Dear Colleagues:

Happy All Saints Day!

As part of a national initiative encouraging doctoral students to consider service to church-related higher education, I recently led a seminar series in which we read Thomas Merton’s *Seven Storey Mountain*. Each time I return to this great spiritual autobiography, I find myself underscoring new lines and scrawling out additional marginalia. Merton is often an exquisite writer, possessed of a capacious and deeply learned mind, fully engaged with the issues of his day, and spiritually discerning. He’s humble, self-critical, and magnanimous toward others. In these respects, he’s an excellent example of qualities to which we should aspire. The students I mentored found themselves inspired by the book.

Among many memorable passages, one seems appropriate today. It’s the point at which Merton’s friend, Lax, asks him what he wants to be. Merton acknowledges, with self-deprecation, that he could not say what he really wanted: “I want to be Thomas Merton the well-known writer of all those book reviews in the back pages of the Times Book Review” or “Thomas Merton the assistant instructor of Freshman-English at the New Life Social Institute for Progress and Culture.” Instead, Merton offers a lame response, which prompts Lax to pronounce boldly: “what you should say is that you want to be a saint.” When Merton demurs that this isn’t possible, his friend insists, “No. All that is necessary to be a saint is to want to be one. Don’t you believe that God will make you want He created you to be, if you will consent to let Him do it? All you have to do is desire it.”

Merton’s realization is right, is it not? We should want to be saints. We should want to be such sooner than later, and more completely than not. If we want these things, we will in turn desire and labor for a host of other things concomitant to a saintliness enabled by divine grace—even things within our University service.

On that note, President Livingstone often remarks that the world needs a Baylor. What this means, I suggest, is that the world needs a university in which saintliness is taken seriously as a vocation for us and for our students, alumni, and benefactors. Happy All Saints Day, indeed!

In honor of our shared work, please note:

- Together with colleagues from around the University, we are welcoming hundreds of prospective students and their families to campus today and tomorrow for Invitation to Excellence. Please hear my deep appreciation for all of our faculty and staff who are hosting guests at tonight’s reception and tomorrow’s academic program. Special thanks to Erin Stamile, enrollment management coordinator, for ensuring that we give our high-ability prospects an inspiring introduction to the Honors College.

- You’ve likely read about the University Libraries’ acquisition of a Heritage edition of the *Saint John’s Bible*, the first hand-written and illuminated Bible produced in centuries. A labor of love in the Benedictine ethos of contemplative prayer, the dream of a lifetime, and the painstaking work of a team of artists, theologians, and scholars over thirteen
years, the Saint John’s Bible is an astonishing accomplishment. If you’re interested in learning more about it, please consider hearing Fr. Eric Hollas, OSB, give a guest lecture entitled “The Artist as Preacher: Illumination in the Saint John’s Bible” on November 7, at 6:00 p.m., in the Mayborn Museum Theater. Thanks to our librarian, Eileen Bentsen, for bringing this opportunity to our attention.

- Kudos to Junius Johnson, assistant professor of historical theology, for a well-conceived Templeton grant proposal: Ars Quaerens Intellectum. A multi- and interdisciplinary project exploring and advancing work in aesthetic cognitivism, the grant envisions an impressive assembly of international scholars contributing in such areas as biblical poetics, philosophy and psychology, historical theology and spiritual practices, literature and theology, music and theology, and visual arts and theology. Best of luck, Junius, to you and your colleagues. Faculty interested in identifying grant funding for research projects can find helpful information here.

- Congratulations to Al Beck, recently promoted to Assistant Director of the Honors Program. Dr. Beck has been a mainstay of the Honors Program for a dozen years, serving most recently as Admissions and Advisement Coordinator. With undergraduate study in history and education, master’s study in church history, and a Ph.D. in religion, politics, and society, he brings broad and deep academic preparation to his work. We’re grateful for your service and leadership, Al.

All the best,

Douglas V. Henry | Interim Dean
Honors College | Baylor University
baylor.edu/honorscollege | 254.710.7689