

# Catholicity and the university: in search of the whole amidst fragments

Author: Matthew Baugh

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:108452>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),  
Boston College University Libraries.

---

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2019

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

# **Catholicity and the University**

---

In Search of the Whole amidst Fragments

D. Matthew Baugh, SJ

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:*

**SACRAE THEOLOGIAE LICENTIATUS**  
BOSTON COLLEGE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY & MINISTRY  
SPRING 2019

---

## CONTENTS

---

INTRODUCTION	<b>The Search for the Whole</b>	1
CHAPTER 1	<b>The Whole Constructed from Fragments:</b> Nietzsche, Culture, and the Will	17
CHAPTER 2	<b>The Whole Extrapolated from Fragments:</b> MacIntyre, Cosmology, and the Intellect	42
CHAPTER 3	<b>The Whole in Fragment:</b> Balthasar and the Perception of God's Glory	69
CHAPTER 4	<b>A Sense for the Whole:</b> Ignatius and the Founding Intuition of Jesuit Education	92
EPILOGUE	<b>Education for Catholicity</b>	118
	<i>Bibliography</i>	125

## The Search for the Whole

The encounter of these two concepts, “catholicity” and “university,” is deeply significant, but not in the first instance on account of any possible synthesis that may be forged from them. The significance lies rather at a deeper level in the implicit point of reference that they share. Catholicity means an orientation to the whole, deriving ultimately from the Greek *κατά* (according to) and *ὅλος* (the whole). University, which has its origins in the Latin *universitas*, similarly refers to the totality—that which, like the universe, encompasses all things in one complete turn (*uni + versus*). While arising in distinct cultural-linguistic contexts, the two concepts thus manifest a shared concern for the maximal dimension, for the framework in which individual parts all find their place. In our day, this connotation of comprehensiveness has been obscured perhaps by the fact that the two words are so closely associated with particular institutions, the very particularity of which seems to negate any claim to universality. The Catholic Church does not encompass even the whole body of Christian faithful, let alone all of humanity; and no two universities share even so much as the same curriculum, to say nothing of agreement among researchers about what common horizon unites all their diverse enquiries. But these facts merely put the question all the more insistently: where then is a definitive whole to be found? In what does it consist?

The problem of the whole and its parts, the one and the many, is a foundational one, arguably the most basic and abiding question for human reflection. Before it could arise as a theoretical matter in the various philosophies of the ancient world, it had already acquired

burning exigency as a practical matter. What was to be the social unit with the fullest claim to sovereignty, and how could one reconcile that arrangement with the existence of other peoples outside its confines? This political question was intimately bound up with the question of sovereignty over life itself, and thus of the gods, something evident above all in the history of Israel. Emerging from the cultural context of the Ancient Near East in which each people had its own god, the Hebrews come to understand, ultimately through the catastrophic experience of exile, that not only Israel but also the entire “earth is Yahweh’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” (Ps 24:1) Far from resolving the puzzle of pluralism, though, this insight merely intensifies it. If all the earth belonged to the God of Israel, then what did that mean for Israel’s place among the nations, which it understood to be distinct and particular? Without resolving the tension, Israel refers the matter entirely to the realm of divine freedom, to which the freedom of the people was in turn to correspond: “if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Ex 19:5; cf. Deut 7:6-11)

While Israel encounters the problem of pluralism in reflecting upon its history, thinkers in ancient Greece discover it in relation to nature and the cosmos. A simple observation forms the basis of the puzzle: the phenomenon of change. Not only is there a multiplicity of things in the world, these things are also constantly in flux, coming into and going out of existence. But something does not come from nothing. What then is the whole of which all these many things are a part and which accounts for all the variations in which they appear? The sheer number and range of theories that this puzzle elicited is evidence not only of the endless ingenuity of the Greek mind but also of the objective difficulty of solving the problem. The earliest approaches attempt to do away with the problem altogether by calling into question the apparent polarity

between whole and part, resolving the tension in favor of either one or the other. Thus Parmenides will say that all the multiplicity of the world is a mere illusion and that the whole of being is but one thing that does not change. Heraclitus takes the opposite tack, claiming that there is no whole but only fragments, with everything in a perpetual state of becoming. Only with Plato does it become possible to see how multiplicity might be consistent with the unity of all things in a way that preserves the reality of both. But even for Plato and the long line of thinkers descending from him, the tension is finally resolved in favor of the One, the discovery of which prompts us to leave the world of multiplicity behind, preferring infinite and unconditioned being to its many finite images.

As the search for the whole continues outside of Greece in the post-classical world, so does the tendency to collapse the whole-part polarity in favor of one side or the other. In the last, Promethean attempt at a synthesis of all things, Hegel will be able to say, “The True is the whole,”<sup>1</sup> and to identify that whole with “Absolute Knowing.”<sup>2</sup> The phenomenal world of finite being is merely the forum in which absolute Spirit unfolds its infinite dimensions dialectically, culminating in the state in which “Spirit...knows itself as Spirit”<sup>3</sup> precisely by means of the finite beings themselves: “it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> In the wake of Hegel, Marx will preserve the dynamic element of dialectic while detaching it from any supposed operation of absolute Spirit, anticipating and fueling the materialist bent of succeeding ages. With this, the pendulum shifts back once again to finite being and thus to the part.

---

<sup>1</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, 493.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel, 493.

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, 409.

So brief and rapid a review, ranging over three thousand years, is obviously not intended as anything like a statement of the *status quaestionis*. The point is merely to form, on the basis of some representative approaches, an initial sense for the question itself and its enduring character as a puzzle of first importance for human reflection across ages and cultures. What indeed is the whole that makes sense of all the various fragments of human life: the tribes and tongues, peoples and nations, nature in all its kaleidoscopic diversity, time itself and its endless succession of moments? Is there such a thing, or are the fragments the final word? In one form or another, this is the question that occupied the Hebrew psalmist and scribe, the Greek lover of wisdom, the German professor and the revolutionary. It is also our own. But it is not, of course, our only question. Like all things in the realm of finite being, even this most fundamental of puzzles exists in a whole-part dynamic: though it itself concerns the whole, any number of other questions also occur to us as we survey the world around us, questions concerning all its many parts. Serious reflection on such questions has taken place in an enormous range of settings, as even the small sample of figures named above makes clear, from the precincts of a place of worship to the public spaces of a city and, only much later, the lecture hall and scholar's office. This last setting, however, has taken on special significance because of the lasting institutional form it has given to what seems, for all the world, to be an inexhaustible activity of enquiring into all that exists.

One need not romanticize the historical origins of the university to see that this was its fundamental orientation from the beginning even in spite of significant indications to the contrary. Two of the three major disciplines in the earliest universities, law and medicine, were of an eminently practical, not speculative, nature and thus quite limited in scope. And the formation of the institution itself was rooted in practical necessity, especially in Bologna where

the initiative lay entirely on the side of students, who sought to organize the studies they needed to complete in order to practice a profession. Even in Paris, where the speculative discipline of theology reigned supreme and where scholars took the lead in organizing the course of studies, narrow questions of practicality played an important role in the decision to found the institution. Thus the totality to which *universitas* originally referred was the sum total of masters and students, *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, the kind of unit that could act for a common purpose, not unlike any other medieval guild.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in no small part because of theology's open horizon, the institution was in principle ordered to the totality of being in a quite unlimited way. This was because of the members' confidence in the intelligibility of all that exists. In the *Summa*, Thomas was to articulate what became the classic formulation of the principle: "everything, in as far as it has being, so far is it knowable."<sup>6</sup> Being and truth are convertible.

In some ways, the university's orientation to the study of being in all its many forms is even more evident eight-hundred years later. If the medieval and pre-modern university typically consisted of only a handful of closely-related faculties, the list of academic departments in the modern university is large and still growing. Even such departments frequently function more like umbrellas for specialized institutes, research centers, and a wide range of individual projects which are highly differentiated even from each other as scholars work in ever more precisely defined sub-fields. While the exploration of a wide variety of questions is in fundamental

---

<sup>5</sup> See generally Stephen C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Charles Homer Haskins, *The Rise of Universities* (New York: Holt and Company, 1923); Ian P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, c.1100-1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Christian Classics, 1981), Ia, q. 16, a. 3, co.



continuity with the origins of the university, this relatively recent proliferation of disciplines and subdisciplines traces its roots to a very particular development: the discovery of positivistic research methods. Honed in study of the natural sciences, the positivistic approach emphasizes the testing of falsifiable hypotheses. It is a straightforward method and a powerful one, giving ample proof of its utility by virtue of its ability to produce objectively verifiable knowledge. What's more, it can be applied widely, opening up new avenues of knowledge not only in the natural and social sciences but also in those humanistic fields historically associated much more closely with the exercise of subjectivity: art and music, history and literature, even philosophy and theology. It was the embrace of this method as the gold standard of academic enquiry that gave rise to a new model of the university, first of all in nineteenth-century Germany and then spreading from there to the United States and the United Kingdom. In short order the German research model conquered the entire world, and its dominance continues to this day. As a result, we now know more than ever before about more subjects, and the results of these investigations merely suggest further avenues of exploration.

Perhaps never before, however, have we had so great a sense of the profound pluralism of the world either. And thus the question returns once again: is there anything that integrates all the many fragments of existence, which only seem more numerous the more refined our knowledge becomes? What is finally at stake in this question is nothing less than the integration and wholeness of the human person herself, who is simultaneously conscious of having a real internal unity and yet also of being but a single part of a much larger reality. How is she to make sense of that reality, of the interrelation of its parts, and of her own place within it? So foundational a question inevitably arises in one form or another for all those who stop to reflect on their lives in whatever particular social context they may inhabit. But the context of the

university proves uniquely well-suited both to surfacing the question in an explicit way and to reflecting on the set of possible answers. In the face of the large and ever growing deposit of human knowledge, the university must decide how to introduce students to it. What is the framework in which such studies may fruitfully proceed? What fundamental points of orientation do students need in order to make sense of the great mass of phenomena in the world? In articulating a course of studies, the university inevitably indicates its approach to the question of the fragments. Here again, therefore, practical necessity can be put to the service of a more universal end. The answer that the university gives in the form of its undergraduate program makes for an eminently useful heuristic for understanding a fundamental problem whose significance extends well beyond the context of education.

Given the prevailing influence of positivism in the modern university, it is perhaps no surprise that curricula in the past century and a half have almost uniformly moved in the direction of eliminating master frameworks altogether. For such frameworks are precisely what positivistic methods are least suited to address. If some whole actually exists as a meaningful reality, it would not seem to be susceptible to description by means of the same methods suited to the study of finite being, namely observation and the testing of falsifiable hypotheses. At the same time, however, the sensible world presents so much to the reason that *is* capable of being scrutinized by this method that the loss can go largely unnoticed, at least at first. As a result, the curriculum in mainstream American universities now consists of three standard elements which are ordered to depth and breadth but not synthesis. The real core of the program is the major or concentration, which facilitates the development of expertise in a specific field. What is typically called the “core” curriculum, on the other hand, is in practice a preliminary set of general education courses taken mostly in the first two years and aimed at providing exposure to a wide

variety of fields and competencies. Finally, a certain number of courses are left entirely to the student to select. That there is thus an explicitly “elective” part of the curriculum obscures the fact that the choice of courses in much of the rest of the curriculum, especially in the so-called core, is also left to the student’s discretion operating within broad parameters. If there is to be any effort at synthesis, therefore, and not merely the exploration of various fragments whether in depth or *en masse*, it falls entirely to the individual student to perform. But this also implies that, from the perspective of the university as a whole, synthesis in the fullest sense is not strictly speaking possible. For the individual is herself merely a part, and thus a personal synthesis can never amount to anything more than a partial reality itself, limited as it is to the confines of the individual who effects it.

