



1989

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Recommended Citation

McCool, Gerald A. S.J. (1989) "Spirituality and Philosophy: The Ideal of the Catholic Mind," *Sacred Heart University Review*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/shureview/vol10/iss1/3>

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Spirituality and Philosophy: The Ideal of the Catholic Mind

Cover Page Footnote

This essay was presented as the Bishop Curtis Lecture at Sacred Heart University on April 27, 1989.

GERALD A. McCOOL, S.J.

***Spirituality and Philosophy:
The Ideal of the Catholic Mind****

Some time ago, a promising young theologian gave a sermon before a University audience in Paris which caused quite a stir. It was blunt and incisive in its assessment of contemporary intellectual confusion. Three great evils, the young preacher said, had caused disarray in the modern university. The first was the intellectual pride of professors who invented new theories simply to call attention to themselves. The second evil was provoked by the first. Ceaseless battles — in which truth was the first victim — went on between factions on the faculty grouped around rival professors. Given the first two evils, the third and worst became inevitable. The students gave up all hope of finding the truth. And so the university, by driving its students into agnosticism through intellectual despair, finally robbed them of their Catholic faith.

The only cure for these three evils, the preacher continued, was a return of the university to Christ. There were plenty of poets, scientists, philosophers and theologians in the world of higher education; but Christ, the Word of God, was the only teacher of truth to be found there: Christ, the Word, Pre-existent and Incarnate, the universal master of every student — *Christus omnium magister*. For, without the light, natural and supernatural, which flows into the human mind from the Word of God, no thinker mind can hope to find the truth. Saint Augustine had seen that centuries ago and none of us can afford to forget it. But professors do, and, by cutting themselves off from the light of Christ, make their own human minds the ultimate norm of truth. When that happens the result is confusion and disarray in education.

As I said, that sermon was preached sometime ago — quite some time ago — about seven hundred years ago, to be exact. The preacher was St. Bonaventure, theologian, mystic, educator, and administrator, friar of the new order of St. Francis, professor of the new

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University of Paris, and soon to be elected General of his order. What he was urging, even as he was teaching in a new way in what was then a new type of school, was retention, of the tradition of Catholic education which he had inherited from the Fathers of the Church—the same tradition, by the way, in which many of you, like me, were educated. Develop that tradition by all means, even transform it, as he himself was doing at the University of Paris, St. Bonaventure urged, but never abandon it. Otherwise the result will be intellectual confusion in which both our faith and the truth slip away from us.

It is about this Patristic tradition of Catholic education that I would like to speak to you tonight. It was already an old tradition when St. Bonaventure helped to bring about one of its great renewals. As a philosophical theology of culture, education, and spirituality, it reached back, through Augustine, to the great theologians of Alexandria, Clement and Origen. The thirteenth century crisis in theology, religious life, and education, provoked by the rediscovery of Aristotle, the establishment of radically new kinds of religious orders, and the displacement of the monastic and cathedral school by the university as the center of higher education, had shaken its foundations. Rising to that challenge, the great theologians and spiritual writers of the thirteenth century, especially St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas, both of them university professors and members of the new religious orders, brought about its restoration and development. Challenged once again by the Reformers and the Humanists of the sixteenth century, this Patristic philosophy of education, theology and spirituality took on new life in the Catholic renewal after Trent. It showed itself in the restoration of Catholic theology and social thought, the re-flowering of spirituality among the Carmelites, the Jesuits, and the priests and religious of the French School. In education it took on new life by adapting itself to the age of the baroque in the curriculum of the new Jesuit colleges. Almost buried in the Enlightenment, the Patristic tradition came back to life once more and adapted itself to the modern age in the great Catholic Renaissance of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Our system of Catholic schools, the growth of teaching congregations, and the social teaching of our Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XI are memorials of that last re-incarnation of the tradition to which a number of us owe our intellectual formation.

