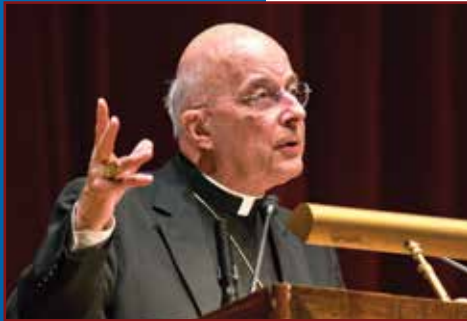




# THE BEACON

NEWSLETTER OF THE LUMEN CHRISTI INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC THOUGHT WINTER 2015



Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.

## Cardinal George's Legacy

For the past seventeen years, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., Archbishop Emeritus of Chicago devoted himself to guiding the nation's third largest diocese (the Archdiocese of Chicago has 2.2 million Catholics)—inspiring immigrant Catholics to cling to Christ despite the difficulties of living in an unfamiliar country, and encouraging Catholics who have lived in the city for generations not to be led astray by secularism, materialism, and individualism—ideologies that undermine the spiritual integrity of American society.

In addition to all the duties that come with being an archbishop in a large metropolitan area, Cardinal George found time to engage in important philosophical debates with prominent intellectuals.

American journalist John L. Allen, Jr.—who specializes in coverage of the Vatican—has described George as the “American Ratzinger.” Although George dismisses this label, “insisting he’s not of Benedict’s intellectual caliber,” Allen contends that he is the “closest thing to it on these shores”—citing as his credentials his “blend of intellectual chops and tenacious commitment to Catholic tradition.”

The Lumen Christi Institute—where Cardinal George was Episcopal Moderator since its founding in 1997—provided him with a forum for wide-ranging philosophical discourse.

Cardinal George would often participate in Lumen Christi events—engaging eminent thinkers (i.e., American theologian David Tracy, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion, and the late American ethicist and public intellectual Jean Bethke Elshtain) in the discussion of topics such as “The

Catholic Faith and the Secular Academy” (1999); “What Can Philosophers Learn from the Tradition” (2005); “God, Freedom, and Public Life” (2011); and most recently “The Human Person, Economics, and Catholic Social Thought” (2014).

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## Archbishop Cupich Returns to Chicago

While many in Chicago are learning about their newly appointed archbishop, Blase Joseph Cupich wasn't new to Lumen Christi when he was installed as the ninth Archbishop of Chicago in Holy Name Cathedral on November 18th.

Cupich visited Chicago in 2012 (then Bishop of Spokane, Washington) to attend the fifth annual Conference on Economics and Catholic Social Thought. The theme of the conference was “Toward a Moral Economy: Policies and Values for the 21st Century,” and was sponsored by the Lumen Christi Institute, The John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and the leading German center for Catholic social thought (the Katholische Sozialwissenschaftliche Zentralstelle or KSZ).



Blase Cupich visited Chicago for the 2012 Economics and Catholic Social Thought Conference titled, “Toward a Moral Economy: Policies and Values for the 21st Century.”

Here Reinhard Cardinal Marx, Archbishop of Munich (who gave the keynote address at the opening symposium), in a lively conversation with Cupich over dinner.

It was an opportunity for the bishop to meet and engage with leading University of Chicago economists—Nobel Prize-winner Roger Myerson and MacArthur Fellow Kevin Murphy—as well as Reinhard Cardinal Marx, whose opening remarks made the case for a global “social market economy” as a corrective to the economic problems facing a world shaken by financial crisis. In using the term “social market economy” Marx refers not to state-planning or socialism or to government intervention in the economy, but rather to a market

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**“Cardinal George saw, as few others did, the central importance of the intellectual apostolate for the task of evangelization and he supported it in ways that will have a lasting impact not only in Chicago but also around the country.”**

# A Guide to the Thought of Pope Francis

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Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.,  
Archbishop Emeritus  
of Chicago



It could not have been more perfect timing for Anna Bonta Moreland—Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities at Villanova University—to visit Chicago to give talks on Pope Francis (on Oct 15th at the University of Chicago; on Oct 16th at the University Club in downtown Chicago).

The media was buzzing with stories on the Synod on the Family, and Pope Francis seemed everywhere to be the topic of conversation.

On October 16, amid all the media hype (and occasional distortion), Argentine-born Moreland sought to clarify, explicate and get to the very heart of the Pope's first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (translated into English as "The Joy of the Gospel"). In so doing, she also attempted to convey the overriding message of Francis' pontificate.

"If you're not going to read the document at all, you just have to read this one sentence," Moreland urged, "'I invite all Christians everywhere at this very moment to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.' That is the message of the Apostolic Exhortation; that is the message of the Synod on the Family; and that is the message of this Pope's pontificate."

