

BENEDICTINE WISDOM & THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

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¹It's an honor to be here with you; to think with you about these schools that we love, about the work we do in them and why we do it, about our mission. I've been trying to think of an image for how I see my task and have settled on a linguistic one. My goal is to offer you a common historical, conceptual vocabulary, with a little grammar, that may help in our conversation about the Benedictine character of our schools. Many of you likely know much of what I have to say, but I think there is value in giving all the parties to the conversation a common body of information, common reference points—a common vocabulary and grammar, for thinking this through.

“Benedictine.” “Wisdom.” “Catholic.” “Intellectual.” “Tradition.” That is quite a collection of big ideas and notoriously hard to define terms. The idea of saying something coherent about them and their interrelations in less than an hour is a bit daunting. A wise person would no doubt be reluctant to rush into such a thicket. The fact that I am willing to do so ought to give you some question about my qualifications! Ah, but what's the fun in conceptual temerity? So let's dive in.

First of all, as a general orientation, a rather obvious comment: these terms, particularly taken together, are about the mission and identity of our schools. So we begin by adding two more big ideas to our collection: “Identity” and “Mission.” If we are going to think about identity and mission, especially if we are going to do more than just talk about it, we have gathered the right group. A primary element of your jobs as presidents and superiors, indeed, for the presidents at least, one could argue that *the* single most important part of the job is to be shepherd or steward of your school's identity and mission. I know it may often seem that it is about other things: raising money, managing conflict, expectations, dilemmas, raising money. But theoretically and—I am convinced—practically, all of this is grounded in your role as steward of the identity and mission. Externally, you know well that only when donors

¹ This address was given to a meeting of Presidents, Prioresses and Abbots of the Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities at the College of Saint Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota on June 28, 2006.

understand who you are as a school and share your mission they will support it. Internally, it is standard and wise managerial advice that we need to pick our battles. But on what basis do we pick them? I would hope we do not just pick those that are easy. We may pick some hard ones because their outcome is directly connected to our identity and mission. These are battles worth fighting. We store up political capital to invest it here. So, this is the right audience.

It is also **the right time**. I am usually pretty skeptical of claims that our time or our problems are unlike any the world has known before. This often shows only that we do not know enough history or do not recognize patterns. Or it is rather that the real thing that is historically different is that this problem now affects *me*. Nevertheless, there is something significantly new and different for our institutions in our time. *We as schools* need to attend to the formation of faculty, staff and administrators into our Catholic, Benedictine identity and consequent mission in ways we have not had to do before. Indeed, in many cases we even need to form presidents into a deep understanding of the mission and identity of the schools they are leading, the very mission of which they are the stewards. That, I take it, is why the ABCU is investing so much time in this topic.

Let me be clear. My point is not that mission formation was not done in the past and now needs to be done. It is not that people used to be born knowing this and now they are not. No, there *was* formation but it was not done by the schools *as schools*. It was done in the wider Catholic community and more specifically in the monastic communities. We all know that the Catholic identity of our schools, like so many other Catholic institutions, was carried for generations by the monastics of our sponsoring communities. The formation of presidents, faculty, staff and administrators into the Catholic, Benedictine identity of the school was done in and by the monastic community in its formation of these individuals into the monastic life. As schools we did not need to attend to this but could simply inherit the results of the work of the monasteries.² Those not in the community would pick it up by osmosis because the Benedictine presence in the school was so strong.

² Historically, if the school *qua school* needed to add anything to the formation, it was most likely around the academic, intellectual aspect of our identity as colleges and universities. As schools—and the presidents as mission stewards, were critical here—we needed to ensure and demonstrate to internal and external audiences that we were as much colleges as our non-Catholic neighbors (whether we were peers was precisely the question). The history of Catholic colleges and the AAUP or Phi Beta Kappa are but two better known examples. For a fascinating study of this around the particular case of Harvard's 1893 decision barring graduates of Jesuit colleges from regular admission to its Law School see Kathleen A. Mahoney, *Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America: The Jesuits and Harvard in the Age of the University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

This is an excellent model. Unfortunately we can no longer count on it. As our schools grew in size and complexity in the 20th century, an increasing number of lay people were invited in to help with the work. At the same time, the number of monastics was decreasing dramatically. As a result we no longer have that famous critical mass of faculty and administrators formed into the Catholic, Benedictine identity of the schools through their monastic formation. Beyond the significance of that loss in itself, it also means we have lost the principle mechanism we used to form the rest of us into that institutional identity and mission.

This is all well-known to you and profoundly important for the lives of our schools. After all, the identity of an organization does not reside finally in documents or buildings, not even beautiful mission statements or chapels, but in the people who embody and make *really present* that identity and mission. This is certainly true of our Catholic, Benedictine identity. If we are to continue to make this present to our students and the world in which we live, the schools need to attend explicitly and intentionally to the formation of their people. Like any other organization, we as schools cannot take our identity for granted as someone else's responsibility. We must build it or it won't be built. This is a natural and appropriate part of our maturing as organizations not defined simply by the monastic communities. We cannot forever, like children, be the beneficiaries of an identity built by someone else in which we passively reside. If we are and want to be Catholic, Benedictine places, then we as schools need to take responsibility for that.

Of course, we do not start from scratch or even from a nice neat hand off from an era of monastic formation to one in which the school takes responsibility for it. There is a positive mission momentum to be sure. We may also be heirs to a number of years of inattention, something of an inertial drift or generational lag. Confident in the power of presence, in the tacit formation by osmosis, and in the strength of our identity—all things to be proud of—many of our schools—and others like them, Protestant as well as Catholic—quite understandably hired people simply on the basis of their professional credentials, without regard to their support of the Catholic, Benedictine identity of the school.³ And once hired, they received no real orientation into the mission.

Since these hires did not benefit from the kind of formation lay faculty and staff received from monastics in earlier generations and since many lacked any general formation in Catholic

³ This is particularly understandable in light of the pressures noted above to prove our academic

culture from their upbringing, we find ourselves in many cases with a significant number of faculty who are indifferent if not downright hostile to our Catholic, Benedictine identity. A significant number of employees who do not share the mission would be problematic—perhaps suicidal—for any organization. Given the nature of faculty governance, it is even more so for colleges and universities.

