

# The Catholic intellectual tradition: A guide for conversation

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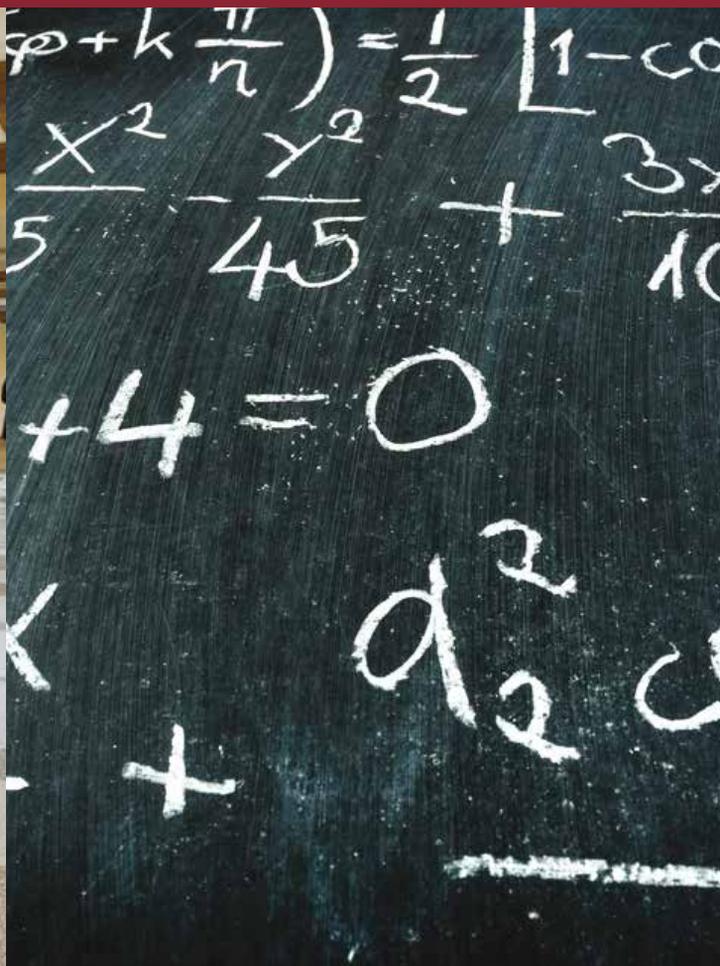
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## The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

A GUIDE FOR CONVERSATION





## CRAFTING THE CONVERSATION AROUND THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

The most effective—and enjoyable—way to profit from this rich set of video reflections on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (hereafter, CIT) is with a group of colleagues in conversation. To that end, we suggest the following pedagogy.

- 1 Begin by reading the introductory paragraph that prefaces each video in this Guide. The intent is to focus on a generic theme that is relevant to your own work at the interface of CIT and Catholic higher education.
- 2 With this shared sense of focus around a pressing and practical issue, proceed to the questions *For Conversation*. The intent here is to invite shared reflection on what is already the participants' opinion or position or practice, or what is presently being done at your institution around the focused theme.
- 3 View the particular video together.
- 4 Engage in more conversation *For Discernment and Decision*. As the heading suggests, the intent is to encourage you to appropriate the insights from the presenter and from the conversation thus far, and then to imagine how to put those insights to work in your implementation of the CIT in your context.

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## WHAT IS THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION?

**FR. ROBERT IMBELLI**



Fr. Robert P. Imbelli is a priest of the Archdiocese of New York. He served as the director of the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry and was an associate professor of theology at Boston College. He is the author of *Rekindling the Christic Imagination: Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization*.

Q: “Where do we come from?”  
 “Who or What are we?”  
 “Where are we going?”  
 A: “We come forth from Love and journey home to Love.”



### FOCUSING THE THEME

The CIT is forged by a deep partnership between faith and reason, as if two sides of the same coin. It reflects the conviction that rational people need to understand their faith for it to be credible. Likewise, in-depth reasoning leads to questions of ultimacy that encourage a faith response. However, for any of us in the everyday of life, this faith/reason partnership of CIT coalesces most intensely around momentous questions about ourselves like “Where do we come from?”; “Who or what are we?”; and “Where are we going?” Responding to such ultimate issues calls for faith and reason working together, and at times, perhaps in fruitful tension.

