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THE BEACON

NEWSLETTER OF THE LUMEN CHRISTI INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC THOUGHT

“We are intelligent,
which means both that
we seek truth and
we make sense of our
lives through stories.”

- from “The Importance of Stories”, pp. 4-6

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear friends of the Lumen Christi Institute,

I would like to begin by sharing with you a short prayer from a meditation of St. John Henry Newman:

O my Lord Jesus, low as I am in your all holy sight, I am strong in you, strong through your Immaculate Mother, through your Saints: and thus I can do much for the Church, for the world, for all I love.

I love this prayer! In just one sentence, it reminds me of the beautiful things that can happen when we place our trust in God and entrust our hopes to the Virgin Mary and the saints.

In 1997, University of Chicago scholars founded the Institute in order to make the Catholic intellectual tradition a vital part of the secular university and the broader culture. Today, we continue to offer Catholic formation to University of Chicago students, faculty and staff. We also collaborate with colleagues at a range of institutions (Duke University, Hope College, University of Nebraska, to name a few) through our In Lumine Network, so that campuses across the country can be enriched by the Church's wisdom.

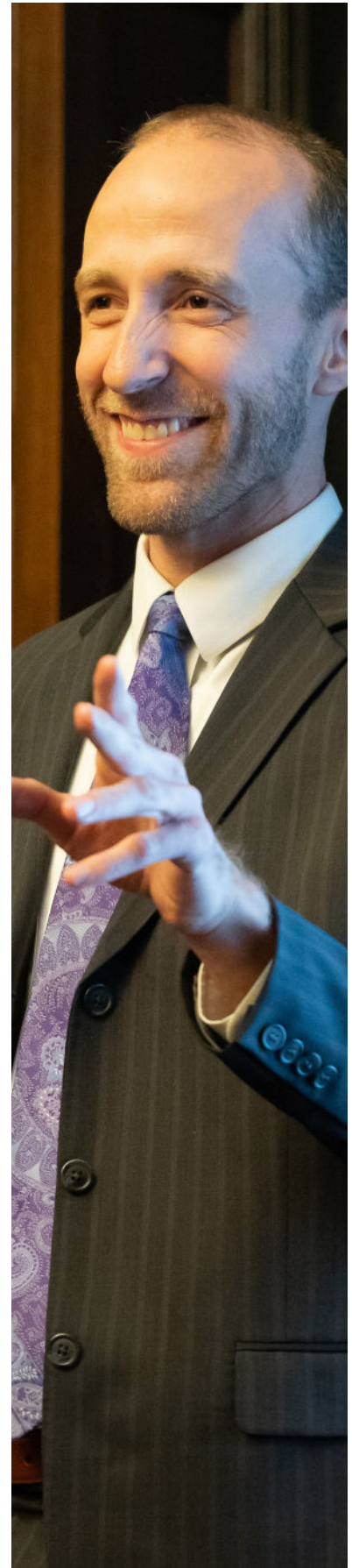
Today, our students find the Catholic intellectual tradition in the classics, like Augustine and Newman, and also in places that may surprise you. In this issue of the Beacon, you'll learn about our visit from master storyteller Martin Shaw, as well as student-led reading groups on Hannah Arendt and Léon Bloy. Our programs challenge students to integrate the Church's wisdom into all fields. To that end, you also will hear from theologian Peter Casarella on programs for scientists and engineers. He will share about Duke University's programs in the Catholic intellectual tradition, available partly through the support of Lumen Christi's latest grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

Please join me in praying that the Church's wisdom may reach students in all areas. St. John Henry Newman, pray for us!

Yours in Christ,

Daniel Wasserman-Soler

Daniel Wasserman-Soler





The Importance of Stories:

A Week with Martin Shaw

On a frigid night in early February, the backyard of Gavin House is sprinkled with snow and filled with students. Despite the bite in the air there is an undeniable warmth to the darkness. Firepits crackle and flicker on smiling faces and fingers wrap snugly around mugs of hot chocolate. One friend leans over to make a laughing aside to another. A low hum of voices fills a space whose walls are trees, fence, and the limit of the firelight's strength. A bearded man stands before them, with a mien at first gruff, but then you see the twinkling eyes and the wry smile tugging at the

edge of his mouth. He lifts his hands and a hush falls. For a split second there is silent anticipation and the sound of measured breathing. And then,

It is said and said truly of the hero Fionn mac Cumhaill that if a day goes by without his name being mentioned the world as we know it will come to an end.

