

Preparing For What Is To Come - Confronting The Challenge Of
St. Thomas University's Catholic Character: Two Catholic Perspectives

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Abstract:

Though St. Thomas University (STU) is a successful liberal arts university, what remains controversial is whether STU continues to be a successful Catholic-Christian university. This paper examines this issue from a philosophical perspective arguing that its resolution has important cultural implications for both Catholics and non-Catholics.

Biography:

Hugh Williams is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Philosophy, University of New Brunswick, Saint John, NB. He received his Ph.D in Philosophy from the Dominican University College and has previously taught at Saint Thomas University in Fredericton, NB. His areas of philosophical specialization are metaphysics, ethics, and philosophical practice. Professor Williams has published articles in such venues as *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *Symposium*, *Environmental Ethics*, *Canadian Catholic Review*, *Grail: An Ecumenical Journal*, *Philo-Sophia*, and *Canadian Journal of Philosophical Practice*.

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Introduction

Clearly, St. Thomas University (STU) is a very successful liberal arts school. What is not clear and remains a somewhat muted controversy is whether STU continues to be a successful Catholic-Christian university. The recent Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick articulated the challenge:

“St. Thomas needs to decide whether it is a public institution with a proud Catholic heritage or whether it is a Catholic institution open to the public.”¹

This paper will attempt to examine this issue from both a philosophical and theological perspective, arguing that it's resolution has important social and cultural implications for both Catholics and non-Catholics. We will draw upon the arguments of two prominent contemporary Catholic philosophers, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre, in suggesting that STU should not only remain a Catholic university but its Catholic character should be enhanced for three fundamental reasons: a) our hope for a humane future, b) the creative ferment and challenges in contemporary events, and c) the weight and lessons of history. This paper further argues that Catholic-Christian philosophy and theology should play a central role because of the need to resist the fragmentation arising in higher education because of the economic pressures for the increasing professionalization and specialization of the disciplines, and because of the need for both teachers and students to have some sense that through their mutual education and research they are participating, as MacIntyre puts it, in a shared understanding of the world and of what it means to be human.

¹ *Commission On Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, (Fredericton: Government of New Brunswick, 2007)

1) The Argument for St. Thomas University's Complete Secularization

My strategy in this section is to confront the argument against STU remaining Catholic i.e., the argument for its complete secularization. It is an argument that has arisen now and again over the years and has been raised very strongly in 2004/5 during a period of administration/faculty contract negotiations, and was expressed again in 2007 before the *Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick*, and then again during the latest negotiations in 2008/9. The opposition to STU's Catholic identity, or what remains of it, was prompted or at least given recent focus by two important Church documents - *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990) and the CCCB's *Ordinances Issued in View of the Correct Application of the Apostolic Constitution Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (July 2005).² In sum *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* lays out four general defining characteristics of a Catholic University:

1) A Christian inspiration for the university as a whole and not just for individuals; 2) A continuing reflection in the light of Catholic faith upon the growing resources of human knowledge to which it seeks to contribute; 3) Fidelity to the Christian message as communicated through the Church; 4) An institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal that gives meaning to life. In other words it must be a community of scholars and an institution in which Catholicism is present and operative. (13, 14)³

² My citations for relevant Church documents are contained in the body of my text.

³ In the view of many Catholics, the STU of the Miramichi met these criteria without question, whereas the STU of Fredericton now seriously struggles over the meaning and programmatic implications of these guidelines. It may be helpful to provide a summary gloss of some of the more important passages from *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* alternately titled *On Catholic Universities* (Vatican: 1990) in order to do justice to its spirit and concern. See also note 4 below. The Catholic University's purpose is to unite two orders of reality – faith and reason; reason in its search for truth and faith in its certain knowledge of the (source) of truth. (1) It is added in a footnote that while reason and faith represent two distinct orders of knowledge, each autonomous with regards to its own methods, the two must finally converge in the discovery of a single whole reality which has its origins in God. (Fn. 20) Through the Catholic University the Church explores the mystery of humanity and the world clarifying these in the light of revelation.(3) A Catholic University is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about Nature, Man, and God. The present age is in urgent need of this service – of proclaiming the meaning of truth without which fundamental human values are lost (sight of). This involves a kind of universal humanism that relates all aspects of truth to the Supreme Truth – God. The Catholic University does this with enthusiasm and without fear as followers of Christ whose Wisdom saves the world from danger.(4) With the rapid developments of science and technology this purpose has greater importance and urgency. These developments have created great economic growth but also a crisis of meaning without which the common good is at risk. The Catholic University is called to respond to this need for meaning precisely because of its Christian inspiration which enables it to include moral, religious, and spiritual dimensions in its research and to evaluate scientific and technological achievements from the perspective of

Opponents of STU's Catholic character have pointed out that the general trend in universities with the growth of government support has been towards secularization. Now some have interpreted these recent Church documents cited above as promoting a type of affirmative action so as to increase the percentage of Catholics within the faculties of Catholic universities as part of an attempt to ensure that the content of the education provided by Catholic universities is consistent with the mission of the Catholic Church as defined by the Vatican.⁴ More to the point

the totality of the human person. This calls for continuous renewal of the Catholic University both as University and as Catholic for what is at stake is not only the meaning of scientific and technological research, of social life and culture but also the very meaning the human person.(7) Clearly the Catholic University is one of the best instruments the Church offers to the culture of the age in its search for certainty and wisdom. In its research and teaching Catholic Universities assist the Church in discovering resources both old and new. Catholic Universities are essential to the growth of the Church and to the development of Christian culture and human progress.(10) The document concludes by saying – that the mission that the Church entrusts to Catholic Universities holds a cultural and religious meaning of vital importance because it concerns the very future of humanity. As members of the Church we should become aware of our mission and discover how the strength of the Gospel can penetrate and regenerate the mentalities and dominant values that inspire individual cultures as well as the opinions and mental attitudes that are derived from it.