However, "Pope Francis is not a linear thinker," she explained. "He is deeply rooted in the Church, in the global community."

Moreland used the image of a tree to illustrate the core of the Pope's concerns.

She began with the image of the trunk. The very foundation of everything Pope Francis is about is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. And from this trunk come the various branches. What is unusual about Francis, she explained (and why he is so often misunderstood), is that he is "not shy in going to the tips of the branches"—to those on the margins, to those who have closed their hearts and can't feel the warmth of Christ's love.

Love is paramount—at the heart of Pope Francis' message. Without ourselves as Christians being renewed by our encounter with Christ, with his compassion and mercy for us, we cannot go out and evangelize the world. "We have to realize that we have received the love of Christ in order to share love with others," explained Moreland.

She urges those who read Pope Francis' words, such as *Evangelii Gaudium*, to keep in mind that he always wants to guide us back to Christ, that he wants us to be touched by His love. Then, from this trunk, Moreland proceeded to illustrate the five main branches of the Apostolic Exhortation: 1) Personal Encounter with Christ; 2) Internal and External Challenges to the Church; 3) The Church's Response to Internal Challenges (i.e. popular piety, homiletics, catechesis); 4) The Church's Response to Challenges in the World (specifically with the poor and the injustice of economic structures); 5) Return to the roots of our personal encounter with Christ and the gift of Mary.

Another interesting insight into the Pope, Moreland mentions, is that one of his favorite paintings is Marc Chagall's 1938 "White Crucifixion" – a painting that emphasizes the suffering of Jesus and the Jewish people. She then speculates on why this might be. Francis is an urban modern Pope that loves the city of Buenos Aires. He also has a deep friendship with Rabbi Abraham Skorka (an Argentine biophysicist, rabbi and book author who resides in Buenos Aires). Perhaps, she says, his love of this painting is in part a "recognition of the history of anti-Semitism in the city that he loves." Furthermore, she adds, he is "a Jesuit who finds God in unexpected places," which may explain a lot about why he has made such a stir with his approach. Finally and most powerfully, she says, "the cross of Christ is at the center of *Evangelii Gaudium*," and Pope Francis sees so many stumbling under the weight of their personal crosses.

One of the more challenging observations (especially given the audience) Moreland offered is that Pope Francis pays little attention to the American Church. He is primarily concerned with the global Church—especially the Church suffering in Africa, in Asia, in his beloved shantytowns outside Buenos Aires where the poverty is unlike anything we experience here.

Pope Francis wants the scope to be broader: "we are moving away from the Euro-centricity of the Church." Given all that he saw walking amongst the poor, given his desire for us to get "bruised, hurting, and dirty," when we walk with the outcasts and those who have long been neglected, "we're not at the center of his concern," she said.

It is helpful—at the same time—to understand that Pope Francis is not moving away from the deeply rooted Western tradition of the Church. "He draws from Ambrose, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Aquinas, Irenaeus, John of the Cross, Thérèse of Lisieux, John Henry Newman—and that's just the beginning—and from recent figures like Guardini, de Lubac, and Bernanos," said Moreland. But while tradition is important, most important is love.

For no matter where in this global Church we dwell, what The Holy Father cares about more than anything is that we run into the arms of Christ, that we are embraced by his love—strengthened by it—and in turn share it with others.



## Cardinal George

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Kenneth L. Woodward—former religion editor of *Newsweek*—publicly praised Cardinal George in his letter “Farewell, Cardinal” in the *Chicago Tribune* for his being instrumental in the formation of Lumen Christi.

“One of Cardinal George’s most important legacies is his solicitude for the intellectual life of the church in Chicago,” wrote Woodward, “particularly as manifest in the support he has given to the Lumen Christi Institute, which he helped to create at the University of Chicago in 1997.”

Lumen Christi benefited immensely by having a Cardinal so deeply invested in its mission.

Lumen Christi Board Chair Noel Moore is grateful for so many years of the Cardinal’s leadership and guidance: “The relationship between the Cardinal and Lumen Christi was a natural and grace-filled match right from the Institute’s early days. Because of the Cardinal’s great scholarship and intellectual gifts, he was able to see our mission as a whole, and therefore wisely lead it.”

Jean-Luc Marion—who along with George was responsible for the creation of Lumen Christi—found the Cardinal a keen thinker who understood the distinct problems facing a society whose heart and mind was at conflict with its soul.

**“One of Cardinal George’s most important legacies is his solicitude for the intellectual life of the church in Chicago.”**

“Cardinal George was perfectly well aware that pastoral and intellectual concerns not only are compatible, but that, in an information-led and structured society, they flourish together,” says Marion. “Taking seriously

philosophy—being himself a scholar in that field—he could see the depth and diagnose the weakness of the arguments, judging from the point of view of both transcendent and immanent truth of Christ.”