To borrow an image from another realm of presidential responsibility, you might think of this as **deferred maintenance on institutional mission**. We inherited a structure built by the monastic community. It's solid, reliable, functional. But the monastic maintenance crew shrinks; it is able to do less and less and some things do not get done. The building is still standing and we can go on for a while, probably for some time—after all, monks do tend to build for the ages. But as with buildings so too with mission: eventually, even in the best of them, this deferral catches up to us.⁴

It's clear, though, that the paper being developed on “Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition” is an effort on your part—as an organization and as schools—to attend to your responsibility for mission maintenance. That the presidents and superiors are doing this together is exactly how it should be done. We need you to work together as full partners in shaping the living identity of our schools. One of the challenges of the paper and even more of

legitimacy as colleges (note 2).

⁴ We may indulge ourselves and linger a bit over this building image. Think of our Catholic Identity and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as a building. It was lovingly and carefully constructed but is now old with more or less deferred maintenance. We have three options:

1. We can treat it like the abandoned farm buildings we see scattered across the countryside. They were once fine and functional, probably sources of pride to their owners, but they are no longer serviceable. They are abandoned and allowed to collapse and disappear with time. We can do the same with our Catholic heritage. Or in a more aggressive approach, we could tear it down to make way for the new, a kind of intellectual urban renewal. So that's one approach: abandon it and let it collapse and disappear over time.
2. A second way of dealing with old buildings is to turn them into a museum in the interests of historical and cultural preservation. Something like Colonial Williamsburg, restored Native American villages, or historical theme parks. Here the buildings are kept in great shape; preserved as they were in the past as concrete memory and tribute to those who have gone before. This is certainly important. The effect is to create a nice place to visit—but not a place in which anyone can really live. We could treat the Catholic Intellectual Tradition that way, as something of a religious-intellectual theme park in tribute to the glories of the past. It may satisfy our historical curiosity but is not anything we can live in or that can be used for our lives today.
3. The third option is some sort of adaptive re-use of the old to serve current needs. It requires understanding of the original structures, what are the bearing walls and what are merely cosmetic features, etc. and it requires knowing what is needed for contemporary uses and a great deal of creativity to make these two come together. That is what we as institutions need to do with the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and our Catholic Identity. And as with re-doing the buildings, it

our work as schools is to translate this Benedictine character, the 10 hallmarks, from characteristics of a monastic community to a college or university. Benedict says that he is establishing “a school for the Lord’s service”[RB, Prologue, 45], but the way a monastery is a school is not the same as the way our colleges or universities are schools—especially not schools accredited by regional accrediting agencies.⁵

Wisdom

One major bridge for connecting monastery and college that is identified in the paper and that we are focusing on here is the idea of Benedictine-Wisdom. Wisdom is a notoriously difficult term to define. It vexed and intrigued Socrates and has engaged us ever since. For our purposes I will simply note a few salient features as a means of locating the concept on a broader landscape of ideas.

For one thing, wisdom is not the same as information. Not all people who know a lot are wise. The relationship between accumulating, imparting and acquiring information and being wise is one of the major challenges we face, not only in our schools but in our culture. We are awash in information, in the midst of what is often referred to as information explosion. But we are hardly awash in wisdom or experiencing a wisdom explosion. If anything, the growth of information is making us appreciate and yearn for wisdom all the more. In the midst of all this information wisdom helps us figure out what is worth knowing and why. I cannot know everything and just about any information I will need is readily accessible, so what should I learn and what should our schools teach? Addressing these questions takes wisdom.

Wisdom has to do with such things as understanding and judgment. Understanding involves not just know *what* is happening in any phenomenon—physical, human or spiritual—or even *how* it is happening but *why*.⁶ Significantly, understanding is not a simple, single or direct

affects everyone who works in them. And to be done well, those who work in the buildings should be consulted about the adaptations.

⁵ This is only exacerbated by the nature of Benedictine spirituality. In a recent article in *America* on Pope Benedict as Abbot of the church, Chris Ruddy observes: “Benedictine Spirituality is perhaps the least spectacular of Catholic spiritualities. Where the Ignatian, for example, seeks the greater glory of God as a companion in Christ’s mission, and the Franciscan a radical identification with the poor and crucified Christ, the Benedictine encounters Christ above all in the routine of daily life. Rarely dramatic, it is a deep life, grounded in steady prayerful attentiveness to God and in hospitable community” [“Pope and Abbot” May 22, 2006]. This is beautiful. But it does not readily suggest an application to a college. That is the task of the paper you are considering and the creative work that needs to be done at each school.

⁶ Diane Ravitch, scholar of education, once referred to “the Law of Selective Advancement (a relative of Murphy’s Law): “The person who knows “how” will always have a job. The person who knows “why”

activity in which one engages like thinking. As Paul Holmer observes it is appropriate to say, after returning from a walk, for instance, that “I was thinking.” It is not quite right though to say in the same way “I was understanding.”⁷ Understanding is not an activity occupying my time, energy or attention in the same direct way as thinking. So too wisdom. It is not acquired directly the way knowledge of anatomy or history or any number of formulas or algorithms may be.

Wisdom also involves our ability to make sound, effective—wise—judgments, to bring our knowledge and understanding to bear on decisions we make about life in the world and life with others. That is why people seek out the wise for advice. They are seeking not information but advice on how to act or how to live.

Finally, wisdom is a virtue. In the classical tradition this means it has to do with character. It is one of the necessary features of an excellent life, a life well-lived. In more modern terms we might say it is an attribute of the whole person. This means that formation in wisdom involves what we have come to designate organizationally as student development. The challenge here is not to fall into the trap of identifying the acquisition of wisdom with student development⁸ and the acquisition of knowledge with academic affairs. There is a plausibility to this but the very division is at odds with the tradition of education for wisdom in which knowledge, understanding, judgment, discipline are all part of a life of wisdom, all part of our development.

Now, what is the function of the qualifier, “Benedictine” applied to wisdom? There are undoubtedly many things we could tease out of a 1,500-year history. I want to highlight only two. The first is the idea that wisdom is cultivated in community. The guiding idea of Benedictine monasticism is that by coming together—living, praying, working, and studying together—they can better grow in wisdom (and holiness) or at least they have a better chance of so growing than they have on their own.

Second, monastic practice recognized, even if only tacitly, that wisdom—understanding, judging—is a function of how one lives; that it may be a fruit of how one lives. In the modern, western, post-Enlightenment, scientific world, particularly the world of education, we tend to assume that the relation between knowing and living, between what one knows and how lives is

will always be his/her boss” [Commencement address at Reed College, see <http://time-proxy.yaga.com/time/archive/preview/0.10987.959231.00.html>].

⁷ Holmer “On Understanding.” Unpublished manuscript.