### FOR CONVERSATION

- When do you find yourself reflecting on such ultimate questions? As comfortable, please share a particular example.
- To what extent do you draw upon your faith to respond? Upon your reasoning? Can you even distinguish between the two when they're at work?
- What is the most satisfying response you have found to the great question, “Does human life have an ultimate meaning and purpose?”

**NEXT: VIEW FR. IMBELLI'S VIDEO** ▶

### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- What rings true for you in the proposal that the ultimate meaning of human life is that “we come forth from Love and journey home to Love”?
- Do you find it reasonable to believe that God so loved the world as to send God's only Son that all might have eternal life (from John 3:16)?
- How can you personally and/or your institution engage CIT's partnership of faith and reason to enable students to respond to the ultimate questions of life?



## THE SACRAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

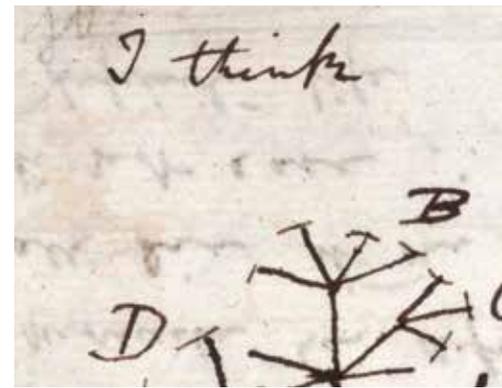
FR. MICHAEL HIMES



Fr. Michael Himes serves as a professor of systematic theology at Boston College. He previously taught at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception and the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to Catholicism*.

“The Catholic tradition insists that the reason anything exists, the reason there is anything rather than nothing, is that God loves it....Everything that exists is held in being by Love.”

The sacramental principle



### FOCUSING THE THEME

Perhaps the most defining feature of a Catholic outlook on life in the world is the *sacramental principle*. While it can be described in many ways, it comes down to an attitude that sees the more in the midst of the ordinary, the ultimate in the created order. There is always “more than meets the eye” and it is God’s presence and effective love at work—what we mean by “grace.” This sacramental principle shapes the Catholic intellectual tradition by encouraging peoples’ in-depth look at everything, with a rigorous examination of reality. The more we can “see through what is there” the more we recognize that all creation reflects and is held in existence by God’s love.

### FOR CONVERSATION

- How does a sense of God’s presence in all reality—the sacramental principle—color your own outlook on life in the world? What tint does it lend to your lenses?
- Why might studying any aspect of reality be an entrée into “the heart of God”?
- That the world is the theatre of God’s grace is a fundamental principle of Catholic faith; how might this color people’s engagement with the various disciplines of learning—humanities, sciences, and arts?

NEXT: VIEW FR. HIMES’S VIDEO 

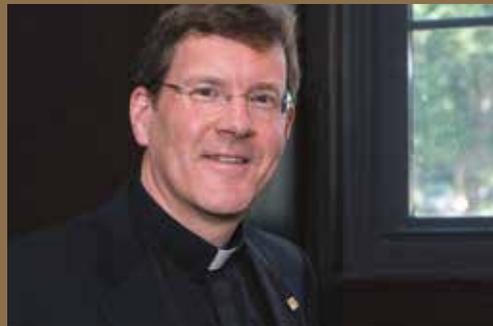
### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- What does it ask of a person to look at the world in ways that “see” God’s presence in the everyday of life?
- How might teachers encourage students in an asceticism that can see grace—God’s love at work—in their own lives?
- How can Catholic higher education integrate the sacramental principle throughout its whole curriculum, educating students ever to “see what is there” and to imagine its source and potential?



## FAITH AND REASON: A DYNAMIC CONVERSATION

DEAN GREG KALSCHUR, S.J.



Fr. Gregory Kalschur is the dean of the Morrissey School of Arts and Sciences at Boston College. Fr. Kalschur taught at Boston College Law School, where his main areas of focus were the intersection of law and religion, constitutional law, and the contributions of Ignatian spirituality to the character of legal education at a Jesuit law school.

“The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is best understood as a centuries-long and ongoing conversation about the biggest questions that people can ask... with openness to the insights of both faith and reason.”