⁴ See Hugh Williams, *How Best To Enhance The Catholic Character Of St. Thomas University: Report To The Advisory Committee To The Pope John XXIII Chair Of Studies In Catholic Theology* (Fredericton: St. Thomas University, 1997). This report addresses this issue and shows the much more nuanced approach needed for reading Church documents and how there is usually considerable freedom exercised by the local Church community through the principle of subsidiarity in adapting to local circumstances what is usually a doctrinal enunciation of general principles. *The Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops Ordinances* (CCCB)(2005) which are charged with the responsibility of adapting principles to local circumstances, in this case the Canadian cultural and legal context, show this not to be “a program of affirmative action” at all but a concern that the constitution of an institution's Catholic character be respected and protected. (See *Ordinances Issued by the CCCB in View of the Correct Application of the Apostolic Constitution Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Art. 4 The University Community, p.4) Whereas the concern of opponents may be that of an authoritarian imposition of Church doctrine by central Church authorities, the real underlying issue for many Catholic leaders and experts is a much older and deeper concern about the forces of individualism and the fragmentation at work in universities where faculty loyalties are often conflicted between the priorities of their disciplines and those of their school institution and the community that it serves. This can also be expressed in terms of the issue of unity. This conflict and tension is not unique to universities concerned only for their religious identity. If anything this entire controversy speaks to the importance of the relatively new area of study, that of Catholic Studies. This area of study can be understood as a means to deepen the understanding of the tradition and to correct considerable misunderstanding. Again, the charge that *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in Article 4.4, which says “the number of non-Catholic teachers should not be allowed to constitute a majority”, was intending to set in motion a program of affirmative action for Catholic university professors reveals a failure in the reading of Church documents. It also is indicative of a misconstrual or ignorance of the important distinction that needs to be made between promulgation of principled ideals and their workable implementation by local Churches in diverse cultural and jurisdictional circumstances. The Canadian Bishops' *Ordinances* modify and adapt the statement of an ideal to our local circumstances by saying as in Art 4.6 “In accordance with its procedures for the hiring and retention of professionally qualified faculty, the university should strive to appoint Catholics who are committed to witness to the faith as professors and senior administrators, so that, to the extent possible, those committed to the witness of the faith will constitute a significant number.”

the documents are interpreted as saying in essence that there is a need to discipline and dismiss instructors if they fail to provide "*a faithful reception of Catholic doctrine and morals in research and teaching.*"⁵ This is a very misleading presentation or interpretation of what the Church documents actually say and it feeds fear and even anti-Catholic bias in a way that is not at all helpful nor is it a reflection of the careful scholarship one might expect at the university level. What is actually said in the CCCB's Ordinance 4.6 is - "*A faithful reception of Catholic doctrine and morals in research and teaching is expected of **Catholic teachers and at least respect for the same on the part of non-Catholic personnel.** When these qualities are found to be lacking, the college or university statutes are to specify a just and fair process to remedy the situation (According to Canon Law 810.1).* I believe the difference in meaning is obvious. A central and fundamental question then becomes, in my view, whether or not this ordinance and the spirit behind it can be reconciled with the notion of academic freedom. My paper in part seeks to answer this or at least address this issue from a philosophical perspective.⁶ In doing so I'm enlisting the assistance of the work of two prominent contemporary Catholic thinkers - the Canadian Charles Taylor and the British (Scottish) philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre.

2) Charles Taylor's Reflections on Modernity and Catholic Thought⁷

Taylor's work is most relevant for sketching the issues surrounding the first two reasons for STU remaining Catholic and being enhanced as a Catholic University - a) our hope for a humane future and b) the creative ferment and challenges in contemporary events.

⁵ See Dr. Rusty Bitterman, *Commission on Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick, Submissions*, (March 9, 2007).

⁶ See especially fn 4 above and fn 13 below for a more direct approach to this issue and the explicit and implicit areas of disagreement.

⁷ This section of my paper draws heavily on Taylor's, *A Catholic Modernity?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also his *The Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

In his *A Catholic Modernity*, Taylor presents an argument highly relevant for our concern for the future of STU as a Catholic University. Our challenge today is to discern valid differences in beliefs and traditions from what is clearly incompatible with the Catholic faith. Taylor acknowledges that at one end of the debate there are those who see the Christian faith in the university as an enemy to be overcome so that some version of Enlightenment liberalism and humanism can flourish. This eventually has had the effect of making the Catholic-Christian feel like an outsider in his own institution. At the other end there is a rigid conservative Christian bias for strict continuity with tradition as what is legitimate while the novel developments of secularity are simply incompatible with the Christian tradition – case closed, no further enquiry is needed. Those who hold to the latter position perhaps would now see no hope for STU as a Catholic institution.

Taylor's own position is that modern culture's break with Christendom actually carried aspects of Christian values further; in other words - a break was necessary for development. We have now a situation where the social forms of Christendom and their often coercive control of conscience have been overthrown without replacement by any one overriding worldview or philosophy. Thus the public sphere has become the locus of competing visions. Taylor observes that more than this there is now a reluctance on the part of Christians to attempt any authoritative interpretation of this history because even this can be seen as a disservice to the freedom that has been won for the individual. Christians are seriously challenged by the position that in the public realm human life may be better served by the absence of any conscious transcendent vision. It isn't difficult to transpose this analysis to STU's present situation and its crisis of identity. Christendom's project, says Taylor, though inspired by the incarnation was and is doomed to frustration and is at risk of corruption. There is wisdom in what he understands to be

the separation of Church and State. A more fully developed rights culture could not happen under the project of Christendom and yet Taylor insists that this does not impute a special weakness to Christian faith and beliefs operative in society or the university.

Thus modern freedom for the most part, in Taylor's estimation, is now identified with an exclusive humanism based solely on the notion of human flourishing with there being no goal beyond this. Now the problem with this from the Christian point of view, says Taylor, is that this development has been actually stifling in its own way. Moreover, there is an exclusive humanism at work especially in the modern university that is a source of great danger for our culture and society. This situation is under explored in modern thought for the most part. Taylor writes:

...academic culture in the Western world breathes an atmosphere of unbelief. I say (this is a) remarkable fact because we are not surprised enough by this phenomenon which is a feature of this important (university) subculture in our civilization rather than of society (as a whole) in which it is set.

.....
Now the deeper historical reasons for this are hard to define, and I won't try here (although this is perhaps one of the most important intellectual tasks of our time). I want to talk about how it manifests itself. It's not just that there is a certain difficulty or embarrassment involved in introducing views that draw on some theistic basis or in avowing religious belief, though this is part of it. It is much more that unbelief has informed more than the answers; it has also shaped the questions. A young entrant into this world – might have a strong faith, or be looking for ways of clarifying it through courses in history, politics, philosophy, or whatever. But in the face of what is actually being discussed, it is often unclear how this relates to the student's agenda and even less clear how the things that are personally important could impinge on the discussion that is going on. There just seems to be no relevant place to make the kind of remarks that this student would like to make.

