

The Unity of Truth: How a Dominican Center of Distinction Fosters Integration and Transformation

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In 2003, Dominican University launched a new venture with an explicitly ecclesial purpose, aimed not strictly at the education of its own students but also toward the continuing education of its neighboring community. The mission of the St. Catherine of Siena Center is to engage faith and scholarship with the critical issues of church and society for the benefit of the university community, professional ministers, and the wider community of faith. Through a review of three of the Siena Center's programming series, this article will explore the Center's unique voice in the university and the local Church. Assessing its impact on both constituencies reveals two ways the Center contributes to the deepening of Catholic identity: (1) new collaborative possibilities for research and curricular developments; and (2) the integration of prayer and study.

In the fall of 2003, after serious study, discernment, and sifting of creative ideas, Dominican University launched a new venture with an explicitly ecclesial purpose, aimed not strictly at the education of its own students, but more broadly and perhaps more ambitiously, toward the continuing education of its neighboring community. In the midst of a society in which so often the public discussion can be dominated by polarizing half-truths, false ideologically-energized assumptions, or the triumph of language over thought, Dominican University sought to create a fresh climate for serious conversation rooted in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and its "respect for the authority of truth."¹ Confident of both the ability and appetite of our neighbors for such conversation, the St. Catherine of Siena Center was created to bring the focus of faith and scholarship to the critical issues of Church and society for the benefit of the university community, professional ministers, and the wider community of faith.

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¹ William Cahoy, "What's Truth Got To Do With It?: The Understanding of Truth in the Catholic Tradition" (lecture delivered at Dominican University, River Forest, IL, September 7, 2007), 1.

The idea for the Center originated with a member of the university's theology faculty, and was developed through consultation with internal constituents, local pastoral leaders, and representatives of the surrounding community. From the beginning, the Center was intended for service beyond the campus boundaries and was explicit in its ecclesial character. Because of this central guiding vision, responsibility for the launch of the Center was soon brought into the portfolio of the newly-created office of the vice president for mission and ministry.

The Center began, and continues, with a full-time director, part-time associate director, full-time communications and events co-ordinator, and a modest operational budget. Now funded through a combination of university subsidy, individual donations, admission fees, and foundation grants, it has emerged in the university's current strategic plan as a "center of distinction," and has been named as a priority for the university's next capital campaign. The Center remains in the mission and ministry department, alongside other units responsible for the ongoing articulation, integration, and promotion of the university's Catholic, Dominican identity.

As John Haughey, S.J. has so beautifully written in his recent volume on Catholic higher education, *Where Is Knowing Going?*, "The human vocation is to know the real, and not from the stooped over, narrow perspective from which we all too often look out at the world."² Haughey himself is speaking here against the increasingly strict confinement of disciplinary specialization that threatens the health, vitality, and perhaps even the existence of the university in our time. But his conviction may also be read within the Catholic university as a call to the service of society, underlining the amazing possibilities of assisting the lay adult Catholic beyond the campus gates in his or her unfolding human vocation. This is the charge of the Siena Center. Confident that the University's mission "to pursue truth" is shared, the Center explores the foundations of Catholic thought with the hope of illuminating new perspectives that might help more adequately to address the concerns of our day.

By widening of the University's attention to include a broader group at the table of conversation, the Center has been a benefit both to intended patrons and to the university as well. The Siena Center is a force within the community that resists the fragmentation of knowledge and insists on the unity of faith and reason. Such a unifying dynamic results in these two outcomes: (1) the revelation of collaborative

² John C. Haughey, S.J., *Where Is Knowing Going?: The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 149.

possibilities which can result in new research and curricular developments, and (2) the creation of space in which prayer and study might come together to move the community from information to transformation, and from information-gathering to meaning-making.

Through a review of three topical themes selected for programming, this article will explore the St. Catherine of Siena Center's unique voice within the university and the local Church, assessing its influence on both communities.