That this state of affairs has not elicited more than a few expressions of concern is perhaps indicative of a broadly shared sense in our day that one cannot speak meaningfully of a whole, but only of parts.<sup>7</sup> In every place where one might expect to find a whole, what appears instead are seemingly irreconcilable fragments. Within the body politic, for example, the place of unity is evidently not the nation but the parties, which endlessly vie with each other for control of the machinery of government to implement their agenda. But even the most superficial scrutiny

---

<sup>7</sup> Prominent examples of such critiques include: Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Stratford Caldecott and Ken Myers, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-Enchantment of Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2017); Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (New York: Penguin, 2012); William Egginton, *The Splintering of the American Mind: Identity Politics, Inequality, and Community on Today’s College Campuses* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018); Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007); Anthony T. Kronman, *Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given up on the Meaning of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Harry Lewis, *Excellence Without a Soul: Does Liberal Education Have a Future?* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007); Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Warren Treadgold, *The University We Need: Reforming American Higher Education* (New York: Encounter Books, 2018); William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014).

of the parties reveals profound internal divisions. And in any case, even the various wings of the parties are not the last word. In the liberal democratic order, the self-determining individual constitutes the fundamental unit of society. With this, we arrive back at the personal synthesis as the unique place in which any potential whole is to be sought—something which essentially, and not merely accidentally, it is incapable of constituting. For proof of the inherent defect of the personal synthesis, one need not have reference to the radical doubts raised in some recent genetics research about the real unity of the individual.<sup>8</sup> Any supposed whole that I seek to assemble for myself will necessarily be reducible to my own limitations.

It is only in this context that the utter peculiarity of catholicity, one of the two concepts with which we began, can at last come into view. For as our ability to analyze finite being has increased, our expectation of finding a meaningful whole has narrowed to the point that the only remaining place in which to seek it is one in which it cannot appear. Even so, the existence of such a whole is precisely what is at stake in the attribution of catholicity to the Christian Church, an attribution which has not been abandoned in the face of modernity but resolutely maintained. We can leave to one side for the moment the second-order question of the truth of the claim. What is breathtaking in our age is that any institution, or finite being of any sort, should claim to have a definitive relation to the whole. But this is just what is claimed on behalf of the Church, even from the earliest decades of its existence. We must hasten to add, as Avery Dulles is careful to point out, that catholicity is predicated of the Church in a variety of ways in the patristic period, including five that Cyril of Jerusalem identifies in his fourth-century *Catechetical Lectures*: “it extends to the ends of the earth; it teaches all the doctrine needed for salvation; it

---

<sup>8</sup> For a popular treatment of the research, which suggests that the individual organism itself can be understood as a site of competition between strands of DNA known as allele lines, see: Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

brings every sort of human being under obedience; it cures every kind of sin; and it possesses every form of virtue.”<sup>9</sup> But in viewing the concept from this variety of angles according to its different modes of application, we ought not lose sight of the central conception common to them all, which is the property of fullness. It is this notion of fullness that Wolfgang Beinert finds to be the governing connotation of catholicity in the theology of Ignatius of Antioch, in whose first century *Letter to the Smyrneans* the term first appears in the historical record.<sup>10</sup> According to Ignatius, says Beinert, “the Church is catholic because, and insofar as, she is the representation and communication of the plenitude and perfection of Jesus Christ. To call the Church ‘catholic’, then, is to say that she is all-encompassing, endowed with all plenitude, perfect.”<sup>11</sup>

Can such a claim still be understood in our age, much less accepted? In the past two centuries, the whole-part polarity has been resolved so decisively in favor of the part that all talk of a whole has been sidelined, if not indeed neutralized altogether by relegating it to the sphere of the private and personal. To affirm that the Church is catholic, however, is to say that the fragmentariness of existence is not the fundamental reality, but that there is in fact a whole of which plenitude and perfection may be predicated in a definitive way. It only adds to the obscurity of this claim that the whole to which it refers is not the Church itself. Rather, the Church is *oriented to* the whole (*κατά + ὅλος*), and for this reason participates in its fullness, while the whole itself lies beyond it. And this indeed is the meaning—and paradox—of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Louth, ed., *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth (New York: Penguin Classics, 1987), 105.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, “The Absoluteness of Christianity and the Catholicity of the Church,” in *Man Is Created*, trans. Adrian Walker, vol. 5, *Explorations in Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 415–16.

concept of catholicity: that, even in spite of the inherent disproportionality, the whole can appear precisely in the fragment when the fragment is oriented to it.

If, therefore, there is an answer to the puzzle of the whole that maintains the integrity of both the whole and the parts without dissolving either, catholicity would seem to be key to it. In precisely what does catholicity consist, though, and how does such an orientation to the whole bring mere fragments into relation to its fullness? We might expect that, of all things, Catholic universities should be in the best position to help us answer the question. For they stand at the very intersection of these two phenomena: the university's fanning out in every direction to explore being in all its multiplicity and the Church's living relation to the divine fullness in Jesus Christ. What we find, though, is that contemporary Catholic universities do not on the whole differ from their secular peers in any meaningful way. With respect to the crucial measure identified above, the undergraduate curriculum, the only element that differentiates Catholic from secular universities are the one or two required courses each in philosophy and theology that remain part of the core.<sup>12</sup> But when one then surveys the long lists of course options that fulfill these requirements at various institutions, the reality begins to dawn: the university either cannot decide what specific aspects of philosophy and theology every student should be exposed to, refuses to make a definite choice for fear of imposing a framework on students, or does not actually know how philosophy or theology can serve to integrate the various phenomena encountered in the rest of the curriculum. Even in Catholic universities, then, the question of integration is remanded to the forum of the personal synthesis.

It does not bear dwelling for long on the contingent historical circumstances that have led to this convergence of Catholic and secular education. Already in 1962, the president of the

---

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the core curriculum of Boston College: <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/undergraduate/core-curriculum/core-renewal.html>

University of Notre Dame, Theodore Hesburgh, who would become one of the iconic figures in modern Catholic education, identified an important challenge to the realization of catholicity in the modern university. As he explained in an article in *America* magazine, “because everything in a pluralistic society tends to become homogenized, the Catholic university has the temptation to become like all other universities, with theology and philosophy attached to the academic body like a kind of vermiform appendix, a vestigial remnant, neither useful nor decorative, a relic of the past. If this happens, the Catholic university may indeed become a great university, but it will not be a Catholic university.”<sup>13</sup> Five years later, Hesburgh famously convened a meeting of his peers from across the country at Land O’ Lakes, Wisconsin, to articulate together the mission and distinctive characteristics of the Catholic university. Despite the concern that he had expressed earlier, the example of ‘all other universities’ loomed large in the meeting, as the opening line of the joint statement indicates: “The Catholic University today must be a university in the full modern sense of the word.”<sup>14</sup> The recognition that Catholic universities had become something of a backwater and lagged far behind the academic excellence of secular institutions made modernization the urgent priority.<sup>15</sup> “With regard to the undergraduate,” the document states, “the university should endeavor to present a collegiate education that is truly geared to modern society.”<sup>16</sup> In such a context, the subtle and difficult question of how to realize catholicity in the institution was bound to be overshadowed by the already enormous challenge of modernization. The generation of leaders gathered at Land O’ Lakes thus settled on a modest and more readily achievable vision of what makes for a Catholic university: the “presence of a

---

<sup>13</sup> Theodore M. Hesburgh, “Looking Back at Newman,” *America* 106 (March 3, 1962): 721.

<sup>14</sup> Neil G. McCluskey and Theodore M. Hesburgh, eds., *The Catholic University: A Modern Appraisal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 336, §1.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the challenge of modernization, see Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> McCluskey and Hesburgh, *The Catholic University*, 339, §8.

group of scholars in all branches of theology”<sup>17</sup> who can facilitate “discussion within the university community in which theology confronts all the rest of modern culture and all the areas of intellectual study which it includes.”<sup>18</sup> On this view, the Catholic university merely “adds to the basic idea of a modern university” the presence of an actively engaged theology department.<sup>19</sup> Lest the presence of such a department raise the specter of “theological or philosophical imperialism,” the statement is at pains to stress that its role is only to keep alive an “interdisciplinary discussion,” confident that “there will necessarily result...an awareness that there is a philosophical and theological dimension to most intellectual subjects when they are pursued far enough.”<sup>20</sup> Rather, therefore, than seeing either theology or philosophy as the essential point of integration, theology and philosophy are themselves to be “integrated into” the kind of curriculum shared with all other modern universities.<sup>21</sup>

While this expedient solution enabled the survival of universities run by Catholic entities, it left unanswered the critical question of whether any real synthesis of catholicity and the university is possible and what form it might take if so. For it guaranteed that the search for the whole in Catholic-run universities would be relegated to the same private forum as in secular universities, which was bound to be partial and incomplete even if supplied with additional input from theology. But this means that the problem of the whole and the fragments remains a burning question for both Catholic and secular universities alike. And thus we can turn to critiques of the modern university in both contexts to aid our own search for the whole. What

---

<sup>17</sup> McCluskey and Hesburgh, 336, §2.

<sup>18</sup> McCluskey and Hesburgh, 337, §4.

<sup>19</sup> McCluskey and Hesburgh, 336, §1.

<sup>20</sup> McCluskey and Hesburgh, 337, §4.

<sup>21</sup> McCluskey and Hesburgh, 339, §8.



form must any such whole take if it is genuinely to gather up all things into one, and how can we come into relation to it?

Friederich Nietzsche was among the first in the modern age to identify the link between the operation of the university and this most fundamental of questions. In **Chapter 1**, we turn to his critique of the modern university to see what he can tell us about the relation between the whole and the parts. On his telling, the whole appears in the form of an all-encompassing cultural synthesis that results from works of genius. The university finds its integrity only in orienting all its teaching and research toward the cultivation of such genius, something which he argues the positivistic approach of the German research model undermines. His account thus emphasizes the action of the human will above all, which must undergo strict discipline in order to recognize and support the will of the genius to construct a whole from the fragments.

But how can any such whole be constructed if not on account of a prior condition that makes it possible? With Alasdair MacIntyre, therefore, we turn in **Chapter 2** to the order evident in the world, from which the Scottish philosopher thinks we can extrapolate the whole that makes sense of all the various fragments. The specialization that is characteristic of the modern university has tended to isolate the various disciplines from one another and to obscure their common foundations in a single order of all things. But the coherence of the university is intimately linked to our ability to perceive the coherence of the universe itself. Only a cosmology capable of revealing the relations between all things can supply that coherence, according to MacIntyre. His account thus emphasizes the human intellect as the mode by which we come into relation to the whole.

As much as they differ from each other, the accounts of Nietzsche and MacIntyre confront a common problem: that the human will and intellect are both finite. How can either of

them come into relation to the whole without reducing it to their own finite proportion? If the whole is to communicate itself to the finite being in its integrity, it must do so as the wholly other and according to a mode of receptivity. But this, says Hans Urs von Balthasar, is precisely what the aesthetic faculty makes possible. In **Chapter 3**, we turn with Balthasar to theological aesthetics, which is capable of perceiving in the incomparable figure of Jesus Christ the divine Son who receives his being from the Father at every moment, not only as man but also in the eternal act of his generation. In the Son's disposition of pure receptivity, it becomes possible to see the fundamental unity of all things—even in the realm of creaturely being—in their proceeding from the Father as an ongoing gift. The only real fragmentation is that caused by sin, but by accepting even the Cross from the Father in an act of loving obedience, the Son suffers the contradictions of sin to the end and thus reconciles the fragments to one another and to the Father. Catholicity in its true and proper sense at last appears in the Son's unlimited readiness to receive all things from the Father, even to the point of letting himself be formed and re-formed according to the exigencies of his mission.

Such a catholic readiness to be formed into whatever God should desire is also the first and final word of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. In that context, it appears as the highest possibility of the creature, but only as a response to the loving contemplation of the figure of the Son. Thus the dynamic that Balthasar would go on to articulate in an explicit way as theological aesthetics already constituted the foundational experience of Ignatius and the first Jesuits. It also formed the core intuition and real theological innovation of the early Jesuit apostolate, especially Jesuit education, which could venture untroubled into “all things” on account of its being anchored in an irreducible sense for the whole in prayer and contemplation. **Chapter 4** reviews the evidence for this interpretation of Jesuit education, beginning with a key

letter from Peter Faber to the first Jesuits Ignatius sent to the University of Paris, which stresses the priority of “holy sensing” even beyond the sheer acquisition of knowledge. Cultivating such a disposition of catholicity remains the fullest realization of Catholic education and the definitive means by which to discern the whole even in the midst of fragments.

