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Challenges and Opportunities Surrounding Catholic Education

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Abstract

Catholic education faces a number of serious challenges including cultural and political disrespect for, and hostility towards religion in general and Catholicism in particular, and lack of knowledge of, and commitment to, Catholic beliefs and values among Catholic educational administrators, school managers, teachers, and other staff, as well as the diminishing percentage of even nominally Catholic staff. I set these matters within the context of broader challenges *surrounding* Catholic education, deriving from three cultural movements: the reformation, the emergence of liberalism, and the scientific revolution, which undermined the synthesis of scripture, theology, and speculative and practical philosophy achieved in the high middle-ages. I propose in response a creative critique showing that what is of authentic value in modernity can be accommodated within the traditional synthesis. I also connect that tradition with strands of eastern philosophy suggesting that the movement of people, ideas, and traditions from Eastern cultures into historically Western societies provides an opportunity for further synthesis of a wisdom-based approach to education.

Keywords: art; Boethius; Chesterton; Confucius; philosophy

1. Introduction

I begin with two contrasting quotations. The relevance of the first, if not immediately obvious, should quickly become so, while that of the second will emerge later. The former is from G.K. Chesterton. The latter is from a figure who some scholars think may not have written anything (and possibly never existed, being instead a cultural amalgam) namely 'Confucius'. Here, however, there is also a Catholic literary connection since the name 'Confucius' was coined by 16th century Jesuit missionaries as a

Latinised version of the Chinese title 'Kongfuzi' (Master Kong), and it was a Sicilian Jesuit of the following century, Prospero Intorcetta, known to the Chinese as 'Yin Duoze', who first translated the *Lunyu* or 'Sayings' of the Master, titling them *Analects* that is, 'assembled items'.[1]

First, then, Chesterton from his epic poem about King Alfred, *The Ballad of the White Horse* (Chesterton 1911). In 878, the Saxon King, facing what the Chroniclers describe as 'the Great Heathen [Viking] Army', has a vision of the Virgin Mary in which she offers a bracing message apt also to our circumstances:

> I tell you naught for your comfort, Yea, naught for your desire,
> Save that the sky grows darker yet, And the sea rises higher.
> Night shall be thrice night over you, And heaven an iron cope.
> Do you have joy without a cause, Yea, faith without a hope?[2]

Second, from the *Lunyu* of Kongfuzi

> 2:11. The Master said, 'If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others'.[3]
> [Which, in a recent translation, is also given as]
> 'A person who can bring new warmth to the old while understanding the new is worthy to take as a teacher'.[4]
> 2:14. The Master said,
> 'The superior man is catholic and no partisan. The mean man is a partisan and not catholic'.[5]
> [Again, otherwise translated as]
> 'The *junzi* [noble man] is inclusive and not a partisan; the small man is a partisan and not inclusive'.[6]
> 12.16 The Master said,
> 'The junzi perfects what is beautiful in people, he does not perfect what is ugly. The small man does just the opposite'.[7]

Here 'catholic' means all-embracing but there is, of course, a connection to the use of the word in the Nicene Creed to refer to the third mark of the Church as its being 'universal' (*katholikín ekklisían*).

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[1]See Luisa M. Paternicò, 'Translating the Master: The Contribution of Prospero Intorcetta to the Confucius *Sinarum Philosophus*', *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies*, 65 (2017), 87–121.

[2]G. K. Chesterton, *The Ballad of the White Horse* (London: Methuen, 1911). For an exploration of Chesterton as an educational thinker, see J. Haldane, 'Chesterton's Philosophy of Education', *Philosophy*, 65 (1990), 65–80.

[3]James Legge trans., *Confucian Analects. The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 1 (London: Trubner & Co, 1861), p. 13.

[4]R. Eno trans. 'The Analects of Confucius: An online teaching translation', (2015), pp. 5–6. <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/23420/Analects_of_Confucius_%28Eno-2015%29-updated.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y> [accessed 9 September 2024].

[5]Legge, op. cit., p. 14.

[6]Eno, op. cit., p. 8.

[7]Eno, op. cit, p. 62.