Truth and Consequences

The pursuit of truth is central to the charism of the distinctively Dominican university. Indeed *Veritas* has served as the motto of the Dominican Order for nearly 800 years, and *Caritas et Veritas* has been the motto of the University since 1926.³ Grappling with the nature of truth, the demands of truth, and the consequences of truth must lie at the heart of any claimed expression of Catholic identity at this or any institution. Such an endeavor has been of critical importance for all of Christian history; it is especially urgent within the contemporary academy, where so often truth is viewed entirely as a social construct, and within dominant U.S. culture, where rhetoric and violence often dominate over truth. In such a context, how do we who know Truth as a name of God find our voice and express our faith? As Pope Benedict XVI has written in his first social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*:

Truth needs to be sought, found, and expressed within the 'economy' of charity, but charity in its turn needs to be understood, confirmed, and practiced in the light of truth. In this way, not only do we do a service of charity enlightened by truth, but we also help give credibility to truth, demonstrating its persuasive and authenticating power in the practical setting of social living. This is a matter of no small account today, in a social and cultural context which relativizes truth, often paying little heed to it and showing increasing reluctance to acknowledge its existence.⁴

While this search for truth is the framework for all of the Siena Center's work, "Truth and Consequences" was chosen as a series theme in fall 2007.

³ Lauren Romeo Chilvers and Jeanne Crapo, OP, "*Caritas Veritas* and the Dominican University Seal," (paper presented at Caritas Veritas Symposium, Dominican University, River Forest, IL, September 28, 2010).

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate: In Charity and Truth* (Vatican City: Typis Poliglottis Vaticanis, 2009), ¶ 2.

The theme took shape through the staff's extended conversation with university colleagues and the center's advisory council⁵ and with awareness of pertinent cultural and ecclesial events, trends, themes, and vexing problems and questions.

The first among a distinguished line-up of lecturers that semester was William Cahoy, dean of the School of Theology at St. John's University, Collegeville, MN. In a challenging address entitled, "What's Truth Got to Do With It?" Cahoy presented the Catholic tradition's "profound confidence that ultimately truth and God are one, and that the pursuit of truth and the pursuit of or desire for God converge,"⁶—an important affirmation perhaps obvious to those well-schooled in Catholic thought, but in need of repeated articulation in the modern university setting wherein familiarity with the tradition is not a given.

Upon this foundation, Cahoy then cut to the heart of the moral life by drawing out some implications and consequences of such confidence in the life of the believer and in the life of the world: "There are times when knowing the truth is itself a moral issue requiring certain moral attributes of us as knowers. Knowing the truth may be connected not only to intellectual capacity but to our moral capacity."⁷ Furthermore, he stated the following flatly and without compromise: "The question of whether we can handle the truth or not is not simply a question of intelligence. It is also a question of courage. There are things it takes courage to know."⁸ The truth demands from us courage: courage to unmask injustice, to face squarely our own complicities and compromises, and finally to exercise the ministry of prophecy in the arenas of power. Yoking truth and knowledge to courage and justice, Cahoy set forth a powerful vision of the Catholic university's vocation, one particularly resonant in the Dominican context.

Those following him in the series pursued the implications of Cahoy's thought for the concrete questions of war (James Carroll), the environment (Brian McLaren), and political elections (E. J. Dionne).⁹ Taken as a

⁵ The Advisory Council consists of about ten persons, both internal and external to the university, with interest and expertise in the mission.

⁶ Cahoy, "What's Truth Got To Do With It?" 16.

⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁹ James Carroll is a columnist at the *Boston Globe*, and author of more than a dozen books including *House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006). Brian McLaren is a public theologian and author. His books include *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007). E. J. Dionne is a columnist at *The Washington Post* and senior fellow at The Brookings Institution.

whole, the series encapsulated the center's way of proceeding: it fostered an ongoing conversation that included the foundations of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, the development of the tradition, and the application of its principles to the complexities of contemporary life. Participants received the series with great enthusiasm. In evaluations collected throughout the season, between 80-100% of respondents indicated that the respective event addressed the topic well or very well, and more than 90% of all respondents said that they valued the work of the Center highly or very highly.¹⁰ These results are consistent with findings from multiple thematic seasons and years of programming. Even at this early stage in the Center's history, it had developed a reputation for excellence and a manner of selecting subjects for contemplation that were deeply resonant for our community of inquiry. Though the challenge of expanding the audience will always be there, by its fourth full year of programming, the Center had established itself as a resource of high quality among the 1,500 or so persons who attended annually. Such attendance provided strong affirmation of the mission's importance and the method's effectiveness.

