

The Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies

A Marianist Work

at the University of Southern California

Los Angeles, California

Nature and Mission

The Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies exists to deepen and advance Catholic intellectual life in the Church and in the universities and colleges of the world. When fully functioning, it will be a residential center in which scholars from many different disciplines and from around the world will be able to spend an academic year doing research which explores and develops Catholic intellectual life. Scholars from other Christian traditions, from other religions and from the secular academy are all welcome; the focus of their research, however, will always be the Catholic tradition broadly considered. Three or four world class Catholic intellectuals on five-year appointments will act as magnets and mentors for the residential scholars, about 10 of whom will be senior academics at the peak of their academic careers, and another 10 junior academics, who show great promise for the future. A full time chaplain will assist scholars interested in exploring their own spiritual journey as they work on their scholarly research.

The Need

Since Vatican II, the religious orders which have founded over 90% of the Catholic colleges and universities in the United States have suffered a great diminishment in membership. Generous and dedicated lay persons, however, have assumed positions of leadership on the faculties and in the administration of these institutions. Most of them have received their doctorates at secular universities. Even if they are practicing Catholics, many have not had an intellectual formation that is deeply Catholic.

At most Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, the transmission of Catholicism has been reduced to one or two courses in theology and/or religious studies, optional access to campus ministry services, and the expectation that the president of the institution be a Catholic. Unless there is a focused institutional effort to assist professors in understanding the depth and relevance of the Catholic tradition for the nature of a Catholic education and for their own subject matter, the academic core of these institutions run the risk of complete secularization and commercialization.

Over a century and a half ago, Blessed John Henry Newman captured a key dimension of the problem facing the Church:

It will not satisfy me what satisfies so many, to have two independent systems, intellectual and religious, going at once side by side, by a sort of division of labor, and only accidentally brought together.... I want the same roof to contain both the intellectual and moral discipline. Devotion is not a sort of finish given to the sciences; or is science a sort of feather in the cap...an ornament and set-off to devotion. I want the intellectual layman to be religious, and the devout ecclesiastic to be intellectual.

In other words, we need a vehicle that will provide for an integrated intellectual and religious formation that in the past characterized the best formation of members of religious orders.

The Institute: A “Normal School” for Scholars

Fr. Chaminade founded normal schools for teachers in order to re-Christianize France. He realized that if he could instill in teachers a deep Christian spirit, he would have a better chance to “multiply” Christian students. In today’s university, students come and go, remaining only four to five years. Professors, however, have tenure, a modern, typically forty year, arrangement. If professors, whatever their disciplines, can discover and deepen their understanding of Catholicism as a valuable intellectual and spiritual enrichment of educational philosophy, generations of students will benefit. In a very Chaminadian way, then, the Institute seeks for form professors both intellectually and spiritually for generations of students.

The Endowment Principle

How are professors supported financially for a full year of research and writing? Interested professors will apply for a fellowship at the Institute. If accepted, the professor’s university will keep one half of his or her salary in order to pay part-time teachers who will teach the courses the professor would have taught. The professor will retain the other half which will be matched by the interest from the Institute’s endowment. We are in the process of building an endowment large enough to support 20 to 25 scholars a year as Institute Fellows. Raising money for an endowment to support research that develops Catholic intellectual life is not easy, but it is possible. We are rapidly approaching the 10M dollar mark, and given recent developments, feel that the wind is finally in our sails.

Current Programs and Publications

Our website, ifacs.com, provides a good deal of information about the Institute. I have a full-time assistant, Shelia Garrison, an Associate Director of Research, Gary Adler (an honors graduate of UD, finishing his PhD in the sociology of religion at the University of Arizona), and a

development person, Mr. Todd Thaxton (donated to us by USC). We organize and make available on the USC campus an annual lecture series that brings typically six scholars for presentations and discussions on religious issues, with a special focus on Catholicism. We also have launched a “Generations in Dialogue” series, which brings together young scholars with a highly accomplished senior Catholic scholar to learn on three weekends spread over eighteen months how to become Catholic intellectuals who write not only for the academy but for the general public. Through the courses I teach at USC, I have gotten involved with students interested in deepening their understanding of Catholicism and their spiritual lives, and have helped out USC’s Catholic (Newman) Center, which strongly supports our lecture series.

Since 2003 we have been organizing, supporting, and publishing research. Here is a current list of publications:

Beyond Violence: Religious Sources of Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, edited by James Heft, S.M. (Fordham University Press, 2004). This volume, now translated into French, focuses on how these three religions, rightly understood, can be forces for justice and peace.

Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians and Muslims, edited by James Heft, S.M. (Fordham University Press, 2006). This volume brings explores how educators and leaders in these three religious traditions successfully pass on the faith to the next generation.

The True Wealth of Nations: Catholic Social Thought and Economic Life, edited by Daniel K. Finn (Oxford University Press, 2010). This volume contains papers from an international group of scholars whom we gathered at USC for four days in 2008 to explore the Institute’s conviction that implementing a morally adequate vision of the economy will generate sustainable prosperity for all. The True Wealth of Nations is a continuing series of research projects in Catholic social teaching on economics.

The Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity, edited by Michael Lacey and Francis Oakley (Oxford University Press, 2011). The essays in this volume shed new light on the paradox of power in the life and thought of the Church today, focusing on the tensions between authority asserted and authority observed.

Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility Among Jews, Christians and Muslims, edited by James Heft, S.M., Reuven Firestone and Omid Safi (Oxford University Press, 2011). This volume explores how scholars from these three revelation-based religions acknowledge that their grasp of that revelation is always limited, and as a consequence permits no basis for fundamentalism or relativism. This volume is being translated into French.

Catholic High Schools: Facing the New Challenges, by James Heft, S.M. (Oxford University Press, 2011). In this book, I argue that Catholic high schools are more important than ever before, that lay people properly formed and educated can lead them effectively, and that there is a great need currently to educate youth in how to handle the internet and social media.

Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue, edited by James Heft, S.M. (Oxford University Press, forthcoming in October). Five prominent Catholic scholars who specialize in the study of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or Confucianism, describe the current state of that dialogue. Two scholars from each tradition discussed respond to the description and the original presenter comments on those responses.

Engineering Education and Practice: Embracing a Catholic Vision, co-edited by James Heft, S.M. and Kevin Hallinan (University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming in December). A variety of scholars, mostly engineers, several from the University of Dayton, describe how their work as educators combines technical, moral and religious dimensions to enhance and deepen the work of engineers as a vocation.

Caritas in veritate and the United States, edited by Daniel K. Finn (Oxford University Press, forthcoming in Spring of 2012) is based on the papers debated at the Vatican at a conference the Institute was invited to organize by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. That same Council has invited us to organize a second conference marking the 50th anniversary of Pope John XXIII's 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in terris*.

After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics, edited by James Heft, S.M. with John O'Malley, S.J. (Eerdmans, forthcoming in late Spring 2012). Using John O'Malley's *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Harvard University Press, 2008) as a springboard, this new volume contains papers about major post Vatican II developments, both intended and unintended, presented in February 2009 at a symposium held at USC and organized by the Institute.

We also have several other research projects in various stages of planning which we expect will result in book length publications.

James L. Heft, S.M.