

Maritain and the Idea of a Catholic University

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Jacques Maritain's essay "Truth and Human Fellowship" contemplates a simple but profoundly important conclusion: genuine intellectual cooperation among persons with differing points of view requires a shared commitment to the pursuit of truth.¹ The repudiation of truth as a goal of inquiry in the name of toleration, on the other hand, destroys the basis for mutual cooperation. This conclusion generates an apparent paradox. Truth does not admit compromise, yet it is imperative that we cooperate for the sake of the common good.² If truth precludes cooperation, then the search for truth and human fellowship appears hopeless. In response to this apparent paradox, Maritain offers a compelling account of how different traditions can appropriate each other's insights without discarding respect for truth.

The purpose of this essay is to examine Maritain's proposal and to show that it can provide a useful model for thinking through the current predicament in North American Catholic higher education. His account of cooperation offers a vision of shared intellectual life that many scholars at Catholic institutions can embrace. Yet, it is not so toothless as to be indiscriminately acceptable to all. Maritain's position reposes upon his

1. Jacques Maritain, "Truth and Human Fellowship," *On the Use of Philosophy: Three Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 16-43.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

metaphysical and epistemological realism, which will be unacceptable to more radical “post-modern” intellectuals. While some may regard this feature of his approach as a weakness, we will demonstrate that the boundaries of intellectual discourse Maritain embraces offer a healthy but manageable challenge to Catholic institutions and their members to fulfill their missions more effectively.

A comprehensive study of Maritain’s critical realism would be helpful for this task, but that is beyond the scope of the present analysis.³ Our purpose is to situate Maritain’s view with respect to the available approaches to the intellectual life at Christian institutions of higher education. The survey of these approaches does not pretend to be comprehensive; rather two representative positions are considered: the high theological model of Cardinal Newman, and the quasi-accommodationist view of George Marsden’s *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. Maritain’s account of cooperation falls in between these two, offering more latitude than Newman’s idea of a university, but affirming a solid commitment to truth as the basis for free inquiry. George Marsden rightly calls attention to the marginalization of Christian scholars within the academy, but he appears perilously close to giving up the principles of truth and objectivity that Maritain so eloquently defends in his essay.

Maritain points out that one often encounters “people who think that not to believe in any truth, or not to adhere firmly to any assertion as unshakably true in itself, is a primary condition required of democratic citizens in order to be tolerant of one another”⁴ He counters that this sort of attitude is self-destructive to democracy and will eventually result in the replacement of liberty by coercion. This is the position of many radicalized intellectuals in the academy today, who vigorously defend the principle of free inquiry as incompatible with the mission of Catholic higher education. The widespread endorsement of this viewpoint in the academy represents the principal stumbling block to the acceptance of Maritain’s model of intellectual cooperation. Commitment to the pursuit of truth is the only firm and lasting basis for intellectual collaboration and mutual respect.

3. Principles necessary for the present discussion will be deployed in course. For further details, the reader is encouraged to consult *Distinguish to Unite; or, The Degrees of Knowledge* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959).

4. *Ibid.*, p 18.

Newman's Idea of a University

No attempt to examine the nature of Catholic higher education could be complete without a discussion of John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*.⁵ As one critic of Newman's lectures puts it, "No work in the English language has had more influence on the public ideals of higher education."⁶ Frank Turner makes this observation, despite his sense that Newman's thought is at odds with the mainstream of North American educators.⁷ Newman's model of liberal education requires a cohesive vision of liberal studies unified under theology, a vision that is practically impossible on a large scale in the present intellectual climate. Some Christian academics like George Marsden, recognizing this reality, have attempted to salvage a space for the integration of faith and learning within the secular pluralistic model that predominates.⁸ Their vision differs significantly from Newman's precisely because they give up the integrity of truth that is so pivotal for his argument. A viable solution to this predicament, offering a sort of middle ground, is found in Maritain's idea that human fellowship can coincide with the vigorous pursuit of truth. His vision is less cohesive than Newman's, and therefore more adaptable to the present situation, but more demanding than Marsden's. It can therefore provide a golden mean that larger, more pluralistic Catholic institutions should be seeking.

At the beginning of Discourse II in *The Idea of a University*, Newman identifies two principal questions he wishes to consider: 1) whether theology can appropriately be excluded from a university education, and 2) whether students should be guided to pursue vocational and professional studies or the liberal arts.⁹ He answers that the liberal arts have value in themselves, beyond the utility value of professional studies, and should therefore be preferred.¹⁰ Theology is a form of knowledge, equal in value to

5. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

6. Frank M. Turner, "Newman's University and Ours," *The Idea of a University*, p. 28.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 283. A thorough and scholarly presentation of the contemporary situation within American Catholic colleges and universities can be found in: James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). Observations in this chapter about the current climate in Catholic academia are drawn from the author's own experience; they are corroborated by this excellent resource.

8. See George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

9. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p. 25.