Add to this that beginning students are rarely too clear about what remarks they want to make anyway; we have more in the nature of confused intimations at that stage (indeed, we have a lot of those at this stage, too), and we can easily understand how a student slides into a pattern of conformity, which may then become a life long habit. A striking example of this preshaped agenda is the aspect of moral theory, which I talked about in "Sources" and again in my lecture here. I argued in the lecture that a key issue for our times is that of moral sources, whether, for instance, we can maintain the high level of philanthropy and solidarity we now demand of ourselves, without these degenerating into their opposites: contempt, the need to control. The issue here is the

quality of our moral motivation – in more old fashion terms, the quality of our will and the nature of the vision that sustains it.”⁸

Taylor, in my view, sets out five areas of concern relevant for the discussion of a university’s Catholic identity which I believe lend considerable credence to the more dogmatic concerns articulated in the Church documents I cited at the beginning of this reflection:

- 1) There is an academic **culture of unbelief**, he says, the historical reasons for which constitute one of the most important questions of our time. We would do well to identify what Taylor sees as the most disturbing problem with this culture.
- 2) That problem Taylor sees is not so much unbelief itself and its answers for some of the deepest questions concerning the proper end of the human person, for these have always been with us. Instead, it is the capacity for modern unbelief **to shape and control the very questions** that meaningfully can be asked today.
- 3) He describes young people being **socialized into** a university culture of unbelief, a preshaped agenda, and very often **life-long habits of unbelief and practice**.

⁸ *A Catholic Modernity?*, pp. 118-120. As much as this paper can be taken to be a somewhat academic account of the tradition of Catholic thought in an institution of higher education in the Maritimes, it also has phenomenological sources for the author as a particular event within this very tradition that it seeks to interpret by way of an academic paper. By this I mean that the subtle and not so subtle personal and inter-personal experiences of doubt and questioning that can and do arise among students and faculty in moments of reflection upon the data of both faith and reason can be deliberately encouraged and promoted by some as opportunities to invite dissent and assent to unbelief or beliefs that are inimical to the Christian faith. For example, the doctrine of Christian holiness and the communion of saints can be dismissed through seemingly innocent remarks such as “I don’t know anyone like this.” The implication can eventually grow into the claim that there is simply no basis for this theological doctrine. On the face of it and as an isolated incident, it can seem harmless enough but as ‘the months and years tell what the days never know’ in the life of young students, this can become a persistent type of anti-clericalism with more remarks about “cheap priests and religious” somehow lessening the value and quality of the faculty body. This can in time, if not confronted directly by the institution’s leadership, turn into a persistent pattern often expressed in a much more serious and concerted effort to have Catholic theology and philosophy isolated, marginalized, and in some cases even dropped from the university curriculum. Now it needs to be admitted that the forces at work in such a brief illustrative account can also involve a form of capitulation over time on the part of an institution’s Catholic leadership and constituency in the face of such a sustained and even growing opposition and/or indifference to the university’s Catholic character. This eventually comes to mean that assent to the fundamentals of a Catholic institution of higher learning, as expressed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* cited above, are either directly opposed or deliberately devalued and ignored. It needs to be said that such a phenomenological account, to the extent it approximates an actual course of events, is not an experience unique to STU but an experience prevalent in many Catholic institutions especially in the turbulent aftermath of Vatican II.

- 4) This is interrelated with Taylor's **concern for the quality of our moral motivations** or what can be put in more classical terms as the quality of our wills and the nature of its nourishing and sustaining vision. (This of course is a much more involved argument that cannot be made here.)
- 5) On the positive side, Taylor has come to see **in Judaic-Christian theism an important source of hope** for both our beliefs and our wills in the face of the serious challenges presented by contemporary culture.

So in a more phenomenological manner, Charles Taylor considers many of the same issues that have been identified in the recent Church documents concerned about the character and identity of Catholic Universities. Though in a typical Taylorian fashion, he concedes that his own critique is open to debate and yet he insists that a new perspective is urgently needed.⁹ His own offering for a new and in some respects countervailing perspective is organized around the notion of transcendence. In this notion Taylor is trying to point to something essential to many faiths or religions – that there is something of value beyond life and on which life originally and fundamentally draws. This commitment to the transcendent involves a call to a change in identity – traditionally understood as a form of conversion – a radical decentering of self in relation to God. The question that this raises is that if this should become one's commitment and direction in life then where does one stand in relation to the value of human flourishing?

When Taylor speaks of humanism he has in mind what he calls a climate of thought, a horizon of assumptions rather than a doctrine clearly spelt out. Nevertheless Taylor says three major features can characterize modern humanism:

⁹ See Charles Taylor, *Sources of The Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) and also his more recent work, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007). These two works are of major scope and along with his *Modern Social Imaginaries* (London: Duke University Press, 2004) present an outstanding enquiry into modernity and secularity.

- 1) the supreme value of flourishing in human life and the driving back of death and suffering;
- 2) its recent development historically because of religions' longstanding concern for higher and otherworldly goals; and
- 3) because of humanism's sustained critique, these religious goals have been eclipsed by the goal of human flourishing.

Taylor says that to speak of a transcendent value beyond human life is perceived to be undermining of the supreme goal of the dominant humanism - to be an effort to restore the old ways of human renunciation and even of self-mutilation for a false promise. Even believers, observes Taylor, have been under the sway of this critique in that there have been efforts since Vatican II to redefine the faith so as not to be seen as challenging this humanism in any way. But Taylor insists that this dominant humanism cannot give meaning to suffering and death except in terms of danger and horrors to be avoided and resisted. Furthermore in our culture there is hostility to the transcendent and its signs. Religious credibility is repeatedly challenged in the face of scientific advance. Nevertheless, Taylor's somewhat unique and controversial perspective is his claim that this issue is primarily moral rather than epistemological, or practical rather than theoretical.¹⁰

However, Taylor begins to push back with his claim that to deny transcendence is to put the advances of modern culture in serious jeopardy. There are signs of this risk in the devolution of the welfare state in recent years and the hardening or indifference in feeling against the poor

¹⁰ See Hugh Williams, *The Problem of Realism in the Philosophy of Charles Taylor and an Existential Thomist Proposal*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, NO. 1, March 2010. This paper challenges Taylor's tendency to avoid or downplay the epistemological and metaphysical issues involved in this issue and suggests that existential-Thomism such as developed by Etienne Gilson and Norris Clarke could provide philosophical support for what he wants to say especially about the human being's best self-understanding.

and disadvantaged. There is a growing tension here because our age has made demands for greater human solidarity and equality. Taylor asks how is it we've done as well as we have done? He wonders about our motivations. His phenomenological reading of our history has provided several conclusions that recur in his work:

- 1) Though we often feel morally superior to our ancestors and societies that are less than liberal, deep down we know how fragile this motivation is and that solidarity driven by a sense of moral superiority is a very fickle thing.
- 2) One's own feelings of self-worth connect deeply with one's sense of the worth of human beings. Thus secular humanism has a genuine and well-deserved sense of accomplishment. But the risk is that this humanism, which in fact has deep roots in, and connections with older religious ideals has a Janus face because failures can bring on cynicism. The ideals can become invested with hatred and the inhumane. This happens in organized religion but it also happens in secular humanism. It seems the higher the potential the more grievous the fall and if high ideals completely lose their connection to unconditional love, the ugly dialectic of history risks repeating. But this is not a simple matter of holding the appropriate beliefs.
- 3) We are often moved by indignation at injustice – this is not necessarily benevolence but can be based upon a hatred of those who support and connive these injustices, which is fed by a sense of superiority that we are not like these people who are instruments of evil.
- 4) The irony is that the stronger the sense of injustice the more entrenched the pattern. We become centers of hatred and even generators of new modes of injustice ourselves even though we may have begun with a passion for justice, equality, and

peace. We simply can't see that the first step involves stilling the anger and aggression in oneself. (The best in our religious tradition can help us with this, says Taylor.)

The central question Taylor is posing here, in my view, is how are we to have the greatest degree of philanthropic action with the minimum hope in human kind? This, he says, is a classic religious question. Taylor argues that simply having and holding correct beliefs is no solution to this dilemma. There is no guaranteed solution, faith is required, and Christian faith points to a solution worth considering – unconditional love, he says, is not based upon achievements but rather upon what one is most profoundly as a human being – a being created in the image of God and he argues that it further makes a great deal of difference whether you think this kind of love is a possibility for us humans. Taylor thinks it is, but only to the extent that we are open to this transcendence (or God), which means overstepping the theoretical limits of an exclusive humanism. Taylor has had the conviction for some time that this is very important to be said in our modern times both because of the transcendence it points to but also because of the fragility of our values that is uncovered upon close examination.

Thus the core of Taylor's argument for the importance of the Catholic tradition being maintained and enhanced in the modern university involves an appeal to the data of faith, a faith that seeks understanding which I've shown elsewhere clearly involves the intellectual work of both theology and philosophy in providing rational grounds for this faith.¹¹ And yet for Taylor, and here I believe he is absolutely correct, this is only experienced and known in concrete relations with others – in other words in practice.

¹¹ See Hugh Williams, *Dialogical Practice And The Ontology Of The Human Person: A Study Of The Philosophies Of Charles Taylor And Norris Clarke*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Philosophy. Dominican University College, Ottawa, 2008.). In this thesis I examine Taylor's important work as a phenomenologist of human practice and his hesitancy and indefiniteness in his efforts at providing a metaphysical or ontological account of this practice.

In the Catholic tradition it is a practice that holds faith and reason together and refuses to see them sundered in any university that calls itself Catholic. This refusal is not only for the good of Catholics or the Church for this it is, but it is also and perhaps even more importantly for the good of the larger culture and society. Why? Because in the words of the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, there is the call

.... for continuous renewal of the Catholic University both as University and as Catholic for what is at stake are not only the meaning of scientific and technological research, of social life and culture but also the very meaning of the human person. (7)

3) Alasdair MacIntyre's Grand Master Narrative on Catholic Thought and the University¹²

MacIntyre's work speaks most effectively to the third issue we said we'd address - the weight and lessons of history. It is within the context of this grand narrative that we will also attempt to briefly address the issue of academic freedom and the Catholic intellectual tradition.¹³

¹² See Alasdair MacIntyre's, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Toronto: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2009). To avoid excessively repetitive footnotes, I've cited in the body of my paper, page references for the pertinent passages that I'm following closely in MacIntyre's text.

¹³ Academic freedom is defined in part by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT Policies, 2005) as "*the right without restriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion; freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof; freedom in producing and performing creative works; freedom to engage in service to the institution and the community; freedom to express freely one's opinion about the institution, its administration, or the system in which one works; freedom from institutional censorship; freedom to acquire, preserve, and provide access to documentary material in all formats; and freedom to participate in professional and representative academic bodies.*" I haven't the time or space here to examine the philosophical assumptions underlying this particular understanding of academic freedom but to say that there clearly will be a need to balance this view with the Catholic notion of freedom as it applies to the Catholic university. One major point at issue is that in the Catholic tradition, professors though they be competent authorities within their own disciplines are not the exclusive judges of the proper exercise of freedom as it may bear in teaching on objective issues of faith and morals; there is also the teaching authority or magisterium of the Church that must be considered in the Catholic tradition of higher education. The issue comes down to a conflict between a notion of individual freedom that seemingly borders on absolute non-interference, and the rights of religious conscience as it is embodied in the constitution and integrity of the Catholic religious tradition and its institutions. Despite appearances to the contrary, according to many experts, this has not yet been adequately worked out in our Canadian body politic and legal frameworks, (See Ian Benson, *Taking a Fresh Look at Religion and Public Policy in Canada: The Need for a Paradigm Shift*. Federal Government of Canada: Religion in Public Policy Project, January, 2008). It may help to present, for the sake of comparison and contrast, The Catholic University of America's interpretation of academic freedom in relation to the tradition of Catholic Universities and Catholic thought and the teaching of theology in particular which most directly bears upon issues in faith and morals with which the Church's magisterium is most concerned:

"The Catholic University of America, from its establishment, has voluntarily embraced a special relationship with the Church. This relationship, with the mutual responsibilities involved, has been made an internal and constitutive part of its mission. Accordingly priority is given to the study of Catholic

There are three aspects to this story that MacIntyre wants to begin with 1) there is a real need for greater understanding of the tradition of Catholic thought among both the laity and clergy, 2) this thought is best approached and understood historically as an ongoing conversation that has spanned centuries and 3) this thought is not just a set of propositions and arguments that can be systematically and critically assessed but it involves real people in particular contexts involved in a real tradition with others. It involves an actual practice in which universities play a crucial role in both good and bad ways, shaping the tradition and its practice. It is a practice of thought that has understood itself as always being related to the central concerns and common experiences of ordinary people. In other words, it was always concerned with the common good in some way. (11)

theology and related disciplines. In the tradition of the Church, theology serves the Christian community by seeking to express the abiding truth of Christ in human terms and, thereby, to mediate between faith and culture. Theology contributes to an understanding of faith and becomes a means of communicating the Church's teachings to the community of believers and to society at large.

