Among modern Christian educators, Jacques Maritain occupies a preeminent place because of his reflections on the philosophy of education, elaborated through the use of Thomistic philosophy. Maritain proposed a general theory of education in which the concept of person stands at the center. Indeed, education according to Maritain depends on one’s view of human persons—their values, destiny, relations to God and society, as well as the way they come to know themselves.

Given that Thomistic philosophy is usually Christian philosophy, Maritain’s philosophy of education constitutes a suitable tool for reflecting on the ends specific to religious education. It is my contention that the contribution made in the twentieth century by Jacques Maritain in philosophy of education is still valuable for developing a Catholic philosophy of education. Not all scholars are in agreement that Maritain’s Thomism is suitable for this task. This essay, however, will argue that it is up to the task of providing a sound basis for the philosophy of Catholic education.

Maritain was convinced that to ignore the task of reflecting philosophically on education—in particular Christian education—amounts to weakening education’s foundation and core. In his view, the very act of reflecting on the nature and aims of Christian education constitutes an important step in providing a correct and meaningful education in a quickly evolving world.

Though he was French it is appropriate to include Maritain in a book about American Catholic educators. First, it is important to recall
that Maritain spent many years in the United States holding a faculty position at Princeton University. He also lectured at many prestigious universities in this country, as will be indicated later in this chapter. Perhaps most important, his principal writings in philosophy of education were written in this country and in the context of United States education. His *Education at the Crossroads* (1943), the Terry Lectures given at Yale University, remains a classic statement of Thomistic philosophy. This work represents a defense of liberal education and is a strong critique of the utilitarian education proposed by educational progressives in this country. In it Maritain also made a strong case for the teaching of religion in the public school curriculum. Furthermore, Maritain was invited to contribute a substantial essay on the Thomistic view on education in the 1955 Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE).

**His Life**

Jacques Maritain was born on November 18th, 1882, in Paris, France. His mother, Geneviève Favre, was the daughter of Jules Favre, a famous republican who was opposed to the policies of Louis Napoleon. Geneviève raised her son in a liberal Protestant environment. After she divorced Paul Maritain in 1884, before Jacques’s sister was about to be born, she gained the right to raise Jacques and Jeanne, on whom she had an enormous influence (Mougniotte 1977, 11).

Young Jacques’s family situation was so difficult that he was later reluctant to remember the days visiting his father at Château de Bussière. As a young man, he had already developed religious, pedagogical, and political ideas. He entered the Lycée Henri IV and then the Sorbonne in Paris. There he met Raïssa Oumançoff, a fellow student at the Sorbonne and the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants. They wed in a civil ceremony in 1904. She was his spiritual and intellectual collaborator all of her life (Viotto 2000, 4).

Not long before Maritain’s birth, the ideas of Marx, Comte, Huxley, Spencer, Darwin, Nietzsche, Balzac, and Zola had become an important part of the intellectual milieu in which European intellectuals lived in the late nineteenth century. However, philosophical positivism did not answer the larger existential issues of life for Jacques and Raïssa, both of whom had once contemplated
suicide. They attended lectures of the French idealist philosopher Henri Bergson at the invitation of Charles Péguy, a socialist writer opposed to traditional philosophy. Peguy later had considerable influence on Maritain’s thinking. Finding Bergson’s lectures in aesthetics, philosophy of religion, and ethics to be a series of revelations exposing the many mistakes of the new scientism, the Maritains stopped thinking about suicide (Viotto 2000, 127).

Jacques and Raïssa started a real conversation about Catholicism with Léon Bloy, a writer who represented a version of French anti-bourgeois Catholicism and was known for his anti-Semitic polemic. They were impressed by the sincerity of one of his books, a novel entitled La Femme Pauvre (The Poor Woman), which was reviewed by Maurice Maeterlinck. Through Bloy’s influence, both Maritains sought baptism in the Roman Catholic Church in 1906. With baptism both assumed the natural stance of “philosophical intelligences.” They believed that only God could heal the spiritual aridity of their intellectual lives and fill their lives with a larger meaning (Viotto 2000, 127).

Maritain obtained a scholarship to study biology at Heidelberg, which offered him an opportunity to abandon philosophy. But Humbert Clérissac, a Dominican, introduced Maritain to the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. In the philosophy of St. Thomas, Jacques and Raïssa found clarity and order, depth and moderation, and above all a sense of mystery. They also found in Aquinas an uncanny predisposition to get to the essence of matters. Their in-depth reading of the *Summa* freed their spirits.

This intellectual encounter was decisive. It was as if Maritain had forged a deep and lasting alliance with St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, born six centuries before his own. The encounter impelled Maritain to become a Christian philosopher for his church. Following his encounter with Thomas of Aquinas, Maritain’s preferred Thomistic axiom was “distinguish in order to unite.” With this idea in mind, he started a dialogue that engaged and embraced different modern ways of thinking and initiated a revival of interest in the Angelic Doctor. To be sure, Maritain was also influenced by the writings of the mystic Carmelite, St. John of the Cross, to whom he dedicated his beautiful essay *Todo y Nada* (Everything and Nothing) (Lacombe 1991, 37).

In 1912 Maritain became a professor at the Collège Stanislas in Paris, causing much controversy because of his use of Thomistic
methodology. In 1919, he obtained the chair of History of Modern Philosophy at the Institut Catholique de Paris. In 1921 he became a full Professor of History of Modern Philosophy, Logic and Cosmology at the same institute (Viotto 2000, 128).

By the late 1920s, Maritain’s attention began to turn to social issues leading him to develop principles of a liberal Christian humanism and a philosophical defense of human rights. Jacques and Raïssa founded the Cercles Thomistes (Thomistic Circles), a group dedicated to the study of Thomism. Leading lights from the intellectual and artistic circles of Paris attended the group, including Jean Cocteau, François Mauriac, George Rouault, Manuel de Falla, Paul Claudel, and Étienne Gilson (Viotto 2000, 128).

Maritain did impressive philosophical work between 1922 and 1931, writing on a great variety of topics found in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, such as religion and culture, political and social thought, and Christian philosophy. In 1932 he published his most important work entitled *Distinguish to Unite: The Degrees of Knowledge*, which focused on epistemology.

Étienne Gilson, a renowned Thomistic philosopher, invited Maritain to give courses and lectures at the Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto. On his way to Canada, he visited the United States and met Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins, prominent philosophers at the University of Chicago. There Maritain first established his reputation as a philosopher in the United States with his lecture on “Some Reflections on Culture and Liberty.” This was further confirmed with lectures on various philosophical themes at Notre Dame, the University of Chicago, New York University, and the Catholic University of America (Viotto 2000, 132). In these lectures Maritain defended a metaphysical approach to philosophy to counter the reigning pragmatic philosophy in this country.