Dr. Martin Shaw is a mythologist and storyteller. As a mythologist, Shaw studies and teaches ancient stories, especially of his own place and people: the Irish,



for his roots, and the small westerly region of England whence he hails. In a way, mythology is like any other academic discipline, requiring advanced graduate training with the tools proper to its field. But a true mythologist, Shaw explains, cannot care only for theory and nothing for the magic of the story—that would be to lose in study the heart of the very thing you study.

This is why during his week-long visit to Chicago in February, Shaw concluded his conversational lectures on the theory of mythopoetics and faerie stories with a spellbinding retelling of the Irish tale, “The Birth of Ossian.”

For Shaw, stories are a basic human need because humans are meaning-seeking creatures. We are intelligent, which means both that we seek truth and we make sense of our lives and our world through narratives, or stories. Our faith, after all, rests on a story more fantastic than any myth: a chosen people questing through millennia, pillars of fire, a virgin birth, angelic messengers, and dead men walking. “The Christian myth is the one with the strangest God of all,” Shaw remarks, “the one with a dog in the race; who throws himself into the madness.”

Learning how to enjoy a myth helps cultivate a distinctly Christian attitude: one of receptivity

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and wonder towards that which exceeds, transports, and sometimes troubles or overwhelms. Myths can be encountered but not conquered; formed by a whole people and with no single author. The meaning may



touch us but always eludes mastery. To truly love and learn from myths, Shaw insists, like the Questing Beast of Arthurian legend, one must ever trail but never trap the ancient stories of one's people. Once you trap it, you have a pelt, not a wild animal.

These transcendent stories are of gravest importance in the moments of greatest pain and difficulty, when facts break down. "Some things," Shaw explains, "are too big for facts. You need poetry." Poetry—not simply rhymes and meters but the flight of the soul—is what you will need when the world bewilders you, when your heart has been broken. We are in a time ripe for myth, because everywhere we see turmoil, unpleasantness, wildness writ large. "Myths always begin when we are outnumbered and utterly bewildered," Shaw explains.

'Myth' nowadays is a word we use to belittle something that is not true or need not be taken seriously. Instead, Shaw says we should think of a myth as a sacred story that we receive through the hands of our ancestors.

A real myth is not selling you something, not trying to convince you that you could be better if you do x, y, or z. A real myth is troubling, difficult. It is never a neat story.

Yet myths do offer important insights about how we came to be the way we are. All cultures have a poetic explanation of origin, which tells a great deal about that culture. We can see this in studying the Hebrew scriptures, the stories of God's loving creation and slow revelation. Myths of many cultures are of value to the Christian because, as St. Augustine tells us, all truth is God's truth. Or in Shaw's words, "Many myths and stories have pinpricks of eternity in them."

Shaw's most recent book *Liturgies of the Wild: Myths that Make Us* is published by Penguin Random House.



Scan to watch Dr. Shaw's lecture on YouTube



INSIDE THE CLASSROOM:

Why Think? Hannah Arendt and The Life of the Mind



This winter, twenty University of Chicago undergraduates filled Gavin House's conference room to discuss the last major work of Hannah Arendt (d. 1975). One of the twentieth century's most influential thinkers, Arendt aimed to write a three-part book on thinking, willing, and judging but died before finishing the final volume.

The impulse to write the book came from attending the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. She found "no sign in him of firm ideological convictions or of specific evil motives... it was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*" (her emphasis). For Arendt, Eichmann's "absence of thinking" prompted a fundamental question: Could the activity of thinking "make men abstain from evil doing or even 'condition' them against it?"

For four weeks in January and February, students joined Prof. Magnus Ferguson to discuss Arendt's thought provoking work and the ways that it intersects with the Catholic intellectual tradition. Arendt's doctoral dissertation explored the work of St. Augustine (*Love and Saint Augustine*), and she drew upon his work throughout the rest of her career. Arendt taught at the University of Chicago's Committee on Social Thought from 1963 to 1967.