10. This is the subject of Discourse V, *ibid.*, pp. 76ff.

the other arts and sciences, so theology cannot be excluded from the university curriculum. As Newman puts it, "A University ... by its very name professes to teach universal knowledge: Theology is surely a branch of knowledge"¹¹ He adds that the goal of knowledge is truth, truth is of facts and their relations, and all facts and relations are tied together in a single web of reality.¹²

Newman uses this conclusion about the unity of truth to argue, in the third Discourse, for the claim that theology is not only one of the sciences, but it also provides these others with their unity and purpose.¹³ The various sciences study portions of reality forming "various partial views or abstractions."¹⁴ As such, each is sovereign within its own subsphere, but imperfect and needing completion when viewed concretely as part of the whole of reality.¹⁵ This completion comes from theology, since theology aims at knowledge of the divine being, and God is the source of all reality. Furthermore, by providing integration to the other sciences, it also directs them to their final end. Newman concludes, "... how can any Catholic imagine that it is possible for him to cultivate Philosophy and Science with due attention to their ultimate end, which is Truth, supposing that [theology] ... be omitted from among the subjects of his teaching? In a word, Religious Truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge."¹⁶

Current Practice

On the surface, it would appear that many Catholic institutions of higher education follow Newman's model, since they do include theology in their curricula and most have maintained a professed commitment to liberal education, despite the growth of professional programs on their campuses.¹⁷

11. Ibid., p.25.

12. Ibid., p. 41.

13. Ibid., p. 41.

14. Ibid., p. 42.

15. Ibid., p. 51.

16. Ibid., p. 57.

17. Burtchaell (*The Dying of the Light*) documents the case of several Catholic institutions that had varying degrees of success in preserving their commitment to liberal arts education and the inclusion of theology in their curricula. Perhaps the worst case is that of the College of New Rochelle, whose programs of continuing education and professional studies rapidly overtook the traditional liberal arts (pp. 657-59). Like many other institutions at the time, CNR converted its theology program into "Religious Studies." Other institutions experienced a more gradual diminution of their classical curricula and commitment to the teaching of theology.

The apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* seeks to enhance the Catholic character of these institutions. The document contemplates a substantive renewal of the Catholic intellectual life penetrating every constituency in the institution, thus effectively reaching towards Newman's vision of "Education ... on a theological principle."¹⁸ Many Catholic colleges and universities, however, have tended to focus their energy on resisting the document's modest juridical norms for the theology faculty.

Thus, the appearance of a commonality between Newman and contemporary Catholic education remains a surface resemblance. Institutions have moved to drop required courses in Catholic theology or to eliminate their requirements *de facto* by creating a range of courses, some of them quite non-theological in scope, which satisfy the requirement.¹⁹ Furthermore, "theology departments" have often been transformed into faculties of "religious studies." This name change is more than merely cosmetic. Occupants of those departments have begun to conceptualize their work in new and different ways. Religious studies can be looked upon not as a body of knowledge or important truths about God, but as an empirical, phenomenological or literary study of religious behaviour and discourse. Even if individual scholars remain committed to the possibility of studying theological truths, religious studies, as a discipline, becomes a particular research unit within the academy rather than a place for the study of truths that unify the curriculum.

Some measure of the "success" of these changes aimed at domesticating theology in the university can be discerned from the fact that many students and faculty regard the Catholicity of their university education in terms of affective experiences with campus ministry programs, not cognitive work in theology.²⁰ Religion has been privatized on Catholic campuses, in much the same way as it has been in broader American culture. Newman foresaw this tendency and vigorously opposed it. According to him, it was an unfortunate feature of certain strains of Protestant thinking about religious faith, that faith was thought to consist, "not in knowledge, but in feeling or sentiment."²¹ Instead, he preferred the Catholic view that "faith was an intellectual act, its object

18. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p. 20.

19. Burtchaell documents this trend at three major Catholic institutions: Catholic University, St. John's University and Boston College (Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, p. 627).

20. See e.g. *ibid.*, p. 625, quoting Fr. Neenan, S.J. at Boston College. Students and colleagues have frequently responded to the author with precisely the same assessment of the identifiable features of Catholic education.

21. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, p. 30.

truth, and its result knowledge.”²² For Newman, the role of theology in a university is predicated upon the unity of truth and its complementarity with religious faith.²³ Any attempt to preserve his view of the place of theology in a liberal education that undermines his understanding of the unity of truth, eviscerates the core of this position. We shall see below that George Marsden’s effort to secure a space for Christian scholarship in academia tends in this direction.

Catholic colleges and universities might be thought to fare better on the whole with respect to Newman’s second essential characteristic of university education, its liberal character. After all, while they may have lost their commitment to specific doctrinal claims, many institutions have tried to shore up their Catholic character and traditions by appealing to the moral value of liberal education for the formation of character. Jesuit institutions especially have found this direction attractive, espousing the Ignatian ideal of service to others and the preferential option for the poor. Liberal education then becomes a sort of seminary for peace and social justice, which is seen as more central to a person’s development than professional training. In this way, the moral dimension of a liberal arts education is seen to be synonymous with an institution’s Catholic identity. Indeed, the focus of many Catholic religious studies departments has been to replace theological requirements with courses concerned with social justice issues.

This approach fails doubly to meet with Newman’s idea of a university education. While he was by no means insensitive to the corporal works of mercy, he had a healthy respect for the reality of human sinfulness and the real limitations of higher education. It is worth quoting his thoughts more fully here:

Knowledge is one thing, virtue is another; good sense is not conscience, refinement is not humility, nor is largeness and justness of view faith. Philosophy ... gives no command over the passions, no influential motives, no vivifying principles. Liberal Education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman ... [The qualities of a gentleman] are no guarantee for sanctity or even for conscientiousness.²⁴

If he were a contemporary observer, Newman probably would say that Catholic institutions of higher education demand both too much and too little from the concept of liberal education. On the one hand, they ex-

22. Ibid.

23. It would appear that St. Ignatius shared the same view, although many of his latter day confreres do not (Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light*, p. 628).

