



THE BEACON

NEWSLETTER OF THE LUMEN CHRISTI INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC THOUGHT

SPRING 2024

“The Lumen Christi Institute not only adds to my intellectual pursuits, but actually allows me to pursue them in the first place.”

Max B.

University of Chicago Class of '25 and Nicklin Fellow

2 LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

3 NICKLIN FELLOWS INTERVIEW

6 WINTER AND SPRING QUARTERS OVERVIEW

8 INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR JOHN BOYER

10 A SUMMER SEMINAR SUCCESS STORY

12 THE CATHOLIC CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM NETWORK

14 ILN SUMMIT: DOES THE UNIVERSITY NEED RELIGION?

15 SYMPOSIUM ON APPROACHES TO VIRTUE

LUMEN
CHRISTI
INSTITUTE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Daniel Wasserman-Soler

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alietia Caughron, Chair

John T. Cusack

Noel J. Francisco

Prior Peter Funk, O.S.B.

Richard W. Garnett

Julie Jansen Kraemer

Noel Moore

Anna Bonta Moreland

Charles W. Mulaney, Jr.

James N. Perry, Jr.

Hon. J. Peter Ricketts

Mark E. Schneider

R. Scott Turicchi

BOARD OF ADVISORS

Rev. Brian Daley, S.J.

Vincent Carraud

Sr. Agnes Cunningham, SSCM

Mary Ann Glendon

Bernard McGinn

Fr. David Tracy

Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron

Carol Zaleski

FOUNDING EPISCOPAL
MODERATOR

Cardinal Francis George, O.M.I. †

Former Archbishop of Chicago

FOUNDING EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR

Thomas Levergood †

Dear friends,

AT THE LUMEN CHRISTI INSTITUTE, we invest in the person and in the friendships that bring our mission to life. In this edition of the Beacon, I'm excited to share the personal stories of students who have been inspired by the Lumen Christi Institute's programs – which your support has made possible.



This year, we emphasized intimate reading groups, investing in the students who will become future leaders. We invited them to propose, design, and lead their own programs, fostering a more personalized space for their intellectual journey. We also launched the inaugural cohort of the Nicklin Fellows program, supporting University of Chicago undergraduates in the pursuit of their academic interests. Participants in this program are cultivating robust, intellectual friendships rooted in a common love of truth, beauty, and goodness.

I am proud that Lumen Christi has become a haven for students to hold open and thoughtful conversations, which lead to meaningful friendships. I hope you'll appreciate reading what our students had to say for themselves as we showcase interviews with three of our fellows as well as several other stories in this edition of the *Beacon*.

I welcome you to write to me directly (dwasserman@lumenchristi.org) with your ideas of how we can continue to serve our students and the broader community.

Yours in Christ,

Daniel Wasserman-Soler
Executive Director



An interview with the Nicklin Fellows, LCI's newest undergraduate program

WHAT IS A GOOD LIFE? HOW DO WE FIND A PURPOSE FROM our talents and passions? And, how does religion (or its absence) inform our answers to these questions? These were the questions University of Chicago student Arjun Mazumdar (College '25) was asking himself as he designed his Nicklin Fellowship project – a reading group on Jorge Luis Borges and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Arjun is part of the inaugural cohort of Nicklin Fellows, a new initiative launched by the Lumen Christi Institute this year. The fellowship supports University of Chicago undergraduates in the pursuit of their academic interests, especially those related to existential questions of being and purpose. The fellowship cultivates robust, intellectual friendships rooted in a common love of truth, beauty, and goodness.

We asked three fellows about their experience in the inaugural cohort of the Nicklin Fellows Program: Arjun, Jacob Neplokh '27, and Max Baumeister '25

LCI: UChicago already has a rigorous academic program. What does the Nicklin Fellows Program at the Lumen Christi Institute (LCI) add to your intellectual pursuits?

ARJUN: I came to LCI seeking the “life of the mind” and conversations of great, canonical texts. LCI's Fundamental Questions seminars, which I've attended as a Nicklin Fellow, have become a haven for me, a place to discuss fundamental questions with open-minded, intellectually curious peers. Being a Nicklin Fellow has enabled me to embody the University's intellectual spirit more than any other activity or class, and my work this quarter has been among the most rewarding experiences of my college career.