The Arendt reading group was organized by Alex Hu, a Nicklin Fellow at the Lumen Christi Institute. The purpose of the Nicklin Fellows is to support University of Chicago undergraduate students in the pursuit of their personal academic and intellectual interests, especially those related to existential questions of being. The Nicklin Fellowship cultivates robust intellectual friendships rooted in a common love of truth, beauty, and goodness.



A Day in the Life of a Lumen Christi Student

with
Miriam Shah

Miriam enjoys walking the mile to campus from her apartment on 53rd Street. Hyde Park is beautiful in the spring—over the weekend it was overrun by visitors coming to appreciate the cherry blossoms, but this morning as Miriam crosses the quad, she has the cherry blossoms to herself.

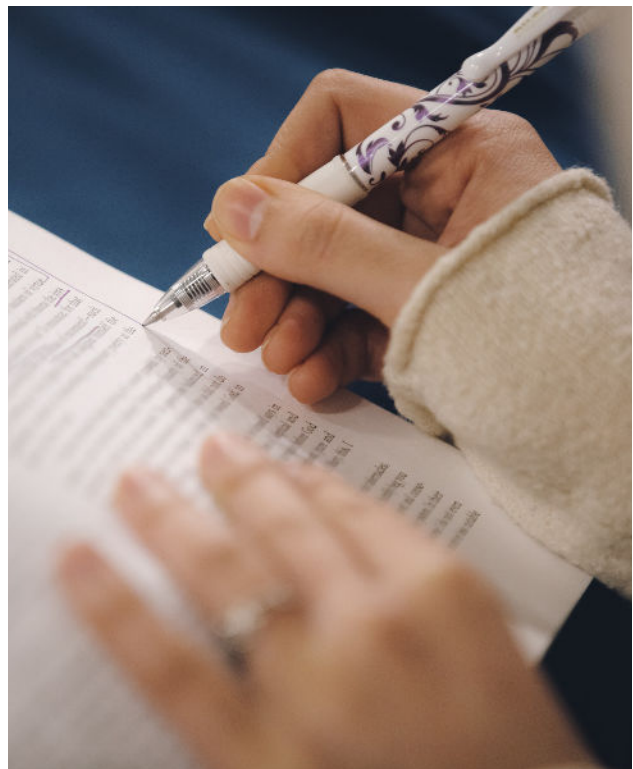
Miriam is in the final quarter of her Masters at the University of Chicago Divinity School. This morning, she is on her way to class with Prof. Richard Rosengarten on literary criticism and Christian thought. As Miriam sips her coffee, the class discusses literary theory and the relationship between literature, religion, and language. The theory under examination argues that a culture or individual's reception of literature depends on what one understands the role of language to be. The class considers how this tension informs Dante's masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*. Rosengarten explains that while in Dante's time Hebrew was thought to be the ultimate language, Dante himself believed Italian to be the most pure language. At the end of class, Miriam notices that she has half a cup of tepid coffee, smiles and makes a mental note to thank Austin Walker (associate director of Lumen Christi), for recommending the class to her.

On her way to lunch, Miriam runs into her friend Jake, who lives at Ricketts House, Lumen Christi's student residence. Both lead graduate student reading groups at the Institute, and they chat about how the groups are going. Miriam's group will meet later that evening to continue working through a compilation of works by Léon Bloy, an early twentieth-century French Catholic writer.

Jake mentions that he recently went to Michael Le Chevallier (senior associate director of Lumen Christi), for career advice and found it very helpful. Miriam laughs, "I also got some really good career advice from Michael!" In fact, she is planning to email Michael after lunch to tell him she got the public policy internship he sent her a few weeks ago.

Later that afternoon, Miriam is at Gavin House for her shift as a student worker. She mostly helps Margaux Taffet (cultural forum coordinator of Lumen Christi) with downtown events and big lectures on campus. Miriam enjoys helping out during events, so that she can extend

to more students the same welcoming atmosphere that makes her so at home at Lumen Christi. But she might like the prep work even more, because then she and Margaux can dive into lively discussions about one of their shared passions: conversion literature. While they fold brochures together for an upcoming dinner-lecture, Miriam confides to Margaux that although she is grateful for the opportunity presented by the internship, she still nurses a hope that she will eventually do doctoral work. "I know what I'd



work on,” she says. “The history of the philosophical concept of attention from Ignatius of Loyola to Simone Weil.” Austin has already given her a recommendation of a scholar at Duke to reach out to when she begins applying for doctoral programs.