## **The Whole Constructed from Fragments:**

Nietzsche, Culture, and the Will

The first major work of Friedrich Nietzsche, a set of public lectures he delivered in the Spring of 1872, appeared once again in English translation only three years ago, after having been out of print for half a century.<sup>1</sup> The event passed mostly unnoticed, eliciting only a few favorable book reviews but, as of yet, no serious scholarly engagement with the text.<sup>2</sup> From Nietzsche's perspective, of course, the relative obscurity of so difficult a text is just as well, since he did not produce it for the general public, but only for those few aristocratic souls able and willing to conceive a philosophy of the future. Whether or not we ourselves belong to that intended audience, these earliest lectures of Nietzsche are nevertheless a vital resource, representing as they do the first word of his philosophy. Of all people, philosophers are especially in the habit of choosing their words carefully, and all the more so their first word, knowing that they cannot take it back and that it inevitably reveals in some way the core of what they have to say. It is remarkable, then, that the philosopher who would go on to detonate a series of explosive critiques of late modernity meant to penetrate to its very foundations should

---

<sup>1</sup> The first English translation was published in 1909 and then reissued in 1964. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Complete Works*, ed. Oscar Levy, vol. 3, 9 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Peter Berkowitz, "'Anti-Education': What Nietzsche's Critiques of Education Can Tell Us," *Commonweal*, January 29, 2016, 27; John Gray, "Anti-Education by Friedrich Nietzsche," *The Guardian*, January 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/08/anti-education-on-the-future-of-our-educational-institutions-friedrich-nietzsche-review>; Paul O'Mahoney, "Anti-Education," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 25, no. 5 (December 1, 2017): 744–48.

choose for his first sally the question of the “future of our educational institutions.”<sup>3</sup> On the eve of the German research university’s rise to utter dominance, it was precisely that model, said Nietzsche, and the entire instructional apparatus built around it, that threatened true education and its integrating function in society.

The essential lines of Nietzsche’s argument can be sketched out in a few quick strokes. Standing as a permanent monument across the ages, the staggering achievement of classical antiquity, and especially of Greece, reveals the highest possibility of human activity: a cultural synthesis produced by—and productive of—literary, artistic, and philosophical genius. Here was a culture ordered to the integral flourishing of every kind of human excellence. While it is characteristic of genius to appear effortless, the singularity of the Greek phenomenon in the long train of human history points to an underlying contest of wills at play in every age. Standing athwart the effort of noble souls to order society toward the achievement of greatness are those endowed with merely common talent who can, nevertheless, come to exercise uncommon influence. To these middling sorts, genius is not only unintelligible but represents a positive threat to the kind of society they seek, one which corresponds to the limits of their own mediocrity. Unable to construct the kind of genuine synthesis that culture represents, they must

---

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Anti-Education: On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, ed. Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, trans. Damion Searls (NYRB Classics, 2015). Prior to the publication of this work, of course, the application of Nietzsche’s philosophy to the realm of education was already the subject of extensive study in Anglophone literature. Representative studies include: Aharon Aviram, “Nietzsche as Educator?,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 25, no. 2 (1991): 219–34; Charles Bingham, “What Friedrich Nietzsche Cannot Stand about Education: Toward a Pedagogy of Self-Reformulation,” *Educational Theory* 51, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 337–52; Jacob Golomb, “Nietzsche’s Early Educational Thought,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 19, no. 1 (1985): 99–124; Thomas Edward Hart, *Nietzsche, Culture and Education* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009); James Scott Johnston, “Nietzsche as Educator: A Reexamination,” *Educational Theory* 48, no. 1 (1998): 67–83; Michael Peters, “Nietzsche, Poststructuralism and Education: After the Subject?,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 1997): 1–19; Eliyahu Rosenow, “Nietzsche’s Concept of Education,” in *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 1986), 119–31; Eliyahu Rosenow, “Nietzsche’s Educational Dynamite,” *Educational Theory* 39, no. 4 (1989): 307–16.

resort to alternate means of approximating unity, relying on political and bureaucratic forms of organization supported by a narrative of radical equality. It is in just such a context that the German research university emerges, broadening access to far greater numbers of students while at the same time applying the insights of bureaucratic organization to the work of scholarship. While such an institution can produce an endless array of new information on account of greater manpower, increasingly specialized investigations, and a commitment to positivistic methods, it cannot say what all the content it generates adds up to or even how the various pieces relate to each other. What's worse, by forming society's most talented youth in this mold, it actively works against the fostering of genius, which alone is capable of generating culture because of its ability to see beyond the fragments to a genuine whole.

### **Man the Measure of All Things?**

Nietzsche himself recognizes a threshold difficulty for this argument, namely that it presupposes readers who have a disposition that he claims the system in which they were educated snuffs out. As he explains in the preface to the intended published form of the lectures, the "most important requirement is this: Under no circumstances may the reader constantly take himself to be the measure and criterion of all things, as modern man is so wont to do."<sup>4</sup> Leaving aside for the moment the puzzle of whether and how such readers can recognize and overcome this limitation, it is worth focusing on the limitation itself, since it represents the principal defect that plagues late modern education, and therefore culture and society, according to Nietzsche. Even if it is in some sense true that "man is the measure of all things," modernity's increasingly narrow focus on the individual threatened to corrupt the original sense of the aphorism

---

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, *Anti-Education*, 94. Note that, for reasons that remain unknown, Nietzsche did not end up publishing the lectures, as originally intended.

altogether.<sup>5</sup> The individual man is no measure for all things. To come into relation to all things, individuals must rather break out of the cramped and narrow confines of their own limited experience and understanding.

In the course of the lectures, which take the form of an extended dialogue recollected from Nietzsche's early years as a university student, the philosopher confesses his own youthful pretensions to education and the humiliation of coming to realize his ignorance. We find him in the first lecture hiking up to a remote spot above the Rhine with a fellow student to spend an evening 'philosophizing,' by which they mean making "serious resolutions and life plans."<sup>6</sup> As he explains, "we hoped to find, in solitary contemplation, something that would shape our innermost souls and satisfy those souls in the future."<sup>7</sup> Those naïve plans of self-discovery, Nietzsche tells us, are interrupted by an encounter with a real philosopher and his former student, who seeks guidance about how to respond to the devastating state of the educational system in which he now teaches. After convincing Nietzsche and his friend to leave them to speak in peace, the elderly philosopher dismisses the foolish students with a barb aimed at their understanding of philosophy: "the last thing I want to do is disturb your reflections about how best to become truly educated. I wish you the best of luck...and views...real brand-new well-educated personal views."<sup>8</sup> Unable to resist the temptation to listen in on the conversation of the brash philosopher and his former student, Nietzsche and his friend eventually come to a realization that leaves them reeling: that they do not in fact know what education is nor are they nearly so educated as they had imagined. For Nietzsche's argument in the lectures as a whole,

---

<sup>5</sup> This phrase became a mantra of the Renaissance humanists, retrieving a thread from Protagoras, the most prominent of the ancient Greek Sophists.

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, *Anti-Education*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, 12.

the key here is the dramatic portrayal the episode provides of the fundamental conundrum identified in the preface. At issue in this debate is not merely the exercise of the rational faculty but the cultivation of a particular disposition of the will, which refuses to take the individual's own limits as the definitive measure of reality. As Nietzsche and his friend come to realize, "our objections had hardly been purely intellectual: What had provoked our resistance to the philosopher's speech apparently lay elsewhere."<sup>9</sup> But where exactly? The answer is humiliating. "Maybe what had spoken from our mouths was" not the well-considered conclusions of reason, but "only our instinctive fear that a man like him might not see us in a positive light; maybe all our earlier ideas now simply compelled us to reject his view, since his view completely rejected our own claim to culture and education."<sup>10</sup>

The reader who wishes to understand Nietzsche's critique of education must cultivate the same disposition, one which is as critical of the system in which the reader was educated as it is of his own well-settled sense of self. "Let him be educated enough to think little of his own education, think scornfully even," Nietzsche exhorts.<sup>11</sup> Given the sorry state of culture and education, what is called for at least in the preliminary stage of reform is an avowal of ignorance reminiscent of Socrates, a condition which Nietzsche himself professes to share. The reader "can confidently follow the lead of an author who ventures to address him only from a place of ignorance, a perspective of knowing that he does not know. This author claims for himself nothing more than a burning sense of what is specific to our contemporary German barbarism."<sup>12</sup> The nature of the problem dictates that even Nietzsche's lectures themselves must be surpassed and ultimately cast aside, for they can only identify the problem in broad outline and then gesture

---

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, 65.

<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, 94.

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, 94.



in the direction of a solution. But this sputtering start, this shaking of quiet complacency, is the essential first movement toward the place from which bold new vision will be possible. “At least be readers of this book,” says Nietzsche, “so that later, through your actions, you can consign it to destruction and oblivion.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Me-Sized Education and Research**

The opposite disposition, which takes as its definitive point of reference the individual, underlies all the gravest corruptions of late modern education and accounts for its inability to produce a coherent synthesis. In the German-speaking world that he describes, the problem, says Nietzsche, begins even before students arrive at university. Already in secondary school, the *gymnasium*, students are asked to form independent judgments of the material they are studying, thus long before they are actually in a position to do so with any real expertise. The rationale, as one character in the dialogue points out, is to inculcate the independence and self-sufficiency necessary to succeed in university. “This preparation,” says Nietzsche’s youthful companion, “was meant to make us independent enough to enjoy the extraordinary freedom of a university student—for no one in any sphere of life today is given as much freedom of choice and action as a student, it seems to me. He has to be his own guide for several years, across a wide plain left entirely open to him.”<sup>14</sup> Later in the dialogue, the old philosopher will make clear that this freedom of choice in the university is precisely part of the problem. But before he can do so, the young Nietzsche himself rounds out his friend’s argument with further points in favor of fostering independence in students, not merely for its benefits to the individual student but for the far more exalted goal of advancing scholarship. Helping the student to develop self-

---

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, 73–74.

confidence is, to be sure, the first step: “The individual must learn to delight in having his own goals and views of his own, so that he can walk without crutches later on. That is why he is encouraged to produce work so early, and criticism and sharp judgments earlier still.”<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, though, it is the way in which such exposure to great works at an early age can “awaken scholarly feelings” that argues most in favor of this model. “How many students,” asks the young Nietzsche, “have been seduced once for all by the charms of academic scholarship because they found in the gymnasium a new way of reading and caught it in their young fingers! The gymnasium student has to study all kinds of things, gather all kinds of knowledge, and this probably, little by little, creates in him a drive to study and gather in the same way at the university, on his own.”<sup>16</sup>

The mature Nietzsche, who speaks through the voice of the old philosopher in the dialogue, finds virtually nothing in this argument persuasive. The actual effect of asking students to render a judgment before they are in a position to do so is to close off the possibility of real education at its very inception, replacing it with the seemingly easier act of making a judgment, which the student comes to understand as equivalent to pronouncing one’s own opinion. As the old philosopher explains, “a whole world of deeply intellectual and self-reflective tasks is presented to a surprised young man who has had practically no self-awareness up until that point, and made a matter of his own judgment.”<sup>17</sup> After he recovers from the initial shock, the student eventually grows comfortable making pronouncements on matters quite beyond him. “[T]he dizzying feeling of having been asked to be independent gives the result a magical halo of

---

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, 74.

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, 73.