2. Challenges

The appearance of the terms 'challenges' and 'opportunities' usually prefigures some cliched advice for those seeking or in the midst of careers, or aspiring to, or engaged in institutional leadership. Often what follows is talk of 'unlocking talent', 'empowering excellence', 'enabling change', and 'leveraging core values'. I am not going to mention any of those things. Nor am I proposing the assurance that every challenge is an opportunity and a chance to grow. Some challenges precisely derive from diminishment and threaten further withering even to the point of perishing. It is thoughtless to suggest otherwise but discouraging and even disabling not to look for ways forward. Grounded hope is a virtue, even if mere optimism is not.

The immediate challenges surrounding Catholic education across the anglosphere will be familiar to most readers and they are serious. Some of these trials are internal and others are external. Some are peculiar to Catholic education, some are more general. Some relate specifically to schooling, while others concern higher education. Those facing Catholic schooling include the following:

1. The history and legacy of the abuse of children by teachers, in many cases clergy, and male and female members of religious orders or societies.
2. The increasing cultural and political disrespect for, and often hostility towards religion in general, Christianity specifically, and Catholicism in particular (only in part connected with the previous point).
3. The lack of knowledge of, and commitment to Catholic beliefs and values among nominally Catholic educational administrators, school managers, teachers, and other staff, as well as the diminishing percentage of even nominally Catholic staff.
4. The general difficulty in recruiting and retaining well-educated teachers, and the greater difficulty of recruiting ones well-formed in and committed to Catholic faith and morals. (This and the previous point are mutually re-enforcing).
5. The fact that many children from nominally Catholic families have no religious education or formation through home or parish.
6. The increasing proportion of pupils who have no personal or cultural connection whatsoever with Catholicism.
7. The fact that the prevailing culture is *both* pervasively materialistic, hedonistic, narcissistic and superficial, *and* censorious and self-righteous, and that Catholics, whether nominal or real, are not immune to those vices.

The problems I have listed are neither new nor temporary, and here I am concerned with a larger and longer view of things, hence the phrase 'challenges *surrounding* …' rather than the more restrictive 'challenges *within* Catholic education'.[8]

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[8]For discussion of the listed challenges concerning Catholic schooling in an Australian context see J. Haldane, G. O'Shea, and N. Giacco, *Review of the Religious Education Curriculum for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* (Melbourne: Melbourne Archdiocesan Catholic Schools, 2023).

3. Art and philosophy

My higher studies and ongoing scholarship and practice have been in two main areas and two subsidiary ones: art and philosophy, and education and theology, and in the various relations between these.[9] The relevance of the latter pair to the task of reflecting on Catholic education is obvious; so it is with the first pair that I begin.

Art-making requires practical skill, imagination, and engagement with one or more art traditions. The challenges for the artist are those of mastering a medium, finding a theme or subject, envisioning a way to realise an idea, and determining how to start and when to stop working on a piece. Otherwise, it is an open field, a fact which presents its own challenges.

Philosophy is rather different. The themes are given by the inherited perplexities, and the principal difficulty is that of trying to negotiate narrowly confined conceptual spaces, or of finding other routes into, through and out of the problems. Consider three examples. First, the issue of *human nature*. There are considerations which would incline one to *materialism*, reducing mental life to physical events and processes, yet other considerations that favour *dualism* conceiving the thinking subject as a non-material entity – a self or soul – somehow associated with but distinct from the human body. Second, and relatedly, there are considerations having to do with the determinants of *human action* which might suggest that freedom is an illusion and that everything is pre-determined by past events. On the other hand, there are reasons, including the familiar experiences of deliberation and choice, which suggest that whatever factors may incline us to act in certain ways they do not necessitate such outcomes. In other words that we have free-will. Third, the issue of the existence of *God* is a philosophical challenge because there are considerations favouring the idea that the universe is the creation of an uncaused cause which, as Aquinas says (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 2, a. 3) is what everyone understands to be God – '*et hoc omnes intelligunt Deum*'. On the other hand, there are factors, such as the extent and degree of suffering, that seem to tell against the idea of an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful Creator. In each of these examples, the challenge to the philosophers is to find a way through to the truth of the matter. Reconciling the contrasting considerations involves working within a very confined space of possibilities. And as has been said in another context, narrow is the gate and difficult is the way (*Matthew* 7: 13-14).