George had a combination of gifts that inspired his city of Chicago, but also resonated with the broader American Church—a Church often struggling with how to pass on the faith, how to speak of its relevance, within a modern secular context.

He called for a fundamental reevaluation of the conversation surrounding human rights, religious liberty, respect for life, just war, commerce, immigration, and globalization in his book *God in Action: How Faith in God Can Address the Challenges of the World*, which he published in 2011.

Don Briel—Founding Director of the Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas and Lumen Christi Advisory Board Member—remarked of George’s influence: “As a religious, a priest, an intellectual, a pastor, and a teacher, Cardinal George was exceptionally well prepared to address the unique challenges and opportunities for the Church within modern American culture. He saw, as few others did, the central importance of the intellectual apostolate for the task of evangelization and he supported it in ways that will have a lasting impact not only in Chicago but also around the country.”

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## Archbishop Cupich

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economy with rules to ensure the market’s freedom and fairness. Marx is also a member of the Council of Cardinals—a group of nine cardinals appointed by Pope Francis to serve as advisers to the pontiff.

During the day-long session of the conference in downtown Chicago, Cupich participated in a conversation with economists, bishops, philosophers, theologians, policymakers, and business leaders from across America and Europe on topics such as: “What Would a Moral Economy Look Like? Values and Metrics;” “Global and Local Solidarity: Issues of Globalization;” “The Family in the 21st Century;” and “Causes and Implications of Social Mobility and the Problem of Rising Income Inequality.”

Cupich has repeatedly spoken on the needs of the poor, on the importance of the Church to be a people for others, to especially embrace in love those who have been abandoned, neglected, and forsaken.

In his first homily as Archbishop, Cupich said: “[Pope Francis] is challenging us to recognize that Christ is always inviting us to more, to greater things. It is the kind of invitation our bishops’ conference

is making to our nation to be what it has always promised to be, to protect the vulnerable, poor and weak, to treat immigrants with justice and dignity, to respect life and to be good stewards of creation. It is the invitation of Jesus, ‘Come, take the risk of being more.’”

Lumen Christi welcomes Cupich back to Chicago—and looks forward to further conversations that invite us all to work more energetically to alleviate suffering, and to seek above all the common good.

**“Come, take the risk of being more.”**



Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., Reinhard Cardinal Marx, and Blase Cupich at an early morning Mass at Saint James Chapel in the Archbishop Quigley Center (June 1, 2012). Afterwards, economists, bishops, and theologians gathered at the Park Hyatt to further discuss topics relating to “Toward a Moral Economy: Policies and Values for the 21st Century.”

## Beyond Good and Evil

U of C Professor Stephen Meredith on How Pursuing Knowledge Without Love Can Lead to Moral Madness

Stephen Meredith is fully immersed in the scientific world. He is Professor in the Departments of Pathology, Neurology, and Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Chicago, and is doing research that may well lead to treatments for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's.

"I do science for a living," explained Stephen Meredith in the opening remarks to his talk, "The Modern Scientist as a Palimpsest of Three Fausts" given at the University of Chicago on October 29th. "I offer some criticism, which is nothing against science, but against a particular way of doing science."

Meredith wasn't even actually critiquing science. Science, for the most part, involves the understanding of theory and mechanism. Scientists do not invent things; they try instead to discover how things work. He quoted Lawrence J. Henderson who in 1917 stated: "science owes more to the steam engine than the steam engine does to science."



Stephen Meredith (University of Chicago)



Goethe's Faust

Often those who make discoveries that change the world are not aware of the scientific principles involved. As an example, he pointed to the discovery of the smallpox vaccine. From the point of view of a modern research scientist, Edward Jenner "didn't know what he was doing," Meredith said.

The scientific quest is praiseworthy. The Church has always supported this desire in the heart of man to understand the mysteries of the universe. The thirteenth-century theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas was in favor of natural science; in the twentieth century, John Paul II famously said that faith and reason are like two wings in which the human spirit rises to truth.

Most of our anxiety about science then, Meredith explained, belongs properly to technology in which we try to control nature.

And by technology, Meredith does not mean the invention of computers or iPhones or washing machines, but rather unrestrained technology that violates the dignity of nature, of the human person.

There is a premise that there is science and technology, and then there is religion and magic.

But Meredith put science and religion on the same side, arguing that they are "two ways of knowing about the world" while technology (in his sense of the word) and magic are "two ways of imposing our will on the world."

Meredith's lecture then was primarily a caution against willfulness, the desire to manipulate human beings and the natural world without considering their dignity, without realizing the cost.

This willfulness is best represented by three versions of the Faust legend—who has been interpreted in the Faust Chapbook of 1587 as a fool who made a wager with the devil, a more sinister sort in Goethe whose lust for knowledge led him to unwittingly hurt and even kill others, and finally by Thomas Mann as a man tormented by a pact that would lead him to be unable to love and be loved.

Faust, in Meredith's lecture, represents the scientist in different time periods. The images of this scientist—layered one upon another like a palimpsest (a very old document on which the original writing has been erased and replaced with new writing)—come back to us at times, like a haunting dream, like a sudden recollection. A part of the past is always with us. But a greater awareness of our past can perhaps prevent us from repeating mistakes that can lead to moral madness.

This madness—an utter disregard for man's eternal soul—is what most concerns Meredith when it comes to man's chasing after knowledge.

It is this scientific restlessness, this using knowledge—not for love and service but manipulation—about which Meredith cautions us.

In the Chapbook Faust, man was merely restless, but increasingly immoral; he began to seek knowledge, science, but what he was really seeking was magic, technology. Afterward came Goethe's Faust. He represents a loss of confidence in reason and science, but also in theology. He symbolizes—not merely boredom, but also a disdain of practical knowledge. He doesn't seek knowledge. All he wants is to strive endlessly, to never savor any moment. In doing so, he seeks to transcend time itself. The final Faust was Thomas Mann's. He represents the moral madness of twentieth-century Germany—a land torn between its Apollonian and Dionysian side, between its cold mathematical rationality and its dense inchoate emotionality. It ends with the lamentation of a dying musician: "for I die as a bad and as a good Christian." It seeks hope out of the depths of hopelessness. This may have been Mann's own cry, his own desire for there to be a glimmer of hope for Germany.

What the latter Fausts have in common is that they both warn against a mad society. Goethe and Mann's stories are cautionary tales. In Goethe and Mann, the Fausts are not "bad." They are beyond good and evil. These characters demonstrate moral madness. According to Meredith, the definition of a mad society is when one group enslaves another, when human beings are treated instrumentally.

Faust shows how madness arises from endless striving without telos, without a goal or an aim. Such striving can lead to disastrous consequences. It also shows what happens when everything is permitted. It reveals the "iciness of a universe without love."

Meredith's lecture was finally a warning about the "perils of a life without love."

There are things in this world that can be done, but should not be done.

"There are those who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge; that is Curiosity. There are those who seek knowledge to be known by others; that is Vanity," said Meredith, quoting the twelfth-century French abbot Bernard of Clairvaux. But what is most important is how one lives in the world: "There are those who seek knowledge in order to serve; that is Love."

**Meredith's lecture then was primarily a caution against willfulness, the desire to manipulate human beings and the natural world without considering their dignity, without realizing the cost.**

## Does Christianity Need Metaphysics?

Distinguished French philosophers Jean-Luc Marion and Rémi Brague debate the question before a standing-room audience



From left to right, Jean-Luc Marion, Willemien Otten, and Rémi Brague

"Since I am not a philosopher or theologian, I go to Lumen Christi's events to expose myself to ideas and debates that don't appear in my classes. Does Christianity Need Metaphysics? gave me such an opportunity—it had never occurred to me to question the place of metaphysics in Christianity. It was a privilege to hear two prominent Christian thinkers discuss the issue, and I will be thinking about their arguments for some time."

— Michael Dinsmore, Third-Year Undergraduate



Richard Strier, one of UChicago's best known professors and an expert on Shakespeare, in his signature pensive pose



Brague pressed with questions after the symposium



## Rémi Brague: *A Catholic Socratic*

### Philosopher Rémi Brague on the Importance of a Broad Education for an Open Mind

Rémi Brague strikes one as a scholar. Maybe it is because of his wiry silver-framed glasses, or the way he walks into a room and immediately analyzes the artwork on the wall (what it symbolizes, what period it came from), or the fact that he was born in France and spends his summers in Germany and speaks English with a hint of a British accent. He appears sophisticated, but downplays it with his sharp yet playful wit.

For the way in which he engages in philosophical dialogue, he has been called a “Catholic Socratic.” “Brague reminds me of a number of thinkers,” writes Paul Seaton at St. Mary’s Seminary & University. “I will mention one. His intellectual eros combined with candid recognition of mysteries, his bold taking-on and equitable taking-the-measure of controverted topics, his dialectical approach, and his delight in paradox and in opening new horizons—all this reminds me of Socrates. I am tempted to call Brague a Catholic Socratic.”

Though he is a philosopher and historian of ideas (he is currently professor emeritus at the Sorbonne and Romano Guardini Chair at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich), he considers himself above all an adventurer. When asked why he took the path in life that he did, he replied without hesitation: “because of my insatiable curiosity—like Rudyard Kipling’s elephant.” Reflecting a moment, he clarified what he meant by his life of adventure. “I am an adventurer that does not go to remote places on the map.”