JACOB: The Nicklin Fellows Program was one of the highlights of my freshman year at the University of Chicago. The Nicklin Fellows Program gave me the opportunity to personally engage with scholars that LCI brings in, broadening my exposure to various thinkers even further.

MAX: The Lumen Christi Institute not only adds to my intellectual pursuits, but actually allows me to pursue them in the first place. As a college student, you tend to mostly focus on...college. The Nicklin Fellows Program allows me to pursue my intellectual interests outside classes.

LCI: Part of the fellowship is designing and implementing an intellectual, community-oriented project. What is your Nicklin Fellows project and how did it go?



Arjun Mazumdar '25

Nicklin Fellows, continued

ARJUN: For my project, I designed a reading group that fuses fiction and philosophy to discuss existential questions: “Texts of Existence: The Interplay of Religion, Individualism, and the Cosmos in Borges and Nietzsche.” We read and discussed *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim* and *The Library of Babel* by Jorge Luis Borges, and selections from *The Gay Science*, by Friedrich Nietzsche. Anecdotally, I can confirm that regardless of students’ familiarity with Borges and Nietzsche, participants left feeling inspired, interested, and hungry for more.

JACOB: I am planning a reading group for next year on Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. The work is famously lengthy and dense, but guidance from LCI—like organizing conversations with Dostoevsky expert Paul Contino—will make this manageable and a success.

MAX: My Nicklin Fellows project is a weekly reading group on James Burnham’s 1941 *The Managerial Revolution*, and it is great to be able to read it with students from all majors.

LCI: What are some questions you found yourself engaging with in your fellowship project or during the Fundamental Questions seminar? What inspired you to pick your fellowship project?

ARJUN: My inquiries were: What is a good life? How do we find a purpose from our talents and passions? And, how does religion (or its absence) inform our answers to these questions? It seemed fitting for me to discuss these using a confluence of fiction and non-fiction existentialism, something rare within the classroom. Nietzsche inspires our critical faculties, while Borges excites our imaginations. It was this combination that allowed for a unique approach to our inquiries. These questions occupy the minds of most undergraduates, but academic and social pressures inhibit us from truly dedicating ourselves to them. The opportunity to debate these points, uninterrupted, for an hour and a half every other week, accompanied by two great thinkers, is nonpareil.

JACOB: The first program I participated in at LCI was a fundamental questions seminar on José Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses*. A key part of the text and discussion focused on an absence of a) respect for history

(or tradition) and b) something higher to aspire to. Given Ortega y Gasset’s correct prediction on the destructive effects of such a condition, I wanted to interrogate an earlier text addressing similar existential themes. Particularly, *The Brothers Karamazov* focuses on religion—a potential solution often absent in contemporary discourse.

MAX: Some big questions we found ourselves battling with in the fellowship project are (1) are we still living under capitalism? and (2) what even is capitalism? Burnham, as early as the 1940s, was already arguing that capitalism was in fact dead. Being a foreign policy student myself, I actually first became interested in Burnham for his influential foreign policy views. But then I realized that he actually had a very rich background in political philosophy and theory. After reading his book *The Machiavellians*, I knew I wanted to read *The Managerial Revolution*.

LCI: How will the Nicklin Fellows program prepare you to take future leadership roles in the workplace and society?

ARJUN: I had to prepare talking points for each session, introduce each text to a diverse audience, and develop a faithful, profound understanding of each text for my fellowship project. Most importantly, I had to field unexpected questions, mediate debates, and be willing to throw away my prepared notes when a more insightful discursive direction revealed itself. This summer, I will be working in a client-facing role in a corporate environment, and the ability to distill information quickly, translate arguments, and invite differing perspectives will be immeasurable. Most importantly, both Borges and Nietzsche emphasize the importance of time, the resilience of free will, and the merits of critically examining one’s values. These principles will make me a better co-worker, and employee. They have also helped align my professional ambitions more clearly with my passions.