As an academic discipline, Catholic theology is the systematic reflection of the data of revelation expressed in Sacred Scriptures and Tradition as proclaimed, preserved and interpreted by the magisterium of the Church, and received by faith. The teachings of the magisterium are a necessary factor in ascertaining truth in the discipline of Catholic theology. The Catholic University of America affirms its commitment to safeguard the freedom that is necessary if theologians are to pursue the disciplined study of Christian faith in the Catholic tradition according to the rigorous standards of scientific investigation. The university recognizes that scholars use diverse methods and sources to explicate the original deposit of faith and to discern patterns of doctrinal development over the centuries. The university also recognizes that freedom of enquiry, thought and expression is requisite to the advancement of knowledge and to the deepening of understanding in matters of faith.

*As in the case of all other faculty members, the academic freedom of those engaged in theological disciplines presupposes personal integrity, scholarly competence, commitment to the mission of the University, observance of professional standards and openness to criticism from one's peers. In addition, Catholic theology acknowledges the singular responsibility of the Church's magisterium to safeguard the integrity of the Christian message, and to protect the faithful from erroneous teachings in faith and morals. Although the roles of theologians differ from those of bishops, theologians share a common goal with the magisterium in their service to the ecclesial community. Catholic theologians are expected to give assent to the teachings of the magisterium in keeping with the various degrees of assent that are called for by authoritative teaching. Differences arising over the interpretation and presentation of Church teaching are resolved through the dialogue of scholars with members of the magisterium, with due recognition that final authority in matters of faith and morals lies with the magisterium. Such dialogue is carried on in accordance with established procedures in a spirit of Christian charity and mutual professional respect." (See Catholic University of America, *Faculty Handbook of The Catholic University of America*, 2006)*

MacIntyre shows clearly that rival and sometimes-incompatible views developed over these concerns leading to ongoing discussions and debate, and requiring reasonable philosophical justification based upon the best argument so far. This “conversation” also required attentive listening to and entertainment of alternative views with which one may disagree fundamentally.

A core principle and assumption in the articulation of this tradition was that understanding how things were with the world was inseparable from understanding them as informed by God’s purposes. Issues tended to center around the doctrines of theism, which were related to the form of organization, curriculum, and modes of teaching. This involved fundamental issues in the relationship between theology and philosophy. It is a history that is still very much active and with us today, and that makes Catholic thought, in MacIntyre’s view, counter cultural to the fragmentation he sees as plaguing university enquiry and understanding today. (18)

In all three great medieval civilizations, Islam, Byzantium, and the Latin West, belief in God was universal. It also was a presupposition of all secular enquiry and activity. The intelligibility of existence depended upon reference to God. Thus any disagreement between those advocating for a theistic culture and those advocating for a non-theistic culture involved not only a disagreement about the existence of God but also a disagreement about the nature of intelligibility. In theistic cultures, theology maintained a hegemonic authority over all other disciplines, which were organized and ordered under it. Still, there were important differences in how this ordering was understood in these various cultures. In the Latin West especially, which MacIntyre’s narrative is focused on, the secular institutions were understood to have legitimacy as a genuine means by which and through which God could be served. These were areas of human activity in which the authoritative standards were understood to be independent of both

the Church as well as the secular rulers. (62) Nevertheless, there was a felt need to give a systematic account of all knowledge and this especially was the responsibility of the theologian who needed a knowledge of both the natural and historical world in order to do theology adequately.

The university in the Latin West was developing according to three discernable pressures, 1) the growing strength of the professional identity of the university masters, b) the centralizing authority of state and church, and 3) student demands for instruction in theology, liberal arts and law. These schools were scenes of inescapable conflict where the fundamental intellectual issues of the age were defined and debated. This was the context in which Catholic thought developed and the story becomes intellectually and dramatically rich. For instance Islamic philosophers regarded Aristotle as nature's exemplary perfection whereas Jesus was the human exemplary for Christians. Augustinian's became deeply suspicious of Aristotle and his followers. There were attempts to overcome this tension between faith and reason with a two truths doctrine for philosophy and theology. This involved an attempt to build a firewall between faith and reason, which, says MacIntyre, was bound to fail.

Thus the nature of truth becomes a central concern for Catholic thought for three reasons, 1) attaining truth is integral for learning and understanding, 2) a perfected understanding involves relating the truths of theology to those of other disciplines which share in an overarching notion of truth, and 3) this project of understanding affects everyone not just university types. Everyone who needs to learn and understand can be helped or hindered by the good or bad influence on one's intellectual formation by those who have been university educated.

Early on in this Catholic tradition there was the conviction that whether or not this influence of higher education would be good or bad depended fundamentally upon a respect for truth which in turn depended upon an adequate conception of truth. It is here that Thomas Aquinas' made some of his most important and profound contributions to the tradition of Catholic thought and Western thought more generally.

MacIntyre suggests that because we are involved in a culture where arguments denying the existence of God are common we are in a better position to distinguish Thomas' theistic argument from that of atheism in its fundamentals. MacIntyre's insights are subtle and he asserts that the disagreement is not only over whether or not God exists but also it involves disagreement over how the disagreement is to be characterized. (76) From the theist position this is a disagreement over everything, again it is about what it is to find anything whatsoever intelligible rather than unintelligible. MacIntyre points out that to view something as intelligible is not necessarily to understand it but rather to understand it as being open to being understood. It means recognizing that if one asks what this thing is, why it is as it is, and why in fact out of the indefinitely large set of possibilities that might have been actualized, this particular possibility has been realized there is a true answer to be discovered and that answer will identify some agency sufficient to make it the case that things exist as they do and have the characteristics that they have. Thus MacIntyre insists that disagreements with atheists concerning God are inseparable from their disagreements with atheists concerning intelligibility. That the truth can be known, is a peculiar claim of first principle that for Catholics stems from the abiding faith that one is in relationship with the source of truth in both being and knowledge. This is not to be confused with any claim to be in possession of the truth and thus free of all doubt and uncertainty. This again would be to confuse two orders of reality – the order of first principles

and the order of particular objects known, or perhaps more simply, to confuse the many objects known with the light by which we see and know and by which these very objects have their being.¹⁴

Universities became the custodians of knowledge through the academic disciplines and also through the organization of the curriculum and yet in this organization there is some view on the nature of the unity of this knowledge either explicit or implicit. Yet MacIntyre is very clear that throughout the history of the university and its various views on the nature of the unity of knowledge there has been recurring conflict. (77)

St. Thomas' view regarding this unity of knowledge perhaps can be captured in his views on the intellectual formation of the university student. It begins with the more technical aspects of effective communication, grammar and logic, followed by the study of mathematics for the exercise of the imagination, then on to the natural sciences. With the student gaining more life experience, the study of moral and political philosophy was to be introduced. This level of study was understood to require enough maturity to allow some degree of reflection upon the passions and was thought to be beyond the capacities of young students. Then only after this study was one considered ready for metaphysics and theology, which for Thomas required a special strength of intellect. Such a course of study was easily regarded as something one had to get through in order to get ready for a career. But this, in Thomas's view, was mistaken for it was intended as a disciplined study directing the person towards the perfection of understanding in reference to the final end of the person.

