



Sacred Heart  
UNIVERSITY

Sacred Heart University  
**DigitalCommons@SHU**

---

Mission and Catholic Identity Publications

Office of Mission and Catholic Identity

---

2011

# The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and its Dynamics

Jean Ehret

*Sacred Heart University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/mission\\_pub](https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/mission_pub)



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Ehret, Jean. "The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and its Dynamics." *The Challenge of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition: Making a Difference in Contemporary Academic Settings*. Ed. Jean Ehret and Erwin Möde. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Mission and Catholic Identity at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mission and Catholic Identity Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact [ferribyp@sacredheart.edu](mailto:ferribyp@sacredheart.edu), [lysobeyb@sacredheart.edu](mailto:lysobeyb@sacredheart.edu).

# The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Its Dynamics

Jean Ehret

## 1 Introduction

This book's intention is to present from different perspectives some aspects of what American scholars commonly call the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (CIT) and thus to make a contribution to the necessary self-understanding and explanation of contemporary Catholicism in its dialogue with the world.<sup>1</sup>

The different contributions of the present volume offer more than abstract considerations to their readers; in fact, they reflect upon texts and practical experiences of people from different countries, continents, and cultures. The contributions introduce the reader to a rich, diverse, and living community both of Catholic believers and other people who either associate with them in a common project or simply share Christian values.

Special attention has been given to the Catholic universities, as they are the place where faculty and students together develop a certain *habitus* of integrating knowledge and creative ways of serving the Lord, his Church, and the world. In fact, Catholic universities play a particular role in preserving, transmitting, and developing the Catholic Intellectual Tradition because they are the place where teachers and students strive "to unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth."<sup>2</sup>

In the final contribution of this book I would like to present the CIT in a more synthetic way, defining each one of the terms that form the expression "Catholic Intellectual Tradition." My reflections on the Catholic understanding of tradition will be rooted in the idea that one can consider the Church as a community of canonical reception in order to understand the fundamental dynamics of the CIT. Finally, I will draw some perspectives for future research. However, not everyone will agree with the idea of defining a specific Catholic perspective or of valuing a "singular" tradition at the

---

<sup>1</sup> The book is the second volume published of an ongoing research project on Catholicism. The first one dealt with the Catholic Church's self-understanding: Ehret, J. and Möde, E. (Eds.) (2009), *Una Sancta Catholica et Apostolica. Einheit und Anspruch des Katholischen*. A third collection of essays will treat of a central ecclesiological topic: Ehret, J. (forthcoming), *Papal Primacy and Episcopacy*.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II (1991), *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 1.

beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These critical voices shall first be heard and discussed.

## **2 Why Do We (Not) Need to Think about a Specifically Catholic Intellectual Tradition?**

*Critical voices* – When I told friends and colleagues I was working on a book on the CIT, some of them got highly interested; others cast some strange, surprised, or even shocked looks at me. In fact, CIT is not a common expression in Europe. Therefore, people will interpret each one of these three words from their respective point of view, sometimes getting close to the original meaning, quite often, however, generating a series of misconceptions. First, I will listen to voices criticizing the idea of a “Catholic tradition;” second, to those who refuse to talk about the Catholic intellectual tradition in the singular; third, to those who question the need for a specific Catholic or even Christian perspective. Most of these voices come from a specific European background.

While people cherish traditions in their families or their sports clubs, Catholic tradition is easily considered as a strongly conservative, even reactionary concept lacking openness to the modern world and other cultures. It seems simply outdated: the ongoing individualization, globalization, and marketization lead to a detraditionalization. The Church’s interest in tradition is often considered as the expression of either her unwillingness or her inability to deal with the modern world. Moreover, certain voices suspect a reactionary spin in Church discipline, combined with the return of an abstract, deontological, static theology missing any consciousness of its own historicity in order to save the Church’s social power. In that perspective, the idea of a Catholic Intellectual Tradition might in the worst case suggest the return, e.g., in the field of biology, of a certain type of “Catholic Sciences,” starting from a dogmatic point of view and operating by deduction. While confining Catholicism to a subculture, the CIT would then represent, in the eyes of its critics, a fearful, new “antimodernist” project, trying to stop the necessary, ongoing, not yet completed, and irreversible process of opening the Church – and thus also its teachings – “to the world.”

Other voices question the CIT’s ability to acknowledge, to respect, and to integrate the diversity of religious and cultural expressions. Shall we speak about the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the singular or rather in the plural? In other words, can one conceive speaking of a Catholic tradition in the singular without ostracizing specific local or historic traditions? Again, there are people who feel that the singular is the expression of renewed Roman, ultramontane centralism or the remnant of the “late” idea of abstract metaphysical universals from which we could derive the truth about contin-

gent facts. Furthermore, the idea of a specific Catholic perspective seems wrong, indeed obsolete: a mere Catholic perspective is thought an ecumenical offense, merely as the return of the triumphalist idea that the Roman Catholic Church in its contemporary form *is* the only true Church. From that perspective, the correct way would rather be to abandon any solitary Catholic approach, to relinquish what separates Christian denominations, to look for those aspects that unite them all (Who knows who is included in this “all?”), and to present a “Christian Intellectual Tradition.” What’s more, there are also people questioning the necessity of developing even a Christian tradition: while globalization progresses, civilizations clash, and religious violence grows, they say that time has come to invest all our energies into a new, universal, post-religious humanism.

Lastly there are also people who consider that there is no place or need for any intellectual tradition in Catholicism: for them, Revelation and Tradition are the sources of secure knowledge which intellectual work may never attain by itself. Jean Greisch considers such an attitude as the expression of “[...] a typically Catholic pathology.”<sup>3</sup> For some time the word intellectual was even considered to be a derogatory name because of its historical origins, at least in France, in the context of the Dreyfus affair: “[...] it refers to individualism, democracy, and free will,”<sup>4</sup> which were highly suspicious categories at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> In recent years the failure of the left-wing intellectuals compromised all those who are identified as intellectuals.

*Why do people react in this way?* – Such negative judgments may have different sources. They are partially based on (modern and postmodern) theological and philosophical reflections that radically question the authority of both reason and tradition. Sometimes they simply derive from prejudice against Catholicism. Since the enlightenment the Catholic Church has been

---

<sup>3</sup> Greisch, J. (2009), “Mit den Augen der Anderen,” p. 560. (All translations are mine. J.E.) See also Roche, M. W. (2003), *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism*, p. 25 and p. 31-32: “The modern concept of the ‘self-made’ man, [...] is not without its appealing dimensions, and here Catholicism is at a modest disadvantage. Intellectual autonomy and a sense of achievement can be undervalued in a world that elevates tradition and community. [...] A Catholic university must encourage its students to become intellectually ambitious, to recognize not only the modern Christian ideal of active service to the community but also the more traditional Christian ideal of contemplation.”

