

Catholic Intellectual Tradition

As part of its mission, ACCU assists its members in fostering a vibrant Catholic identity within their institutions. This information about the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is designed to assist administrators, faculty, staff, students, and others interested in the tradition that underlies our colleges and universities, as well as others who want to learn about it.

Overview

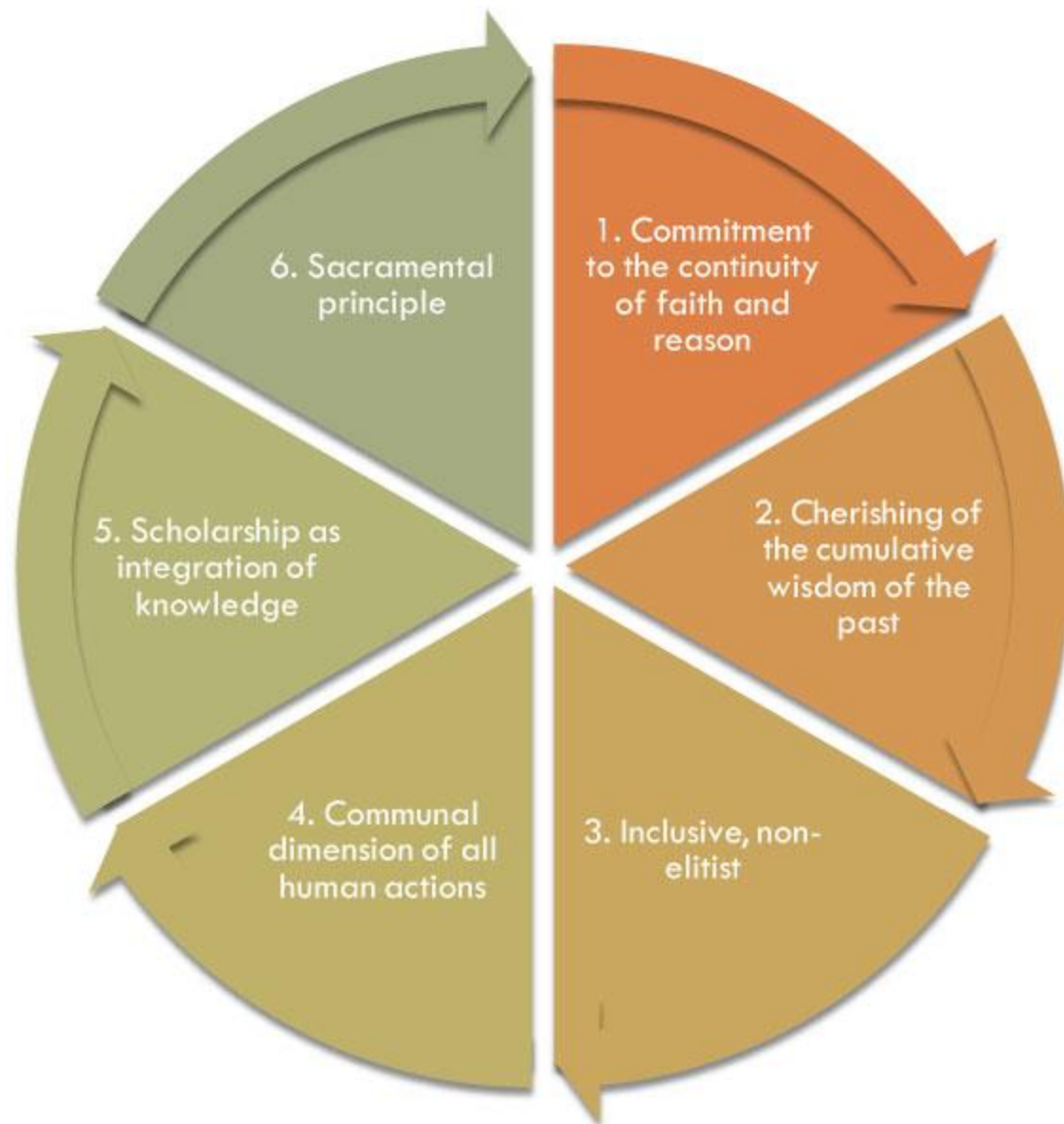
Catholicism aims for an understanding of the world around us, in an effort to bring people closer to God. Given that, it is no surprise that intellectual pursuit has been a hallmark of the Church over the past two millennia.

In 2000, Monika Hellwig wrote, “Perhaps the most fruitful way of thinking about the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is in terms of two aspects: the classic treasures to be cherished, studied, and handed on; and the way of doing things that is the outcome of centuries of experience, prayer, action, and critical reflection.” The treasures, she explained, include certain classic texts, art and architecture, music, as well as developments in science and technology. “When these things are appreciated as part of the Christian intellectual heritage, they are studied in a way that tends to integrate the disciplines by relating everything to the meaning of human life in its relationship to the transcendent.”

