

# NEWSLETTER

OF THE THOMAS MORE CENTER  
FOR THE STUDY OF CATHOLIC THOUGHT AND CULTURE

## Catholic Studies at Rockhurst University

### Inside this issue:

Catholic Studies at Rockhurst (cont.)	2
Ron Hansen's Visit at Rockhurst	2
Why a University Press at Rockhurst?	4
New Book for the Millennium	4
What's Being Said About Catholicism...	4
Review of <i>Catholicism at the Millennium</i>	5
Add Your Name to the Mailing List!	6
Catholicism at the Millennium Order Form	7

### Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought and Culture:

- **Director:**  
Richard Jonet, Ph.D.
- **Committee Members:**  
John Callahan, S.J.,  
Donna Calvert,  
M. Kathleen Madigan,  
Timothy McDonald,  
Gerald Miller, Nancy  
Montgomery, and  
Wilbur Stancil
- **Editorial Assistant:**  
Abigail Holsey

This issue of the Thomas More Center Newsletter is being distributed well beyond the Rockhurst campus to include the mailing list of the Rockhurst Visiting Scholar Lecture Series (thanks to Dr. Joe Cirincione, director of the Visiting Scholar program). The Center hopes by this broader distribution to draw attention to its goals and purpose and to encourage community participation in the activities of the Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought and Culture. Hopefully, news of our activities and plans, as well as a small taste of what Catholic studies is about, will inspire you to contact the Center, add your name to our mailing list and join in our upcoming events. This occasion also affords us the opportunity to review our charge, survey what we have done and project plans (and dreams) for the future.

In recent years, Catholic studies programs have been established on a number of Catholic (and some public) university campuses. These programs, some of which offer undergraduate majors and minors and even graduate degrees, others of which sponsor lectures, publications and faculty research, represent an effort to engage experts from a wide variety of academic disciplines in a discussion with students and the interested public on issues of import to the Catholic tradition. Rockhurst president Father Edward Kinerk, convened a task force of faculty in the spring of 1999 and charged it with exploring "ways to enrich, and to make more available, appreciation of the Catholic intellectual tradition in a Jesuit context. . . [for] both our internal and external constituencies." The Rockhurst task force recommended the establishment of a Catholic studies center – the Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought and Culture – to coordinate, encourage and sponsor campus activities focused on various aspects of Catholic thought

and culture.

The Thomas More Center has already sponsored three spring courses, open to the general public, featuring faculty and guest experts on a variety of topics. The first such course, "Catholicism at the Millennium," offered in the spring of 2000, became the basis for the first publication of the Rockhurst University Press (*Catholicism at the Millennium: The Church of Tradition in Transition*, 2001). The spring 2001 course featured lectures on prominent Catholic figures, from St. Paul to Dorothy Day, and the 2002 course, now underway, analyzes aspects of Catholic culture, including music, art and literature. The Center hopes to publish the spring 2002 lectures as a book on Catholic culture.

The Thomas More Center has also hosted three different public lectures over the past year. David Tlapek, a film producer from Los Angeles, previewed his documentary on the civil war in Sudan and its effects on Sudanese Catholic tribes (*The Hidden Gift: War and Faith in Sudan*). The well-known Catholic historian David O'Brien of Holy Cross College visited campus in March 2001, delivered a public lecture on "Catholic Studies and the Renewal of American Catholicism", and offered invaluable advice to the Thomas More Center faculty committee. Ron Hansen of Santa Clara University, a critically-acclaimed American novelist whose works include *Atticus*, *Hitler's Niece*, and *Mariette in Ecstasy*, delivered lectures to the Catholic culture course and the general public just last month on the role of faith in his writings.

The Thomas More Center committee is currently working on plans for a minor program in Catholic studies that would provide the opportunity for students of any major to take a series of



**Ignatius of Loyola,  
the founder of the  
Society of Jesus.**

## Catholic Studies at Rockhurst University (cont.)

complementary courses from various departments, many of them already being offered in the Rockhurst curriculum, that deal with issues in the thought and culture of Catholicism. The committee is also considering possibilities for public lectures and a new spring course for the 2002-03 academic year.

Of course, we have big dreams. We would like to regularize our occasional lecture offerings as an established series of public lectures by leading authorities on Catholic ideas and issues. We would like to encourage and develop faculty interests in Catholic themes through a program of research grants by which Rockhurst professors could focus efforts on enhancing their courses or pursuing scholarly research in Catholicism. We would like to expand this newsletter into a regular journal of Catholic ideas and opinions directed toward a general audience of serious-minded readers and observers (Catholic and non-Catholic alike).

