A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY IN THE KIMBERLEY

Reflections on a Catholic Identity

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THE NATURE AND MISSION OF THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

Faith in God and God’s revelation and faith in humans’ ability to know truth are united, not opposed, because they come from the same God.
- John Paul II

It is often taken for granted that Catholic universities rest upon the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. However, too often there seems to be a neglect of the question, “What is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?” This chapter will endeavour to answer that question.

A Tradition that Unites Faith and Reason

First, Pope John Paul II opens Ex Corde Ecclesiae by stating that a Catholic University’s task is to unite faith and reason through rigorous intellectual inquiry. That is, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition aims “to unite existentially by intellectual effort ... the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth” (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n.1). This unity of faith and reason was crucial at the founding of modern universities last millennium. Universities were founded as institutions that united faith and the pursuit of knowledge.
However, it is important to note that, when we say “faith” in this context, it may be taken for granted that we mean “faith in God.” However, the founding of universities was also a time when people wanted to affirm faith in human beings – in our ability to know truth, to develop conscience, to work for the common good and the advancement of our race. So, I would emphasise that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition unites knowledge and reason with the dual intellectual commitment to faith in God and faith in humanity.

**Faith, Reason and Integration**

In terms of the more theoretical aspects of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, John Paul II reminds us in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* ([n17]) that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition promotes the integration of knowledge and that a specific part of that integration is promoting “dialogue between faith and reason.” The integration of faith and reason is an historical and traditional element of Catholic higher education, but an essential part of Catholic Intellectual Tradition also thus stands against the current trend of higher education to fall into compartmentalisation and disintegration.

This tradition is not without current challenges. As Liddy notes (2000, 523), for centuries the Catholic Intellectual Tradition used scholastic philosophy to unite the university curriculum. However, from the 1960s, the limits of scholastic philosophy became clear and there emerged a division within Catholic higher education between those who wished to preserve an outdated integrating philosophy that imposed unity on the other disciplines, “from above,” and those who wanted to encourage the autonomy of individual, specialised disciplines (Gleason 1995, 296).

Despite those debates, the need for a unitive, integrating philosophy became evident. As Turner notes (1998, 255), secular institutions, as well as Catholic ones, felt the strong need for integration rather than fragmentation; and unity rather than compartmentalisation. We do see such an integrating philosophy in Lonergan’s generalised empirical method, which brings together multiple
disciplines under the mantle of explaining how we know, why we know, what we know and by what method we should pursue that knowing (Lonergan 1992, 95-96). John Paul II likewise sought a renewal of Catholic philosophy and theology that would unite different pursuits of truth under a common mantle.

As per Lonergan and John Paul II’s visions, instead of promoting a cacophony of disciplines whose practitioners cannot understand one another, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition draws a university to the unity of all truth. This unity has a two-fold effect. In the first place, it leads to genuine interdisciplinarity, most importantly, by uniting different branches of truth under the mantle of higher truth and wisdom. In the second place, this unity of disciplines enhances the relationship of faith and reason. As Pope John Paul II writes (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n20), it leads to the realisation that “the things of the earth and the concerns of faith derive from the same God.”

This vision is essentially theological, and Pope John Paul II does see theology as playing a vital part in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. First, theology “plays a particularly important role in the search for a synthesis of knowledge as well as in the dialogue between faith and reason” (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n19). In his view, theology gives meaning to other disciplines and orients them towards the needs of human beings.

Secondly, the theological vision of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition distinguishes a Catholic university from a secular university, or even from some other religious universities that do not share the same theological vision. Pope John Paul II states (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n1) that Catholic universities share with all other universities a joy in the truth, “which is that joy of searching for, discovering and communicating truth in every field of knowledge.” Even if that statement needs qualifying in the light of the political polarisation and political correctness rampant on so many campuses today, Pope John Paul II’s next point highlights the importance of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Instead of pursuing truth or knowledge without the compass of higher purpose, he argues (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n1) that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition unites two orders
of knowing reality, those being the human search for truth, and the “certainty of already knowing the fount of truth,” which is God. This position stands in contrast to those who would situate in stark opposition the human pursuit of knowledge and faith in God. As an evangelist for atheism, Richard Dawkins (2006, 282-286) is a prominent example of those who would thus oppose faith in God and faith in human reason.