Science and Religion

In the fall of 2006, the Center launched a new, targeted initiative to tackle one of contemporary culture's most pressing and often vexing issues, namely the relationship between science and religion. In the rich soil of the center's already well-established space of dialogue, inclusive of members of academe as well as laity of the wider community, the Albertus Magnus Society was planted. A gathering of persons who share an academic, professional, or general interest in exploring issues related to the intersection of religious belief or experience and scientific thought, the goal of the society is the pursuit of new information and insight in a setting that is both scholarly and congenial, and reflects the Catholic Dominican understanding of the compatibility of religion and science. The society is a project of the Siena Center, consistent with its mission, and is wholly integrated into the Center's staffing, budget, and marketing, with a particular content focus intended for a new constituency.

Coinciding with the university's opening of a new state-of-the-art science building (John D. and Carolyn C. Parmer Hall), the Siena Center

¹⁰ 53 attendees responded to the question, "How effectively has this event addressed the topic?" Of these, 41 said "very well" and 8 said "well." 46 people responded to the question, "How valuable do you consider the work of the Center?" Of these, 36 said "very highly" and 10 said "highly."

requested funding from the Metanexus Institute on Religion and Science through its Local Societies Initiative to create the Albertus Magnus Society for the Intersection of Religion and Science. The proposal, written by the Center's founding director, Bryan Froehle, was supported fully by the vice president for mission and ministry and by select faculty from the departments of natural sciences and theology. Dr. Froehle was assisted in the development of the proposal by the university's Office of Research and Sponsored Projects. The award from the Metanexus Institute allowed for the creation of the society as a founding member of the Local Societies Initiative network. It was, and continues to be, cochaired by Dan Beach, professor of psychology, Elizabeth Jeep, associate director of the Siena Center, and Hugh McElwain, professor of theology. The chairs are assisted in their work by a larger steering committee that includes additional members of the Dominican University faculty and community members with a particular interest and expertise in the society's work.

The society was launched in November 2006 with the inaugural Albertus Magnus Lecture given by John Haught, the distinguished theologian from Georgetown University. In addition to this annual lecture, the society meets monthly for a presentation by a guest lecturer, followed by a rich discussion of the presentation among the members. The Albertus Magnus Society has prompted some of the most prominent scholars in the field, including Kathleen Duffy, S.S.J.; Philip Hefner; Kevin O'Rourke, O.P.; Carol Rausch Albright; Daniel Sulmasy, O.F.M.; and Kevin FitzGerald, S.J. to visit the University and participate in campus activities. All have contributed the excellence of their scholarship and the depth of their wisdom both for the edification of individual participants in the Albertus Magnus Society and for the development of a community of shared and extended learning. A strength of the society has been the time (usually about one hour) allowed for interchange among the group. This structure gives appropriate weight to the expertise, investment, and queries of the membership. It has created, over time, both a stable, loyal core and an openness to new and expanding participation. Monthly gatherings that drew, in the first year, about twenty-five persons on a given night now regularly draw seventy-five and often more than a hundred. The annual Albertus Magnus Lecture draws as many as 250 participants. The society is now well-established as a vital dimension of the Center's work.

One need look no further than the 2008-09 season to see how the society's efforts have had a primary and valuable effect on the Catholic identity of the university. The theme for this season was "Evolution and

the Human Spirit.” As mentioned previously, while the society is a project of the Center, its membership is open beyond Dominican University’s faculty and student body. Therefore, as with the whole of the Center’s structure, its unique value on campus springs precisely from its engagement with the wider community.