⁸ Indeed, I would argue that we must be careful not to identify student development with “student development” as the term for one part of what we do at our schools.

uni-directional and that direction is from knowing to living, from theory to practice. I know certain things and as a consequence I live or act certain ways. Hence, if we want to change behavior we focus on changing the knowledge. There is obviously much truth in this. However, it should be equally obvious that this move is not automatic. Not everyone who knows they should exercise exercises. And more information about the benefits of exercise does not always make exercise more likely.

Not quite so obvious, though no less important, is that the relation between knowing and living may not be only one direction. The monastic tradition (wisely) recognizes that sometimes the movement is the other direction: knowing, understanding, wisdom also flows from how we live. Practices of charity, regular prayer, *lectio*, obedience, humility, and hospitality may *yield* understanding and not just be a product of understanding. Again, wisdom has to do with the interplay of knowing and living, it is a matter of character and virtue, and the Benedictine tradition manifests this in particular ways.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

There is much more we could say about wisdom in general and Benedictine wisdom in particular but this should be enough to give us a general sense of what we are talking about—and how elusive yet how present and available the ideas are. We now need to turn to the principle task of this paper, which is to “embed” this wisdom tradition in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. I will attempt to get at this by looking first at the history of the Tradition, particularly as it is manifest in Catholic higher education, and then focusing more explicitly on the guiding concepts or principles that define the tradition. My hope is that the *history* will give us something tangible to grab on to and the *concepts* will suggest ways of critiquing and contributing to this history as we move forward. Along the way I will try to connect this with the idea of Benedictine Wisdom and some of the ideas in the position paper you are developing on “Education within the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition.”

First a general orientation and a warning. The orientation is that we are talking about the Catholic *Intellectual* Tradition, not the Catholic Tradition or Catholicism in general. Catholicism involves a whole host of beliefs and practices, politics and prayers, saints and sinners. It is twenty centuries old and currently numbers 1.1 billion Catholics in probably every country in the world. We are *not* here talking about all of that. We are focusing on one aspect of it: its *Intellectual* Tradition, which is daunting enough.

Briefly stated, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is the 2000-year conversation resulting from the belief that thinking—serious sustained intellectual reflection—is a good thing and that it needs to be applied to our lives as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth as well as to everything else. There are things in the Christian faith that are worth thinking about and that benefit from serious thinking. Conversely, our intellectual lives, our understanding of human existence in all its vicissitudes, are enriched by including God and the spiritual dimension of life in the things we think about and how we think about them.

Moreover, it is important for us to recognize that colleges and universities *are not* and *should not be* the only places for this intellectual life. It occurs among novelists, artists, labor unions (at least it used to) and business people. It might even occur in a parish here and there. But we are considering it at our colleges and universities. Significantly, the Church looks to its colleges to *practice* a vital intellectual life and to *cultivate* that life in its students and graduates. These schools were founded by the Catholic community to preserve, understand, critique and extend the intellectual life of the Catholic community.

As Peggy Steinfels, retired long-time editor of *Commonweal*, has observed, “Catholic intellectual life is central to Catholic identity.” And “Colleges and Universities cannot claim to be Catholic if this tradition is not part of their core understanding and the tradition cannot survive if Catholic colleges and universities do not renew it, maintain it, nourish it, support it and pass it on.”⁹ The church founds colleges and universities to cultivate this intellectual aspect of its identity. It founds other institutions for other aspects, such as worship, social justice or basic religious instruction.

Thus, we do not fulfill our *religious* mission, we are not living up to our *Catholic* identity, and do not contribute what the church needs us to contribute to its vitality, if our schools fail to be places of vital intellectual inquiry. That is an extremely important point so let me repeat it: We do not fulfill our mission as Catholic if our schools fail to be places of vital intellectual inquiry. It is simply an un-Catholic move to pit these two against each other.¹⁰ More on this when we get to the principles.

⁹ “The Catholic Intellectual Tradition” in *Occasional Papers on Higher Education*, Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (November, 1995), 5 & 6.

¹⁰ As Hellwig puts it, “most basic to the whole enterprise is the institution’s respect and care for the Catholic intellectual heritage” [“The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University,” in *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, ed. Anthony J. Cernera & Oliver J. Morgan (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2000), 3].

The warning is that this intellectual tradition is big and sprawling and resists definition or characterization—certainly by me and certainly in the time we have. There are exceptions and counter examples to just about every claim I will make. There are dramatic failures to live up to its principles—the treatment of Galileo is probably the most obvious. There are less dramatic daily failures that we have all experienced – and perpetrated. In the end, though, there are patterns, characteristics and rationales that persist over time and across cultures that allow us to give a broad and generally accurate account of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

Historical Sketch

To make the connection with **wisdom**, and to understand the roots of Catholic intellectual tradition, we need to go back before Christianity to Greece. In the classical age of Greece, the era of Socrates (d. 399 B.C.), the Greeks devoted much thought to wisdom: **Sophia**. As noted above, they identified it as one of the four cardinal or foundational virtues of a life well lived—an *excellent* life (the others being courage, justice and self-control). They attempted to teach wisdom and even developed a group of people dedicated to this teaching, appropriately called the **sophists** – the wise ones. However, these sophists, as you know, had an ambiguous reputation at best—a lot like lawyers today. Intriguingly, the ambivalence about them is rooted precisely in their success. They were able to teach people how to use various techniques of reasoning and argument to achieve power and position in the society, to win cases in court, but it was not always clear they were as committed to the truth as they were to winning. The charge was that they could make the weaker argument defeat the stronger—a charge leveled against Socrates at his trial.

Plato was very concerned about this. He works hard in the *Apology* and elsewhere to show that his beloved teacher, Socrates, was not a Sophist. His love was truth and the good not winning. He took no money for his teaching and he died for it. Plato coins a word for what Socrates and his followers did to contrast it with the Sophists: **Philosophy**. It has the same root, *sophia*, wisdom, but it adds another component, *philia*, love.

The difference between the sophists and the philosophers was not simply their wisdom, not what they knew, but their love. What do they love? Wisdom or Power? Plato's insight was that the object of our love shapes the quality of our loves and the quality of our lives. This connection of wisdom and love endures in the Catholic intellectual tradition and is kept alive in a

particular way in the monastic tradition, as evident in the first hallmark identified in your paper: Love.¹¹

What the Greeks—Plato—and the monastic tradition help us see is that love is not only a *consequence* of our knowing; it is part of how we know, it affects how and what we know. If there is no *love for* and *commitment to* the truth—including painful truth—knowing and education are hardly possible. Knowing in this wisdom tradition is more than a *neutral technique*. Knowledge is power. Wisdom is knowing how to use it. And whether we love *gain* or *justice* will affect both how we use our knowledge and what we know. Wisdom has to do with the interplay of what we know and how we live.