24. Newman, *The Idea of A University*, p. 89.

pect it to provide moral character formation that it cannot be expected to do. Furthermore, they have mistakenly deprived knowledge and truth of its intrinsic value by subordinating it as a mere means to the achievement of certain moral ends. On the other hand, they have despaired of the unity of truth and theology's role in the quest for it. The attempt to yoke Catholic identity solely to a program of character formation is a direct concomitant of the collapse of the conception of the unity of truth.

Assessing the Viability of the High Theological Model

Since contemporary practice in American Catholic higher education is quite distant from Newman's 'high theological' vision of a university, it is natural to ask whether his proposal is feasible or impractically utopian. Newman himself confessed in his lectures to having doubts about its practicality.²⁵ The present analysis takes the view that Newman's model can be successful, but only under certain controlled conditions. Careful reflection demonstrates that the success of the high theological model depends very much upon the sort of institution one intends to create. For Newman the unity of truth is what justifies the inclusion of theology in the curriculum, not ultimately a moral vision or historical tradition. Furthermore, theology provides a purpose in light of which the other elements of a liberal education can be organized and given meaning. An integral consensus about truth is therefore pivotal for Newman's vision. Without that consensus, it is not only theology that will be without justification, but the broader purpose of a university education. This leads inexorably to the conclusion that his model requires a single theological system at the core of the curriculum. It is not a plurality of faiths within the university community that is unmanageable, but the loss of an integrating rational principle. Thus, even though Newman rightly indicates that the arguments in the lectures are not based upon authority but philosophical reflection, his model presupposes that Catholic theology will unify the institution. This model has concrete implications for the type of institution one can create. It is incompatible with schools in which the Religious Studies Department views theology as merely another research enterprise alongside many others. Furthermore, where theology is the integrating final cause of a curriculum, there can hardly be a war within the theology faculty, or even among other faculty within the institution as they relate to the discipline of theology. The integrity of truth must penetrate deeply, so that it can serve as the animating spirit of a place.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

Conscientious faculty must be honest with students. Otherwise, they cannot model the appropriate respect for truth that is essential to inculcating a love of learning. If faculty members are deeply ambivalent about the integrating final cause of the curriculum, they will either deceive their students or ultimately pass that ambivalent and fragmented view on to them. This will undermine the whole educational process, not merely the study of a particular subject. Moreover, it is unimaginable that faculty could carry off this enterprise in good conscience without a considerable degree of theological sophistication in addition to their own particular professional competencies. The high theological model thus requires an extraordinary unity of purpose from its faculty, and an uncommon level of training, especially considering the typical pattern of postgraduate education today.

All of these constraints upon the choice of faculty and the organizational structure of the institution point to a single conclusion. Like Aristotle's *polis*, Newman's university will be relatively small, and it will require good friendships among persons possessing the intellectual, moral and theological virtues. Furthermore, like Aristotle's conception of friendship, Newman's university will be remarkably stable but rare. Attempts to expand such a university beyond very modest boundaries will inevitably result in a collapse of its unifying principle and the remarkable model of liberal education Newman envisioned. It should be no surprise that Catholic universities (many of which were founded by closely knit religious communities) that grew rapidly in size after World War II, have fallen upon hard times and are struggling with their Catholicity. Newman's vision of a Catholic liberal arts education is by no means impossible, but it is difficult to execute successfully. It will be unavailable to most larger and mid-sized Catholic institutions today, which have very pluralistic faculties and less homogenous student populations. Whether these institutions can retain enough of an authentically Catholic character without strict adherence to the Newmanian model, we shall consider shortly.

One clear vision of how to implement Newman's original model of liberal education in a world where lay scholars are going to serve as the faculty is articulated in the founding document of Thomas Aquinas College.²⁶ Some features of that document are worth noting. First and foremost is the fact that it explicitly repudiates the principle of free inquiry as the basic axiom of academic life.²⁷ This repudiation is neither a rejection of

26. Ronald P. McArthur, et al., *A Proposal for the Fulfillment of Catholic Liberal Education: The Founding Document of Thomas Aquinas College* (Santa Paula, California: Thomas Aquinas College, 1993).

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 17ff.

intellectual freedom nor the search for truth. Rather, the document cogently argues in logical fashion that the pursuit of truth can only be made possible by the possession of certain rational first principles that are accepted as undeniable.²⁸ Furthermore, it takes the view that acquiring and abiding in the truth is necessary for genuine intellectual freedom. In our case, where human rationality is limited and imperfect, reason can only attain its ultimate purpose with the assistance of faith. Free inquiry is an important means of attaining wisdom where there is controversy and doubt, but it is not the end in itself. This is perfectly understandable in light of Newman's view that theology is not just one of the fields of human knowledge, but the unifying element in the university curriculum. This leads to an important and potentially startling conclusion in the document. Only the religious university, where the pursuit of truth serves under the light of faith, can offer the fullness of a liberal education.²⁹ So far as it goes, this is a coherent model for a Catholic liberal arts education.