Finding and following the narrow way, and of the difficulty of doing so, are also themes in the *Analects*. The *Tao* is a path or course, and by metaphorical extension a way of life that must be sought and which requires the quality of *jen*, human-heartedness, to discern and to adhere to. When the philosopher Master Zeng fell ill he summoned his disciples and said to them 'Uncover my feet; uncover my hands! *The Book of Poetry* says, '*All vigilance, all caution, As though nearing the edge of abyss, As though treading upon thin ice*' 'My young friends, from this point on, I know that I have escaped whole!'.[10]

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[9]For discussion of some these relations see J. Haldane, 'Educational Studies and the Map of Philosophy', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60 (2012), 3–15; 'The Limits of Philosophy: Learning from Art and History', in *Philosophy, Faith and Modernity, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, ed. by M. Oliva and S. Striby, vol. 91 (Charlottesville, VA: Philosophy Documentation Center, 2017), pp. 39–50; and 'Experience and Transcendence', in *Ciphers of Transcendence: Essays in Philosophy of Religion in Honour of Patrick Masterton*, ed. by F O'Rourke (Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2019), pp. 260–76.

[10]*Analects* 8:3 see Eno, op. cit., p. 36.

4. Switching lenses

Against this background, I want to suggest that in thinking about the challenges and opportunities surrounding Catholic Education it may be useful to approach them somewhat in the manner of an artist or of a speculative or practical philosopher. An artist (be they visual or literary) sees challenges as inviting an imaginative response, changing the existing way of viewing them, shifting perspective, or seeing them under an unfamiliar aspect. In effect, the artist says 'you have regarded them in this way but now look at them like *this* and see what that shows you'. This is what Chesterton had in mind when he wrote that 'Now it really is a fact that any scene such as a land-scape can sometimes be more clearly and freshly seen if it is seen upside down'.[11] This 're-visioning' is helpful both as a method within art-making and as way of viewing the history of art within a given cultural tradition in which there has been evident change and development is to regard it in terms of seeing the familiar in new and initially very unfamiliar ways. Such is the case with the emergence of portraiture, of landscape painting, and of still-life in western art. Human figures, hills and rivers, domestic vessels, and fruit and flowers had appeared in painting long before, but they then came to be seen in new guises as themselves, not as features in but as subjects of paintings.

Analogously, one might view the situation of Catholic education through an *economic* lens, seeing it in terms of a marketplace, and the behaviour of educators and educational managers as that of service providers looking to respond to, and also shape consumer demand. In a market, a product or service succeeds by delivering what competitors provide but doing so to a higher quality or at a lower cost or by providing something seemingly different. In respect of the former option, in countries such as Australia and the United States, where diocesan or parochial schooling has low fees attached to it, Catholic education may be seen, and present itself as, a less expensive form of private education, attractive to those who want an alternative to secular government schooling. In terms of the latter differentiating option, it may present itself as offering at least as good and as much as is otherwise available but with an added extra – such as a 'Catholic ethos'. What that might be is often unclear, but it is often cited in the style of what advertisers have taught us to call a 'unique selling point'.

Another reimagining of the issues might propose seeing the situation of Catholic schooling through a *sociological* lens. In a fast-evolving cultural situation, with a changing and increasingly diverse population profile, Catholic schooling might be regarded as offering a degree of relative stability and continuity, or of being more hospitable to certain ethnic groupings, or to new immigrant groups, and so on. Switching lenses again, or in this case adding an additional one, the imaginative observer may view the trajectory of Catholic education across the past hundred years through the eyepiece of *evolutionary theory* seeing the present situation as involving mutations some of which may prove to be adaptive to a changing habitat. In this perspective, however, it is important to add that, unlike Darwinian biological speciation, this kind of evolution is 'Lamarckian', i.e., it involves, as well as unplanned mutations, the phenomenon of organisms (schools or school systems) altering their behaviour in response to environmental factors (social and economic changes) resulting in modifications of structures

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[11]G.K. Chesterton, *St Francis of Assisi* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), p. 80.

and functions, these latter acquired characteristics then being passed on, explicitly and implicitly, to succeeding generations. In all of this, what is applicable to Catholic schooling is equally applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to Catholic higher education.