<sup>4</sup> Serry, H. (2004), *Naissance de l’intellectuel catholique*, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> See also Schenuit, J. (2010), *Über den Sinn katholischer Überlieferung*, p. 101: “For many young intellectuals, who feel bound to Catholicism and want to be loyal to the Church, one of the cardinal questions of their lives is how to unite their liberal incentive to think by themselves with humility and fidelity to the Church.”

presented by some as a major obstacle to scientific progress. Today, this prejudice might be rooted in mere ignorance about Catholic teachings; it is also the result of past authoritarian interpretations of tradition or of the behavior of Church representatives or Catholic intellectuals.<sup>6</sup> After World War II, French Catholic intellectuals didn't want to present themselves as different from other people; they wanted rather to adapt to the contemporary society. Then, in the aftermath of May 68, "the political radicalization [seems] to have separated the left wing Catholic activists from the thought of the intellectuals who claimed to be rooted in the Council's heritage."<sup>7</sup> There was no real interest in tradition at that time.<sup>8</sup> A reconstruction of the intellectual field started only in the seventies when a new generation claimed again its Catholic difference.<sup>9</sup> In a different connection, the mass media's depreciation of the Catholic Church can have its own corrosive impact, e.g., when they focus only on sexual morals. Finally, different backgrounds of Church and cultural history shape the connotations of each of the three words. If the CIT is to be the reference for Catholic institutions of higher learning, and if it is to have a true influence in social life and in politics, it needs to listen to this criticism and to develop an identifiable profile.

*The necessity of reflecting on the CIT* – From the Church's perspective, there are multiple reasons to reflect upon and present the CIT. First, it still remains widely unknown among Catholics and Catholic academics. In fact, despite American Catholic institutions of higher learning defining themselves as the place where the CIT is preserved, transmitted, and developed,<sup>10</sup> in 2000, Cernera and Morgan noticed that "[t]he landscape delimited by the term 'Catholic Intellectual Tradition' seemed vague at best, or was addressed in a variety of places and in language that was not accessible to a

---

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., François Mauriac's disgusted antipathy for those "[...] who don't need the living Christ, but the Catholic system from which their social pride depends," quoted in: Serry, H. (2004), *Naissance de l'intellectuel catholique*, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Pelletier, Denis (2000), *Le "Silence" des intellectuels catholiques français*, p. 298.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, one cannot only blame the traditionalists for being reactionary; it is necessary to keep in mind that, in the aftermath of Vatican II, "activists" of the reform demonstrated a will to break up with everything that remembered the past: breaking out of a kind of ideological ghetto, Christianity should somehow be born again, it should rise in a sometimes even anarchic movement from the ashes of the post-Tridentine period.

<sup>9</sup> See Pelletier, Denis (2000), *Le "Silence" des intellectuels catholiques français*, p. 300; Dagens, Claude (2009), *Passion d'Église*. Bishop Dagens, a member of the *Académie française*, is a co-founder of the journal "Communio" in France.

<sup>10</sup> See Cernera, A. J. and Morgan, O. J. (Eds.) (2000), *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, p. vii.

number of our colleagues.”<sup>11</sup> This statement applies also to Europe; in fact, for many faculty and staff members of Catholic universities as well as for their students, CIT and the Catholic identity of their university is not a common reference. When administrators address it, it might even become a concern for faculty members who fear for their academic freedom. However, if Catholic universities want to fulfill their mission and to keep a specific profile and identity in the growing diversified academic market, they need to understand, defend, implement, and develop the CIT.

Second, beyond the great names and works of the CIT and their contribution to the life of the Church and of society in general, one has to acknowledge the mistakes, failures, tragedies, and mortal sins in the history of the Church: Catholics have not always lived up to their vocation. Mark Lilla writes about “secular” intellectuals: “Distinguished professors, gifted poets, and influential journalists summoned their talents to convince all who would listen that modern tyrants were liberators and that their unconscionable crimes were noble, when seen in the proper perspective.”<sup>12</sup> Similar facts have been observed for Catholics. Lilla concludes that “[w]hoever takes it upon himself to write an honest intellectual history of twentieth-century Europe will need a strong stomach.”<sup>13</sup> The historian of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition will of course remember the moments when Catholic intellectuals have been at their best and make that part of the tradition accessible to our age. He will also work on the indirect influence of Catholic thought on the greater community, e.g., the influence of Catholic schools and colleges educating people who are neither Catholics nor Christians, or of social teachings transmitted second- or third-hand. But he won’t ignore the black sheep in this history either. Doing research in the CIT and writing about it doesn’t mean to idealize the Church; it rather means to write according to the perspective of the Bible that doesn’t exclude the sins of God’s chosen ones. Blessed Pope John Paul II took an unprecedented important theological step<sup>14</sup> when he asked for forgiveness for the sins of members of the Church on the First Sunday of Lent, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2000.<sup>15</sup> Mark Lilla concludes that the historian of the intellectuals “[...] will need something more [than a strong stomach]. He will need to overcome his dis-

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lilla, M. (2001), *The Reckless Mind*, p. 198, quoted by Sowell, Th. (2009), *Intellectuals and Society*, p. vi.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> International Theological Commission (1999), *Memory and Reconciliation*, 1. The Problem: Yesterday and Today. One knows about certain countries’ difficulties to follow this example in the political domain.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II (2000), *Confession of Sins and Asking for Forgiveness*.

gust long enough to ponder the roots of this strange and puzzling phenomenon.”<sup>16</sup> The genuinely objective historical theologian interested in Catholic intellectuals will try to understand the individual and social motivations as well as the context of the wrong and sometimes sinful behavior that he acknowledges. Without referring to the mystery of evil as an explanation that makes any other research in the causes of human and spiritual failures obsolete, he will remember that man is not perfect and continuously needs conversion, a continuous improvement that cannot be reduced to a mere intellectual process. Understanding how and why our ancestors acted as they did may have great pedagogical value if this knowledge is combined with personal introspection and intimate examination of conscience.

Third, there is a need to reflect on the CIT when the Church enters into dialogue with the world. We notice a new interest in Catholicism as, e.g., an increasing number of books published on this topic shows.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, beyond traditional forms of anti-Catholicism, Catholics have to face a new, aggressive atheism attacking in particular Catholic beliefs and institutions. Church history, Catholic doctrines, and liturgy are studied by secular sciences, which offer important insights. The study of Catholicism must of course be interdisciplinary; it needs to combine insiders’ and outsiders’ perspectives. It even needs to listen to the harshest criticism while it also includes theology as a science of its own, rooted in the faith of the Church. Catholics cannot simply rely on others to tell them who they are. In every situation, Christians need to integrate the theological perspective to explain truly in whom, what, and why they believe, live, think, and feel as they do. Furthermore, the dialogue with people from other faith traditions, with non-believers, and with people whose idea of Catholicism has been shaped by anti-Catholics requires that Catholics explain who they are and how they conceive their place in the contemporary world. The relationship between faith and reason is a core element of this dialogue. This is nothing new – explaining and sometimes defending the Catholic faith as well as the intellectual life it generates has always been part of the Christian mission. We read in 1Pt 3.15b-16: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason of your hope, but do it with gentleness and rever-

---

<sup>16</sup> Lilla, M. (2001), *The Reckless Mind*, p. 198, quoted by Sowell, Th. (2009), *Intellectuals and Society*, p. vi.

<sup>17</sup> Among the numerous publications, Trigilio, J., Jr. and Brighenti, K. (2003), *Catholicism for Dummies*, shows the interest a broader public takes in Catholicism while the paperback edition of a volume from the well-known Blackwell Companion series attests to the growing academic interest: Buckley, J. J.; Bauerschmidt, F. Chr. and Pomplu, T. (Eds.) (2011), *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*.

ence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame.”