In 1936 Maritain wrote *Humanisme Intégral* (*True Humanism*) based on lectures given in Santander, Spain. This book, which focused on a new lay and pluralist Christendom, was criticized in some circles, by socialists for not sufficiently embracing socialism and by others for adopting too many socialist ideas. The same year he gave an important lecture in Chicago entitled “Socialist Humanism and Integral Humanism,” which demonstrated that a Catholic philosopher could be a major contributor to the serious dialogue about the growing acceptance of socialist ideas in the academy.
Maritain returned to the United States in 1938 where he gave lectures in New York, which furthered his reputation in this country. While visiting Fordham University he met a group of young Catholic professors, including Harry McNeil, Emmanuel Chapman, and Dan Walsh (Florian 2000, 43). In January of 1940, he gave a series of conferences in New York, Chicago, Buffalo, Princeton, Washington, Annapolis, Charlottesville, and Philadelphia. At this time he decided not to return to Paris because of the Nazi occupation of France, settling in New York (Mougel 1988, 9) and becoming an established figure in Catholic thought in the United States (Mougel 1988, 7-28).

Maritain's ideas were also very influential in Latin America, as well as in Europe and the United States. He was noted for his conferences on anti-Semitism. As a result of the “liberal” character of his political philosophy, which included certain socialists concepts and a defense of liberal democracy, Maritain came increasingly under fire from both the left and the right both in France and abroad (Mougel 1988, 8).

Maritain wrote two anthologies in English: *Scholasticism and Politics* (1940) and *Ransoming the Time* (1945). The former made the case that there was no incompatibility between Christianity and liberal democracy because of the Christian ideal of universal love. The latter presented a strong case against anti-Semitism. Maritain also founded the “École Libre des Hautes Études” in New York and published *Human Rights and Natural Law* (1942), in which he defended natural law ethics and an ethics of human rights. In 1943, in lectures at Yale University on education, he confronted American pragmatism and published his Yale lectures under the title *Education at the Crossroads*. This major educational work will receive extensive treatment later in this chapter.

Following the liberation of France in the summer of 1944, Maritain was named French ambassador to the Vatican, where he served from 1946 to 1948 under Pope Pius XII. While there he befriended Giovanni Battista Montini, the pope's secretary of state, who later became Pope Paul VI (Viotto 2000, 131).

In 1948, Maritain resigned from his diplomatic position because of an invitation by president Harold Dodds of Princeton to teach moral philosophy at the university (Maritain 1955b, 150). The following year he gave six lectures at the R. Walgreen Foundation of Chicago, later published as *Man and State* (1951). Maritain frequently returned to France to give short courses on philosophy. At the same time he
continued to write on politics and social matters, and was actively involved in drafting the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) (Viotto 2000, 136).

In 1954 Maritain suffered a heart attack and had to limit his teaching (Viotto 2000, 132). His writing continued apace, however. In 1958 he wrote *Reflections on America*, a paean expressing his gratitude to the United States for what the country had done for him and his wife. In 1960 Maritain and his wife returned to France, where he received the Grand Prix de Littérature awarded by the French Academy. Following Raïssa’s death later that year, Maritain moved to Toulouse where he decided to live with the Little Brothers of Jesus, a religious order founded by Charles de Foucault. There he wrote his famous polemic and cry of a broken and bitter heart, *The Peasant of Garonne*, a critical reply to the Second Vatican Council. He died in Toulouse, France in April 28, 1973.

Since his death several institutes have preserved the intellectual legacy of his works: The Jacques Maritain Center founded in 1958 at Notre Dame University; Institut International Jacques Maritain founded in 1964 in Rome, with a second branch called Centre International d’études et de recherches in Treviso, Italy; and the Cercle d’ Études Jacques et RaVssa Maritain founded at Kolbsheim, France in 1962, to which the philosopher gave all rights to his works, which were published as *The Complete Works of Jacques Maritain* (*Oeuvres Complètes*).

**His Philosophical Sources**

Maritain’s philosophy was influenced by Henri Bergson, Aristotle, St. Augustine, and most of all St. Thomas of Aquinas. Maritain described his philosophical sources during a conference in New York on January 9, 1943, saying:

> An old lady who I venerate, spoke about me to one of my friends, some time ago, saying: he is Catholic, you know, but from a particular sect; he is Thomistic as well. My God, Thomism is not a sect such as Christian Science; it is simply the philosophy of Aristotle baptized by Saint Thomas of Aquinas. It relies on a synthesis of the principles of reason and faith to face the sharpest problems of our time. It has been
twenty-five years since I have let Thomism go out from the historic chests or from manuals of the seminars in order to construct a vivid philosophy, and this was an absurd enterprise, an enterprise for people in despair. I want to believe that our adventure turned out well, because from its very beginning it was led by the freedom of the spirit.” (Maritain 1947, xi-xii)

Maritain considered Thomism a philosophy that was anchored in a strong foundation of common sense and intellectual insight. He saw Thomism as a true, evolving philosophy with vitality and openness to all questions, not a closed doctrinal system. Fernand Brunner said of Maritain, “His work represents an important tendency in Neo-Thomism and showed an ambition to extract the thought of Thomas Aquinas from its theological context in order to consider it as philosophy” (1975, 5).

Maritain knew how to combine medieval thought with contemporary ways of thinking, especially about education. For Maritain, Thomism was not a dead philosophy of the past but a key to the present and the future. Consequently, one cannot classify Thomism as “anti-modern” simply because it opposes some ideas and philosophies of the twentieth century, such as voluntarism, pragmatism, or intellectualism. Maritain addressed this matter himself:

What I call anti-modern here could just as well be called ultramodern . . . anti-modern against the mistakes of the present time and ultramodern because of the multiple truths to be developed in the future time. . . . Thomas’ thought is not a thought of a century or a sect. It is a universal and timeless thought elaborated by the natural reason of humankind. (1922, 14-16)

What separated Maritain from the philosophers of his time were his strong affirmation of the “primacy of the spiritual” and the belief that reason is not against faith but a legitimate way to seek God. In this manner, Thomism was decisive for Maritain’s work; his philosophical effort was to reestablish the real hierarchy of being, both human and divine, and give rightful priority to spiritual and metaphysical values (Hovre, in Gallagher 1963, 41). Maritain’s philosophy built a bridge
between reason and Christian mysticism, according to Philippe Filliot (2007). In other words, Maritain’s thought possesses a double frame, one theological and the other philosophical. For Maritain, philosophy is no longer the “hand maiden” of theology, as it was regarded in medieval times; rather, theology is a useful tool for philosophy.

