



ART BY DARREL D. NELSON



Here faith and reason could hand in hand explore the implications of Catholicism.

An Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies

— BY JOHN T. NOONAN JR. —

F AITH AND REASON ARE COMPANIONS indispensable to each other on Catholicism's journey from Jerusalem. To understand the implications of faith, to relate the constructions of reason to these implications, the two must go hand in hand. One kind of institutional setting in which such understanding and relationships could fruitfully be explored is an institute for advanced studies.

I want to do three things here: first, to argue the advantages of such an institute by analogy with existing independent institutes, sketching their special characteristics; second, to show the particular good of an institute for advanced Catholic studies; and, finally, to offer the comfort of examples from the past of comparable Catholic educational enterprises.

JOHN T. NOONAN JR. is a member of the Commission on Catholic Scholarship.

Institutes and centers abound within the framework of American universities. At the campus of the University of California at Berkeley, for example, I have counted 20. But in the United States there are only four outstanding independent centers for advanced studies. The centers are independent in the sense that their agenda is not set by an institution whose primary mission is teaching. By "advanced" no more is meant than that persons liberated from the usual duties of pedagogy will pursue in depth a chosen academic subject. Their work presumably advances the field. The place where they work is a place of advanced studies.

The four centers are the Institute for Advanced Studies, situated in Princeton, N.J.; the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, Calif.; the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.; and the National Center for the Humanities in the Research Triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill) of North Carolina. They are all popular institutions in academe. Why shouldn't they be? They give faculty members a semester, a year or a lifetime away from the importunities of students and the demands of deans. They cut through narrow departmental lines. They afford leisure, conversation, reflection. But they are more than experiences of Elysium for the professorate. They are examples of the invigoration achieved by interdisciplinary exchange, by the meeting of young faculty and seasoned scholars, by the sustained pursuit of a research goal without interruptions or distracting duties. The success of these four centers is the most powerful argument for an institute of advanced Catholic studies.

Common characteristics of all four centers are these: independence from any university, concentration on broad but specific fields of study and sustained cooperation of the centers with university faculties. The founding of the centers has not been in disparagement of the existing system of higher education but in enhancement of it. None of the centers has been at the expense of an existing university. None could flourish without the constant input of university faculties. But none has been a captive of its university neighbor or neighbors. Independence, cooperativeness, concentration—these have been the hallmarks of the centers.

The hallmarks have been the necessary conditions for their success, plus the sine qua non of funding adequate to support the staff and to subsidize the scholars. That funding, I add parenthetically, came originally from the Bam-

bergers of Newark in the case of the institute at Princeton, from the Ford Foundation in the case of Palo Alto and from Congress for the two other centers. As each has flourished, each has drawn on a combination of personal philanthropy, foundations (both domestic and foreign), governmental grants and sabbatical stipends. The centers have flourished because discerning donors have taken note of their contributions.

Beyond their hallmarks, the centers share seven characteristics. I list them in what seems to me the order of importance in causing the centers to succeed. First, they select their fellows on the basis of merit and promise; no one is chosen without evaluation; acceptances from invited scholars are the norm; the quality is high. Second, the fellows are chosen almost entirely from the ranks of faculty, principally from the United States but also from abroad. Third, the fellows are artfully drawn into interaction with each other by workday lunches and sometimes splendid dinners in common, by teas and sherry parties, by joint workshops or seminars or conversations in the halls. Fourth, the scholars have their own substantial work spaces or studies, so that camaraderie is not claustrophobic. Fifth, each center is linked to a great research library, which supplies its daily book needs. Sixth, secretarial support and computer backup are provided. Seventh, special projects for teams of scholars are promoted.

The success of a center in one field has led to a start in another. So the circle has opened from mathematics and physics at Princeton in 1933, to the social sciences at Palo Alto in 1954, to government and international relations in Washington, D.C., in 1968, to the humanities in North Carolina in 1978. What is conspicuously lacking is a center focused on religion.

Each of the centers, it is true, has from time to time been host to a scholar whose interest embraced religious topics. The centers have not been hostile to such interests. But they have not cultivated them. Given the importance of religion for an understanding of the universe, an understanding of our culture and of other cultures, an understanding of the human mind as culture has shaped it, it would seem that a center cultivating advanced religious studies was an obvious lacuna.

The need has been met in part by the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion at the University of Chicago where Bernard McGinn, for example, has pursued the

Some two years ago, 28 U.S. Catholic scholars formed a Commission on Catholic Scholarship to develop the concept of an institute for advanced Catholic studies and explore the feasibility of establishing such an entity. Working in five subcommittees under the general chairmanship of James L. Heft, S.M., chancellor of the University of Dayton, Ohio, this group has produced a final report that serves as the prospectus for such an institute. Fund-raising is under way for the \$60 million needed to launch the project.