However, Thomas' view of how universities should be organized was more theoretical than practical in the sense that it was, according to MacIntyre, remarkably uninfluential in

¹⁴ It may help to get the full sense of this Catholic emphasis on truth if we were to make reference to its philosophical roots in Plato in contrast to its roots in Christian revelation. A summary way to do this is to contrast it with power, and particularly state power as the alternative basis for deliberation and the exercise of judgment.

determining the universities actual development.¹⁵ Historically, one could even say that medieval universities were shaped for the most part by influences that were inhospitable to Thomistic thought. (94)

Though philosophical thought exhibited considerable variation, originality in Christian philosophy was centered on theodicy and the issues of God's power and its implications for the world and its evils. Eventually however these conflicts and tensions of the medieval universities lost their relevance and energy and they became the preoccupations of a learned elite while becoming removed from the concerns of the larger culture. And so it was from outside the university that creative philosophical enquiry was to emerge.

What was becoming increasingly apparent to the educated observer was the seriousness and seemingly irresolvable nature of the disagreements surrounding various schools. There were two major responses to this state of affairs, 1) to soldier on within one's intellectual tradition developing one's side of the argument and being prepared to defend one's tradition, or 2) to become skeptical regarding the power of rational argument to overcome disagreement. Catholic thinkers took up both responses. But as the conflicts appeared more intractable and the devastation of religious wars became more widespread the question about the nature and powers of human reason became more urgent in the face of a mounting skepticism.

Overall suspension of belief in the powers of human knowing was not acceptable, as it would have impaired the progress of the natural sciences. So there was a strong motivation to remove the obstacles to belief in the powers of human reason. This provided a large part of the impetus for Descartes' huge impact and influence and his allegedly setting philosophy upon a new path. His efforts were seen as contributing to the defeat of Aristotle on the central issues of

¹⁵ An exception was Thomas' influence among important Dominican schools, which have been at times sources of considerable scholarship and innovative thought.

philosophy especially in relation to the new and expanding sciences of the age. MacIntyre points out that in the wake of Descartes and especially in the period of the 18th century and what has been called the Enlightenment, there was a profound dislike of Catholicism, and as a reaction in some Catholic circles there was a tendency to retreat into *fideism*.¹⁶

According to MacIntyre's telling it was Cardinal Newman who provided the much-needed antidote for this defensive tendency in Catholic thought with his rich philosophical perspective. For Newman, human beings always have some form of faith and have beliefs based upon this faith that go beyond the evidence of natural reason.(142) So for Newman revealed theology clearly has its place in the Catholic university as it is needed to correct the distortion and corruption to which natural reason left to itself was prone. Thus all understanding ultimately had a theological aspect.

Philosophy for Newman involved a wholistic grasp of the universe through an effort to understand its parts. This meant there was a vision of the university as a whole having a purpose embodied most comprehensively in theology and philosophy. However, there was a tendency of the other sciences to trespass into the intellectual territory of philosophy and theology for which they were ill equipped, and for these sciences to make claims they couldn't justify because of the limitations of their methodology. (147)

The aim of the university for Newman was never reducible to career preparation but rather to develop the human being so that they can engage in enquiry, discussion, and debate and

¹⁶ "*Fideism*" is a philosophical term meaning a system of philosophy or an attitude of mind, which, denying the power of unaided human reason to reach certitude (especially in moral and theological matters), affirms that the fundamental act of human reason consists in an act of faith, and the supreme criterion of certitude is authority.

to exercise proper judgment in the complex and difficult situations of practical life. These were intellectual virtues and for Newman these needed to be distinguished from the moral virtues.¹⁷

Newman believed universities tended to confuse these two sets of virtues often acting as if the cultivation of an aesthetic distaste for bad behavior was the same as good moral sense. Newman was convinced that this distinction was clearly evident in the moral teachings of the Catholic Church. (148)

In Newman's view the university had serious limitations in regards to moral education and furthermore tended to deceive itself regarding the nature of this limitation. He saw moral philosophy as a particular aide in this self-deception. For Newman assent to various propositions is not the result of a demonstrative argument, instead our move from reason to assent was an exercise of judgment that can only be described as a *phronesis* of conscience.

There were three major differences between the aesthetic and moral sensibility in Newman's view, 1) the aesthetic sense was concerned with a whole range of objects without discriminating the profound difference between the human person and these other objects, 2) aesthetic taste provided its own evidence appealing to a sense of the beautiful and the ugly, whereas 3) the moral conscience reaches out towards and desires to conform with some commanding or constraining sanction addressed to us by some unique and incomparable higher power beyond one's self. Sorting out this difference between aesthetic taste and moral conscience is important for two reasons, 1) acknowledging the importance for this distinction can be a guard against the self-deception that can result from even the best university education,

¹⁷ For Aristotle the intellectual virtues assisted one in the pursuit of the truth as theory, in the sense of seeing things with one's mind as these are meant to be seen. These virtues were - understanding, science, wisdom, and prudence; whereas the moral virtues – prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, assisted one in acting intelligently in the pursuit of the good life that is, living life as it was meant to be lived by a human being. The process of achieving human well-being or happiness as the goal of a human life, required *phronesis* – practical wisdom, and involved the development of both intellectual and moral virtues. It seems that prudence provided the conceptual and practical bridge between these two orders of virtue.

2) by acknowledging this difference we place ourselves on the threshold of an awareness of God.
(149)

Arguments outside of pure mathematics and logic tend not to have the same compelling force and to remain more probable rather than demonstrative. For Newman it is our backgrounds, our existing thoughts, beliefs, principles, hopes, and desires all integral to our self-identity and self-understanding that so greatly influences our assent or dissent to reasoned argument. Thus our response to an argument is said to be as much a test of us as it is of the presenting argument. Thus according to Newman, one's character plays a role in one's openness to the truth and this in turn determines one's philosophical stance.¹⁸

What then are these arguments that direct us towards the truth? For Newman these were arguments that integrated theological understanding of the created universe with the understanding provided by the various secular disciplines. According to MacIntyre, Newman succeeded in defining the tasks confronting Catholic thought in a general way without identifying the philosophical resources for carrying out these tasks. Again a major problem was that Catholics had forgotten much of this tradition and so it was to this problem that Pope Leo XIII directed his attention.