The Search for Alternative Models

The high theological model of a Catholic college or university, with its specific emphasis upon the unity of all the sciences and arts under theology and the light of faith, has much to offer. Students will receive a solid grounding in the traditional liberal arts and sciences that is free from the corrosive effects of post-modern fragmentation upon the curriculum. In order to carry off this pedagogical plan successfully, there must be extraordinary unanimity among the various faculty members, and a corresponding ability to present the liberal arts as unified in this manner. While many Catholic educators aspire towards the unity of truth, the state of their particular fields of expertise is not at that goal. Practically speaking, it would be very difficult to achieve the sort of consensus required by the high theological model at most larger and mid-sized Catholic colleges and universities because the integrity of truth is so foreign to contemporary culture.

Without denigrating the extraordinary service these institutions provide to the community, it is necessary to ask whether a different model for a Catholic institution of higher education, one more thoroughly in the earthly city, but still authentically Catholic, can be articulated. There are three principal advantages to pursuing this line of inquiry. First, Catholic institutions have a duty not only to provide formation for their students,

28. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

but also to engage in fruitful dialogue with the contemporary world in order to contribute to the common good. This can only happen if Catholic scholars and students work together closely with other people of good will. Without sacrificing intellectual rigor or the principles of the faith, competent scholars must engage the contemporary world in dialogue, on mutually agreeable terms. Second, we must face the current situation within the Catholic community forthrightly. An entire generation of the faithful know so little about their own faith and are often alienated from it in such a way that they will be disinclined to choose what the high theological model has to offer. Third, and most relevant from the point of view of Maritain's essay on intellectual cooperation, we must face the fact that many faculty at the vast majority of Catholic institutions of higher education find themselves in an ambivalent or even hostile relationship to their institution's Catholicity. There has been well justified skepticism in recent years concerning whether many Catholic colleges and universities have traveled so far down the road to secularization that they are incapable of serving their Catholic mission. While such doubts are justified, it remains incumbent upon us to ask whether or not some institutions can retrieve their authentic Catholicity within the real boundaries of their institutional potentialities and resources.

The fact is that it is possible for some to do so, but that the predominant approach many Catholic institutions are adopting is bound to fail. They embrace radical pluralism at the heart of their curricula, while attempting to preserve "Catholic identity" as one of a series of special perspectives or interest groups. Perspectivalism rests upon the very kind of relativism that, Maritain warns, threatens to undermine their institutional integrity.³⁰ Furthermore, the pursuit of truth is replaced by a series of procedural arrangements. Some disconcerting aspects of the current crisis in Catholic higher education are relatively uncontroversial. Many of these institutions have begun to regret the loss of their Catholicity and the dissolution of their core curricula. Faculty, administrators and students wonder aloud about the integrity and purpose of a liberal education. Efforts to correct the course have been made by placing renewed emphasis upon mission statements that articulate institutional identity. Numerous institutions have revised or reinstated a core curriculum.³¹ Pedagogical consensus among the faculty, however, is harder to achieve in an age of professional specialization and post-modern fragmentation.

30. Maritain, "Truth and Human Fellowship," p. 23.

31. See e.g. *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, Spring 1999: 15. The entire issue is devoted to the revitalization of core curricula.

The situation has become so extraordinary that many Catholic colleges and universities now contemplate the creation of centers for “Catholic Studies” alongside other specialized programs such as gender studies, peace studies, and environmental studies. Their goal is to preserve a legitimate space within the life of the institution for the Catholic character of the place, while frankly acknowledging that the institution as a whole can no longer sustain the effort. When sympathetic faculty members join together to discuss what a “Catholic Studies” program should be, however, rancorous argument may ensue. No common understanding exists about the content of such a program of study or what it must aim to produce. This should not come as a surprise when we recall that the Newmanian model of the integral curriculum has been set aside. Social scientists, literature and art history specialists, philosophers, and theologians all have very different discipline-generated conceptions of a desired curriculum. These troubles are merely symptoms of a deeper difficulty. The effort to preserve the Catholic character of such an institution has sacrificed the foundation for the sake of certain manifestations. As Maritain put it in *Education at the Crossroads*, education has lost sight of the end for the sake of certain means:

This supremacy of means over end and the consequent collapse of all sure purpose and real efficiency seem to be the main reproach to contemporary education. The means are not bad. On the contrary, they are generally much better than those of the old pedagogy. The misfortune is precisely that they are so good that we lose sight of the end.³²

A Catholic studies program is a prime example of a fundamental transformation in the way that education is conceptualized. Instead of an institution’s Catholicity being integral to its animating spirit, it is rather viewed as one of a series of incompatible perspectives that must be represented in order to meet the demands of equity. Larger and mid-size Catholic institutions cannot go back to a simpler time when smaller faculties and student bodies could allow for the implementation of Newman’s ideal. We must ask whether Catholic education must either accommodate itself to the contemporary academy or take up a kind of monastic isolation within society? Let us look briefly at the case for accommodation.

32. Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), p. 3.