Please join us as we continue these efforts. I can promise you that we will do our best to provide quality opportunities for serious dialogue

on Catholic ideas. I assure you that we will push no agenda other than the critical review and analysis of the Catholic tradition, presented in a way that appeals to a broad campus and community audience. You and I may disagree with each other and with guests brought to Kansas City by the Thomas More Center but we will surely enjoy and profit from the stimulating exchange of ideas offered by Center activities.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the Thomas More Center Newsletter. In it you will find news of Center offerings and, hopefully, reflections that model what Catholic studies is all about. I hope to hear from you regarding your own response to our programs, your ideas for future Center offerings, and your willingness to join our mailing list and participate in the growth of the Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought and Culture.

— Rick Janet



**“If you who wanted to attend the Hansen lectures but were not able to do so...you may feel as I do that an important event was missed.”**

### For those of us who missed Ron Hansen...

*Ron Hansen, critically acclaimed author and Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., professor in the arts and humanities at Santa Clara University, recently visited Rockhurst University at the invitation of the Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought and Culture. Hansen gave two talks, signed books and interacted in informal settings with students, faculty and staff members. An award-winning novelist, Hansen's works include Desperadoes (1979), The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford (1983), Mariette in Ecstasy (1991), Atticus (1996), Hitler's Niece (1999,) as well as screenplays, short stories and a book for children, The Shadowmaker (1986). A videotape of the evening lecture given at Rockhurst University will be made available for viewing at the Thomas More Center (mezzanine level of the library.)*

If you who wanted to attend the Hansen lectures but were not able to do so, perhaps out of town, as I was, or struggling to catch up after a week without power following the ice storm, you may feel as I do that an important event was missed. I had been asked to write about the Han-

sen visit, but when I heard when he was coming, I knew I had to be at a conference at the same time; then, after reading his novel *Mariette in Ecstasy*, I only regretted the conflict with a previous engagement more. However, since my return, I have learned that one of the lectures was based on the first essay in Hansen's collection *A Stay Against Confusion*, while the other was videotaped, as mentioned above. So there is hope for "making up" to some extent for the absence. While not presuming to replace the excitement of meeting a critically acclaimed writer in person, the following reflections are offered as another chance to consider this writer, his books and the vocation he claims through his craft.

*Mariette in Ecstasy* is the story of a seventeen-year old woman, Mariette Baptiste, who enters a monastery in upstate New York in 1906 and later exhibits a form of the stigmata, that is, wounds or markings similar to those sustained by Christ tried and crucified. The "other side" of her story may as well be called *Mariette in Agony* as she also endures the



## For those of us who missed Ron Hansen... (cont.)

suspicion, jealousy and hate of some in her own order. She does, however, also receive significant support from other members of her community, the curious attention if not awe of outsiders, and the loyalty of a confessor who sees in her signs of the presence of Christ. My youngest sister tells me that when she read the book, the ending was a relief; I do not want to ruin the suspense by giving that away here, though it is what I would most like to discuss. All I will divulge is that the last page of the book is extraordinary, and can only be interpreted through belief in or rejection of what is presented as a dialogue with God. In this case, Hansen's imagination of what the spirit might say in such a situation takes the form of a renewing and liberating question.

Hansen neither encourages easy belief nor suggests obvious grace. Indeed, there is nothing cheap in the story at all. The essential plot revolves around the tension between the suspicion that Mariette is a sexual hysteric, on the one hand, and the conviction that her wounds were caused supernaturally, on the other; opposing testimony could support either interpretation. In his book of essays, *A Stay Against Confusion*, Hansen considers the mystery which the stigmata can represent, stating that people of all walks of life have been given them, whether Catholic or of another faith, steadfast or suicidal, stable or mentally ill, male or female, and young or old, although there is a trend, as most cases of it are known among Catholics and women. Hansen fully exploits the human tension inherent in opposing interpretations of any apparently supernatural event, using sources such as conflicting views on the life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux and the religious passion represented by a nun in the fictional *Lettres Portugaises* (*Portuguese Letters*). In *Mariette in Ecstasy* her own testimony itself appears to be consistent. Therefore, some may feel that the controversy among the characters surrounding judgment of her as deluded or saintly is sufficient in *Mariette in Ecstasy* without additional confusion introduced by a narrator who certainly sees more than any one character or group of them. If this is the case, it bears pointing out that Hansen strives in general not to simplify interpretation, but rather to engage us in searching out ever more the "imponderables" of life. He challenges us to remember that even the Parables of the New Testament, instead of offering ready solutions, consist rather of "familiar situations becoming unfamiliar", which "interpret us" as we seek to understand them and which make us wonder even more. In this vein, some may see the novel as one that avoids sentimental or ridiculous exaggeration of the superhuman feats of a holy person, the likes of which even a St. Thérèse of Lisieux criticized.

