

**Convocation 2018**  
**Liberal Arts Diploma Program**  
**Catholic Pacific College**

Fort Langley

26 April 2018

Interim President Philip Hannis of Catholic Pacific College, President Kuhn of Trinity Western University, Mrs. Mary Ann Hessels, Chair of the Board, Honoured Graduates, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

***Introduction***

Before offering a few remarks on the Catholic intellectual tradition in the liberal arts, I wish to offer my heartfelt congratulations to today's graduates. Everyone here is enormously proud of you. But remember that your accomplishments are the result of being supported by many others. No one achieves a diploma alone. In the Body of Christ, we are all linked to one another, interdependent and indebted to one another – and you, honored graduates of the Liberal Arts Diploma Program at CPC, are indebted to your dedicated faculty and staff, your supportive families, and to the generous friends and benefactors of the College. They are partners in your success, and so they deserve all the thanks you can muster. Do express your gratitude to them today.

***The Catholic Intellectual Tradition***

Through your study of the liberal arts you have come to appreciate the importance of the intellectual life in the Church's mission. Blessed

John Henry Newman insisted relentlessly that the primary purpose of higher education is decidedly intellectual: to cultivate and transform the mind, so that the student becomes a different kind of individual, a person capable of engaging fruitfully in conversation and debate, someone who has a capacity for exercising judgement, for bringing insights and arguments from a variety of disciplines to bear on complex issues.<sup>1</sup> This you have learned in your courses in the liberal arts program at CPC.

The Catholic intellectual tradition is essentially a product of the interaction of the Gospel and culture down through the ages. It learns from the culture where it is lived and, at the same time, shapes that culture, borrowing some things, rejecting some and modifying many others. Christian thought has been involved in this dance with the world from Pentecost onwards.<sup>2</sup> To affirm that we have an intellectual tradition means that we can learn from those who have gone before us. Knowing that the world has not always been the way it is now can help us resist the tyranny of the present. Familiarity with the tradition stimulates us to imagine ways the world could very well be different. It can help us shape the future knowledgeably and responsibly.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, Coventry (19 September 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. “The Catholic Intellectual Tradition: What Is It? Why Should I Care?” Fall Forum CSB/SJU (20 August 2003): <http://www.csbsju.edu/catholicidentity/values/billcahoy.htm>.

## **Two Lessons of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition**

Now I would like to suggest to you two lessons that can be garnered from the liberal arts intellectual tradition, lessons that might well prove to be helpful as you continue your studies. The first touches upon having the conviction that truth can be pursued, arrived at and communicated; and the second, that faith and reason are two complementary, not contradictory, ways of reaching the splendour of the truth.

Now to a brief explanation of these lessons, which constitute the framework of your continuing, life-long education.

### ***1. Foster a Passion for Truth***

Let me begin with what Benedict XVI once affirmed about the major challenge to the Church of the twenty-first century: “the massive presence in our society and culture of a relativism that, by not acknowledging anything as definitive, only has as its ultimate measure the ‘I’ itself, with its tastes.”<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere he referred to this state of affairs in the classic phrase as the “dictatorship of relativism.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, relativism has become a kind of contemporary dogma, to the extent that

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants of the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome (6 June 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, Homily for Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontefice* (18 April 2005).

nowadays “it is considered dangerous and ‘authoritarian’ to speak of truth.”<sup>5</sup> To be sure, “The splendor of truth is not highly valued in a society which is mired in the swamp of subjectivism.”<sup>6</sup> In such a toxic environment, dear friends, fostering a thirst for truth is more necessary than ever.

As graduates of this program, the Church is relying on you to face head-on this prevailing cultural climate of relativism which makes people suspicious of, if not hostile to, any claim to know the truth.

Our Catholic intellectual tradition, on the contrary, is grounded in the conviction that truth can be sought after and, to a limited but real extent, attained by the human mind and communicated to others. We hold that human beings want to know the truth, even if that desire is often obscured. Dedication to service of the truth, commitment to freely searching for “the whole truth about nature, man and God”<sup>7</sup> is, therefore, your responsibility. It is a gift you bring to an often confused world.

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Convention of the Diocese of Rome (7 June 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Collins, “A Catholic University in the 21st Century,” *Origins*, 39:7 (25 June 2009).

<sup>7</sup> St. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 4.

## ***2. Uphold the Harmony of Faith and Reason***

Besides cultivating a passion for truth, a second lesson that I hope you will take away from your experience at CPC's the conviction that a harmony exists between faith and reason.

As already mentioned, our Catholic intellectual tradition calls into question the conventional wisdom which considers as true only what can be demonstrated in the empirically verifiable scientific realm.<sup>8</sup> Such a view, in fact, limits human reason, which should, on the contrary, be “broadened’ in order to be able to explore and embrace those aspects of reality which go beyond the purely empirical.”<sup>9</sup> “It is urgent, therefore, to rediscover anew human rationality open to the light of the divine *Logos* and his perfect revelation which is Jesus Christ, Son of God made man.”<sup>10</sup> Reason, if it is to be true to itself, cannot *a priori* exclude the contribution that faith makes to its proper use. Whenever reason “becomes deaf to the great message that comes to it from Christian faith and wisdom, then it withers like a tree whose roots can no longer reach

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Homily at Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice* (18 April 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the First European Meeting of University Lecturers (23 June 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Benedict XVI, Angelus (28 January 2007).

the waters that give it life.”<sup>11</sup>

Don't be seduced by an intellectually lazy fideism. As graduates, continue to give public witness “to the dignity of human reason, to its requirements and its capacity for seeking out and knowing reality.”<sup>12</sup>

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis forcefully asserts that “faith is not fearful of reason; on the contrary, it seeks and trusts reason, since ‘the light of reason and the light of faith both come from God’.”<sup>13</sup>

Remember that faith and reason are “the two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”<sup>14</sup> Believing paves the way for crossing the threshold of the truth, and understanding opens the door to belief. Believing devoutly and thinking critically are mutually supportive.

### ***Conclusion***

Dear graduates, I hope that you will carry with you the intellectual

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<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, Address Prepared for the University of Rome, *La Sapienza* (17 January 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. St. John Paul II, Message to the 6<sup>th</sup> National Meeting of Italian Catholic University Professors (4 October 2001), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 242. Citation from St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 7.

<sup>14</sup> St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 1.

discipline, love for truth and conviction of the harmony of faith and reason.

Embrace your future with joy and enthusiasm. You have received many gifts from the Lord. Never forget to offer them in his service. I wish you all – graduates, teachers, families and friends – many blessings in the years to come.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver