

## INTERVIEW WITH JOHN C. CAVADINI, PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME



Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

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### EXCERPTS:

- “I am always interested in recovering and re-proposing the riches of the Catholic theological tradition. The challenges are to make these riches intelligible to modern people, without reducing them to rationalism and without making it simply an exercise in nostalgia.”
- “There is nothing especially interesting about me that I can think of. I am very devoted to St. Joseph, because he too, seemed to be of no particular interest to anyone. But he didn't mind.”

#### Would you describe where you work, and some of the particularities of your university?

I am a Professor in the Department of Theology, and also the Director of an independent unit, the McGrath Institute for Church Life. Notre Dame's Theology Department was recently ranked #1 in the world, for a second year in a row, with reference mainly to the Ph.D. program. But we also have a flourishing undergraduate culture in theology, with over 500 majors and minors.

#### What is your main field of research, and why did you choose that field?

My main field of research is Patristic Theology, which I chose because it is both biblical and yet deals with questions that today might fall under the category of systematic theology. I also chose this field because many of the riches of Christian Tradition are patristic, but are relatively unknown to most Catholics. So I like to think I contribute towards the recovery of these riches and giving them life in our contemporary setting.

#### You are a recipient of the Expanded Reason Awards. What was your contribution for receiving the Award?

I am Director of the Institute in which the program which received the award is located. *[On the program itself, see the interview of Jay Marin in this series!]*

#### Box 1: Interview Series

**What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website?** The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

**Why a series of interviews?** Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

**What is the focus of this interview?** In this interview, John C. Cavadini, Professor at the University of Notre Dame, shares insights about the work that together with three other colleagues he received an Expanded Reason Award for - the Science & Religion Initiative at the McGrath Institute for Church Life.

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**How easy or difficult is it for you to share your values with students when teaching?**

Relatively easy. I teach a large class called "The Catholic Faith," and the values and vision it teaches are certainly ones I share and want to help students understand and acquire a sympathy for.

**How do your values affect your research? And what are some challenges you face?**

I am always interested in recovering and re-proposing the riches of the Catholic theological tradition. The challenges are to make these riches intelligible to modern people, without reducing them to rationalism and without making it simply an exercise in nostalgia.

**What is your advice for students who may be Catholic and are contemplating doing graduate work or a PhD?**

It is hard to give advice in the abstract, since students vary in their talents, preparation, and aspiration. It is certainly very important, too, to emphasize that there are fewer opportunities for jobs. It is ironic that there is such a need for pastorally minded theologians who really do

know the tradition, and yet so little ability for the Church to hire and support them.

**Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?**

Mostly by accident, actually. I did not seek out any of the positions I currently have, or any that I have had here at Notre Dame.

**Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?**

I don't normally think in those terms, since I am passionate about a lot of things, some in a good way, some not. I don't have any dramatic conversion stories, or any conversion stories at all. I am a very standard Catholic, lucky to have been born into the faith since I am sure I would not have had the good sense or courage to convert. There is nothing especially interesting about me that I can think of. Perhaps that is my most distinguishing feature. I am very devoted to St. Joseph, because he too, seemed to be of no particular interest to anyone. But he didn't mind.



Photo: Cavadini, Baglow, Bellm, and Martin at the Vatican to receive the 2018 Expanded Reason Award.