JACOB: The Nicklin Fellows program expects fellows to carefully prepare the pedagogical design of our projects. These skills will, of course, be quite helpful in any profes-

sional or social role because they depend on prudence and deliberation.

MAX: It taught me that intellectual pursuits should be genuine in order to get the most out of them. It also taught me that intellectual pursuits should be unpretentious and shared. You never know who might share your interests.

LCI: How did working with LCI’s staff help you shape this project and offer support?

ARJUN: LCI was invaluable in helping me craft my project. Danny Wasserman encouraged me to apply, after observing my curiosity during LCI’s Fundamental Questions seminar on Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses*. Austin Walker helped me streamline my lofty proposal, and narrowed my extensive reading list down to two authors, who would most engage and excite students and offered advice on how to navigate Socratic conversations as a leader. Finally, David Strobach’s operational support was instrumental. I’m so grateful to the Lumen Christi Institute and its donors for investing in my intellectual development.

JACOB: I owe much gratitude to the LCI staff for helping me to workshop my project idea, assisting with logistical matters, and for putting me in touch with a Dostoevsky expert: all have been crucial. More generally, I also want to thank the entire LCI team for creating a welcoming, intellectual space on campus.

MAX: A better question would be “How did working with Lumen Christi staff NOT help you shape this project and offer support?” In short, the Lumen Christi Institute was incredibly supportive, useful, and generous. The Lumen Christi Institute provided the place, the material, nutrition, and most important, intellectual guidance. What else could a college student ask for?

“I’m so grateful to the Lumen Christi Institute and its donors for investing in my intellectual development.”



Jacob Neplokh '27



Max Baumeister '25

Spotlights:

APR 10-12: a weekend of Dante with Denys Turner



Dante the Theologian: Ken Woodward interviews Denys Turner

APR 4: Magis Lecture on “Do We Know More Than the Apostles? Or Do Doctrines Develop?” with Lewis Ayres (Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas)

MAY 15: Chicagoland Catholic Culture Series “The Bond of All Creation: Renaissance Humanism and the Incarnate Word” with Matthew Gaetano (Hillsdale College)

115 events

2,210 in-person attendees

367 online attendees



Winter & Spring 2024

MAY 2: “What is Ideology?” with Mark Shiffman and James Matthew Wilson



FEB. 3: “Hannah Arendt and the Human Condition” with Thomas Meyer (Ludwig Maximilian University)



FEB. 10: Red Mass for Legal Professionals and Students with Fr. Andrew Wawrzyn (Calvert House), Rev. Joseph N. Perry (Chicago Auxiliary Bishop), Rev. Jeffrey Grob (Chicago Auxiliary Bishop), and Fr. Michael Trail (St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church)



MAR 22: “The Quandaries of Biotechnology: a symposium of Theory and Practice” with Paul Scherz (University of Virginia), Silvianna Aspray (University of Cambridge), Stephen C. Meredith (University of Chicago), Lesley Rice (Pontifical John Paul II Institute) and more.



Spring Non-credit Course: “Approaches to Virtue: Secular and Religious, Ancient and Modern” with professors from the University of Chicago



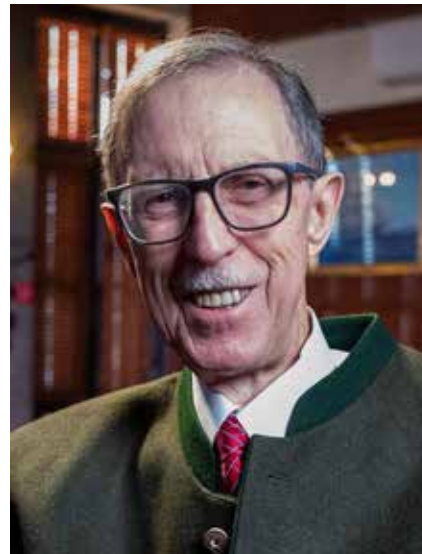
APR. 12: “Poetry Being the Body: Theology in Dante” student master class with Denys Turner (Yale University emeritus)

