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Fides et Ratio:
**The Pursuit of Faith and Reason
in the 21st Century Catholic University**

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Abstract

The faculty fellows who participated in the 21st Annual Loyola Marymount University's President's Institute in May 2016 explored the topic of faith and reason in the 21st century Catholic university. The fellows explored the theme from the perspective of the relationship between faith and reason; our personal relationship to faith and reason; and the relationship of faith and reason to our academic disciplines in the context of our teaching, scholarship, and service. The idea that these notions compete for primacy in a Catholic university became fundamental to the exploration. This article provides an overview of the Institute's theme and the literature that served as foundational; the essential questions that formed the basis of the presentations and activities of the Institute; an analysis of the fellows' experiences in relation to those questions; a discussion of the themes that emerged from the fellows' written data sets; and recommendations for Jesuit institutions considering the exploration of topics such as this with faculty.

Introduction

In May 2016, the faculty fellows who participated in the 21st Annual Loyola Marymount University President's Institute explored the topic of faith and reason in the 21st century Catholic university. Derived from LMU's core values of faith and reason—and inspired by John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*¹ and Pope Francis's encyclical *Lumen Fidei*,² that instantiated the bond of faith and reason—faculty explored the theme from three perspectives. The first was the relationship between faith and reason. The second was our personal relationship to faith and reason. The final perspective was the relationship of faith and reason to fellows' academic disciplines and more specifically, to our teaching, scholarship, and service. The idea that these notions compete for primacy in a Catholic university became fundamental to the exploration. This article provides a background to the documents that framed the work of the Institute; the essential questions that faculty fellows explored around

those three perspectives; an analysis of the fellows' experiences in relation to those questions; and a discussion of the themes. We conclude with reflections for our institution and others considering the exploration of topics such as this for faculty members' deeper examination of themes relevant to the 21st century Catholic university.³ The article is a companion to the LMU Faith and Reason Collection found in the 2017 volume 2, number 6 of *Jesuit Higher Education* and can be accessed at this link:

<https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/>

Foundational Literature

In selecting a theme for the President's Institute, co-directors and administrators considered three elements: fidelity of the theme to Roman Catholic teachings and grounded in doctrinal perspectives of church leaders; fidelity of the theme to the



LMU
Faith and Reason
Collection

[McGrath & Reilly,
LMU President's
Institute Collection:
Introduction and
Overview](#)

[Snyder, *Necessary
Companions: Faith
and Reason*](#)

[McGrath & Reilly,
President's Institute
on the Catholic
Character of LMU:
A Twenty-One-Year
Tradition](#)

[Reilly & McGrath,
*Fides et Ratio: The
Pursuit of Faith and
Reason in the 21st
Century Catholic
University*](#)

[Bouvier-Brown,
*Nurturing Student
Scientists as People
of Faith*](#)

[Jarvis, *Faith and
Reason in the
Pursuit of
Understanding*](#)

[Rohm, *Our
Students' Search for
Meaning*](#)

[Scheibler, *What Can
TV Teach Us About
the Spiritually
Healthy Institution?*](#)

[Reilly & McGrath,
*Faith and Reason in
Antiquity:
A Photo Essay*](#)

Jesuit and Marymount missions, teachings, and traditions; and fidelity of the theme to LMU's core values, mission, and vision. This section explores a summary of the foundational literature at the heart of the 2016 theme.

Fides et Ratio

In his Encyclical Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, titled *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II wrote,

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.⁴

In this letter, the Pope set forth an argument that there is a relationship between faith and reason—neither mutually exclusive—and in fact, wholly congruent with being a person of faith. It is through the exploration of both that we come to understand God and thereby become fully human.

John Paul II further offered how faith and reason protect us from nihilism, which he cited as the crisis of rationalism in society today. He wrote,

In the nihilist interpretation, life is no more than an occasion for sensations and experiences in which the ephemeral has pride of place. Nihilism is at the root of the widespread mentality which claims that a definitive commitment should no longer be made, because everything is fleeting and provisional.⁵

Faith unmoored from reason “runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition.”⁶ Truth, then, is found through the amalgam of faith and reason—tools that serve as the antidote to disaffection, alienation, and nothingness. Simultaneously autonomous and harmonious, faith and reason, in unity, best serve humankind.