The point that faith in God and the human search for truth are two orders of knowing reality also needs clarification. The human search for knowledge is what we can call an “upward” search for truth. It begins with human experience and the acquisition of data, which is then subjected to questions, understood and then judged reasonably to be true, or not. The certainty of faith, on the other hand, is a “downward” reception of the truth of God, who is revealed, through Scripture, tradition or other means. This God is then greeted with the faith that is “born of religious love,” and subsequently believed in by people who trust that what God has revealed is true (Lonergan 1994, 44-45, 115, 121, 321, 336 and Ogilvie 2001, 143-154). Having clarified that point, what is important for John Paul II is that the two orders of knowledge are not opposed, but complementary in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Faith in God and God’s revelation and faith in humans’ ability to know truth are united, not opposed, because, as John Paul II puts the point (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n20), they come from the same God.

To add to Pope John Paul II’s point, we should say that the reason that faith and human reason come from the same God is because, in the first place, God has not only revealed himself, but also has created human beings and their intellects in God’s own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). In this way, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition begins with a Biblical anthropology. It is characterised by the conviction found in the Book of Genesis (1:27) that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. This belief means that our intellectual pursuits begin with our conviction and commitment to the inalienable dignity of every human person. When we do our research and
teaching, our tradition calls us to treat our fellow humans and ourselves as precious to God and worthy of utmost respect. That faith in the dignity of people is a characteristically Catholic outlook. It is shared by many other faiths, such as Judaism, but not all. Unfortunately, there are some other faiths that are pessimistic about human beings and our ability to do good in this world. After all, John Calvin famously stated that, “Everything Proceeding from the Corrupt Nature of Man [is] Damnable” (Institutes 2, iii). Radical Islam also over-emphasises human ignorance and incapacity to know in contrast to Allah’s knowledge (Quran, 2:216). Our conviction in the dignity of human beings means that in Catholic intellectual pursuits, we should always have concern for our students and the weakest in our communities. That is, we are called to have concern not only for the powerful, those who can pay expensive fees or those who will have the highest post-graduation incomes. We are called in service to the common good of all of humanity.

It should also be emphasised that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition’s integration and union of faith and reason is a fertile union that has flow-on effects, chief among which is an interdisciplinary approach to reality. Pope John Paul II (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n20) sees that when different disciplines are taught properly, and when they are aided by philosophy and theology, interdisciplinary studies result with students developing a view of reality that is united, organic and in which all things are related, rather than disintegrated and separated. I would concur that this interdisciplinarity occurs in both “upward” and “downward” modes. In the upward-looking mode, the higher viewpoint of wisdom gained from transcendent perspective can unite different disciplines under the one mantle of faith. At the same time, the downward-looking mode takes this higher perspective and challenges students to question their methods in inquiry, to inquire into the broader implications of their studies and to pursue an ethical purpose in their inquiries.

The importance of theology for integrating faith and reason should now be clear, but at the same time, philosophy has also been a vital part of the Catholic
Intellectual Tradition. Indeed, as Ormerod notes (2002, 16), philosophy is the discipline that provides an “integrative framework” that can unite particular branches of knowledge within a common worldview. However, as we see in Liddy (2000, 523) this integrative philosophy is constituted not by the objects or contents of philosophy, but its subject, which is the human person. That is, the philosophy vital to the Catholic intellectual tradition explains the “dynamics of human understanding” and through explaining human knowing itself, established the method of human knowing, in which we find the foundation of all human knowledge. An eminent example of such basic philosophy is in Bernard Lonergan’s Insight (1992) which draws readers to explore their own intentional consciousness philosophically and to come to an understanding of the structure of their own knowing processes in all areas of their knowledge.