It will also, of course, affect how we educate. Plato and his compatriots referred to this education for wisdom as *Paideia*.¹² Paideia included not just information and technique but also formation of character. Its aim was “to shape people in such a way that they are *in-formed* by virtue.”¹³ Specifically, that they could form in students “the virtue ... needed to function as responsible citizens.”¹⁴ To this end, their educational program included not just study of texts and ideas but an *ascesis*, a discipline and training that included such things as athletics and music. Ultimately, what was at stake was not just the character of an individual but the character of a culture. Education is not just for the accumulation of knowledge but for the vitality of their community.

This idea of education as formation of character, of the whole person, in virtues needed for a good life and a good community had a significant influence on the early church and the whole Catholic tradition—intellectual and otherwise. The earliest teachers and leaders of the church were formed this way and took it for granted that this is how they would educate those Christians in their charge. The goal of Christian education was the formation of a Christian

¹¹ John Neary explores this connection as it might shape teaching in “The Erotic Imagination and the Catholic Academy” in *Professing in the Postmodern Academy: Faculty and the Future of the Church-Related Colleges*, ed. Stephen R. Haynes (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2002), 149-166.

¹² The classic study of *Paideia* is Werner Jaeger’s three-volume *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, 2nd ed., trans. by Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945). In his introduction to the whole project, Jaeger makes a connection between education and community that could have particular significance for both Catholic and Benedictine education: “...education is not a practice which concerns the individual alone: it is essentially a function of the community. The character of the community is expressed in the individuals who compose it...”[xiv]. I am particularly indebted to David Kelsey’s comparison of *Paideia* and *Wissenschaft* in his study of theological education, *To Understand God Truly: What’s Theological about a Theological School?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), esp. pp. 63-100.

¹³ Kelsey, 68.

¹⁴ Kelsey, 65.

character. While this may have some significant differences from the Greek ideal, the *methods* and *assumptions* of how this was done were for the most part very much those inherited from the classical world. This is evident in the earliest Christian schools, most famously the catechetical school of Alexandria, and—of particular significance for us—in the writings and the practices of the desert abbas and ammas. It is also operative in Benedict’s understanding of how the monastery is a *school* for the Lord’s service or even why he would use that phrase. The practices of the monastery are forming people in the character and virtues needed for knowing God.

We as schools are not monasteries, but we might consider whether this principle of formation for knowing—understanding, judging, *for wisdom*, could apply to what we do. One concrete example: this could be a compelling *educational* rationale for practices of service learning. Such experiences of services—such practices—form the student to be able to know, understand, judge in ways they did not do before. It is not simply an application of what was learned in the classroom. The practice also teaches. This is *paideia* in the wisdom tradition.

This idea of education as *paideia* remained largely unchallenged until the 18th century, even beyond the monastic or Catholic tradition. It is related to the whole idea of the liberal arts and what they seek to achieve. It was the guiding force shaping that fascinating phenomenon of the liberal arts college in America. But we get ahead of ourselves. Let’s get back to the development of Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

History makes clear that the influence on Christianity of the Greek notions of wisdom and *paideia*, as well as much else from the Greek world is the norm rather than the exception. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is a product of the interaction of Christianity and the culture of which it is a part: learning from the culture, shaping the culture, borrowing some things, rejecting some things and modifying others. Christianity has been involved in this dance with the world from its very beginning, laying in its first centuries the cornerstones of what would become the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. I will highlight a few of these cornerstones very briefly as I think they illustrate some fundamental principles of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

- In the first generation the question arose as to whether **Gentiles needed to become Jewish** in order to become Christian. After all, Jesus, everyone he called to follow him, and all members of the Church were Jews. Put more generally the question was “Is the church open to people of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds than it was used to?” The answer was yes. In a decision that changed the course of Christianity

forever, it was determined that Gentiles did not need to become Jewish but could come into the Church as Gentiles (Acts 15). As noted earlier, they brought with them their Greek ways of thinking which affected virtually everything we know as Christianity and its intellectual tradition.

- In the second century a group of theologians who were trying to explain Christianity to their non-Christian fellow intellectuals¹⁵ argued that **the Spirit of the one true God had been at work in Greco-Roman culture** before the birth of Christ and outside the visible church or even the chosen Jewish people. Thus in addition to telling them about what God has done in Jesus, it would be prudent for us to listen to and learn from these non-Christians. Significantly, this is not just a ploy to convert them but an effort to hear the Spirit as it speaks in their experience—the experience of those who are not Christian.
- In the fourth century, at the **Council of Nicea** (325) it was decided that in order to express the ideas of Scripture and Tradition in that time and place, it was necessary to use words and ideas not in Scripture. If we are to say the same thing, we must use different words. Determining what to use from the surrounding culture is not an easy thing. It requires serious intellectual work—and we did not always get it right. Accepting the dominant culture's views on slavery and women are but two of the more egregious failures that come to mind. What we must remember, however, is that these were accepted in large part to fit in with the surrounding culture. Clearly, it was no easier then than now to know when to support and when to critique our culture.

So, there emerge from these early, formative centuries a few cornerstones on which the intellectual tradition will be built:

- We need to be open to those who are not like us.
- We need to think seriously about the culture in which we live.
- We need to use new ideas to understand and communicate the Gospel as we move to new times and places.
- We need to listen to those outside the church to hear what God might be speaking through them.

¹⁵ Typically referred to as the Apologists, they would include such figures as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Tatian, Theophilus, and Athenagoras.

And through it all the exercise of reason. Not a bad start. Not a bad tradition on which to build a college.

As we move out of the Classical era into the Medieval, the church and its clergy are heavily involved in continuing the intellectual tradition in the faded Roman Empire as writers, teachers and students. Here is where the monastic communities played an extremely important role in keeping alive the intellectual life of the West. From roughly 600 to 1000 **Monastic schools** were the principal centers of education and learning. As you know, the Rule of Benedict establishes a schedule for praying the Psalms, which means that at least some of the monks needed to know how to read them. It also urges *lectio divina*, a practice of meditative, holy reading. Reading and study thus become part of the monastic life of seeking God. Jean Leclercq captures this well in the title of his magnificent study of monastic culture, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*.¹⁶ The harmony and mutual enrichment of these two sets the tone for the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Note too how deeply this reflects the Platonic idea of the connection of love with knowing. What characterizes the monk, like the philosopher, is not merely learning but the *love* of Learning, not necessarily Godliness, but the *desire* for God.