Lumen Fidei

Pope Francis expanded on the thinking of Pope John Paul II with the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, which elucidates his thinking on the light of faith.⁷ In particular chapter 2, sections 32-34 of the encyclical illuminate how faith and reason serve as the basis for dialogue and contribute to the relationship between God and us. Francis presents three key notions. First, the truth of God's love can be apprehended because of “the circular movement” of faith and reason.⁸ The necessity of dialogue between these seemingly incongruous principles establishes a path to God. Reciprocity between faith and reason establishes a means by which the conversation can occur. The second notion reflects St. Augustine's embracing of Neoplatonism over Manichaeism. Manichaeism, which emphasizes conflict—light and dark, good and evil, faith and reason—gave way to the Greek notion of light, which metaphorically comes from the Divine. Light, which offers us sight, and thus, insight, becomes a path to God, thereby eliminating the need to view faith and reason as contentious opposites that fight for supremacy.⁹

Third, the interplay of faith and reason lead to a common truth grounded in love—an ever-evolving unfolding of our relationship to others. Francis concluded,

The gaze of science thus benefits from faith: faith encourages the scientist to remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness. Faith awakens the critical sense by preventing research from being satisfied with its own formulae and helps it to realize that nature is always greater.¹⁰

Faith and reason, then, are similar to the twin legs of a compass. At times, faith is the leg that anchors the compass while reason becomes the adjustable leg. At others, reason serves as the anchor while faith adjusts course. Neither can function without the other. Together they invite us to consider greater discernment in the path toward truth.

Loyola Marymount University's Mission and Core Values

Memorialized in the December 3, 1990 document entitled *Mission and Goals: Loyola Marymount University*, Robert Caro, S.J. put forth the three principal purposes of the university memorialized in its mission: the encouragement of learning, the education of the whole person, and the service of faith and the promotion of justice.¹¹ While many characteristics serve as hallmarks of LMU's intellectual and cultural heritage, most relevant to the 2016 theme was this statement: "[The university] seeks an integration of knowledge in which 'faith and reason bear harmonious witness to the unity of all truth' [found in] John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1990, par. 17."¹² In other words, the apprehension of truth requires faith and reason to co-exist. Caro additionally explained that the encouragement of learning does not demand compliance with a particular doctrine, but instead encourages "a radical commitment to free and honest inquiry in teaching and research—but always with reverence before the mystery of the universe and openness to the Transcendent."¹³ While LMU's commitment to welcoming people of all faith traditions or no faith tradition may seem contradictory to the mission of a Catholic institution, it is that practice that opens the opportunity for critical and challenging conversations among faculty and with students about the remaining values of educating all that a person is and encouraging faith and social justice in practice.

Further affirmation for faith and reason is found in LMU's core values.¹⁴ They explicitly state,

We affirm our commitment to the faith that does justice, which is rooted in our Jesuit and Marymount traditions. Further, we both inherit and contribute to the ever-developing Catholic intellectual tradition which views the pursuit of truth as an inherent good, emphasizes both the harmony and creative tension between faith and reason, and embraces ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.¹⁵

Here, both faith and justice are intertwined in the service of the university's Catholic intellectual tradition and are engagements with the world in

active ways, not merely passive discussion. There is also a concomitant recognition that in authentic engagement, there will be disagreement and perhaps discordant perspectives, but that the broader commitment to embracing all viewpoints overrides the prospect of divergent views.

Essential Questions Explored

The foundational literature and LMU's mission and core values led us to generate questions that would guide the overall work of the Institute—the selection of presenters and the activities in which fellows would engage. The process of coming to the questions was recursive in nature. We interviewed numerous colleagues from various academic disciplines and leadership roles, along with several members of the Jesuit community. Our conversations with them helped us to refine the questions. Five questions made it through the lengthy vetting process. Fellows considered these during the course of the retreat:

- What are the attributes of faith and reason?
- What is the relationship between faith and reason?
- What is my relationship to faith and reason?
- What does it mean for a professor of my discipline to address the tension between faith and reason?
- How do we as a community foster ongoing conversations and actions about faith and reason?

Two Wings Contemplate Truth: Fellows' Exploration of Faith and Reason

Several data sources informed the themes that emerged from the fellows' work with Institute presenters and with one another. Presenters' remarks served to provide insight into the five essential questions and invited us to consider our values, beliefs, and actions. Because nearly all presenters were LMU faculty, their thinking is reflected in this data set. In addition, fellows' formative data from daily, personal reflections, as well as reflections on metaphors found in images from antiquity that we viewed during a fieldtrip to J. Paul Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades, California,

provided insight over the five-day Institute, as did their summative evaluations.¹⁶ Here, we highlight three of the many themes as they related to the essential questions: faith and reason as distinct but not separate ways of knowing; the Catholic intellectual tradition as the nexus to faith for teacher-scholars; and the benefit of diversity in community to enacting faith and reason as teacher-scholars. We provide several examples from the data for each theme.

