In these brief remarks, limited by the necessities of our symposium to what can be said in twenty minutes (which is to say in three thousand words or so), I'll provide just one thing: a brief outline of how to think and speak as a Catholic about the nature of the intellectual life, and about the practices ancillary to and preparatory for engagement in it. There are deep differences between this Catholic account and the pagan accounts of the intellectual life dominant in the universities of the West. Perhaps we may be able to pursue those difficulties in discussion.

Intellectuals are, in Catholic parlance, those whose principal vocation it is first to study particular creatures or ensembles of such with the purpose of arriving at greater cognitive intimacy with them -- of understanding them better, that is; and then to write and speak about the understanding thus gained. What intellectuals do -- study, writing, speaking -- is necessarily and constitutively social in a number of senses, among which two are obvious. First, these activities can only be undertaken if there are teachers prepared to offer instruction in how to perform them and students willing to submit themselves to instruction. And second, teachers and students can together do what they do only because they have been given gifts by a cloud of witnesses who have preceded them in doing what they do. The creatures studied by intellectuals may be of many kinds: texts, social structures, economic arrangements, historical events, mathematical objects, and so forth. The habits appropriate for fostering cognitive intimacy differ, of course, according to the kind of creature you're seeking to understand: different habits would be appropriate for attempting to prove Goldbach's Conjecture than for writing a treatise on the sexual habits of Christians in third-century Egypt.

It properly belongs to Catholic thinking and speaking about the intellectual life (itself an instance of what it thinks and speaks about, for the human enterprise of study is something creatures do) to provide an account of the relations that obtain, or should obtain, among the various kinds of study, kinds that are themselves given by the kinds into which creatures may be organized. Catholics, that is, want to account for study and learning in its various dimensions, and to explain how these dimensions are related one to another.

A classic instance is Bonaventure's claim, in his treatise *De reductione artium ad theologiam* [On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology], that "omnes cognitiones famulantur theologiae" (§26) -- that every form of cognition is theology's slave. He includes under the heading of *cognitiones* (forms of cognition or modes of knowing) not only what we might call the disciplines, such things as astronomy and history and literature and mathematics, but also the acquisition of particular skills, such as those possessed by the farmer or the shipbuilder or, we might say, though he of course does not, the auto mechanic or the plumber or the computer programmer or the economist. Bonaventure really does mean all forms of knowledge and every kind of learning, both knowings-how and knowings-that. All are at the service of theology; each is theology's slave. Bonaventure does not mean by this that all these particular knowledges are forms of theology, or that theologians, just because they are theologians, know how to make sails or lay bricks or prove theorems in mathematics. Much less does he mean that theologians can prescribe to those who do have such knowledge and skill how they should deploy or extend it. Your local theologian will have nothing useful to say about how you should fix your car. What Bonaventure does mean is that...
theology, which is reasoned and reasonable discourse about that God who is the Lord, provides both the frame and the explanation for all these particular forms of study.

Something of what this means can be seen by observing that there is no Catholic mathematics. This is so because mathematics, like all particular knowledges and skills, does not, for the most part, climb sufficiently far up the ladder of generality to give it any particular Catholic interest. Mathematics, like all particular sciences, is theology's slave and can be accounted for by theology, and to that extent it is of interest to the Church. But only to that extent. Catholics, as Catholics, have neither special mathematical interest nor special mathematical competence. When we do mathematics (and some of us do, very well, though I am certainly not among their number) we do it just as the pagans do, and we are and should be judged by the same criteria of mathematical excellence as they. Saying this is quite compatible with saying that Catholics do have a special interest in providing an account of what mathematics is. That is because giving an account of what an activity is has not much to do with performing it, a point that can be put only a little differently by saying that it is quite possible to be a virtuoso practitioner of some activity without being interested in or capable of offering an account of what it is that one does as such. Providing a Catholic account of the nature of mathematics -- as, perhaps, the seeking of cognitive intimacy with the eternal order of abstract objects as these subsist in the Lord's nature -- has only marginal and indirect effects upon mathematical practice, as is evident from the fact that mathematicians who offer no account of what they do, or one in every particular incompatible with the one just given, can coöperate well with those who offer a Catholic account of mathematics.

Accounting for the aspects and dimensions of the intellectual life is, therefore, something Catholics do and must do; we do not all do it in the same way, however. Some of us prefer, in my view wrongly, to say that philosophy is the mode of thought most appropriate for giving such an account; Bonaventure, against such a view, had it right. Much can be said about this matter, but the point of interest for us here today is that we Catholics do, typically, offer an account of the branches of learning without thereby being committed to prescribing how those who live on this or that branch should order their practice.

