

# The Catholic Intellectual Tradition at Sacred Heart University

---

NOTE: This presentation is based on  
“The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University”  
by Monika K. Hellwig, Ph.D., in  
*Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*  
Sacred Heart University Press, 2000



**SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY**  
**FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT**

# Sacred Heart University Mission Statement

Sacred Heart University is a coeducational, independent, comprehensive institution of higher learning in the **Catholic intellectual tradition** whose primary objective is to prepare men and women to live in and make their contributions to the human community.

# The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

A 2000-year-old “conversation” between the Church and the world, a dialogue between the Christian community of believers and the culture in which it finds itself.

While the tradition is broader and older than the university, in large part the Catholic university has served as the **steward** of this “conversation,” **preserving, transmitting** and **developing** it by engaging the questions and challenges of its own time and place.

# The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

- **Content:** classic treasures to be cherished, studied and handed on.
- **A way of doing things** that is the outcome of centuries of experience, prayer, action, and critical reflection.

# Content: a treasury of classic “texts”

The Catholic intellectual tradition cherishes, develops, and employs a valuable treasury of “texts” that are worth preserving: written texts, musical texts, art, customs and rituals, and modes of thought, expression and action — “finished products” that need to be maintained, supported, and explored. The Catholic intellectual tradition is committed to introducing new generations to these texts.

# Content: a treasury of classic “texts”

- **Scriptures** → elaborated in commentaries and the treasures of Christian imagination in art and literature
- **Formulations of faith** → elaborated in theology, catechesis, religious drama, fiction, poetry
- **Natural sciences** → integration of human knowledge with the claims of faith
- **Prayer** → spirituality: rules for living, devotions, hagiography (lives of the saints: role models), pilgrimages, etc.
- **Rituals** → music, art, and architecture

# The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

- Content
- *A way of doing things*: a way of approaching knowledge that is the outcome of centuries of experience, prayer, action, and critical reflection

There are *values* and *principles* that “*shape*” the tradition (as opposed to prescriptive characteristics that “define” Catholic). These values and principles are “*characteristically* Catholic” while, at the same time, shared by many religious traditions.

NOTE: Offense is sometimes taken at the term “**characteristically Catholic**” because it seems to suggest that Catholicism is trying to take credit for anything and everything that is good—implying a superiority to other religious traditions.

“**Characteristically Catholic**” does not mean “**uniquely Catholic.**” Catholicism shares many values and principles with other traditions, e.g.,

- Hinduism is profoundly sacramental in its understanding (although it does not use that the term).
- Judaism emphasizes the continuity of faith and reason.
- Islam stresses the communal nature of life; the responsibility to use one’s gifts for the community.
- The Quaker and Presbyterian traditions have much to teach Catholics about social responsibility.



# A “way” of approaching knowledge

A **way** of dealing with experience and knowledge in order to acquire true wisdom, live well, and build good societies. Values and assumptions include:

- Human life has meaning, which meaning can be known.
- The basic principles of moral right and wrong are given and not humanly invented.
- The deliberately fostered yearning for communion with the ultimately Transcendent is in some way connected with the way we relate to one another.
- In the person of Jesus of Nazareth we have an utterly trustworthy interpretation of the meaning and destiny of human life, of human relationship with God, and of what constitutes a good life.

# A “way” of approaching knowledge marked by:

- A deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason
- A cherishing of the cumulative wisdom of the past
- An inclusive, non-elitist bent
- Goals/methods that reflect the communal dimension of all human actions
- Scholarship as integration of knowledge
- The “sacramental principle”

# A “way” of approaching knowledge marked by:

- A deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason
  - The rational search for truth is the search for God.
  - Philosophy and theology are included as essential components of the liberal arts core of undergraduate education.
  - Public lectures are offered on current issues in public, professional and private life, addressing these issues from a faith perspective.