George Marsden's Defense of Christian Scholarship

One must be cautious not to dismiss prematurely the idea of Catholic Studies programs. They are often the result of a genuine desire to do something constructive about an institution's Catholicity. Ivory tower speculation aimed at casting doubt upon realistic though imperfect efforts to fix a problem would not be helpful. Centers of Catholic thought at large secular institutions have been well established for some period of time. Furthermore, serious and thoughtful minds, like the Christian historian George Marsden, have endorsed these sorts of programs. Marsden has spent a great deal of time reflecting upon how faith and learning can continue to co-exist in the academy. As a Protestant Christian who has taught at Catholic, Protestant and secular universities, he has experience of the widest variety of efforts to preserve religious intellectual culture in the academy. In order to understand why such programs will ultimately prove unsuccessful in Catholic higher education, we should take a brief look at Marsden's work.

In his 1994 study *The Soul of the American University*, Marsden documented the secularization of mainstream American universities over time.³³ While this process came later for Catholic institutions, the pace of secularization has accelerated in recent years. At the end of his book, Marsden made a modest proposal for the return of religious scholarship to the academy that generated a firestorm of criticism. In response to this reaction, he wrote a second book: *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. The aim of this book was to defend the case for Christian scholarship as a respectable enterprise on secular academic grounds. While Marsden's book is not specifically about Catholic institutions and is more concerned with scholarship than pedagogy, the thesis it puts forward has been inspirational for many who are concerned about secularization among religious institutions of higher education. Marsden endorses the idea of centers or institutes within Catholic universities as a way of preserving their Catholic identity.³⁴

At first glance the argument of Marsden's book is an ingenious one. He maintains that by its own current criteria of scholarly merit, pluralism, and equitable treatment, the secular post-modern academy no longer has any reasonable basis for excluding religious perspectives.³⁵ We immediately notice a significant difference between Newman's justification and Marsden's.

33. George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

34. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, pp. 103-104.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

For Newman, theology belongs in the curriculum because it is a unifying form of knowledge. For Marsden, the justification is extrinsic and moral. Religious perspectives merit a place in the academy as a matter of fairness or equity to all groups.

The relevance of this argument to Catholic institutions may not seem evident until we recall that the faculties of these institutions have become as pluralistic and diverse as many of their secular counterparts. Groups within these institutions agitate against "Catholic identity" as a form of exclusion and unfairness. Marsden's point is that the pendulum has swung in the other direction and it is time for academia to grant religious perspectives their rightful place within the curriculum. Since this argument is made on the basis of equity, its rhetoric does not permit a repossession of the center of the curriculum. Rather, equity takes the form of endowing a center or institute, or even a number of chairs to promote "Catholic identity" alongside various other interdisciplinary and co-curricular initiatives.

Marsden's equity argument to the post-modern academy is made on the following grounds. The original reason for the disestablishment of religion in the academy depended upon an Enlightenment conception of rationality that has now been discarded.³⁶ According to that conception, only empirically verifiable statements are meaningful. Scientific and social scientific research aims at truth. Religion is discredited as a source of wisdom, because its knowledge-claims depend upon blind faith. It constitutes an emotional and aesthetic commitment that one is entitled to hold as a subjective matter of freedom of conscience, but it ought not to intrude upon the objective matter of academic scientific inquiry. Furthermore, religious doctrine is by its very nature divisive. Religious perspectives are not only unproductive of a body of knowledge; they are positively hostile to the cooperation required for the advancement of human understanding. Therefore, they are to be excluded from the academy and reserved to the home and church, synagogue, mosque or temple.

Since the Enlightenment, however, a new consensus has emerged. Here Marsden refers to the increasing awareness of the historical and sociological conditioning of human thought. He alludes to the example of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.³⁷ No longer does the academy regard scientific knowledge as free-floating from a background intellectual context. Drawing upon the work of Reformed epistemologist Nicholas Wolterstorff, Marsden points to the idea that all

36. Ibid., pp. 25-26.

37. Ibid., p. 27.

theorizing happens in the context of certain control beliefs.³⁸ These control beliefs do not free us from the evidential and justificatory standards of academic research. But, we are increasingly aware that research is shaped by assumptions and preconditions that can even be opaque to the researcher him or herself.

Marsden points to recent work in Marxist and feminist studies that call attention to the idea that our gender, race and ethnicity are part of our identity in such a way as to have a fundamental impact upon our scholarly commitments and research programs.³⁹ He concludes that “religious commitments” are no different. In fact, they shape our identity in ways even more fundamental and far-reaching than some of these other categories. This use of “identity politics” as a way to make the case for Christian perspectives has important consequences. One cannot engage in the rhetoric of perspectivalism without embracing it in other areas. Once the notion of “Catholic studies” is adopted as a vehicle to preserve Catholic identity, one must give up making more universal claims about the scope of Christianity and the curriculum.

Marsden uses the displacement of the Enlightenment conception of rationality in order to make the case for Christian scholarship. There is an important paradox in his presentation of his case that reveals the difficulty with his adoption of the accommodationist model. One of the reasons why Christian perspectives can claim to make a substantive contribution to the academy, and therefore why they should be given a place at the table, is their anti-relativist character. Marsden essentially endorses Newman’s model of the integrity of truth.⁴⁰ That is, Christian perspectives can provide a welcome contribution to the academy because they offer first principles that help us reclaim the idea of wisdom. But, these first principles militate against the perspectival view. Marsden is well aware of the apparent paradox of defending Christian perspectives by appealing to contemporary relativist practice in the academy. He notes:

Christians and other believers who reject the dominant naturalistic biases in the academy would be foolish to do so in the name of postmodern relativism. What they should be arguing is that the contemporary academy on its own terms has no consistent grounds for rejecting all religious perspectives.⁴¹

38. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-54.