Maritain’s work in the United States was appreciated and well recognized by such philosophers as Donald and Idella Gallagher, who wrote:

Maritain has much in common with the sages of the ancient and medieval periods—with Platonic and Aristotelian views of rational human nature and the dignity of contemplation, with Augustine and Aquinas on the final end for humans and the primacy of love-in-contemplation. Still, his is a twentieth-century philosophy of education and not a mere recapitulation of classic ideas and ideals. (1963, 29)

Maritain and the Thomistic Revival

Jacques Maritain is rightly considered a key figure in the Thomistic revival which flourished in the United States before and after World War II. This revival featured translations, articles, and textbooks. Between 1911 and 1935, the Dominican Fathers from the English Province issued a translation of the Summa Theologica, which helped raise interest in Thomism in the United States. At the beginning of this revival only Catholics were interested; later other philosophers took serious note of Thomism. From the 1930s to the early 1950s Thomism was the locus of philosophical action for Catholic philosophers and a number of prominent scholars in secular universities. New journals provided a forum for those exploring Thomism in depth or attempting to relate it to modern philosophies. In 1927 the American Catholic Philosophical Association started to publish the journal, New Scholasticism, while the American Dominicans started The Thomist in 1929.

This renewed interest in Aquinas’s thought before Vatican II was called “neo-Thomism,” with two schools of interpretation. One was Aristotelian Thomism, whose distinguished adherents included James Weisheipe, William Wallace, Vincent Smith, and Benedict Ashley. The other school was Existential Thomism, which claimed Étienne Gilson
(born in 1884) and Maritain, both French philosophers living in the United States.

In the estimation of John Knasas, there was also a third school called Transcendental Thomism, which was represented by Jesuit theologians Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, and Bernard J.F. Lonergan. Knasas (2003, 30-31) argues that although the Thomistic revival continues in the work of major Catholic systematic theologians from the school of Transcendental Thomism, the metamorphosis of the Thomistic revival from Neo-Thomism into Transcendental Thomism had been disaster for Thomism itself, since it takes into account Immanuel Kant’s idealism, and thus is not “pure” Thomism. Not all scholars take this negative view of Transcendental Thomism (Kerr 2007, 111-12).

Maritain and Gilson were the most important figures representing the revival of Thomistic philosophy in the 1940s and 1950s (Elias, 1999, 93). Though some have called Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler Thomists, Donohoe states that, “They would themselves have very likely disclaimed this attribution” (1968, 16). As laymen, both Maritain and Gilson made Thomism appear less the forbidding clerical preserve. Gilson was the peerless historian of medieval thought while Maritain the preeminent Thomistic commentator on contemporary epistemology, political philosophy, metaphysics, culture, and education.

The combined impact of Gilson and Maritain has been greater in the United States than in France. French and Belgian interest in Thomism goes back to the time of Pope Leo XIII. He urged the restoration of the wisdom of St. Thomas and helped Belgian bishops create a chair of Thomistic philosophy at the Catholic University of Louvain. In 1888, Abbe Desire Mercier founded the Institute Superieur de Philosophie, which became an important center of Thomistic research. Leo XIII was also instrumental in establishing the pontifically recognized Catholic University of America, whose philosophy department was committed to Thomism for many years.

Maritain galvanized the movement of Neo-Thomism. This was especially true with the educational issues he raised in his Terry Lectures at Yale in 1943. In these talks “the most vital phase of his work . . . was . . . carrying scholasticism beyond seminary walls and into the world. . . . Maritain came . . . like a breath of air into a room long sealed” (Fecher 1953, 340).
Maritain’s neo-Thomistic Catholic philosophy of education was a reaction to progressive or pragmatic philosophies of education. It aimed at helping persons to achieve a supernatural destiny as its primary goal, and at placing “emphasis on the inner resources of the student and the vital spontaneity of the child” (Elias 1999, 84). Neo-Thomism offered “a rigorous and a coherent synthesis of human nature, society and God” (Bryk, Lee, Holland 1993, 36). It also sought to recover truths and to bring these perennially valid principles to bear on the moral dilemmas of the present day.

Equally important, neo-Thomism reconnected with Aristotle and St. Thomas. After all, it was the Angelic Doctor who supported and then advanced the Aristotelian ideal of science in which many of the mysteries of human life could be revealed through the application of human reason to faith. Neo-Thomist philosophy therefore draws its principles from religious and philosophic sources. It sought to recover truths, valid principles, and moral values and incorporate them into current philosophical discussions.

The revival continued under the aegis of Pius XI. Inspired by ideas similar to those of Maritain, he claimed:

Christian education is to co-operate with divine grace in forming the true and perfect Christian; that is, to form Christ Himself in those regenerated by baptism. . . . Christian education takes in the whole aggregate of human life, physical and spiritual, intellectual and moral, individual, domestic and social, not with a view of reducing it in any way, but in order to elevate, regulate and perfect it, in accordance with the example and teaching of Christ. (Pius XI, in Treacy 1945, 64-65)

In Maritain’s thinking, Christian humanism and personalism came into play. Both philosophies bore significant influence for the encyclicals of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II. The latter wrote the Angelicum in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of Leo XIII’s Aeterni Patris:

The philosophy of St. Thomas deserves to be attentively studied and accepted with conviction by the youth of our day by reason of its spirit of openness and of universalism,
characteristics which are hard to find in many trends of contemporary thought. . . . Such openness is also a significant and distinctive mark of the Christian faith, whose specific countermark is its catholicity. (John Paul II 1980, 130-40)

For Knasas, Aquinas's philosophy does not claim to embrace the totality of truth but to be “open” to all truth: “Christian philosophy, of which Thomism is a model example, follows a methodology in which faith prompts one’s thinking to the limits and so helps to avoid the limitedness of viewpoint that plagues historical, that is, secular, forms of philosophy” (2003, xiii).

A Philosopher of Education

For Maritain, philosophy is a witness to the supreme dignity of thought, pointing to what is eternal in a person, and a stimulant to the thirst for pure knowledge. By vocation the philosopher seeks knowledge of those fundamentals “about the nature of things and the nature of the mind, and man himself, and God” (Maritain 1961, 7). Indeed, for Maritain, people do not live on bread or technological discoveries alone, but on the

values and realities which are above time, and worth being known for their own sake; they feed on that invisible food which sustains the life of the spirit, and which makes them aware, not of such or such means at the service of their life, but of their very reasons for living. (Maritain 1961, 7)

Maritain constructed a philosophy of education that focused on reflection about the nature of education itself—its motifs, raison d’être, objectives, meaning, and methods. The basis of Maritain’s philosophy of education can be found in the answers to four questions he raises regarding education. These are: What is education? What is the person? What are the fundamental dispositions of the student? and What is the role of the teacher?

It should be noted that Maritain’s responses to these questions take him into the realm of metaphysics; he presents largely but not exclusively a metaphysics of education. John Dewey criticized
Maritain’s view by attacking metaphysics, which Dewey thought was the basis of Maritain’s philosophy of education. Dewey rejected what Maritain proposed as the perennially valid truths about reality and education. He also pointed out “the elitist social condition that gave rise to it” (Elias 1995, 14), the Greek world in which the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were formulated.