PROFESSOR JOHN BOYER, *University of Chicago*

We sat down for an interview with John Boyer, Martin A. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor of History at the University of Chicago and long-time Dean of the College (1992-2023). Prof. Boyer is the author of several books, including *The University of Chicago: A History and Culture and Political Crisis in Vienna: Christian Socialism in Power, 1897-1918*. Earlier this year, Professor Boyer and LCI Executive Director Daniel Wasserman-Soler co-taught “*The Closing of the American Mind and the Death of Philosophy*,” a seminar for undergraduate students at the University of Chicago. Part of LCI’s *Fundamental Questions Seminar* program, the course is designed to foster rigorous conversation around significant texts – enabling students to experience the force of the existential questions which animate their lives.

LCI: You attended Loyola University of Chicago as an undergraduate. Please tell us about your experience in Catholic higher education / Jesuit education.

BOYER: Loyola University had a core curriculum, emphasizing theology, philosophy, and (for some students) Latin. It was a Catholic version of what we would call “general education” at UChicago today, and I admired their willingness to ask students to engage in a broad set of liberal arts courses that were completely unrelated to their major. The Jesuits also had a compelling philosophy of education. Their idea was that everything you do is for the greater glory of God, even if it’s not directly religious. So, if you asked them to describe the purpose of a liberal education, they would say something about the cultivation of critical thinking skills, but they would also argue that you should deploy these skills for the good of society. That is a philosophy that I tried to carry over to my time as Dean of the College at UChicago. It is why I supported creating organizations like the Institute of Politics that involve



civic engagement and why I worked very hard in the establishment of the Odyssey Scholarship program.

LCI: You’ve taught Western Civilization at the University and edited Chicago’s Readings in Western Civilization series. What do you see as the place of Western Civilization in higher education today and particularly at the University of Chicago?

BOYER: I started teaching Civ in the College as an advanced graduate student in 1973. During my first quarter of teaching, I was asked to teach Greek and Roman history to two sections of 20 students each. My research specialty is modern Central European (German and Austrian) history, so I had to go to the library and give myself a crash course in ancient Greek and Roman history, along with the history of ancient Judaism and of early Christianity. I think I took perhaps as many of 200 books out of the library in ancient history, just to get caught up.

It was a transformative experience, and I have been teaching ancient, medieval, early modern, as well as modern European history ever since. I found that studying intensely new scholarly fields in European history that were (nominally) unrelated to my own research area was fascinating, and it certainly broadened my historiographical horizons. I really enjoyed the intellectual challenge of working up fields of study that were not directly relevant to the conduct of my own scholarly research.

The broad compass of the History of Western Civilization course also underscores the importance of an informed knowledge of the whole history of Europe, from ancients to moderns, and not only on the



undergraduate level. I fear that doctoral education in History in the United States is becoming ever narrower and more specialized, to the point where students are losing a command of the field as a whole. This is a common complaint, and no one knows what to do about it. To give but one example: one really cannot understand modern European culture without a solid knowledge of ancient history and the cultures of antiquity. Yet, how many American graduate students specializing in modern European history nowadays have read such ancient authors as Thucydides, Aristotle, Cicero, Sallust, Tacitus, and Augustine in a serious and systematic way?

LCI: As you worked on your first edition of *The University of Chicago: A History*, what was something that surprised you?

BOYER: I was surprised by the boldness and openness to risk that marked key leaders of the University, and I was also surprised by serious financial and organizational challenges that those same leaders had to deal with over time. The success of the University of Chicago resulted from its ability to combine two very different cultural traditions, one of which was deeply indebted to the model of the classic nineteenth-century European (and especially German) research university, while the other

resulted from an American conception of the college as a local institution embracing the mission of civic service to the community and anchored especially in undergraduate instruction. From the outset the new University had enormous ambitions, and it enjoyed and grew accustomed to having very substantial philanthropic support. Yet over the decades tensions between ardent zeal of innovation and the reality of constrained financial resources became all too apparent. My book explores both themes: the surging academic distinction of the University and its capacity for bold, transformational reforms in American higher education, and its ongoing search for the necessary resources to sustain such distinction.

LCI: You participated this year in two Lumen Christi Institute seminars. Can you tell us about what you think the Institute offers to the university community?