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, 26.

newness, destined never to return... From that point on, the young person feels himself to be *finished*: feels able, indeed encouraged to speak with anyone on equal terms.”<sup>18</sup>

The structures of university life and studies serve only to confirm and intensify the message that independence and personal judgment are the bedrock values of education. To begin with, the late modern university defines the scope of its educational activity so narrowly as to exclude altogether that which takes place outside the lecture hall and seminar room. “Insofar as [the student] speaks, sees, or walks, or spends time in others’ company, or makes art—insofar as he lives and breathes, in short—he is independent, that is to say, not dependent on the educational institution,” remarks the old philosopher.<sup>19</sup> Implied in such an arrangement is not merely that the student ought to have maximal freedom of choice outside the classroom, but inevitably also that education is restricted to formal academic settings. What’s worse, the logic of free choice extends even to the academic program itself, leaving much to the student’s discretion about what to study, in what order, and how. In such a system, the duties mutually owed between professor and student are highly attenuated, since the balance of responsibility falls to so great an extent on the individual. “This double independence” of student from professor and professor from student, “is glorified as ‘academic freedom,’” laments the old philosopher. “To make for even greater freedom, the [professor] can say whatever he wants, more or less, and the [student] can listen to whatever on offer he wants, more or less.”<sup>20</sup> The outward appearance of the student-professor relationship is thus retained (more or less) even as its meaning is thoroughly changed. If in other eras it was the master who designed the program of formation for the novice, in the late modern university such freedom and responsibility thus falls largely to the novice. As the old

---

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, 25–26. (emphasis original)

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, 75.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, 75.

philosopher notes, since “even the choice of what is to be listened to is a matter of the independent-minded student’s personal judgment, and since this student can refuse to believe anything he hears, can deny it all authority, the educational process is strictly speaking left in the student’s own hands.”<sup>21</sup>

But what of the research activity of the university? Surely it constitutes a real excellence, perhaps even making up for the defects and decadence of the educational program to the extent that it eventually channels the best students into highly productive academic labor. Already in Nietzsche’s day German institutions had risen to global prominence for their revolutionary approach to scholarship, which resulted in the continual production of new information in ever more specialized fields of study. What goes unacknowledged in the midst of all this praise, says Nietzsche, is the way in which this all-consuming drive for specialization increasingly crowds out and ultimately undermines the kind of education necessary to make sense of all the various fragments of information. Once the transformation of the university is complete, he warns, there may indeed be many scholars who know a great deal about their narrow areas of study, but no one with a synthetic vision of the whole. In Nietzsche’s dialogue, the elderly philosopher’s former student puts the matter starkly: “the current system reduces scholars to being mere slaves of academic disciplines, making it a matter of chance, and increasingly unlikely, for any scholar to turn out truly *educated*. Academic study is spread across such a large area now that anyone with real but unexceptional talents and academic ambitions will devote himself to a narrowly specialized subfield, remaining totally unconcerned with everything else.”<sup>22</sup> The startling result is that even the highly trained scholar is no better equipped than anyone else to address matters outside his field. In that sense, says the philosopher’s former student, “A scholar with such a

---

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, 76.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, 17–18. (emphasis original)

rarified specialty is like a factory worker who spends his entire life doing nothing but making one single screw.”<sup>23</sup>

What makes such a development so insidious, according to Nietzsche, is the fact that it is no mere hapless byproduct of an otherwise praiseworthy advance. On the contrary, it is rooted in the same effort to accommodate the institutions of society to the measure of modern man that has so deformed the educational process. Nietzsche himself was trained as a classical philologist, and he employs an extended discussion of the field’s self-imposed limitations to illustrate a phenomenon common to the university as a whole. Existential engagement of the scholar with the object of his study is now out of the question, either because it has come to seem methodologically dubious or (what Nietzsche thinks is even more likely) too uncomfortable. “Today,” as the old philosopher explains, “whether consciously or unconsciously, philologists have largely come to the conclusion that any direct contact with classical antiquity on their part is pointless and hopeless. Even they [of all scholars] consider such studies sterile, derivative, and obsolete.”<sup>24</sup> In its place, a purely historical and positivistic method reigns supreme. Avoiding altogether the question of what a text has to say to its reader, the philologist turns instead to strictly objective questions such as how the text was produced, what sources the authors drew on in creating it, and what textual variants in various manuscripts can tell us about its most authentic form. Such a dramatic change in method amounts, not to a development within the field, but to an abandonment of philology in favor of something quite different: “linguistics,” which the old philosopher discounts as “an endless expanse of freshly cleared arable land where even the most

---

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, 45.

limited minds can now find useful employment, where the very modesty of their ambition is considered a positive virtue, for a rank-and-file piece of work is exactly what is most desired.”<sup>25</sup>

Nietzsche’s point is not simply that such research is trivial by comparison with true philology. Rather, his fundamental concern is that, when it poses *as* philology, it effectively dissolves the one kind of scholarly engagement that can actually make sense of the ancient world—and ultimately, he thinks, our own. In the sanitized world of linguistics and other such positivist forms of investigation, explains the old philosopher, “no majestic voice resounds from the ruined world of antiquity to rebuff the newcomer. All who approach are welcomed with open arms; even someone on whom Sophocles and Aristophanes have never made any particular impression.”<sup>26</sup> Under such conditions, they will never succeed at encountering the real Greece in all its greatness. On the contrary, they will encounter only themselves and their own limitations, inevitably reading their own world back into the subject that they study. “They simply set up shop amid the ruins as comfortably as you please,” observes the philosopher’s former student. “Then there is great rejoicing when they find in these ancient surroundings what they themselves have smuggled in.”<sup>27</sup> He rattles off a list of such projects: hunting down contradictions in Homer, re-interpreting the Oedipus trilogy as a proto-Christian admonition to meekness and gentility, counting lines and syllables in Greek and Roman poetry in search of hidden ratios. The same kind of trivialization has effectively “banished” philosophy from the university as well. “Historical... considerations have slowly but surely taken the place of any profound exploration of the eternal problems. The question becomes: What did this or that philosopher think or not think? And is this or that text rightly ascribed to him or not?”<sup>28</sup> By thus circumscribing the scope

---

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, 78.

of enquiry, the university guarantees a steady stream of answers to questions of minimal importance relative to those that cannot be asked.

### **Culture and the Metaphysics of Genius**

Whether consciously acknowledged or not, a certain metaphysics is implied by the structure of the German research university as Nietzsche describes it. It takes as the basic unit of reality the individual, whose independence it fosters in education and whose average powers of intellect and will it takes as the proper measure of research. The result, says Nietzsche, is a staid and homogenous mediocrity that eliminates all possibility of corporate greatness—indeed, that works constantly against the emergence of any genuine corporate reality at all. This outcome is a self-fulfilling prophecy: to posit the individual as the fundamental reality necessarily implies that any attempt at corporate organization can have only derivative status at best. But it is also problem: if each individual constitutes a whole unto himself, what happens when such units come in contact with each other, as they inevitably do in society? Into this vacuum steps the modern state, which on Nietzsche's account simultaneously seeks to maintain the narrative of the radical equality of individuals even as it sets itself up as the ultimate principle of integration. Nowhere was this logic more baldly on display than in the highly centralized Prussian state in which the research university was born.<sup>29</sup> Claiming for itself comprehensive oversight of society, Prussia sought to “subordinat[e] all educational aspirations to state purposes” and did so under the self-imposed moniker “culture-state” (*Kulturstaat*).<sup>30</sup> For Nietzsche, the adopted title is telling, since it reverses the hierarchical ordering of state and culture that he claims existed in the ancient world. As the old philosopher explains in the dialogue, “The [ancient Greek] state was

---

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, 48–51.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, 49.

not the culture's border patrol and regulator, its watchman and warden, but the culture's sturdy, muscular, battle-ready comrade and companion, escorting his admired, nobler, and so to speak transcendent friend through harsh reality and earning that friend's gratitude in return."<sup>31</sup> In the ancient world, that is, culture was king.

With this we arrive at Nietzsche's core insight and conviction, on the basis of which proceeds his entire critique of late modern education and society in these inaugural lectures. States come and go, as do individuals, without leaving anything but the barest traces once they have disappeared. But the light of true cultural achievement shines undimmed across the ages, revealing an almost bewildering solidity that makes everything else seem insubstantial and unreal by comparison. The whole remarkable phenomenon of Greek culture may be likened to a single massive statue which, now found lying on the ground, not only sums up in itself the astonishing age that produced it but also rebuffs the attempts of lesser ages to hoist it anew. "You should know," says the old philosopher's former student, "that philologists have spent centuries trying to raise once more the statue of Greek antiquity, long since fallen and sunk into the earth—and they have never succeeded, for it is a colossus, on which any individual can only clamber around like a dwarf."<sup>32</sup> Having been produced by a society functioning as an integral whole, no individual is equal to the task. Even entire societies are thoroughly dwarfed by the task when they comprise nothing more than individuals gathered together in mere approximations of wholeness, as in modern political and bureaucratic forms of organization. The former student goes on, "Tremendous collective efforts, all the leverage of modern culture, have been brought to

---

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, 45.



bear, and again and again this statue, barely raised from the ground, has fallen back to crush those beneath it.”<sup>33</sup>

It is at this point that we can at last begin to piece together Nietzsche’s positive account of where wholeness is to be found, albeit with some preliminary caveats. Three features of the lectures complicate the task at hand. First, the work is framed in negative terms as a critique. Now a critique is possible only on the basis of an implicit standard, but identifying that positive standard may require the same kind of imaginative reconstruction as when one envisions a photograph on the basis of its negative. Second, as noted earlier, the lectures take the form of a dialogue rather than a straightforward exposition, requiring that we sort through the various voices to arrive at the argument in much the same way one does in engaging a text of Plato or Kierkegaard. Finally, the aphoristic style that Nietzsche would eventually adopt as his characteristic form of expression is already present here in the elliptical way his characters make their arguments. It frequently falls to the reader, therefore, to interrogate and spell out what is only alluded to in highly suggestive fragments of arguments and in the novel use of standard vocabulary from the long history of philosophy.

The implicit core of Nietzsche’s argument is that culture constitutes a true whole, indeed that it is the unique reality of which wholeness can be predicated. What is the basis for such an argument? Once it becomes clear what Nietzsche understands by the concept of culture, which shares nothing in common with modern sociological usage, the claim is all the more striking; and Nietzsche is fully aware that it is bound to confound his audience. While one can speak of “modern culture” in an analogical or colloquial sense, the true standard of culture, according to Nietzsche, is revealed in classical antiquity. This is not to say that culture is identical with the

---

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche, 45.

forms particular to ancient Greece and Rome, as if the task were merely to preserve and attempt to inhabit the achievements of an earlier age, still less to produce new works that slavishly copy older forms. Rather, we can recognize in antiquity a definitive image of a society in which true culture has been realized, a universal phenomenon that remains a possibility in other eras in ever new permutations. It is for this reason that the old philosopher in Nietzsche's dialogue can affirm that he "cling[s] to *the German spirit*" and expresses his "hope that in future the schools will draw true culture into the battle and...inspire the younger generation with a burning passion for what is truly German."<sup>34</sup> Key to this renewal, which must plumb the depths of all that is most authentically German, is contact with the greatness of ancient Greece, even if the process of cross-fertilization is neither obvious nor linear. "The link between the innermost essence of the German and the genius of the Greek is a mysterious bond," which he also acknowledges is "extremely difficult to grasp."<sup>35</sup> But of this much he is certain: that the realization of true culture in the German idiom depends on first catching sight of the Greek achievement. "[U]ntil the true German spirit, in its noblest and uttermost need, reaches out for the saving hand of the Greek genius, as though for a firm handhold in the raging river of barbarism; until an all-consuming desire for what is Greek breaks forth from this German spirit; until the distant view of the Greek homeland, laboriously achieved, with which Schiller and Goethe refreshed their spirits has become a place of pilgrimage for the best and most gifted among us," the goal of true education and culture will merely "flutter about in the air, untethered to anything."<sup>36</sup>

Even with this clarification in hand, that by culture Nietzsche does not simply mean Greek culture, the question still remains in what sense it constitutes a whole unlike any other.

---

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, 38. (emphasis original)

<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche, 38–39.

Here we must make explicit what Nietzsche himself only hints at and seems to assume. There is a twofold sense in which culture possesses a fullness that all other realities lack and gathers all things into a unity. First, as demonstrated by the remarkable artifacts of ancient Greece—poetry, music, architecture, philosophy—the products of culture represent the most complex phenomena in existence, owing their origin to the creative activity of man. While drawing upon the natural order in the process, cultural creation is not reducible to a merely natural or automatic phenomenon but rather brings nature into a synthesis effected by man’s activity. It has the power to make of all things a *Gesamtkunstwerk*—a total work of art—realizing on the grand scale the kind of unity opera has the capacity to forge among the arts according to Richard Wagner, whom Nietzsche still deeply admired at the time of the lectures.<sup>37</sup> Second, while culture in the sense Nietzsche understands it necessarily depends on the activity of an elite, he insists that it alone is capable of uniting both masses and the elite. The fact that their experiences of the one same culture are mediated by different points of contact does not undermine the truth of this unity. “The deeper regions where the masses come into true contact with culture are” those traditions in which “a people harbors its religious instincts, where it continues to create its mythical images, where it stays faithful to its customs, its law, its native soil.”<sup>38</sup> These are the conventional forms that a culture gives rise to, and efforts to bypass them in the interest of eliding the differences between people serves only to degrade culture and to bar the simple from access to it. “The

---

<sup>37</sup> In their introduction to Nietzsche’s lectures, Reitter and Welmon note that Wagner “in 1868 became for Nietzsche the living model of genius” and speculate that the friend whom the old philosopher awaits at the end of the dialogue is meant to suggest a Wagner figure. Nietzsche, viii, xx. Nietzsche’s first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), also praised Wagner effusively as did another essay specifically dedicated to an analysis of his work, but Nietzsche later soured on the composer and wrote a book-length critique of his music: *The Case of Wagner* (1888).