In any case, the sheer poetry of the prose is a literary and in a sense, a spiritual event: Hansen's surprise turn of phrases work with the narration so that we as readers are transported more instantly and completely into the scene; as with the Ignatian spiritual exercises used well (with which Hansen is very familiar), we come out of ourselves and consider through the imagination what may lie beyond. In one essay, Hansen talks about writing as making pictures, and in *Mariette* he breathes life into the photographs taken by St. Thérèse's sister Céline, which were also part of his inspiration. Carefully balancing the intense, scrutinizing scenes with an occasional frolicsome one, he balances an intense trial with playfulness. Finally, the story told within the framework of religious feast-

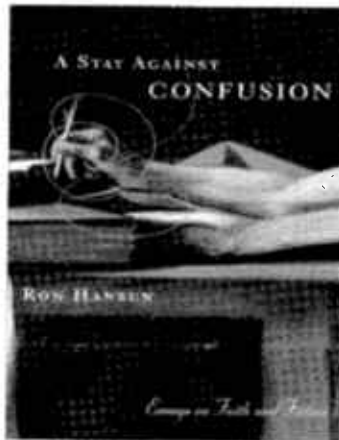
days and chronological narration is balanced with alternating portions of the future inquiry into Mariette's spiritual state, until the final culminating scenes, in which it at all comes together, apart, or both, depending on how you view it.

You may hear hints of other stories in *Mariette's*, and Hansen talks elsewhere about cribbing ideas from multiple sources before these borrowed notions are transformed through the artistic process. Seasoned writers know that little new remains to be told about the human condition; instead, the way character is more fully developed, changed, recombined and sequenced makes the telling of a story fresh.

Whether in fiction or the essay form, Hansen probes ever more deeply to fit together motive with outcome and sequence. In *A Stay Against Confusion*, the title of which comes from the poetry of Robert Frost, Hansen addresses various topics (some essays were written for special occasions or other books), but implicit everywhere is the idea explored under the first heading of writing as sacrament. A Catholic devoted to the Eucharist, Hansen writes about his love affair with stories, which like the medieval mystery plays, began with the liturgy. These are essays to read one at a time and savor.

Those curious about or drawn to the Jesuits may wish to consider learning "something more" here, for that is what the reader is rewarded with, in the studied portrayal of St. Ignatius and the moving one of the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador. For literary buffs, one may learn not only about other authors, but also about the kind of teacher Hansen must be as he instills in the reader appreciation for writers like Gerard Manley Hopkins, Leo Tolstoy or John Gardner, a sort of informal mentor to him. As a screenwriter in his own right, Hansen invites us to take another look at the film *Babette's Feast* and the tale upon which it is based. Surprisingly (or maybe not for some of us, as we think back to our own childhood expectations of what would happen on a most special day), it was a line in the essay on the Eucharist, concerning his First Communion Day,

...Article continued on Page 6.



## Why a University Press at Rockhurst?



Rockhurst University is a community dedicated to learning, leadership, and service. The Rockhurst University Press was established to produce quality books in support of the mission of the university.

Why establish a press now?

- The press sets Rockhurst apart as a first-rate university committed to academic publishing.
- The press provides Rockhurst with a national and international presence beyond its geographical region.
- The press signals a maturing process in scholarship at Rockhurst.

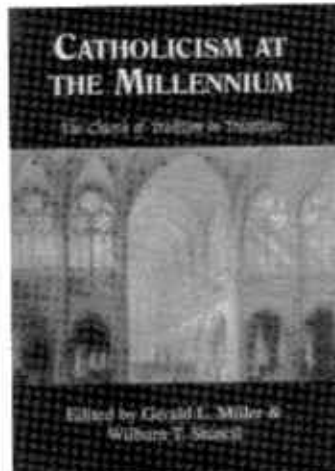
In 2002 the Rockhurst University Press will release two new books, one on the liberal arts and another on the use of the internet for medical personnel. Watch for them!

## A New Book for a New Millennium

*Catholicism at the Millennium* is a book that grew out of a series of weekly lectures to students and the public at large on the state of the Catholic Church at the millennium. The book looks at the Catholic Church from the perspective of such diverse areas as theology, philosophy, biology, economics, sociology, music, history, and literature.