The Catholic tradition was very firm in its conviction that something of God can be known with certainty from the study of things by our natural reason. The problem, says MacIntyre, was that the voices arguing such were either isolated such as Newman or ineffective such as Rosmini. Pope Leo's project was to urge both the clergy and the laity to meet the intellectual needs and challenges of their times by rediscovering and renewing the philosophy of

¹⁸ This insightful discussion by MacIntyre of Cardinal Newman's crucial role in developing and promoting an understanding Catholic higher education perhaps can better help us to see why so many of the Bishops and Popes have always attributed such cultural importance to Catholic higher education. More specifically Newman helps us see why it is argued that the tradition properly presented and communicated can be important not only in the intellectual development of the human person but in his/her moral development as well.

St. Thomas Aquinas. (151) Pope Leo's famous encyclical *Aeterni Patris* argued that the 19th century's errors were those of materialism and positivism and the work of redressing these errors simply cannot be based upon the philosophical resources of post 16th century philosophy primarily because it was a concerted effort to completely separate faith from reason.

MacIntyre asks astutely if there is an inconsistency in Pope Leo's presentation of the tradition in arguing that we can proceed on the basis of natural reason distinct from faith and yet the root cause of the modern errors is in the separation of rational thought especially as expressed in philosophy from faith? It is on this issue that MacIntyre's hermeneutic of the Catholic tradition becomes particularly rich. He doesn't believe there is a contradiction and he returns to Newman to sort out why not. Newman, he says, saw that we all enter into philosophical enquiry and argument with pre-philosophical convictions and biases. (152) What faith enables us to do is to recognize these as sources of error, something to which we might otherwise be blind. We tend not to recognize how difficult it is to become a genuine rational enquirer and to find the right starting point for philosophical enquiry. It is so difficult, he says with Newman, because we carry with us unrecognized prejudices and assumptions. Christian faith enables us to distinguish between faith and reason, which we cannot do from the perspective of reason alone, only from the perspective of faith. Reason needs Christian faith if it is to do its work well, because reason without Christian faith is reason always informed by some other set of unacknowledged beliefs that render its adherents liable to error. Again MacIntyre says it is in the Christian philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas that we find an exemplary philosophy guided by faith working well that has been endorsed by Church authorities. Yet even here in this Thomistic revival there has been controversy between those scholars engaged in the creative rediscovery of the spirit of Thomism and those involved in the doctrinaire promulgation of what MacIntyre calls a derivative textbook

Thomism. Nevertheless, MacIntyre calls attention to a central Thomistic doctrine he finds fundamental for this entire discussion. It is the philosophical view of man as a material particular embedded in space and time and yet capable of an understanding that transcends the limits of this particularity and finitude. (156-7)

Still MacIntyre shows that by the mid-twentieth century Catholic thought could no longer be identified as strictly Thomist as many believe Pope Leo had hoped for and even promoted. Yet he does see a unity remaining in this tradition and so he turns to Pope John Paul II's important encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, to help articulate this unity in the final phases of his narrative. He asks again what is the nature of this Catholic intellectual tradition and what is the special role of Catholic theology and philosophy in this tradition? (162-3)

4) Faith and Reason

According to Pope John Paul II, when Catholic thought is true to its own principles it carries thinking on as it needs to be carried on. These are principles that direct our thinking to take seriously the existential questions integral to the human person and for which religion is understood to offer a coherent response. When this thought fails to do its work adequately, the Church sees itself responsible for urging Catholic thinkers to renew the effort in accordance with the purpose of its principles.

The Church has never accepted the temptation to say that after receiving divine revelation, Catholic thought and philosophy was not needed any longer. Natural reason was always seen to have its own distinctive manner for approaching the mystery of God. It is first concerned with the truth of things from which it moves towards the truth of the mystery of God. But also there is the approach of theology that begins first with the truth of God's self-revelation and considers the order of things in the light of this revelation. In this tradition both philosophy

and theology are necessary, as they are understood to complement each other. And yet, says MacIntyre, John Paul II is very clear that though there be this interdependence between theology and philosophy, philosophy has an autonomy in its search for truth as a secular enterprise. The Church may feel the responsibility now and again to call Catholic thought to a renewal of its proper task through philosophy yet it is only philosophers enquiring according to standards internal to philosophy that can carry out this task properly and correct error. MacIntyre nevertheless agrees with the tradition that the truth being sought must be truth rightly conceived and it is here again where St. Thomas is so important for Catholic thought in aiding us in moving in the proper direction. (167)

MacIntyre points to the materialism, positivism, and idealism of the 19th C as examples of error, where the powers of reason tended to be overestimated and even in some cases presumed to be able to adequately address certain questions that could only be adequately approached through theology. By contrast, says MacIntyre, our own age is marked by an underestimation of reason's powers and the promotion of a type of fideism in theology with an over reliance on faith at the expense of reason. Again MacIntyre cites Thomism as an important help in balancing between these two extremes.

MacIntyre focuses on certain deep and seemingly irresolvable disagreements within the tradition as it developed and how any call to participate actively in this intellectual tradition is a call to situate oneself within an ongoing conversation that is conflicted. This MacIntyre believes witnesses to the fact it is a real living tradition.

That being said, MacIntyre also shows that these disputes and disagreements have the importance and significance they do because there are also fundamental agreements that are constitutive of this conversation as a Catholic tradition and practice. And so when

the Church out of concern and responsibility intervenes to condemn certain positions or methods, it does so because these are clearly understood to endanger the tradition's underlying constitutive agreements and to deprive it of its humanizing purpose.

What then are these underlying and constitutive agreements of the Catholic tradition? MacIntyre says they have to do with first principles, which in turn have to do with the beginning and end of the enquiry and its conversation, the pursuit of which and fidelity towards aide in perfecting its practice and its practitioners. (170) These principles are said in varying ways and yet they are similar in their existential significance so that the end or purpose of the conversation and practice of enquiry is an adequate understanding of that about which questions were originally asked.¹⁹ So then to uphold and promote any thesis or argument that denies the significance of these principles and their related questions by implying or asserting that they are unanswerable or meaningless for human understanding is to deprive the tradition of its very life and purpose and thus to be rejected and condemned.

