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The Catholic university can make a natural home for experimenting with the foundations of knowledge because Catholic scholars retain faith in a God who created the universe and human reason as a reliable God-given instrument for comprehending this creation. The central question is: How can the Catholic university reconstruct itself to bring the resources of Catholic tradition to bear on our common task of rebuilding the house of learning? Our common problem is the fragmentation of knowledge. The Catholic university needs to inhabit the domains of both secular learning and Christian knowledge. The participation of Catholic intellectuals and universities in the postmodern dialogue will benefit the entire intellectual community.

Among the striking recent developments on the American academic scene is a sharply rising interest in the relationship of religion and higher education. The reasons are far from clear. Possibly this growing attention simply responds to a general increase in the volubility of religion in American public life, heard in the so-called Religious Right, in the abortion controversy, and in the Catholic bishops' interventions on issues of peace and social justice. Perhaps it springs from dissatisfactions with the academy, with failures in the moral education of students and the coherence of curriculum. Perhaps it has something to do with multiculturalism, postmodernism, and more explicit attention to the perspectival character of knowledge and the influence of values on academic discourse. Whatever its sources, the fact of growing interest is patent. Nothing quite like this has been seen on campuses since the 1950s during the heyday of the Danforth Fellows.

Rising interest does not necessarily imply rising enthusiasm. Optimism among many believers about an enhanced role for religion in classrooms and research mingles with fear among others (believers as well as non-believers)

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of a return to ecclesial oppression. The points of tension are numerous. Should church-related colleges and universities have a distinctive role? If so, what? Should university teachers pay attention to the gap between the religious world views that most American students bring to higher education and the nontheistic character of most academic knowledge? If so, how? Does a largely secularized academy still have a valid role in the broad formation of students? Should we as teachers help in forming students as whole human beings rather than as disembodied intellects? If so, how? Does religion make legitimate cognitive claims? If so, what is the relation of those claims to academic knowledge? More specifically, should a scholar's religious beliefs influence her or his academic research? How should and how can the integrative tendency of religious belief comport with the highly professionalized, specialized, disciplinary nature of academic knowledge?

As this list suggests, within the general concern about the place of religion in colleges and universities, the point of greatest tension is probably the conflict between the knowledge claims made by religion and the decidedly nontheistic, secular understanding of knowledge characteristic of modern colleges and universities. This epistemological tension has attracted more and more explicit attention recently. Within the general problem of religion and knowledge, the most sensitive question—but also the key question—is the possible bearing of religious commitments and religious traditions on academic research.

The prevailing view within academe is that religion properly has nothing to do with research—except, of course, in fields where religion provides the subject matter under study, as in theology, philosophy of religion, or religious studies. Otherwise, religion is understood to be a private matter, standing apart from the necessarily public discourse of an academic discipline—religion being no more relevant to sociology or political science than is an enthusiasm for fly fishing or membership in the Girl Scouts. This is not just the opinion of scholars without religious beliefs; it is probably the view of most academics who are themselves church-goers. Some professors would go further and argue that religion ought to be quarantined from intellectual life because it is dangerous, even toxic, to rational thought. Dawkins (1996) calls religion "a virus" threatening rational discourse. This is perhaps an extreme statement (though one must concede that the history of religions gives some ground for it); but it is not terribly remote from academic orthodoxy.

The importance of guarding intellectual life against all kinds of irrational fanaticism goes without saying. Further, I want to insist on the great value of liberating academic research insofar as humanly possible from personal biases and extramural pressures. Put differently, I do not join in the so-called postmodern flight from objectivity. This is not because I have been napping for the past century. I know that knowledge is never pure; never isolated from the social conditions under which it is produced; never seen from a God's-eye

view undistorted by individual or group perspectives; never free from political agenda and power plays; and always necessarily the product of an interpretative community. But I also believe that the ideals of a pure knowledge and of universal canons of knowledge are worth striving for and that the closer we can come to those ideals (which may never be very close), the more valuable knowledge will be to the human race. Therefore, whenever religion becomes a threat to the academic enterprise, whenever religious presuppositions or ecclesiastical authorities try to put blinders on scholarship, as notoriously has sometimes happened, then that threat must be warded off, just as must the heavy hands of political or economic coercion.