### FOCUSING THE THEME

Reason alone is likely to concentrate on knowing *what* is and not as likely to ask *why* it is. On the other hand, faith alone can tend to focus on *why* things are but neglect the data of *what* is and the demands of faith. It is when faith unites with reason and when reason works with faith that people are most likely to look intensely at the realities of life, *and* to ask ultimate questions about those realities. This is precisely why the CIT can encourage dialogue among and across the various disciplines of learning within academia, with all working together to empower the search for wholeness.

### FOR CONVERSATION

- What are the most persistent “great questions” that arise from your own life in the world? Please share as comfortable.
- Are you personally convinced of the need for both faith and reason to address these great questions? Why or why not?
- How do you think your teaching affects your students as persons? How does it affect your own personhood?

### NEXT: VIEW DEAN KALSCHUR’S VIDEO ■

### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- How can the CIT help your school to integrate the various disciplines and bring them into dialogue toward “the truth”?
- Might it enhance your own education to often ask your students who they are becoming? How they might hope to shape the world?
- What are your best hopes for the kind of graduate your college produces? List some of the most desirable characteristics and commitments. How can the CIT help effect such “learning outcomes”?



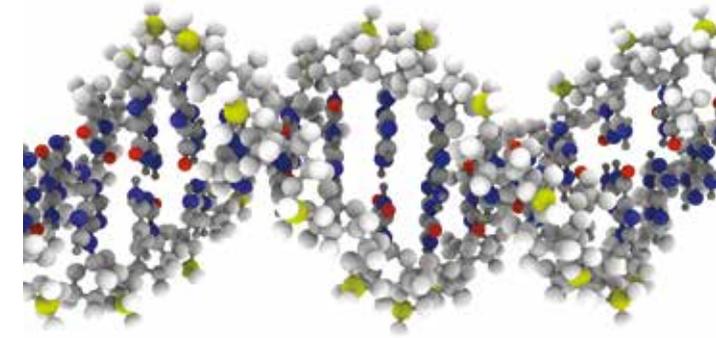
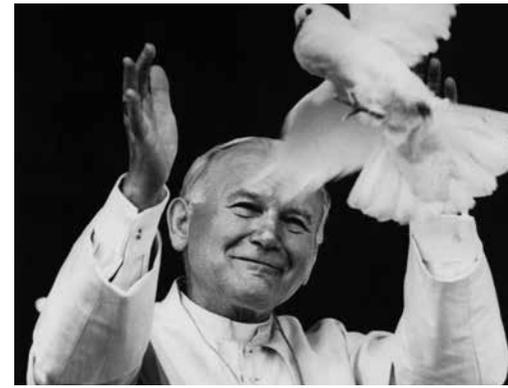
## A WISDOM FOR THE AGES

### PROFESSOR MARINA MCCOY



Professor Marina McCoy teaches philosophy at Boston College, with a focus on ancient philosophy and Sophists. She has published *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists*.

“Faith and reason are like two wings that lift the human spirit to the contemplation of truth.”



#### FOCUSING THE THEME

Central to the CIT is the conviction that God communicates with us in a multiplicity of ways. In other words, God’s word comes to us not just through biblical revelation but through the very structure of reality and God’s whole created order (see Romans 1:19-20). We hear this conviction reflected in the opening lines of John’s Gospel, where the term *logos* refers to the revealed “word” of God and connotes human “reason” as well. It is the combination of the truths found in God’s word and through human reason that enables Catholic faith to make compelling arguments around social issues like the value of work, and that justice demands a living wage for all workers.