Essential to this tradition, which seems to survive through

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constant transformation, is the conviction, based on both faith and reason, that the world makes sense, and that the human mind has the power to understand it. That understanding can be brought about if the liberal arts, science and philosophy are unified by a sound and believing mind under the light of faith. Once human knowledge has been integrated by a coherent education, it will enable the believing mind to understand God's revealed word. More than that, it can lead a prayerful and reflective mind through the meaning which it finds in God's creation to knowledge and love of God himself. Inspired by that tradition, in its sixteenth and seventeenth century form, my own intellectual ancestors, the old Jesuit school masters, could cheerfully spend their life in the classroom. For what they were doing was forming minds which, in the beautiful Ignatian formula, "could find God in all things."

But to assign an aim like that to our own classroom work today would strike a lot of us as a charming but outmoded ideal. For, whether we look at the world from the point of view of culture, philosophy, or theology the very *possibility* of that type of integration of experience has become extremely questionable. And with good reason. For the philosophical attack on the foundations of our traditional philosophy of Catholic education goes deeper today than it has done at any time in the past. And even those who, like myself, are unwilling to concede that a long-lived tradition has reached at last the moment of its death, must admit in all honesty that contemporary philosophy and culture have brought it to an hour of crisis. We know that, if this time around, we hope to contribute to another renewal of our inherited tradition through our philosophical reflection, we will have our work cut out for us. We must refresh our memory of the philosophical and theological tradition from which our schools have come; we must honestly assess the difficulties which are now brought against its intellectual foundations; and, only then can we determine whether our educational tradition can be renewed once more without losing its continuity with its past. Should that renewal prove impossible — and it may — then a completely new aim will have to be found for Catholic education, and its future history will be one of rupture, radical discontinuity, with its past.

Intrinsic to the spirituality of the Church Fathers, as it was to their theology, was a view of man, human knowledge and human freedom which can be summed up in what I will call the ideal of the

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Catholic mind. The same ideal structured the Fathers' philosophy of education, the tradition of Catholic education which we have inherited from them. That ideal was once as familiar to Catholic teachers, who knew their Newman, as it was to the Fathers of the Church, but in the last few decades it has been practically forgotten. This lapse in our Catholic memory is significant, as I hope to show you. For the crisis in Catholic education is due to our present uncertainty as to whether our inherited ideal of the Catholic mind can continue to serve as a viable aim for Catholic education.

Let me then speak first about the ideal of the Catholic mind, its history, its pervasive place in the tradition of Catholic education, its possibilities for development, its philosophical and theological foundations. This I will do at some length and with great affection. Then I will outline the serious intellectual difficulties brought against the viability of this ideal today. This I will try to do honestly and soberly. Finally I will assess the prospects of this ideal passing in our time through another moment of continuity through transformation. This I will do tentatively and with great caution.

The Ideal of the Catholic Mind

When, at the turn of the century, a group of American Jesuits decided to found a review of Catholic intellectual interest, the name which they decided to give it was *The Catholic Mind*. Their choice is quite understandable. By the turn of the century, the Catholic intellectual revival was well under way. Cardinal Newman had published his *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, his *Grammar of Assent* and *The Idea of a University*. Leo XIII had recommended the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas as the structuring element of a Catholic liberal education in his landmark encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*. In the United States, the Catholic University of America had been established, and a thriving system of Jesuit higher education was coming into being. In their defense of the uniqueness, breadth and excellence of Catholic education, its defenders usually pointed to its integration of the arts and sciences by the believing mind under the guiding light of theology. This was, of course, the ideal of Catholic education proposed by Cardinal Newman. Papal support for that ideal, and some practical hints for its realization could be found in *Aeterni Patris*, the encyclical of Leo XIII, who had

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made Newman a cardinal at the outset of his pontificate. Jesuit educators claimed the authority of these great prelates for their own educational endeavors.

Catholic education was unique and successful because the philosophy of man and knowledge which guided it promoted both the unity of knowledge and the proper distinction and independence of the individual disciplines. Integration of the disciplines, rather than the imperialism of a single type of knowledge or a single scientific method, was the key to a humanistic education. Because the distinctions between faith and reason, theoretical and practical intellect, conceptual science and artistic imagination, defended by both Newman and the scholastics, were properly appreciated in the Catholic school, philosophy and theology, scientific and literary experience could be progressively integrated in the individual's mind in the course of his liberal education.