To facilitate this reading, monasteries created libraries by copying books. Significantly for them, for Western history and for our schools and how we understand our catholic identity they did not just copy religious books, or safe, pious books. They copied just about whatever was available.¹⁷ They believed learning was good and that there was something in these books worth preserving and thinking about—even if they did not understand what it might be. Notice the fearlessness and confidence in that simple act of copying. This is central to the Tradition we’re claiming here: The Catholic and Benedictine Tradition.

¹⁶ “Education is not separated from spiritual effort,” writes Leclercq. “All the monk’s activities, including his literary activity, can have no motivation other than spiritual” [*The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1961), 18. As an example I have a friend in the St. John’s community whose *lectio* has included Einstein’s original essays on relativity. What is Einstein saying? What does it mean? What are its implications for my life and relation to God? Madeleine L’Engle also writes engagingly of finding in Einstein her deepest theologian (“The Possible Human,” *Cross Currents* Winter 1988-89, 385-94].

¹⁷ The story of this copying and other elements of cultural preservation and transmission by monks is well told in Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, (New York: Doubleday, 1995). From a totally different perspective and genre, Walter M. Miller Jr. makes a similar point about monasteries preserving culture in his science fiction classic, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959). Intriguingly, this is not only a Catholic or Western phenomenon. The Buddhist monastery of Dunhuang, China and on the silk road copied and preserved thousands of manuscripts. See <http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/dunhuang/>

It was not long before non-monks came to the monasteries as students. If you wanted your children to learn to read, this was the natural place to send them. They had the teachers and they had the books. Out of this, schools developed—or at least some formalized structure of teaching and learning. Later in this same period (600-1000) **Cathedral schools**, maintained by bishops for the education of clergy and usually in urban centers, became increasingly common. The basic curriculum of all these schools was the **Liberal arts**. Significantly, these were secular subjects, derived from classical antiquity, that preceded the study of theology or any other profession (medicine, law, teaching). Traditionally there were seven liberal arts in two sets: the **Trivium** of the literary arts: rhetoric, grammar, logic; and the **Quadrivium** of the mathematical arts: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, harmonics. Notice how the structure of this very curriculum affirms the idea that secular, humanistic learning is valuable to human flourishing and of service to the life of faith and the quest to know God. This is how you prepared to study theology. This is the tradition of which our schools are a part.

From around 1000 to 1300 some of these cathedral schools evolve into what Rabbi David Novak has referred to as “one of the greatest contributions [the Catholic] tradition has made to our civilization: the university as [a] ... community of teachers and scholars.”¹⁸ While the relationship to the church was not the same as with the monastic or cathedral schools, they were still closely connected. With the emergence of Renaissance Humanism and much more with the Enlightenment, there was a progressive distancing of Universities from the Church. We’ll come back to that.

To bring this story home, in the United States, as you know, most of the early colleges had a church connection of some sort, starting with Harvard in 1636. Catholics were not welcome at these schools and had a difficult time starting schools of their own because of legal

[dhintro.html](#) and <http://www.artstor.org/info/collections/mida.jsp>.

¹⁸ “Comment” [in response to Buckley, “The Catholic University and the Promise Inherent in Its Identity”] in *Catholic Universities in Church and Society*, ed. John P. Langan, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1993), p. 100. Rabbi Novak describes in these remarks why he as a Jewish graduate student came to Georgetown to study in part because it was a Catholic University.

As a bit of an aside, we might note that the Universities arose at least partly in response to an increased need for trained professionals of all sorts brought on by increasing commerce and trade. From the start, universities have been dealing with the twin goals of knowledge for its own sake and professional/career preparation. They have always been tied to the society of which they are a part and to the commercial and political interests of that society as well as the religious and academic or scientific interests. Moreover, as independent entities, universities have also been tuition dependent and needed to satisfy student demands which led to pressure to keep students happy. Students could (and did) migrate from school to school for popular or accommodating teachers. Cambridge began in 1209 when a number of unhappy students moved there from Oxford. In 1229 Oxford benefited from a group students moving

restrictions in the English colonies. John Carroll, first bishop of the U.S. (appointed 1790), hoped Catholics could attend the established colleges, but this was not to be. So in 1791 Georgetown was founded to offer higher education to Catholics. Since then there have been hundreds of Catholic colleges and universities founded across the country—including ours.

It is worth noting here that historically there are two reasons Catholics founded colleges: 1) To provide *access* to higher education and the dominant socio-economic culture for immigrant Catholics who were typically outside the mainstream of American life; 2) To *preserve Catholic culture and identity* in a predominantly Protestant environment. These purposes generate the basic mission of these schools—and a basic tension. The more successful they were in helping Catholics fit into the mainstream of American life (as they have been), the less distinctive they are likely to be and the less successful they are likely to be in preserving Catholic culture and identity. On the other hand, success in preserving Catholic culture and identity makes it more likely that Catholics remain a separate, sub-culture. This tension is very much with us and is a large part of what we need to think through as a community as we try to understand our identity as Catholic institutions and our mission, particularly in what is largely a post-immigrant, post-ghetto Catholic church in America. In other words our identity and mission as Catholic colleges in the U.S. cannot be separated from the place and self-understanding of Catholics in American society.

In the broader world of western culture, the last two centuries have seen shifts in our understanding of knowing and education that have profoundly affected our schools, our identity and our model of what counts as success and excellence. We noted earlier that Paideia as a model for education was assumed until the 18th century. What happened to change this was the Enlightenment. With this and the scientific revolution came the dominance of a model of knowing as scientific, neutral, objective and autonomous. Education, at least university education, is about acquiring this knowledge and the skills needed to understand, critique and—the ultimate goal—add to it.

Such education betters the human condition and human society by expanding our understanding of the world. With its close ally, technology, it also enables us to manipulate the world for the better, to improve our lot—which it has done. It is rigorous, specialized, professional – and successful. The general term often used to represent this approach to knowing

and education is *Wissenschaft* (German for science). It took institutional form in the University of Berlin, the establishment of which in 1810 is usually regarded as the origin of the modern university.¹⁹

Education as *Wissenschaft* and the university that practices and perpetuates it stands in tension with the model of education as *paideia*. For one thing, it is very uneasy about the whole notion of character formation or virtues such as wisdom being part of the educational enterprise. It is important and needs doing, but it is not the task of a university to do it.²⁰ If it has to be in higher education, it is in co-curricular activities or student development.

