

## FROM NUGENT HALL

by President John Garvey

# A Cornerstone of Academic Excellence

This issue of *The Catholic University of America Magazine* features an article on page 26 about the Mount Olivet Cemetery, where several prominent figures from our University's past are buried. It is a small treasure of Catholic University's history. I'm delighted it's been rediscovered. The article got me thinking about one of our oldest academic departments.

Among those laid to rest at Mount Olivet is Monsignor Henri Hyvernat, who founded our Department of Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures and the Institute of Christian Oriental Research. Hyvernat was an icon in Catholic University's early days. He was the very first member appointed to our faculty, and throughout his years here taught courses in Oriental languages, biblical archaeology, and Semitic languages and literature. Monsignor Hyvernat served at the University for an impressive 52 years, during which he cultivated a reputation as a well-respected scholar. His private library became the foundation for our Semitics/Institute for Christian Oriental Research Library.

In addition to his accomplishments as a scholar and teacher, Monsignor Hyvernat helped establish our splendid and distinguished tradition in the area of Semitic and Egyptian languages and literatures. Today Semitic and Egyptian languages continue to be a cornerstone of academic excellence at Catholic University. Together with the related areas of Greek and Latin, and early Christian studies, Semitic and Egyptian languages are especially beloved to the University because of their special relationship to our Catholic identity. The study of ancient language, cultures, and texts deepens our appreciation



An ancient Syriac manuscript from the Semitics/Institute for Christian Oriental Research Library.

of the historical and cultural circumstances that lie at the origins and early development of our Catholic tradition. They are an entree to many of the great texts of Judaism and early Christianity. They also enable us to study the literature and cultures that inspired much of Western civilization and culture.

They make an enormously impressive contribution to scholarship in their fields. Our Department of Semitics, for example, is a center in the U.S. for the study of Aramaic, the mother tongue of Jesus. We offer more classes in Aramaic than any other university in the United States. In the area of biblical scholarship, our scholars have been recognized for their important contributions to crucial studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls, manuscripts copied between the second century B.C. and 60 A.D. that help us to understand

how Jesus's contemporaries understood the Gospels. Our experts in Christian-Muslim studies have performed vital work in the area of interfaith dialogue.

It is easy at times to forget that these programs are a glory of our University. Academic culture tends to leave these ancient and medieval fields of study behind for more current interests. But although the subjects represented on campus today have multiplied exponentially since Monsignor Hyvernat's day, the central role played by Semitic and Egyptian languages and literatures, Greek and Latin, and early Christian studies at Catholic University has not altered. They anchor our pursuit of knowledge, and remind us that knowing where our tradition and civilization come from is every bit as important as knowing where they are going.



## FORUM

Comments from the CUA community

*The music at Mass tonight and everybody singing together is what brings me peace and true joy ♥ #CUA*

— @TaraGretchen

 Spending my last night at #CUA in Mary's Garden. I love this place.  
— @Holleratmeee

The pomp and circumstance makes it all too real. Gowns and hoods and cords and diplomas and tears. Lots of tears. #graduation #CUA  
— @lizzie\_mcguiree

My alma mater, @CatholicUniv, made former ed sec't @WilliamJBennett list of "Schools Worth Attending" in his new book *Is College Worth It?*  
— @kathrynlopez

 126 years later, and still looking quite wonderful :) Happy Birthday, The Catholic University of America!!!  
— Victor Catolico David

Loving The Catholic University of America's own Msgr. Irwin LIVE on CNN.  
— Chris Pierno

 Although saddened by the news of Brother Patrick Ellis' passing (spring issue, page 39), I was gratified that you assembled so many highlights of his long and devoted service to Christian education. In this, he was preeminently a true disciple of John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Christian Brothers.

As a former Christian Brother, I was privileged to live in community with Patrick, graduating with him from CU in 1951. He was the *summa cum laude* awardee in our class.

Patrick was always enthusiastic and resourceful, wherever he invested his talents. The students who sat in his English classes had to be touched by his infectious love for literature and poetry.

— Jerry Hammell  
B.A. 1951

It was such a pleasure to receive the latest magazine focusing on women's athletics at CUA (spring issue, page 14). As a student athlete, most of my best memories from CUA are from my time as a member of the track and field team. I had many successes during my track and field/high jump career, but the life skills and lessons I learned from being a part of that team are invaluable to me.

Coach [Joe] Fisher is a true mentor and friend to me. He was my best teacher at CUA and continues to inspire me with his dedication to the sport and his dedication to higher education.

While it is difficult for me to visit the campus, I continue to support the women's track and field team as best I can with annual gifts.  
— Megan Marconi Norman  
B.A. 1993

You do a great job with the magazine. In the latest issue, I especially liked the article about Charles Ota Heller (spring issue, page 33). It triggered [me to think about] the research that I have conducted with sisters in Eastern Europe, learning about their over 40-year oppression under communism. I am executive producer of a documentary, *Interrupted Lives: Catholic Sisters Under European Communism*, which uncovers the plight of sisters in Eastern Europe. I recently gave a conference in Slovakia and know that the Eastern European sisters are getting into the state files — now open — and doing some good research on their own

— Margaret Nacke, C.S.J.  
M.F.A. 1961

During the past 34 years I have been teaching at Sacred Heart School of Theology in Hales Corners, Wis.

I noticed in your spring issue there was a comment on page 3 about Bill Graham by his

daughter. He was one of my best teachers. During my teaching at Sacred Heart, I have often used some of the DVDs that were made at many of his teaching seminars to priests at different locations in the country. He has a marvelous sense of humor and the ability to demonstrate how a priest ought to preside in preaching during the liturgy.

— Rev. Andre Papineau, S.D.S.  
B.A. 1960, M.A. 1971

(Bill Graham was an honorary co-chair of CUA-drama's recent 75th anniversary celebration).

 "CUA has enabled me to be more authentically the man God has called me to be, and the generous support of friends like you has helped make that possible."

— Brett Garland  
a graduating senior, in remarks he delivered at the American Cardinals Dinner in Washington, D.C., May 10

"My special greeting goes to the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Hartford and the Alumni Association of The Catholic University of America. In these days when the Church celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, I invoke upon you and your families his gifts of wisdom and peace. God bless you all!"

— Pope Francis  
in his general audience on  
May 22, 2013

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