# A “way” of approaching knowledge marked by:

- A deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason
- A cherishing of the cumulative wisdom of the past
  - Appreciation of the liberal arts tradition
  - Strong programs in the humanities and the classics
  - Common Core Curriculum: *The Human Journey*

# A “way” of approaching knowledge marked by:

- A deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason
- A cherishing of the cumulative wisdom of the past
- An inclusive, **non-elitist** bent

- **Universality** (*katholikos*): All human beings and all peoples and nations are precious to God. Salvation and all other human goods are intended for all by the Creator.
- **Responsibility** to the community for:
  - what one chooses to research and write;
  - the resources one uses up in doing it;
  - the way one uses time when the labor of others indirectly makes possible the leisure for study and scholarly work.
- **Writing** in a style that is accessible to non-specialists.
- **Teaching** in a way that is helpful to all students.
- **Including** the underprivileged and those whose voices are normally excluded from society.
- **Treating respectfully** cultures and customs alien from one's own.

# A “way” of approaching knowledge marked by:

- A deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason
- A cherishing of the cumulative wisdom of the past
- A non-elitist bent
- Goals/methods that reflect the communal dimension of all human actions

- Everything that is taught is placed in the **context** of what the students will do with their knowledge and the impact that will have on their communities.
- **Collaboration** replaces competition. The vision is one of working to achieve the goals of learning together rather than seeking personal status or recognition.
- Goals/methods that reflect the **communal** dimension of all human actions



# A “way” of approaching knowledge marked by:

- A deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason
- A cherishing of the cumulative wisdom of the past
- A non-elitist bent
- Goals/methods that reflect the communal dimension of all human actions
- Scholarship as **integration** of knowledge

- In today's educational environment, so much knowledge and skill must be assimilated at such speed that more significant questions of **meaning and purpose** are often crowded out.
- The Catholic intellectual tradition fosters a broader view of scholarship as **integrative**:
  - Teaching as not only ensuring the mastery of material by students but also the sparking of their **imagination** and their **learning** to enjoy the things that make for **wisdom**, the **dedicated life**, and the **discernment** of the good, the true, and the beautiful.
  - Education as the “drawing out” of the maturing **character** of the person. The teacher's role is to help students become **reflective, discerning persons**.

# A “way” of approaching knowledge marked by:

- A deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason
- A cherishing of the cumulative wisdom of the past
- A non-elitist bent
- Goals/methods that reflect the community dimension of all human actions
- Scholarship as integration of knowledge
- The “sacramental principle”

Deep realization that one's relationship to the Transcendent is always **mediated** by **created reality**: people, events, music, rituals, symbols, narratives, etc. Because human beings participate in the mediation, we are attentive to the critical roles played by:

- Narrative, role models (saints), and rituals that educate the **faculties of imagination and interpretation** — the way we put the elements of our experience together.
- Stories and images in art and literature, in music and architecture, in liturgy, and in the elaboration of symbols of all kinds that **shape the memories and the imagination** of succeeding generations of believers so that they will interpret all their experiences in terms of the **pervasive presence of the sacred** and of a **history of salvation**.

# A “way” of approaching knowledge marked by:

- A deep commitment to the continuity of faith and reason
- A cherishing of the cumulative wisdom of the past
- An inclusive, non-elitist bent
- Goals/methods that reflect the community dimension of all human actions
- Scholarship as integration of knowledge
- The “sacramental principle”

# Catholic Intellectual Tradition

- **Content:** classic treasures to be cherished, studied and handed on.
- **A way of doing things** that is the outcome of centuries of experience, prayer, action, and critical reflection

# The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

A 2000-year “conversation” between the Church and the world, a dialogue between the Christian community of believers and the culture in which it finds itself.

The Catholic university serves as **steward** of this “conversation,” **preserving, transmitting** and **developing** it by engaging the questions and challenges of its own time and place.

# Catholic Intellectual Life

What is it?



# Catholic Intellectual Life is a vibrant living of the tradition!

Catholic intellectual life is a **living** tradition that is constantly evolving and developing, shaped by the exigencies of the world in which we live.

- The Catholic intellectual tradition is one of human **inquiry**, human **formation**, and divine **revelation**.
- Catholic intellectual life pulls from the diverse elements of that tradition in order to find the best way to **respond to the context and situation within which one is living, working, teaching and learning**.
- Catholic intellectual life seeks to be of **service to the world**, offering a **prophetic presence** in the world.

# The Catholic Intellectual Tradition at Sacred Heart University

---

NOTE: This presentation is based on  
“The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University”  
by Monika K. Hellwig, Ph.D., in  
*Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*  
Sacred Heart University Press, 2000



**SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY**  
**FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT**