Catholic institutions of higher education to intellectual excellence, that Benedictine monasteries and convents who founded Benedictine colleges and universities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries often made great efforts as communities to cultivate within them sub communities of scholarship and intellectual vitality. Young monks and sisters were sent for doctoral studies to major universities here and in Europe. Yet few of them, upon return, became productive scholars and researchers, writers of books and monographs and leaders in national professional societies. Why? Their lives were typically overwhelmed by prefecting in dormitories after long days in class and sharing in community labors. Can-do, know-how, and pastoral care commonly trumped promoting the leisure for study and creative thinking necessary for monks and sisters to make a contribution to the Catholic intellectual tradition. Pastoral care of first-generation college students, the children of farmers and laborers, fostered our early identity as custodial institutions, committed to introducing these young people to “the deep pool.”

Catholic colleges and universities -many of our Benedictine institutions among them - took seriously the challenge in Ellis's 1955 essay. They begin to aspire collectively to become productive universities, unafraid to negotiate "the rapids." By the early 1970's and '80's, under the leadership of Father Theodore Hesberg, then president of the University of Notre Dame, many Catholic college and universities leaders committed themselves to sponsoring "true universities, truly Catholic." Although they honored their history as "custodial" colleges where the Catholic tradition was handed on as heritage, they were equally determined to be participants in the intellectual life of the larger American university community, entering with Catholic faith into dialogue with the culture of modernity. The story of that effort is told in Alice Gallin's history *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education since 1960*. As she recounts it, one of the outcomes of the effort of that era was the growing concern among some ecclesiastical authorities and lay critics that participating in the intellectual life of the modern American university was an occasion for both endangering the Catholic faith and the Catholic identity of our institutions.<sup>ii</sup>

That interest in growing as "true universities, truly Catholic" ran into trouble. This leads us to the second part of our shared story, the Catholic Church's continuing ambivalence about the modern world. We participate with gratitude in the goods and blessings of modernity and simultaneously maintain a high guard against the culture of modernity. To understand our institutional unease, we need once again to look backward.

Fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe experienced a cultural rebirth, the Renaissance that laid the foundations for the culture of modernity. A major characteristic of that era was the new valuing of human reason. The traditional authority of faith – the biblical revelation mediated through traditional ecclesiastical authority - gradually lost its power to compel assent. There were many reasons. One example will make the point. Renaissance linguists retrieved the almost forgotten knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, the original languages of the Bible. Their new knowledge challenged the centuries-old

authority of St. Jerome's fifth century translation of the Greek and Hebrew Bible into Latin. Some churchmen even proposed retranslating the sacred texts from the originals into the emerging vernacular languages of Europe and disseminating them widely. Church authorities censured and condemned the linguistic innovators, recognizing correctly that with the proposed new translations they would lose control of traditional interpretations of texts. Reason and the authority of faith found themselves on a collision course.

A centuries-long cultural struggle evolved in Western Europe, with church authorities seeming to stand against the voices of reason and so evoking ridicule from those voices. A movement of cultural elites and intellectuals known as the Enlightenment gained prominence. It unintentionally fostered non-elitist, popular resistance to all voices of authority, and the unchecked *vox populi* generated the French revolution. The revolutionaries were determined to overthrow both ecclesiastical and royal pretensions to divine authority on any and all matters.

In a shockingly hostile act against the Catholic faith at the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the revolutionaries dramatically enthroned a statue of the goddess Reason on the high altar of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, symbolizing the breach between the authority of faith mediated through the Church and the authority of reason. That breach still characterizes the culture of modernity.

The Church found itself maneuvered into a defensive and often anti-intellectual posture throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Modernist thinkers were judged dangerous to the Catholic faith and their works placed on an Index of Forbidden Books. Catholic thinkers interested in engaging with their ideas were suspected of infidelity and were themselves condemned as modernists. This fear of new ideas and the questions human reason raised for believers could not help but influence the

intellectual climate that surrounded our newly developing Benedictine colleges and universities. But the fear was never all-pervasive, as an anecdote from my own student days illustrates.