40. For his discussion of Newman, see *ibid.*, p. 76.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

This is an ingenious idea, if it can be carried through. Marsden wants Christian scholars to maintain a perspective external to the cultural relativism in the academy, while using the language internal to that domain in order to affect a political outcome. There are several serious problems with this idea, however, the first of which is a potential charge of hypocrisy. This is a special problem for the Christian who claims not to conceptualize truth in pragmatic terms. It is analogous to the problem Socrates faced in trying to defend himself at his trial. While his accusers were willing to perjure themselves in order to secure a conviction, he could not consistently espouse untruths about his case in order to defend against a series of unjust charges.

The situation of the Christian academic is similar. We cannot isolate our discourses into separate compartments. If we find the rhetoric of relativism unacceptable for internal dialogue among ourselves, it would be unreasonable to engage in these external polemics. If the reader finds this argument impossibly Utopian or naïve, consider the case of a group of academics who, for practical purposes, mount such an argument in order to fund a Catholic Studies Program. They will have to relinquish Newman's idea that theology provides a unifying final cause for the whole curriculum, and with it the integrity of truth. They can shift back and forth between language games for political purposes, but this action will speak louder than any words they may write or say in defense of truth against post-modern fragmentation.

In addition to the problem of hypocrisy, cultural relativists express the concern that Christian scholarship is intolerant.⁴² Christians are certainly capable of toleration in the original sense of the term. As we will see shortly, genuine toleration constitutes the impetus towards a middle way between Newman and Marsden that is central to Jacques Maritain's philosophy of intellectual cooperation. Toleration in this original sense is a virtue having to do with respect for seeking the truth. We tolerate views that we do not agree with because we believe that pursuit of truth is a supreme goal of human activity, and we recognize as philosophical realists in the Maritainian sense that everyone is capable of error.

This does not satisfy cultural relativists, who repudiate these claims about truth. Marsden quotes a remark by Stanley Fish, who asserts that Christianity is dangerous to the liberal academy because all "genuine religion' must subvert liberalism, rather than accommodate itself to the latter."⁴³ Marsden argues to the contrary that "some believers have no interest in

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

destroying the pluralistic academy."⁴⁴ Fish's comments are revealing, however. Post-modern academicians do not see Christianity as just another perspective among many. The Christian viewpoint, by its very existence, threatens to undermine the principles that preserve the current political situation. Newman's vision of the integrity of the curriculum cannot be tolerated because it challenges the core of both Enlightenment scientism and post-modern pluralism.

Marsden and many other Christian intellectuals have failed to appreciate fully the force of this argument. When it is combined with a second important point, we can begin to see why the strategy of embracing the rhetoric of post-modern relativism in order to build Catholic institutes within Catholic universities is bound to fail. The modern academy does not have the same attitude towards truth and justice that Marsden has. His argument that religious perspectives must be accepted at the academic table does not appear compelling to his opponents. Intellectuals who repudiate a commitment to truth as the goal of inquiry in Marsden or Newman's sense will never be compelled by arguments about equity and consistency. Once a Catholic institution cedes its commitment to universal truth as a goal of inquiry, it sets in motion a struggle between adversaries in the academy that cannot reach an amicable form of co-existence. The problem is not fundamentally one of orthodoxy or specifically Catholic truth, but of the very idea of truth as the goal of scholarship and teaching. To the opponents of Catholic tradition in the university, there is a political problem with which fairness and justice are not involved. Furthermore, tacit or explicit acknowledgment of post-modern fragmentation provides one of the most potent theoretical and political tools for further fragmenting the curriculum. Catholic Studies programs may very well be, contrary to the fervent hope of their supporters, the final nail in the coffin of Catholicity at Catholic colleges and universities.

Maritain and Intellectual Cooperation

At this point, we are faced with an apparent dilemma. On the one hand, Newman's idea of a university, which requires the unity of the arts and sciences under theology, is impractical as a model for larger and mid-size Catholic colleges and universities. On the other hand, Catholic institutions that seek to preserve their Catholicity by acknowledging the fragmentary character of their curricula and creating a Catholic center within the institution seem bound to fail. Short of writing off the majority of Catholic

44. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

institutions of higher education in the country as having grown too large and too diverse to continue serving their missions, the question arises whether a middle road can be found. Is there a model for Catholic education in the midst of the earthly city that will allow existing institutions to preserve enough of the vision of Catholic liberal education in order to serve their missions? Two of Jacques Maritain's works, "Truth and Human Fellowship," and *Education at the Crossroads* point the way toward an imperfect but worthy solution. Like Aristotle's second-best city, Maritain's vision of intellectual cooperation provides us with the very best alternative for institutions that are staffed by a pluralistic group of faculty members. It is also best for students who are not from the outset suitably disposed towards the integral vision of a Catholic education that a select few of the smaller Catholic Colleges can offer.

In a move that seems prescient, Maritain begins his essay on intellectual cooperation with a vigorous critique of pragmatism and relativism. As he points out, some intellectuals clamor for the need to get rid of "zeal for truth" in the name of liberal toleration.⁴⁵ Their idea is that true believers, who seek universal truth, are the source of fanaticism and persecution. On the contrary, Maritain asserts that pragmatism and relativism turn out to be the real source of intolerance, especially intolerance towards truth.⁴⁶ Those who seek truth are not above engaging in intellectual persecution of their peers, but Maritain thinks that "humility together with faith in truth" is the only viable alternative.⁴⁷

Relativists must "cut themselves off from truth," otherwise they become committed to imposing their particular beliefs on everyone else. For them, authentic democracy requires that we discard truth as a goal of inquiry and replace it with acceptance by the majority of our peers. Maritain argues that this view is deadly because it removes its own support from under itself. The common commitment to belief in such truths as the value of freedom, the sacred character of justice, and the necessity of the rule of law, all can be called into question. We can see this trajectory in relativism when we recall that Marsden's argument in defense of the rights of Christian scholarship in terms of equity fails to find traction with his opponents.

Maritain concludes the first section of his essay with an argument for the view that genuine toleration can only proceed from the absolute com-

45. Maritain, "Truth and Human Fellowship," pp. 16-17.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

mitment to the possibility of attaining truth.⁴⁸ This argument springs from the deep sense of awareness Maritain has, as a philosophical realist and a Christian, of the transcendence of the world. For the relativist, the universe runs out no farther than our own conceptual schemes provide. For the realist, on the other hand, the world transcends our grasp of it, and yet it is available to us. In *Education at the Crossroads*, Maritain observes: "thinking begins, not only with difficulties but with *insights*, and ends up in insights which are made true by rational proving or experimental verifying, not by pragmatic sanction."⁴⁹ As he puts the point in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, "the mind, from the very start, reveals itself as warranted in its certitude by things and measured by an *esse* independent of itself"⁵⁰ Confidence about the possibility of attaining truth, rather than closing the mind off to other ideas, enforces upon it a sense of humility.⁵¹ With our awareness of the world's transcendence of our conceptual schemes, must also go the awareness that we can be mistaken about our worldview. Coupled with love of the truth and zeal to attain it, humility provides the basis for loving the truth-seeking capacity in our fellow human beings. This is the pivotal source of intellectual cooperation.

Maritain and Liberal Education

Maritain's philosophy of education takes its point of departure from the rejection of pragmatism and the importance of learning to love wisdom. In *Education at the Crossroads*, he argues that we have lost our way in education, placing educational means above ends, which leads to a loss of appreciation for the intrinsic value of truth and a focus upon increasing specialization. Our sense of what matters has been transformed into a focus upon the cultivation of particular kinds of technical expertise. In order to recover the basis of genuine liberal education, we must focus not only upon making young people proficient in certain specific disciplines and skilled in the mental gymnastics of reason and argument; rather, we must teach them to delight in the beauty of truth.⁵² Not surprisingly, Maritain's vision of the end of liberal education is quite similar to Newman's. The purpose of liberal education is not to induce a special skill in the student or even the special appreciation for a particular field, but to help the student

48. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

49. Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 13.

50. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 74.

51. Maritain, "Truth and Human Fellowship," p. 24.

52. Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 52.

take hold of the beauty of truth in each of the fields of human endeavor.⁵³ At the pinnacle of this process, liberal education must allow the student to attain knowledge of first principles, since these are the basis of wisdom. This includes training in philosophy and theology as the underpinning and goal of the educational process.⁵⁴ He quotes with approval Newman's statement that a university "is a place of teaching universal knowledge."⁵⁵

It is clear that Maritain's idea of a university shares with Newman's a commitment to the unity of truth as the goal of inquiry, which was the crucial premise that Marsden was forced to lay aside by embracing perspectivalism in his bid to preserve religious identity and tradition. At this point, however, Maritain's narrative of liberal education takes a significant turn. As he observes, although good philosophy attains truth and contradictory philosophical positions cannot both be true, the reality of the human situation is that philosophers themselves "are bound to hold philosophical positions that differ widely."⁵⁶ Somehow, we must continue to provide a liberal education to our students despite these differences, and without descending into the fragmentation of relativism. But, how can it be done? This would seem to be a generalized version of the problem which many North American Catholic institutions of higher education face today.

Maritain's answer to this question is that we must understand how it is possible for philosophers to cooperate, not merely to tolerate or respect each other's differences. The case of philosophy is typical of the wider problem of liberal education in the sense that the search for truth "admits of no compromise."⁵⁷ The solution to the problem of philosophical cooperation is not to be found in the ubiquitous pseudo-virtue of openness, vigorously criticized by Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind*.⁵⁸ Rather, we must somehow manage genuinely to appreciate other intellectual systems with which we vigorously disagree and even regard as thoroughly incorrect. Maritain offers two key insights into how this inherently difficult task may be accomplished. These provide the rudiments of a plausible guide as to how Catholic universities may conceptualize their mission in such a way as to do justice to the integrity of truth and the plurality of their

53. Ibid., p. 63.

54. Ibid., pp. 71ff.

55. Ibid., p. 76.

56. Ibid., p. 72.

57. Maritain, "Truth and Human Fellowship," p. 25.

58. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 25-43.

faculties. None of what Maritain proposes will be easy to achieve. It will depend upon the cultivation of certain civic virtues in the academic community and it is notoriously difficult to legislate the virtues. Still, the achievement of intellectual cooperation is not an impossible goal and Catholic institutions that shepherd carefully the process of choosing and supporting their faculties can achieve this goal.