The major questions concerning the philosophy of education focus on the aims of education, the role of the educator, the dynamics of education (i.e., the relationship between teacher and student), the specific role of the school, as well as the spirit, curriculum, and values of education. If the aim of education is steering persons toward their own human achievement and happiness, then education cannot escape the problems and entanglements of philosophy, for it presupposes them by its very nature.

After writing in branches of philosophy ranging from metaphysics and epistemology to philosophy of nature and philosophy of history, it seemed only natural that Maritain sought a practical field for applying his theories. This field was education. An early letter he wrote to Françoise Baton in 1898 reveals Maritain’s keen interest in education: “And of course all that I shall think and know, I shall devote to the cause of the proletariat and to mankind; I shall use it completely for the preparation of the revolution and the education of mankind” (Allard 1982, 8).

Maritain’s own childhood provided him with a wealth of material that formed his approach to education. Early in his life he raised many questions, such as: What does education mean? What are the aims of education? What are the principles that inspire education? What is the role of the student in relation to the teacher? Is there an \textit{élan vital}, a vital impetus, inspired by the grace of God? Is there such a thing as liberal education? Do we really know what freedom is? Is it possible to be wise? Because of this holistic and measured approach to education, it is indisputable that Maritain enjoys an important role in the history of pedagogy. Maritain answered these questions in \textit{Education at the Crossroads} and other educational essays.

His fresh approach to the subject can be seen in a series of pithy remarks, such as “Education is an art” (1943, 2), “Education of man is a human awakening” (1943, 9), and “Education is the conquest of internal and spiritual” (1943, 11). Maritain’s purpose in entering
debates about education was to provide a philosophy of education based on Christian thought and suited to the needs of contemporary persons. Guy Avanzini would later write of him, “I know that not everyone shares his faith, but we have to recognize that a faith is indispensable to initiate a dynamic education. We are losing sight of the true purposes of education and thus we have the contemporary crisis in our schools” (1978, 365).

Maritain’s writings on philosophy of education are regarded as possessing enduring value (Elias 1999, 93), a value especially evidenced in *Pour une Philosophie de l’Éducation* (Maritain 1959b, 10). The work collects three essays, written first in English and later translated into French in this book.

The first essay was developed from a series of conferences given at Yale University in 1943. “The Thomist Views on Education,” the second essay, was a study written at the request of the National Society for the Study of Education in 1955. Maritain was familiar with the American educators known as the “Chicago group,” which included Robert Hutchins (president of the University of Chicago), Mortimer Adler, Stringfellow Barr, Scott Buchanan, and John Neff, then director of the Committee of Social Thought at the University of Chicago. This esteemed group advocated that an integral liberal education replace the elective system established at Harvard. Maritain agreed with its ideas, values, and desire to integrate liberal arts and humanities with scientific and technological based studies while broadening the so-called “specialization” approach, which according to Maritain, kills a more global approach to thinking (Maritain 1959b, 10).


Another of Maritain’s compelling works is *The Education of Man* (published by Donald and Idella Gallagher in 1963). This volume contained two of the earlier essays “The Thomist Views on Education” and “Specific Aspects of Christian Education,” as well as “Moral Education,” “Education and Humanities,” “Moral and Spiritual Values
in Education,” “The Education of Women,” “Conquest of Freedom,” and two appendixes entitled “Education for the Good Life” and “The Crucial Problem of the Education of the Human Being.” Evans and Ward considered this collection “a token of the courtesy and generosity extended to a French philosopher by this great country, a country in which he has lived for a long time and in the cultural life of which he is proud to participate” (1995, xii). Of Maritain, Donald and Idella Gallagher said:

The philosophy of education issuing from this half century of teaching, and from meditating upon the principles of education and the practical problems involved in schooling the young, is undoubtedly one of the lasting contributions of this eminent Thomist to twentieth-century thought. (1963, 9)

Although Maritain’s writings on education are not a large part of his work, they are significant and enduring in classical value. His writings on education reflect deep personal insights and clear solutions to frequent questions. There is also a unity in his thought that is remarkably contemporary. Furthermore, Maritain’s originality was to establish an approach to pedagogy centered on the learner as a person, to reexamine the aims of education, to emphasize the importance of culture for balanced human development according to moral virtues, to assume democratic responsibilities in society, and to search for truth.

An integral humanism and a liberal education for all are components of Maritain’s democratic dream. The welcoming of theology in the classrooms, emphasizing the dignity of manual work, and the seeking of wisdom are all part of a pedagogical ideal that is centered on the “formation of a true moral conscience and the formation of man as an image of God” (Cassata 1953, 98).

**Christian Pedagogy**

In Maritain, as in Thomas Aquinas, there is an impressive marriage of rationality and spirituality. His philosophical reflections on education proceeded along the two paths of theology and philosophy. But his Christian reflection on education transcended the limits of the Christian society. It encompassed the whole world and proposed an answer to the crisis of modern society.
In this context Maritain’s work is outstanding. His Christian convictions are always at hand, never hidden. In writing his work *Pour une philosophie de l’éducation*, he dedicated an entire chapter to the Christian idea of the human person, providing a foundation for a Christian pedagogy.

It should be noted that in a pluralistic world, Christian pedagogy has been often been characterized as being discreet or silent. Guy Avanzini (1996, 555) analyzed this phenomenon by describing two types of Christian educators. Some practice what they teach by embodying virtues like commitment, competence, readiness, respect for others and equity, which resonate with gospel teaching. The other group claims that Catholic doctrine is the unifying principle of their teaching. Of these two groups, it is the first that has taken a dominant role in our society. The reasons are many: the prohibition of religious proselytism in society, the pervasive spirit of secularism, the respect for other faiths, and so forth. Consequently the second group has been excluded and Christian pedagogy has been a silent presence. Maritain falls into the second group in his public arguments for the inclusion of the religious in all forms of education.

Education is twofold—philosophical and spiritual—throughout Maritain’s writings. Even in addressing secular civilization, his philosophical and religious ideas are always present. In particular, the Christian idea of the person is presented in these two senses: “I say philosophical because this idea pertains to the nature or essence of man; I say religious, because of the existential status of this human nature in relation to God and the special gifts and trials and vocation involved” (1959b, 151).

According to Filliot, it is possible to say that Maritain has a “spiritualist pedagogy,” because of the questions he raises about education (2007, 2). The first question is “What is education?” (1943, 2-28) and the second is “What is man?” The two essential questions define the fundamental principles of education considered as a dynamic process where the student is primary and teachers play an integral but facilitative role. The second question, which also concerns the aims of education, asks if it is possible to be wise and if an education for wisdom is possible. According to Maritain, “Education and teaching can only achieve their internal unity if the manifold parts
of their whole work are organized and quickened by a vision of wisdom as the supreme goal” (1943, 48).

According to Allan Mougriotte, Maritain—due to his Thomistic philosophy melded with modern theories of education—holds a balanced and open position. In addition, even if he acknowledges the Christian belief of sin in human nature, he does not lean at all toward a repressive pedagogy (1997, 115).