Miriam finishes her day in the Gavin House seminar room. That evening, the group is discussing Bloy’s concept of ‘dolorism.’ Bloy believed that suffering could be mystically substituted. “If you suffer,” Miriam explains, “you can suffer on behalf of someone, and that can help them attain salvation. You can even suffer on behalf of an impious nation.” The group breaks out into a debate about whether God wants us to suffer, with Catholics, other Christians, and self-professed agnostics all joining in.

Someone asks if Bloy should be trusted at all since his penchant for alienating the press meant he could not provide for his children financially. Can you separate the art from the artist? Can we really respect someone and use him as a spiritual leader if he allowed his children to die of starvation?

At nine o’clock, the door to Gavin House closes behind her and Miriam reverses her steps to 53rd Street. She continues to ponder the questions from that evening and marvels how these groups and lectures never fail to attract a substantial number of nonbelievers, many



of whom return again and again.

“One thing that’s really striking about the Lumen Christi events,” Miriam thinks, “is that they never compromise the integrity and the truths of the Catholic faith. People who have no faith background at all are still so drawn to these events and to the people who organize them because of the strength of this conviction. You can sense that there’s something real and true there.”



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THE LUMEN CHRISTI INSTITUTE
PRESENTS

Witness^{to} the Light

The Mankowski Lectures

From 2012 to 2020, Fr. Paul Mankowski, SJ delivered hundreds of lectures and master classes at the Lumen Christi Institute. Seeking to share the depth of his scholarship, this podcast offers many of his lectures (edited for coherence and quality) to the public in digital format for the first time.



The first season features a course that Fr. Mankowski gave on Joseph Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth*, and dozens of lectures centered around the books of the Bible (including Genesis, many of the prophets, the Gospel of Matthew, and St. Paul's Letter to the Romans). Two interviews with people who knew Fr. Mankowski well and can offer an entry point to his person and scholarship conclude the season.



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PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

THE FON'S VITAE INSTITUTE AT DUKE



One afternoon in 2000, Peter Casarella received a phone call. At the time, he was an assistant professor of theology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The number that appeared on the caller ID was from Chicago. The voice on the other end introduced himself as Thomas Levergood, the founder of a new Catholic initiative called ‘The Lumen Christi Institute.’ He had a favor to ask.

“He called me up to help him with this event,” Casarella explains. Levergood had founded the Lumen Christi Institute three years before and he was scheming to bring it to the next level with a major event featuring Cardinal George, then archbishop of Chicago, and the eminent theologian David Tracy. Casarella knew Tracy. “Thomas thought I could be a middleman. And he was right.”

The event was a success and helped lift the Lumen Christi Institute to greater visibility in Chicago and in Catholic intellectual circles more broadly. It also sparked a friendship between Casarella and Levergood. When Casarella moved to Chicago in 2007 for a position at DePaul University, it was not long before he was a regular at Lumen Christi events and in Levergood’s office.

Today, Casarella is a professor at Duke Divinity School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and the founder of Fons Vitae, a member organization of Lumen Christi’s In Lumine Network. Initiated in 2022, the In Lumine Network brings together Catholic institutes at non-Catholic colleges and universities, ensuring that students have access to the Catholic intellectual tradition. The network fosters collaborative programs and sharing of best practices amongst the members. It began through the support of the John Templeton Foundation with a grant to create the first-ever national network of independent institutes of Catholic thought. Like Casarella, many leaders of the member institutes had friendships with Thomas Levergood, though each institute came into being in its own way.

After arriving at Duke in 2020, Casarella was inspired by Levergood to think about how the Catholic intellectual tradition could speak to lacunae in the students’ education. As a fellow with Duke’s Kenan

Institute for Ethics and the Theology, Medicine, and Culture Program, Casarella has a particular awareness of the basic human need for broaching questions about society, technology, ecology, morality, and the common good. To even begin to answer these questions requires a compelling definition of what it means to be human. This is the guidance the Catholic tradition can offer.