5. Synthesising faith and reason

Approaching matters by way of the imaginative-seeing analogy has much to commend it, but I move next to the philosophical perspective which is compatible with and may be complementary to the artistic viewpoint. Indeed, in the case of the first figures, I shall mention, philosophical thought is expressed in purposefully literary forms, in one case allegorical and partly poetical involving the personification of wisdom. In turning to philosophy in the present context, it is relevant to note the difference in scope and specificity between a Catholic philosophy of education and a philosophy of Catholic education, though obviously the latter presupposes aspects of the former. I am interested in both but here am ultimately concerned with the second.[12]

There were two great periods in the history of western philosophy through which the ethical, political, and metaphysical ideas and theories of the classical worlds were transmitted onwards in forms that synthesised them with Christianity. The first was in late Roman antiquity in the 4th to 6th centuries when the two major figures were St Augustine and (St) Boethius. They have three main points in common: both drew heavily on Plato and neo-Platonism, both lived in times of cultural disruption as the Roman world order gave way to the Goths, and both are best known for semi-autobiographical highly-literary meditations: *The Confessions* and *The Consolation of Philosophy*, respectively.

They have a fourth, less well known but very fitting connection between them regarding the location and veneration of their remains. Some years ago, having published an academic essay on the *Consolation* a decade previously,[13] but not then thinking about the place of Boethius's death, I was travelling in the north of Italy and stopped for a break in the medieval university town of Pavia. Wandering along a street I entered a quiet, featureless and shadowed piazza, and saw a rather ordinary if battered-looking large brick-fronted church: *San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro* (St Peter in the Golden Sky). Stepping through the portal I was struck by what looked to be a double altar but in fact was a view of the crypt with the sanctuary above it. I then made two entirely unexpected discoveries: first, that the Church contained the remains of Boethius (in the crypt) and of Augustine (in the sanctuary), and that an inscription on the tomb of Severinus Boethius identifies him as a Martyr-Saint ('*Corpus S. Severini Boetii Martir*'). The latter fact is relevant to the resolution of an old debate as to whether the author of the philosophical work *De Consolatione* was the same person as the writer of important

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[12]In which connection see J. Haldane, 'Catholic Education and Catholic Identity', in *The Contemporary Catholic School: Context, Identity and Diversity*, ed. by T. McLaughlin, J. O'Keefe and B. O'Keefe (London: Falmer Press. 1996), pp. 126–35; 'The Need of Spirituality in Catholic Education', in *Catholic Education: Inside Out/Outside In*, ed. by James Conroy (Dublin: Veritas, 1999), pp. 188–206; and 'The Future of the University: Philosophy, Education and the Catholic Tradition', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 87 (2013), 731–49.

[13]J. Haldane, 'De Consolatione Philosophiae', in *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life*, ed. by Michael McGhee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). pp. 31–45.

theological works including the *De Trinitate*. In the event, an early manuscript was discovered in the 19th century containing paragraphs that imply the identity,[14] and in 1883 Pope Leo XIII approved the traditional Pavian veneration of him as a saint. The reason for doubt was that no Christian figure is mentioned in the *Consolation* but that is explicable given its purpose and literary genre: a paean to the pursuit of philosophical wisdom written as a prosimetric dialogue.

Boethius was honoured and his martyrdom cited by the greatest of all Catholic poets. In the *Paradiso Canto* X, 127-9, Dante describes being led into the Heaven of the Sun containing the souls of the wise. The inner circle of these includes one whom the soul of Aquinas, addressing Beatrice and Dante, describes as follows:

> [B]ecause he saw the Greatest Good, rejoices the blessed soul who makes the world's deceit most plain to all who hear him carefully. The flesh from which his soul was banished lies below, within Ciel d'auro [San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro], and he came from martyrdom and exile to this peace.[15]

6. Taking a historico-cultural approach

Besides these historical and literary matters and connections, there is relevance in this to contemporary Catholic education in respect of its typical content and methods. For some decades, the focus has been on contemporary matters approached sociologically, psychologically, and politically. This is a reflection of pervasive tendencies in society and education more generally, and the causes of those are multifarious. First, there is the influence of empirical social science charting the tides and turns of belief, opinion, and behaviour, in place of earlier modes of critical historical reflection and analysis. Second, there is a switch from the examination of personal conduct and the cultivation of character and virtue to the promotion of group attitudes and behaviour towards societal issues: economic policy, environment, international affairs, and social justice. Third, there is the idea that identity is a matter of subjective feeling and self-avowal, and that eliciting personal perspectives and encounters, promotes authenticity and positive affirmation.