Such a self-appropriation of one’s intentional consciousness brings a person to an affirmation of oneself who “experiences, questions and is capable of understanding, judging, deciding, loving” (Liddy 2000, 524). This sort of self-knowledge has a dual effect. In the first place, it frees a person from those various misunderstandings of human knowing that lead to errors such as materialism, idealism, or relativism. In an article on evolutionary theory (2009), I have highlighted how faulty understandings of human knowing have led to scientific errors, such as what has been called “Darwinian Fundamentalism” (Gould 1997).

In the second place, a philosophical self-appropriation of one’s consciousness allows a person to understand the intelligibility of faith in their human knowing. With such a self-understanding of faith, as Liddy puts the point, (2000, 525) a person of faith can place faith in relation to other “areas of human knowing,” to acknowledge “the proper autonomy of all these other areas,” while at the same time setting them “within the higher viewpoint of faith.”

From another perspective, a philosophy of human knowing finds genuine interdisciplinarity and integration in the self-understanding of the knower. This
is how philosophy serves the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as what Lonergan (1984, 8) called “the basic and total science,” which does not “deal with the whole of knowledge, but rather with the whole in knowledge, that is, the integration of the disciplines.”

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is Moral

The ethical purpose and positive anthropology to which I have just referred reflect the fundamentally moral orientation of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Taking its prompt from Greek philosophy, Catholic theology, especially as articulated by Thomas Aquinas (De Veritate, Q. 1 A.1), has seen the true, the good and the beautiful as one. This means that goodness, virtue and an ethical dimension are intrinsically united with the pursuit of truth.

The implications of this moral and intellectual union mean that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition does not operate in a moral vacuum. In practical terms, it exists to serve the human person. So, as John Paul II says (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 18) “Because knowledge is meant to serve the human person, research in a Catholic University is always carried out with a concern for the ethical and moral implications both of its methods and of its discoveries.” In other words, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is a tradition with conscience that sees learning and discovery as being ordained to the good of the human person.

Thus, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, specifically as a tradition that embraces Catholic faith and values, is not immune to the challenge of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (25:31-46), “when you did this to the least of my brothers, you did it to me.” We can thus bring together the Jewish-Christian anthropology of human beings being created in God’s image and Jesus’ words that when we do things to other humans, we do them, “to me [Jesus].” That presents a challenge to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and to a Catholic university working in the Kimberley. It would seem that a University’s mission to Indigenous Australians is mandated by the University and its tradition being ordered to this ethical mission. At this stage of history after two centuries of
dispossession and oppression, the good of Aboriginal people is of great concern to Jesus Christ and His followers. In an age in which universities are bending to the idols of budgets and government over-regulation and the afflictions of bureaucracy, it can be tempting to ask, “Why should a university invest so many resources into Indigenous education?” Yet the answer in Christ’s words is that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition demands that a university serve the needs of the most needy persons. From another perspective, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is an academic embodiment of the disposition shown by St Martin of Tours. He was a soldier, who met a near-naked beggar while he approached the gates of the city of Amiens. Without hesitation, he cut his military cloak in half, keeping one part for himself and giving the other part to the beggar. In a dream that night, Martin saw Jesus wearing the half-cloak and he heard Jesus tell the angels: “Martin ... clothed me with this robe.” The challenge for a Catholic university in the Kimberley thus, is to bring this ethical perspective to our work and to treat our students and our community just as we would treat Christ.

The Biblical Worldview.

I have touched upon the importance of Biblical anthropology for the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. However, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is also rooted in a wider Biblical worldview. We often take the Bible for granted, but if we read it within its cultural context, we realise that Biblical theology, in fact the Biblical worldview, represents a rebellion against the normalcy of evil, a point made very well by Philipe Nemo (2006, 29). Prior to the message of Israel and its prophets, the ancient Near Eastern religions had taken evil and suffering for granted, as a necessary part of human life. They resigned themselves to the inevitability of suffering and accepted evil and suffering as fate. This fatalistic worldview seemed to absolve people of responsibility toward suffering.