*On May 9, John T. Noonan Jr. made a public announcement of the plans for the institute in a lecture at Harvard University. The text of that lecture is printed here. Noonan, a leading historian of legal and moral issues, is the author of many books, including most recently *The Lustre of Our Country: The American Experience of Religious Freedom* (1998). *The Erasmus Institute at Notre Dame* is a new institute also addressed to advanced Catholic studies. —Editor*

study of mysticism and by the Center for the Study of World Religions, set within the frame of the Harvard Divinity School and directed by a distinguished student of the anthropology of religions, Lawrence Sullivan. Here all the religions of the world are studied sympathetically, with fellows drawn from religious traditions around the globe. The value of the enterprise is undeniable. It brings a concentration of effort, a breadth of perspective, a perception of commonalities and a mutual reinforcement of religious insights that can only be beneficial to the study of religion.

Is that not enough? Why an institute for specifically Catholic studies? The answer lies in the nature of Catholicism. Catholicism stretches back 2,000 years, a religion of the Middle East that once flourished in Alexandria and Athens; that had its day in North Africa in dioceses like Carthage and Hippo; that evangelized Europe from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and the Baltic; that sent its religious orders to the Americas, Africa and Asia; that coexisted with and battled and survived Gnosticism, Donatism, Manichaeism, Arianism, Catharism; that stood fast against the onslaught of Islam; that lost its unity with the Orthodox East and its leadership as a Christian church in Northern Europe and now prayerfully seeks to repair the rifts; that was satirized and stripped by the revolutionaries of

France but was not exterminated; that has been persecuted in nearly every nation and has emerged resilient; that formed the minds of those like Luther and Calvin, who disputed with it; and of those like Robespierre and Voltaire, who rejected it, and stretched the minds of Thomas Aquinas and Thomas More and Blaise Pascal, who defended it, and molded the minds of those like Augustine and Newman and Maritain, who came to it. Embracing so many times and places and conflicts and minds, Catholicism is a field in itself. The study of Catholicism is broader than religious studies understood as the study of worship, ritual and sacred texts, though these elements are central to Catholicism. To be appreciated, they must be understood in context and in consequences.

Catholicism is resplendent with remarkable persons from Ignatius of Antioch to Ignatius of Loyola, from Teresa of Avila to Thérèse of Lisieux, from John the Evangelist to Jeanne d'Arc, but it is a field that cannot be equated with individuals alone, as William James tried to confine the study of the varieties of religious experience. Nor can it be confined to any collectivity alone, as Emil Durkheim attempted to analyze religion. What collectivity embraces fourth-century Carthage, 12th-century Winchester and 21st-century Krakow? Scripture and theological reflection

on Scripture are vital currents in its life, but it cannot be reduced to the Bible or to theology. Scholastic philosophy has been used to express its doctrines, but it is broader and deeper than scholasticism. It is centered in institutions—the papacy, the curia, the councils, the hierarchy, the clergy, the dioceses, the parishes, the orders. But it cannot be identified with any single one of these elements; and to understand the whole as it lives, more is required than to disaggregate the parts. An organic unity exists in which interaction of the parts creates the balance necessary to the life of the whole.

Catholicism, of course, as it is apprehended by any individual, is influenced by the culture in which that individual exists. François Mauriac was a Catholic writing novels in the France of the Third Republic. Shusaku Endo was a Catholic, influenced by Mauriac, writing novels in postwar Japan. Their Catholicism was the same and different as they expressed it in their very distinct cultures.

Does the very variety suggest the objection that there is no core, that Catholicism is either a term embracing contradictories or is so determined by the different cultures it inhabits that it has no essence? An afternoon is not enough to answer such a question. Every believer believes there is a core; but it would take a book to demonstrate it and an institution of advanced studies to examine and delimit it. An institute for advanced Catholic studies would look at the core and at its contexts.

Catholicism is constrained by culture, but also interacts with it, sometimes powerfully. That there have been contradictions between Catholicism and the circumambient society is undeniable. How could a faith teaching love of neighbor tolerate a society built on slavery? How could a faith dependent on grace punish—even punish by death—those whose faith was not firm or fixed enough? Part of the development of Catholicism has consisted in eliminating the contradictions.