In 1956, the year after Monsignor Ellis wrote about the widespread disengagement of Catholic colleges and universities from the intellectual life of the modern American university, my Benedictine sister philosophy professor sought the local archbishop's permission to use primary sources for a course on modern philosophy that she was offering for majors and minors. Not surprisingly, he refused permission; young Catholic girls did not need exposure to dangerous ideas. She negotiated, and got permission to provide us with judiciously selected excerpts from Kant and Hume, Spinoza, Hobbes, Nietzsche, and the like. She had a firm commitment to "the pool" of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, but she was committed also to preparing us for "the rapids." Accordingly, in those pre-computer and photo-copier days she managed to get an early IBM Selectric typewriter, and she reproduced massive sections of texts on the purple dittoes familiar to school children of the era. Equipped with our bad reproductions, she taught us not to fear ideas but rather to think about them, to read texts critically. She taught us to discover by practice and under guidance how to enter into the dialogue with modern culture, engaging both faith and reason. Obviously her diligence to equip undergraduates intellectually for engagement with the modern world was not the norm. Yet I am confident that you have stories from your own institutions that show that she was not the solitary exception.

How did it happen that a once proud Catholic intellectual tradition found itself under siege and cowered? Remember that the Church faced a literal battle front in Italy by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Papal States, territories owned and governed by the Roman See of the Catholic Church, were being summarily confiscated by Italian armies intent on overthrowing the weakened Church's last claims to temporal power. Forced to retreat on many fronts, Catholic identity took a distinctive new turn.

Church theologian and historian [Joseph Komonchak](#) looks at four expressions of that new Catholic identity, what he calls a distinctively new *Roman* form of Catholicism constructed at the end of the nineteenth century under papal leadership. The fourth concerns our interest, the Catholic intellectual tradition. But I will briefly name the first three, since the fourth is intelligible in the broader context. Furthermore, many in this room will recognize all of them as integral to the continuing search for Catholic identity.

First, the late 19<sup>th</sup> church generated multiple Catholic societies and associations under ecclesiastical patronage and authority. These groups drew Catholic inward and together. As Komonchak observes, “The associations had the purpose of promoting social contacts among Catholics in the hope that they could ... be kept from infection by liberal [i.e., Enlightenment] ideas and sentiments.” The groups’ names typically embraced the military metaphor of the embattled: *Knights of Columbus* and the *Legion of Mary*. Young Catholics learned to sing of themselves as “an army of youth ... fighting for Christ the King.” Struggle against the culture was promoted as part of modern *Roman* Catholic identity.

Second, ecclesiastical order was centralized in Rome in ways previously unprecedented. To appreciate this shift, Americans need only recall that the bishops of the United States held several Councils of Baltimore in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to handle matters of distinctive concern to the national and diocesan churches. It was the Third Council of Baltimore in 1863 that authorized the development of a national catechism, the Baltimore Catechism through which generations were formed in the faith. Local ecclesiastical leadership was steadily consolidated in Rome throughout the remainder of the century. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Roman See promulgated the first universal code of Canon Law, standardizing earlier centuries of local, regional and national church legislation.

Third, the emerging *Roman* Catholic identity was characterized by heightened devotional life that also found expression in the complementary metaphors of monarchical authority and military power. These devotions took shape from memories of the indignities of the recent past. They were intentionally aimed to counter the democratic values of the increasingly dominant secular authority. Within this context, for example the universal feasts of Christ the King and the Queenship of Mary were established; and generations of Catholic school girls aspired to crown the true Queen, the Mother of God, fully unaware that their devotional gesture was a continuing corrective to that eighteenth century revolutionary effort to dethrone Mary.

But our interest is in the Catholic intellectual tradition. How was it faring as the church struggled to redefine itself and to strengthen its identity as a unified voice and a unified force resisting the modern world? Having noted earlier the successive papal condemnations of those few Catholic intellectuals itching to engage modern thought through both faith and reason, it is not surprising that the Catholic intellectual tradition, too, became a protectorate of the Vatican. Komonchak observes that “An integral part of the Church’s response to contemporary challenges was its effort to take control of Catholic thought. . . . As the century moved on, it saw an unprecedented increase in the claims of Rome over the intellectual life of the Church. . . . Under Gregory XVI and Pius XI every significant attempt at independent encounter between faith and reason, between religion and modern society, came under suspicion if not outright condemnation.”<sup>iii</sup>