I also want to insist that consigning religion to epistemological irrelevance is not merely needless; it is positively detrimental both to contemporary scholarship and to religious believers. Now, this is a very broad claim. It presents an enormous, and enormously complicated, series of questions. Marsden (1997), writing from a Reformed perspective in his recent book, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship,* has pleaded one part of the case: that a believing Christian can bring distinctive and valuable perspectives to scholarship. Much of what Marsden argues would hold true for other religious believers as well, especially those in the Abramic faiths. His arguments are bound to raise hackles. But I find myself broadly in agreement with his brief, with the important qualification that I am less of a perspectivalist regarding knowledge, more of a universalist, than he.

In any case, I wish to approach the issue of Christianity and scholarship from a different angle and with a very modest aim. I intend only to outline a couple of problems and to map broadly, in a suggestive and tentative spirit, some approaches to dealing with them. A reader fond of Kant might call this essay "A Prolegomenon to Some Possible Future Research Agenda." A little more precisely, I would like us to reflect on the relationship between Catholic intellectual traditions and contemporary academic research.

This focus specifically on Catholic intellectual traditions is in no way meant to denigrate or marginalize the intellectual heritage of other faiths; it simply recognizes my background and my recently acquired role as a teacher in a Catholic university. I am ignorant enough of my own traditions, but at least they are mine; I do not want to blunder in an offensive way into other people's traditions. Still, it should be acknowledged that a great deal of the wisest recent thinking in this area comes from Protestant thinkers and that most of what I shall say about Catholic scholarship might be said about other Christian traditions and much of it about Jewish and Islamic scholarship as well. Moreover, a lot of the most original and profound work even on Catholic intellectual traditions has been accomplished by scholars whose backgrounds and beliefs are far distant from Catholicism, such as the late Amos Funkenstein.

With this prologue, then, let us ask two symmetrical questions. First,

would contemporary secular scholarship benefit from closer attention to Catholic intellectual traditions? Second, would Catholics benefit from closer attention to the relations between their intellectual traditions and contemporary scholarship?

A CLOSE LOOK AT THESE TWO QUESTIONS

Any attempt to answer these questions must begin by acknowledging the very distant relationship at present between Catholic thinking and the academy. On the one hand, there exists a growing, complex, rich body of Catholic thinking and scholarship stretching back almost two millennia. This is no simple corpus; it is rife with disputation, disagreement, development, and divergence. Heterogeneity and many-sidedness are two of the great strengths of Catholic intellectual traditions; this is why they have provided such rich resources for human reflection, so flexible and open-ended a source of possibilities for understanding. Recently, however, Catholic intellectual traditions have become the proprietary preserve of theological scholars, understanding that category broadly to include scripture scholars, ethicists, and so forth. Self-consciously Catholic thinking seems to have limited itself to two tasks: (1) deepening scriptural, theological, and philosophical understanding of the Christian faith, and (2) providing guidance to the faithful in matters of personal and social morality.

These are crucial tasks; but, to put the case baldly, the intellectual work expected of Catholics no longer includes participating as Catholics in the human race's common task of expanding the range of understanding of the world and adding to the stock of knowledge. A great many academic intellectuals happen to be Catholic; they are growing in number and in distinction. But their Catholic beliefs, however important to them personally, usually make no difference to them as intellectual resources in their research as sociologists, historians, literary scholars, economists, or anthropologists.

On the other hand, there exist vibrant, growing, complex, rich bodies of contemporary research in a wide variety of academic disciplines. A certain amount of research crosses disciplinary boundaries. Yet the prevailing axiom is that one intellectual boundary cannot be crossed: the frontier between academic knowledge with its secular assumptions and religious thought with its theistic assumptions. And so one sees at present almost no connection between these two impressive bodies of thought—Catholic intellectual traditions and contemporary scholarship—except, as mentioned earlier, where religion itself forms the subject matter of research.

Habit inures us to anything; but, if we could look with fresh eyes, this situation would appear more than slightly weird. Two lively and sophisticated groups of thinkers and researchers, each with well-developed institutions for advancing and propagating ideas, often working on similar problems—and they pay virtually no attention to each other. Strange indeed.

However, the reasons for this peculiarity are old hat to historians of higher education and academic knowledge. Until about a century and a half ago, scientists and scholars commonly assumed that knowledge formed a coherent whole; more precisely, they assumed that all parts of knowledge ultimately could be connected because every area of knowledge focused on some aspect of one single divine creation. Under these circumstances, it was relatively easy for specialists to pursue their specialized researches through the lens of Christian intellectual traditions (including specifically Catholic ones) whether they studied economics, biology, history, or any other subject. The best scientific and humanistic knowledge was Christian in its assumptions, and Christian intellectual traditions helped learned people to understand the reality they studied.