While these are broader factors, they have taken hold within Catholic contexts including schooling and higher education. One pervasive example being a confusion between different notions of dialogue with a consequential loss of an important instructional method. Philosophical and theological dialogues from Plato (e.g., *Timaeus*) to Cicero (e.g., *De Natura Deorum*), to Augustine (e.g., *De libero arbitrio*), to Boethius (*De Consolatione*), to Anselm (e.g. *De Veritate*), to Berkeley (*Three Dialogues*), to Hume (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*), are all essentially critical, dialectical, and instructive, intended to bring one or other party, and thereby the reader to the

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[14]Known as the 'Anecdoton Holderi' after its discoverer, the 10th century manuscript has appended paragraphs copied from an early 6th century text including the following: 'Boethius excelled in the highest positions. He was a very skilled orator in both languages: he praised King Theodoric in an eloquent speech in the senate for the consulship of his sons. He wrote a book on the Holy Trinity and some dogmatic chapters and a book against Nestorius'. For the Latin text see T. Hodgkin, *The Letters of Cassiodorus* (London: Frowde, 1886), pp. 74–75.

[15]Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by A. Mandelbaum (London: Everyman. 1995).

recognition of their ignorance and/or of the truth of the issue under examination. They are not invitations to self-definition or personal value-clarification in the 'therapeutic' style, and nor are they negotiatory in the manner of transactional dialogue aimed at compromise between divergent positions. The move from the Socratic-elenctic and Platonic-dialectical methods towards modes of self-exploration and inter-personal negotiation obscures the distinction between personal interest and objective truth and thereby represents a switch from education to non-directional sharing.

Along with the general tendency to regard pre-enlightenment and especially pre-modern cultural forms as outmoded, inaccessible and otherwise irrelevant to the interest and needs of current students, the general effect has been to neglect the study of historical works. A result and reinforcing cause of such neglect is a loss of understanding of the conceptual, representational, and expressive modes deployed in the great artistic, literary, philosophical, and theological works of Catholic Christianity, including the *Confessions*, the *Consolation*, and the *Divina Comedia*.

There has been some revival of studying the tradition, originating in the *Great Books* movement begun at Columbia University in the 1920s by John Erskine, carried on by his former student Mortimer Adler at Chicago, and adopted at St John's College Annapolis on the eve of World War II. While this movement declined in the 1960s, it was later recovered as a response to the perceived crisis in US higher education. That revival encouraged the adoption of a version of it by American Catholic educators leading to the founding of institutions such as Thomas Aquinas College, California. These have served as models for others in the US and elsewhere, principally Campion College in Sydney and the Benedictus College project in London, but the successes have been few and limited (Benedictus struggled then failed) and largely confined to small-scale, niche higher education generally associated with political conservatism.

These are not criticisms, but the needs are greater. The constituencies are far larger and more varied than could be catered for by this movement, and the sector in which development is most needed is schooling. Rather than think in terms of high-school versions of Catholic Liberal Arts colleges, the focus should be on initial teacher education and the development of curricula, syllabi, and teaching materials that can be used across the range of Catholic high schools, eschewing to the greatest extent possible issues of politics. The lessons to be learned about the interpretation of narratives in literal, moral, allegorical, mystical, existential, and other modes, about the exploration of human experience and meaning through painting, and of the power of great music to engage and guide the spirit can begin in simple ways. At the level of teacher education, one might first to introduce students to extracts from the *Confessions* and the *Consolation* then have them think about what points of substance and expression are of enduring interest and significance, and of how versions of the 'stories' could be introduced to high school students. Likewise, with the paintings of Ciamabue and Giotto, or the music of 'Gregorian' chant and the antiphons and responsories of Hildegard of Bingen, and great Romanesque architecture, and so on through later phases of Catholic artistic and literary development.