Finally, there is a more fundamental reason: Christianity doesn’t exist in a pure, abstract universe: it has grown throughout the centuries in different traditions and communities. Studying one’s own history and accepting one’s part in that history is the necessary consequence of understanding that there is no absolute, ahistorical scientific point of view from which one can interpret life as a whole. Excluding inherent differences, relativizing denominational traditions or simply breaking up with them in order to speak about Christianity in general and to make this relativizing speech the reference for any Church’s life is a utopian and irresponsible solution. Such thought would actually deny that historically grown religious traditions and their parallel cultural, social, and even political customs or traditions deeply shape peoples’ lives. Far from lacking influence, traditions are part of what we call in the deepest sense “home.” So a theology reduced to the lowest common denominator will never offer an acceptable way for promoting the unity of Christians. The efficient way to follow must be different; one has to study one’s own tradition in its historical context in order to understand the true meaning and the intention of theological statements. Beyond the content itself, the process in which this content was generated has also to be taken into account.

### **3 The Catholic Intellectual Tradition: An Ongoing Hermeneutical and Transformational Process of Revelation, World, and Humanity**

The CIT has been described with a dynamic expression as a “[...] 2000-year conversation resulting from the belief that thinking, serious sustained intellectual reflection, is a good thing and that it needs to be applied to our lives as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth as well as to everything else.”<sup>18</sup> The individual contributions of this book have shown that the CIT is rooted both in the teachings of the Church and in the realities of this world; specific examples have illustrated its impact on business, management, social sciences, politics, education, ethics, and culture. We could easily add references from philosophy, literature, music, the arts, and theology itself. It is obvious that CIT is not a static system of ideas but still an “[...] ongoing conversation [that] is essentially a product of the interaction of Christianity and the culture of which it is a part.”<sup>19</sup> Thus the tradition appears both as a hermeneutical and as a transformational process: on the one hand it intends to interpret

<sup>18</sup> Cahoy, W. J. (2003), *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition*. See also McIntyre, A. (2009), *God, Philosophy, Universities*, Introduction.

<sup>19</sup> Cahoy, W. J. (2003), *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition*.



the world at the light of the Gospel, on the other to read the Gospel with the questions raised by this world in one's mind. Engaging the tradition, Catholic intellectuals then strive to make this world a better place to live for everyone and to express the Catholic faith in a contemporary language.

Several articles and books analyze main aspects of the CIT and their importance for the life of Catholic universities.<sup>20</sup> In the following paragraphs I would like to discuss each of the components of the expression "Catholic Intellectual Tradition." The three terms of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition express together what CIT means: they are interdependent. Therefore, when I start with presenting a certain idea of tradition, I also have in mind a particular view of Catholicism and some specific understanding of the intellect. However, this doesn't mean that the understanding of what tradition is has been derived from a definition of Catholicism as Catholicism is not derived from a certain understanding of the intellect. Moreover, because the Catholic intellectual tradition and its three components form a whole, the analytical dissection is not well adapted to its presentation. A picture would do better and offer a nearly simultaneous perception of the relationship between the three realities. Putting into words and thus into a linear expression a complex idea requires, however, that one starts one's text somewhere. Finally, as the Catholic intellectual tradition is a living, evolving phenomenon, the analytical presentation that follows can only be a snapshot of a system. I hope to write in such a way that the reader may not only grasp the singular elements but the form of what has been presented to him.

*Tradition* – Monika K. Hellwig points out that tradition means "[...] respect for the cumulative wisdom of the past. In contrast to the position of some Christian communities which look for Christian wisdom only in Scripture or only in the legacy of the pre-Constantinian era, the Catholic community has set great store by knowledge of the cumulative wisdom of all the Christian centuries."<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> For instance, Cahoy, W. J. (2003), *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition*; Cernera, A. J. (2009), *The Catholic Character of Catholic Universities*; Cernera, A. J. and Morgan, O. J. (2000; 2002), *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition* (2 vol.); Hellwig, M. K. (2000), *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition*; Loris, M. (2009), *Engaging the Catholic Intellectual Tradition – Sacred Heart University's Common Core: The Human Journey*; Roche, M. W. (2003), *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism and the Idea of a Catholic University*. – Still inspiring of course, Newman, J. H. Card. (2006), *The Idea of a University*. See also Bottone, A. (2009), *Knowledge and Morality in Newman's The Idea of a University*.

<sup>21</sup> Hellwig, M. K. (2000), *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, p. 7.

Theologically speaking, this doesn't mean that Catholics consider tradition to be more important than Scripture.<sup>22</sup> In the context of the Church, which could be described as a community determined by a canonical reception process,<sup>23</sup> revelation itself is not "objectively" at hand. The transmission of the God's self-revelation to all men corresponds to a mandate from Christ himself who entrusts the preaching of the Gospel to his apostles. This is the theological origin of Christian tradition, considered as a continuous communication process: "In preaching the Gospel, [the apostles] were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline."<sup>24</sup> This communication process remains always linked to the apostolic succession: "In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority. Indeed, the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time."<sup>25</sup> Therefore, in the Catholic Church, it is only up to the Church, to the bishops in union with the pope, to present the authoritative interpretation of Revelation.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the Church makes a difference between oral tradition, Scripture, and Tradition. In fact, "[...] the apostles [...] handed [the Gospel] on by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received – whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit."<sup>27</sup> Besides this oral tradition, the Gospel is handed on in writing. In the gospels, the inspired written word bears substantial witness to the eternal Word made flesh. "Through Tradition, the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes."<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the Church teaches that Scripture and Tradition are

---

<sup>22</sup> See Vatican II (1965), *Dei Verbum*, no. 9: "[...] there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end." *Ibid.*, no. 10: "Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church."

<sup>23</sup> See Ehret, J. (2009), *Katholisch: Christus als Mitte*, p. 26-27.

<sup>24</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 75.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 77.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 85-86.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 76.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 78.

"closely connected."<sup>29</sup> This is true both from a theological and a historical point of view.

In fact, Scripture itself has its origin in the very life of God's people to whom God revealed himself.<sup>30</sup> The life of this community had already been shaped by the liturgical celebration and proclamation of the faith, by the service to those in need, and by the witnessing to the faith in all situations. This life of the faithful community offers the hermeneutical background for the reception of God's self-revelation and for its oral transmission. Then Scripture can be considered as the first permanent verbal expression, the original written expression of the living "tradition." It is also the first theology in which all other theologies are rooted so that the Second Vatican Council can call "[...] the study of the sacred page [...] the soul of sacred theology."<sup>31</sup> In fact, Holy Scripture is at first, as its name suggests, not a book for profane readers, but a message to God's people. God's Spirit introduces the faithful to the deep understanding of God's Word.<sup>32</sup> Thus its reception and its origin have their proper place in the spiritual life of the Church. Thus, tradition can be considered as this dialogical process of receiving the Revelation.

It would be wrong to think that the Holy Spirit eliminates the specific historical aspects of the reception process: the four gospels offer four narratives about Christ, and while each one is definitely marked by its specific *Sitz im Leben*, they all proclaim the one Lord. Historical research has made the readers more aware of the composition of the Gospels, of the struggles to understand the deep meaning of the inspired word, and more recently of the slow differentiation of Jewish and Christian beliefs and communities.<sup>33</sup> Thus tradition cannot be reduced to a set of clear-cut, normative liturgical and moral rules and dogmatic truths in a *ne-varietur*-expression of an idealized past. It is rather a creative process of reception, at a given period of time, and therefore never coming to an end before the final day. This process is influenced by the social, cultural, historical, political, etc. context; yet it cannot be reduced to these factors because it is fundamentally rooted in the living dialogue with God. Through personal prayer, the liturgy of the Church ("[...] ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi."<sup>34</sup>), it is a personal and institutional process of discernment in history. While the Church is con-

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., no. 77.