BOYER: I think that Lumen Christi has remarkable opportunities to supplement and enrich the regular academic work of the University by the kinds of intellectual conversations, lectures, workshops, and debates that it has regularly sponsored, particularly in the context of the multiple Catholic traditions of learning and scholarly engagement.

The St. Irenaeus Institute: A Summer Seminar Story

The Lumen Christi Institute interviewed Joshua Miller and Aaron Ebert, summer seminar alumni and founders of the St. Irenaeus Institute in Milwaukee, WI.

LCI: Could you explain the impetus for the St. Irenaeus Institute? How did it come about? Where did it start?

The concrete impetus for the St. Irenaeus Institute was a Lumen Christi summer seminar in 2021 on Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* (co-ed by Fr. John Behr and Lewis Ayres), which we both attended. Joshua excitedly shared some insights from the seminar with seminarians from his hometown of Milwaukee, and they expressed a desire for a forum to learn more about Irenaeus and his work. Thus, the Fides Patrum ("Faith of the Fathers") seminar was launched in September 2021 at the local Newman Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Every few weeks, a small group, led by Joshua, met in a homey living room-type space to read and discuss *Against Heresies*. But people kept coming and the seminar grew. So, we moved on to other patristic texts and began inviting other scholars and students to help lead the seminar. It soon became evident that there was both a need and desire in the Milwaukee area for a larger institute devoted to cultivating and teaching the Catholic intellectual tradition. Out of conversations with various scholars, clergy, and lay people, the St. Irenaeus Institute was born.

LCI: What was Lumen Christi's role in sparking this idea?

The Lumen Christi seminar encouraged us to press on with



"The Lumen Christi seminar encouraged us to press on with our broader vision of promoting and teaching the Catholic intellectual tradition in a forum outside the traditional bounds of the academy yet still engaged with it."

our broader vision of promoting and teaching the Catholic intellectual tradition in a forum outside the traditional bounds of the academy yet still engaged with it. Lumen Christi, with its history of offering opportunities for high-level study of the tradition from within the living, faithful community of the Church has been an exemplar for us. Lumen Christi's early sponsorship for Fides Patrum was also invaluable—in donating books, giving advice for further growth, and providing credibility to a young initiative.

LCI: It sounds like both of you have had some serious discernment of life (seminary/RCIA)? What role, if any, did your summer seminar experience have in that?

JOSHUA: The summer seminars put on by Lumen Christi informed my vocational discernment by increasing a love for robust study and teaching of the Church's intellectual tradition in a manner un beholden to the expectations and priorities of the academic world today. My encounter with the work of Lumen Christi helped me envision ways in which scholarship and teaching could better serve the Church through continuing intellectual formation in non-traditional ways, set apart from a formal teaching position in a university. In this way, I consider my vocation to ordained ministry in the Church as compatible with my desire to promote the study and teaching of her intellectual heritage.

AARON: The Lumen Christi summer seminars have been a radiant instance of one of the attractive forces that drew me back into the Catholic Church, and that is her rich intellectual tradition. Many factors went into my

discernment of returning to the Church, but my study of the Church's tradition—especially the Church Fathers—was a critical one. The Lumen Christi seminars I took on Irenaeus and Origen exemplified the theological and philosophical rigor combined with fidelity to the Catholic faith that you find in the Church's great doctors and teachers. I found this combination deeply compelling, and I am grateful for the way Lumen Christi has so consistently and creatively sought to give it expression today.

LCI: What "gap" is the St. Irenaeus Institute filling locally?

Over the past twenty or so years, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has been experiencing a spiritual renewal. Many have sensed both a need and a desire for an intellectual dimension to supplement, enrich, and deepen this renewal. We aim to provide a variety of forums in which Catholics and other Christians—students and scholars, priests and deacons, lay men and women—throughout the Milwaukee area can encounter and be enriched by the Catholic intellectual tradition. One example of this has been the planning of the 2025 Legacies Conference (on the anniversaries of Nicaea I and Vatican II) which, while spearheaded by the St. Irenaeus Institute, has brought together representatives from Marquette, Saint Francis Seminary, Sacred Heart Seminary, and the Archdiocese. Similarly, our Fides Patrum seminar has gathered local Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and other scholars committed to the study of early Christianity.