Casarella brought his idea to a friend who is a former Duke chaplain. To establish their institute, they needed to answer: what is unique about Duke students? The chaplain said, “They are all pre-med. And even the ones that are not pre-med, they are pre-med too.”

Casarella himself had been a pre-med student before changing course to get his PhD in religious studies. He set out to do something that would speak to pre-meds: intelligent, ambitious students who were inclined to use their intellectual talents to help others and who were hungry for real, ethical guidance in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

The initial cohort of In Lumine Network members had already begun, however, so Casarella followed Levergood’s example and kicked off with a big event, bringing Lumen Christi in as a cosponsor. In the summer of 2023, Casarella and his former student, Sister Damien Marie Savino, FSE, Ph.D. hosted ten graduate students at Duke for a week-long seminar: “Theology for Engineers and Scientists: Technology, Environment, and the Pursuit of Wisdom.” The seminar, underwritten by Lumen Christi’s *In Lumine* Grant (62372), received rave reviews from participants and garnered attention from the wider Duke and Research Triangle community about what Fons Vitae would do next.

The seminar was an initial foray into ethical questions about technology, creation, and the human person, bringing in graduate students from across the country. When Fons Vitae officially became a member of Lumen Christi’s In Lumine Network, Casarella decided to begin with something more focused on the needs of Duke ‘pre-med’ undergraduates. The network gave Fons Vitae a microgrant for a pilot project: the Catholic Medical Humanities Fellowship. The first cohort of the fellowship ran for the 2025-2026 academic year, consisting of monthly meetings led by Dr. John Thorpe, an obstetrician at the University

of North Carolina, and featuring other medical experts to discuss the purpose of medicine.

“We cannot just let these students wither on the vine and go into medical schools, try to make money, and climb the ladder without some teleology, without some direction in life,” Casarella said.

Fellows explored Catholic bioethics, ethical and religious directives, some nuts and bolts, and a Catholic approach to the healing profession. “The intent was to spur them to think about the relationship between the Church and medicine before they apply to medical school, such as what is distinctively Catholic about questions in bioethics and questions related to end of life.”

The year’s capstone was a visit to Washington DC to visit the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception and attend a seminar with two professors at the John Paul II Institute for Studies of Marriage and Family. Students also met with White House officials from Health and Human Services and representatives from the Catholic Medical Association to talk about policy issues in medicine.

The program had 36 applications from highly qualified undergraduates for 12 spots. Due to the demand, they had to turn away lowerclassmen, which Casarella says is a good sign for the sustainability of the fellowship in the future. This program, Casarella explains, is an example of how *Fons Vitae* is trying “to shape and form the hearts and minds of people interested



Peter Casarella and Sister Damien Marie Savino, FSE



Participants in the “Theology for Engineers and Scientists” graduate seminar working at the Duke Campus Farm as part of their hands-on introduction to ecology and faith.graduate seminar.

in Catholic intellectual traditions as they relate to a profession.” His goal is to replicate this program in other academic and professional areas.

The programming that Fons Vitae provides at Duke, like each of the member-institutes of the network across the country, exemplifies Levergood’s vision for the expansion of the effort to maintain the Catholic intellectual tradition today. “We are not trying to do a branch office of Lumen Christi that happens to be at Duke,” Casarella explains. “It’s not like McDonald’s. Thomas was far too much of the libertarian to give his blessing to something like that.”



In the spring of 2021, Casarella called up Levergood to tell him about the idea to start something at Duke and to brainstorm. At that point, Levergood had been diagnosed with cancer. Their conversation did not last long, because Levergood was weak and not up to talking much at the moment, but he loved the idea.

“My dear friend Thomas Levergood passed in August of 2021,” Casarella recounts, “which was a very sad day. I thought, naively, that Thomas would recover. I thought we’d have time to have beers to plan it out. And of course, silly me, I didn’t realize that was my last conversation with Thomas.”

Casarella carries on his friend’s legacy in the work he does to bring the Catholic intellectual tradition to Blue Devil country. Though Levergood did not live to see their first event, Casarella says he feels Levergood’s blessing on his work. Through the friendship of Thomas Levergood and the network, Casarella says, “There is a spiritual link between Lumen Christi and Fons Vitae.”