First, Maritain argues that it is possible to love the truth-seeking capacity and desire in one's neighbor, even if one disagrees with the direction that aptitude takes in this person.⁵⁹ As a good realist, he insists that this love is possible, in part, because even in erroneous philosophical positions, there is still attainment of truth.⁶⁰ Realism begins with the capacity for the knower to access truths about reality. Even erroneous worldviews begin from a large stock of correct opinions and fundamental insights about the world, and they have a desire to solve certain real difficulties. This leads to a second insight, namely that it is possible from this loving point of view to become imaginatively engaged with another conceptual system foreign to our own.⁶¹ We can do this in two ways. First, we take the external point of view, looking at the conceptual scheme of the other as an internally coherent network of concepts. Second, we take the internal point of view, attempting to understand the "central *intuition*" or core insight of the other system.⁶² Maritain insists that the basic insight expresses a truth about reality and displays a conceptual scheme's beauty and power. Difficult as it is to imagine, Maritain contends that this insight provides us with "the *place* which each system could, according to its own frame of reference, grant the other system as the legitimate place the latter is cut out to occupy in the universe of thought."⁶³ Catholic intellectuals must therefore make a constant effort to deepen their appreciation of truth by engaging in serious dialogue with other intellectual traditions. Furthermore, scholars who will bring a healthy dialogue to Catholic institutions must share a commitment to truth as a goal of inquiry, and have the ability to enter imaginatively into the Catholic tradition's core insights, recognizing their beauty and power.

59. Maritain, "Truth and Human Fellowship," p. 29.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Catholic Education and Intellectual Cooperation

These observations drawn from Maritain's philosophy of education and intellectual cooperation provide us with several lessons concerning the future of Catholic higher education. First, the Catholicity of an institution will not be preserved by retreating into a fortress of Catholic "identity" within the larger shell of what was once a Catholic university. The unity of truth as the goal of inquiry is an indispensable purpose for all faculty members at such institutions. Treating the core insight of Catholic education as a fragmentary matter of "identity" or tradition historicizes it in such a way as to render it useless. It will also deprive students of the proper end of liberal education, causing them to focus entirely upon the discipline specific means to knowledge. This will only engender confusion and skepticism in the minds of the students. Catholic institutions need not seek for all of their faculty members to be orthodox Catholics, or even believing Christians, in order to avoid this fragmentation. Indeed, a diverse faculty can represent a truthful picture of the struggle for understanding and a salutary reminder of the need to deepen one's grasp of the roots of his or her tradition. But, prospective faculty members must share the sense that they are engaged in a collective enterprise of truth-seeking, that such an enterprise is not futile or ill-fated, and that truth is ultimately one. They must also have the capacity to appreciate the beauty and truth of the Catholic view with which they may vigorously differ. Finally, one would expect that a Catholic institution that sees itself as engaged in the pursuit and teaching of integral truth will want to hire and nurture Catholic faculty members who can do the very best job articulating it.

While these requirements might appear toothless, they are in fact not. Minimally, intellectuals who adopt the position of post-modern academics that truth is not a goal of inquiry, or who espouse a kind of irreducible perspectivalism cannot, in good conscience, meet these conditions. Furthermore, Maritain's philosophy of intellectual cooperation demands more than just lip service to truth or respect for an historical tradition. If we say that we are genuinely engaged in the pursuit of truth, we cannot merely tolerate other conceptual systems or historical traditions. Faculty members at Catholic institutions who remain genuinely hostile to the Catholic intellectual tradition fail to find that place from which they can enter imaginatively into the Catholic vision of truth. This is not another way of saying that secular academics must provide in equity a place for Catholic scholarship at the academic table. It demands much more than that. If one is to make teaching at a Catholic institution his or her life's work, there should be an

interest in and zeal for understanding the place from which the Catholic vision of reality can attain truth, even if one cannot fully assume the point of view internal to that vision. Thus, a faculty member who regards the Catholic view as merely an emotional affectation or pure folly, and who is committed to the pursuit of truth, but can see no intellectual place for the Catholic position within that search, cannot in good conscience serve the mission of a Catholic college or university.

On the other hand, none of what Maritain says about intellectual cooperation is inconsistent with a faculty member subjecting the tradition to vigorous intellectual scrutiny and even criticism. This is part and parcel of the zeal for truth and the love of truth-seeking capacities in our fellow human beings. Correction in the spirit of genuine intellectual friendship can be among our highest moral duties as scholars. Practically speaking, what is the difference between sheer hostility to the mission of a Catholic liberal arts institution and the attempt to engage imaginatively with it through respectful criticism cannot be expressed in a simple algorithm or recipe. This requires prudential judgment. In concrete cases, however, it is quite possible to judge this from experience. One should think that it would be manifested minimally in a desire to support vigorous examination of the Catholic vision of truth at all levels and in all areas of the curriculum, and in the desire to enter into discussion about these matters with one's colleagues. Faculty members who are willing to tolerate the Catholic intellectual life at a Catholic college so long as it is constrained to the chapel, to a building or program, or it is made someone else's responsibility either misunderstand their role or have failed to enter imaginatively into the tradition.