LCI: What are people saying about it?

Here are a few testimonials:

BELLA HSU (young lay Catholic): "I first encountered the St. Irenaeus Institute as a non-Catholic who was looking for ways to grow in their understanding of the faith. I had previously studied Catholic theology as an undergraduate student and was eager to delve into the rich teachings of the early Church fathers. Over the next few months, I was welcomed into an intellectual community that engaged more than just my mind. Now a baptized and confirmed Catholic, I know that the St. Irenaeus institute played a formative role in my conversion to the Catholic faith."

FR. ANDREW LINN (Archdiocese of Milwaukee): "I am so

excited for the growth of the Saint Irenaeus Institute. I am excited to see it become a locus of Catholic intellectual life in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, much like the Lumen Christi Institute is in Chicago. The church in Milwaukee is thriving in so many ways, and the Institute answers a real need for the Church both at UWM and in the wider community!"

LCI: Where do you want to go with the St. Irenaeus Institute? What is on the immediate horizon for the project and what are your aspirations?

For the upcoming academic year, we are planning an exploration of St. Augustine's theology for our Fides Patrum seminar, and we are in the final stages of getting an accredited course on Early Christianity approved at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (with the help of Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology) for Spring 2025, to be taught by Aaron. In response to interest from local clergy, we are also developing a reading group for priests and deacons on patristics homilies. We hope to begin this soon. Though it is more than a year out, we are also deep into the planning of a major academic conference commemorating the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea together with the 60th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. The conference, which is co-sponsored by the St. Irenaeus Institute, Marquette, Sacred Heart, Saint Francis de Sales, and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, will take place on September 4-7, 2025 in Milwaukee. Two prominent bishops will deliver plenary addresses, and a few well-known scholars and theologians will give keynote lectures. (Registration and Call for Papers forthcoming!) Other ways of serving the Church and the academy in Milwaukee—such as summer seminars for high school students and training for catechists and lay ministers—are on the further horizon. Ultimately, our aspiration is to put Milwaukee on the map as a place for Catholic intellectual renewal.



CATHOLIC CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM NETWORK



On Feb. 21 the Catholic Criminal Justice Reform Network held a Chicago-based dialogue "Reconciling Justice: A Community Conversation on Criminal Justice Reform." The night included Mass, breakout discussions, and a panel featuring men and women impacted by the justice system and Cardinal Blase Cupich (Archdiocese of Chicago). The invite-only event was attended by 177 participants – including legal scholars, attorneys, judges, clergy, law enforcement, people impacted personally by incarceration, and others committed to seeing criminal justice reform. The event was co-sponsored by the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage at Loyola University Chicago, Hinda Institute, Kolbe House Jail Ministry, Catholic Lawyers Guild of Chicago, the Athenaeum, Loyola University Chicago School of Law, and Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation.

Read more about the event using the QR codes below.

READ MORE
ABOUT THE
EVENT:



NATIONAL
CATHOLIC
REPORTER



CHICAGO
CATHOLIC



Which Science, Whose Faith: The 2024 In Lumine Network Summit on 'Does the University Need Religion?'



JANUARY'S SCIENCE AND RELIGION SUMMIT FULFILLED A dual purpose. As the 2024 annual meeting of the In Lumine Network, it brought together member institutes, prospective members, and fellow travelers interested in sharing best practices and charting the future of the network. At the same time, it addressed the crisis of faith and the rise of the "nones" (the non-religious). Taking as its guiding theme the question "Does the university need religion?", the summit explored topics such as the role of prayer in the good life from the perspective of neuroscience and practical concerns over fostering meaningful dialogue.

Notre Dame philosopher Meghan Sullivan drew on the parable of the prodigal son to provide a scriptural framework for how Catholic institutes can best approach the pluralistic secular university, and Steve Barr, a renowned physicist and president of the Society of Catholic Scientists, shared his insights on the science and religion dialogue in the keynote address. Michael Ferguson (Harvard University) shared how religious commitments make a difference in neuroscience. Michael Burns and Joe Vukov (Loyola University) shared best practices at building dialogue at the university.