Also noteworthy in Maritain’s philosophy is the integration of culture in education according to a healthy hierarchy of values and knowledge. Christian pedagogy is based on *intellectus quaerens veritatem* (intelligence seeking the truth) and finding through the light of faith the real sense of human knowledge. “Art, science, and wisdom are the intellectual virtues” (Maritain 1959b, 152), which, when coupled with a liberal education, can equip, cultivate, liberate, and give the intelligence needed for their development.

For Maritain, education is an ongoing process which also has a social dimension. Indeed, education, in the broad sense of the word, will “continue through all our life in every one of us” (Maritain 1959b, 155). By the action of God’s grace, education helps us find the “supreme perfection which consists in love” (156). And it is only because of love that we give ourselves to others who have the same image of God as we do and share a common good. In Maritain’s penetrating words, “Education ought to teach us how to be in love always and what to be in love with” (1943, 23).

Maritain asserted that “The educational adventure is an incessant call to the intelligence and free will of the youth” (1959b, 166). However, Christian pedagogy is not to be limited to the learner. Ideally, a teacher possessing deep personal convictions, not to mention intellectual openness and generosity, accompanies the learner as a companion. This implies a context where school, common life, and fraternal charity are involved and integrated.

Maritain’s educational philosophy is a Christian pedagogy that constantly reiterates a conception of liberal education. Liberal education for Maritain includes the traditional liberal arts as well as philosophy and theology. The aims of this education are intellectual understanding, moral development, aesthetic cultivation, and religious formation through the inculcation of perennial truths and values. This education takes place in three stages of life: rudimentary or elementary
education attends to the development of the imagination and intellectual skills; secondary education in secondary schools and colleges focuses on the liberal arts; advanced graduate education entails specialization to prepare a person for professions and careers.

For Maritain it was important to foster spiritual flexibility needed in the search for the truth, in accordance with the Church’s mission to teach, as interpreted by St. Thomas (Mougnoiitte 1997, 117). Mougnoiitte concluded that Maritain built a very modern educational practice on a traditional anthropology: “The paradox of his thought consists in presenting a Christian pedagogy, faithful to its Christian sources, but at the same time, a pedagogy that offers the best warranties of respecting their faith” (1997, 118). To J.L. Allard, Maritain’s pedagogy reflects his conception of philosophy, and “It could surely contribute to an enrichment of contemporary pedagogical thought and education” (1982, 115). His ideas also contribute to Christian education—or religious education as some would call it today.

The Concept of Education

According to Maritain, “The task of education is above all to shape man, or to guide the evolving dynamism through which man forms himself as a man” (Maritain 1943, 1). In other words, education helps us to become who we really are or “to become a man” (1943, 1). This goal is possible because human beings are educable. The idea of liberal education is founded on having an education available for every human being. In Maritain’s words, “Every human being is entitled to receive such a properly human and humanistic education” (Gallagher and Gallagher 1963, 69).

Maritain emphasized that “Becoming who we are” stresses the broader purpose of education, which is “any process whatsoever by means of which man is shaped and led toward fulfillment” (1943, 2). If man becomes man, man enters into a dynamic process of creativity. This is why Maritain affirms that “Education is an art” (1943, 3) and everyone could become a work of art.

The primary goal in Maritain’s philosophy of education is “the conquest of internal and spiritual freedom to be achieved by the individual person, or, in other words, his liberation through knowledge and wisdom, good will, and love” (1941, 11). But this liberation is not
to be understood as merely unfolding potentialities without any object to be grasped or without a goal to reach. Rather, “No one is freer, or more independent, than the one who gives himself for a cause or a real being worthy of the gift” (Maritain 1943, 12).

The virtue of wisdom is also important in Maritain’s philosophy and the pursuit of freedom is inseparable from the pursuit of wisdom. Wisdom appears as the supreme knowledge that embraces all realities of the person as well his or her aspirations, including freedom (1943, 48). Thus, Maritain writes that “Education and teaching can only achieve their internal unity if the manifold parts of their whole work are organized and quickened by a vision of wisdom as the supreme goal” (1943, 48).

Paradoxically, wisdom cannot be obtained directly by education, since education is only an indirect means to wisdom, providing the student with the basic necessity to obtain it. Maritain writes of education that “Its specific aim is to provide [humans] with the foundations of real wisdom” (1943, 48). He continues, “The purpose of elementary and higher education is not to make of the youth a truly wise man, but to equip his mind with an ordered knowledge which will enable him to advance toward wisdom in his manhood” (1943, 48).

The reason why wisdom cannot be obtained directly by education is that wisdom cannot be taught. Wisdom cannot be achieved by science alone (1943, 48), but also needs “human and spiritual experience,” since “it is over and above every specialization” (1943, 48). Wisdom appears then as a practical experience, requiring not only the use of reason but also of intuition—“intellectual insight” as Maritain calls it. This insight occupies an important place in his thought (1943, 43). The answer to the paradox of wisdom that cannot be taught lies in the appeal to intuition.

The formation of a person depends upon guidance. “Education, like medicine, is *ars cooperativa naturae*” (1959b, 165),” Maritain writes. Continuing, he says, “The principal agent in the educational process is not the teacher, but the student” (1959b, 65). (Thomas Aquinas developed this in *Summa Theologiae*, 1q.117, a. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles* 75; *De Veritate*, q. II, a. 1.)

To be more precise, Maritain urges that “the primary dynamic factor or propelling force is the internal vital principle in the one to be educated” (1943, 31). There is an *élan vital*, in the famous Bergsonian formula, which can be defined as a “vital and active principle of
knowledge” (1943, 31), that exists in each person. For Maritain, the teacher or educator—the secondary factor or agent—“has to offer to the mind either examples from experience or particular statements which the pupil is able to judge by virtue of what he already knows and from which he will go on to discover broader horizons” (1943, 31). Put another way, “His power of intuition will be awakened” (1943, 45). Therefore “education of man is a human awakening” (1943, 9), but the results of the human action of learning is attributed to God who created this vital principle, which in Christian terminology corresponds to “divine grace.”

Education transforms the person, who moves from reality to a transcendent level. “Man does not merely exist as a physical being,” Maritain wrote. “There is in him a richer and nobler existence; he has spiritual super existence through knowledge and love” (1943, 8). This spiritual conception of education in Maritain is contrary to the instrumental and technical views of education that came to prominence in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s and are still present in the postmodern world of today.

Through education one becomes truly human, according to Maritain. This humanity is not for the self alone but for the community and society. If education is the ability to think, it has to perform its task in a world which thirsts for the liberation of the human person (Gallagher and Gallagher 1963, 100).