One need look no further than the 2008-09 season to see the society’s valuable effort on the Catholic identity of the university. The theme for the season was “Evolution and the Human Spirit.” In the second full year of programming, the society tackled a recurrent issue of tension between the religious and scientific communities. Invited speakers explored how the human family has evolved, noted evolutionary processes evident in the present, and considered where human evolution may be heading. Topics included human consciousness and its development as well as ethical issues raised by the effects of current science and technology on the human spirit. The society’s steering committee created a year-long program that included both explications of long-accepted scientific theory (such as a primatologist’s lecture on the genuine ability of great apes to learn, to direct their own learning, to create tools, and to establish relationships of affection and empathy) and areas of emerging knowledge (including an astronomer’s presentation of recent discoveries showing that the raw material for life appears to be ubiquitous in a universe containing hundreds of billions of galaxies) such that young university students of various disciplines, interested members of the public, and scientists were encouraged to engage together in the dialogue. The scientific evidence was then addressed by theologians—from systematic, constructive, and ethical perspectives—for its implications, possibilities, and meanings for the Christian life. The season was very beneficial to the University as an expression of its Catholic mission and for the deepening of its Catholic identity on at least three levels.

First, the very nature of the society’s construction is an expression of a widely acknowledged mark of the Catholic university, namely the unity of truth and complementarity of faith and reason. As James Heft urged, “Catholic universities must resist the fragmentation of knowledge typical of secular universities. Scholars who rely exclusively on already established methodologies within their disciplines will prematurely dismiss important questions they don’t yet know how to answer.”¹¹ The society is intentionally constructed to resist the dynamics of fragmentation and to invite both scholars and laity into interdisciplinary

¹¹ James L. Heft, “Distinctively Catholic: Keeping the Faith in Higher Education,” in *Commonweal* (March 26, 2010): 10.

conversations with multiple methodologies to address squarely and from various perspectives critical, emerging questions which are empirical, humanistic, and religious in nature. As a result, the theologians and scientists within the faculty—and budding theologians and scientists from within the student body—had occasion for a mutually-enriching exchange that encouraged them to stretch, both as scholars and as human persons, beyond the certitudes of their own disciplines into the perhaps unfamiliar territory of another's expertise. The society provides, therefore, a lived experience of the Catholic way of proceeding. As such, it is an expression of the University's Catholic mission. But, insofar as the faculty and students are unaccustomed to proceeding in this manner, it is also an enhancement to Catholic identity because the society is an avenue that the institution can utilize to acclimate faculty to this particular mark of the Catholic university, to this dimension of a particular call within the academy.

Second, in the construction of the programs, the Center has included very fine scholars from among the University's own faculty along with those from the national and international community of scholars; this has allowed the Center to become an influential and valued asset for curricular enhancement. As Louis Dupré observed more than ten years ago, "One might consider it one of the main objectives of the Catholic school to extend a religious vision to all areas of life...In no case should it be satisfied with providing religious 'information' about sacred history, dogma, and morals without rendering that information *meaningful*, that is, fit to *inform* all of life."¹² One of the primary obstacles to meeting this objective at the contemporary Catholic university is the reality of pluralism (including, of course, atheism) among its faculty. How can formation in religious vision happen when those responsible for this formation are neither conversant in nor convinced of the Catholic religious vision? Relying on the good will and the commitment of our faculty (whatever their individual religious convictions) to support the mission of the institution, the Center has been able to offer the programming of the Albertus Magnus Society as a resource for "*meaningful*" engagement with the Catholic religious vision, particularly as it "*informs*" our reception of scientific advancements.

For example, juniors in the University's honors program were required to read Charles Darwin's classic work, *Origin of Species*, as part

¹² Louis Dupré, "On the Task and Vocation of the Catholic College," in *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, ed. Anthony J. Cernera and Oliver J. Morgan (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2000), 25; emphasis in original.

of their study of the human person. These students were invited to participate in the society's series on "Evolution and the Human Spirit" as an enhancement to their classroom studies. One gathering proved especially beneficial in regard to "extending religious vision" to the study of Darwin, namely the Albertus Magnus Lecture delivered by the distinguished Christian ethicist from Boston College, Stephen J. Pope. In his lecture, "Ethics After Darwin," Pope laid out an exquisite response to Darwin's "radically new way of thinking about who and what we are as human beings"¹³ which he named "critical appropriation."¹⁴ Pope outlined his position in this way:

It seeks to accept Darwin's insight into the evolution of life without holding the same level of confidence in evolutionary philosophical or moral speculation. Critical appropriation is facilitated by distinguishing three meanings of evolution: evolution as fact, evolution as scientific theory, and evolution as ontology.¹⁵

After unpacking each of these three terms, Pope concluded with a discussion of "the challenge of solidarity, the central ethical challenge after Darwin."¹⁶ Going boldly and directly to the legacy of Darwin's emphasis on competition and natural egoism (and the wrongful, yet powerful adoption—some say perversion—of Darwin's theory by social theorists), Pope called his listeners to embrace the Christian vision of solidarity, or "justice rooted in love," as the proper ideal of human aspiration. Solidarity, he said, "calls us to go beyond the 'imperatives of our genes' and to use our evolved emotional, cognitive, and social capacities in a way that is self-transcending. This commitment in turn depends on the hope that grace can lead us to direct and even go beyond where nature itself might take us."¹⁷ After Pope's lecture, a history professor who has served the University for decades and who herself rejects a religious worldview wrote, "I have been looking for this kind of material for this course for years." She had a desire to include the Catholic Intellectual Tradition into her coursework, but because it was beyond the scope of her own expertise, she needed the assistance of the institution to discover the appropriate, meaningful connections to her course content. For her, and for many others before and since, the Center, through the society, has provided just such a connection.

¹³ Stephen J. Pope, "Ethics After Darwin" (lecture, Dominican University, River Forest, IL, November 13, 2008), 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

Finally, the society provides an illustration of how the Center embraces the responsibility of Catholic higher education that Haughey articulated: “The institution itself must make it clear that the function of the knowledge industry of which it is a part is to advance the condition of the many, not to benefit the few who have the privilege and opportunity of a life of scholarship.”¹⁸ As previously discussed, the Center primarily aims its programming at the ongoing education of the adult community of faith. This local community is reached through the direct mailing of promotional materials, extension of invitation through professional and personal networks, advertisement, occasional cosponsorship with organizations with shared interest, and press coverage. As a result of relationships developed between the Center (with assistance from the University’s public relations staff) and local and national media outlets, information about the Center’s offerings reaches beyond the immediate geographical community and the members of the local community who are able to attend programs in person.

The 2009 Albertus Magnus Lecture by Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, for example, became the foundation for a major piece run by *U.S. Catholic* magazine,¹⁹ which with a circulation of 30,000 is one of the most widely-read Catholic media outlets. Under the title, “Deep Incarnation: Prepare for Astonishment,” Johnson traced the narrative of Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection in light of the awe-inspiring scientific understanding of cosmic evolution. From the depth of her own scholarship as a systematician, Johnson, like Pope, contributed to the meaning-making enterprise of the Catholic university, weaving scientific insight together with the sacramental, incarnational vision that is central to the Catholic tradition. By way of illustration, here are just a few words from her lecture:

The genetic structure of [Jesus’] cells made him part of the whole community of life that descended from common ancestors in the ancient seas. The *sarx* of John 1:14 thus reaches through Jesus and beyond all other human beings to encompass the whole biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which we are composed....“Deep” interpretation understands John 1:14 to be saying that the incarnation, a concentrated expression of divine love already poured out in creation, has effects in two directions. First, it links the transcendent God forever with the flesh of the cosmos. By becoming flesh, the Word acquires personal time, a life story, a death, and does so as a participant in the history of the world. Matter itself now becomes a permanent reality of the Holy Mystery of God, who never shucks off this connection. Second, this relationship

¹⁸ Haughey, *Where is Knowing Going?* 25.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, “For God So Loved the Cosmos,” *U.S. Catholic* (April 2010): 18-21.

confers blessing on the whole of earthly reality in its corporal dimensions, and on the cosmos in which the Earth dynamically exists.²⁰

Johnson's wisdom opens paths not only for intellectual inquiry, but also for religious contemplation and moral transformation. This experience provided a forum whereby the 200 + in the lecture audience, along with the readers of *U.S. Catholic*, were invited to engage in two essential practices of the distinctively Dominican expression of the Catholic tradition: prayer and study.