Such was the narrowing intellectual culture and the state of the Catholic intellectual tradition during the formative years of our Benedictine institutions of higher education. Nevertheless, Catholic intellectuals have never stopped thinking, questioning, imagining new ways to advance the tradition by facing the questions arising in the cultural “rapids.” This is not the place to recount any further particular biographies and movements that advanced the Catholic intellectual tradition in the Roman Catholic Church during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet it was this hidden, quasi-

underground work done in difficult circumstances for a century that laid the intellectual foundations for the Second Vatican Council that convened in 1962. Thinkers were more confident that the Church was ready to dialogue creatively and critically with the modern world.

What happened? It is enough for our purposes to recognize that the Council produced “a much more positive assessment of modernity for its intellectual, social, and political aspects,”<sup>iv</sup> most notably in its embrace of the notion of religious freedom but also in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, where the previously unqualified suspicion of modernity diminished, and appreciation of positive challenges and promises of modern culture was acknowledged.

Yet forty years after the Second Vatican Council closed, ambivalence about the achievement of the Council has spread. This is the era in which we are pursuing our current Benedictine mission to higher education. The conciliar spirit of confidence about the Catholic Church’s dialogue with the culture of modernity is being challenged by resistance to the new openness from within the Catholic community itself, even among some who profess a vocation as Catholic intellectuals. We live in an era of competing claims about Catholic identity. We engage in contentious “either / or” thinking: *either* the authoritative voice of the Roman church *or* the creative thinking responsive to local ecclesiastical and cultural challenges – poverty in Latin America, AIDs in Africa, multiple challenges in life science research in the United States. But the times always require the “both / and” balance of the greater Catholic intellectual tradition – holding the authority of the tradition in constructive tension with the creative thinking of believing intellectuals.

We judge before understanding the alternate perspectives of our brothers and sisters in the household of the faith. How do I know this, when I have not visited all your campuses? Directly or indirectly, our student bodies and their bill-paying parents have been formed by the past decades of contentiousness within the Church before they ever enroll as freshmen. Our faculties, our

administrators, and Board members have been marked by the ecclesial impasse. Quick, facile answers and the suppression of genuine dialogue in search of greater understanding have only exacerbated the tensions. So I come to my third and final part of this presentation point. What, if anything, do Benedictines have by way of resources to provide an intellectually vital academic environment that will affirm for our students, faculties, and administrative staffs, our Boards of Directors, and our alumni the expansiveness of the Catholic intellectual tradition and our commitment to it?

#### IV. A Potentially Transformative Meeting of the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition with the Catholic Intellectual Tradition

Interestingly, you have already begun to identify the way beyond impasse to vital institutional balance. In your earlier discussions of the Benedictine wisdom tradition, you named characteristics of the tradition that provided the spiritual foundations for your mission. These spiritual foundations are the very resources that you have available as you commit your institutions to a full participation in the Catholic intellectual tradition, its “deep pool” and “the rapids.” Your most recent text on the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition already opens up at many points the implications of Benedictine spirituality for the cultivation of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

You speak of obedience as “a commitment to listening and consequent action” and observe that teaching and learning about anything “are impossible without obedience, without listening to others with the awareness that no one possesses all truth, or knows everything worth knowing.” The Catholic intellectual tradition took shape through many successive generations as contemporaries with different view but one faith slowly learned “to listen and to respect the viewpoints of others.” Listening and respecting does not preclude critical judgment. But judgment that precludes listening, respecting and understanding viewpoints other than our own will inevitably lack intellectual integrity.

You speak of humility as “knowledge of self in relation to God, others and creation.” It is obvious that self-knowledge is blinded by intellectual arrogance, by overmuch confidence in one’s own readiness to speak the last word. The Catholic intellectual tradition has always been ready to learn in order to understand. Thomas Aquinas is a clear model here of intellectual humility; when his major work was completed, this most gifted thinker judged it a “work of straw” in the light of the divine truth he had tried to explore.