It is significant that Maritain, a Frenchman, defined what a democratic education should be when he was living in the United States:

A democratic education is an education which helps human persons to shape themselves, judge by themselves, discipline themselves, to love and to prize the high truths which are the very root and safeguard of their dignity, to respect in themselves and in others human nature and conscience, and to conquer themselves in order to win their liberty. (Gallagher and Gallagher 1963, 69)

The Concept of Person

Maritain’s philosophy of education has a departure point: the human person. The goal of education consists in becoming who we are (1943, 1). The social and political implications of his personalism are
expressed in his *True Humanism* (1946). Maritain has been considered a “personalist humanist” (Viotto 1991, 17), for his philosophy is person–centered.

The answer to the question “What is a man?” (Maritain 1943, 1) constitutes the basis for his philosophy of education. Maritain’s idea of the person is the Greek, Jewish, and Christian concept of

man as an animal endowed with reason, whose supreme dignity is in the intellect; and man as a free individual in personal relation with God, whose supreme righteousness consists in voluntarily obeying the law of God; and man as a sinful and wounded creature called to divine life and to the freedom of grace, whose supreme perfection consists of love. (1943, 7)

This unified view of the person needs to be considered in the work of education and teaching. That is why both education and teaching should unify in fostering the “internal unity in man” (1943, 45).

Maritain’s consideration of the union of body and soul explains the person *ad intra*, or in relation to oneself. And for completion, Maritain introduces the concepts of “individuality” and “personality,” which allow him to describe the person *ad extra*, in relation to the world. According to Maritain, a human being “is an individual in so far as he is part of the universe, the human being is a person in so far as he is a spiritual object” (Gallagher 1963, 214). Put another way, “Because we are individuals, we are subject to the stars. As we are persons, we rule them” (Maritain 1925, 28). Considered as a person, a human being possesses special dignity, or, as Maritain would say, “an absolute dignity because he is in direct relationship with the realm of being, truth, goodness, beauty, and with God” (1943, 8).

Therefore education can never be akin to mechanical training. On the contrary, it is a perpetual appeal to intelligence and free will (1943, 9-10). Guidance of a person requires a dynamism “which shapes him as a human person–armed with knowledge, strength of judgment, and moral virtues–while at the same time conveying to him the spiritual heritage of the nation and the civilization in which he is involved” (1943, 10). That is why education for Maritain cannot be merely utilitarian or pragmatic; it cannot be reduced to a social reality, a mere
idea, or an act of the will. It must primarily be an effort to develop the intellect or intelligence of the person of the person, as is emphasized in the Thomistic tradition.

The Fundamental Dispositions of the Student

For Maritain, the power of learning is naturally present in the learner. He recalls the example of Pascal, who was kept away from books on mathematics when he was a boy but nevertheless became a great mathematician (1943, 49-50). Since Maritain believed that “What is learned should never be passively or mechanically received, as dead information which weighs down and dulls the mind” (1943, 50), he recommended that knowledge must be given to students in such a way that they can assimilate it in such a vital manner that it becomes their own. As Maritain puts it, “Teaching liberates intelligence instead of burdening it. . . . Teaching results in the freeing of the mind through the mastery of reason over the things learned” (1943, 49). Teaching is not forcing the students’ minds to receive information; rather, the teacher touches their spirit of learning and motivates them to develop new dispositions and desires for learning.

Learners thus become human by virtue of their inner resources, enlightened by truth, animated by the love of the good, and by taking charge of their own destiny. The vitality and intuitiveness of the spirit, says Maritain, “should be relied upon as invaluable factors in the first stages of education” (1943, 61). Elias has commented that the imagination has to be guided by rules of reason, space, and time. He also argues that while Maritain’s theory “does have a place for understanding the power of imagination,” it does not emphasize the free play of imagination (Elias 1995, 85). Childhood is characterized by imagination (Maritain 1943, 62), but adolescence witnesses ascending natural reason. For Maritain, it is mainly in this second stage of adolescence that the “natural impulse [is] to be turned to account by education, both by stimulation and by disciplining reason” (1943, 63).

It is this abiding internal disposition that enables us to grasp the meaning of science or art in the specific truth or beauty it offers us: “I should say that the youth is to learn and know music in order to understand the meaning of music rather than to become a composer” (1943, 63). This is possible if young people grasp this truth or beauty
by the natural power and gifts of their mind—including their intuitive capacity—says Maritain. He enumerates five natural dispositions to be fostered in the student.

The five dispositions are: the love of knowing the truth; the love of truth and justice, that is, the love of acting according to the truth; the love of simplicity and openness, or “the attitude of a being who exists gladly, is unashamed of existing, stands upright in existence, and for whom to be and to accept the natural limitations of existence are matters of equally simple assent” (37); the love of work, which does not mean hard work or laziness, but “a respect for the job to be done, a feeling of faithfulness and responsibility regarding it” (38); and the love of cooperation that is, a disposition against the tendency to rivalry and competition (see Filliot 2007, 7).

To foster these five dispositions in learners, educational norms are needed. In actuality these norms comprise the attitudes the teacher must take toward learners. The teacher must encourage individuals, be concerned above all with their inwardness, nourish internal unity of the person, and liberate learners’ minds by leading them to mastery of the things learned (Maritain 1943, 35-39).

As such, education and teaching can only achieve their internal unity “if the manifold parts of their whole work are organized and quickened by a vision of wisdom as the supreme goal” (1943, 48). As stated above, there are no classes on wisdom (1943, 23), nor can wisdom, virtues, love, or intuition be taught; they are freely given gifts. Indeed, to acknowledge that not everything can be learned already counts as wisdom. Maritain criticizes the cultural milieu in which courses are served up for almost anything; he maintains this is not enough for acquiring the wisdom, love, and internal freedom that he wants education to accomplish.

Consequently, Maritain’s philosophy—which unites a teacher who cooperates in eliciting the fundamental dispositions of the student, upon which education builds—acknowledges the practical level of a spiritual education, which may ultimately lead a person to wisdom.

The Role of the Teacher

Maritain proposed a list of four rules that ought to light the path of a teacher. First, the teacher must foster the good dispositions of students by liberating their best energies and repressing their worst
ones, with repression being only a secondary means if other approaches do not work (1943, 39). His second rule is to focus on the interiority of students and their spiritual well being by stressing “inwardness and the internalization of the educational influence” (39). The third rule is to foster internal unity in humans by fighting against what brings dispersion and fragmentation in a person. In short, if persons do not overcome the inner multiplicity of drives and various currents of knowledge and belief and the diverse vital energies at play in their minds, they will always remain more slaves than free persons (47). Fourth, the cited dispositions have as their aim freeing the spirit of the person. For Maritain this formation happens not by the mental gymnastics of a person’s faculties but by the truth that sets persons free, a truth that is vitally assimilated by the insatiable activity, which is rooted in the depths of the self (47).