<sup>30</sup> See Vatican II (1965), *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Vatican II (1965), *Dei Verbum*, no. 24.

<sup>32</sup> See John 16.13: "But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth."

<sup>33</sup> See Boyarin, D. (2006), *Border Lines*.

<sup>34</sup> Prosper of Aquitaine, *Capitula Coelestini* 8.

fronted with the fullness of truth as transmitted by the Sacred Texts and the living tradition, this process is definitely part of its nature. Because she is divine, she can understand the Word of God; as she is contingent, she can only grasp it according to human intellectual structures and processes.<sup>35</sup> In fact, God's self-revelation creates the conditions necessary for its own reception and understanding, combining at the same time self-evidence and the diachronic dimension of human intelligence.

As human intelligence is an essential means of tradition and as it is open both to God and the world, I don't intend to limit the understanding of the process of tradition to the interpretation of Revelation. In fact, when people belonging to a certain culture have read the Scriptures and asked the Word of God to shape their whole being, they look in a different way on the world, on philosophical traditions, on cultural practices, etc. While historians have often studied the influence that the ideas of a particular age had on theology, it is equally important to analyze how the Christian mind reshaped these ideas. While one has to acknowledge a constructivist moment in tradition and theology, one also has to remember that it reshapes culture and that it is rooted in the dialogue with the living God and the concomitant practice of discernment. Hence tradition, as a whole, including the intellectual tradition, considered as one aspect of the greater tradition, is simultaneously creative and faithful (or conservative).

Today we are still struggling to express our faith, as did our ancestors at their time. One aspect of this struggle is exemplified in engaging the impact of natural sciences. They help to break the filtering effects of metaphysical or theological rhetoric with closer observation of life or of what we call reality. They question theological interpretations of numerous fundamental Christian beliefs and require theologians to rethink them. In the midst of this process, one continuously struggles to fit together "the rightful autonomy of the creature,"<sup>36</sup> which natural sciences help to discover and understand, and the absolute freedom, power, and grace of God. As one feels that the language of our predecessors is sometimes inadequate for our times, a new theological consensus, which is beginning to rise on different topics, hasn't yet made its way into the different communities.

Discussions about ethical questions seem even more difficult. The press likes to focus particularly on Catholic sexual morals. For many people the Church's teaching isn't progressive enough; very often however, people forget about the cultural background of their ideas and their forms of

---

<sup>35</sup> See Vatican II (1964), *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8: "[...] one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element."

<sup>36</sup> Vatican II (1965), *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 41.

thought.<sup>37</sup> Because Catholic teaching recognizes universal, objective truth, it rejects the relativistic approach claiming that truth can be reduced to the subjective understanding that a culture, an age, or even an individual has. It then requires that the intellectual acknowledge his particular situation and the influence this situation has on both his thinking and the quality of his experiences. It also stresses the intellectual's obligation to open himself to different perspectives. Encompassing the whole Church – geographically and theologically speaking –, tradition brings particular claims of truth into perspective. With all its aspects it offers the necessary space for a dialogue that also needs time, patience, humility, and discernment in communion with the Church and her magisterium.

In this process one must not, however, underestimate the impact of socio-cultural factors and reduce the non-identical (Th. W. Adorno) to the categories of the prevailing discourse. "Tradition is an interactive process [...] that has the character of an ever new fight for the truth that needs to be carried out in the present moment, in which the existence of both the one who passes down the tradition and the one who receives it is at risk."<sup>38</sup> Tensions between different interpretations among theologians and between them and the magisterium belong to the organic process of tradition as long as they are grounded in the love for God and for one another.

Thus any "return" to tradition as an imaginary lost theological Catholic paradise is certainly utopian and even dangerous. The creative rethinking that our times need is not possible without being deeply rooted in what Christianity and more specifically Roman Catholicism has developed as doctrines, forms of social and spiritual life, art, etc., in short a tradition that is not confined to any specific historical period but embraces the whole history. Tradition is not an obstacle to progress. On the contrary, it is the fertile soil in which faithful new expressions of God's living presence have their deep roots.

*Intellectual* – In our analysis tradition appeared as a complex process shaping the life of the faithful and the Church as a whole. The following paragraphs develop the intellectual aspect which is one among other factors involved in the process of tradition with all its components such as liturgy, art, or law.

---

<sup>37</sup> See Legrand, H. (2008), *Théologie et culture universitaire*, p. 698, who comments briefly upon the theological turmoil in the Anglican communion about openly gay clergy and the ordination of women. He asks: "It is of course a theological conflict (normativity of Scripture, theology of the ordained ministry, moral theology) but doesn't the cultural difference, let's say between Nigeria and the United States of America, make it difficult to prevent a schism in its beginning?"

<sup>38</sup> Wegenast, K. (2002), *Tradition*, p. 724.

What is an intellectual? Sowell's occupational definition says intellectuals are those people whose "[...] work begins and ends with ideas."<sup>39</sup> He adds another criterion: "[...] among people in mentally demanding occupations, the fault line between those likely to be considered intellectuals and those who are not tends to run between those whose ideas are ultimately subject to internal criteria and those whose ideas are ultimately subject to external criteria."<sup>40</sup> In the end, "intellectuals [...] are ultimately unaccountable to the external world."<sup>41</sup> Sowell is aware of the problem and even "the great social danger" of such unaccountability: "[...] purely internal criteria [...] can easily become sealed off from feedback from the external world or reality and remain circular in their methods of validation."<sup>42</sup> The history of the twentieth century is full of intellectuals who were completely wrong in their judgments, yet were influential people.

What is, in particular, a Catholic intellectual? Someone under the control of a watchdog called papal magisterium? Or an ecclesiastical apparatchik? Probably because the name Catholic intellectual is often associated with such representations, Jean Greisch finds it difficult to use it. He asserts that we can speak about Christian intellectuals as we speak, for example about Christian painters. "This [doesn't] precisely mean that the Christian faith or a religious institution stipulated what and how [the artist] had to paint. [...] As creative persons, they dealt with questions and topics that were issues for them as believers. The intellectual's catholicity can't consist in conceptualizing specific positions as it happened in olden days in the Communist party [...]. The Catholic intellectual first has to be an intellectual, too."<sup>43</sup> In fact, intellectuals are not to be put in the care of Church authorities. They are free people. History shows how they had to fight for their freedom.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, a specific concept of the intellectual activity has been developed in the Catholic tradition.

The main aspect of Catholic intellectual activity is the continuous search for truth. The Church believes that human reason can discover and know truth. However, one has to understand what this means. In Christianity, truth is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus knowledge of truth is at the same time

---

<sup>39</sup> Sowell, Th. (2009), *Intellectuals and Society*, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Greisch, J. (2009), "Mit den Augen der Anderen," p. 559.