In the 19th century knowledge came to be reconfigured along very different lines. Academic knowledge was divided into "disciplines." These different specialized areas of knowledge became separate from each other, entirely distinct fields rather than special aspects of a single whole. And once academic disciplines lost their connections with any larger reality, then the idea of placing them within some transcendent Christian perspective became absurd. In the course of the 20th century, broadly similar assumptions migrated out from academe into general understandings of knowledge.

The problem created was not specialization as such; it was the cutting off of knowledge within each discipline from larger, integrating structures of knowledge. While it is possible to work within a disciplinary structure and in addition connect one's intellectual work to larger religious meanings, this has proved very difficult. In American Protestant intellectual life, Christianity and learning were already well on the way to divorce in the early 1900s. Among Catholic intellectuals, the official neo-Thomist philosophy retarded the separation of learning from Catholic intellectual traditions, although at the cost of isolating Catholic thought from the mainstream. But after Vatican II the secularization of knowledge vastly accelerated for Catholic intellectuals as well.

The effect of this transformation was to create boundaries dividing "real" knowledge, of a modern sort, from the theistically grounded "speculations" of earlier eras and of contemporary theology. Speaking broadly and too crudely, one can say that the line was drawn chronologically at roughly the end of the Enlightenment. Thinkers of earlier eras—Aquinas, Averroës, or Anselm—might make interesting objects of historical study; but they were not to be taken seriously as live sources of theoretical understanding. An economist or literary critic or sociologist might plausibly draw on Marx, Nietzsche, or Weber for the concepts that framed her or his research, but rarely could she or he derive conceptual underpinnings explicitly from Augustine and expect to be taken seriously in the secular academy. As a result, in almost all fields of knowledge it is now very difficult, if not impos-

sible, to approach the understanding of reality from a Catholic point of view. Someone may be both a Catholic and a political scientist, but can be a Catholic political scientist only by swimming vigorously against the stream, and vanishingly few are able or wish to do so.

It is important to stress that this configuration of knowledge is relatively recent; we should not regard the present state of things as natural or inevitable. Indeed, the arguments today over postmodernism, perspectival knowledge, and antifoundationalist epistemologies remind us just how historically contingent and subject to change our present-day conceptions of knowledge are. Nonetheless, our present conceptions are our present conceptions—at present.

I hasten to add, too, that these exclusionary attitudes do not arise from blind prejudice or secularist animus. (Prejudice and animus being, of course, entirely foreign to academic life.) The academy's problem with Christianity is genuine and fundamental. Scholars need to share assumptions about what counts as knowledge if they are going to engage in a common search for it. The fact is that modern knowledge does not recognize the existence of God, and this does make Augustine problematic.

Problematic is not, however, the same as useless. We may well ask whether, in secularizing knowledge, the modern academy has gone too far in almost totally excluding religiously grounded thinkers as serious interlocutors: whether, even from a secular point of view, it has thrown out the baby with the bath water. But as soon as we raise the possibility of some link between Catholic intellectual traditions and contemporary scholarship, we face an obvious question. Anselm or Duns Scotus might provide intriguing objects of study for intellectual historians or maybe theologians, or conceivably a few philosophers. But, really, are they not part of a past long dead? What resources could Catholic intellectual traditions possibly have to offer to contemporary scholars? That is the first question to approach.

If we no longer assume that thinkers who think *qua* Catholics must be excluded from academic discourse on religious grounds, if we simply ask whether contemporary scholarship might have something to learn from Catholic intellectual traditions, then the answer in my view is "of course!" We are talking, after all, about nearly 2,000 years of human intellectual effort; of grappling with the problems of human psychology, social organization, political power, and aesthetic imagination; of the thinking and writing by some enormously gifted people, including at least two individuals, Augustine and Aquinas, who rank among the most profound, prolific, and creative minds of all eras. Granted, much of what these earlier scholars wrote has grown outmoded; perhaps even more would need to be recast and reinterpreted in terms accessible to contemporary scholars. But it would be the rankest prejudice to pretend that this vast and complex intellectual heritage contains nothing of value to us, and it would be the wildest hubris to claim

that we have already assimilated all of its riches. To believe that Christianity has run out of steam intellectually strikes me as unwarranted bias arising from the hangover effect of the Victorian ideology of scientific progress; put differently, it is to take Auguste Comte's positivist schema of world-historical evolution far more seriously than any historian would.