Not surprisingly, this development has significant consequences for American liberal arts colleges, especially church-related and specifically Catholic, liberal arts colleges. A significant number of U.S. faculty studied in Germany in the 19th century and brought that experience back to their schools. In addition, prominent leaders of American higher education in the 19th century were attempting to implement the Berlin or German model at their institutions: Henry Tappan, University of Michigan (1852-1863); Andrew Dickson White, Cornell (founder and president, 1868-85); Daniel Coit Gilman, Johns Hopkins (founder and president, 1868/76-85). Johns Hopkins plays a particularly significant role here in that it was founded (1876) specifically as a research university centered on graduate research and granting the Ph.D. It was self-consciously a Berlin in America and set the standards for the research ideal. The idea of these educational entrepreneurs was that the liberal arts college would continue to tend to character development, to *Paideia*, but that graduate Ph.D. education was *Wissenschaftliche* in the German model.

Well, you know or can readily imagine how this unfolds. As those who received their graduate degrees at the research universities joined the faculty of liberal arts colleges, they were not content to engage in or pass on to their students what they could only regard as some second-rate education and eventually remade their schools into smaller versions of the research universities. They may be more humane and caring—and be able to sell that legitimately—but

¹⁹ I recount this story more completely in “A Sense of Place and the Place of Sense,” in *Professing in the Postmodern Academy: Faculty and the Future of the Church-Related Colleges*, ed. Stephen R. Haynes (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2002), 73-111.

²⁰ In reviewing this history, George Marsden adds the important qualifier that “the German version of the scientific ideal was not a celebration of cold abstract analysis as the model for all thought. Rather German science, or *Wissenschaft*, was to take place within the context of philosophical idealism and could contribute to the larger humanistic goal of *Bildung*. Sometimes translated as cultivation, *Bildung* suggested the ideal of education as building character” [*The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 105]. However, in practice, as Marsden goes on to demonstrate, this context dropped out and the general effect on education was eventually to disconnect character formation from education that was scientific.

they are still forming—excuse me, *educating*—students into *Wissenschaft* with all the epistemological, anthropological and cultural assumptions that go with it. *paideia*

Perhaps the most significant challenge to Catholic colleges, or any church-related college, from this Enlightenment, *Wissenschaftliche* understanding of knowing and what makes a college a college is its notion that authentic knowing must be autonomous. To be rational, scientific, objective (all seen as roughly synonymous and generally desirable), one must be independent of particular, local commitments, traditions and practices, be they national, ethnic, racial, religious or gendered. Such commitments were seen as obstructions to the work of reason—bias. In order to see truly or to see the truth, in order to be reasonable, any such commitments must be set aside. Obviously this raises profound questions about the very idea of any college related to a church. Seen in this context the connection to the church is antithetical to the authenticity of the college as a college.

Starting with his case study of Vanderbilt, James Burtchael has described how this model took hold in post-civil war America and how college after college found itself confronted with a choice between excellence—as the now dominant *Wissenschaft* model defined it—and their church relation.²¹ Once put this way, it's hard to make a case—or a decision—against excellence. For Catholic colleges the dilemma was a bit longer in coming, but it has arrived. Burtchael asks whether post-Vatican II Catholic colleges and universities are repeating the history of post-Civil war Protestant schools. Whatever we think of his conclusions or his analysis, the question is one that we avoid at our peril.

Principles of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition

This is the historical context in which we need to understand and make a case for Benedictine wisdom and Catholic identity. To complete our picture of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, we need to augment this history with a brief overview of its guiding principles. I am using six that have been put forward by Monika Hellwig in various places.²² As we consider these six principles, it is important to remember that Hellwig is not claiming – nor am I – that

²¹ *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

²² Specifically here I am using a synthesis of “The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University” in *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, ed. Anthony Cernera and Oliver Morgan (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2000) 1-18 and “What Can the Roman Catholic Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?” in *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. By Richard Hughes and William Adrian (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 13-23.

these principles are *uniquely* Catholic. On the contrary, there is much in this Tradition that is shared with other Christians and other religions. Rather, the contention is that while none of these factors are unique to Catholicism, they come together in the Catholic Tradition in a way that is distinctive; that characterizes Catholicism and its intellectual tradition. In the end, however, the point is not to identify what makes this tradition different, but what makes it Catholic. If that turns out to be similar to others or different, so be it. The same could be said of our Benedictine identity. The primary task is not to be different—from Franciscan, Jesuit, etc.—but to be authentic. Whether it is different or the same is secondary.

The first and perhaps most significant of the six principles Hellwig identifies is the **Continuity of Faith and Reason**. As noted earlier, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the colleges and universities to which it gives birth are grounded in the conviction that thinking is a good thing. In the words of John Paul II, the “[churchly] origin of the university . . . expresses [the fact that] . . . the faith . . . the church announces is . . . a faith that demands to . . . be thought out by the intellect.”²³

The theological foundation for this conviction is the belief that God as creator is the source of all Truth (as well as Goodness and Beauty). Since reason seeks the truth it will ultimately bring us closer to God. All knowing has a dynamic toward knowledge of God as source and goal of creation. Sin—tragic and pervasive as it is—has not totally corrupted either creation or our reason. As a result, we need not distrust our knowledge of nature. On the contrary, we must, in the words of *Ex Corde*, “search for truth wherever analysis and evidence leads”[¶12n.15].

This deep and profound confidence in the creator and in our ability to know characterizes the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. It is what prompts us to found colleges and universities as places to think about anything and everything as part of the life of faith. Needless to say this is a high-risk move, for if we are mistaken about the convergence of faith and reason, we have sown the seeds of our destruction. Dangerous though it might be, however, it is also honest. After all, what is the alternative to such fearlessness for people of faith, people who trust that God really is the creator of the world in which we live and the source of Truth. What can it be but bad faith to think that we need to protect God from our quest for truth?²⁴

²³ “The Church Needs the University,” 8 March 1982, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition (May 3, 1982), 6.