Since the living mind, oriented by nature and grace to intuitive knowledge of God, progressively prepared itself for that culminating experience through its response in knowledge and love to God's whole creation, visible and invisible, the goal of Catholic education, which Newman described as the development of the integrative habit of mind, could rightly be called the cultivation of the Catholic mind.¹

The cultivation of the Catholic mind was the directive ideal of Catholic education during the first half of this century. It is the ideal of Christian education proposed by Pius XI in his encyclical *On the Christian Education of Youth*. Jacques Maritain presented a brilliant theoretical justification of this ideal in his Thomistic philosophy of man and knowledge. Maritain's major work, as you recall, was *The Degrees of Knowledge*, sub-titled *Distinguish to Unite*.² It should not surprise us then that the turn of the century team of Jesuit editors chose *The Catholic Mind* as the title for their intellectual review. In choosing it, they echoed the common conviction that Catholic uniqueness and Catholic universality were reconciled through the integrative habit of mind developed by a Catholic liberal education. A centuries old tradition in Catholic philosophy, theology and spirituality could be drawn upon in support of this contention.

The Jesuit review is no longer in existence. It died because, in a market place crowded with competitors, it could no longer rally enough support to stay alive. The same, I am afraid, could be said of the Catholic mind as an ideal of Catholic education. In the latter half

of our century the idea no longer stirs the interest which it provoked a quarter century ago.

There are good reasons, of course, for the current decline in interest in the idea. Nevertheless, the decline represents a loss. For it can be argued that the idea of the Catholic mind is one of those notions whose life and interest put it in the category of what Cardinal Newman called "leading ideas." A leading idea not only proposes a thematic view of some important aspects of human reality; it also tends to organize around itself institutional forms of social realization, schools, societies and religious orders, for example.³ This has surely been the case with the idea of the Catholic mind.

Among the institutional forms of social organization to whose constitution this idea has contributed significantly since its emergence in the Alexandria of Clement and Origen are great religious orders. Among these we can surely count the Benedictines, Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits, whose contribution to the history of education is significant. Through their schools and their educational tradition these orders have notably influenced the development of Catholic education. Other forms of the idea's social realization have been the classic works on Christian education whose abiding influence on Catholic schools extended over many centuries. Among these classics we might mention Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogus*, Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* and *Reductio Artium ad Theologiam* and, on a much lower literary level, the various editions of the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*.⁴

An idea which has remained alive for a millennium and a half and incorporated itself in a variety of concrete realizations in the course of its history is also what Newman would call a "developmental idea." An understanding of the idea of the Catholic mind as a developmental idea could provide a key to a proper appreciation of the continuity in Catholic education. The idea of the Catholic mind has incorporated itself in the Alexandrian catechetical school of Clement and Origen, the Benedictine monastery school, the Franciscan and Dominican *studia generalia* at the medieval universities, the Jesuit college of the Catholic Reformation, and Newman's Oratory School in the nineteenth century.⁵

Developmental ideas have a history of continuity through diversity. They are personal and historical realities. They are neither

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Hegelian ideas nor elements in a deductive system. Because developmental ideas incarnate themselves in the concrete historical world, they constantly provoke us to a fresh contemplation of their object. This means that they are successively interpreted and clarified over a period of time. *They die in one incarnation only to come to life in another. They unfold their virtualities through change.*

The variety of concrete educational projects which the idea of the Catholic mind has inspired and directed in diverse cultural epochs from Clement's Alexandria to Newman's Birmingham makes it reasonable to anticipate that the virtualities of this idea have not been exhausted. If as some would argue, the idea is no longer effective in the concrete form it took in the Catholic college and school of the first half of our century, there may be reason to believe that it will re-emerge in a new and more effective form. Such has been its history of continuity through change in the past, and it is probable that its history of development will continue in the future. In any case it might pay the philosopher, the theologian and the educator to remain alert to this possibility.