Each chapter, by looking back and looking forward, explores what it means for the Catholic Church to be both a Church of tradition but also a Church in transition.

The book provides readers with a solid grounding in the traditions of the Church. It also challenges them to think about



Catholicism in new ways.

As a snapshot of the Catholic Church at this point in its history, *Catholicism at the Millennium* engages the reader in the ongoing debates today involving academy, Church, and culture.

Growing out of the head and the heart, *Catholicism at the Millennium* will both inspire and challenge you.

## What's Being Said About *Catholicism at the Millennium*?

"*Catholicism at the Millennium* affords readers the opportunity to explore both the old and the new, as the Roman Catholic Church transitions into the third Christian millennium. The book underscores the complementary relationship between faith and reason, the community of humanity as an arena for the discovery of God and God's truth, the ethical dimension necessary for the proper use of knowledge, the justice and dignity due to all persons, and the life of service as a way of discovering one's true self."

Edward Kinerk, S.J.  
President  
Rockhurst University



Reverend Edward  
Kinerk, S.J.

"*Catholicism at the Millennium* provides 'exceptional overviews of the principles of Catholic thought.' The book offers 'an introspective and engaging conversation among American Catholic intellectuals.' It 'will absorb the perspective reader in the ongoing debates with Catholicism about faith, reason, and culture.'"

Joseph S. Rossi, S.J.  
Professor of Theology

## *A Review of Catholicism at the Millennium: The Church of Tradition in Transition*

The dawn of a new millennium is surely an occasion to reflect and to take stock, in the broadest sense of those words. If this be true of individuals, it is no less so of institutions, societies, and even cultures. But it would be wrong, out of some festive hubris, simply to declare, "The past is dead, long live the future!" Neither individually nor corporately can we so easily shrug off the tides of time which have borne us into the challenges and dilemmas of the present and will propel us into whatever is to come. Yet past remains for us prelude: we cannot return to it even if we would, nor can we escape, even if we would, the inexorable thrust forward into the unknown. Though we may learn many and profound lessons from what has gone before us, every year—indeed, every day—is a transition to something different. Even the Catholic Church, at once an institution, a mystic community, and a deposit of gospel values rooted in a deep and jealously guarded tradition, nevertheless has for two thousand years been in a state of animated transition. Nor should this circumstance dismay us. As Cardinal Newman famously expressed it: "In a higher world it is otherwise; but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often."

*Catholicism at the Millennium* invites us to pause and examine, at this significant moment, the apparent paradox between "tradition" and "transition." The eleven essays in this remarkable collection, all written by members of the faculty of Rockhurst University, had their origin in a lecture series, which ran parallel to the consideration of the establishment within the university of a center devoted to explicitly Catholic studies. Involved in the deliberations and discussions were the larger Rockhurst faculty, students, staff, and the Kansas City community generally. The scholars who contributed to the book that resulted from this activity range across the spectrum of academic disciplines, from philosophy, literature, history, theology, and economics to biology, music, sociology, and business ethics. Their work is by any intellectual reckoning first rate, but, at the same time, it is attractively written and highly readable.

The authors are not shy. In the section called "Truth and Belief" is a sturdy, three-pronged defense of philosophical realism against the assaults not only of the old-time Cartesians and Kantians but also against the doctrinaire deconstructionists and post-modernists of

today. "Church and Culture" contains two essays that in different ways underscore serious inadequacies in the Church's present approach to transition: one deals with the distinct failure to allow the gospel to flourish within specific, non-European cultural contexts; and the other explains how contemporary pastoral problems are compounded by the routine neglect of the insights available through sociology. "Social Justice" also offers two articles, first a judicious review of Catholic social teaching since *Rerum novarum*, and second a fascinating critique of the elements contributing to the shameful incidence of hunger in the Third World. "Contemporary Concerns" is a miscellany that includes a learned commentary on the present state of liturgical music, an analysis of the current controversy between evolutionists and creationists—with useful information about Galileo and Darwin—and, finally, a review of the antecedents and current status of the ecumenical movement. As an old historian, I save for last the section most congenial to myself, "Faith and History." Here is a single essay that

sums up splendidly the evidence that tradition and transition are far from incompatible: "Catholic history seeks the continuities in history because it recognizes a central human event—the Incarnation—as the spiritual tie binding past, present, and future."

Such a summary as this does scant justice to the quality of the papers that make up *Catholicism at the Millennium*. One further point, however, I must stress: each writer shows a scrupulous regard for precise documentation, and each provides a bibliography for those who might want to pursue the matter at hand by further reading. There is nothing trivial or slipshod here.

