CATHOLIC EDUCATION
and Substantial Ends

We have too many means and only a few insubstantial ends," Pope Francis tells us in his new encyclical Laudato Si’. His critique of modern society points out that while we have more options than ever to choose from, rarely do we consider our ultimate purpose and final end—to live know, love and serve the Lord. Pope Francis clearly identifies our “throw-away culture” as well as the social and ecological problems that we face as a result of misunderstanding the human person. Like his predecessors, he is calling for an “adequate anthropology.”

In addition to the principles of the “unity of knowledge” and the “complementarity of faith and reason,” Catholic education seeks to form the whole person in light of Christ’s revelation of who man is—a beloved son and daughter of the Father. In partnership with the family, Catholic education is meant to be the privileged place of studying and learning who the human person is and their ultimate end. In other words, Catholic education’s dedication to forming the whole person seeks to provide this adequate human anthropology. The Catholic school’s unique position to serve this role yields beautiful results when it lives up to its highest principles.

Catholic education, and in particular the Catholic University, can serve as a corrective to the problem of having “too many means and only a few insubstantial ends.”

The Hunger for Beauty, Truth, and Goodness

At the core of a Catholic university’s philosophy and theology requirements lives the desire to respond to the deepest yearnings of the human heart. Our human longing for beauty, truth, and goodness is not served by an infinite array of half-measures and substitutes; rather it is served by knowing what beauty, truth and goodness are. How to evaluate, receive, and appreciate them on this side of heaven fulfills a fundamental requirement of “having life to its fullest” (John 10:10). The academic discipline of theology examines these three transcendentals and seeks to answer the fundamental questions of our origin, identity, purpose, and destiny to rightly inform a person’s central outlook on life. How we love, how we serve, how we seek truth, how we pray, what seizes our imagination, and breaks our heart, what causes us to rejoice, what moves our heart and mind to action all ultimately intersect in how we answer life’s fundamental questions.

How college-aged students answer these life questions at this particular time of their mental and social development will impact the trajectory of the rest of their life. Are they made more free and more human by possessing an ever expanding multiplicity of means, or are they best served by knowing who they are, why they are here, and what they are called to be? A serious and authentic Catholic university joyfully presents and cultivates their full human flourishing as well as knowledge and appreciation of life’s “substantial ends” by satisfying their deep hunger for beauty, truth, and goodness. This ethos permeates every academic field within its curriculum.

The Result of Knowing Our Substantial Ends:

This past May, my wife and I had the opportunity to travel with several of our Tempe students to the University of Mary’s main campus in Bismarck. We joined our founders, the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery, in prayer; we attended Mass with the student body, participated in informal lectures, and shared in fellowship with students and faculty at evening BBQs where the discussion moved from the virtues of a good burger to the deeper questions of life and our universal and particular vocations. These students were filled with brightness; they owned their faith and willingly engaged life’s fundamental questions. We sensed in them a joyful humility and intense intellectual hunger for beauty, truth, and goodness. Students openly discussed the theological insights of Ratzinger and Pieper, the poetry of Hopkins, and the literature of Waugh and O’Connor alongside conversations about popular culture, fears of graduating, and shoes. Their formation in theology and Catholic studies provided them with knowledge of the substantial ends, and in doing so took away nothing from their appreciation and awe of the multitude of means to achieve those ends. Our UMary-Tempe graduates leave us well-prepared to be a leaven in society. Two of our graduates recently wed and are witnessing the beauty, truth, and goodness of marriage, another joined FOCUS where she’ll witness the faith to university students, another is serving an international apostolate that defends freedom of religion and conscience, others are serving at parishes, schools or going on to graduate studies.

Please pray for us so that our mission to form students in the service of beauty, truth, and goodness continues to grow.

Dr. Ryan Manning Ph.D.

Study Theology and Catholic Studies at University of Mary right here in Tempe, Arizona.

Now enrolling for Fall 2015.

umary.edu/asu
arizona@umary.edu