It might be worth our while therefore to look a little more closely at this educational ideal which Catholic philosophers, theologians and educators found so attractive at the beginning of our century. Its history shows us that, although the idea of the Catholic mind is not compatible with every system of philosophy, it is by no means restrictive in the variety of philosophies through which it can be expressed, and by no means narrow in the range of cultures in which it can incorporate itself. Its first great proponents were the Alexandrian theologians, Clement and Origen. Augustine carried the idea to the Benedictines of the Middle Ages. The Franciscan and Dominican Scholastic Doctors picked it up and passed it on both to the Anglican Church of Andrewes and Laud and to the Jesuit educators of the Catholic Reformation.⁶ That is why both Newman and the Benedictines — neither of whom found Jesuits or scholasticism particularly congenial — shared the Jesuit commitment to the ideal of the Catholic mind and to its educational significance.

What then in the broad Patristic tradition, shared by Augustine, the Scholastic Doctors, and Newman, despite their significant philosophical differences, was meant by the Catholic mind? Before we consider its catholicity, we will have to examine the Patristic notion of the mind itself. In the Patristic tradition, the thinking mind is

always a concrete, spiritual reality. The human mind is distinguished from its objective content. Unlike many post-Cartesian philosophers, the Fathers of the Church never confused the living personal mind with an idea or a complex of ideas. St. Thomas never confused the ideal system of the *Summa Theologiae* with the concrete subject who reasoned, made moral decisions, and submitted himself to God's personal influence in prayer. Abstract concepts have no history. Personal minds do. The Platonic and the Christian elements in the Patristic tradition both support its conviction that the conquest of truth is the result of an interior conversion of the mind and will, and that self-transformation through the moral and intellectual virtues is the necessary condition for human growth and the integration of knowledge. Conversion and self-transformation is the path to contemplation of the truth.

Truth was the fruit of personal activity. Nevertheless, the activity of the human mind, ordered to truth by its very nature, was a participation in the light of truth communicated by the Word of God himself. For Clement, the Word was the Universal Pedagogue. For Augustine, Christ, the Word, was the interior master dwelling in every mind. Growth in truth was always both teaching and learning, the interpersonal co-operation of the human person and the Word of God. Learning was conversion, the progressive transformation of the student into the likeness of the Eternal Word.

In this conception of the human mind, illuminated by God himself, we find the reason for the sacred character of the work of teaching — any teaching whose goal is the truth — in the Patristic tradition. To teach is to share in the work of the Interior Master, the Divine Pedagogue. In the eyes of Newman, whose theology was formed by the Alexandrian Fathers, teaching the arts and sciences was a sacred ministry.⁷ As the Interior Master taught by shedding his own light, the human teacher taught by his personal influence. Both teachers — human and divine — taught by sharing with their student what they were. Teaching — any genuine teaching — was a holy and highly personal activity. It was never a job like another. Once you hold the Patristic conception of the human mind that conclusion follows.

If growth in learning is a process of self-transformation, we are far from the world of abstract impersonal reason drawing conclusions from universal principles. As a good Aristotelian, St. Thomas placed

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great stress in his moral and religious teaching on prudence, the virtue of the practical intellect which enables the mind to judge correctly in individual cases. As a disciple of the Fathers, however, he placed equal weight on *synderesis*, the moral sensitivity of a well-developed conscience, and upon *connaturalty*, the “feel” of the religiously or aesthetically cultivated mind for definite areas of experience, a “feel” developed only through lived experience, personal history, and good moral habits acquired through the exercise of proper moral choice.

Their common commitment to the Patristic tradition of learning as the interior transformation of the personal intellect, will, and imagination through the acquisition of good cognitive and moral habits explains why both Newman and Maritain, two of the great defenders of the Catholic mind, insist on the need for literary and artistic as well as scientific education in the formation of the cultivated mind. If learning is conversion in the full sense of the word, theoretical education cannot be divorced from moral education. On the other hand, the proper distinction of the intellectual disciplines demanded by a coherent philosophy of knowledge require that the individual teacher observe the demands and follow the proper method of his own subject. Integration is not confusion. Systematic schooling in the arts and sciences, and the personal influence of a community of educators, not all of them classroom teachers, must work together to develop the integrative habit of mind. The school as a community of personal influence is all-important in the Patristic tradition of the Catholic mind.⁸