Catholicism has also fostered specific cultural forms—the building of cathedrals, the painting of religious art, the singing of choral music, the development of a legal system governing contracts and fostering charitable corporations, creating trusts and wills, providing for the uniform formation of marriages and a standard for their dissolution. To capture its many-sided variety, to follow its implications and to chart its consequences is matter for theologians and philosophers, for linguists and literary critics, for political historians, biographers, sociologists and anthropologists, for art historians, music historians, legal historians. Clearly, no single institute of advanced studies can harbor all these

specialities at once. Just as clearly there is so much here to explore and to interrelate that a single institute focused on Catholicism will have more than enough to do.

Among the many cultural manifestations of Catholicism was the invention of the university—as new and as distinctive a phenomenon of Catholic Europe as the construction of the cathedrals. First came Bologna, with its remarkable 12th-century school of law, then Paris, Oxford and Cam-

bridge, and finally universities in nearly every European country from Coimbra in Portugal to Charles University in Prague. This extraordinary accomplishment stands as enduring evidence of the educational commitment of the Catholic Church. It is that commitment on which an institute of advanced Catholic studies must draw.

To invoke two more analogies whose size is perhaps more appropriate to compare to an

institute's—in the 17th century Jean Bolland, a Flemish Jesuit, created the group whose mission would be a completely accurate life of every canonized saint, casting out every spurious detail and even every spurious saint. The heroic labor of this company in Brussels has now produced at least 69 volumes. It still goes on. Beginning with the saints commemorated on January 1, they have reached December. As an example of what close collaborative work by Catholic scholars can achieve, their work is unparalleled.

The second analogy is the pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies founded in the 1930's by Etienne Gilson and the Basilian Fathers in Toronto. What a flow of studies has come from this initiative, from Michael Sheehan's study of the will in England, to Ambrose Raftis's study of English peasantry, villages and abbeys, to Gilson's own work in depth on the spirit of philosophy in the disputations of the contentious schools of the medieval universities. Again a small band of Catholic scholars has brought a new light to illuminate a Catholic culture.

If I were to illustrate the kind of subjects that might be addressed in the new institute, I would give three examples. First, the role of Catholicism in the literature of England. This literature, as a subject of modern university study, began in the 19th century with assumptions that marginalized Catholicism. For example, when Shakespeare was studied, he was presented as the playwright of Protestant England. His Catholic roots, his possible Jesuit and definite recusant connections, his Catholic allusions and sensibility

Embracing so many times and places and conflicts and minds, Catholicism is a field in itself.

were downplayed or ignored. The whole world of popular piety that Eamon Duffy has uncovered on the eve of England's Reformation was undiscovered as the soil in which great English literature grew and flourished.

The humanities are interlaced with Catholic aspirations and assumptions. Science seems distant and forbidding. Yet the significance and spectacular success of science in our day makes a relation to science imperative. The neurosciences, it is widely acknowledged, will be to this century what physics was to the last. The neurosciences are discovering how the brain actually works. In both law and morals we still use a set of concepts, like intention, that may or may not be displaced by the new discoveries. Not to relate the discoveries to the ancient apparatus would be an inexcusable default.

A third instance: phenomenology, an approach to philosophy that achieved status in the past century; that breaks the Cartesian grip yet is not prey to materialism; that opens wide vistas for the spirit, yet has not been completely domesticated either in American idiom or in Catholic contemplation. What it can mean for Catholic theology is illustrated by the work of Robert Sokolowski.

What better place than an institute of advanced Catholic studies to reassess the Catholic strain in English or in any European literature or to bring together the assumptions of moral judgment with the interactions of the neurons or to make phenomenology, purged of its pretentious language, at home?

I cannot predict what subject will be taken up or what disciplines will predominate in such an institute. I cannot predict the exact form the institute will take. There must be some permanence, even if the permanent members are few, and some rotation, even though the numbers rotated may vary. Some questions must be left to mature; the shape must evolve. But the hallmarks of the four exemplary centers—independence, concentration, cooperation—are fundamental. And the institute will be the work of those who believe in the Catholic faith.

There is a reason that such an institute is appropriately the work of believers. No one is neutral about Christ. No one is

neutral about the Catholic Church. Catholicism cannot be studied as a fossil. It challenges its interlocutors. No one is wholly objective in examining its prophets and its popes, its claims and its credentials and its consequences. Believers, sympathetic as they are bound to be, have also the belief that their greatest ally is truth, and that where truth is found, they are completely bound by its demands. So as family members more conscious of the family's flaws and virtues than strangers could ever be, believers may begin such an enterprise to explore, to enrich, to encompass their Catholic cultural heritage. ■