



The Catholic Intellectual Tradition:
A Conversion D849 Bo on College



This document introduces two issues of central importance to Boston College: what is meant by the Catholic intellectual tradition, and how this tradition can be a guiding force in a complex, contemporary university committed to its Jesuit, Catholic heritage.

What follows is intended to serve as a starting point for reading and conversation about the Catholic intellectual tradition among members of the Boston College community—whatever their academic disciplines, personal convictions, or religious beliefs. All are invited to bring their insights, experiences, and intelligence to the expansive search for truth, meaning, and justice that animates both the Catholic intellectual tradition and Boston College.

a 2,000-year-long conversation

for christians, the dialogue between faith and culture is as old as their earliest efforts to articulate what it means to be a distinctive faith community. The first Chris-



and scholars are convinced that they have been and are dealing with a body of ideas, practices, and ways of thinking rich enough and consistent enough to be called a tradition. More importantly, they believe this tradition and their experience must be brought into regular conversation with significant

life. Thus, the most probing questions in every discipline are never deemed to be in opposition to faith but are welcomed into the conversation on the conviction that ongoing discovery of the intelligibility of the universe will reveal more of the truth about God. The Catholic intellectual tradition can thrive only with the participation of all who seek the truth, including those whose inquiry leads them to question whether the search reveals purpose, meaning, or God, or to conclude that it does not.

eight qualities of inquiry

the catholic tradition of inquiry includes:

- A conviction that faith and reason are mutually illuminating, that they are united in the search for truth, and that people of faith must devote themselves to building a world characterized by an “uncompromising commitment to truth”—a world in which truth is explored and revered “in whatever way it discloses itself,” as theologian Michael Buckley, S.J., has written.
- A sacramental vision of reality that holds that each discipline offers the potential to reveal something of the sacred. In the Christian view, grace—God’s loving self-gift to the world in Christ—underlies all of reality. In the words of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” Thus, the search for truth in any discipline can be a sacred and sacramental activity.
- A hopeful commitment to intellectual integration among disciplines, combined with an appreciation for the integrity and autonomy of individual academic disciplines.
- A resistance to reductionism and an openness to analogical imagination—a disposition to see things in terms of “both/and” rather than “either/or.”

it to develop in new ways even as it retains its firm roots in the foundational Catholic worldview. In the Catholic university, wisdom accumulated in the past is handed on, criticized, reworked, and re-appropriated in response to new questions prompted by new experience, new evidence, new arguments, and new interlocutors.

So, too, a university animated by the Catholic intellectual tradition and committed to contributing to the Church and enhancing Catholic life embraces all who are dedicated to learning from one another, and remains open to contributions that may come in a range of ways. This persuasion challenges a Catholic university to engage all people, cultures, and traditions in authentic conversation—conversation







further reading

The most sustained analysis of the role of the Catholic university in fostering a Catholic intellectual tradition is *The Catholic University as a Place of Learning: Reflections on the Idea*, by Michael J. Buckley, S.J. (Georgetown, 1998).