Our consideration of the mind in the Patristic tradition up to now has been largely philosophical. But the mind is not only catholic in the universal sense. It is also Catholic in the specific sense attributed to a mind illuminated by the Catholic faith and elevated and strengthened by the power of supernatural grace. In the Patristic tradition the Word of God is not only the creator and supreme exemplar “through whom all things are made,” the normative truth whom all reality imitates. He is Christ, the Word Incarnate, the Redeemer who restores fallen nature to a new life of grace. In the spirituality of all the great religious orders who have influenced the history of Catholic education, Christ, the Creator and Redeemer, is the key to the meaning of nature and human history. The goal of human development achieved through a liberal education can be

properly appreciated only through the light of faith.

It follows then that a theoretical education which in principle divorces itself from the truths of Christian revelation formulated in the Church's theology and a moral education which in principle denies the need and efficacy of grace and prayer will fail to develop the integrative habit of mind. Neglect of Christian truth does not mean simply that a significant element in liberal education has been omitted. The meaning of the whole of knowledge, in the light of which each of the liberal disciplines and their relationship to one another must be interpreted, has been fundamentally misunderstood.⁹

Within that whole of meaning created nature and human history can be understood, and the concrete world, to which each one of us must respond through the history of his life, makes sense. Created and redeemed by the Word of God, who is Wisdom and Truth, created nature is neither corrupt nor meaningless. Visible creation has its own intrinsic intelligibility, autonomy and order. The theology of the hypostatic union and the theology of grace and nature, by proclaiming the intelligible autonomy and goodness of God's restored creation grants to every art and science its own independent status.

In the Patristic tradition, however, visible nature points beyond itself. In Newman's theology of the economies and in St. Thomas' metaphysics of man and being, subordinated to his theology, visible nature is sacramental.¹⁰ It is a sign leading the reflective mind to the invisible God. Only through the gift of faith, however, can the sacramental sign of nature and history be understood in the light of what it signifies. To the believer, therefore, Christian revelation is not an intruder in the field of liberal education. Christian revelation makes possible the interpretative whole of meaning within which the arts and sciences can be properly appreciated.

The Contemporary Challenge

Such was the ideal of the Catholic mind which directed Catholic education in the first half of our century. Given its coherence, its attractiveness, its perdurance through the history of Catholic education, why has it so suddenly and dramatically dropped from view?

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There are serious reasons for its disappearance. Some are practical problems of application. The expansion and diversification of Catholic education, the increased variety of the curriculum, the demands of university research, and the growing specialization of graduate education make practical application of the ideal across the board difficult and ambiguous. Catholic education has many more tasks today and serves a more varied clientele than it did at the turn of the century when it confined its efforts largely to academic high schools and liberal arts colleges. These problems of interpretation and application, however, formidable though they are, are not the profound intellectual challenges which today threaten the very life of the Catholic mind as a directing principle in Catholic education.

The intellectual validity of the ideal itself has been called into serious question within the Catholic community. There are Catholic theologians and philosophers today who would deny any probability to the claim that the idea of the Catholic mind could be called a leading idea in Newman's sense of the term. The idea of the Catholic mind, they believe, can no longer provide a sound thematic view of man or education. Far from being able to inspire Catholic enterprises as it did in the past, the idea of the Catholic mind is superannuated and it can only hurt educational institutions which still cling to it. A new and different ideal must inspire Catholic education today.

The challenge to the old ideal — which has reached crisis proportions — is due to the radically different approach to culture, theology and philosophy in the Catholic community in the quarter century after the Second Vatican Council. The ideal of culture regnant in the Catholic Church before that time was essentially the normative classicist culture of Greece and Rome. This was the conception of culture which shaped Leo XIII's view of education, and it dominates the educational writing of Cardinal Newman. Its norm of taste was dictated by classical literature. Its universal person, we are now told, was no more than Aristotle's ideal of human nature. Greek philosophy determined its norms of thought and truth. This culture's universal man, in other words, was Christianized Greek man of Hellenistic society, Clement of Alexandria's educated man.¹¹

The supposed universality of the culture was really a sign of its great deficiency, its ignorance of history and of empirical social science. History and the social sciences have taught us that there are

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and have been many cultures. There is no such thing as a single universal culture based on human nature. There are many cultures, Eastern and Western. All are historical creations. All are culturally conditioned. Each enjoys its own cultural autonomy, sets its own norms, proposes its own view of man.