<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, 42.

people are given ‘culture’ in only a crude and completely external way when that is the direct goal.”<sup>39</sup>

How then does culture emerge on Nietzsche’s telling? It is an elite phenomenon, but understanding precisely what Nietzsche means by “elite” requires careful parsing. For what he clearly does not mean is simply those with more power or influence in society. In fact, it is precisely such figures who he claims are typically responsible for thwarting the rise of culture. The elite that Nietzsche has in mind is the genius. But before considering that rare phenomenon, we must look at what Nietzsche considers the ordinary state of affairs, the improbable context out of which the genius must emerge for culture to appear. That context is, in short, Nature, which appropriately appears in capitalized form in the English translation of Nietzsche’s text. There are two faces to Nature in Nietzsche’s thought: on the one hand, the relentless force of destruction and renewal that shows little concern for any individual, and on the other, the source of pristine and awe-inspiring forms that point to a latent potential to be shaped into something great. The second of these constitutes above all the condition for the possibility of culture. And it is direct contact with this reality that proves the most important aspect of the education of children who show promise of greatness. “Forest and stone, the storm, the vulture, the single flower, butterfly and meadow and mountainside must speak to him in their own tongue—he must be able to see himself in them as though in countless mirrors and reflection...and he will unconsciously feel the metaphysical oneness of all things in the great symbol of Nature, while also drawing peace from its eternal perseverance and necessity.”<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, it is this same Nature that constantly puts human life in question, whose eternal processes are calibrated in favor of Life itself and not in favor of one’s own individual existence. “A person needs to

---

<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, 56.

learn much if he is to live, to fight his battle for survival,” says the old philosopher. But he insists that “*everything* [a person] learns and does with that aim, as an individual, has *nothing* to do with education and culture.”<sup>41</sup> Culture pertains instead to that “atmosphere far above the world of necessity, scarcity, and struggle.”<sup>42</sup> Here is where we see the vital distinction between the true elite, understood as genius, and the person who is merely able to marshal Promethean efforts toward the hopeless cause of individual survival. Such people long for immortality and seek it in all manner of things that can in no way deliver it: “riches, power, intelligence, quickness of mind, eloquence, a healthy appearance, a famous name.” They will succeed in nothing more than “enlarg[ing] their subjective needs and sphere of influence to construct a mausoleum of astounding size for themselves, as if they could thereby defeat that monstrous adversary, time.”<sup>43</sup>

There is, by contrast, a distinct selflessness that marks the elite who are capable giving birth to real culture. These, rather than concentrating on the personal struggle for survival, “rise up quickly and easily into the sphere in which they can forget and as it were shake off their own selfhood.”<sup>44</sup> With an eye on what is eternal even in the midst of constant change, they will find within their contemporary world precisely the resources needed to craft yet another expression of Nature’s highest possibilities. The genius thus stands at a critical juncture between the particular and the universal, the daily reality of his people and a timeless continuity that stretches across ages. But this raises a puzzling riddle: what can explain the origin of such genius? Here Nietzsche’s dialogue takes a decidedly mystical turn. “The genius,” says the old philosopher, “is not actually born of culture, or education: His origin is, as it were metaphysical—his homeland

---

<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, 54.

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, 54.

metaphysical.”<sup>45</sup> Unable to say more than this, the old philosopher simply moves on to consider how one so rooted in the eternal comes to immerse himself in the contingent reality of a people and age. But the philosopher’s former student at least gives voice to how difficult and apparently incomplete is the proffered account: “Teacher...you amaze me with this metaphysics of genius, and I have only a dim sense of the truth in these metaphors.”<sup>46</sup> For true culture to emerge, so it seems, the latent possibilities of Nature must be informed by some eternal reality. But what precisely that reality is must remain a question mark. What one can say on the basis of this aphoristic fragment alone is that, for Nietzsche, the fundamental unit of reality is genius. Individuals come and go; even Nature itself merely contains the conditions for the possibility of this reality. But by appropriating the language of metaphysics, the dialogue implies that being may be predicated most truly and fully of genius.

It is genius, we might recall, that mediates the appearance of the whole, namely culture. How then does the genius perform the critical act of mediation? Here again the old philosopher must resort to language that is highly mystical. Perhaps Nietzsche would chafe at the thought, but the resonances of Christian theology, which are already evident to some degree elsewhere in the text, break fully into the open here. The genius, says the old philosopher, must be “ripened in the womb and nourished in the lap of his people’s culture.” Only then will he be able “to appear, to emerge from a people; to reflect as it were in its full array of colors the whole image of a people and its strengths.” Perhaps it is possible up to this point to read these lines in a strictly natural sense that might well apply to any great leader, who must be brought up in the authentic traditions of his people. But the old philosopher goes further. This genius, whose origin is metaphysical, must sum up in his very person the whole nation in order to bring them in an act of

---

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, 43.

great liberation into the eternal. He will “reveal this people’s highest purpose in the symbolic essence of one individual and his enduring work, thereby linking his people to the eternal and liberating his people from the ever-changing sphere of the momentary.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Culture, the Will, and the University**

Nietzsche’s account of the essential role of geniuses in the realization of culture would seem to undermine the central purpose of his lectures, the critique of educational institutions. For as the old philosopher has noted, strictly speaking, genius is not produced by education. Furthermore, institutions are by definition for large numbers of people, whereas genius appears only rarely. It would seem, then, that all discussion of reforming educational institutions is quite beside the point. In fact, the young Nietzsche and his student companion in the dialogue raise precisely this objection: “if we can truly speak of ‘culture’ only with respect to these most distant beings, how could their incalculable nature be the basis of an institution—what would it even mean to imagine educational institutions that benefit solely these chosen few?”<sup>48</sup> The question provokes the unremitting ire of the old philosopher, and presumably the mature Nietzsche for whom he typically speaks. The role of educational institutions, he insists, is not to cultivate genius but rather to prepare for them collaborators who can both recognize genius and aid in the construction of true culture. At the very least, such institutions should provide the same protective function as the ancient state, fending off the inevitable attacks on the development and hegemony of culture by those pursuing less noble and more individualistic aims. For most of history, says the old philosopher, exactly the opposite relation obtained. “Not one of our great geniuses has ever received any assistance from you...it was in spite of you that they created their

---

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, 61–62.

immortal works... Who can imagine what these heroic men might have accomplished if the true German spirit had been able to spread its sheltering roof above their heads in the form of strong institutions?”<sup>49</sup>

The core educational program required for such institutions consists of a simple three-part structure, says the old philosopher. Students must be trained in philosophy, art, and Greco-Roman culture. Why these three, and what precisely does he mean by each? By philosophy, he does not mean the narrowly technical form of enquiry that had already become characteristic of an increasingly professionalized discipline by the late nineteenth century. What he has in mind is rather engagement with the most difficult and fundamental questions about existence. Such questions inevitably arise in the course of one’s own personal development. “We are so beset by serious and difficult problems,” he says, “that, when brought to see them aright, we quickly acquire a lasting philosophical wonder... Especially in tempestuous youth, almost every personal incident shimmers with a double reflection: as an instance of everyday triviality, and at the same time as exemplifying an eternal, mysterious problem that cries out for an answer.”<sup>50</sup> The experience has the effect of revealing possibilities latent in nature which until now have not been apparent to the young person, as if something that was one-dimensional suddenly discloses another hidden dimension. “A young person has suddenly and almost instinctively been convinced of the double meaning of existence.”<sup>51</sup> If he is to recognize and cooperate with genius, the essential starting point will be this conviction that there is more to reality than what simply appears—a conviction weakened, indeed stamped out, by the positivistic method elevated by the German research university. The development of “a strict artistic discipline” contributes to the

---

<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, 63.

<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, 77.

<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, 77.



same objective in addition to clarifying that it is possible to speak of standards of excellence in art, contrary to the prevailing opinion that art was a matter of individual taste.<sup>52</sup> The old philosopher does not elaborate at this point in the dialogue, but earlier he has asked, “Who among you will attain a true feeling for the sacred earnestness of art when you are spoiled with methods that encourage you to stutter on your own when you should be taught to speak, to pursue the beautiful on your own when you should be made to piously worship the artwork.”<sup>53</sup> Much has already been said also about classical antiquity and its unique value as a witness to true culture. Perhaps for this reason, the old philosopher does not say more to justify its place in the educational program except to recall that it is “the categorical imperative incarnate of all culture.”<sup>54</sup>

Given the hostility to greatness that Nietzsche finds not only at the level of society but also within the individual, he recognizes that the educational program cannot be a matter of content alone. It also involves, and even more fundamentally, the training of the will. In fact, eras productive of cultural achievement are distinctive for having cultivated “dependence, discipline, subordination, and obedience—resisting with all their might every delusion of independence.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the old philosopher puts the matter categorically: “all education begins with obedience.”<sup>56</sup> The student must submit to the arduous and initially unpleasant experience of being guided through a course not of his own choosing, not however because of the inherent value of submissiveness of will. Quite on the contrary, those students who prove truly capable will eventually be required to exercise the authority proper to their place atop the natural

---

<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, 78.

<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Nietzsche, 76.

<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, 84.

hierarchy. Rather, the strictest of obedience is required so that they will develop a well-formed aesthetic: a sense for what is truly noble.

The place where such a sense must first be formed, says the old philosopher, is in the study of one's own native language in secondary school. This is the essential preparation for the definitive encounter with philosophy, art, and classical culture at university, studies which presuppose an ability to perceive excellence in the midst of endless kitsch and mediocrity. "Only rigorously disciplined, artistically scrupulous linguistic standards can create a proper feeling for the greatness of our classical writers," explains the old philosopher. "[O]ne must know from personal experience how difficult language is; after searching long and struggling hard, one must reach on one's own the path our great poets stride, if one is to feel how lightly and gracefully they walk it and how stiffly and awkwardly others follow in their footsteps."<sup>57</sup> The inevitable frustration the student feels in attempting to imitate the highest standards of speaking and writing is indispensable for rooting his sense of form so deeply as to become second nature—indeed, to the point that he feels revulsion for anything less than that which is truly good. "Let no one think it easy to develop one's sensitivity to the point of physical nausea," says the old philosopher, "but let no one hope that it is possible to acquire an aesthetic sense along any other path except the thorny one of language."<sup>58</sup> But the ones who thus persevere in the struggle to rise above their own their own narrowness and that of their age are rewarded with entrance to a lofty atmosphere in which the peaks of true culture can at last come into view. Uniquely among all people, they are ready for education. "The awakening of this sensibility, able to distinguish between form and

---

<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche, 29.

<sup>58</sup> Nietzsche, 29.

abomination, is the first flutter of the wing that can carry [them] to the only true homeland of culture: Greek antiquity.”<sup>59</sup>

---

There are any number of lines along which a critique of Nietzsche’s theory might proceed: that his view of classical antiquity is unbalanced and romanticized, that his dismissiveness of all positivistic research is extreme and untenable, that his critique of individualism over-corrects in the direction of a simplistic elitism. For the purposes of this study, though, two other critiques have far greater force than any of these, since they concern philosophical problems raised by the very structure of the argument itself and not merely with matters of practical judgment and contingency. First, the key condition of the possibility of culture is merely assumed rather than explained. How is it that Nature has a latent capacity to be shaped in such a way as to give rise to culture when acted upon by the genius? What explains this order, what is its source? To answer this challenge adequately, Nietzsche would have to have recourse to a much more elaborate metaphysics, and even in his mature works it is not clear that this is something he is able or willing to supply. Indeed, given his emphasis on the foundational character of action and the will, one might well conclude that Nietzsche seeks to substitute ethics for metaphysics. Still the question remains. Second, his argument in these lectures seems to suggest, by contrast, that aesthetics is even more fundamental than ethics. For the genius cannot act to construct an instantiation of true culture in his own age without a sense of form. But this sense of form can only refer to the ability to perceive in a universal way the excellence that lies beyond any particular instantiation of it. Nietzsche’s extraordinary inaugural lectures thus leave

---

<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, 31.

us with a powerful demonstration of how culture can be said to constitute a genuine whole and yet which also seems to point beyond itself to other spheres with an even stronger claim.