Sacramental Imagination

In the year following the Albertus Magnus Society's series on evolution, the Center picked up the theme of the sacramental imagination and developed it from the perspective of literary and film studies. The 2009-2010 series, "Envisioning Grace: The Sacramental Imagination in Literature and Film," afforded the opportunity to work in extended partnership with faculty from the English, modern foreign languages, and communication departments, inviting new reflection on works with which they were already deeply engaged. As with previous series, outside experts—both creative writers and theologians—were solicited to deepen the study and contemplation, spark the imaginations, and widen the intellectual vision of participants as well as the entire University. The series focused attention on "The Catholic affirmation of the manifestation of God in the world" and the particular capacity of art to "leave us with a sense of mystery and multivalence" and "make visible for us the absolute and allow us to see the essences superficiality [of a secular sensibility] sometimes covers."²¹ It was, indeed, a graced experience with significant impact on the life of the university.

First, the series proved a remarkable tool for introducing faculty to the notion of the sacramental imagination, a perspective now commonly understood within theological conversations as distinctively Catholic.²² The sacramental vision is intimate, familiar, and treasured for so many, but often unnamed outside of theological circles. Therefore, opening up

²⁰ Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, "Deep Incarnation: Prepare for Astonishment" (lecture, Dominican University, River Forest, IL, November 19, 2009), 8-9.

²¹ Mark W. Roche, *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism and the Idea of a Catholic University* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 23.

²² We are indebted to the work of the University of Chicago scholars David Tracy and Andrew Greeley and their seminal works *The Analogical Imagination* and *The Catholic Imagination*, respectively, for this understanding.

conversation, experience, and analysis from and about this fundamental Catholic conviction was not only personally valuable, but also academically fruitful.

Two scholarly outcomes of the series, in particular, are worthy of note here as they underscore the capacity of the Center to stimulate research and curricular innovation. First, Dominican University is fortunate to have a strong cohort of faculty engaged in medieval studies, including members in the English, History, and Italian departments. One of the opening events of the series featured professor *emerita* of English, Mary Clemente Davlin, O.P., and associate professor of Italian, Tonia Triggiano, giving an analysis of Dante's *Divine Comedy* as an exemplar of the sacramental imagination in poetry. For Dr. Triggiano, this analytical perspective was new and exciting. She expressed her delight to be working with Sr. Clemente and presenting her findings to the Siena Center's audience. She found the exercise to be so intellectually interesting that she pursued and obtained a research grant to Florence and will present the paper "The Metaphor of Unified Diversity in Dante's *Paradiso*: Ravenna's Byzantine Mosaics Revisited" at the Patristic, Medieval, Renaissance Conference at Villanova University this coming fall. Another medievalist, Mickey Sweeney, professor of English, worked with us to create a new upper-level English course on the sacramental imagination. Sweeney created an interdisciplinary course featuring not only literary studies, but also theological and historical considerations. The Siena Center's spring lectures were included in the course syllabus, and the students had the added experience of meeting and learning from nationally recognized scholars and writers. In this collaboration, the Siena Center helped to stimulate new research and innovative curricular design.

Second, the subject matter, the presenters, and the formats worked harmoniously together in this series, making possible a connection to participants' spiritual lives. Because the series was hosted by the Siena Center, which is explicit in its mission to address the *believing* community, people were able to speak openly and deeply about religious experience without constraint or apology. The opportunity for such communal contemplation was not only welcomed, but also deeply appreciated by both speakers and participants. For example, the center hosted a dinner lecture by Dominican scholar Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P. entitled, "What the Saints and Poets See (Maybe): Human Life as Sacrament." Hilkert wove poetry, biography, and theology together into a marvelous reflection on discovering the glory of God in the mundane realities of human life. Participants shared conversation about Hilkert's thought and their own experiences over a leisurely meal. When the event

concluded, several people—members of the faculty, senior administrators, and community guests—with tears welling up in their eyes, approached Center staff and expressed their gratitude for the profound insight of the evening. It is not often at the University that the community is invited to make such deeply personal, emotional, spiritual connections with fellow members and colleagues. In the university context, Catholic identity must be expressed in the life of the mind. But it cannot be confined there, for the essence of Catholic identity resides in the conversion of the soul. Outside of university ministry, the soul of our community is often neglected. Nevertheless, the Center has the capacity to create space precisely for the purpose of nourishing the spirit of the community.