If the Catholic Church wishes to be truly universal, it must abandon its alliance with an outmoded classicist culture, venerable though that culture may have been. The Church can no longer afford to tie her theology, her spirituality, her preaching and her ideal of education to the pseudo-universality of an outmoded classicist culture. So runs the first challenge to the idea of the Catholic mind today.

The second challenge comes from a radically changed approach to theology in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. It is no secret that Catholic theologians, as a whole, are no longer devoted to Scholastic philosophy. Increasingly biblical and historical in their approach, and deeply concerned with the ecumenical dialogue, contemporary Catholic theologians are chary of metaphysics, and of Greek metaphysics in particular.

One consequence of this change is that the affection for the Greek Fathers which nourished Newman's thought is not the distinguishing trait of contemporary Catholic theology. Yet the idea of the Catholic mind is clearly part of our Patristic inheritance. Born in the Greek East, it has come down from the Alexandrian Fathers, through Augustine, to the Latin West. The Patristic inheritance is too deeply embedded in the Church's tradition both in doctrine and spirituality for it to remain long out of the center of theological concern. For the moment, however, the metaphysical theology of the Fathers is a source of problems rather than of inspiration for contemporary theologians. The project of defending the Patristic heritage of the Catholic mind does not attract them.

Two other serious challenges to the idea of the Catholic mind come from contemporary philosophy where the influence of Hume and Kant is still felt. Contemporary analytic philosophers would question the philosophical evidence for the existence of a personal mind clearly distinguished from its objective content. They would question the existence of a spiritual mind associated with a power of free choice and a sensibility. They would ask for evidence that there really is a person, known through immediate self-consciousness,

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whose capacity to integrate his knowledge and judge soundly in ethics and aesthetics, can be developed through the experience of a life and a history of personal choices. As we indicated earlier, a philosophy of knowledge and a philosophy of the human person is implied in the idea of the Catholic mind. A number of contemporary philosophers would question them.

The second difficulty which contemporary philosophers would raise is whether any philosophy, even aided by theology, can validate a world-view, an integrative interpretation of the whole of knowledge, which, even in principle, could lay claim to universality. The vastness of the universe, the limited nature and uncertainty of human knowledge, the partial and historical character of every view-point make any universal world-view philosophically impossible. Each one of us must view the world from his or her own limited point of view. Within that limited view-point, we determine our scale of values, set our definition of humanity, decide what we mean by human development and the means to achieve it. Universal agreement, even in principle, on the fundamental meaning of the world and the basic value of human life is quite impossible. All that we can do is to talk to one another across our fundamental disagreements and try to solve our immediate common problems in a reasonable and decent way.¹² Ideals, based on catholicity as universality, like the integrative habit of mind, or the Catholic mind, are chimeras. They can do no good. All they can do is breed intolerance and block discussion.

We can begin to understand the malaise that affects both Catholic religious orders and Catholic institutions of education when we appreciate the pervasiveness of the idea of the Catholic mind in Catholic spirituality and education. From the time of Clement of Alexandria to the present day the history of Catholic spirituality and Catholic education have been intertwined. It is easy to see why. Implied in both is a philosophy of personal development through response to the world in knowledge and love. Every crisis in culture provokes a crisis and a reaction in Catholic spirituality and Catholic education.

None of these crises, however, has been as intense or widespread as the cultural crisis which we face today. The malaise which many of us feel today arises from the perception, clearly seen or dimly felt, that the ideal of the Catholic mind, which has structured spirituality and education for centuries, and whose foundations are under attack

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today, may not survive.

If the idea of the Catholic mind is a genuine developmental idea, which preserves its identity through change, then Catholic philosophers and theologians should be able to re-examine the idea, modify and develop it in the light of the serious difficulties which have been brought against it. Should they succeed in their endeavor, a developed idea of the Catholic mind might continue to inspire Catholic education and structure a re-invigorated Catholic spirituality. Continuity would be preserved through change.