The Catholic archive has, therefore, as we should expect, nothing to say about how to become a good musician or a good botanist. What it does have something to say about is the habits and practices and attitudes that should inform all particular forms of study, habits and practices and attitudes that are preparatory for, ancillary to, and informing of what belongs properly to particular forms of study. It is to these preparatory, ancillary, and informing practices that I now turn, practices that apply to all Catholic study no matter what is studied. Their absence damages the cultivation of studiousness, and their presence nurtures it, and in that sense their presence makes those who practice them more properly studious -- and therefore more properly learned -- than they would otherwise have been. But, to say it again, while the practices I am about briefly to comment upon are constitutive of a properly Catholic approach to study, they do not contribute directly to the intensification of cognitive intimacy with any particular range or kind of creatures. They are to those particular intimacies rather as the cultivation of the capacity to love is to becoming a good lover of a particular human person: that is, necessary but very far from sufficient.

Catholic thinking about the habits of study should begin from thinking about the liturgy. That is because Catholic life is lived most intensely and most fully in the liturgy. It is there that the Church is most fully herself as sponsa Christi*, there that she returns most explicitly and intimately the embraces given her by the Lord, and there that she learns most fully what she needs
to know in order to be herself. Attending to the liturgically-given shape of the Catholic life is of essential and fundamental help in seeing what ought to inform a fully Catholic performance of study. I distinguish four central elements to the fundamental grammar of the liturgical life.

First, there is a sacrificial gift-exchange, in which the Lord offers himself to his people and they acknowledge the gift with gratitude by returning the gift to its giver. The gift-exchange occurs in words, in the movement of bodies, and in the use of material objects. In every modality, the Lord initiates by giving the gift and the people respond by returning it: that is the fundamental liturgical structure.

Second, liturgical work is done without interest in or concern for outcome. We do not receive the body and blood or hear the word or sing praises to the Lord because we think that doing these things improves us morally, makes us healthier, provides us material blessings, or conforms us to Christ — even though it may do some or all of these things. We work liturgically because it is the thing to do; because liturgical gratitude is the only way to accept a gift given, especially one of surpassing beauty and value that we do not merit; and because we are in love and are eager to show that love.

Third, the liturgy is threaded through with lament. Its paradigmatic form is the confession of our incapacity to do what we are in fact doing, a confession that carries with it the implication that it is not we, or not only we, who do it.

Fourth, the liturgy is endlessly repetitive, and in being so it takes -- or, better, wastes -- much time, transforming it from the linear time of the day and the month and the year into the liturgical time of eternity. To enter into the repetitive patterns of the liturgy is to lay waste linear time with the radiance of eternity, and in that way to provide a foretaste of heaven.

These aspects of the liturgy, its fundamental grammar, can serve as paradigm for the consideration of what prepares for, structures, informs, and orders the work of study. It is not that study is itself liturgical; it is rather that the extent to which study is well-ordered, aimed at studiousness rather than curiosity, is the extent to which it participates in and reflects, according to its own peculiar nature, the liturgical order. Thought about that order, therefore, illuminates thought about the practices of study. How, more specifically, might that thinking go?

There is, first, prayer as preparation, for study. One prepares for engagement in the liturgy by settling the soul and turning one's eyes from the world to the Lord. So also for study. There is a long tradition in the Western Church of offering prayers before study, and the rationale for doing this is that by doing it we place ourselves in appropriate relation with the Lord as the one who gives wisdom, without which understanding is not possible. Prayer before study is essential, and properly liturgical. It serves not only as an invocation of the Lord, but also as a reminder that we do not arrive at understanding by ourselves, or from our own powers. In that way, preparatory prayer is an instance of the act of disowning so important to all liturgy: whatever learning we have is not ours, and not arrived at by our own efforts -- which is not to say that our efforts are irrelevant to it. To forget to pray before we study is to forget to acknowledge what it is that we are doing, and, very likely, thereby to tend toward desire for mastery over what we study rather than for intimacy with it. We remind ourselves in study-prayer not only of the Lord, the first and last giver of what there is to be studied and of the capacity to study it, but also of those who have taught us and those whom we teach. It is important for teachers to pray for students, whenever
possible by name. Doing so serves as a reminder that the gifts given by teachers to students are just that -- gifts, owned by neither -- and that grace is needed to receive them. Praying for students also serves to place teacher and students into the same context, which is the liturgical one of the gift-exchange.

The place of study, which may also be the place of teaching, is, by prayers such as these, assimilated to the liturgical place, as it should be; and because prayers of these kinds are generic, setting the scene for study simply as such rather than that for any particular variety of it, they are practices preparatory to any and every kind of study. Prayer acknowledges gift, and in the liturgy, the focus is on the prevenient giving of gifts by the Lord to the Church and the Church's grateful return of them to the Lord. On the site of study, this is also true; but there is an added and very important emphasis, upon the gifts given by teachers to students and returned by students to teachers. This nexus of giving of course participates in the primary nexus, which is that between the Lord and us; but it is not identical with it.