In contrast to their Near Eastern neighbours, the Hebrew people introduced the Biblical ethics of compassion. This Biblical ethic of compassion says “no” to suffering and rejects the inevitability of evil (Nemo 2006, 30). The Biblical
revolution rejected the inevitability of evil and suffering, and instead embraced a worldview in which, with God’s help, we could work against evil, and eliminate suffering in the world which was to come.

This Biblical worldview reached a high point, if one pardons the pun, in Jesus’ sermon on the mount, which challenged people to take responsibility for suffering, even when it is not caused by them (Nemo 2006, 30). This is a point vital for a Catholic university’s mission in the Kimberly and the cause of Reconciliation in general.

During Biblical times, not a lot of that worldview was put into philosophical categories. But when the first Christians came into contact with other cultures, the Christian communities fostered an intellectual tradition that embraced dialogue between their faith and the intellectual cultures with which they came in contact (cf. Boston College, 6). Sometimes they adopted parts of those cultures that could give expression and intellectual credibility to the faith – other times these traditions were used as intellectual sparring partners to make the tradition more robust.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in Medieval Times

The “Gregorian reforms” are named after Pope Gregory (1073-1085). His reforms were crucial in forming the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as we have it today (Nemo 2006, 57). At this time, reason was given its due place by the Church. After Pope Gregory, we saw the birth of the first universities, which were products of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. It is there that reason was used in a way that was systematic and abstract, not linear, historic and symbolic. In other words, scholars were no longer content just to expound the teaching of great writers of the past. Instead, they explored topics systematically and often dialectically, as in the method of using disputed questions.

At this time, in the Papal Revolution, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition did explicitly and systematically what had been brewing for a millennium; it synthesised the philosophy, law, and faith of Christianity and different cultures.
As Nemo puts the point (2006, 57), at this time Faith was seen as expressing itself “through the flowering of human nature”.

At this time, at the formation of the first Universities, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition came to take on the ethical and eschatological ideals of the Bible and to employ reason in order to meet those ideals. In other words, in a systematic, intellectual way, we began the project of improving our world not by coercive politics or the force of armies, but through the pursuit of learning (Nemo 2006, 57).

**St Thomas Aquinas**

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in these times received its most substantial articulation from St Thomas Aquinas, who, through a thorough analysis of humankind, engaged the moral, political and economic issues of the day (Nemo, 2006, 56; Boston College, 7). Thomas Aquinas’ pursuit of truth led him into intellectual conversation with diverse partners. He used Aristotle at a time when some in the Church were suspicious of the ancient philosopher’s teachings, but he also entered into dialogue with Muslim and Jewish thinkers such as Averroes and Maimonides. Aquinas’ passionate engagement with the intellectual pluralism of his times enriched and was a key contribution to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. It is ironic though, that Aquinas was attacked, notoriously by Archbishop John Peckham (Lonergan 1964c, 49), who complained that Thomas’ followers relied upon new “philosophic dogmas” that put “idols” and “the vanity of conflicting questions” into the house of God. Peckham faded into obscurity, but there are many Peckhams today. They may reject the Catholic Intellectual Tradition’s encounter with Aboriginal thought and law today; but I propose that if Aquinas were alive today in the Kimberley, he would be asking, “How do we integrate Aboriginal people’s thought into the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?”

Thomas Aquinas also heralded a vital development of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition: that is, to seek out not only authorities, but also reasons
When asked whether authorities or reasons were more useful for instructing students, Thomas replied (Quaestiones Quodlibetales, IV,q9a3 [18]) that an argument could have either of two intentions. On the one hand, an argument could be aimed at removing doubts, so that one was concerned with establishing the intellectual certainty of what is so. In that case, one was better served by appealing to the authorities recognised by the hearer.