Brague loves what he does. Since his discovery of philosophy in his last year of high school (the French school system introduces students to philosophy in secondary school), he has embarked on an academic adventure that he finds “deeply nourishing and rewarding.”

He is able to “travel” to exotic cultures and lands—and time periods as diverse as Ancient Greece and Rome, Medieval Europe, and even recent modernity.

Interested first in Greek philosophy, he followed that by the study of Roman philosophy and then Medieval philosophy. Reading texts in the original language was incredibly important to him. At the age of 20, he learned Hebrew so that he could study the Old Testament; at 38, he learned Arabic so that he could take a closer look at the writings of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides.

He speaks three living languages (French, German, English), in addition to having expert knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Arabic.

Few thinkers have knowledge that runs both broad and deep; few are as well rounded in their knowledge of the progression and development of Western culture. Because of his unique training and insatiable curiosity, Brague has been able to publish books that span

**“His intellectual eros combined with candid recognition of mysteries, his bold taking-on and equitable taking-the-measure of controverted topics, his dialectical approach, and his delight in paradox and in opening new horizons—all this reminds me of Socrates. I am tempted to call Brague a Catholic Socratic.”**

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cultures and religions (i.e. *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*), that ambitiously explore three thousand years of history to trace the idea of divine law in the West from prehistoric religions to modern time (i.e. *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea*) and that examine nothing less than universal wisdom and how it has been interpreted over the centuries, from the time of ancient Egypt to the modern era (i.e. *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*). *The Wisdom of the World* has been described as “encyclopedic and yet intimate,” and “the best sort of history: broad, learned, and completely compelling.”

Brague attributes his broad base of knowledge to the outstanding education he received in France. As a teenager, in preparation for the rigorous Grande École exam that determines whether students can enter one of the prestigious higher education establishments in the country, he “really had to work like several beavers,” he joked. He had to have a grasp of classical languages, philosophy, history (modern and ancient), and French literature, which gave him “a glimpse of the whole landscape” and provided him with an intellectual roadmap. “I knew where things are to be looked for,” he said of the result of such extensive study. He was fortunate to be accepted into the École Normale Supérieure, which was founded in 1793 and has since become a platform for many of France’s brightest young people to pursue high-level careers in government and academia. Brague attended École Normale Supérieure along with French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion (Marion is a year older than him). Afterwards, he pursued doctoral studies at the Université Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV) where he was required to focus a bit and concentrate on a definitive field (he chose to write his dissertation on Plato).



Rémi Brague gives a lecture on “The Necessity of Goodness” (Nov 5), arguing that the concept of good is broader than just morality

But Brague would once more be placed in an environment that would encourage his proclivity to think in terms of centuries. What further influenced his intellectual development—but now as a mature thinker—were the eleven years he spent teaching in Germany (from 2002-2013).

German higher education emphasizes breadth of knowledge—later than in France. As a doctoral student, you have to write two dissertations on two very different topics (for example, you would write something on Plato and then something bulkier on Kant). In addition, you have to have a grasp of two unrelated fields (if you major in mathematics, your other fields could include Spanish or Biology). Germans take great pride in their philosophical tradition and a philosopher is “supposed to have serious training in the whole history of philosophy,” explains Brague.

With such a background and all his knowledge, Brague is an ardent believer.

He finds Christianity to have a unique place in the history of ideas.

“Christianity is the only religion,” Brague argues, “that has a theology.” “There is no such thing in other religions. Judaism, for example, is legal in nature, dealing with what one should do (i.e. the Torah and the Talmud). In Buddhism and Islam, the project is not the same. Hinduism, for example, asks how to sacrifice things, how to reach union with God.

It is in theology that we encounter “thinking Christianity”—faith grappling with spiritual ideas and realities and concepts and how to explain them. “Theology is the intellectual sifting of the credo by philosophical means,” he explains.

In Christianity, the world is a rational whole. “Logos makes the world understandable—it is reason lying in hiding.” This alliance between philosophy and religious thought is deeply attractive to a person like Brague who has spent his life entranced by ideas and their development: “The dialogue between reason and religion is what is great in Christian theology.”

**Few thinkers have knowledge that runs both broad and deep; few are as well rounded in their knowledge of the progression and development of Western culture.**

## Catherine Duggan

THIRD-YEAR PHILOSOPHY UNDERGRADUATE



### What is your area of study and what is the focus of your current research?

I am a third-year undergraduate majoring in philosophy but studying French and Spanish as well. I have yet to settle on a specific area in philosophy to delve into in my final year here at the University of Chicago—still dabbling in a little bit of this and that—but I have thoroughly enjoyed classes on bioethics, moral theory, the relationship between faith and reason, and ancient philosophy. That said, I am interested in reading more about the relationship between positive and negative liberty as a potential topic for my BA paper.