## **The Whole Extrapolated from Fragments:**

MacIntyre, Cosmology, and the Intellect

If a critique of the modern research university represents the first word of Nietzsche's philosophy, it seems increasingly likely to be the last word of Alasdair MacIntyre's. During his final academic post, which he held at the University of Notre Dame from 2000 to 2010, the formerly Marxist philosopher best known for reviving Aristotelian virtue ethics increasingly turned his attention to the state of the university, sounding the alarm about the incoherence into which both its teaching and research activities have fallen. The turn seems to have been prompted, at least in part, by his taking up long-term residence for the first time in a Catholic-run university after having spent the vast part of his fifty-year academic career prior to that in secular institutions, and discovering surprisingly little difference between them. "[W]hat in fact we find," says MacIntyre, "is that the most prestigious Catholic universities often mimic the structures and goals of the most prestigious secular universities and do so with little sense of something having gone seriously amiss."<sup>1</sup> In an article written for a general audience, he puts the matter even more colorfully: "the major Catholic universities...are for the most part hell-bent on imitating their prestigious secular counterparts, which already imitate one another. So we find Notre Dame glancing nervously at Duke, only to catch Duke in the act of glancing nervously at Princeton."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 179.

<sup>2</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "The End of Education: The Fragmentation of the American University," *Commonweal* 133 (October 20, 2006): 10.

But what, on MacIntyre's telling, has gone wrong in the university? It is not, strictly speaking, the role that feverish competition plays in institutional decision-making, still less a sectarian concern that religion is marginal to the life of the institutions that others are eager to imitate. The problem is rather the profound fragmentation of higher education. "[T]he contemporary secular university is not at fault because it is not Catholic," claims MacIntyre. "It is at fault insofar as it is not a university."<sup>3</sup> To understand precisely what MacIntyre means by this, and the real novelty of the claim, will require attention to his characteristically careful and nuanced argument. For he is far from the first scholar to note the fragmentation of the modern university. As MacIntyre himself points out, the legendary president of the University of California, Clark Kerr, was already speaking of the "multiversity" in the early 1960s, and his book *The Uses of the University* remains in print and widely read to this day.<sup>4</sup> It should come as no surprise, though, if what a philosopher understands by fragmentation is significantly different from what an economist and university administrator does, even if they concern aspects of the same phenomenon. For MacIntyre, the critical question is whether all the various activities of the university constitute an intelligible unity: whether, that is, the university itself equips its members to understand how, for example, investigations into the properties of subatomic particles are related to the study of game theory in economics and Troubadour poetry in literature. Not only does the modern research university not do this, it does not even recognize such integration as necessary. "For there is no sense in the contemporary American university that there is such a task, that something that matters is being left undone."<sup>5</sup> Rather each discipline conducts its work fully independently of the others, its horizon shaped by the scope of enquiry

---

<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre, 10.

<sup>4</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 174; See Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 5th ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 16.

proper to its particular methods. Indeed, even within disciplines, questions and methods have been refined to the point that it is no longer clear to what degree the discipline itself represents a genuine unity, with scholars increasingly working within ever more specialized subfields that have little to do with each other in practice. But this state of affairs, says MacIntyre, threatens the very existence of the university, not in the mere practical sense of its governability as an administrative unit, but in the far more radical sense of its capacity to fulfill precisely the task it sets for itself: to achieve an increasingly adequate understanding of the world in all its various dimensions. How so?

Even if we speak colloquially at times of the “world” of business or of music or some other field, we do not mean that these activities and the study of them exist in anything other than the one world we share. Because the world is one, so too must be the knowledge of all its many aspects. Individual disciplines and sub-disciplines can pursue their enquiries along the ever multiplying paths that they forge, but to the extent that they claim to arrive at knowledge in the process, they are making a universal appeal that necessarily implicates all the others. If the various disciplines do, in fact, arrive at genuine knowledge, it must ultimately be possible to give an account of how the knowledge achieved in particular enquiries relate to each other. This set of relations, together with the content of each field, constitutes the intelligible order of all things that is the ultimate object of the university and also therefore the source of its unity. “We are able to understand what the university should be,” says MacIntyre, “only if we understand what the universe is.”<sup>6</sup> By its very orientation to the whole, that is, the university implies a cosmology. And the fulfillment of its work depends on ongoing dialogue between the ever more refined

---

<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, 95.

enquiries of particular fields and this rational account of the general order in which each finds its place.

For the purposes of this study, MacIntyre's claim that cosmology is the whole that makes sense of all the various fragments of the universe is of even greater significance than his critique of the contemporary university, which proposes to operate without a cosmology. But to understand his positive claim, it is worth beginning with his negative assessment of where things stand since it illuminates the multiprong effects of the current approach on teaching, research, and even patterns of life in society at large, all of which can be summed up under the heading of compartmentalization. Beginning with his critique also clarifies how MacIntyre arrives at his conclusion about what is to be done: since it is philosophy that has the capacity to unite all the various forms of enquiry and ultimately to adumbrate a cosmology, it will have to resume its place at the center of the university, reversing its more recent transformation into a specialized discipline in imitation of the others. For reasons that MacIntyre explains in some detail, such a philosophy will have to be explicitly theistic, since all intelligibility must ultimately rest on the existence of a source of all being that is its own cause. Indeed, in order to achieve complete integration, each discipline will have to be brought into relation with theology. But for MacIntyre, as indeed for his key points of reference, Aquinas and Newman, it is to philosophy that the crucial task of integration belongs.

### **Compartmentalization in Life and Thought**

While MacIntyre and Nietzsche offer differing accounts of what has gone wrong in the university, they agree that one of the principal causes is the increasingly narrow specialization by scholars, the lasting fruit of the nineteenth-century revolution in the German academy. For Nietzsche, the problem with circumscribing scholarship in such a way is that it undermines the



possibility of coming into contact with true cultural achievement, which constitutes an integral whole and can only be perceived as such. Slicing up phenomena into smaller pieces for analysis not only reduces scholarship to menial labor, but also deprives the scholar of precisely the broad horizon and sense for greatness that is required to recognize genius. For MacIntyre, by contrast, the problem is not the division of scholarly tasks into ever more focused and narrow enquiries, but rather the threat such specialization poses to the very coherence of those enquiries when they begin to be understood as radically independent of all the others. Since the refinement of research involves the pursuit of increasingly differentiated enquiries, an inherently centrifugal logic is at play in scholarly work. It is only a deliberate effort to keep the overall order of things in view that prevents the otherwise positive pursuit of new enquiries from resulting in an exaggerated, and ultimately incoherent, sense of their mutual independence.

To casual observers of the university, the various academic departments and individual members of the community may well appear an evident and unproblematic whole, united by an institutional identity, campus, administration, and above all, joint educational effort. But as MacIntyre knows, the experience of those at the heart of the institution, the faculty members, reveals a different reality altogether. The history of increasing specialization has created ever stronger incentives for scholars to engage peers in their field at other institutions at a much deeper level and with greater regularity than scholars in other fields at their own university. Their “professional success and standing depend in large part on the degree of their identification with some particular subdiscipline or subsubdiscipline.”<sup>7</sup> As enquiries have become more narrowly defined, it is only the peers in their academic specialty that understand and are interested in the

---

<sup>7</sup> MacIntyre, “The End of Education,” 10.

precise set of questions that frame the scholar's work; and it is the same group of peers that will determine whether the scholar's papers are accepted for presentation and publication.

This re-balancing of the academy's center of gravity toward networks of specialists and away from the university has inevitably, if subtly, altered the way that knowledge itself is viewed. For it has become clear, to scholars at least, that knowledge is a product, not so much of the university, as of the fields that play a decisive role in the organization and recognition of scholarly work. This gives the impression, explains MacIntyre, that "[t]here is...nothing to understanding except what is supplied by the specialized and professionalized disciplines and subdisciplines and subsubdisciplines. Higher education has become a set of assorted and heterogeneous specialized enquiries into a set of assorted and heterogeneous subject-matters."<sup>8</sup> This impression is virtually guaranteed to go unexamined by the very logic of system itself. With every discipline engaged in its own investigations, to whom in the university does it fall to ask about the system of academic enquiry as a whole? And even if there is such a discipline, how could its findings have any effect outside its own discipline? In the past, explains MacIntyre, philosophy filled this role, and its universal relevance to all the various enquiries in the university was uncontroversial. But now that philosophy has been transformed into one discipline among others, its findings have no more relevance to the enquiries of other specialized fields than do those of chemistry, psychology, or communications. Thus the powerful impression that knowledge is inherently disciplinary in nature and origin not only goes unchallenged but necessarily strengthens with time. The practical result is that what began as an unreflective assumption eventually hardens into a positive conviction: that there is no meaningful sense in which we may speak of a unified order of all things. As MacIntyre explains, "the conception of

---

<sup>8</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices," in *Higher Learning & Catholic Traditions*, ed. Robert E. Sullivan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 5–6.

the university presupposed by and embodied in the institutional forms and activities of contemporary research universities is not just one that has nothing much to do with any particular conception of the universe, but one that suggests strongly that there is no such thing as the universe, no whole of which the subject matters studied by the various disciplines are all parts or aspects, but instead just a multifarious set of assorted subject matters.”<sup>9</sup>

Nor do the effects of such a view remain confined to the realm of research. They extend to the educational program of the university. Here again, to the casual observer, which includes most students and their parents, the underlying fragmentation may not be obvious. Every ten years or so, universities undertake a revision of the curriculum, at the end of which they typically produce a document explaining the coherence of its animating vision and how the novel features represent the cutting edge of pedagogy. Often such documents positively crackle with buzzwords—interdisciplinarity, team teaching, technology integration—but the basic structure of the undergraduate curriculum in most American universities has not changed since the 1930s. There are general education requirements spread across a variety of fields, a major area of concentration in one field, and a certain number of electives. The layman might reasonably conclude that such a curriculum successfully marries breadth and depth. As MacIntyre points out, though, the courses that fulfill each of those elements of the curriculum are designed and taught by scholars whose own training has been oriented more and more narrowly to particular specialties. Therefore, “what students learn in their major, whatever the discipline, has more and more become what they need to learn if they are to become specialists in that particular discipline.”<sup>10</sup> Even the courses they take for the purposes of general education or elective exploration are invariably marked by the same logic of specialization that shapes the professional

---

<sup>9</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 174.

<sup>10</sup> MacIntyre, “The End of Education,” 11.

development of the professoriate. “[W]hatever pattern of courses is taken by an individual, it is unlikely to be more than a collection of bits and pieces, a specialist’s grasp of this, a semispecialist’s partial understanding of that, an introductory survey of something else.”<sup>11</sup> Thus the practical reality of contemporary higher education no longer matches its historic aspirations, even if they remain enshrined in requirements ordered to integration. MacIntyre puts the case in forceful terms: “And how indeed could it be otherwise when every course, even when introductory, is a course in a specialized discipline taught by a teacher who may be vastly ignorant of everything outside her or his own discipline? Each part of the curriculum is someone’s responsibility, but no one has a responsibility for making the connections between the parts.”<sup>12</sup>

If the educational program of the university fails to make connections among different disciplines, it is unsurprising that what happens in the classroom remains largely disconnected from the other spheres of life on campus too. The residence hall, the dining hall, and the recreation center play host to the activity proper to each, but without a sense of how they might be related to the academic program or indeed how each might be related to the others. MacIntyre thus highlights a phenomenon that Nietzsche also considered deeply significant: what the student does outside of the classroom is a matter above all for the private judgment of the student. For Nietzsche, such a conception of the relationship between university and student represents a dereliction of the university’s obligation to form comprehensively the tastes of the student. For MacIntyre, by contrast, it is the consistency and coherence of education that is at stake. Failing to integrate the various spheres of university life betrays “an uncritical attitude toward the norms

---

<sup>11</sup> MacIntyre, 11.

<sup>12</sup> MacIntyre, 11.

and values of each particular compartmentalized area, arising from an inability to bring to bear what has been learned in each such area of one's life upon the activities of the other area."<sup>13</sup>

The concept of compartmentalization here is key. MacIntyre sees it as one of the characteristic features of societies in the condition of advanced modernity. Without proposing to account for the origin of the phenomenon and the degree to which developments in the university itself may have played a part, he insists that understanding it is an essential task for the university because of its pervasive influence on contemporary patterns of thought and behavior. According to the logic of this cultural norm, explains MacIntyre, "[e]ach of the separate spheres of activity through which individuals pass in the course of a day or a week or a month has its own distinctive culture, its own mode of relationship, its own specific norms. And in each of these spheres individuals can function effectively only by presenting themselves in and through whatever roles they occupy in this or that particular sphere."<sup>14</sup> At home, therefore, I am one person, at work another, and when relaxing with my buddies a different person from either of the other two. The refrain from a popular country song a little over a decade ago captured the sentiment memorably: "I don't have to be me 'til Monday." The social and economic conditions of late modernity have made it possible and even necessary for people to belong to a variety of different spheres. But without simultaneously supplying a sense of how all those spheres form a genuine whole, the trend puts the integration of the individual himself in question. "And so in extreme cases," says MacIntyre, "the individual is nearly, if not quite, dissolved into the set of roles that she or he plays."<sup>15</sup> The problem is only exacerbated by the fact that the phenomenon remains largely unacknowledged and indeed difficult for an individual to detect. The

---

<sup>13</sup> MacIntyre, "Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices," 18.

