

SELECTED SESSIONS

CATHOLIC STUDIES

- Topic: “Catholic Studies: An Effective Strategy for Handing On the Faith to the Next Generation?”
- Convener: Dave Gentry-Akin, Saint Mary’s College of California
- Moderator: Jaime Phelps, Xavier University of Louisiana
- Panelists: Don Briel, University of Saint Thomas
Nancy Dallavalle, Fairfield University
Dave Gentry-Akin, Saint Mary’s College of California
Richard M. Liddy, Seton Hall University

Jaime Phelps of Xavier University of Louisiana called the session to order and introduced each of the panelists. Don Briel, Founding Director of the Center for Catholic Studies at the University of Saint Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota, opened with his remarks, which focused on the conception, history, and growth of the Center at Saint Thomas. It is the oldest, largest, and, in the eyes of many, most successful Center of its kind in the United States. It incorporates an interdisciplinary Department of Catholic Studies that offers an undergraduate major and minor and graduated more than three hundred majors at UST’s commencement in Spring 2008. The Center sponsors numerous extra-curricular programs for interested students, including retreats, Masses, Eucharistic Adoration, a series on ‘Engaging Truth and Beauty’, student seminars and colloquia of various kinds, a student newsletter, and student social events. The Center for Catholic Studies offers a ‘Study Abroad’ Program in Rome at its Bernardi Campus, with students studying at the Angelicum. Further, it sponsors ‘theme’ dorms and floors in the University’s residence halls, and various leadership intern and Catholic Scholars Programs. It houses the Lilly Endowment Program, ‘From Career to Calling’, on the theological exploration of vocation. The Center offers various Faculty Development Programs, including new faculty orientation, and summer seminars on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. The Center offers a Master of Arts degree in Catholic Studies with both full time and summer only formats. It hosts both the Terence J. Murphy Institute in Catholic Thought, Law, and Public Policy, and the John A. Ryan Institute for Catholic Social Thought. Finally, it publishes a quarterly interdisciplinary journal, *LOGOS: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, and the Center for Catholic Studies newsmagazine, *Perspectives*.

Nancy Dallavalle's remarks focused on the context for Catholic Studies at her institution, Fairfield University. At Fairfield, the Catholic Studies program exists to institutionalize the place of Catholicism as an academic focus. As a moment in "academic evangelizing," Catholic Studies programs are effective to the extent that they are tailored to the sensibilities of their institutional homes. Yet it remains difficult to introduce this as a scholarly focus mid-career, so hiring continues to be at issue. She urged program directors to seek out mid-level and junior scholars as lecturers, perhaps even to band together to allow junior scholars to give a single lecture at several different campuses in a given region. She also asked how such programs contribute to the next generation's formation as Catholic parishioners, and indicated that they need to allow for a new generation's faith to take root, while also challenging Catholic colleges to make concrete connections between their programs and parish life.

Dave Gentry-Akin's remarks focused on the crisis around Catholic mission and identity currently being experienced in Catholic Higher Education. Using Pope Benedict's remarks to Catholic Educators during his Spring 2008 Apostolic Visit to the United States, Gentry-Akin spoke about Catholic Studies Programs as an effective strategy for securing the role of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic college or university. He spoke about the need to reaffirm the Catholic Higher Education's historic role in handing on the faith, the challenges posed by the cultural assimilation of Catholic institutions into the mainstream of American higher education and the concurrent, the growing tendency toward secularization, the urgency of reaffirming the distinctive value of a Catholic education at the university level, and closed by identifying five strong arguments in favor of the Catholic Studies model as a means of reaffirming institutional mission and identity.

Professor Richard M. Liddy, the Director of the Catholic Studies Program at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, concluded the panel presentation with his remarks about the genesis and evolution of the program at Seton Hall. The program there began with the creation of the Center for Catholic Studies in 1997. That center consists of a number of institutes (Chesterton Institute, Lonergan Research Institute, the Micah Program for Business Leaders, etc.); but it has also focused on faculty development seminars which have united faculty across disciplines and resulted in the initiation of a new core curriculum based on the Catholic intellectual tradition. The Center for Catholic Studies at Seton Hall has also initiated an undergraduate program in Catholic Studies with a major and minor. That program has evidenced a gradual increase in student enrollment and discussion is underway regarding the formation of a department of Catholic Studies. Liddy's own reflections on method in Catholic Studies seek to shed light on the different contexts in which Catholic Studies has emerged: the general context of historical and religious studies, the theological context of Catholic universities and, within the Catholic context, the pastoral concern of "praxis" which explicitly raises the question of personal authenticity,

intellectual conversion and the transformation of the disciplines. Bernard Lonergan's method in theology has been particularly helpful in these reflections.

Jaime Phelps facilitated deeper conversation among the panelists and with the audience in attendance.

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