Thomas explained, however, that one could also intend to bring a student to understand the truth at hand. If one sought understanding, one would leave a student empty if one appealed only to authorities, for the student would have neither understanding, nor any grasp of the principles of the matter. In Thomas’ words, “the listener will indeed be made certain that the matter is so; but he will acquire no scientific knowledge or understanding and will go away empty” (Quaestiones Quodlibetales, IV,q9a3 [18]). Aquinas argued that one is better served by establishing the reasons that both illuminate the grounds of the truth, and also enable one to know how what is said is in fact, true.

Thomas highlighted the quality of questions. There is a difference between knowing that something is so, and knowing how it is so. This is like the difference between describing the reality that “objects fall” and the explanation that objects fall according to the laws of gravity.

That concern for reasons, not just authorities, cannot be underestimated. Thomas emphasised that we need to know not just “what is so,” but to be able to know “why is it so?” As much as this method began in theology, it was a method that gave birth to modern science as we know it today. I would be bold enough to say that without this crucial development in Catholic Intellectual Tradition, we would not have the modern science, math or other knowledge that we have today.

That answers a question some teachers in Catholic Universities ask: “How can we teach something like mathematics in a way that is Catholic?” Now, while the content of mathematics may have no faith component; if we take an historical perspective, we realise that without the rigorous pursuit of scientific
knowledge that was fostered by the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, we simply
would not have the mathematics or science that we enjoy today.

What is “The Catholic God”?

At this point, we come to a key question. If the Catholic Intellectual
Tradition is about uniting faith and reason, that is, fostering both faith in
humanity and faith in God; what sort of God are we talking about? Archbishop
Timothy Costelloe gave an address in 2013 in which that question and an
answer to it became very clear. Archbishop Costelloe argued (2013, 3) that a
Catholic university is not just committed to any God, but it is committed
specifically towards a God who, “is a creating God, a God who is deeply
committed to and involved in the world and its history, a God who created
human beings as the high point of his creative activity, a God who sent his divine
son to humanity as its saviour...” In other words, the God to which a Catholic
university is dedicated is a God of love and compassion, a God who is on the
side of human beings, who loves people and wants the best for us.

The nature of the God, to which Catholic universities are committed, is even
more important if we appreciate the radical nature of that notion of God. To
give an example, the first creation story of the book of Genesis (Chapter 1) was
written to subvert and oppose pagan notions of God, especially those found in
the Akkadian epic Enuma Elish, which was written in the areas later known as
Assyria and Babylon (modern-day Iraq) and to which the Israelites were
subjected during their Babylonian captivity. Enuma Elish (Pritchard, 1969) tells
of gods who were warmongers and spiteful. They were gods who cared little for
their creation, seeing the world and its elements as mere tools. These gods were
capricious, they cared not for humanity, and created humans only as savage
slaves with no dignity. As the text says (Pritchard 1969, Tablet VI) of the creation
of humans:

[Marduk said] Blood I will mass and cause bones to be.
I will establish a savage, 'man' shall be his name.
Verily, savage-man I will create.
He shall be charged with the service of the gods that they might be at ease!

One might observe through history that people tend to treat each other the way they see themselves treated by their gods. The ancient Babylonians thought that the gods were either the slaves or masters of one another, and that all the gods were lazy deities who kept human beings as dumb savages to be the slaves of the gods. Under that religious outlook, the Babylonians found it easy to lead lives of laziness and luxury while they were kept by poor uneducated slaves. They worshipped gods who were inconsistent in their righteousness and who basically bribed one another to forget about their transgressions. So the Babylonians felt no need to be consistently just in their dealings with other people.

The Hebrew Bible, however, speaks of a God who is good, who is loving and willfully creative, who is righteous, a God who is just. Within the Jewish tradition, and the Christian faith from which it sprang, is the imperative for followers of Israel’s God to be followers not just with their lips but to follow God in being just, in being creative, and in loving people and serving others.