<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre, 15.

<sup>15</sup> MacIntyre, 16.

thoroughgoing partitioning of late modern life into various spheres conspires against exactly the kind of holistic viewpoint from which alone it is possible to take stock of the different roles one plays. As MacIntyre notes, “There is increasingly nowhere within compartmentalized societies in which individuals are invited in a practically effective way to view their lives as a whole, to evaluate themselves and those qualities that belong to them as individuals, the virtues and the vices, rather than those that belong to them as successful or unsuccessful role-players.”<sup>16</sup>

It is precisely here that MacIntyre sees a nexus between Catholicism, the university, and the cultural malaise of advanced modernity. For the Catholic faith claims a universality that reaches out to all things and draws them into one, and it is the university’s distinctive work to be the place in which the whole of reality can be studied and known in its integrity. In both of these phenomena, and especially in their synthesis, MacIntyre sees a salve for what ails late modern society. And indeed, in earlier eras, “it was one of the works of the Catholic faith, and more especially of Catholic education, to provide within just such milieus an integrative vision of the human and natural orders, as well as of the supernatural order, one that could inform not only education, but the subsequent lives of the educated, by providing them with a standard for identifying and criticizing the inadequacies of the social orders that they inhabited.”<sup>17</sup> But the contemporary Catholic university suffers no less than its secular counterparts from the negative effects of unbalanced specialization that threaten its coherence and from the cultural trend of compartmentalization that drives an artificial wedge between the spheres of life and thought. It will be of no help whatsoever, then, if a university that functions according to the prevailing model is run by a Catholic entity, even if this means that there are ample opportunities for faith development and that “a significant proportion of the practitioners of the specialized disciplines

---

<sup>16</sup> MacIntyre, 16.

<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre, 16.

happen also to be Catholics.”<sup>18</sup> Such institutions cannot provide the kind of integration that alone makes academic enquiry, and finally human life, coherent. Rather, on account of the dominant logic of compartmentalization, they amount to nothing more than “a place where the activities of a secular university and Catholic religious practice happen to coexist within a single institution.”<sup>19</sup> It may indeed be the case in such universities that “the question would often arise for particular individual faculty members of how their faith relates to their academic studies and teaching, and enterprises designed to pursue this question would recurrently flourish.” But to the extent that the institution as a corporate body fails to ask and answer the question in a robust way, “such enterprises would necessarily be marginal to the projects that would be in practice treated as central to the life of such universities.”<sup>20</sup> The problem of compartmentalization, which undermines the coherence of the university, does not admit of partial, indeed compartmentalized, solutions.

### **Philosophy, Theology, and the Order of Things**

The practical question of how to undertake a reform of the university is distinct from, but dependent upon, a prior theoretical question: what the university is in its essence. In his account, MacIntyre closely follows that of John Henry Newman, who set forth his views on the matter in response to a different sort of practical necessity. In 1851, the Catholic bishops of Ireland had asked the former Oxford don, not to reform a university, but to found a new one for Catholics, who were then excluded from the state-sponsored institutions of higher learning. In a series of ten public lectures delivered in Dublin in May and June of 1852, Newman carefully laid out the essential parameters for the new university. But he did so in a way that indicated quite clearly the

---

<sup>18</sup> MacIntyre, 9.

<sup>19</sup> MacIntyre, 10.

<sup>20</sup> MacIntyre, 10.

universal terms in which he understood his task. Having been charged with creating a Catholic university, he nevertheless set out in the lectures to define what “a University [is] in its essence,” a way of framing the topic eventually reflected in the title of the published form of the lectures, *The Idea of a University*.<sup>21</sup> For Newman took all universities, regardless of the circumstances of their founding, to be “place[s] of *teaching universal knowledge*.”<sup>22</sup> This meant, first of all, that their principal function was the instruction of students rather than the discovery of new knowledge, something proper instead to academies and research institutes. But it also meant that the object of their teaching was “intellectual, not moral.” If its object were “religious training,” explained Newman, “I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and science.”<sup>23</sup>

Given this position, it may come as a surprise that Newman spends the first three discourses following the introduction discussing the vital place of theology in the university. The first of those discourses, though, makes clear the logical consistency of his argument. There he seeks to establish on the basis of reason alone that theology is not merely “religious training,” but constitutes a branch of knowledge. What then does Newman mean by theology? Without prejudice to the reasonableness of revelation, which he upholds, Newman nevertheless proposes to consider the theology proper to the university first of all in a much more limited sense.<sup>24</sup> It does not, therefore, concern the doctrine of the Catholic Church, nor the sorting out of interdenominational polemics, nor even the study of Scripture, much less religious interpretations of the physical world.<sup>25</sup> “I simply mean,” says Newman, “the Science of God, or

---

<sup>21</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), xxxvii.

<sup>22</sup> Newman, xxxvii. (emphasis original)

<sup>23</sup> Newman, xxxvii. Note that, by “religious training,” Newman has in mind the kind of formation in faith and morals that he believes is proper to the college rather than the university.

<sup>24</sup> Newman, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Newman, 45–46.



the truths we know about God put into system; just as we have a science of the stars, and call it astronomy, or of the crust of the earth, and call it geology.”<sup>26</sup> What he has in mind more or less is that dimension of philosophical thought traditionally called “Natural Theology,”<sup>27</sup> which employs logical reasoning not only to prove the existence of the one God but also to specify the divine attributes that necessarily follow, amplifying this account only slightly by attributing to God both the act of creation and an ongoing providence.<sup>28</sup> It should be uncontroversial, he argues, that a field of study defined by such a scope and method constitutes a science and thus belongs in the university no less than any other. “I speak of one idea unfolded in its just proportions, carried out upon an intelligible method, and issuing in necessary and immutable results.”<sup>29</sup>

In the effort perhaps to avoid all association with religion and its long history of sparking controversy and conflict, some universities had already begun to marginalize theology or even exclude it altogether by Newman’s day. It was impossible to do so, however, without undermining not only the identity of the university as a place concerned with universal knowledge but also its practical capacity to fulfill that role. In an argument that MacIntyre would largely adopt and develop further a century and a half later, Newman explained the web of connections among disciplines on which the coherence of the university was based. The first step is to recognize that the universe, which the university purports to study, is one. “I lay it down,” says Newman, “that all knowledge forms one whole, because its subject-matter is one; for the universe in its length and breadth is so intimately knit together, that we cannot separate off

---

<sup>26</sup> Newman, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Newman, 52.

<sup>28</sup> Newman, 46–47.

<sup>29</sup> Newman, 50.

portion from portion, and operation from operation, except by a mental abstraction.”<sup>30</sup> Though God is not a being in the universe, but rather the source of all being, study of this source is itself essential to the process of understanding and a constitutive part of it. Even if “Theology has its departments towards which human knowledge has no relations” because it extends beyond what is knowable by reason alone, “we cannot truly or fully contemplate [the universe] without in some main aspects contemplating [God].”<sup>31</sup> Having thus established that theology is an essential science alongside the others ordered to the study of the universe, Newman goes on to argue that the individual sciences presuppose and depend upon all of the others, claiming that they fall or stand together. “As [all sciences] belong to one and the same circle of objects, they are one and all connected together; as they are but aspects of things, they are severally incomplete in their relation to the things themselves, though complete in their own idea and for their own respective purposes; on both accounts they at once need and subserve each other.”<sup>32</sup> But perhaps someone will still object that theology ought to be excluded from the sciences because of the invisibility of its subject matter and the highly speculative nature of its method. If one opts for that line of argument, says Newman, the whole of the university will fall like a house of cards, built as it is on the conviction that reason can proceed according to different modes proper to its object. “If the knowledge of the Creator is in a different order from knowledge of the creature,” Newman explains, “so, in like manner, metaphysical science is in a different order from physical, physics from history, history from ethics. You will soon break up into fragments the whole circle of secular knowledge if you begin the mutilation with divine.”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Newman, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Newman, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Newman, 38.

<sup>33</sup> Newman, 19–20.

This defense of theology's place in the university, which can only be characterized as minimalist, nevertheless points to what Newman sees as the pinnacle of the university's work and thus its highest possibility. It is worth following Newman's analysis this one step further, since it also forms the central move of MacIntyre's argument. Newman has already sought to establish the interdependence of the sciences. Now he proposes to show that the highest possibility of the university and the mark of true education is the ability to see the various sciences for the genuine whole that they form and to bring the universal perspective to bear on the consideration of any given particular. Such integration is possible only because there is a master science capable of performing the task: "the comprehension of the bearings of one science on another, and the use of each to each, and the location and limitation and adjustment and due appreciation of them all...belongs...to a sort of science of sciences, which is my own conception of what is meant by Philosophy, in the true sense of the word, and of a philosophical habit of mind."<sup>34</sup> The reason Newman feels compelled to qualify his definition of philosophy in such personal terms is that, already by nineteenth century, the general movement toward disciplinary specialization had combined with philosophy's own internal developments in the previous two centuries to narrow dramatically the scope of academic philosophy. Newman wished to recapture an earlier sense of philosophy's open horizon, indeed its all-encompassing role as the place of synthesis of human knowledge. Such philosophical integration is the end to which all the various enquiries of the university are ordered and the ultimate goal of education. "That only is true enlargement of mind," says Newman, "which is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence. This

---

<sup>34</sup> Newman, 38.

is that form of Universal Knowledge...set up in the individual intellect, and constitutes its perfection.”<sup>35</sup>

In this account of the university and the centrality Newman accords to philosophy, MacIntyre finds a coherent statement of both the multifarious tasks of the university and what serves to integrate them as a true whole. It is a whole which, while existing in reality, is made present to the human person only through the work of reason, that is to say, through the process of logical extrapolation. The various fragments that constitute the immediate content of sense experience are made intelligible in the first place through the particular mode of investigation proper to the nature of the object. As MacIntyre explains, “Each [science] is a representation of some aspect of reality and it is as the mind grasps how each plays its part that the mind advances toward that comprehension of the whole that it is the end of the human mind, by its nature, to achieve.”<sup>36</sup> But this further movement toward more comprehensive intelligibility is possible only by means of higher level abstraction, as reason in the mode of philosophy serves to integrate the various fragments of knowledge. “It is beyond the power of the human mind,” MacIntyre notes, “to grasp the universe as a whole, even inadequately, except through first understanding the parts, and so we abstract, for our intellectual attention, the different parts of the whole... We move toward a philosophical understanding as we grasp the relationship of each science to the others and the distinctive contributions that each makes to the understanding of the whole.”<sup>37</sup>

But which philosophy is equal to such a task? Here MacIntyre proposes to go beyond Newman, whom he finds unable to supply an answer to the problem so clearly and correctly delineated. “[I]f Newman had succeeded to some significant degree in defining the tasks

---

<sup>35</sup> Newman, 103.

<sup>36</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 146.

<sup>37</sup> MacIntyre, 145–46.

confronting Catholic philosophy,” remarks MacIntyre, “it was evident that the philosophical resources for carrying out those tasks still had to be identified.”<sup>38</sup> The most that Newman could say, somewhat unusually for his age, was that Aristotle remained a definitive point of reference. “While we are men,” so he claims in the fifth of his lectures on the university, “we cannot help, to a great extent, being Aristotelians.”<sup>39</sup> MacIntyre does not disagree. For Christians, however, the decisive encounter with Aristotle had already occurred some six centuries earlier when his works were first translated into Latin, sparking first controversy and then fruitful engagement among the scholastics of the University of Paris. Among the achievements of that era, the philosophical synthesis of Thomas Aquinas has unique and enduring relevance according to MacIntyre, a status aptly reflected in magisterial documents that treat it as the *philosophia perennis*.<sup>40</sup> By the time of Newman, Thomas had long fallen out of favor and would only begin to return to prominence at the turn of the twentieth century. But why, in MacIntyre’s estimation, is the work of Thomas so significant? It unites the integrative power of Aristotle’s comprehensive philosophical framework with the insights that come from Christian revelation, insights that are capable of being investigated by reason but which cannot be discovered in the first place through the operation of reason. In this way, Thomas indicates a more ample place for theology in the pursuit of universal knowledge than Aristotle, exceeding even the relatively modest place assigned it by Newman. As MacIntyre explains, Aquinas “transcended the limitations of Aristotelian modes of thought and recognized conceptual possibilities that were unknown and alien to the philosophers of the ancient world. It is here that Aquinas’ theology is important. Without that theology he would not have been able to ask some of the key

---

<sup>38</sup> MacIntyre, 150.