This brings me to the second great period in the history of western philosophy in which ethical and philosophical ideas and theories from the classical worlds were synthesised with Christianity scripture and theology: the high middle-ages. Here, the

main figures are the close contemporaries St Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas (both dying in 1274 aged 53 and 49, respectively). These differed in that whereas Bonaventure remained within the Platonic-Augustinian tradition favoured by the Franciscans, Aquinas followed his fellow Dominican teacher St Albert the Great in taking up the philosophy of Aristotle, while yet incorporating what he could from Augustine. It was the latter Catholic-Aristotelian synthesis that proved the more effective and the more lasting articulation and defense of faith through reason. But in the 16th century, the world began to change, and with it Aristotelianism declined. The consequence of that change and decline is still with us and constitutes a serious challenge to Catholic education at all levels.

7. From higher synthesis to disintegration

The change in question was in effect *three* related changes which between them defined the onset of the modern world. The first was the Protestant Reformation in the forms advanced by Martin Luther, and more radically by Jean Calvin, that developed in the second and third decades of the 16th century. Abstracting from important differences between them, the reformers advanced three anti-Catholic doctrines: the priority, and effective *exclusivity of scripture* as the source of teaching authority; the *denial of the real presence* of Christ in the elements of the eucharist; and the doctrine of unconditional election and *salvation by grace alone*. Between them, these doctrines set aside the Catholic belief in the authority of Apostolic tradition, the sacrifice of the Mass, and the role of works and introduced a new conception of the relation between the Divine and the Human seeing it terms of a series of singular relationships between individuals and God, mediated not by Bishops or sacraments or liturgies but through hearing or reading the Bible.

One consequence of the success of the Reformers in converting a number of European Princes and Sovereigns was that states fell into conflict internally and externally as they divided between Catholics and Protestants living in different parts of what had hitherto been a unified Holy Roman Empire. The 1555 Peace of Augsburg produced a resolution via the formula *Cuius regio, eius religio* – 'whose region or realm it is, so it is his religion'. This, however, left out Calvinists, but that omission was addressed a century later in the Peace of Westphalia of 1658 which extended the principle that rulers of states could choose their own religion while also lifting the requirement that subjects follow the religion of their rulers.

Thus, was born a form of religious and political liberty – though it attached to denominations rather than to individuals. But, having gathered momentum, the movement towards freedom ploughed on and through these residual elements of ecclesial and social communitarianism. Notwithstanding the Treaties of Augsburg and Westphalia, civil conflicts and the persecution of minority religious groups had continued. This led the English philosopher John Locke to write his famous work *Letter concerning Toleration* of 1686 in which he argued that there should be a separation of Church and State and an end to the persecution of groups or individuals on account of their religious beliefs. But not quite! For having considered the argument for universal toleration Locke drew back and reasoned that there are two groups to whom it should not be extended. *Atheists* because not believing in God they cannot make solemn oaths and promises upon which law and politics depend, and *Roman Catholics* because they

owe their allegiance not to the ruler of the state in which they live but to a foreign Prince: the Pope. He writes:

> That church can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate which is so constituted that all who enter it *ipso facto* pass into the allegiance and service of another prince …. Lastly, those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist.[16]

A similar argument was made by William Gladstone against English Catholics in the 19th century and replied to by John Henry Newman in his 'Open Letter to the Duke of Norfolk' and again in the 20th century by one hundred and fifty Protestant Ministers opposing the Presidential candidacy of John F. Kennedy who likewise repudiated the charge effectively and was elected the first Catholic President of the United States.

Through the 18th and 19th centuries, the persecution of Catholics in the British Isles diminished, but from a philosophical point of view the next great moment in the onward march of liberalism came in 1858 with the publication by John Stuart Mill of *On Liberty* subtitled *A Few Words on Non-Intervention*. He writes:

> The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion. … That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.[17]

8. From final to efficient causes

This part of my reflections began with the Protestant Reformation and led to the emergence and development of liberal individualism, thus conjoining two of the related changes which I earlier suggested defined the emergence of the modern world and the decline of the Catholic-Aristotelian synthesis. The third of these was the scientific revolution that began in the middle of the 16th century. Such movements have no definite starting or finishing points but two clear markers were the publication in 1543 (three years before the death of Luther) of Copernicus's theory of heliocentrism overthrowing the view that the sun and the other planets orbited the earth and that of Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (*Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*) in 1687 around the same time as Locke penned his *Letter*. To these could be added a series of other foundations of modern science including, very importantly, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, published in 1859, the year following Mill's *On Liberty*. The first of these works concerns cosmology, the second general physics and classical mechanics, and the third biology. What they have in common, and which sets them apart from, and against the earlier Aristotelianism, is that they

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[16]J. Locke, *Two Treatises on Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. by Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) pp. 245–46.