### How did you first hear about Lumen Christi? Which event did you first attend, and why?

I first heard about Lumen Christi through family friends who attended the University of Chicago several years ago. When they heard that I would be coming here, they told me that Lumen Christi lectures were one of the many gem opportunities here that I should not miss. The first event I attended was a talk given by Fr. Edward Oakes titled, “The Second Vatican Council and the Church’s Engagement in the Modern World” because it was one of the first events of the year and because at the time I knew very little about the history and influences of Vatican II but was interested in learning more.

### How has your participation in Institute lectures, conferences, and seminars contributed to your growth as a scholar?

The speakers at Lumen Christi events are role models of Catholic intellectuals whose knowledge of the faith gives me something to aspire to have in the future. When I leave a Lumen Christi event, be it a fascinating discussion of natural law with Professor Russell Hittinger or Fr. Raymond Gawronski’s lecture on “Saint John Paul II and the Polish Catholic Experience,” I find that I come away with an appreciation for a new array of concepts and thoughts, but at the same time a sense that I have only skimmed the surface of the particular topic at hand. It is then that I am reminded that part of learning is coming to see how little one does know, and that finding some ideas difficult to comprehend but interesting nonetheless is a strong reason to study further on one’s own.

### Is there a particular event (or encounter with a scholar) that has directly impacted the development of your academic work?

Fr. Paul Mankowski’s, “The Catholic Tradition of Prayer and Devotion” last February resonated with me because Fr. Mankowski emphasized the necessity of a strong prayer life in order to be successful in whatever one’s task is, in this case, the work of being a student at the University of Chicago. He observed that sometimes people don’t adopt a regimen of prayer because they don’t think that using formulaic prayers suit them, but, noting that that is a mistaken assumption, emphasized that devotions can provide regularity to our prayer lives and help sustain them. This talk reminded me to invite God into an area of my life in which I had rarely asked for His inspiration, namely, my development as a student. Relying on God to let Him shape me into the scholar He needs gives me a great sense of peace.

### What do you plan to do after you have completed your degree from the University of Chicago?

After I complete my undergraduate studies here, I think I would like to do some research and writing at a think tank specializing in something relating to bioethics or religion. Recently I have been considering pursuing graduate studies in religion and philosophy, though where I would go for that I have yet to decide. I think in the long term I would like to teach something in the area of religion at the college level.

### Please comment on the role you think the Institute plays on the University of Chicago campus.

From an undergraduate perspective, I have noticed that Lumen Christi has created a strong sense of camaraderie among the undergraduates who attend the lectures and enjoy discussing the topics of the events long afterwards. Students who love discussing the finer points of the Catholic intellectual tradition can delve into them in great depth at Lumen Christi events and have the opportunity to speak to scholars one-on-one. By providing this forum for discussion, the Institute is very concretely building the Catholic presence in higher education. In addition, Lumen Christi showcases the ways in which Christian thinkers have made significant contributions to the secular disciplines of philosophy, literature, and art, among other fields. In providing a space for these conversations—be it those regarding the changing notions of love, the sacredness of the human person, or the history of sacred music—Lumen Christi events are occasions to continue thinking about the complexity and beauty of the faith.

**“Students who love discussing the finer points of the Catholic intellectual tradition can delve into them in great depth at Lumen Christi events and have the opportunity to speak to scholars one-on-one. By providing this forum for discussion, the Institute is very concretely building the Catholic presence in higher education.”**





# MARK SHIFFMAN

## From a Love of Nature to a Love of Truth

Mark Shiffman has a profound love of nature. Growing up in rural Tennessee, and spending seven years of his life in Anchorage, Alaska instilled in him a deep love of the outdoors, of the natural beauty of lakes, trees, and mountains, “gifts from God,” he says. As a teenager, he loved the poetry of Wordsworth.

Today, he teaches courses in the humanities at Villanova University. His favorite course to teach is “Humanities Gateway: World” where his students read texts like Aquinas on Creation, Descartes, Dawkins, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Aristotelian natural philosophy—which treats questions of Creation and technology.

He regularly assigns readings from the Desert Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius (a late fifth century Christian philosopher and theologian), where students discuss how everyone is responsible for everyone else, that we must come to grips with our own sinfulness and our guilt before others, but that ultimately we are united to one another through God’s Creation.

If it weren’t for his coming to the University of Chicago at the moment Lumen Christi was created, Shiffman wouldn’t be familiar with these texts. He probably also wouldn’t be a Catholic scholar.

Shiffman didn’t grow up in a religious home (his father was a secular Jew; his mother a non-practicing Presbyterian). As he teenager, he embraced Methodism. In college, he fell away into atheism. He found his way back to God through the Quakers, an ironic twist, of course, because you don’t have to be a Christian to be a Quaker.