If, however, the idea has been thoroughly invalidated, continuity has become impossible. A new model of Catholic spirituality and education must be found. Otherwise both will lose their identity and disappear. But when the new model emerges, it will be in radical discontinuity with the past.

At the moment Catholic philosophers and theologians are divided over which of these alternatives represents the sound Catholic option for the future. Hence the crisis in the Catholic philosophy and theology of education and the malaise in Catholic education which it has provoked.

Prospects for Survival

Is it likely that the idea of the Catholic mind will survive the attacks directed against it today? Does it still have a future as a valid ideal for Catholic education? I am not a prophet. Still, I am not convinced that the time has come yet to count the idea out.

In the first place, the idea of the Catholic mind, even if we grant it only plausibility as an ideal, justifies a number of values in Catholic education which many of us are convinced are sound. Among these are the focus of education on the formation of the total person, the ideal of the integration and distinction of the disciplines, the emphasis on personal influence in teaching and the demands which it places on the teacher, the sacredness of the teacher's work, and the appreciation of the school as a community of personal influence.

The ideal of the integrative mind, even if we take it as an asymptote, preserves education from a number of distortions. Faith in the presence in the world of a creating and redeeming God is a protection against a narrow, this-worldly secularism or a despairing resignation to an unintelligible universe. Conviction that the human

person has a divine call to wholeness is a defense against a narrow professionalism in education or the tyranny of a single discipline or a single method. Interdisciplinary co-operation is neither a sacrilege nor an imposition. Fidelity to an old and coherent tradition frees the educator from slavery to the present or to the immediate future.

Nevertheless, are the difficulties against the idea of the Catholic mind from the contemporary understanding of culture and from contemporary philosophy so great that they are unanswerable? They are formidable, I admit, but I remain convinced that they can be handled. It would take more time than we have at our disposal to do more than drop a few brief hints to indicate why I believe that my hopes are not without foundation.

Implied in the idea of the Catholic mind was a philosophy of the person, as a spiritual knower associated with a power of choice, and *ordered to self-development through his grasp of a variety of distinct disciplines, each with its own proper method.* The path to self-development was through intellectual and moral conversion under the illumination and attraction of the Supreme Truth present through his causality in the human spirit. In Maritain's *Degree of Knowledge*, the philosophy of the person was the philosophy of St. Thomas. Newman's original philosophy of the person was inspired to a great extent by the metaphysics of the Alexandrian Fathers and the ethics of Aristotle.

In his major works, *Insight and Method in Theology*,¹³ however, a contemporary philosophical theologian, Father Bernard Lonergan, has developed a philosophy of knowledge and of the human person through which I am convinced the great values of the idea of the Catholic mind can be defended. Yet Lonergan's philosophy of the person is not a Greek philosophy. It is not bound to Greek metaphysics or to the Aristotelian conception of human nature. It is a contemporary philosophy which presents evidence for its assertions which contemporary philosophers can understand.

Father Lonergan is well aware of the distinction between the classicist and contemporary notions of culture. He too is convinced that what he calls classicist culture is dead. If, however, the human person, who is the author and reviser of cultures, transcends culture, as Lonergan claims he does, then an idea of the Catholic mind and its integration of knowledge based on a philosophy of the transcultural person need not perish with the classicist ideal of culture. The ideal

of the Catholic mind may have to be transformed but it need not die. In other words, it may turn out to be one of Newman's developmental ideas.

Finally, if the mind's self-development is ordered to the vision of God, whose Second Person is the Word, then we know, if only by faith, that the world which came from Unity and Truth is an intelligible whole. If matter has been assumed by God himself, it is an autonomous, intelligible sacramental sign, sound in itself, yet pointing beyond itself. Trying to make sense of it in its own reality and in its status as a sacramental sign is the way in which we prepare ourselves to contemplate the Truth. For continuity goes beyond the grave. Life is changed, not ended.