One does not have to be a Catholic to want to look afresh at the contemporary academic relevance of Catholic intellectual traditions. Clearly, personal belief does give one a special view of religious intellectual traditions. A believing orthodox Jew will look upon rabbinic traditions differently than a Christian, and both will look upon them differently than an atheist. Nonetheless, religious intellectual traditions are productions of human cultures and are accessible to everyone in the same way and to the same extent as other productions of human cultures. We can all comprehend Aquinas or Lonergan in roughly the same way as we do Marx or Engels: you do not have to be Catholic or Marxist to understand their writings (though you might understand them somewhat differently if you were the one or the other).

But why should some political scientist or economist bother to comprehend Aquinas or Lonergan? What difference could attention to Catholic intellectual traditions make in contemporary knowledge? What would a Catholic approach to knowledge have to offer? There is more than one type of answer.

The first is *critique*. Catholic intellectual traditions offer a standpoint outside of the conventional wisdom of academic disciplines, a well-thought-out and carefully articulated alternative perspective from which the contemporary researcher can criticize effectively the limits imposed on thinking by axioms underlying work in a field. One thinks, for instance, of commonplace yet almost self-evidently feeble models of human nature that direct research in psychology and sociology. Augustine's understanding of the mind is not likely to displace present models of cognition in experimental psychology, but it might well help a researcher to see more clearly aspects of mental activity for which present models fail to account. And one recalls the enormous influence that Niebuhr had, in the middle of this century, on American historians and social scientists, many of them "atheists for Niebuhr." He redirected them away from simplistic notions of the plasticity of human beings, simply because the doctrine of original sin profoundly informed his otherwise not terribly profound writings (Fox, 1985).

Second, scholars can recover from Christian intellectual traditions' *analytic devices* or conceptual apparatus useful in developing their own theories or approaches. Peirce is today regarded as perhaps the greatest of American philosophers and his semiotic theory of knowledge as his greatest achievement. Peirce was notoriously eccentric, eventually sadly isolated. It must have been sheer idiosyncrasy that led him to the decidedly unfashionable (outside of Catholic circles at least) scholastic philosopher Duns Scotus—an encounter crucial in Peirce's development of his theory. Today a sociologist

trying to figure out why Americans react differentially to police officers, clergy, politicians, and teachers might develop a new model of response to authority by contemplating late antique and medieval discourse on modes of authority and belief. A literary theorist might turn to Augustine's numerous writings on language for sounder models of interpretation. A historian trying to understand competing conceptions of knowledge and of what counted as "science" in the 19th century might gain insight from studying biblical hermeneutics.

Third, certain *developed bodies of thought* in the Catholic heritage still offer scholars rich resources. Perhaps the prime recent instance is the revival of just-war theory in the past two decades. Whatever one thinks of its virtues, and many Catholics of pacifist inclination have criticized it harshly, just-war theory has undeniably emerged as an academic discourse as significant for secular political theorists as for Christian ones. And just as undeniably it has drawn very heavily on Catholic thinkers, notably Augustine (see Elshtain, 1992).

Finally, Catholic traditions offer contemporary scholars something less easily definable but perhaps more important: a *reflective interlocutor* who "thinks" in very different terms than most of us do now, offering fresh approaches to problems we grapple with. Wittgenstein's long tangle with Augustine may not have left him fond of the Bishop of Hippo, but it did provide an anvil on which he hammered out a lot of his own thinking about language.

A handful of Notre Dame faculty, asked last fall to specify an aspect of Catholic intellectual traditions with possible resonance for research in their fields, suggested the following further examples:

1. The relation between current legal philosophy and Aquinas. (Work along this line is already being done by Professor John Finnis of Notre Dame and Oxford.)
2. Catholic perspectives on the fundamental but usually unspoken assumptions about human nature current in experimental psychology. How would altering these axioms change understandings of motivated behavior?
3. The relevance of Catholic experiences of "multiculturalism" (across time and place) to contemporary debates in literary studies about multiculturalism and canon formation.
4. David Tracy's conception of the "classic" in *The Analogical Imagination* as an entry point for rethinking liberal arts educational theory.
5. The role of beliefs such as original sin in developing norms for economic systems.
6. Interactions of the Catholic tradition of "reading" (cf. perhaps the work of Walter Ong, S.J.) with postmodern discussions of reading, especially reader-response theory.