Faith and Reason: Distinct, But Not Separate Ways of Knowing

Fellows and presenters emphasized in many ways over the course of the Institute that faith and reason are different from each other but do not require separation in coming to understand each of them. During the fellows' visit to the Getty Villa, one particular 1500-year-old mosaic from the early Syrian church integrated images of nature with the celestial.¹⁷ Featuring fauna and flora, it drew inspiration from Greek mythology and emerging Christian symbology, emphasizing the metaphors in natural objects such as that of the peacock, which suggested immortality and apotheosis—elevation to the status of the divine.¹⁸ One fellow wrote, "In the philosophical language of the day (e.g., Augustine of Hippo), it was understood that humans could better know the Creator through the created. Rather than considering Faith and Reason two opposing forces, philosophers and scientists enjoyed the study of nature as a means of learning of (and increasing their Faith in) God."¹⁹ In other words, what could be observed anecdotally and empirically in creation could serve as a means to better understand the nature of God.

As a comparative theologian, one LMU faculty member and presenter suggested that one of the ways to more thoroughly understand faith and reason is through a comparative lens. In citing her work with John Henry Newman's theology and his "notion of natural religion and universal revelation," she stated, "I believe that comparison with other religions helps theologians understand the other, but also it helps theologians understand their tradition more fully in light of the other. Comparative theology is still faith seeking understanding, but in a comparative mode that finds understanding other religions' traditions

helpful for understanding faith more broadly."²⁰ So, not only can insight be had into one's preferred tradition, the examination of similarities and differences teaches individuals about other traditions, providing greater clarity as a result. While not exactly a Hegelian triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, the comparison, or in Hegel's term, the dialectic does permit an examination of what the concepts of faith and reason are in other traditions and perhaps bring the individual to a new understanding.²¹

An LMU philosophy professor and presenter at the Institute expressed his hesitancy to provide definitions of faith and reason and preferred to rather examine their attributes. He offered, "I want to propose that we think about the possibility that faith and reason are two different ways of dealing with or experiencing the truth or pursuing the truth."²² Challenging those who approach the world principally through the lens of faith or reason, he suggested that both may lack understanding of the attributes of the "bogeyman"—the lens typically vilified. In his discussion, he echoed the perspectives of both Popes in their encyclicals on faith and reason, suggesting that both contribute to the project of uncovering truth. This philosopher invited fellows to consider that in uncovering a deeper understanding of faith and reason could be had through each discipline, through every discipline—that there exists no one discipline through which faith and reason can be understood.

Catholic Intellectual Tradition: The Nexus to Faith

As we consider how as teachers and scholars we integrate faith and reason into our work, fellows and presenters suggested in various ways that the Catholic intellectual tradition provides that bridge to faith—that it is not a blind faith, but one informed by the institution's commitment to the liberal arts. Robert Caro, S.J., who retired as Vice President for Mission and Ministry in June 2017, provided some context to the fellows in an afternoon fireside chat. He explained, "The Catholic tradition militates against letting go of [teaching a course in ethics and justice, which is a part of LMU's core curriculum]. Further, there are the Ethics [endowed] Chairs spread throughout

the various schools and colleges, started by Fr. O'Malley [LMU's 13th president], who started the President's Institute. This fosters the idea of the importance of ethical reflection."²³ The Catholic intellectual tradition is more broadly interpreted through art and beauty as evidenced by the cathedrals and museums throughout Europe, for example. This expanded understanding of the intellectual tradition, then, serves to inform a deeper understanding and relationship of faith to reason, of reason to faith.

An Institute fellow confirmed his belief of how our intellectual tradition teaches about the marriage of faith and reason—even when our academic discipline does not directly address it. He wrote, “As professors at a Catholic university we must realize that even when classes have no direct mention of theology we are teaching about creation. Therefore, we are indirectly teaching about the Creator. I believe that these mosaics served as (and continue to serve as) a reminder that Faith, Reason, Belief, and Nature need not exist in different spheres.”²⁴ Through both direct and indirect means, faith can be apprehended through reasoned and thoughtful interaction with the natural world for our students and for ourselves.