Therefore the drive to integrate our knowledge, which philosophy of knowledge reveals at work within us, is not a drive to frustration. The drive makes sense. It should be fostered, even if total integration, in our modern world, must remain an asymptote. The philosophy of the person and the Catholic theology of the Word as Creator and Redeemer, as Karl Rahner, one of our great contemporary theologians, has pointed out in his *Foundations of Christian Faith*,¹⁴ makes marvelous sense out of the experience and aspirations of contemporary man. Why should they not provide an antidote to much of contemporary philosophy's despair of finding meaning in the world in a contemporary idea of the Catholic mind?

It would seem then from what has been said about the philosophical theologies of Rahner and Lonergan that one of the great intellectual traditions in Catholicism at least, the tradition of St. Thomas, can be transformed and developed sufficiently to cope with the contemporary problems of knowledge and culture which threaten the viability of the ideal of the Catholic mind. The ideal itself, however, is older than St. Thomas, and, as our consideration of Bonaventure and Newman showed, it can be defended by philosophers other than the Angelic Doctor.

Catholic educators should remember nonetheless that not every philosophy is capable of bearing the weight of the Catholic ideal of the integration of culture. Nor is every theology capable of doing justice to the Catholic tradition of created and redeemed human nature. The Catholic mind cannot be just *any* mind formed by *any* philosophy or theology. Nor can the Catholic school be just *any sort of school* which a group of Catholics decides to attend or support. Its

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intellectual justification has to be more than “birds of a feather flock together.”

Conclusion

The crisis of Catholic education today, I have argued, is due to its inability to define and defend the basic purpose of its work. Up to now, I have also argued; its traditional purpose has been defined through the ideal of the Catholic mind — an ideal now subject to serious intellectual attack. Can a Catholic philosopher, or group of philosophers, be found capable of doing justice to that traditional ideal aim of Catholic education in our contemporary climate of cognitional and cultural pluralism? If they are to make the attempt with any hope of success, they will need a theory of knowledge capable of dealing with both nature and history and a philosophy of being which can lead the mind from the created world to its personal creator. I have not given up my hope that in our Catholic tradition and in the community of philosophers and theologians formed in our Catholic schools we have the resources to create that contemporary philosophical theology. But I dearly wish that more of our philosophers and theologians would show some interest in the project; for with some notable exceptions, few of them have made any move in that direction. Should they do so, Catholic education, along with Catholic spirituality and Catholic education should wish them well. For what is at stake today is our intellectual continuity with our past, the continuity through change which is found in every living tradition. Will the ideal of the Catholic mind survive through renewal as it did in the time of St. Bonaventure with whose sermon our talk began? We cannot be complacent but we can hope and I, for one, still do.

Notes

¹For an excellent exposition of Newman's theory of liberal education see Vincent F. Blehl, S.J., *The Essential Newman* (New York: New American Library, 1963), pp. 156-60. For the influence of the Alexandrian Fathers on Newman's philosophy of education, see Vincent F. Blehl, S.J., "Newman, the Fathers and Education," *Thought*, 45 (1970), 196-212.

²Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959).

³See James Collins, *Philosophical Readings in Cardinal Newman* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), pp. 251-59.

⁴One of the finest introductions to the thought of St. Bonaventure remains Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1938).

⁵For the Benedictine humanism of the Middle Ages see Jean Leclercq, O.S.B., *The Love of Learning and the Desire of God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974). For medieval education in general see David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (New York: Random House, 1964).

⁶Laud's greatest educational achievement was the statutes which still governed Oxford in Newman's early days at the University. See H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1963), pp. 271-94.

⁷Louis Bouyer, *Newman* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), pp. 74-95.

⁸Blehl, *The Essential Newman*, pp. 167-70.

⁹Blehl, *The Essential Newman*, pp. 171-76. Pius XI, *On the Christian Education of Youth* (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1936), pp. 29-31.

¹⁰Blehl, "Newman, the Fathers and Education," pp. 210-12.

¹¹For a clear exposition of the difference between the classical and contemporary conception of culture, see Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., "The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical Mindedness," in *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 1-9.

¹²A powerful expression of this approach to philosophy can be found in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

¹³Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., *Insight* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958); *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

¹⁴Karl Rahner, S.J., *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).