It was during this period of religious seeking that Shiffman encountered Thomas Levergood, then a student in the prestigious Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and two years his senior. Levergood was running a theology reading group and that week they were reading the twentieth-century French philosopher and political activist Simone Weil.

## ALUMNI PROFILE

Shiffman eventually decided to attend the University of Chicago and found that Levergood’s reading group had turned into something more serious.

In the autumn of 1997, the Lumen Christi Institute was officially founded. The year that Lumen Christi came into existence was an important one for personal reasons; it was also the year Shiffman entered into the Roman Catholic Church.

After a brief stint in New York, Shiffman returned to Chicago where he continued work on his dissertation. He was also asked to work part-time at Lumen Christi. From 1998-2001, he assisted Thomas Levergood in solidifying the Board of Directors, in finding consistent financial supporters, in developing good relationships with foundations. Most importantly, it was through his work at Lumen Christi that he became integrated into the world of Catholic scholars.

Because of his background working at Lumen Christi and being exposed to a broad spectrum of scholars and thinkers, Shiffman now recognizes that he has a wealth of resources that he can share with his students.

Lumen Christi has been an incredible resource for him—not only exposing him to the beauty of the faith (helping him reconcile his love of nature with his belief in God), but also connecting him to a community of scholars that have helped him grow as a person.

He is grateful for the timing in which he began his studies, for the people he encountered, for the small part he played in helping stabilize an organization that would have a lasting impact on so many lives.

How has Lumen Christi changed since those early years?

In a very visible way, of course. Lumen Christi is no longer operated from two small rooms in Calvert House, the Catholic Chaplaincy at the University of Chicago. Gavin House is a “huge development,” he says. Also, the staff has expanded, signaling a much more established and formal structure.

But Lumen Christi is also reaching beyond its original boundaries. Shiffman is impressed that that the Institute has developed its downtown programming and international programs, i.e. Paris and Munich, as well as its summer seminars for students—revealing an impact that reaches beyond the University of Chicago campus.

**Lumen Christi has been an incredible resource for him—not only exposing him to the beauty of the faith (helping him reconcile his love of nature with his belief in God), but also connecting him to a community of scholars that have helped him grow as a person.**

Above all, Shiffman finds praiseworthy the degree of intellectual freedom experienced when giving a talk or participating in an Institute event. Compared even to Catholic colleges and universities, Lumen Christi enjoys an unparalleled sense of freedom, uninhibited by administrative conflicts and hostilities. By being able to talk freely and raise important questions during his time at the Lumen Christi Institute, Shiffman is then able to challenge his students to think more deeply about their own positions, their own philosophy of what it means to live in the world—to seek the truth, to ultimately find what it is that they love in it.

## The Myth of Romantic Love

Gnostic heresy taught European literature its rhetoric of passion



Tristan and Isolde

The literary tradition in the West—which shapes how we think and feel about our desires and fantasies and what we wish for in our most intimate relationships—has its roots in a heretical form of Christianity.

Occasioned by the seventy-fifth anniversary of Swiss cultural theorist Denis de Rougemont's book *L'Amour et l'Occident* (or *Love in the Western World*), Mark Shiffman—Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities at Villanova University—delivered a lecture titled “The Myth of Romantic Love” (November 13), arguing that a Gnostic dualist sect with an aversion for marriage and the body is responsible for how we understand romantic love.

Gnosticism, Shiffman explained, “is roughly the belief that the world as we know it is not good, and something has to be done about it.” The body is therefore seen as something that needs to be transcended, needs to be left behind as one soars to the true good.

But our physical body—as understood by Orthodox Christianity—is sanctified and good and should be at the center of our deepest desires and longings. Christian love is Incarnational. Man and woman, as created by God, are made to revel and delight in their embodiment. They are meant to join in physical pleasure—but also to share and give and help one another on the path to sanctity: “Because the Creator affirms the goodness of created beings, of bodily existence and life and fecundity, He also sanctifies marriage as a site for sharing in His self-giving love,” said Shiffman.

But most of our greatest poems and novels don't celebrate passionate love that takes place within the context of marriage.

On the contrary, romantic love usually involves a man and woman whose love is thwarted, sometimes by the most trivial of obstacles.

One such example is the myth of Tristan and Isolde, where de Rougemont sees “the clearest prototype of subsequent European literary treatments of love, especially in the novel,” said Shiffman.

This prototype however had its origins in Provençal troubadour poetry (the Provençal word *trobador* means maker or composer) in which the animating heart of the poem is the obstruction of love (be it distance or disparity in rank of one of the lovers being married), which heightens the intensity and anguish of the passion.

“De Rougemont turns to the troubadour poetry,” explained Shiffman, “precisely because it is this constitutive obstruction of passion that catches his attention in the myth of Tristan and Isolde, the knight and queen who fall passionately in love but are repeatedly separated by the most contrived obstacles.”

