

# THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION IN THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

*A desktop primer*

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is most alive in the arts, literature, scientific thought, philosophy, and theology that stretches back over two millennia and extends as far geographically as the Catholic faith in all its diversity. The Catholic university plays a key role as the locus of intellectual inquiry.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

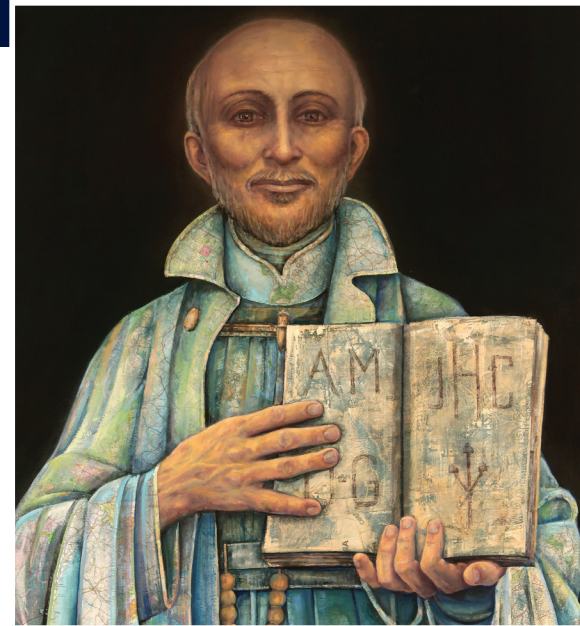
- Expansiveness: open to diversity of humanistic traditions.
- Expressiveness: manifesting in faith and culture, such as literature, music, drama, film, painting, philosophy, political theory and many other spheres of human activity.
- Respect for cumulative wisdom of the past.
- Openness to mystery of creation and God.
- Integration of faith, knowledge, and reason in the search for truth, meaning, and justice.
- Asserts the idea that there is a relationship between faith and the intellectual life.
- Engages in the world, often through Catholic Social Teaching.

Catholic intellectual work can be its own vocation and is not limited to any particular discipline. All disciplines can contribute to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, as God can be found in all people and things through a sacramental imagination. God is in all things, but because of that, we often miss God's presence. A sensitivity open to God's presence is useful to see the sacramental nature of our disciplines.

Perhaps it best to think of Catholic intellectual traditions, not so much that there are conflicting traditions, as much as there are so many varieties of living out the Catholic intellectual life. For example, there are the "Catholic Classics", Aquinas, Chesterton, and Teresa of Ávila, but there is also a dynamic, living tradition that can be found in the poetry of Denise Levertov and Mary Oliver, the art of Holly Schapker (shown), and the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez, and which calls us to do today what the Classics did for their day.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition forms the whole person, not just the intellect. As such, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is not a separate endeavor from prayer and contemplation, and actually may be enhanced by such spiritual practices.

By Tom Strunk, PhD



*Reflection*

*How does your discipline and your scholarship contribute to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?*

# CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The essential characteristics of a Catholic university are expressed through its commitments to the Catholic justice mission. CST are the ideals and values that have been disseminated through papal and other Church documents through time; contemporary themes are:

## HUMAN DIGNITY

"[H]uman life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of [Catholic] social teaching...-that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person."

## COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPATION

"The person is not only sacred but also social. How [our society is organized]—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community...people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable."

## HUMAN RIGHTS

"[H]uman dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency [including access to steady work and the rights that flow from it"]. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society."

## SOLIDARITY

All people "are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers and sisters keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace."

## STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

We "are called to protect people [including 'future generations'] and the planet, living in relationship with all of God's creation."

By Debra Mooney, PhD

\*quotes from papal, conciliar and episcopal documents

*Reflection* | *How is the commitment to these teachings expressed at my University?, in my department and/or division?*