



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

Catholic Intellectual Life for Prospective Staff

The Catholic Faith

The Catholic faith unites twenty centuries, all nations and at present around 1.2 billion people. The Catholic Church's key work is '*sanctification*': making the world holy; bringing people to God through Jesus Christ.

Many who are not Catholic but belong to a different Christian church have important and valuable relationships with the Catholic Church. The Church also has significant relations with the other major world faiths.

The Church seeks sanctification in many ways, including by a number of *activities and works*; most obviously in this country through engagement in healthcare, education and social services (the Church is the largest healthcare provider on earth, and operates one of the largest education systems globally). In addition, the Church's *moral teaching*—the understanding of the moral life the Church proposes and commends to the faithful—animates countless projects and activities throughout the world, as well as the lives of hundreds of millions of people, including many millions of Australians.

Many people who do not share Catholic faith have enjoyed happy working relationships within Church institutions and agencies. Of course, for this to be possible there has to be some *understanding* of the Church's position, particularly as it reflects our own work and life, and a *genuine respect* for this position. In other words, people who completely reject the Church's stance, or find it offensive, uncomfortable, impossible to support in the workplace, embarrassing to identify with as a staff member etc. are unlikely to be suited to working in Church institutions. This is the same basic position as any university or any other institution adopts and follows through its Mission Statements and other statements of value and purpose.

The Church's requirement of all who work within Catholic institutions is genuine respect; and from staff members who are themselves Catholic the Church asks a little more: an active support for the work of the Church in their institution.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

At Catholic universities the most prominent aspect of the Church is *Catholic intellectual tradition*. It is important for all staff members of a Catholic university to know something about this - and for all *academic* staff members to be familiar with the main ideas and open to learning more - as it is these ideas which are the context for the institution's view of academic life.

Catholic intellectual tradition begins with the thought that *faith is fully compatible with reason* (i.e. there is no conflict between our religion and any true science or other academic knowledge). The tradition acknowledges that:

- men and women of all traditions can come to *know that God exists* by using their minds, their reason—though to know much more about Him will also require faith;
- people can distinguish between *reality and illusion*, and so can know the objective truth about the world;
- ethics, or morality, is not simply a matter of what you like or what your culture approves but is based on some *objective moral truths* about human persons and their flourishing—truths that hold across cultures;
- the foundations of morality (e.g. we should never attack human life; truth is good and should be pursued; marriage and family are great social goods; people have a natural right to anything strictly necessary for their welfare; and so on) are *known by reason*, our own thinking minds—we do not need faith to know the basis of morality;
- society exists to serve the *common good* and has a particular duty towards the needs of the most vulnerable—from conception to old age;
- *prayer* is a crucial activity for religious believers; we pray together frequently for the happiness and salvation of all peoples, including our own happiness and salvation; and
- it is our Christian duty to provide the *works of the Church* humbly to all who can benefit from them.

Catholic intellectual tradition contains many ideas, inspires hundreds of universities, colleges, seminaries and thousands of schools. Catholic intellectual tradition also underpins whole systems of Christian social action and informs the personal and working lives of millions of individuals. The tradition is captured in many publications, including teaching documents of the Church—official statements and explanations of Catholic positions. The University can always give advice on how to access these documents. One obvious starting place to learn about the Catholic faith is the *Compendium to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a short version of the longer *Catechism* document, which is widely available. To learn more specifically about the

Catholic intellectual tradition one good introductory source is *Our Sunday Visitor's Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine* (Our Sunday Visitor: 1998).