In addition to prayer before study, attention to liturgical grammar also provides the Catholic tradition with emphasis upon the fundamental importance of the minutiae of the practices of study, and of whatever creature or ensemble of creatures is studies. And just as the liturgy lays waste to time by taking enormous amounts of it and transforming it, so also does study. The parallels go deep here as in the other examples canvassed; and bearing the liturgy in mind can help Catholics to understand more fully what study is and how it should be undertaken.

*Akribeia* is a useful Greek word for this aspect of study. It means, roughly, repeated attention to particulars, even of the minutest kind. The word is used several times in the New Testament, and often by the Fathers. To attend to something with *akribeia* is to attend to each and every one of its particulars, and in so doing to regard all of them as important and revealing of what it is. In the case of studying a text, this might mean attending to its rhetoric, lexicon, argument, silences, author, reception, genre, and so indefinitely on. The idea that every creaturely particular is important finds its ground in the thought that whatever is, is good: this applies to every creaturely particular, and it means that nothing is too insignificant to warrant attention.

The most immediate Catholic working assumption of studying a creature with *akribeia* in mind is that the task of learning cannot be completed because what is studied cannot be comprehended. That in turn is because comprehension denotes complete understanding, knowing everything there is to know about what is studied, and since the particularities of every creature are inexhaustible -- they include, for example, the very fact that it is a creature, which means in turn that comprehension of it, were that possible, would include complete understanding of its relation to the Lord -- that is in principle not possible. Studious practitioners of *akribeia* know this, and therefore do not attempt mastery of what they study, a mastery that would only be possible if comprehension were possible. They attend, instead, repeatedly to what they study, always under the sign of necessary incompleteness, and with reverence for what is attended to. If every creature is inexhaustible then none can be mastered: mastery in the sense of dominance is both impossible and an improper goal.

Study, like liturgical work, is also done without interest in or concern for outcome; and for essentially the same reasons. To attend to the particulars of a creature is a gesture of loving intimacy, and it needs no other justification. We do not study in order to make the world a better place or ourselves better people. Those things may or may not happen; that they do, or do not, is
neither the goal nor the motive of study. The studious do not assess outcomes or undertake their studies with particular expectations. Instead, they attend, lovingly, to what gives itself, and with the certain knowledge that it cannot be comprehended.

I've noted that the liturgy is shot through with words and actions that question its possibility. Liturgical agents stammer and lament. So, and for similar reasons, do the studious. First, we lament our own incapacities: we are, in various ways and to different degrees, stupid, inattentive, lazy, domineering, and blind. Being catechized in the direction of studiousness does not by itself remedy these defects, but it does bring them to consciousness exactly as defects and permit them to be lamented as incapable of removal by our own efforts. For the studious, lament at one's own incapacity for study and one's failures as a student is intrinsic to learning. The extent to which it is forgotten or laid aside is the extent to which the path of studiousness has been abandoned.

Lament is, for Catholic students, prompted not only by awareness of the damaged and inadequate nature of our own cognitive capacities, but also by awareness of the damage to which the world, the ensemble of creatures has been subjected. The world is radiantly translucent, but it is not only that. It is also shot through with darkness. The divine light does not shine everywhere, but the places of shade and shadow exist only as its absence, its lack, its privation. They can be described only by negation, sought only by aversion (the closing of the eyes), and entered only by embracing the loss in which they consist.

Although we cannot be sure about our ability to discriminate the damaged from the undamaged, the beautiful from the ugly (and our lack of certitude about these things is one more occasion for lament about our own cognitive incapacity), we can be sure that what we study is, at least in the contingent and sensible order, in some respects damaged in such a way that it resists the studious gaze, showing to that look an absence rather than a presence. And this is a matter for lament at least as much as the lacks evident in our own studious capacities. When a Catholic student seeks learning about, for example, the violence to which we human beings constantly subject one another, something can be learned. But there will also be a point at which the studious eye notes only chaos and absence, and laments that fact: the city with all its inhabitants is deliberately destroyed in fire; the infant in the womb is intentionally dismembered; the slave is lynched; and so, bloodily and grimly, on. Lament belongs here too, and not just as sadness for pain and death. There is also a properly cognitive lament, a lament that the world is not as beautiful as it should be, and that the efficient causes for its ugliness necessarily remain opaque.

To recapitulate: The intellectual life is for Catholics a studiously intimate cognitive caress of the creature. The variety of creatures provides the variety of habits appropriate to seeking that intimacy; and theology is the intellectual activity that comprehends and accounts for that variety. In particular, Catholics prepare for and prosecute the life of study in conformity with the liturgy as an act of prayer, with minute and loving attention to the particulars of what is studied, and with lament produced by knowledge of the damage suffered by both student and creature studied. Such an understanding is in many respects different from and incompatible with that dominant in the pagan -- and also, often, the Catholic -- universities of the West.