<sup>44</sup> In France, lay Catholic intellectuals were also born when the encyclical *Pascendi* banned clergy from academic and intellectual discussions. See Legrand, H. (2008), *Théologie et culture universitaire*, p. 691-693; Serry, H. (2004), *Naissance de l'intellectuel catholique*, p. 18.

divine, relational, and integrated in a dialogical process. Moreover, human reason won't be able to grasp the complete truth, neither of God nor of creation. In fact, there is no perspective from which we can completely see the whole of creation, and even less God and creation, as Saint Paul knows already: "for we know partially [...]" (1Cor 13.9) Moreover, from a Christian perspective, all being is created by God and thus keeps in itself the creator's trace, something from his unfathomable depth. Hans Urs von Balthasar accordingly recalls the mystery of being.<sup>45</sup> The constant search for truth consists in exploring reality by all possible means; in listening to our ancestors; in understanding and overcoming the obstacles tradition faces today, integrating all the different aspects in a coherent understanding that takes into account that everything that exists in relationship with God. The analytical, linear method of natural sciences is not rejected – it has its due place in the context of these sciences. However, knowledge provided by science is not considered as the ultimate understanding of reality. The CIT is in its roots interdisciplinary, it is working towards a synthetic view, towards a unity of knowledge, towards wisdom. In this process, faith, the living relationship with God is considered neither as contrary to reason nor as a possible substitution for it but as the realm in which worldly aspects of truth and divine truth exist together and are thought of together. The expression of truth becomes therefore a construction, yet a construction that is informed by the self-giving reality of God and creation.<sup>46</sup> Although Neo-Scholastic rationalism had frozen this process, such a dynamic reasoning has become possible again since theology rediscovered and reintegrated – without becoming relativistic – its own historicity. In the CIT, the openness of reason to truth goes together with a fundamental receptive attitude and the desire to integrate different sources of knowledge in a dialogical process.

The CIT doesn't limit itself to linking natural and human sciences with reality. Intellectuals are invited to expose themselves to difficult and challenging aspects of life. Cernera provocatively writes, "[...] that the faculty and other researchers and scholars within the university [...] seek to learn from the poor."<sup>47</sup> The different contributions of this book show that CIT is not an abstract exercise of the mind, but a way of assuming responsibility for the world we live in. The questions that Catholic intellectuals seek to solve are often rooted in social reality. The CIT starts very often with a kind of "phenomenology of the world." Its process of handling ideas permanently refers to the realities of a given society. However, tradition will prevent the intellectual from considering contemporary thinking models as absolute.

<sup>45</sup> Balthasar, H. U. von (2000), *Theo-Logic I*, chap. III.

<sup>46</sup> See also Roche, M. (2003), *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism*, p. 20-21.

<sup>47</sup> Cernera, A. J. (2009), *The Catholic Character of Catholic Universities*, p. 442.

Finally, in Catholic universities, according to Christian anthropology, the intellectual formation is only part of an education of the whole person. "Catholic education is committed to the full human development and formation of those who study at Catholic universities. We enrich the liberal arts experience of undergraduate students by engaging their hearts as well as their minds."<sup>48</sup>

*Catholic* – The first attribute of the CIT is its catholicity. Many aspects of this quality have already been included implicitly in the preceding developments. Catholicity is one of the four characteristics of the Church. While Catholicism refers more precisely to the Roman Catholic Church, no Christian denomination can actually abandon its claim to be truly Catholic, i.e., universal, as it strives to be the Church of Jesus Christ who is the original *katholikos*. Reference to a Catholic intellectual tradition thus means that it is part of the life of the Roman Catholic Church which derives its catholicity from that of Christ Jesus himself.<sup>49</sup>

Thus the CIT is based on a theological *a priori*. More precisely, Catholics do not only believe in some unknown God, but in Jesus Christ "the only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, [and] who revealed him." (John 1.18) For Christians, Christ is not simply an extraordinary person, not one founder of religion among others; neither is the Church one religion among others; neither does the Roman Catholic Church consider itself as one denomination among others. In each of these characterizations, there is a specific claim of uniqueness, challenged many times in history, raising in our globalized world many issues concerning enculturation, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue. For the Catholic Church certainly "[e]quality [...] is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue [but it] refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ – who is God himself made man – in relation to the founders of the other religions. Indeed, the Church, guided by charity and respect for freedom, must be primarily committed to proclaiming to all people the truth definitively revealed by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments, in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Cernera, A. J. (2009), *The Catholic Character of Catholic Universities*, p. 442. See also Roche, M. W. (2010), *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?*

<sup>49</sup> See Ehret, J. (2009), *Katholisch: Christus als Mitte*, p. 22-26; Cernera, A. J. (2009), *The Catholic Character of Catholic Universities*, in particular p. 451-452.

<sup>50</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (2000), Declaration "Dominus Jesus," no. 22. For a discussion of this premises in the context of the CIT, see, e.g.,



This faith is the God-given center of Roman Catholicism; it is the source of its unity. If one compares the Church to a living body, the Holy Spirit is her soul. While the divine origin of the Church is the source of her unity, Catholics need to implement this unity in time and space. In fact, Catholicism continues to develop a rich diversity of expressions. In every age then, we find documents and institutions that show what it means to be Catholic and that foster the visible unity. So there is Catholic doctrine. Certainly, it can't be reduced to the Catechism of the Church, but doctrine finds a faithful, condensed, and authoritative expression in it. Moreover, there is Church discipline, canon law; there are liturgical books; there is religious life and the life of Christian families; there are also officially Catholic institutions, from the Roman Curia to the Catholic universities, the official charity organization Caritas Internationalis, the International Federation of Catholic Universities, the Pontifical Academies, etc., down to the parishes. And there is the ministry of the Pope to whom unity is entrusted in a particular way. Together with many other aspects, these elements express what it means to be Catholic. They shape the lives, the self-understanding, the personal prayer and the official worship of the faithful and thus contribute to an identity that remains grounded in baptism.

Therefore membership in the Catholic Church is more than intellectual consent to doctrine, aesthetics, or ethics. In fact, faith means handing oneself over to God. Christians pray the "Our Father" as the sons and daughters of God. At the same time, they are the sons and daughters of their parents. They are at home both in heaven and on earth. Their identity lies in two fundamental relationships; one cannot be reduced to the other; both coexist in the human person and shape it. Each one of the two relationships can be experienced as conflictual just as they may conflict with one another. Being a Christian means in fact constructing one's identity continuously while developing, readjusting, and deepening one's fundamental relationships.

Similarly, Catholics neither identify nor completely separate the secular and the divine. They continuously seek to deepen into the God-given relationship<sup>51</sup> between these two realms, to understand and explain it, and to live in it. This perspective is based on the faith in God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and Catholic intellectuals are responsible to develop arguments that speak in favor of this position. Yet these arguments won't ever have the kind of evidence natural sciences produce. Love can show itself, it can be accepted or rejected; it cannot be enforced. For example, the argument that ethics need

---

Machado, F. (2009), *The Catholic University in Multicultural and Multireligious Society*.

<sup>51</sup> This relationship is based on the realities of creation, covenant, incarnation and passion, resurrection and eschatological new creation.

to be founded in God is not comparable to any evidence of natural sciences; it is rather a criticism of an atheist position, emphasizing one of its weaknesses or aporias. Furthermore it is an invitation to explore the other way, the believer's position. It will naturally have its own aporias. For example, the existence of evil or illnesses in a world created by God who is good and almighty is challenging to explain. Believers and non-believers are invited to compete on an intellectual level as both are striving for truth. The responsibilities in this competition are very high. Not only individual existences are at stake but the future of our planet. This competition may well be a crucible for the CIT.