But then is this not a blatant violation of academic freedom where some authority outside the university and its thinking dictates the conclusions of this thinking? Is this not a violation of the autonomy of the thinker in this insistence on the rightful exercise of the Church's teaching authority? No, says MacIntyre, because it is for the thinkers alone to judge what the outcomes of their enquiries and the conclusions of their arguments are. But

¹⁹ James Swindal, for example, has recently outlined the type of enquiry that has been fundamental to Catholic philosophy and its principles. In its essence he says, it is concerned with the mystery of being and its import for the question of our relationship to our selves, the world and the Divine. It is interesting that Swindal suggests that it is this deep philosophical concern that unifies Catholic philosophy and that it is the enquiry itself and the ways of thinking and acting it fosters that are important and not the particular label "Catholic". See James Swindal, "Ought There Be a 'Catholic' Philosophy?" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*(ACPQ) 73, 3:449-475. For a more classic treatment of the issue of being and Christian philosophical realism see the works of Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, yet even here between these two great neo-scholastic Christian philosophers of the last century there was a degree of philosophical disagreement on how best to understand this realism.

if thinkers reach conclusions that are incompatible with what is presupposed by Catholic faith, they will have put in question both their faith and the very tradition and enterprise of Catholic thought. And when this occurs it is for those who exercise the teaching authority of the Church to point this out because of their responsibility for the care of the faith and its tradition. And yet again it is entirely up to Catholic thinkers and their institutions to determine how they respond to encyclicals such as *Fides et Ratio* and their authoritative declarations.

The situation is now fraught with intellectual drama, says MacIntyre. The tradition of Catholic thought, reflection, and enquiry is regarded as an activity offering resources of universal and crucial importance for the human person. This puts the tradition in a counter-cultural position with respect to the dominant culture of secularizing modernity. This secularizing modernity now for the most part regards philosophy and theology as simply two more academic specialties among many which are regarded as dispensable and even irrelevant parts of higher education in its hurry to prepare students for the “real world”. (175) MacIntyre argues that this attitude itself involves unexamined philosophical presuppositions that if left unarticulated and uncriticized make it impossible to think purposively and rigorously about those existential questions to which philosophy and theology in the Catholic tradition provide fundamentally important approaches and responses. This then is an issue of fundamental concern for the Church as well as for philosophy and theology, which according to the tradition are understood to be interrelated.

Nonetheless, MacIntyre has repeatedly shown us how this tradition of Catholic philosophy and theology in both its rigor and depths involve competing and contending views that seem to have little prospect of satisfactory resolution. Discerning observers have concluded

that it must be something other than philosophical analysis and argument that determines why one takes this set of reasons rather than that set of reasons to have compelling force. It seems that thinkers within this tradition are drawing upon pre-philosophical and non-philosophical convictions that greatly influence the assent to philosophical conclusions.²⁰

MacIntyre recognizes this as a serious challenge to which Catholic thinkers can only respond adequately if 1) they can provide clear epistemic accounts of their arguments and conclusions that show the sufficiency of their reasoning and 2) they can justify the kind of self-knowledge that enables them to distinguish between beliefs and commitments that would not be theirs without sufficient reason and those beliefs and commitments that are theirs because of some non-rational motivation.

MacIntyre argues that this discussion confronts us with the central question of what does it mean to be a human being? Any response to such a question, he says, must explain our capacity for self-knowledge that is committed to an integration of learning about the nature and constitution of human being from the sciences, history, economics, and sociology with what only theology can tell us. This means wrestling with the persistent philosophical issues of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. It means a fundamental concern for understanding what we are doing when we are understanding. This involves some understanding of the universe in which this understanding occurs and how this universe and ourselves are dependent upon God for our existence and to whom we are directed, and how this directedness involves requirements for caring and responsibility.

Such an account will undoubtedly draw upon resources from the tradition of Catholic thought which involves a conversation that carries debates and disagreements, which along with

²⁰ MacIntyre makes reference to Nietzsche's analogous and rather negative criticism of so many 18th and 19th century thinkers' arguments as being sophisticated masks for a resentful will to power.

its fundamental principles are also constitutive of this tradition.²¹ MacIntyre, true to his form as a world class philosopher, says also that it is very important for the tradition to engage thought that is incompatible and even antagonistic so as to discern what it is about the human being that such views see well and what they may overlook, distort, trivialize, or conceal. He points out that often in important philosophical positions strengths, limitations, and error are closely intertwined. (178)

5) Global Conclusion

MacIntyre concludes that his suggestion, to the extent it is programmatic, is absurdly ambitious and yet he is convinced that the well-being of the Catholic tradition depends greatly upon how far such a program can be articulated and implemented institutionally. He is quite clear that he sees the modern secular university as inimical to any such undertaking because the goal of such a program in Catholic higher education is significantly different. Furthermore, for any Catholic university to uncritically imitate the structures and goals of these universities without being aware of something gone wrong has little prospect of such an undertaking; and yet with almost a twinkle he says this is nothing new for a tradition that has always had much more to hope for than could be reasonably expected.

6) Local Conclusion

Something should be said in concluding about the promise of some such development in Catholic higher education in Miramichi that perhaps, to some modest degree, could realize something of what Taylor, MacIntyre, along with the Bishops and Popes are envisaging and hoping for. This initiative, it is proposed, would be affiliated with STU and the NBCC system. My argument is that any such initiative should also to some significant degree reinstate and

²¹ We might say in conclusion that while Thomism may not play the governing role perhaps envisaged by Pope Leo XIII, it certainly continues to play a central and vital role within the tradition of Catholic thought.

continue that tradition of Catholic higher education begun at STU over one hundred years ago. It should be done for the three reasons that I began with and have attempted to clarify in this paper with the help of Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre: a) our hope for a humane future, b) the creative ferment and challenges in contemporary events, and c) the weight and lessons of history.²² This would mean, philosophy and theology again playing a central role in inviting students to consider, at least at an introductory level, the proper ends of the human person in relation to the common good. This goal would be pursued in conjunction with the important practical goals of acquiring the technical know how of earning a living and contributing to the economic well being of one's community.

²² STU's last theologian to seriously engage its faculty regarding the university's identity and project was Rudolf Siebert in the early 1990s. He said with some urgency at the time, now nearly twenty years ago, that it was the cooperative task of the theologian, the religiologist, the philosopher, and the social scientist to do their utmost to mitigate the arrival of a totally bureaucratized and technologized society, to resist the arrival of a society of perpetual violent conflict, war, and ecological devastation, and to instead promote the liberated society where universal solidarity and personal autonomy are reconciled. (*I would interject here that clearly we can be told and shown but how will we be motivated?*) Siebert concludes, all our efforts to rescue unconditional meaning without God are in vain. (See Rudolf J. Siebert, *Critical Reflections on the Dialectical Relationship between Theology and Religiology, and other Human and Social Science* (Fredericton, NB: St. Thomas University, April 1994)).