Teachers cooperate with students in their learning because they act as instrumental causes, not as efficient causes of learning, in accordance with the view of Aquinas:

Their duty is not to mold the child’s mind arbitrarily as potters mold lifeless clay; rather, their task is to assist the mind and the living spiritual beings, which they are endeavoring to develop, and which in that process of development must be the principal agents. In like manner, the teacher’s task is to cooperate with God. (1943, 43)

The art of education consists “in inspiring, schooling and pruning, teaching and enlightening, so that in the intimacy of human activity, the weight of the egoistic tendencies diminishes, and the weight of the aspirations proper to personality and its spiritual generosity increases” (35). Teaching is a subtle art in which teachers performs as artists in the role of awakening intelligence and will.

Maritain asserts that a special kind of child is best able to be educated; it is the one “whose intellect, before being fecundated by sense-perception and sense-experience, is but a tabula rasa, as Aristotle put it” (33). Therefore, knowledge does not pre-exist in the soul as Plato taught, for there are no innate ideas. The teacher possesses knowledge the student lacks; hence, teachers are required.
Maritain’s conception of education is not mechanical, but spiritual. The old analogy of education depicts the teacher as a sculptor who imposes form on the previously formless marble of the student. But Maritain, like Aquinas, prefers instead the analogy of the doctor who exerts real causality in healing a sick person “by imitating the ways of nature herself in her operations, and by helping nature, by providing appropriate diet and remedies that nature herself uses, according to her own dynamism, toward a biological equilibrium” (30). According to Maritain’s metaphor, a teacher is comparable to a doctor, and is not just an artist. Rather, the teacher practices science and art.

The teacher’s role is to facilitate the process of education by trying to create the conditions so that students can find truth and wisdom. Teachers should awaken and heed the inner resources of the learner (35). The educator then has to stimulate the expression of the awakened mind by listening to and respecting the natural path of spiritual awakening and by doing this until the learner’s “intuitive power is liberated and strengthened” (44).

The teacher’s domain is the domain of truth, which is determined not by the masters but according to the value of evidence. Teachers are called to have a very special mission in which “What is most important . . . is a respect for the soul as well as for the body of the child, the sense of his innermost essence and his internal resources, and a sort of sacred and loving attention to his mysterious identity, which is a hidden thing that no techniques can reach” (9). This mission also consists in making learners think: “From the very start teachers must respect in the child the dignity of the mind, must appeal to the child’s power of understanding, and conceive of their own effort as preparing a human mind to think for itself” (27). Therefore the teacher has to offer learners “either examples from experience or particular statements which the pupil is able to judge by virtue or what he already knows and from which he will go on to discover broader horizons” (31). The more the teacher frees the mind, the more students become eager to know and can aspire to wisdom.

According to Maritain, far more than pedagogical skill is required. It is very important to have a Christian inspiration when teaching. “I think, there are of course no Christian mathematics or Christian astronomy or engineering,” Maritain allows. “But if the teacher has Christian wisdom, and if his teaching overflows from a soul dedicated
to contemplation, the mode or manner in which his own soul and mind perform a living and illuminating action on the soul and mind of another human being.” What will his impact be? He will “convey to the student and awaken in him something beyond mathematics, astronomy, or engineering” (Gallagher and Gallagher 1963, 136). Note how Maritain distinguishes between a teaching being Christian and teachers who are not. The difference is in how teachers approach issues and insights from students.

Teachers must guide pupils in becoming truly human and doing so with values such of love, generosity, service, and hope. Teachers must draw intelligence from the interior of their students. In doing so, wisdom can be attained as the supreme aim of education. The true educator has the important task of “centering attention on the inner depths of the human person and its preconscious spiritual dynamism, in other words, to lay stress on inwardness and the internalization of the influence” (1943, 39). An appeal should be made to the “sources of knowledge and poetry, of love and truly human desires, hidden in the spiritual darkness of the intimate vitality of the soul” (41).

It is by the truth that learners will be set free, and not by a mere gymnastic exercise of their powers. The human mind gains its freedom “when truth is really known, that is, vitally assimilated by the insatiable activity which is rooted in the depth of self” (1943, 52). Education is not about imposing truths on the learners, but about developing in them their own personal convictions.

**Maritain’s Legacy**

Maritain’s philosophical reflections on education have an important value for our modern world. Technology has achieved major advances, and globalization has torn down borders between people. But people have allotted precious little time to reflect on the world that is being created. As a consequence, issues arise that escape our control. One example of this lies in the field of Catholic education, specifically its philosophical underpinnings. What happened to this philosophy of education? This is a profound question that Elias raised (1999, 92). He noted the concept of transcendence and the effect of its disappearance from religious education. Earlier, Marie-Odile Metral (1969, 11) noted
that education itself has lost its philosophical roots. It is important to reflect upon the meaning of education.

It is imperative that philosophers of education constantly assess and evaluate the aims and nature of education and adapt these to a changing world. For this reason, the contribution of Maritain is valuable. As Métral states, “It is for philosophical reasons, relying on a philosophically based humanism, that Jacques Maritain offers sometimes impertinent reflections because they are pertinent for a human and fully democratic education” (1969, 11-12).

The legacy of Maritain seems irrelevant in the contemporary scene. For evidence, we can cite how Thomistic philosophy of education—sponsored mainly by the Catholic Church—has essentially disappeared in educational theory. In an article he wrote in 1999, Elias offered some reasons for this. He cited changes within the Catholic Church and changes within the field of philosophy of education (101). Regarding the first, Elias noted that at Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes* (13), the Church admitted to not having “the answers to all problems and expressed a willingness to work with others to discover solutions to the pressing problems of our times” (102). As a consequence, Catholic philosophers do philosophy “within a number of different perspectives: analytic philosophy, pragmatism, phenomenology, existentialism, and even Marxism” (102). This varied approach is motivated by the desire to leave behind the “dogmatic attitude” of Thomistic philosophy in order to pursue the apparent freedom and openness in other philosophies. Elias’s second reason is linked to the first: philosophy of education has been taken up by other philosophical approaches besides Thomism. He avers that “By the 1960s, analytic philosophy of education had become the predominant mode of philosophizing in the English-speaking world” (104).

Interestingly, these reasons found support in the analysis on the future of Thomistic philosophy made by Maritain himself at the end of his life. Maritain expressed his disapproval in *The Peasant of the Garonne* (1966), which he wrote after joining the Little Brothers of Jesus, a Catholic congregation in Toulouse, France. In a bitter tone he pointed out that recent popes had not made an impression on the professors who have the responsibility for teaching in the name of the Catholic Church. He continued to think that if the Church insists on recommending a human doctrine, “She obviously could not possibly do
so in the name of the divine Truth” (1968, 168). Such was the case when promulgating Canon 236, n. 3 after Vatican Council II, which states:

There are to be classes in dogmatic theology, always grounded in the written word of God together with sacred tradition; through these, students are to learn to penetrate more intimately the mysteries of salvation, especially with St. Thomas as a teacher. There are also to be classes in moral and pastoral theology, canon law, liturgy, ecclesiastical history, and other auxiliary and special disciplines, according to the norm of the prescripts of the program of priestly formation.