Some non-believers may come to the conclusion that the Catholic position offers important, promising, helpful, insights and perspectives for action. They can share the Catholic position while not believing in Christ. Even if they are interested or participate in preserving, transmitting, and developing the CIT, they haven't necessarily become believers in the religious sense, Catholics, or anonymous Christians. Similarly, believers may find arguments that non-believers develop very challenging; in the worst case they may even lose their faith. They may also be able to take up the challenge, to deepen into their own tradition, and to develop it in order to let its truth shine forth under new conditions. The necessity to be creative has been emphasized several times in this book and in this contribution, as the CIT is not a set of rigid recipes but the expression of an active mind bringing together God and the world in the context of the Catholic tradition.

Likewise, at the institutional level, Catholic universities are open to students, to staff and to faculty members who belong to different faith traditions or who consider themselves to be non-believers. The students will study and do their research at Catholic universities; they may even work upon topics specifically related to the CIT. Similarly, non-Catholic faculty members will educate and teach students and do research at Catholic universities as they share the values and ideals of the CIT. These students and faculty members also introduce an opportunity for the dialogue with other traditions into the heart of Catholic universities. However, the CIT can't exist and be developed without people deeply rooted in their faith. It won't be enough to have only people committed to Christian "values." In fact, values continuously need to be interpreted in new situations. If the living relationship to God who revealed himself is missing, the hermeneutic and transformational process lacks its central reference. Economic, political, or other strategic arguments may then impose their own law even more than they do now, cutting the CIT off from its roots and dehumanizing (under the mask of greater benefits for all) our cultures. In order to fulfill its mission, the CIT therefore needs a strong Catholic identity.

Is the specific reference to Catholicism therefore an obstacle for ecumenism or does it foster it? If one accepts that the human mind has no access to an absolute perspective from which it could compare different denominations and evaluate them,<sup>52</sup> one will have to enter deeply into the tradition to be able to understand its truth claims without reducing them to the expression they had at one period of time. Then the broad knowledge of tradition and its process will become the way to get closer to the “differentiated consensus” that Catholics and Lutherans have already been able to reach on certain controversial theological issues.<sup>53</sup> The postmodern historical situation of religion in public life calls also for Christians speaking with one voice. The urgency of problems of hunger, violence, or injustice may even keep pushing different Christian denominations to move together and thus work as catalysts. While the fight for social justice may easily lead to common statements, the different denominations may, however, come to quite different positions when it comes to ethical topics like abortion, euthanasia or same sex marriage.<sup>54</sup> Therefore it seems even more important that the respective denominations study their tradition as a continuous process, addressing the impact of cultural diversity on theological hermeneutics.

Finally, one shouldn’t be afraid of the denominational meaning of the word Catholic. People who had reservations about the concept of a Catholic tradition very often envisioned a specific authoritarian expression of the magis-

---

<sup>52</sup> See Greisch, J. (2009), “Mit den Augen der Anderen,” p. 558: “The philosopher has for sure not the role of a nonparty arbitrator [...]”

<sup>53</sup> See Legrand, H. (2008), *Théologie et culture universitaire*, p. 698-700.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., the highly critical assessment on Anglican-Orthodox relations, insisting not only on doctrinal differences (ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate) but specifically also on moral values, in Alfeyev, H. (2010), Address: “Nowadays it is increasingly difficult to speak of ‘Christianity’ as a unified scale of spiritual and moral values, universally adopted by all Christians. It is more appropriate, rather, to speak of ‘Christianities’, that is, different versions of Christianity espoused by diverse communities. [...] The abyss that exists today divides not so much the Orthodox from the Catholics or the Catholics from the Protestants as it does the ‘traditionalists’ from the ‘liberals.’ [...] Some Protestant and Anglican churches have repudiated basic Christian moral values by giving a public blessing to same-sex unions and ordaining homosexuals as priests and bishops. Many Protestant and Anglican communities refuse to preach Christian moral values in secular society and prefer to adjust to worldly standards. Our Church must sever its relations with those churches and communities that trample on the principles of Christian ethics and traditional morals. Here we uphold a firm stand based on Holy Scripture.” The Metropolitan Hilarion rightly stresses the critical points of disagreement between various confessions; his conclusions may, however, be considered by some as very radical. The actual problem lies in how far we can go in our literal interpretation of certain scriptural texts.

terium. The presentation of the concepts of both tradition and intellect already showed how much theology and official doctrine have integrated their own historicity, how concepts and contents are situated in their historical context, and how tradition itself is an ongoing process, both creative and faithful. Other people may be afraid of the potential of violence inherent in a denominational reference, remembering the wars of religion. However, the danger of violence cannot be avoided by not referring to the denomination, to its institutions, its dogmas, and its morals. A non-denominational – whatever that might be – conception of catholicity or Christianity could also become violent, ostracizing, and intolerant once it has gained sufficient power. The intellectuals' duty is rather to acknowledge, "[...] that every faith, due to its claim to absoluteness, contains potentials of violence with which one has to deal to become able to communicate with the other. The lowest level of a putative common denominator is insufficient to agree on the essentials."<sup>55</sup> Finally, without the denominational reference, the concept of a Catholic Intellectual Tradition would become blurred and lose its diacritical function. Contemporary research on Catholicism, and on Catholic intellectuals in particular, recognizes the need of a concept that is not reduced to sociological, political, or cultural aspects.<sup>56</sup> This is true for both insiders<sup>57</sup> and outsiders' perspectives on the CIT.

#### 4 Perspectives

The CIT offers Catholic universities, associations, and organizations new prospects of understanding and developing our humanity; of deepening our common bonds and real hopes; of transforming the world in such a way that it may become a better place to live for everyone; and a safe basis to under-

<sup>55</sup> Greisch, J. (2009), "Mit den Augen des Anderen," p. 558.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Chaubet, F. (2009), *Quelques réflexions sur l'histoire des intellectuels*; see also the review of Schwab, H.-R. (2009), *Eigensinn und Bindung. Katholische deutsche Intellektuelle im 20. Jahrhundert*. 39 Porträts, by Džugan, R. (2010), *Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung*, who misses a clear profile of the Catholic intellectual and of catholicity in Schwab's book. The reader may then be surprised by the reviewer's list of Catholic elements: the first three elements concern sexual morals...

<sup>57</sup> See for instance the recent collection "Rombach Wissenschaften – Reihe Katholizismus. Quellen und Studien zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte des modernen Katholizismus," edited by Claus Arnold, Wilhelm Kühlmann, Thomas Pittrof, Günter Schnitzler and Peter Walter. Two volumes have been published so far: Kühlmann, W. and Luckscheiter, R. (Eds.) (2008), *Moderne und Antimoderne*; Pittrof, Th. and Schmitz, W. (Eds.) (2010), *Freie Anerkennung übergeschichtlicher Bindungen*. For an introduction to the corresponding research project on "literary Catholicism" and methodological reflections, see Pittrof, Th. (2007), *Literarischer Katholizismus als Forschungsaufgabe*.

stand and proclaim God in current times. The contributions of this book have exemplified this claim with various cases studied in detail. They illustrated how the contemporary world challenges traditional representations. They also showed that a sense of tradition is the necessary means to overcome disorientation and alienation.