Such examples, I hope, suggest useful ways in which scholars today might approach Catholic intellectual traditions. They certainly suggest something worth recovering there. This work of recovery has already begun, as the mention of just-war theory indicates. One of the chief voices in that discourse, Elshstain, in her lectures published in 1995 as *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, suggests broad relevance of Augustine for political theory; five years earlier, Walker (1990) had already carried out one piece of such a project in *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought.*

Of course, for many problems of modern knowledge, especially in areas developed after the divorce between religion and academic learning, Catholic traditions would prove irrelevant. What does a molecular biologist trying to understand retroviruses have to learn from Lonergan? Or an engineer trying to develop quantum machines from Albertus Magnus? Not much. How would Catholic traditions help a historian studying American electoral behavior under the second party system of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s? I cannot see any way. But at present we can only imagine the range of connections that could be made between Catholic thought and current knowledge. It would be a serious error to think them few or trivial.

We owe our intellectual and religious foundations to the ancient Hebrews; we share with Jews and Muslims as well as with other Christians crucial axioms of monotheism. Much of our Christian tradition belongs to Protestants and Orthodox; and unbelievers might also benefit from and participate actively in the recovery of Catholic intellectual traditions for contemporary knowledge. But what might Catholics—as believing Christians—have to gain from an ongoing conversation between contemporary knowledge and their own intellectual traditions? Here discussion can be much briefer because, unfortunately, the answer is certainly more obvious, probably less controversial.

Catholics, like other religious believers in the contemporary intellectual world, live with divided minds. We have one set of beliefs about reality, as constituted by divine creation and expressing God's providential will. But this comprises, so to speak, only our "Sunday knowledge." For we have another set of beliefs about reality, as taught in schools and colleges, in which God does not exist; and this provides our knowledge for most everyday purposes, including our work as scholars. Our most fundamental understanding of the world thus does not cohere with most of what we actually know in detail about it. Such a plight is hardly healthy for a faith seeking knowledge.

From this predicament we can hope for no easy exit. A divided mind simply is the condition of religious believers in the 20th century. I do not, however, find in this quandary occasion for despair. Our state is, after all, not unlike the situation of the earliest Christians, who lived with a similar ravine between their creed and their culture. And, if Catholics can start to see points of connection between the God-centered world of Augustine or Lonergan and

the world they learn about in school, then they can at least begin the long and arduous task of trying to understand the world in terms compatible with their beliefs about its most fundamental character. It is even possible that they will find their own understanding of the faith enriched by close encounter with secular knowledge, as Augustine famously did as a result of his confrontation with classical culture.

If, then, all of us—Catholics, scholars, Catholic scholars—might have something to gain from reengaging Catholic intellectual traditions with contemporary scholarship, what is to be done?

A PLAN OF ACTION

The crucial first step is the creation of institutions to foster investigations bringing Catholic intellectual traditions to bear on issues in contemporary scholarship. The climate in most graduate schools and research centers for work along these lines is still only a few degrees above frigid. So for the time being, the project of recovering the Catholic heritage for mainstream academic work will require its own structures to encourage established scholars and nurture new ones.

One such effort has just begun at Notre Dame, the Erasmus Institute. The Institute will sponsor residential fellowships, graduate seminars, conferences and colloquia, working groups, and publications. It will not toil in splendid isolation nor restrict its programs to the Notre Dame campus; for the job is not one that any university can take on by itself, but only in cooperation with institutions and individual scholars elsewhere. Probably most people inclined to take part will be Catholic, but neither can such an institute be sectarian if it hopes to succeed. It should welcome other Christians, Jews, and Muslims who are pursuing parallel work in the intellectual traditions of their own faiths. It must invite the collaboration of scholars of all faiths and none. If the intent is to reconnect Catholic intellectual life with mainstream academic thought, we can hardly hope to succeed without the partnership of leaders in it.

At the same time, operations like the Erasmus Institute offer one type of answer to the "identity" dilemma that puzzles Catholic campuses. Like more established centers at Notre Dame—the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, the Medieval Institute, the Center for the Philosophy of Religion—this new institution proceeds from the axioms that Christian and Catholic traditions have great value and that a Catholic university bears special responsibility to bring them to the contemporary world. But such centers for research and study are not a source of unwelcome pressure on faculty, only of opportunity. They do not retreat into a Catholic ghetto, but try to identify the common ground that can be shared with mutual benefit by seriously Catholic and secular intellectuals. They are not exclusionary in attitude, but welcome anyone interested in their work, for whatever reason, from

whatever angle. Indeed, few other university activities make clearer how central to the mission of a Catholic university are those among our colleagues who are fully secular and even skeptical about claims for the intellectual value of Catholic traditions. For we Catholic scholars need that skepticism—to save us from sentimentalism, to keep us honest, to force us to sharpen our research and hone our thinking as we work to reclaim the riches of our traditions. We will not get far if we talk only to ourselves.

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