You speak of hospitality as “openness to the other.” And while you have focused your discussion on hospitality in relation to the appearance of unexpected newcomers to campus, your discussion can easily be extended to address the matter of the intellectual climate of your institutions. Strange and unfamiliar ideas, questions, and the perspectives of unexpected outsiders from the secular and ecclesial cultures need to be welcomed. A hospitable intellectual environment welcomes what seems “other.” An intellectually hospitable campus knows it must be prepared to receive the possibly transforming gift of Christ in the form of a new idea (See Rule of Benedict, 61:4). Yes, spirits must be discerned, but no spiritual discernment about what is good can take place when the unknown “other” is immediately viewed with suspicion or outright hostility.

My final comment points back to my subtitle, which is both question and invitation: *Shall we gather at the altar?* You speak of frequent communal and personal prayer as another distinguishing mark of a Benedictine institution. You explain that the life of prayer “opens up new space within which qualities and virtues such as compassion, integrity and courage can develop and grow strong.” You note explicitly that the intent of the cultivation of a life of prayer in your educational setting is “to cultivate by analogy a fundamental openness to the work of intellectual and personal transformation.” In this statement you affirm that the prayer life of the campus must be open, welcoming, humble, and obedient to the invitation of Christ to “come aside and rest a while.” Resting with one another in Christ

prepares all the institution's stakeholders to face with courage whatever this new millennium will demand for personal and institutional transformation.

Moving forward will require its own disciplined intellectual work on every campus that chooses to enter onto a path to institutional revitalization for a new century. Claims about the Benedictine wisdom tradition and Catholic intellectual tradition as fundamental to institutional identity are much more than marketing tools we own and can use to bolster enrollments and cultivate donors. The truer picture is that these spiritual and intellectual traditions will be alive on campus only if you who lead and sponsor Benedictine colleges and universities, and your associates in classrooms and offices, are yourselves possessed by them.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Tracy Ellis, "American Catholics and the Intellectual Life," *Thought*, 30 (autumn, 1955).

<sup>1</sup> Alice Gallin, OSU, *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education since 1960*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, "Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism" in *Modernism as a Social Contract*, ed. George Gilmore, Hans Rollman, and Gary Lease (Mobile, AL: Spring Hill College, 1991, pp. 11-41. (Typescript, p. 21. )

<sup>1</sup> Komonchak, "Modernity," (Typescript, p. 31).

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#### Recommended Additional Reading

Michael Buckley, S.J. "Schools of Thought," on line at [bcm.bc.edu/issues/winter\\_2007](http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/winter_2007)

Anthony J. Cernera and Oliver J. Morgan eds., *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, Fairfield, Connecticut, Sacred Heart University Press, 2000.

Ten essays from contemporary Catholic intellectuals reflecting from distinct perspectives.

Anthony J. Cernera and Oliver J. Morgan, eds. *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Vol. 2: Issues and Perspectives*. Fairfield Connecticut, Sacred Heart University Press, 2002.

Sixteen additional essays, grouped under the headings Stewards of the Tradition, Developing the Tradition, and Handing on the Tradition.

These two books may be ordered on line from the University Press.

Alice Gallin. *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education since 1960*. Notre Dame, IN; University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.

A history of the period by the former head of the 200 member Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment.

Joseph A. Komonchak. "Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism," in *Modernism as a Social Construct*, ed. George Gilmore et al, (Mobile, AL: Spring Hill College, 1991.), 11-41.

Available in typescript upon request from M. Collins.

Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, S.J. *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

A research work developed in collaboration with a wide range of Catholic intellectuals and Catholic college and university administrators.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> John Tracy Ellis, "American Catholics and the Intellectual Life," *Thought*, 30 (autumn, 1955).

<sup>ii</sup> Alice Gallin, OSU, *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education since 1960*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.

<sup>iii</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, "Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism" in *Modernism as a Social Contract*," ed. George Gilmore, Hans Rollman, and Gary Lease (Mobile, AL: Spring Hill College, 1991, pp. 11-41. (Typescript, p. 21. )

<sup>iv</sup> Komonchak, "Modernity," (Typescript, p. 31).

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Anthony J. Cernera and Oliver J. Morgan, eds. *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Vol. 2: Issues and Perspectives*. Fairfield Connecticut, Sacred Heart University Press, 2002.

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