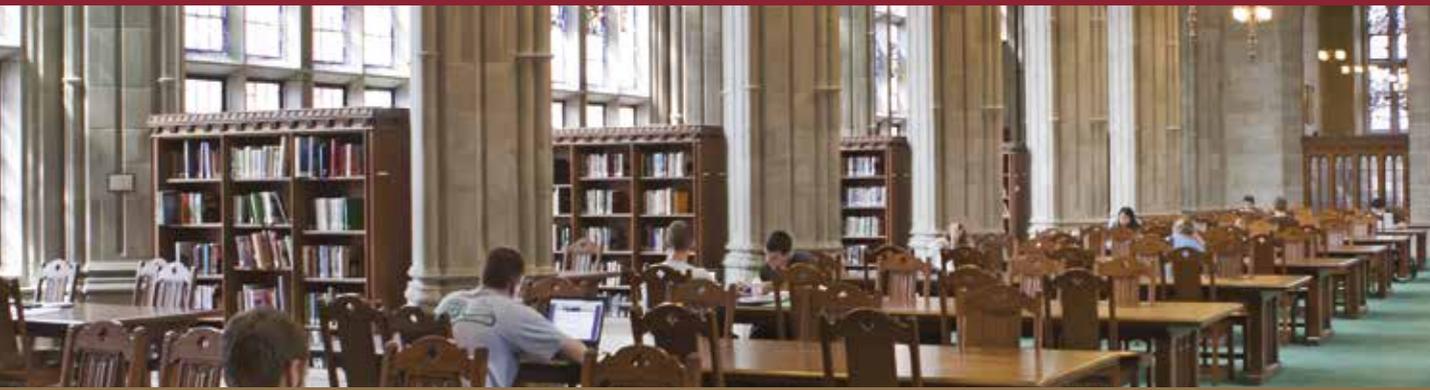
#### FOR CONVERSATION

- Name some of the multiplicity of ways that you have experienced God’s presence and self-disclosure in your own life.
- What might be some dangers of religion that relies exclusively on divine revelation and does not have the monitor of critical reason?
- How might the wise constitutional arrangement of “separation of church and state” lead to an unwise separating of Christian faith from everyday life?

NEXT: VIEW PROFESSOR MCCOY’S VIDEO 

#### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- How can Catholic higher education help students to integrate faith with daily life and avoid their false separating?
- What is the asset of having a unified teaching body that safeguards the truth and wisdom of Christian faith across time? How can this wisdom be reappropriated in fresh ways in new historical circumstances?
- How can you draw upon the CIT—and its emphasis on reason as well as faith—to engage all students, regardless of their religion or lack thereof, with the great social and spiritual issues of our day?



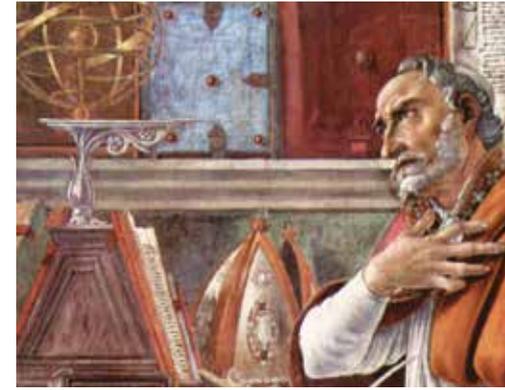
## TRANSFORMING LIVES

### KATHERINE MARTIN



Katherine Martin is a graduate of the Boston College Class of 2015. While at Boston College she focused her studies on theology and philosophy, while becoming involved with the Church in the 21st Century Center.

“My reading Augustine really influenced how I see my friendships with others. He has such an emphasis on how God is Truth and how as friends we have to lead one another to truth.”



#### FOCUSING THE THEME

A distinctive aspect of the CIT is to engage students with great ideas (usually by exposure to great thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and so on). It does so not simply to learn about them but to learn from them for life. This is how the union of faith and reason becomes integrated in the CIT to the advantage of students. It invites them to take great ideas to heart, to make them their own, and to do so from a faith perspective—faith in themselves, in others, in life, and, grounding all, in God. Because the CIT reflects the conviction that all intellectual work quests for truth, which is ever grounded in ultimate Truth, can help people to connect great ideas from across the disciplines of learning and, even more importantly, with their own lives.

#### FOR CONVERSATION

- What are some of the “great ideas” that you engage regularly in your own teaching or function of leadership?
- How do you encourage students to “take responsibility” for themselves—who they are becoming—and for the well-being of others?
- How effective is your institution at making its students consciously aware of the CIT and how it can shape their lives in the world?

NEXT: VIEW KATHERINE MARTIN’S VIDEO 

#### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- How can your institution engage the CIT to encourage a “holistic” education of its students, one that enables them *to have a life as well as make a living*?
- What positive difference can it make for students’ future lives when the CIT highlights that all good human work participates in God’s creation?
- Are there commitments to uniting faith and reason that your institution or your own work needs to deepen or renew?



