

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 8

Article 2

10-1-1995

For Openers: Talking Tradition

Editorial Board

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Recommended Citation

Editorial Board (1995) "For Openers: Talking Tradition," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 8, Article 2.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol8/iss1/2>

Talking Tradition

The three articles brought together here address their common topic from some very different points of view. Each was originally delivered as a talk, and each still carries in printed form some resonance of the audience to which—and the occasion on which—it was presented.

Catholic intellectuals, says Michael Lacey, are a problem. Their interest in maintaining a tradition and asserting the continuity of faith and reason makes them a backward-looking group in a forward-looking age. Lacey was not preaching to the choir. He wrote his talk for a gathering of Catholic theologians, telling his listeners (in a prologue that does not appear in the version published here) that their discipline, whatever the glories of its tradition, has had a negligible impact upon the intellectual life of the United States. Lacey suggests that backwardness can be a good thing—as C.S. Lewis was fond of saying, turning back is going forward when you're on the wrong road—but only if those with hindsight are also fully versed in the language and assumptions of the present. The books and articles that Lacey recommends here offer examples of the kind of confident engagement with modernity that he believes can (but too seldom does) characterize Catholic intellectual life.

Monika Hellwig's "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times" was delivered as the inaugural Landegger Memorial lecture at Georgetown University. Addressing herself to scholars, students, and members of the Washington, D.C., community, Hellwig agrees with Lacey that the Catholic intellectual in the United States has a foot in two worlds, but emphasizes very different aspects of the predicament. For Hellwig, the Catholic intellectual in today's academic setting is less a peripheral outsider and more a pioneer of new borderlands in and among the academic disciplines. Informed by convictions about the unity of knowledge and the need for communal, non-elitist approaches to its dissemination, Catholic intellectual tradition can help point the way toward greater integration of curricula and greater continuity between classroom learning and service to the larger community.

Michael Himes says toward the end of his talk that he fears he has compressed an enormous topic—what makes the intellectual life of a Catholic university recognizably Catholic—into "too

absurdly small a space." In fact, his intrepidity was exactly what first attracted members of the seminar to his talk. We had heard rave reviews from people who had been present when Fr. Himes delivered versions of "Living Conversation" to faculty members at gatherings at Loyola Marymount (February 1994), Gonzaga University (October 1994), and the University of San Francisco (February 1995). Fr. Himes works without notes, so no text of the talk was available. A member of the seminar, Thomas Buckley, S.J., graciously volunteered to oversee transcription of a videotape of the Loyola Marymount presentation. We then asked Fr. Himes to look over the transcript, to revise anything he saw amiss, but to try to keep as much as possible the conversational tone of the original. The reviews from Loyola, Gonzaga and USF described the talk as the work of a master teacher—a strong, clear, and engaging presentation of some of the most basic, and therefore most complex, issues in a manner that encouraged further thought and investigation. We hope you agree with the reviews.

Three new members have joined the seminar this fall. Cynthia Langham has taught communications studies at the University of Detroit Mercy for twelve years. An expert in interpersonal communications, she has done extensive work in the community as a consultant for a number of educational, business, and health care groups. Ronald Slepitz was appointed vice president for student affairs at Xavier University in April, 1993, after serving five years at Creighton University as assistant vice president for student services. He holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from St. Vincent's College and a master's and Ph.D. in counseling and student personnel administration from the University of Maryland. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., is associate professor of theology and chair of the theology department at Creighton University. In 1994, she was named outstanding teacher of the year in the college of arts and sciences at Creighton. She is currently at work on a book about the Catholic identity of institutions. These three will pick up where three irreplaceable colleagues left off. Mary Ann Donnelly of Le Moyne College, Elizabeth Linehan, R.S.M., of St. Joseph's University, and Allan Service of Regis University will be missed. *Ed.*