To this end, the Center regularly integrates the prayerful expression of faith into sponsored gatherings. Several annual events, such as the Advent, Lent, and St. Catherine of Siena lectures, begin liturgically, sometimes with the prayer of the Church, such as the Liturgical Hour of Vespers, or by drawing upon the expertise of staff and colleagues to create another format particularly appropriate to the evening's theme or topic. The prayer sets a sacred atmosphere for the proclamation and reception of the lecture. On other occasions, the essence of the topic or format of the event itself integrates prayer and study. This was the case with the 2006 Easter season preaching series and the 2008 Blues and the Spirit symposium. Often the mission of the Center gives the lecturer herself the freedom she needs to express her own prayerfulness. This was the case at the conclusion of the series on the sacramental imagination when the annual St. Catherine of Siena Lecture was delivered by Colleen Carpenter of St. Catherine University. In a powerful address, she spoke of literature's potential to help us interpret grief as a sacramental experience.

In the opening minutes of her lecture, Carpenter extended this possibility:

If grief is recognized as potentially sacramental—that is, if grief is recognized as a specially significant reality that can transform us by bringing us into closer contact with the saving action of Jesus Christ—then our experience of the anguish and nausea and darkness is not simply a terrible experience to be avoided or gotten through as quickly as possible. Instead, mourning becomes a time of encounter with the Divine, and we discover that grief is not the end of love, but part of the wholeness of love; that grief is not darkness alone but an illuminated darkness; and that grief is not disembodied and inside our heads, but is instead profoundly connected to our bodies, the world around us, and to the Earth.²³

²³ Colleen Carpenter, "Okapis By Moonlight: Sacramental Witness in Women's Writing" (lecture, Dominican University, River Forest, IL, April 27, 2010), 5.

She, then, with reference to several contemporary women novelists and memoirists, led us through a contemplative exploration of the sacramentality of death and mourning. At the end of the evening, one undergraduate student who was herself mourning the death of a grandparent reported to her professor that Carpenter's lecture had been "the most important thing to happen to [her] at Dominican so far." A woman from the local community in attendance spoke up at the question and answer period observing, "You [Carpenter] have moved us into a place of conversation that never happens in this culture." One man bravely shared that he had lost his wife a few months ago, "I think you said that we can be in our grief 'broken-hearted but wildly alive with hope,' and that's exactly how I feel. ... This evening has really been a surprise, and I am so grateful."

Integration and Transformation

In these series and in all that the Center does, we invite people to look together for "the abiding presence of God in the things of this world."²⁴ Of course, along the way there have been sidesteps and missteps, poorly conceived themes, underwhelming speakers, budgetary limitations, and unsustainable ideas, but the trajectory of the Center has been one of growth. Most significant for the Center's self-assessment is the growth in its community of benefactors, in its community of participants, and in its internal influence. Such growth encourages the Center's staff to continue in the Center's original vision as a place of faith *and* scholarship, of university *and* community, of scholar *and* laity examining critical, contemporary issues. The Center draws together university students, faculty, staff, and neighbors; scientists and theologians; poets and saints; skeptics and believers into the vital collaboration that can proceed naturally within a Dominican, Catholic center of distinction, and which gives rise to creative possibilities, innovative curricula, and interesting avenues of research.

Having confidence in Jesus' promise, "search and you will find" (Mt 7:7), the Center embraces the university's stated mission "to pursue truth" not only as an intellectual exercise, but also as a practice of the soul. Embodying the Dominican imperative of prayer *and* study in the context of a community of shared inquiry allows this center to advance a vision of Catholic higher education as a work of the Church and a participation in the transformative power of the gospel for person and society.

²⁴ Paul Mariani, *God and the Imagination* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 257.