Obstacles then are what bring about heightened passion which transport lovers into an ecstatic, “rarefied world of their own.” This passion is tormenting. The lovers cannot be together so their longing and desire for one another can never be realized. The only release from such torment is death. This “death wish” is “de Rougemont's clue to the connection between troubadour poetry and the religious mysticism of the Cathars,” explained Shiffman.

The Albigensian Cathars (a heretical sect which flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) belong to a broad stream of Gnostic Christianity. They were dualists, believing that the good God made a purely spiritual creation that was then



**“Whereas, according to the doctrines of mystical paganism, human love was sublimated so thoroughly as to be made into a god even while it was being dedicated to death, Christianity has restored human love to its proper status, and in this status has hallowed it by means of marriage.”**

Continued on pg. 11.

entangled in a material world created by the bad God (or demiurge). One needed to be purified of the material world, and anything that entrapped the flesh. Denial of the body and its satisfactions was encouraged—to the extent that passionate love rarely ended in consummation. One did not want to defile love by satisfying the desires of the flesh.

Only by negating life—and the body—could passion come to its climax, and then, with nowhere left to go, end in a glorified death. “In other words,” said Shiffman, “the secret love conveyed by the literature that celebrates the transports of passion is the love of death.”

Death for one’s beloved. “What could be more glorious?” said the hopelessly romantic Marianne in Jane Austin’s *Sense and Sensibility*. Shiffman also gave Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* as a literary example that elevated the romantic myth. In that case, the defiant and heartbroken Edna after realizing she could never be with her lover Robert “returns to the sea whose terrifying power had awakened her and swims out until her strength fails.”

But Shiffman argued that in dying for passionate love, one is not proving his or her worthiness for the beloved. For the beloved is not a real person. They are an idol “to whom one willingly sacrifices oneself so as to prove one’s worthiness.” Therefore the Western literary tradition is inspired by a religious metaphysics that rejects life and celebrates overwhelming, all-consuming passion; a passion that elevates us above our “common concerns,” but also “launches us towards death.”



“What the heretical tradition revolves around is pure pagan eros,” he said, “which is to say boundless desire, a longing that reaches beyond all limited satisfactions, dissolving those limits so as to arrive at absolute unity without differentiation, and reabsorption into the All.”

Eros then. Is it true that its fiery intensity is impossible to experience in the conjugal embrace?

According to de Rougemont, if obstacles are responsible for heightening passion, then amazingly the “obstacle which nurtures all passion can be reborn within marriage.”

De Rougemont provocatively suggested: “If it is true that passion seeks the Inaccessible, and if it is true that the Other as such remains the best-defended mystery in the eyes of demanding love—could Eros and Agape not join in a paradoxical alliance at the very heart of an accepted marriage?”

Shiffman concluded his lecture by reminding us that the erotic longing within us can “only be satisfied by loving the Good.”

And if we “evacuate beings of goodness,” if we think that our mortal flesh is something dirty, something we have to escape, than paradoxically we will “be impelled to seek the Good only beyond them,” meaning we will desire ultimately death.

But if we see that the body as created by God is very good, what is revealed is the poignant beauty of marriage. As de Rougemont acutely observed: “Whereas, according to the doctrines of mystical paganism, human love was sublimated so thoroughly as to be made into a god even while it was being dedicated to death, Christianity has restored human love to its proper status, and in this status has hallowed it by means of marriage.”

## Upcoming Events

### January

- 21 Wednesday, 4:30pm  
**“Abraham and the Absoluteness of God”**  
*Jon D. Levenson (Harvard University)*



- 28 Wednesday, 4:30pm  
 A symposium on  
**“The Interior Life: Perspectives from Literature, Psychoanalysis, and Spirituality”**  
*Jonathan Lear (University of Chicago)*  
*Bernard McGinn (University of Chicago)*  
*Lisa Ruddick (University of Chicago)*  
*Rosanna Warren (University of Chicago)*

### February

- 5 Thursday, 4:30pm  
**“Aquinas’s Third Way of Proving a God: Logic or Love?”**  
*Fr. Stephen Brock (Pontifical University of the Holy Cross)*



- 19 Thursday, 4:30pm  
**“Theology and Evolutionary Naturalism: How Much Can Biology Explain?”**  
*John Haught (Georgetown University)*
- 19 [TENTATIVE] Thursday, 12:00pm  
 Cultural forum downtown luncheon on  
**“Science, Faith, and the New Atheism”**  
*John Haught (Georgetown University)*



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– Kenneth Woodward, former religion editor of *Newsweek*, on the Lumen Christi Institute in his letter “Farewell, Cardinal” in the *Chicago Tribune*

**Taking notes at symposium on “Does Christianity Need Metaphysics?” (Nov. 6)**

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