²⁴ Jesuit theologian Michael Buckley explains this by saying that the Church needs to foster scientific inquiry because scientific inquiry raises serious questions about ultimacy and because it has a passion for truth. A faith not fed by these scientific questions and this passion is a faith diminished. This is the

Hellwig extends the rationale for this understanding of faith and reason with a second characteristic: the **sacramental principle**. This is about more than the seven sacraments. It is about the understanding of the world that is the context for those sacramental actions. The sacramental principle refers to the sense, pervasive in Catholic life and ritual, that the material stuff of the world—bread, wine, water, oil, but also stars, microbes and the person sitting next to you—all this can be a means for making God present. As such, the world not only *can* be studied it *should* be studied lest we miss part of God’s self-communication. We study the world to know God, to appreciate the glory of creation and the Creator. Hence the medieval idea that God can be studied in two books: the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature. The history of science is replete with people who understood themselves to be pursuing their scientific work as a means of tracking the footprints of God in nature. Moreover, not only can the *fruits of nature* be studied as sacramental, but *the work of human hands*—and minds—art, literature, music, technology, government all can have a sacramental character, that is, all can be a means of making God present and all are studied in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

Hellwig takes this in another direction when she points out that such a sacramental world-view draws on, shapes and stimulates our *imagination* and our *memory*. It teaches us to see the reality of the world as good and worth knowing but it also teaches us to see in things and people more than meets the eye. Such memory and imagination opens up realms of possibility that we might not have known before. In this way memory and imagination, a sacramental world-view, can help free us and our students from the **tyranny of the present**, the tyranny of thinking that the way the world is, is the way it *must* be. Such a narrow understanding can easily lead to despair on the part of those for whom the world is not a good place, or defensiveness on the part of those for whom it is, and all too often to violence by both.

The remembering component of this brings us to a third guiding principle: **Tradition** or “Respect for the Wisdom of those who have come before us.” If this tradition is a 2000-year conversation, it is appropriate, as with any respectful conversation, that those who come in later

rationale for the Catholic intellectual life. We need scientists to be good scientists. We need poets, musicians, playwrights and accountants to be good at what they do. It is in a special way the mission of schools like ours to nurture that life among all of us who work here as well as among our students. And one need not be Catholic to participate in that mission. One needs to be a good scientist with a passion for truth and an openness to the ultimacy such a passion raises [“The Catholic University and the Promise Inherent in Its Identity” in *Catholic Universities in Church and Society*, 74-89].

listen and not rudely disregard those who have already spoken. However, this listening, this respect for tradition does not mean that newcomers cannot speak or that they must say only what has already been said. It is not conformity, repetition or group-think. Rather, it is meant to engender humility about our own positions and a readiness to learn from others, the dead as well as the living. As Socrates demonstrated long ago, such humility and willingness to learn are the necessary conditions for learning. Tradition, learning from those who have gone before, is far more than some antiquarian trivial pursuit. Knowing that the world has not always been the way it is, can—like the sacramental worldview—help us resist the tyranny of the present. It may stimulate us to imagine ways the world could be different now. It can help us shape the future knowledgeably and responsibly. That is what our schools should be doing for our students, for the society in which we live. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is a significant resource in that work. And it is a work that both engenders and demands wisdom.

Thomas Aquinas, 13th century philosopher and theologian, is a good example of these first three principles in action. Aquinas is heralded by many as the prototypical Catholic thinker in part because of his enormous confidence in the harmony of faith and reason. He was so confident of their convergence that he was absolutely fearless in considering ideas and arguments. Steeped in the tradition, he was an innovator in theology and philosophy. He used philosophers that people thought could not be reconciled with Christianity and even learned from Muslim philosophy. We could hardly do better for a representative of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

However, there are two significantly different ways to understand his contribution to the tradition and how we stand with him in the tradition. One is that we follow and repeat his *answers*, the *results* he came to when he wrestled with the religious and secular ideas of his day. The other is that we imitate his *method*, his questioning intellect, his fearlessness in wrestling with the best ideas and arguments he could find. As 20th century theologian Karl Rahner once put it, we need to have the courage to ask questions, to think with the mind and heart we *actually* have and not with the mind and heart we are *supposed* to have.²⁵ This is the tradition of Aquinas. If we learn from him to think fearlessly, with the minds and hearts we have at the dawn of the 21st century, we may—like the Council of Nicea—come up with different answers than he did in the 12th century, but we will be sharing his faith in the creator, in the sacramental world and in the harmony of faith and reason. That is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

²⁵ “Current Problems in Christology,” *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (New York:

The next two principles we can deal with very briefly. **Integration** is the idea that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition seeks to connect the various pieces of what one knows into a coherent whole. It seeks to connect learning with living, raising questions of meaning and purpose, asking always, “How should I live?” It pushes for cross-disciplinary connections and what we have come to call the education of the whole person. In this it is clearly in harmony with the ancient tradition of wisdom and *Paideia*.

This plays out in a particular way through the characteristic Catholic affirmation of the **Communal Dimension of Life**. As Benedictine schools we talk much about community. People have a right to expect something distinctive from us here. However, commitment to community, also calls us to think about the common good and the interrelatedness of all that we do. As educators, we need to think of the impact of education on students and on society. If knowledge is power—and it is—how do we use it responsibly? Plato’s old question of the Sophists. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition, and education in its spirit, is about more than imparting information or maximizing individual advantage. It is not baptized sophistry. It also raises ethical questions and offers principles by which to answer them. It calls for and should impart wisdom.

The final characteristic of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition we will consider is what Hellwig terms its **Universality, Catholicity or Inclusiveness**. For many, it is surprising to see inclusiveness listed as a principle of Catholicism. But it is—and the problems we have living it out bring us face to face with the difficult issue of diversity that must not be avoided in any discussion of Catholic identity. It is also clearly related to the monastic virtue—hallmark—of hospitality.

Inclusiveness and diversity come in here around the idea of universality. After all, the very term “catholic” means “universal.” With more than a billion Catholics spread all across the globe (70% of them in Africa, Latin America, and Asia), one would be hard pressed to find a more culturally and racially diverse religious group. While the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is historically European, the last 40 years or so have seen the Catholic Church come to terms with the reality of its global character.²⁶ The challenge we face is for our intellectual tradition and

Seabury, 1974) I:153.

²⁶ Karl Rahner describes Vatican II as marking the second great turning point in the church’s history. The first was the move we described in the first century from the church as a Palestinian-Jewish group to the

the schools that cultivate it to be as catholic, as universal and diverse in practice as the global Church of which it is a part.