Another presenter, an LMU theology professor who approaches his work through Eastern religions, emphasized that the Catholic intellectual tradition draws broadly from its interaction with and relationship to other world religions. He asserted, “The Jesuits were the ones that in the early days required all of their members to live in, embed themselves not only in a culture and in a place, but in the language.”²⁵ Rather than reject the vast array of world perspectives, Jesuits embraced them, expanding on their understanding of Catholic intellectualism. At the core of the quest for truth is pluralism; only through diversity can one come to understand.

The Strength of Diversity in Community

One clear thread of recurring conversation and reflection among fellows and presenters suggested that apprehending faith and reason is made possible through community; alone, we can flounder, but together as teacher-scholars committed to understanding how faith and reason

affect our teaching, scholarship, and service, we can gain greater clarity of thinking and direction for action. Diversity is grounded in our Catholic identity, but there is a tension between “particularity and inclusivity.”²⁶ While our common understanding of the identity of our institution makes us uniquely LMU, our commitment is to inclusion—to inviting those of differing views into the community. Robert Caro suggested this is a creative tension and that in community, the balance can be maintained between the two. He offered, “We should have no problem maintaining the creative tension because we are doing it all the time—nature and grace, creativity and obedience, God and man, for example.”²⁷ Values that we find of equal value can seem to be in conflict and it is through discussion, debate, and reflection that the community can strive to keep them in balance.

Another notion that related to diversity and the cultivation of fellowship was the reminder of why the Institute came about to begin. It was started over twenty years ago, namely to foster and maintain the distinct mission and identity as a Catholic university and specifically as a Jesuit and Marymount institution. It was through a series of national conversations that many initiatives were born and several took root at LMU. The faculty-led LMU Committee for Mission and Identity was formed under the direction of Fr. Thomas P. O'Malley, LMU's 13th president from 1991-1999, and he founded the Institute in 1996. The function, practically speaking, was to address the tension between particularity and inclusivity. It has remained the same to the present. How does the institution initiate new faculty into mission and identity while recognizing that the many disciplines and backgrounds of professors—including religious identities—would vary greatly? Could there be diversity and continuity simultaneously among the academic community? During and subsequent to the May 2016 Institute, numerous fellows directly addressed how the Institute had affected their sense of commitment to LMU both in the short and long term. We present and discuss that data set in greater detail in the article titled, [“President's Institute on the Catholic Character of Loyola Marymount University: A Twenty-One Year Tradition,”](#) found elsewhere in this collection.

Coming to the Fullness of Truth: A Discussion of the Efficacy of the Institute's Theme

Now, more than ever, the topic of faith and reason and its understanding in the 21st century Catholic university is relevant. Now, more than ever, the beliefs and actions of university academicians matter as they consider faith and reason in their teaching, scholarship, and service. At a time when faith is being conflated with non-scientific, magical thinking and actions throughout American society, it is incumbent upon faculty in a faith-based institution to make clear that we repudiate this association. It is incumbent upon us to embrace a reasoned faith that instantiates Jesuit values of *ad maiorem Dei gloriam, cura personalis*, and *magis* as we strive to become and to participate in the formation of individuals for others. The discussion that follows align with the themes that emerged from the Fellows' exploration of faith and reason and how it affects our work as teachers, scholars, and persons of service in a 21st century Jesuit and Marymount institution.

For the Greater Glory of God

Both secularism and fundamentalism—two extremes of the same coin—fight for our allegiance in this postmodern world. Both, though, close the door on conversation and cooperation, compromise and conciliation. If faith and reason are to be reflected on and interwoven into the work of academicians, then these must be considered in the context of the precept of greater glory. How do faith and reason impel us to find God in our teaching, our scholarship, and our service? Furthermore, in considering the greater glory of God, we can reflect on the past, the present, and the future: what have we done, what are we doing, and what might we do?

For the Care of the Entire Person

So that faculty members can care for the entire person (the student), so must the institution initiate and demonstrate care of those who are on the front line daily with those students. By necessity, there must be the time and space for faculty members to discuss Catholic mission and identity and more specifically, Jesuit mission and identity and its relationship to our work.

Approaching complex topics such as faith and reason require thoughtful reflection and organization, as well as the commitment of human capital and fiscal resources to support any opportunities.

While care can be demonstrated in myriad ways, one clear way as evidenced through twenty-one years of President's Institutes is that institutions offer their faculty retreat-like opportunities to explore teaching, scholarship, and service within the context of themes such as faith and reason. Fellows were united in their purpose for attending the Institute: to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of faith and reason and of the Catholic intellectual tradition through its relationship to the Jesuit mission in a trusting environment with fellow scholars from many disciplines.