The God to whom a Catholic university is committed is also reasonable. That point sounds almost obvious, but it is not taken for granted in all faiths. In the Catholic tradition, God is reasonable, and in fact, is Reason itself (as its creative origin). In the Catholic university’s mission, commitment to reason and its commitment to God are thus one and the same. Having said that, a commitment to a God who is reasonable distinguishes the Catholic Intellectual Tradition from some other faith traditions and even from aberrations of the Catholic tradition. As Pope Benedict XVI observed in his Regensburg Address (2006), in the Middle Ages, certain trends within Catholic theology abandoned the reasonableness of God. While Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas had promoted a synthesis of Greek philosophical reasoning and Christian faith, medieval scholars such as Duns Scotus promoted a voluntarism which conceived God as “pure will,” and that God was not bound by reason or
goodness. Under this voluntarist view, God could act, if He so willed, in a way opposite to ways that he had acted before. As Pope Benedict observed, this movement paralleled certain Islamic positions, which became increasingly dominant, in which Allah was conceived of as pure will and thus was “a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness” (Regensburg Address).

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition came to firmly side with Thomas Aquinas and Augustine in affirming God’s reasonableness and inherent goodness. The effect that theological position had on education was profound. In being dedicated to a reasonable and good God, Catholic education was thus committed to formation of students through and with reason and moral commitment. This was instead of indoctrinating people through force or coercion.

The importance of this Catholic viewpoint can be seen in contrast to a voluntarist view of God, in which God is not bound by reason or goodness, but only by pure will. Such a view of God’s pure voluntarism can be seen in certain strains of Islamic thought through scholars such as Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), who asserted that “God is not bound by what we perceive as the rational order” (Reilly 2006). Faith for those who follow al-Ghazali’s tradition is thus a faith of unreasonableness. Such a theological approach means that those who follow God need not persuade through reason, but are entitled to impose their will on others.

In contrast, the Catholic vision is that people should be formed through persuasive reason. The radical Muslim approach was to coerce people through force of will. That situation, as Reilly observes (2006), explains the radical Muslims of today, whose commitment to unreasonable faith in an unreasoning Allah translates into a “politics of unlimited power.” In other words, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, standing upon a God who is reasonable and benevolent, is committed to transforming our world for the good through reason, education and persuasion. But, as Pope Benedict observes (Regensburg Address), when God is conceived of as “unreasonable,” God’s followers believe
that “unreasonable violence” is a fitting way to spread the will of God. Thus, the radical Muslims of our world, standing for a God of unreason, pure will, and power, seek to transform our world through coercion, force and violence.

In the context of this work on a Catholic University in the Kimberley, we can see where the Catholic Church has obviously failed to live up to its own intellectual tradition. Despite being done with the most sincere of intentions, the violence of the Stolen Generations and the complicity of Church personnel in forcing children from their families raises the question, “Where was the reasonableness and goodness of God in such actions?” It is clear that if the Church had remained true to its own convictions, then instead of force and coercive violence in stealing children from their families, the more authentically Catholic way would have been to serve the Aboriginal community through education, service and care. After all, are not all human beings created in the image and likeness of God? That raises another key part of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition that I would like to address.

Catholicism Affirms God and Affirms Humans

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition means that, in a University setting, we should see our students, our faculty and our staff as absolutely valuable and loved by God and that what we do in the name of God is not just a job, but a vocation of service to God’s people. Hence the institutional vocation in the Kimberley means that the university is not there to make money, but to realise the dignity of people. While universities today tend to be more fiscally oriented, it should always be borne in mind by a Catholic university that an excessive fiscal fixation can lead to “mission bankruptcy,” in which a university may be well “cashed up” but has lost its soul and no longer serves the purpose for which it was founded.