[17]J. S. Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Parker & Son, 1859), pp. 21–22.

explain natural events and processes not in terms of intrinsic natures, functions, and goals but by reference to material causes and effects: at base the motions of matter.

This significance of this broad shift was immense. In the Aristotelian-Thomistic scheme, the action of an agent be it a substance, a non-rational animal, or a human being is explained in terms of the end towards which its acting is directed, that for the sake of which it occurs. In the post- and anti-Aristotelian sciences, action is explained in terms of antecedent causes: things are moved by prior events not drawn towards natural ends. Taken in full, this puts paid to the idea of animate natures, purposes, and values. The world is no longer viewed as a system of agents actualising their specific natures but as a set of objects moved by internal and external forces. Chemistry and biology are just higher-level versions of physical aggregations and movements. The implications for understanding human nature in general are obvious and troubling as are those for Christian beliefs.

Even apart from this literal de-animation of nature, the intellectual consequence of the rejection of Aristotelianism was to deny that there is a human essence, and with that the idea that the social order can be seen as an organic formation, in and through which human beings find fulfilment. Instead, society came to be viewed as an artificial aggregation of individuals, produced in order to achieve certain ends. For the 17th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, as for Locke, and also for the 18th century French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, society is a compact entered into by individuals for safety, security, and mutual benefit. Likewise for Mill, political authority is justified where it conduces to the general happiness of those subject to it.

By contrast, in Catholic Aristotelianism, there is a natural progression running from individual to family, to community, to community of communities (the *civitas* or *res publica*), and the principle of social cohesion is the fact that we are social animals whose nature includes communal life through which both individual and shared goods are realised. This is the basis of the idea of the *bonum commune* – the 'common good' often cited, along with human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity in descriptions of Catholic Social teaching.

9. Responding to the challenges

The challenge posed by all of this to Catholic anthropology, to Catholic social ethics, and to Catholic ideas of culture, economics, and education, is that the contemporary western world is one shaped by, and living in accord with, the ideas of the modern age inaugurated by the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and Political Pragmatism. Whatever their merits, these ideas and their contemporary descendants are inimical to the understanding shaped by the two great syntheses of Judaeo-Christianity and Greco-Roman philosophical thought: Augustinianism and Thomism. How in the face of this conflict might one proceed?

There are several options. First, reject modernity both in respect of its historical foundations and in its contemporary expression. Second, accept modernity and reject the traditional Catholic syntheses of faith and reason. Third, work out some *modus vivendi* between the two world views, living to and fro between them. Fourth, engage in some creative critique showing that what is of authentic value in modernity can be accommodated within the traditional synthesis. Fifth, pretend there isn't an issue.

Pretending changes nothing except oneself, inducing shallowness, evasiveness, and indifference. The search for a *modus vivendi* is what has gone on for the last three-hundred years, but it has proven unsuccessful. Modernity has pressed onwards and inwards and in so doing has breached and undermined the intellectual and social structures of Catholicism, including Catholic education, and seeped into Catholic consciousness. This accounts for four of the seven challenges I listed earlier: two *external* – disrespect and hostility, and a degraded yet self-righteous secular culture; and two *internal* – a lack of knowledge and commitment, and of formative Catholic home life. Where Catholicism has not sought an accommodation with the surrounding culture, now often extending to special pleading and ingratiation, it has produced a sectarian, reactionary, remnant, and fortress mentality.

It will be evident that I favour the fourth option: creative critique preserving the good features of modernity but showing that they do not depend exclusively upon it. One such is the idea of liberalism as a form of toleration an idea implicit in the writing of Aquinas where he discusses and dismisses the argument that vice should be suppressed by law. But the work of critique and selective preservation needs to be conjoined with a recovery of the central ideas of the Catholic-Aristotelian synthesis. Happily, something of a neo-Aristotelian revival has been going on for the past few decades within secular metaphysics, philosophies of mind and action, and ethics; so the project I propose is neither eccentric nor fanciful. Also, there are broad, cultural and political changes in process whose outcomes may be favourable. One is, in effect, the destruction of freedom in the name of 'liberal progressivism', but which is anything but free or forward moving; rather it is coercive and regressive. Along with this is the loss of the sense of human nature and identity, and of the necessity of family and community. These are collapsing the contemporary western order, but in addition to the internal push back against them, still weak but growing, there is another positive trend.