Natural sciences as well as the humanities have offered an abundance of factual knowledge, hypotheses, and theories to explain life, the world, and the universe. Such information may have the power to make common representations and norms of behavior seem obsolete. However, while a feeling of freedom may first arise, sooner or later the need for orientation follows.

Serious orientation in life presupposes a unified representation of reality. However, not only theologians have a difficulty in assimilating all the interdisciplinary information, expressed in a language different from theirs, and in realizing some unity of knowledge. Natural scientists also have to face this challenge when they are confronted with aspects that their methods do not necessarily include, as do the humanities as they struggle to integrate the knowledge offered by the natural sciences.

Capelle-Dumont considers that "[...] the task of unity of knowledge [...] is more than ever before us."<sup>58</sup> Tanzella-Niti shows that the quest for unity of knowledge "[...] begins by asking for the unity of the object and for the interdisciplinarity of methods [and] ends up by involving the subject, who is, ultimately, he or she in whom that knowledge must be unified."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore he suggests "that the act that grants unity to the intellectual experience of the subject, once he or she assents to ask for the ultimate questions on the origin, the ends, and the meaning of the whole of reality, has a *religious* nature [...]."<sup>60</sup>

To overcome mistrust in tradition, I contend that precisely the dynamics of tradition offer the possibility for a different dialogue with the world, between sciences, and with God. I am speaking here about tradition as it has been presented, in a truly Catholic sense that refuses to reduce it to the museum representation of a past period of Church history and conceives of it as an ongoing dialogical process founded in the relationship with God.

Dialogue has not been introduced as a heterogeneous category; it arose when the structure of divine self-revelation was analyzed. The initiative of the dialogue lies in God who creates a universe and persons who are essentially distinct from Him; furthermore, He enables these persons to commu-

---

<sup>58</sup> Capelle-Dumont, Ph. (2009), *The Catholic University in Post-Modern Societies*, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Tanzella-Niti, G. (2006), *In Search for the Unity of Knowledge*, p. 407.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

nicate with him: He enters a covenant with them. Moreover, it is the God of the incarnation and passion, of the *kenosis*, who consents to become similar to humanity in everything but sin, to humble himself, “becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.” (Phil 2.8) It is also the God of glorification who rises from the dead and in whom humanity and the whole creation will be glorified. Christians believe all this since they are involved in a specific relationship with God, in a covenant with Him.

It would be important to dedicate future research into the covenant not only as a theological but also as a fundamental anthropological and epistemological category.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the covenant can be considered the central category that helps to conceive of the unity of knowledge without going back on the irreducibility of rationalities. It enables the differentiation that allows for the diversified study of worldly realities. Moreover, the covenant thus becomes a genuine channel of recognition and communication and, for Catholics, a liberating agent for a fruitful dialogue.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the covenant is not a reality of the past; while it is informed by tradition as content and process, it is offered to humankind in the present.

To explore deeply the reality and the concept of the covenant should be a major task for Catholic intellectuals, especially for Catholic universities. IFCU’s sectorial groups offer helpful structures for interdisciplinary research from the perspective of a specific science or branch of knowledge. The collaboration of the sectorial groups can go a step further if representatives from each group, or more generally from different disciplines, formed a panel to enter into dialogue on a specific common topic. This would be a possible approach that one might call transdisciplinary: an “object” would be “moved through” different disciplines such that each makes a new synthesis from its own perspective, integrating knowledge acquired from other points of view and through different methodologies.

This method could, in the long run, overcome the fragmentation of knowledge. Of course, it presupposes and fosters a new type of collaboration where the representatives from different sciences listen to one another, make the new information their own, are able to express in dialogue with their colleagues the information they got from them in such a way that the colleagues would agree with the “translation” of their own presentation in another language, and integrate the new insights into their own research and

---

<sup>61</sup> See also Ehret, J. (2009), *Verbum vitae*, p. 49-52.

<sup>62</sup> See Capelle-Dumont, Ph. (2009), *The Catholic University in Post-Modern Societies*, p. 9-13. Capelle-Dumont emphasizes that Christianity alone can “explain, allege, and invoke” the “code of transcendence” that offers the “transcendental aspect” [sic] of the dialogue. (Ibid., p. 8.)

presentation. Such an approach also fosters transparent heuristic, gnoseological, and epistemological foundations as well as hermeneutical processes. It enables intellectuals to reflect upon different types of language, upon their possibility to communicate, and upon their ability to express a unified vision;<sup>63</sup> thence to integrate a more complex description of the object of one's science into one's own research and thus to revise one's first presentation. In other words, before publishing the different papers, scientists would need to revise them, integrating the new "insights" offered by their colleagues from other disciplines. This process illustrates the idea of the systemic relation of disciplines, so that progress in scientific knowledge in one discipline affects also the others. Such an approach is of course not limited to the concept of the covenant.<sup>64</sup>

The publication of the collected papers would go beyond existing multidisciplinary volumes, as every contribution would have integrated the contribution of the other disciplines, at least to a certain extent. If, in addition to this, the individual contributors are willing to perform an introspection to analyze the process of confronting themselves with other perspectives, such a volume could offer a series of diversified descriptions of the process of (re)constructing knowledge.

This approach is rooted in the dialogical character of tradition; it also offers the possibility for theology to be neither the "first science" in a hierarchical representation of disciplines nor the conceptual frame in which all other knowledge needs to be "integrated," or rather reduced. On the contrary, in dialogue with other disciplines, and with the living God to whom the Catholic tradition bears witness, theology can develop a new language in this space.

The result of such an approach will never be an "absolute" or ultimate knowledge but the mental picture of a landscape in perpetual evolution. Thus, this mental landscape presupposes a mind that opened itself to the contributions of different rationalities, and ultimately to God Himself in its

---

<sup>63</sup> In this context, special attention might be given to art, and to literature in particular. Single works offer a coherent vision of a virtual world; different works of an artist can introduce the "reader" to an original worldview. The diversity of the works cannot be reduced; they compete with one another, complement, ignore, or inspire one another. Understanding aesthetical processes may help to understand better the creative process of tradition.

<sup>64</sup> One example: as spirituality has become both a blurred concept and a broad social phenomenon, researchers from different disciplines currently plan to create an international network "Transdisciplinary Theorization of Spirituality." For more information contact J. Ehret at [poetics67@yahoo.com](mailto:poetics67@yahoo.com).

search for truth.<sup>65</sup> It would be an original Catholic contribution to the intellectual world.

## 5 Conclusion

This book has introduced a variety of aspects of the CIT. Its last contribution asked for a portrait of this tradition and developed its dynamics through the analysis of the three concepts, tradition, intellect, and catholicity. The concept of the covenant has been emphasized as a central epistemological and anthropological category, as the reality in which the history of God and his people is founded. This history has not yet come to its end; it is the place where Christians are called to be witnesses of faith, hope, and love; the salt of the earth (Mt 5.13). They are invested with a divine mission of dialogue and mediation, as they are children of God and children of their parents. They continuously experience a generative tension between the world they live in and their spiritual roots, a tension rooted in the difference between God's infinity and humanity's limits and contingency, between his holiness and humanity's sinfulness. If the faithful don't give way to the temptation to ignore, avoid, or deny these tensions, if, on the contrary, they consider them to be fully part of a Christian's life, these tensions can actually become the inner motivation for receiving and developing tradition in a creative way. So if Catholic intellectuals are faithful to God's self-revelation and to the world, if they accept the resulting tension as their specific universe, they can develop different, original, and inspirational perspectives and fulfill their ultimate mission. In fact, intellectual work is not everything, but it is an essential part of the mission the faithful receive in baptism: as reason is God-given, each person has the duty to develop it. I hope that the different contributions of this book stimulate enriching new thinking among Catholic intellectuals and beyond.