Fons Vitae’s Medical Humanities Fellowship was made possible through the Lumen Christi Institute’s grant, In Lumine Tuo: Expanding and Sustaining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition Nationwide (grant #63614) from the John Templeton Foundation and the generous support of our donors. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.



Casarella and Savino with participants from the “Theology for Engineers and Scientists” graduate seminar.

FIDELITAS SOCIETY

The Fidelitas Society recognizes committed supporters who make a recurring monthly contribution to the Lumen Christi Institute. **You are invited to become a monthly contributor through the Fidelitas Society.** Your contributions over time will help more students, faculty and the broader Catholic community attend Lumen Christi's programs, and you will be counted among the Institute's most loyal supporters.



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Julie Conway

FIDELITAS SOCIETY MEMBER

“Lumen Christi plays an important role on the university campus in creating a space for undergraduates and graduate students to explore the richness of Catholic intellectual thought in ways that are not otherwise available. Supporting the impact that Lumen Christi has on the young minds of our future innovators, academics, and explorers is vitally important to me.

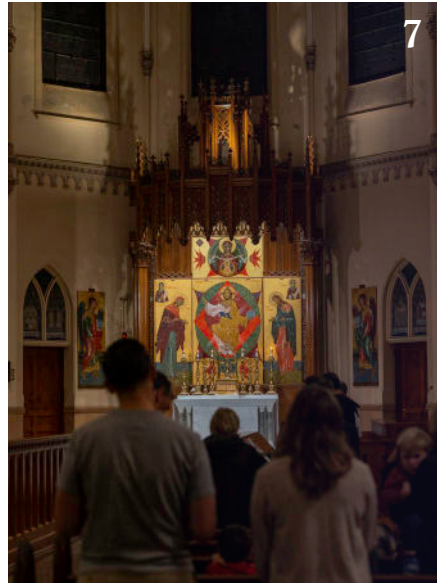
“There are many ways to support organizations we believe are valuable and bring some benefit to others. I choose to support the Lumen Christi Institute via a monthly donation. This way, my giving keeps the mission and purpose of an organization I feel is making an important impact front and center. Monthly giving provides a consistent, steady stream of support as we are asked to offer our time, talent, and treasure in the service of God.

“My monthly giving is also an opportunity for me to take a moment, monthly, to offer prayers of support and wisdom to those who work so hard to promote the work of the Lumen Christi Institute in the world of the university and also, bringing the message to the wider community.”



WINTER & SPRING QUARTER EVENTS





- 1 JAN 26 - FEB 23 | Student reading group, "Hemingway's Short Stories."
- 2 JAN 8 | Winter Social
- 3 MAR 19 | Master class with Scott Roniger (Loyola Marymount University) on "Wonder at the Silence of God: Sin and the Mystery of the Divine Presence in Shūsaku Endō's Masterpiece"
- 4 JAN 15 – FEB 12 | Undergraduate student reading group, "Mythmaking and the Epic Tradition in Tolkien's *Silmarillion*."
- 5 APR 10 | Faculty colloquium with Bernard McGinn on *In the Eagle's Wake*

- 6 JAN 22 – FEB 19 | Graduate student reading group, "Léon Bloy: Martyr or Madman?"
- 7 FEB 28 | Winter monastery visit, "Conversion in the Modern Church: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil."
- 8 OCT 17 – MAY 15 | Student reading group, "The Greek New Testament."
- 9 JAN 30 | Candlemas Party
- 10 OCT 29 | Symposium with Carlos Eire (Yale University) and Kristen MacFarlane (University of Chicago) on *They Flew: A History of the Impossible*



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2026 SUMMER SEMINARS

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The Mystery of Christ from Chalcedon to Maximus

June 14-20

Glimpses of Wonder: Epiphanies of Beauty in the Midst of Technological Change

June 16-19

Catholic Social Thought in Business Education

June 21-25

Judgment in Rome: Art and Papal Teaching from John Paul II to Leo XIV

July 2-8

The Thought of René Girard

July 19-25

The Thought of John Henry Newman

Aug 2-5

Economics and Catholic Social Thought: A Primer

Aug 2-8

Catholic Social Thought: A Critical Investigation

Aug 4-8

From Ancient Wisdom to Person-Centered Care: Historical, Philosophical, and Theological Foundations of Healthcare



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