10. Another synthesis?

This is the movement of people, ideas, and traditions from Eastern cultures into historically Western societies, which returns me to the relevance of quoting from the Confucian *Analects*. For within them one finds a conception of life, of the virtues required to live well, and of the forms of teaching and learning required to inculcate those virtues, that bears some resemblance to what is to be found in Aristotle and Aquinas. No doubt this was a factor that influenced Prospero Intorcetta SJ in his translation, for he had studied Aristotelian philosophy at the Jesuit Seminary in Palermo and Aquinian theology at the Jesuit College in Messina. Here then, if widely engaged with, may be growing support from unexpected quarters. A regrettable consequence of largely confining discussions of historical treatments of virtue to those originating in Greek ethics is the relative brevity of the list, principally, of course, the cardinal four introduced by Plato in Book IV of the *Republic* (427e): prudence, courage, temperance, and justice, to which Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* adds a further ten or so. In the *Analects* there are five cardinals: wisdom (*zhi*), human-heartedness (*jen/ren*), propriety (*li*), fidelity-trustworthiness (*xin*), and righteousness (*yi*), and very many further virtues including attentiveness, circumspection, decency, empathy, determination, dignity, discernment, generosity, graciousness, hopefulness, humour,

loyalty, moderation, modesty, patience, piety, resolution, refinement, resourcefulness, simplicity, and sincerity.[18] Separated by significant stretches of distance, time, and culture, and by the idea of monotheism, there are nonetheless significant points of resemblance between these reflections and those of Aquinas on the demeanour and aims appropriate to learning and character formation.

From the point of view of philosophy of Catholic education, the significant difference between the authors is that Confucius' aphorisms stand apart from any theoretical account of metaphysics and value, while these latter fields more naturally characterise the work of Aquinas than do words of wisdom. Among the reasons for this is that whereas Confucius was a sage, Aquinas was a philosopher-theologian. This suggests a way of studying Aquinas and Eastern sage traditions as complementary, for the focus of the writing of Confucius (as of Mencius 'the second sage', and Zhu Xi, and others in related traditions), is upon the guidance of conduct through the cultivation and internalisation of certain habits and ritual practices, whereas Aquinas gives his attention to the analysis of action and cognition. The effort to read Confucius in conjunction with an Aristotelian-Thomistic analysis of final causation, or by reference to the distinction between innate and acquired dispositions, or in connection with an account of the good as pertaining to the realisation of nature, is neither difficult nor unrewarding, and the possibility of doing so suggests a productive synergy.[19]

Finally, I return to Chesterton's *Ballad*. Having told Alfred 'naught for his comfort, save that the skies grow darker and the sea rises higher', Mary asks whether he has joy even though the circumstances are grim and threatening, and again whether he has faith even though things look hopeless. The questions are rhetorical and really reminders that for the Christian faith and joy do not depend on human estimations of how things are going but are religious responses of trust in God and joy at the prospect of salvation. It is these that must be brought into the work of meeting the challenges and seeking the opportunities surrounding Catholic education. There are no quick fixes for the larger problem but there are ways of moving forward in faith, hope, and charity. And that challenge is the most important and rewarding of all: to live in the light of God's promise and grace and to try to help others to do so also which is what fundamentally Catholic education is about.

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[18]The identification and classification of qualities and virtues in the *Analects* is a scholarly matter and subject to principled variation, see Xinzhong Yao, 'Conceptualising Virtues in the Analects of Confucius', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 39 (2012), 3–7. For an interesting account of Confucius's philosophy that draws on aspects of modern ordinary language neo-Aristotelianism in the style of J. L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle, P. F. Strawson and L. Wittgenstein see Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

[19]The previous two paragraphs draw in part from J. Haldane, 'Foreword', in *Aquinas, Education and the East*, ed. by T. B. Mooney and M. Nowacki (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), pp. vi–vii.