Many scriptural passages allude to the tension between tradition and transition that every generation of believers has to face. My favorite is from the Prophet Isaiah: "The Lord will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails. The ancient ruins will be rebuilt for your sake, and the foundations from ages past you shall raise up."

—Marvin R. O'Connell  
University of Notre Dame

A "remarkable collection" of essays, which "is by any intellectual reckoning first rate" and "attractively written and highly readable...There is nothing trivial or

## Ron Hansen...(cont.)

which had me laughing out loud. In his most personal essay, he honors his "grandfather" who though not a blood relative, but rather the man his grandmother married late in life, gifted others with the recognition of the importance of family; we note the influence, as Hansen dedicates books to his family.

Whether describing the discovery of a vocation in his childhood role as the Evangelist Luke in a school play, his experience of the young Jesuits who started the high school film club discussions, or his adult understanding of the connection between his faith and craft, Hansen calls us to think about the markings of our own journeys. *A Stay Against Confusion*, to my mind, is a wonderful companion piece to *Mariette in Ecstasy* because it makes possible just the kind of "conversation" through reading that one might wish

for, having missed the lectures. The essays, in the form of a religious quest, do indeed offer a "momentary stay against confusion" or a temporary clarification of life. It would be wonderful, nonetheless, if Ron Hansen would agree to another visit in the future, perhaps not so much to answer any lingering questions, but rather to continue to call us to wrestle with the "imponderables" of our lives, reflection upon which may even give rise to our own form of sacramental art.

— M. Kathleen Madigan

## ADD YOUR NAME TO THE THOMAS MORE CENTER MAILING LIST!

*We will see to it that you receive future issues of this newsletter and advance notice of Thomas More Center activities.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

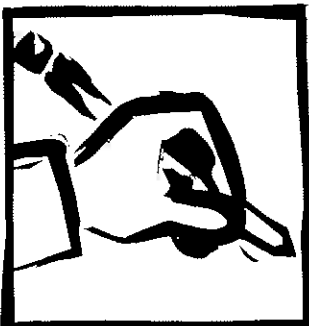
Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Suggestions for future speakers, programs, etc. \_\_\_\_\_



Mail to: Thomas More Center  
Rockhurst University  
c/o Richard Janet, Ph.D.  
1100 Rockhurst Road  
Kansas City, MO 64110

*Catholicism at  
the Millennium*

**THE CHURCH OF TRADITION  
IN TRANSITION**

Edited by:  
GERALD L. MILLER  
WILBURN T. STANCIL



In a rapidly diverse and increasingly secularized culture, how will the Roman Catholic Church respond to the challenges of the new millennium? In *Catholicism at the Millennium*, eleven Rockhurst professors explore crucial issues facing the Catholic Church at the start of the third Christian millennium.

Contributors include Richard J. Janet, Brendan Sweetman, Curtis L. Hancock, Joseph A. Cirincione, Fr. Wilfred LaCroix, S.J., Fr. Robert Mahoney, Gerald L. Miller, Laura E. Fitzpatrick, Timothy L. McDonald, Richard E. Wilson, and Wilburn T. Stancil.

**Order Your Copy Now!**

WAYS TO ORDER:

- o Fax this form to 419-281-6883 or mail with payment to Rockhurst University Press, 1100 Rockhurst Road, Kansas City, MO 64110
- o Order by Phone: 800-247-6553
- o Available Online through: [www.rockhurstpress.org](http://www.rockhurstpress.org) or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com)
- o Available at the Rockhurst University Bookstore

ISBN	TITLE	PRICE	NO.	LINE TOTAL
1-886761-26-4	<i>Catholicism at the Millennium</i>	\$20.00/paper	_____	_____
1-886761-25-6	<i>Catholicism at the Millennium</i>	\$35.00/cloth	_____	_____
			*Shipping	_____
			TOTAL	_____

**Shipping Information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

- Visa
- MasterCard
- American Express
- Discover

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Add \$4.50 for the first book, \$1.00 for each additional book

WE'RE ON THE WEB!  
WWW.ROCKHURST.EDU

nas More Center  
hurst University  
c/o Richard Janet Ph.D.  
1100 Rockhurst Road  
Kansas City, MO 64110  
Phone: 816-501-4000  
Email: rickjanet@rockhurst.edu

ROCKHURST UNIVERSITY

NONPROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
KANSAS CITY, MO  
PERMIT NO. 782