## THE LAW OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

### DEAN VINCENT ROUGEAU



Vincent Rougeau has served as dean of the Boston College Law School since 2011. Dean Rougeau taught contracts, real estate law, and Catholic social thought for 12 years at the University of Notre Dame. He published the book *Christians in the American Empire: Faith and Citizenship in the New World Order*, which explores the theological underpinnings of Catholic social teaching as they apply to American law.

“In the Catholic tradition there are some critical and core values; first, that we’re created in the image and likeness of God—all people—and the second is that we can only fully realize what God intends for us—what our human possibilities are—in community with others.”



#### FOCUSING THE THEME

One common stereotype of the word “intellectual” raises the image of a lone scholar who is more concerned about ideas than real issues. By contrast, in the CIT, faith and reason combine into what is, in fact, a spiritual way of knowing. This can make a world of difference to Catholic higher education, for example, making its law school education more likely to promote justice for all.

#### FOR CONVERSATION

- What do you recognize as the dynamics of both faith and reason when they work together to shape a person’s way of knowing? What are the likely “learning outcomes”?
- Should the ultimate purpose of law be to promote justice for all, or is it simply to regulate a people’s common life together? What would a faith perspective encourage?
- How do you imagine that the CIT might shape law school education in a Catholic university?

#### NEXT: VIEW DEAN ROUGEAU’S VIDEO

#### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- That all people are made in God’s image and are most likely to realize our divine potential within community; do you agree, disagree, or nuance?
- How might the CIT help ensure that education in the law commits people to the work of social justice?
- How will you allow a “religious way of knowing” (uniting faith and reason) to shape the dynamics of your own cognition both personally and professionally?



## INFORMING AND FORMING CAREGIVERS

### PROFESSOR KATHERINE GREGORY



Katherine Gregory worked for a number of years as a neonatal intensive care nurse before becoming a professor at Boston College in the Connell School of Nursing. She conducts clinical research as a nurse scientist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

“A nursing school in a Catholic university is unique because, while we teach scientific principles and the foundations of nursing practice, [the CIT encourages] teaching compassion that is critical to the success of any nurse or caregiver.”



#### FOCUSING THE THEME

The CIT can empower our striving for wholeness. However, its union of faith and reason is never more needed than when we face the precariousness of life, as in facing serious illness or the reality of death. As a Catholic college or university prepares people for the helping professions such as nursing, it can lend a unique resource to encourage care and compassion for the human condition when most in need.

#### FOR CONVERSATION

- How have you experienced the CIT to encourage care and compassion for people in need?
- What is the best Catholic rationale for forming students in such values as care and compassion?
- How might the study of theology and philosophy lend people unique resources to prepare them for the helping professions?

#### NEXT: VIEW PROFESSOR GREGORY'S VIDEO

#### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- How can the whole curriculum of your college or university be crafted to nurture its students in care and compassion—especially for when “we suffer the human condition”?
- In your own teaching or leadership, how can you model the quest for truth and harness it to improve the quality of life for all?
- Should all of the curriculum in an institution of Catholic higher education be value laden? If so, which values should be favored?



## OPEN TO ALL TRUTH

### PROFESSOR CATHERINE CORNILLE



Catherine Cornille is a professor of comparative theology and holds the Newton College Alumnae Chair of Western Culture at Boston College. Her research interest includes Theology of Religions, the theory of interreligious dialogue, and the phenomenon of inculturation and intercultural theology. She organizes the Boston College Symposia on Interreligious Dialogue.

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these [world] religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all people.”

Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*



#### FOCUSING THE THEME

St. Augustine said some 1,500 years ago that “catholic” means to be open to the truth, wherever it can be found. Yet, for many centuries the Church itself was not open to learn from non-Christian religions—this would not happen until the Second Vatican Council. Throughout the centuries, however, the Catholic Church has consistently taught that all people of goodwill who, through no fault of their own, do not have access to Christian faith, yet can be saved by “baptism of desire.” Vatican II and its “Declaration on Non Christian Religions” (*Nostra Aetate*) went a significant step further; it encouraged respect for and dialogue with non-Christian religions precisely because they have “a ray of that truth which enlightens all people.”

#### FOR CONVERSATION

- Has your own faith been enriched by dialogue with or the good example of people of other religious traditions?
- What might be some preconditions for effective interreligious dialogue?
- Why might the CIT encourage openness and dialogue with non-Christian religions?