For the More Universal Good²⁸

We can never do enough. Although on its face, this is a daunting and perhaps overwhelming reality, instead we should view *magis* as a clarion call—an inspiration and an aspiration—rather than as an unattainable ideal whose path is hopelessness and actions that we take futile. There is only this path, today, that we can strive to be more, to say more, and to do more.

Noteworthy, however, is discernment of what “more” means. More may be viewed less as quantity of activities and instead as judicious selection of that which results in the universal good. For the purposes of discussing how we achieve the more universal good, we rely on Geger's explication in which he suggests that our work is to be done where there is greater need. This notion of greater need suggests that *magis* is a living precept which is realized through conversation in community with those who must determine who needs something and how it will be fulfilled.²⁹

Conclusion: Two Wings in Contemplation of the Truth

We end where we began. Faith and reason are two wings through which we contemplate truth. Three themes emerged from work of the fellows and presenters: faith and reason as distinct but not

separate ways of knowing; the Catholic intellectual tradition as the nexus to faith for teacher-scholars; and the benefit of diversity in community to enacting faith and reason as teacher-scholars. From these three themes, we invite consideration of how they relate to the Jesuit values of *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, *cura personalis*, and *magis*. An exploration of faith and reason can guide us to uncovering deeper truth about God, about the individual, and about the community as we reimagine our teaching, scholarship, and service. 

Notes

¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, *Encyclical Letter* (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), accessed May 4, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.

² Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, *Encyclical Letter* (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), accessed May 4, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html.

³ Refer to the article in the LMU Faith and Reason Collection: Cathleen McGrath and Elizabeth Reilly, “President’s Institute on the Catholic Character of Loyola Marymount University: A Twenty-One Year Tradition,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 12-16, <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol6/iss2/3>, for a full description of the LMU President’s Institute.

⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷ Francis, *Lumen Fidei*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹ Robert V. Caro, S.J., *Mission and Goals: Loyola Marymount University*, December 3, 1990, accessed May 7, 2017, <http://www.lmu.edu/AssetFactory.aspx?did=6799>

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Loyola Marymount University, *Core Values* (n.d.), accessed May 2, 2017, <http://academics.lmu.edu/strategicplan/strategicplan2012-2020/strategicplatableofcontents/corevalues/>

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Refer to the article in the LMU Faith and Reason Collection: Elizabeth Reilly and Cathleen McGrath, “Faith and Reason in Antiquity: A Photo Essay,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 25-30, <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol6/iss2/30> for fellows’ full reflections and accompanying photographs.

¹⁷ The J. Paul Getty Museum, “Roman Mosaics Across the Empire,” 2016, accessed May 7 2017, http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/roman_mosaics/Mosaics_gallery_text.pdf

¹⁸ The J. Paul Getty Museum, “A Brief Introduction to Roman Mosaics,” April 4, 2016, accessed May 7, 2017, <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/a-brief-introduction-to-roman-mosaics/>

¹⁹ James Plecnik, e-mail message to authors, August 25, 2017.

²⁰ Tracy Tiemeier, “Faith and Reason in Teaching, Service, and Scholarship” (presentation, Loyola Marymount University’s President’s Institute, Los Angeles, CA, May 9, 2016).

²¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. George de Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²² Brian Treanor, “Faith and Reason in Teaching, Service, and Scholarship” (presentation, Loyola Marymount University’s President’s Institute, Los Angeles, CA, May 9, 2016).

²³ Robert Caro, S.J., “The Catholic Intellectual Tradition” (presentation, Loyola Marymount University’s President’s Institute, Los Angeles, CA, May 9, 2016).

²⁴ James Plecnik, e-mail message to authors, August 25, 2017.

²⁵ Chris Chapple, “Faith and Reason in Teaching, Service, and Scholarship” (presentation, Loyola Marymount University’s President’s Institute, Los Angeles, CA, May 9, 2016).

²⁶ Robert Caro, S.J., “The Catholic Intellectual Tradition” (presentation, Loyola Marymount University’s President’s Institute, Los Angeles, CA, May 9, 2016).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Barton T. Geger, “What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012): 16-31, <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol1/iss2/16/>.

²⁹ Geger’s work pertains to the determination of *magis* in this manner: “a Superior General should make a decision about the *magis* only after prayer, rational deliberation, and consultation with others.” Further work is necessary to delineate a model for how lay academics within a Jesuit university can apprehend *magis* and is outside the scope of the investigation described in this article.