In both formal sessions and informal discussions over meals and during breaks, In Lumine Network members brainstormed about the central role of Catholic intellectual institutes in bringing religion back to the academy and continuing to craft their individual and shared programs to further this end.

Event made possible through the support of 'In Lumine: Supporting the Catholic Intellectual Tradition on Campuses Nationwide' (Grant #62372) from the John Templeton Foundation.



Can we be good on our own? A symposium on ancient and modern approaches to virtue

BY EVA MASSEY
*University of Chicago Divinity School Masters Student and
Lumen Christi Institute Participant*

CAN WE BE GOOD ON OUR OWN, OR DO WE NEED DIVINE assistance? Four scholars explored this question in a symposium that was the highlight of LCI's spring University Program Series. With Emily Austin (University of Chicago) moderating, Angela Knobel (University of Dallas), Candace Vogler (University of Chicago), and Daniel Lapsley (University of Notre Dame) reflected on the relationship between Aristotle's and Aquinas' moral frameworks from theological, philosophical, practical, and behavioral-scientific perspectives.

The author of a recent book on the subject, Angela Knobel set the stage by remarking on the relationship between Aristotelian natural virtue and Aquinas' notion of infused virtue. Contrary to typical views, Knobel argued that the apparent dichotomy between the Aristotelian conception of virtue and the Thomistic one is neither as extreme nor as loose as is sometimes supposed. She remarked that Aquinas is both "more Christian and more Aristotelian" than often presumed. Aristotelian excellence consists in becoming the best possible version of oneself through the self-cultivation of virtue, whereas Christian moral excellence has as its goal union with God as His sons and daughters – something we cannot do on our own. While Aquinas embraces Aristotle's view of nature and moral excellence, he joins it to the Christian notion that nature is both transformed and perfected by grace. For Aquinas, the moral excellence radically depends on God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas's notion of infused virtue means that grace radically transforms human fulfillment. For Knobel, Aquinas gives us a thoroughly Aristotelian picture

of the fulfillment of nature, "and yet, in its recognition of our utter dependence on God, it is not Aristotelian at all."

Candace Vogler pressed further into the inadequacies of the Aristotelian moral framework as a suitable foundation for contemporary moral thought. "No, we can't be good on our own," she concluded. Vogler noted that we should not take the Aristotelian account because it excludes all but well-to-do and able-bodied men in the scope of beings capable and worthy of the moral life. Pressing on in a jovial and satirical manner, she further pointed out the quietness of such a man's conscience – "it is very hard to imagine Aristotle's phronimos ever needing to go to confession!"



As the psychologist on the panel, Daniel Lapsley noted points of resonance between Aquinas' account of moral and infused virtue and the behavioral science theories of the social cognitive development of moral identity. Empirical research has revealed that young children have an inborn moral sense akin to synderesis, the Thomistic concept of conscience. However, on the issue of divine aid, he emphasized that empirical research is inherently limited, presenting challenges to any future project of "Thomistic virtue psychology." Psychology cannot access the supernatural, and even if it could, there is much evidence that moral goals and identity can be accounted for without an appeal to supernatural origins. As Aristotle asserted, we have access to moral exemplars. One case for the need for divine aid, on Lapsley's account, is the darker side of social formation. Human agency is saturated with contingency; our motivations as well as those of others are not always transparent, and therefore precarious. In such a world, getting it right might just require God's help.



LUMEN CHRISTI INSTITUTE

1220 EAST 58TH STREET
CHICAGO, IL 60637
773.955.5887

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
CHICAGO, IL
PERMIT NO. 6230

SUPPORT OUR WORK!

Please consider making a gift to support our work. Return the enclosed envelope, donate online or scan the QR code **below**.

WWW.LUMENCHRISTI.ORG/DONATE



**SUBSCRIBE AND FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA
FOR VIDEO AND AUDIO FROM OUR EVENTS**



Your gift supports new encounters with wisdom for students at the University of Chicago and beyond.