#### NEXT: VIEW PROFESSOR CORNILLE’S VIDEO

#### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- What are some of the likely benefits from interreligious dialogue and the study of comparative theology?
- How might you participate and encourage your Catholic institution to engage in interreligious dialogue?
- Reflecting on the new attitude that *Nostra Aetate* encouraged toward non-Christian religions, what are some practical implications (such as in curriculum, admissions, or campus ministry) for Catholic higher education?



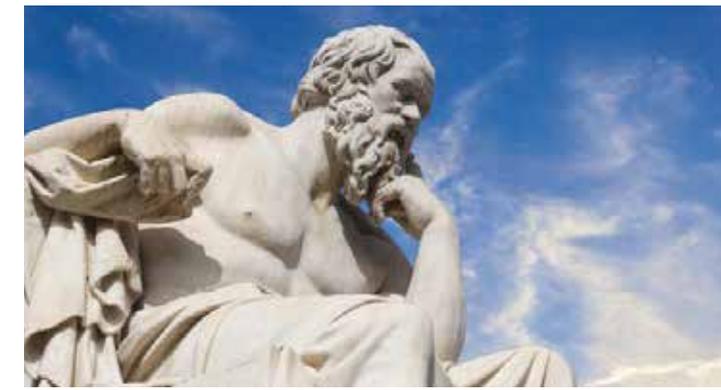
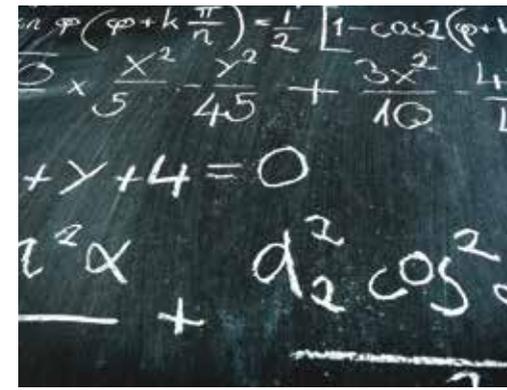
## CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION: THE STEWARD OF CIT

PROFESSOR THOMAS GROOME



Thomas Groome is professor of theology and religious education at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry and was the long-time chair of its Department of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry. Currently he serves as director of BC's Church in the 21st Century Center. His most recent book is *Will There Be Faith*.

“The CIT should shape all instances of Catholic education—from preschool to postschool—yet Catholic higher education is surely its primary steward, responsible to carry it forward and develop its legacy over time.”



### FOCUSING THE THEME

The CIT epitomizes the ancient Catholic conviction—reaching back to the beginnings of the Church—that faith and reason, divine revelation and human scholarship, are necessary partners to each other. The pages of history are replete with examples of the danger of “faith” that does not have the tempering influence of “reason.” Likewise, reasoning without the guidance of faith and of a Source of Truth higher than ourselves can be equally dangerous. Yet, holding the two—faith and reason—in mutuality, sometimes in fruitful tension rather than choosing either/or, can be a challenge. In many ways, the modern university is marked precisely by its collapse of the tension and its favor for reason alone. It is not easy for Catholic higher education to resist the temptation to do likewise.

### FOR CONVERSATION

- In your own life as a scholar or leader, when or how are you more likely to engage predominantly with reason? With faith? With their integration?
- What pedagogical moves (such as questions, statements, assignments, readings, and so on) do you use to encourage the partnership between faith and reason?
- What do you recognize as the assets for your students' lives of encouraging the partnership?

### NEXT: VIEW PROFESSOR GROOME'S VIDEO

### FOR DISCERNMENT AND DECISION

- What kind of reasoning would be the most appropriate partner with faith?
- What kind of faith would be the most effective partner with reason?
- In light of the video and your shared insights, how do you articulate your own understanding of what constitutes Catholic education and the rationale for it?



The Catholic intellectual tradition arises from the partnership of faith and reason that is essential to address both the ultimate and immediate questions of life. The CIT enriches the quest of all the arts and sciences, encouraging them to reflect the Transcendent ground of existence and the sacramentality of life in the world.



Resources developed by the Church in the 21st Century Center at Boston College.  
The C21 Center is a catalyst and resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church.

[WWW.BC.EDU/CHURCH21](http://WWW.BC.EDU/CHURCH21)