According to Maritain, recommending St. Thomas’s teachings was not a matter of preserving people’s faith or a safe doctrine. Rather, he wanted St. Thomas taught because he viewed his insights as truth. The Church was against positivism, rationalism, and pragmatism, which assert the existence of reason alone. The Church reacted to such philosophical movements by recommending the philosophical approach of Aquinas, an approach that acknowledged the existence of faith, which enlightens and informs the faculty of reason. The problem was that the Church’s original recommendation of St. Thomas’s system subsequently came to be seen as an imperative, with scholars and teachers not given alternatives. Maritain thought that Thomism (which he preferred to the term neo-Thomism) had to be adhered to because of its inner truth, not because it was imposed by some ecclesiastical authority. In fact, Maritain thought that this was the reason for the rejection of neo-Thomism in the twentieth century. Maritain suffered severe criticism for his *The Peasant of the Garonne* and his position against the alleged neo-modernist deviations of some of the theologies propounded after the Second Vatican Council, such as various forms of political and liberation theologies.

Maritain, however, held out hope for the future. He wrote, “I am dreaming of a day when the Church would turn, even in the most delicate matters, toward the road of freedom” (1968, 169). But he should not be misunderstood: he does not oppose freedom to obedience to the Church. Rather, he speaks of freedom because he intends to appeal less to obedience and more to the pursuit of truth. Socrates, who lived from 469 to 399 BCE, had defined philosophy as
“the pursuit of truth,” and many philosophers since have agreed. Similarly, for Maritain the truth of a Christian philosophy of education should be enough to ensure its preservation, progress, and expansion, which could become a reality if there were true freedom of expression and not the arbitrary imposition of authority.

Rethinking and reformulating a Christian philosophy of education has value in today’s pluralistic and diverse world. It can be accomplished by employing rigorous reasoning. A Thomistic philosophy of education remains a valid option more than ever when the array of philosophies of education is considered. Even Elias, despite his critique of Maritain, believes that “The tradition of Thomism should be kept alive as one possible way of grounding this tradition” (1999, 105).

What can a Thomistic philosophy of education offer teachers and students in our time? Elias (1999, 106-09) suggests an interesting list of the enduring values of Thomism. He mentions Thomism’s rich view of human persons, including its religious orientation; the depth of its social concern; its eloquent articulation of the aim of liberating the human spirit, its emphasis on having a liberal arts curriculum centered in philosophy and theology; its concern for methods of transmitting truths; and the stress it puts on the teacher in developing insight in learners.

Jacques Maritain’s aim of liberating the human spirit is especially needed, given the present materialistic world that promotes an exaggerated individualism and exalts materialistic achievements or possessions as the ultimate end—what Aquinas called the *summum bonum*—of human existence. Maritain offers valuable insights on behalf of a Christian education, whose aim is to foster the Christian idea of what humanity is. He emphasizes the unity of the human being, body and soul, and sees the person as both a natural and a spiritual being.

Maritain does not maintain that Christian education makes humans perfect. Rather, it seeks to develop as far as possible natural energies and virtues, both intellectual and moral, depending more on grace than on nature, without separating divine and human love. According to Maritain “Christians must take risks . . . and, at the same time must be prepared to fight to the finish for their souls and lives in God, using the weapons of the Cross every day” (in Gallagher and Gallagher 1963, 132).
It should be noted that neo-Thomism, especially as a philosophy of education, took root more in America than in Europe. As Maritain noted:

Neo-Thomism is one of the living currents in American Philosophy today. The National Society for the Study of Education asked a Thomist philosopher [Maritain] to write a chapter in its Yearbook for 1955, entitled *Modern Philosophies and Education*. So according to this Yearbook Thomism ranks among modern philosophies. Never did M. Emile Bréhier or his colleagues at the Sorbonne recognize the fact. (Maritain 1955, 150-51)

While the religious truth of the Church cannot be expressed through a single exclusive system, nevertheless, it is possible even today to establish a solid basis through Thomism; not to reduce truth, but to find it and love it. So, as Maritain did with his well-known work, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, where he demonstrated Thomistic epistemology and metaphysics had validity, I have tried to show in this essay that St. Thomas’s theology has a “theological wisdom, structured by a perennially valid metaphysics” (McCool 1992, 213).

Such a revival is not without precedent. About Maritain and the Thomistic revival, Charles A. Fecher said, “No one man could have done the whole job; but Maritain certainly made the foundations firm, set the pace, pointed out the direction to follow” (Fecher 1953, 340). The Thomistic renaissance has gained much ground, as Fecher says, and has triumphed over many obstacles. Maritain has never been afraid of getting his shoes muddy or his knuckles bruised, and much less afraid of having his feelings hurt (1953, 346).

**Conclusion**

Maritain had been all but forgotten, not only in France but in the United States as well. But the publication in 1995 of a 16-volume edition of his complete works, *Oeuvres complètes de Jacques et Raïssa Maritain*, inspired scholars in France to appreciate anew his contribution to the fields of politics, culture, philosophy, art, education, human rights, and so forth. Maritain’s writings are
considered by many to contain the best philosophical work of Christian thought (Bressolette et Mougel 1995, 1). His writings on education show his personal insights and clear solutions to questions often asked about and reflected upon. Whether one agrees or not with his theology and philosophy, the lucidity of his way of approaching the problems, the topics of his analysis and the solutions he proposed must be acknowledged. His is a Christian philosophy, not in terms of excluding others but in terms of considering the full development of persons through Christianity and for his contention that a liberal education is valid for persons in every era.

From Maritain’s perspective, it appears that education today lacks a clear understanding of its purpose and essence. Human persons are no longer considered subjects of education—persons who have to be educated. They are merely treated as objects or things to be studied and analyzed, Maritain noted. As he puts it, “By dint of insisting that in order to teach John mathematics it is more important to know John than it is to know mathematics—which is true enough in one sense—the teacher will so perfectly succeed in knowing John that John never succeeds in knowing mathematics” (Maritain 1943, 13-14).

Maritain makes explicit the objectivity of human knowledge—not to mention its aims and values—without offering a new educational theory. He renews Thomas Aquinas’s thinking and applies it to the present educational situation. The originality of Maritain was to establish a pedagogy that centered on the learner as a person, reexamined the aims of education, stressed the importance of culture for a balanced human development through living according to moral virtues, fostering the ability to assume democratic responsibilities towards society, and encouraging the search for truth. Maritain motivates his followers to search for wisdom and to return to the sources of the Western European cultural tradition.

Thomistic philosophy can still show how to extend little by little the boundaries of philosophy itself, to go further into the problems of our time, and help us to express ourselves in a religious educational setting where Christian philosophy has always had so much to offer.