## Bibliography

Balthasar, Hans Urs von, *Theo-Logic. Theological Logical Theory*, vol. I: *Truth of the World*, San Francisco (CA) 2000.

---

<sup>65</sup> See Newman, J. H. Card. (2006), *The Idea of a University*, I. III. Bearing of theology on other knowledge, p. 59: "[...] Religious truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge."



- Bottone, Angelo, Knowledge and Morality in Newman's The Idea of a University, in: Ehret, J. and Möde, E. (Eds.) (2009), *Una Sancta Catholica et Apostolica*, p. 427-439.
- Boyarin, Daniel, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia (PA) 2006.
- Buckley, James J.; Bauerschmidt, Frederick Chr. and Pomplu, Trent (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, Chichester 2011.
- Cahoy, William J., The Catholic Intellectual Tradition. What is it? Why should I care?, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2003, <http://www1.csbsju.edu/catholicidentity/values/billcahay.htm> (accessed May 14, 2011).
- Capelle-Dumont, Philippe, The Catholic University in Post-Modern Societies. Challenges and Promises, in: IFCU/FIUC, 23<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly – 23<sup>e</sup> Assemblée Générale – 23<sup>a</sup> Asamblea General, CD-ROM, Paris 2009.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM) (accessed May 27, 2011).
- Cernera, Anthony J., The Catholic Character of Catholic Universities, in: Ehret, J. and Möde, E. (Eds.) (2009), *Una Sancta Catholica et Apostolica*, p. 440-454.
- Cernera, Anthony J. and Morgan, Oliver J. (Eds.), *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, Volume 1, Fairfield (CT) 2000.
- Cernera, Anthony J. and Morgan, Oliver J. (Eds.), *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, Volume 2: Issues and Perspectives, Fairfield (CT) 2002.
- Chaubet, François, Quelques réflexions sur l'histoire des intellectuels, in: Zelis, Guy (Ed.), *Les Intellectuels catholiques en Belgique francophone aux 19<sup>e</sup> et 20<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Louvain 2009, p. 7-19.
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration "Dominus Jesus" on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, Vatican City 2000.
- Dagens, Claude, *Passion d'Église*, Paris 2009.
- Džugan, Roberto, Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung. Oder: das Problem katholischer Identität, in: *Fuge* 7 (2010), p. 102-111.
- Ehret, Jean, Katholisch: Christus als Mitte, in: Ehret, J. and Möde, E. (Eds.) (2009), *Una Sancta Catholica et Apostolica*, p. 15-39.
- Ehret, Jean (Ed.), *Papal Primacy and Episcopacy. Theology and History*, Vatican City (forthcoming).

- Ehret, Jean, *Verbum Vitae – Études sur le rapport entre la foi et la vie chrétiennes*, Metz 2009, [www.theses.fr/2009METZ021L/document](http://www.theses.fr/2009METZ021L/document) (accessed May 27, 2011).
- Ehret, Jean and Möde, Erwin (Eds.), *Una Sancta Catholica et Apostolica. Einheit und Anspruch des Katholischen*, Freiburg i. B. 2009.
- Greisch, Jean, "Mit den Augen der Anderen." Ein Gespräch mit dem Philosophen Jean Greisch über Glaube und Intellektualität, in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 63 (2009) p. 556-561.
- Hellwig, Monika K., *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University*, in: Cernera, Anthony J. and Morgan, Oliver J. (Eds.) (2000), *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, p. 1-18.
- Alfeyev, Hilarion, Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations to the Annual Nicean Club Dinner (Lambeth Palace, 9 September 2010), <http://www.mospat.ru/en/2010/09/10/news25819> (accessed May 17, 2011.)
- International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation. The Church and the Faults of the Past*, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000307\\_memory-reconc-its\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-its_en.html) (accessed May 14, 2011).
- John Paul II, *Confession of Sins and Asking for Forgiveness*, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2000, [http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/12654\\_pope\\_john\\_paul\\_ii\\_asks\\_for\\_forgiveness\\_march\\_12\\_2000\\_.cfm](http://www.sacredheart.edu/pages/12654_pope_john_paul_ii_asks_for_forgiveness_march_12_2000_.cfm) (accessed May 14, 2011).
- Kühlmann, Wilhelm and Luckscheiter, Roman (Eds.), *Moderne und Antimoderne. Der Renouveau catholique und die deutsche Literatur*, Freiburg 2008.
- Legrand, Hervé, *Théologie et culture universitaire*, in: *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 92 (2008) p. 691-711.
- Lilla, Mark, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*, New York (NY) 2001.
- Loris, Michelle, *Engaging the Catholic Intellectual Tradition – Sacred Heart University's Common Core: The Human Journey*, in: Ehret, J. and Möde, E. (Eds.) (2009), *Una Sancta Catholica et Apostolica*, p. 455-464.
- Machado, Felix, *The Catholic University in Multicultural and Multireligious Societies*, in: IFCU/FIUC, 23<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly – 23<sup>e</sup> Assemblée Générale – 23<sup>a</sup> Asamblea General, CD-ROM, Paris 2009.
- McIntyre, Alasdair, *God, Philosophy, Universities. A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, Lanham (MD) 2009.

- Newman, John Henry, *The Idea of a University*, London 2006.
- Pelletier, Denis, Le "Silence" des intellectuels catholiques français, in: *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 95, 2 (2000), p. 289-304.
- Pittrof, Thomas, Literarischer Katholizismus als Forschungsaufgabe: Umrisse eines Forschungsprogramms, in: *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 48 (2007), p. 373-394.
- Pittrof, Thomas and Schmitz, Walter (Eds.), *Freie Anerkennung übergeschichtlicher Bindungen. Katholische Geschichtswahrnehmung im deutschsprachigen Raum des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Freiburg 2010.
- Roche, Mark W., *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism and the Idea of a Catholic University*, Notre Dame 2003.
- Roche, Mark W., *Why Choose the Liberal Arts?*, Notre Dame 2010.
- Schenuit, Jörg, Über den Sinn katholischer Überlieferung, in: *Fuge* 7 (2010), p. 101-102.
- Schwab, Hans-Rüdiger (Ed.), *Eigensinn und Bindung. Katholische deutsche Intellektuelle im 20. Jahrhundert*. 39 Porträts, Kevelaer 2009.
- Serry, Hervé, *Naissance de l'intellectuel catholique*, Paris 2004.
- Sowell, Thomas, *Intellectuals and Society*, New York (NY) 2009.
- Tanzella-Niti, Giuseppe, In Search for the Unity of Knowledge: Building Unity Inside the Subject, in: *Annales theologici* 20 (2006), p. 407-417.
- Trigilio, John, Jr. and Brighenti, Kenneth, *Catholicism for Dummies*, Indianapolis (IN) 2003.
- Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium"*, Vatican City 1964.
- Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation "Dei Verbum"*, Vatican City 1965.
- Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World "Gaudium et Spes"*, Vatican City 1965.
- Wegenast, Klaus, Tradition. VII. Praktisch-theologisch, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 33, Berlin 2002, p. 724-732.