More importantly, though, is the point that God affirms human nature, because it, and we, are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27). But let not the point be misunderstood, it is not just white human beings who are made in
God’s image, but all humans, including Aboriginal people, who are created in God’s image and likeness, who are loved and affirmed by God and whose lives, culture and natures are affirmed by God and should be affirmed by others. This will be a vital point to bear in mind later when I write about “classicism.” But it is something that has been neglected or repressed in mission and university activity. If our role is to raise people up to their dignity as images of God, then that dignity need not, and should not, be constituted by “raising people up” into a white culture, but instead raising them up within their Aboriginal culture.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition Today

The Boston College statement on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (Boston College) has a clear summary of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition today. In the first place, it tells us (Boston College, 8) that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition today integrates our desire to know our world with the desire to find ultimate intelligibility in God (cf. Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n1). This tradition rests upon a conviction that the sacred and the secular things of this world are equally the object of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition because the sacred and the secular come from the same creator God. In a way, Catholic Intellectual Tradition reflects the “two books of God” written about by Francis Bacon. Bacon wrote in The Advancement of Learning (1605) that, “God has, in fact, written two books, not just one. Of course, we are all familiar with the first book he wrote, namely Scripture. But he has written a second book called creation.” So the Catholic Intellectual Tradition proceeds from a point of view that, by understanding the world around us and its people, we simultaneously come to understand even more about the God who created them.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition (Boston College, 8) has a theological outlook: it unites the search for all truth with the search for ultimate truth (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n1). In other words, the deepest questions of any discipline and faith should never be in conflict but should instead work together in dialogue and mutual support. That is, in this tradition, that faith and reason are brought
into dialogue and fused together in a unit under a higher mantle of theological perspective. Again, the tradition proceeds from the starting point that faith and reason are not exclusive and excluding ways of knowing, rather they are two ways of knowing that come from the same God.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition today, and this repeats an earlier point, is committed to intellectual integration among the different disciplines. While we hold to the autonomy of different disciplines we still look to integration and interdisciplinarity (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n20). This integration comes not from relating disciplines laterally, but by uniting them vertically, under the mantle of higher wisdom.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is simultaneously humble and confident. We are confident in reason’s ability to know truth, meaning and purpose. But our confidence is moderated by humility. St Augustine reminds us (Boston College, 9-10) that, “If you think you have grasped God, it is not God you have grasped.” Likewise, the Fourth Lateran Council (Canon 2) insists that God is mystery and that for everything that we think we know of God, there is even more that we do not know. Thus, in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, the Tradition is never a terminal point and that means that anything we do know now is subject to revision, review, augmentation and perhaps ultimate correction. At the same time (Boston College, 9-10) we have, “an awareness that confidence in reason must also be tempered by the recognition that sin can deform reason’s unbiased quest for truth.”

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is eschatological (Boston College, 9-10). It means that Catholics are working towards the betterment and fulfilment of all creation. That means that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition has a purpose and at the same time, we should be open to the mystery in a creation which is developing and evolving, just as our understanding of it is evolving.

Coming back to John Paul II, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is “characterised by reverence for the dignity of each human being” (Boston College, 9-10). That is, Catholic tradition holds that people are created in the
image of God (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). The Tradition affirms God and affirms human beings, who are the objects of infinite esteem and affirmation by their creator God. This means that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is not just intellectual, it bears ethical responsibilities. The Tradition is thus committed not just to abstract learning, but learning that is committed “to justice, to the solidarity of the human family, and to the common good.” In other words, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is a tradition that is there to serve people. That is, that truth is not just an end in itself, but that truth is a cause (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n4), and that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is intended for service, to pursuing the meaning of truth which gives awareness and meaning to freedom, justice and human dignity.

Lastly, I would also say that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is not a closed shop. It is an interactive, dynamic tradition that “lives and breathes” as it encounters and is augmented by the cultures it encounters. As John Paul II says (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n10), “By research and teaching, Catholic Universities assist the Church in the manner most appropriate to modern times to find cultural treasures both old and new, ‘nova et vetera,’ according to the words of Jesus.” In other words, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is a growing, developing, living tradition. As we will see below, that final point is vital for the encounter of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Aboriginal Wisdom Traditions. While certain paternalistic approaches would exclude Aboriginal wisdom from the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, by uniting the “old” and the “new” Pope John Paul II would endorse the nourishment of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition by the Aboriginal Intellectual and Spiritual Tradition.