The other aspect of this tradition, Hellwig wrote, is the way we have learned to deal with experience and knowledge in order to acquire true wisdom, live well, and build good societies, laws, and customs. Fundamental to this process is the understanding that faith and reason do not conflict. Rather, the continued pursuit of understanding leads ultimately to wisdom. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition invites us out of isolation and into a community whose cumulative efforts contribute to the construction of a whole—a wholeness that is a Catholic hallmark.

For Catholic colleges and universities, this component of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition is manifested throughout various academic fields—theology and philosophy, but also in the arts, sciences, and professions. Because the tradition is a living one, scholars are invited to examine contemporary issues and to help the body of Catholic thought grow and adapt.

- See vol. 31.2 of the [Journal of Catholic Higher Education](#) for detailed discussion of how the tradition is evident in graduate business education.
- Learn more about [Collegium](#), an annual program for faculty and graduate students who want to develop their ability to articulate and enrich the spiritual and intellectual life of their institutions.
- Download the Faculty installment of the ACCU [Strengthening Catholic Identity](#) series.



Additional Resources

A diverse set of documents are available to inform and guide contemporary efforts to incorporate and build upon the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. You may also wish to view a presentation by ACCU President Michael Galligan-Stierle, [*Big Questions and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*](#), delivered to the Freshman Symposium at the University of St. Thomas (TX).

For Further Reading

William J. Cahoy, *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition: What Is It? Why Should I Care?* Fall forum, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, August 20, 2003.

Anthony Cernera and Oliver Morgan, eds., *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, Sacred Heart University Press, 2000.

John C. Haughey, SJ, [*Where Is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject*](#), Georgetown University Press, 2009.

Monika Hellwig, "What Can the Roman Catholic Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?" in *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997.

Robert Imbelli, ed., "Exploring the Catholic Intellectual Tradition," *C21 Resources*, Boston College, 2013.

Michelle Loris, "[Engaging the Catholic Intellectual Tradition - Sacred Heart University's Common Core: The Human Journey.](#)" *Mission and Catholic Identity Publications* 7, 2009.

John J. Piderit, SJ, and Melanie Morey, eds., *Teaching the Tradition: Catholic Themes in Academic Disciplines*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

Margaret Steinfels, "The Catholic Intellectual Tradition," *Origins* 25(11), 1995.

Terrence Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, Orbis Books, 2000.

Guiding Documents of Catholic Higher Education in the United States

[Ex corde Ecclesiae](#)

Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic Universities (August 15, 1990)

[Ex corde Ecclesiae, An Application to the United States](#)

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2001)

[Address to Educators, Pope Benedict XVI](#)

Catholic University of America, April 17, 2008

[Fides et Ratio](#) (1998)

Encyclical Letter, Pope John Paul II

Resources Maintained by Member Institutions

[Catholic Identity](#), College of St. Benedict's/St. John's University

A description of how "the intellectual life of these campuses embodies and affirms the harmony of faith and reason in addition to the dignity of each person."

[The Catholic Intellectual Tradition](#), Sacred Heart University Press

Offers books and a video series focused on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

[The Catholic Intellectual Tradition](#), St. Mary's University (TX)

Video of University President Thomas Mengler discussing Catholic Intellectual Tradition at his institution

[Center for Catholic Studies](#), Seton Hall University

Dedicated to fostering a dialogue between the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and all areas of study and contemporary culture.

[Center for Catholic Thought](#), Creighton University

Offers perspective on the contemporary Catholic Church from an Ignatian perspective.

[The Church in the 21st Century Center](#), Boston College

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is one of the four focal issues of the Center, which offers a number of resources to explore the tradition.

[The Benedictine Intellectual Tradition: An Overview](#), Association of Benedictine Colleges and Universities

The Rev. Joel Rippinger, OSB, Marmion Abbey, traces the features and sources of the Benedictine intellectual tradition.

[*The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition*](#), Association of Franciscan Colleges and Universities Publications exploring the rich Franciscan intellectual heritage.

[*Integritas: Advancing the Mission of Catholic Higher Education*](#), Boston College

A journal publishing the papers presented at each Boston College Roundtable, which brings together scholars and administrators from Catholic colleges and universities to discuss the vision and promise of Catholic higher education in the United States.

[*Foundational Documents on Jesuit Catholic Education*](#), Xavier University

Online resource directory to several documents on Jesuit education, including a focus on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

[*The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Mission of the University: A Continuing Conversation*](#), University of Dayton

An intended starting point for conversation and reflection on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and its incorporation.

[*Office of Mission and Ministry: Catholic Intellectual Tradition*](#), Villanova University

Resources provided to assist with the goal of preserving and contributing to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

<https://www.accunet.org/About-Catholic-Higher-Ed-Catholic-Intellectual-Tradition>