This brings us to an intriguing connection between universality or inclusiveness, and the particularity of commitment to Catholic identity. One of the great documents to come out of the Second Vatican Council, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*), makes this point well. Drawing on a tradition that goes back to those theologians of the second century we discussed earlier, it speaks with confidence of the Spirit of God at work throughout creation and not only in the church. It articulates from *within* the tradition a mandate to engage the world in dialogue, listening and learning as well as speaking and teaching [esp. no.1-4, 28-45, 53-62]. It also extends the Christian principle of love of others to enjoin diversity:

“Those also have a claim on our respect and charity who think and act differently from us in social, political and religious matters. In fact the more deeply we come to *understand* their ways of thinking through kindness and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them”[no. 28].²⁷

Ex Corde makes clear that this dialogue between church and culture should occur in a special way at Catholic colleges and universities.

The point here is that diversity and openness are not at odds with the Catholic tradition, they are not something we pursue *in spite of* our catholic identity. Quite the contrary, it is *required* if we would be truly catholic. This is not something we do to be politically correct or to fit in. It is something we must do to be Catholic. Thus using the affirmation of Catholic tradition and community to create a ghetto of like-minded people is a *misunderstanding* of the specific tradition of *this* community. This is all the more true for a part of that community committed in a special way to the practice of hospitality. Turning in upon ourselves in parochialism or sectarianism, *is a failure to live up to our ideals as a church*. In the end it is a failure to be Catholic, not merely a failure to be humane, relevant or politically correct.

Moreover, it is of the essence of a vigorous intellectual life to be open, hospitable, not only to people but to ideas. Here too there are resources within the Catholic Intellectual

Greco-Roman-European Gentile group. This second turning point, nineteen centuries later, is a shift from a European to a global church, finally becoming the claim of its name: catholic [“Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1981) XX:77-89].

²⁷ Notice here again the idea that understanding comes through love and not just the other way around.

Tradition that impel us to such inquiry. For one thing the tradition encourages a vigorous self-criticism. The biblical prohibition against idolatry and its histories of kings and prophets is remarkably consistent in portraying the imperfections of its heroes and the presumptions of its own institutions. *This* tradition, the practices of *this* community, are not simply cheerleading for “everyone and everything that is on one’s side.”²⁸ It is also critical of its own. Faithfulness to this tradition demands that we pursue the truth vigorously, even about ourselves, and that we not make an idol of our own constructs. Academically this ought to manifest itself in the cultivation of rigorous intellectual honesty with critical self-examination and humility. Wisdom is not an excuse for mushy thinking. Hospitality and community-building is not mutual self-flattery.

Unfortunately, the Catholic Church has far too often failed to live up to its ideals and forgotten its need for these intellectual virtues of listening, humility and self-criticism, forgotten its own tradition. It would be naive to suggest that such failures are all in the past, that these intellectual virtues are not now and will not in the future be threatened by forces of conformity from within the church. Real and frequent as that fight may be, however, the point I want to underscore is that it is a fight *within* the tradition and community of faith. It need not and should not be understood as a fight between *the church*, identified with the forces of conformity, on the one side and *reason*, the forces of secularism, on the other.

The church’s failures are evident, but it is very significant to me that we need not turn away from the tradition to assess them as failures. A strong sense of being located in the tradition and community of the Catholic Church does not turn us in upon ourselves in some smug insular ghetto. To be sure, the tradition gives us something to say but it also turns us outward to receive others as Christ, to engage them in dialogue, to be genuinely open to learn from them and to be critical of ourselves.²⁹

²⁸ George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 54.

²⁹ One huge question I have successfully avoided is whether the Catholic identity of our schools is only for Catholics? No, like all other aspects of our identity and mission, liberal arts, e.g., it must be an institution-wide concern. We should not shift from relying on the monastic communities to bear the mission of the place we work to relying on the Roman Catholics. It is not unreasonable that, like the monastic communities, the Catholics on our campuses might care about Catholic identity in a particular way. Nevertheless, it is not just theirs. It is a mistake to shift the responsibility for our *collective* mission to any subset among us. We are in this together.

With regard to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in particular it is important to recognize that it is a body of knowledge, a set of claims and constructs that can be studied by anyone, whatever their particular religious commitments. For one thing, if Catholics are to understand their own tradition, they need to do so in dialogue with those who are not themselves Catholic. The diversity of backgrounds in

It is the privilege and the responsibility of the Catholic college to be the special locus of this dialogue, to exist in the midst of the vulnerability that is its constant companion. Confident that it will be a better church for it, the Catholic community commissions its colleges—and you and me—to engage in this dialogue in order to understand better the world, the church and the ways of God in both. We do this at our schools in a particular way out of the heritage of Benedictine Wisdom. It is a great thing you are doing for us by keeping alive this idea and ideal.

our schools is a strength of these institutions not a weakness—and it is a strength precisely as Catholic. It makes us more Catholic, not less.

Since this is one of the most sensitive issues around any discussion of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Catholic Identity of our schools, I would like to offer a non-religious example that I think has some intriguing parallels: **Historically Black Colleges and Universities**. A central part of the mission of these schools is preserving, studying, and advancing African-American culture and the issues that pertain in a special way to the African-American community in the United States. This is one of the reasons they exist. In addition to ensuring that African-Americans have access to higher education, they are also to ensure that African-American culture and tradition are not lost in the melting pot, that their voice remains in the conversation. Their success in this is important not only for African-Americans but for our whole society.

The study of this tradition, intellectual engagement with it, is available to those who are not African-American and can be enriched by those who are not African-American. If one taught or worked at one of the historically Black Colleges it would be important to care about this part of the mission. One might even want to learn about African-American history and culture and the issues that pertain to that community more than if one taught or worked elsewhere. To be sure, the focus on African-American culture is not all they do. They do not have an African-American math or physics—though they might look at how race has played a role in the scientific community. But preserving, critiquing and handing on this heritage is something they need to be sure to do amidst all the rest that they do. As institutions they must care about this heritage. If they do not there is no real reason for them to continue. The people who work in those institutions—black or white—need to care about this heritage if the schools are to carry out their mission.

So too with Catholic institutions and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. This tradition is not simply a historical artifact that we tend in some sort of museum or curio shop. It is connected to a living community of Roman Catholics around the world, who have a continuing stake in this intellectual tradition. That community feeds and is fed by this intellectual tradition and what institutions like ours do with it, how we help preserve, understand and apply this heritage. And, we would like to think, it is important for the wider society in which we live that this Catholic voice not be lost in the melting pot. For example, preserving, understanding and applying the idea of a just war is both true to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and a significant service to American society. We would all be impoverished if that went silent.