<sup>39</sup> Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 83.

<sup>40</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 153, 167. See also the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* (1879), #17–31; and of Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), #43–44.

philosophical questions he addressed” such as “what reason we have to assert that the God who reveals himself exists, how it is that human beings are directed by their nature to an end beyond nature” and how God’s omnipotence is consistent with finite beings’ “independent powers of causal agency.”<sup>41</sup>

As this comment suggests, MacIntyre still regards philosophy as the central axis of Thomas’ thought, even if it is assisted in the performance of its function by insights drawn from theology. It is no surprise, then, that he applies the same framework to the university. While theology has an irreplaceable role to play, it is nonetheless philosophy above all that is responsible for the critical work of integration. “In Catholic universities,” says MacIntyre, “this integrative task is understood as having an essential theological dimension. But the integrative task is nonetheless a task for secular reason and a task for the secular university and to abandon it is to endanger the functioning of universities as universities, rather than as mere assemblages of assorted disciplinary enterprises.”<sup>42</sup> As a sort of temporary concession, therefore, MacIntyre is willing to leave to one side the question of whether theology in some form is essential to the coherent operation of every university, undoubtedly on account of how much more foreign even than in Newman’s era the suggestion has become. Indeed, many Catholic universities have followed their secular counterparts in creating department of religious studies in place of, and to the exclusion of, theology. It nonetheless remains the case that, even in universities with a robust commitment to theology, the task of integration is one for reason, and thus for philosophy. It is only philosophy, in MacIntyre’s estimation, that has the capacity to show “what bearing each of [the disciplines] has on the others and how each contributes to an overall understanding of the

---

<sup>41</sup> MacIntyre, 85–86.

<sup>42</sup> MacIntyre, “Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices,” 2.

nature of things.”<sup>43</sup> Where theology is present, as it should be, “it would be a central task of philosophy in such a university to enquire into the nature of the relationship between theology and the secular disciplines.”<sup>44</sup> Philosophy, that is, continues to operate in the same way. In the latter case, it simply has more complete matter to work with, relating theology to the secular disciplines and not merely such disciplines to each other.

On the question of how precisely theology relates to the various disciplines, MacIntyre’s account remains rather vague. *That* the goal of perfected understanding requires the integration of the theological perspective is clear. As MacIntyre notes, “education in physics or history or economics remains incomplete until it is to some degree illuminated by philosophical enquiry, and all education, including...philosophical education, is incomplete until it is illuminated by theologically grounded insight.”<sup>45</sup> The picture becomes only marginally clearer when MacIntyre introduces the classic distinction between nature and grace to explicate the contributions proper to philosophy and theology. “What theology has to respond to in the first instance,” he writes, “are the incompleteness and the limitations of a purely philosophical view of the order of things: it has to show us nature from the standpoint of grace.”<sup>46</sup> MacIntyre, of course, is himself a philosopher and not a theologian. So perhaps he can be forgiven for not saying more about grace. But if theology plays such a vital role in both the teaching and research functions of the university, it would seem that MacIntyre ought to provide, at the very least, an account of the central features of grace. What is the content of the Christian revelation that proves so decisive to our perception of the world and its order?

---

<sup>43</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> MacIntyre, 17.

<sup>45</sup> MacIntyre, “Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices,” 8.

<sup>46</sup> MacIntyre, 8.

MacIntyre ends up opting for a more modest account of theology's role, one that notably returns to the precincts of philosophy, albeit a theistic philosophy. And this is consistent with his claim that the religious philosophy of Thomas Aquinas provides the essential framework for the coherence of universal knowledge. There are two elements of MacIntyre's argument in favor of the relevance of theology. "First, it is only through the relationships of the different parts and aspects of the universe to God that its unity and intelligibility can be adequately grasped."<sup>47</sup> For proof of this claim, he turns to the earliest, and quite possibly most significant, of Thomas' contributions: the real distinction between essence and existence. In brief, both essence (what it is) and existence (that it is) can be predicated of all extant beings. But the fact that we can also understand essences apart from actual existence indicates that the two are not identical among finite beings. There are many finite beings that might exist but do not in fact, or that have existed but no longer do. The existence of such beings therefore requires reference to a cause outside of themselves. But even an extended chain of similar beings will not be enough to discover their first cause, because an infinite regress results. There must therefore be, at the head of the chain of causality, some being that is its own cause. The essence of such a being is necessarily identical to its existence. It is Existence itself. And this is what the Scriptures reveal the God of Israel to be. Thus, every investigation of finite being in the university implicitly relies on this foundational discovery of philosophy that finds confirmation in theology. "No matter how far scientific explanation is taken, the existence of whatever it is that exists and its having the characteristics that it has remain surd facts, yet to be made intelligible," explains MacIntyre. "What kind of agency would have to be identified to make them finally intelligible? It would have to be such that it itself, its existence and nature, require no further explanation, that is, that there is no

---

<sup>47</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 175.



question of existence having been conferred on its essence, something ruled out only if *what it is* and *that it is* are one and the same, that it is a being whose essence and existence are identical. But this is how theists conceive of God.”<sup>48</sup>

MacIntyre’s second argument for the relevance of theology to the project of universal knowledge rests on the unique status of human beings in the universe. “[T]he unity of the human being and the nature of human beings,” he argues, “also requires a theistic perspective for its full comprehension.”<sup>49</sup> If this sounds at first like an abandonment of cosmology as the point of integration in favor of anthropology, MacIntyre makes clear that the two fundamentally coincide. The order of all things in the universe finds particular expression in the human being, who is uniquely capable of self-reflective cognition and thus in a certain sense sums up the whole cosmos in himself. As he explains “any adequate account of what it is to be a human being will explain how and why human beings are capable of the relevant kind of self-knowledge. Such an account will have to integrate what we can learn about the nature and constitution of human beings from physicists, chemists, and biologists, historians, economists, and sociologists, with the kind of understanding of human beings that only theology can afford.”<sup>50</sup> Theology, it seems, lends its own evidence of the unique status of human beings to what can be discovered by the secular sciences. In addition to its substantive content, the very nature of theology as an existential pursuit serves a critical function in the university as a reminder of both the possibility and importance of subjective appropriation, not merely objective acquisition, of knowledge. “It is not just that Catholic theology has its own distinctive answers to” fundamental questions, says MacIntyre, “but that we can learn from it a way of addressing those questions, not just as

---

<sup>48</sup> MacIntyre, 77.

<sup>49</sup> MacIntyre, 175.

<sup>50</sup> MacIntyre, 177.

theoretical inquiries, but as questions with practical import for our lives, asked by those who are open to God's self-revelation."<sup>51</sup>

There is, then, an important role for theology in the pursuit of perfected understanding. But it remains dependent on philosophy, and not just because of the practical marginalization or even exclusion of theology from the late modern university and intellectual life. Its dependence on philosophy, in other words, is not accidental but essential, owing to the nature of the two disciplines. While theology is concerned with realities both knowable by reason alone and those that exceed reason, the whole realm of what is knowable by the human intellect constitutes philosophy's province. To it alone therefore ultimately falls the critical work of synthesis, even as it engages both theology and the secular sciences in the process. From this perspective, MacIntyre's proposed reform of undergraduate education—the necessary prerequisite to the reform of the university as a whole—logically follows. He envisions a tripartite curriculum with each part corresponding to the three realities that comprise the experience of the human person: the physical world (mathematics and natural science), one's own cultural heritage (history of ideas in socio-political and economic contexts), and the need to come to terms with cultures radically different from one's own (linguistic and literary studies). "All three have a philosophical component: philosophy of mind and body, the philosophical questions raised by different aspects of our past history, the interpretive and evaluative questions posed by our relationship to other cultures."<sup>52</sup> Thus it is philosophy that must guide the enquiries in each part of the curriculum and reveal their interconnections so that students emerge with a clear sense of how they form a genuine whole. Only after three such years of integrated study would it then be possible for students to proceed to professional training or specialized research. Nor would

---

<sup>51</sup> MacIntyre, "The End of Education," 14.

<sup>52</sup> MacIntyre, 14.

MacIntyre stop there. For coherence to be restored to the university, “we would have to reform all our Ph.D. programs by adding to them both a theological and a philosophical dimension, so that the training of future college and university teachers is informed by the same integrative perspective that is required in undergraduate education.”<sup>53</sup> And to combat the ills of compartmentalization, the university must find ways of encouraging that “what goes on in the classroom provides a leaven for student conversation in every area” of university life, though MacIntyre does not specify how it might do so.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps a revised curriculum that emphasized integration above all would itself go a long way to accomplishing this end.

### **The Incompleteness of Perfected Understanding**

With MacIntyre’s account, have we thus arrived at a genuine whole: the perfected understanding of the order of things that results from the philosophically integrated pursuit of manifold enquiries? There are objections of both a practical and a theoretical nature that indicate we have not. While the theoretical objections are more serious, indicating as they do the logical inadequacies internal to the argument itself, the practical ones are also worth mentioning, since the solution we seek cannot remain in the realm of theory alone if it is to satisfy the concrete longing for a whole capable of integrating the fragments of human life.

There are three practical objections, two of which MacIntyre himself acknowledges. To begin, then, with the one that MacIntyre does not himself flag: his proposed undergraduate curriculum suggests that all members of the university must first and foremost be trained as philosophers and only secondarily as practitioners of the various disciplines. In order, that is, to achieve the kind of philosophical integration such a curriculum envisions, the level of

---

<sup>53</sup> MacIntyre, “Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices,” 9.

<sup>54</sup> MacIntyre, 18.

philosophical sophistication required would be equal to that of what today we would consider a major in the field. But weighting the course of studies so heavily in the direction of philosophy necessarily constrains the ability of students to develop the levels of expertise in other fields required for them to understand precisely the matter proper to those fields that is to be integrated into the overall scheme. Perhaps MacIntyre would reply that such expertise will come later, after the groundwork of philosophy has been laid. But then one confronts a further practical difficulty: that the philosophical integration of disciplines as diverse as subatomic physics and medieval French literature must occur at such a high level of abstraction as to have minimal practical effect on the pursuit of those disciplines.

A second practical objection is the sheer lack of will for reform, above all in secular universities, but even in Catholic ones. As MacIntyre himself notes, “the structures of the contemporary research university are...deeply inimical to such projects. So that any Catholic university in which such projects were to be successfully pursued would need to have structures and goals very different from those of the great secular research universities.”<sup>55</sup> Experience suggests that, far from such a willingness to strike out in bold new directions, Catholic universities are more prone to follow the lead of their secular peers, especially those intent on competing with prestigious secular institutions for the same pool of students and faculty. A further practical objection constitutes the most serious of the three. Even if one could specify a curriculum that successfully balanced philosophical training with that of other disciplines and had the will to implement it, the state of academic philosophy itself is riven by such radical divisions that even the most basic concepts have become essentially contested. Shortly after MacIntyre made the transition from Marxist philosopher to Thomist, and thus long before he

---

<sup>55</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 179.

explicitly took up the question of the state of the university, the problem of rival traditions in philosophy came to occupy a central place in his work. Already in 1981 in the study for which he is probably best known, *After Virtue*, his conclusion points toward alternative and incommensurate traditions which force a choice for philosophy.<sup>56</sup> MacIntyre went on in 1988 to choose for the topic of his Gifford Lectures precisely this problem of rival versions of moral enquiry that have become practically unable to engage each other and that thus require deliberate structures that promote productive confrontation. In a move that perhaps portended his late career reflections on the university, MacIntyre dedicated his final lecture to “reconceiving the university as an institution.”<sup>57</sup> Anticipating the central theme of his later work, he notes: “Insofar as the curriculum, both in respect of enquiry and in respect of teaching, is no longer a whole, there can be no question of providing a rational justification for the continued existence and flourishing of that whole, of the university as the whole that it once was.”<sup>58</sup> With philosophy itself marked by such fundamental divisions, the only way forward was to make the university into a place in which regular and deliberate clashes between the traditions might occur. “[T]he contemporary university,” MacIntyre concludes, “can perhaps only defend that in itself which makes it genuinely a university by admitting these conflicts to a central place both in its enquiries and in its teaching curriculum.”<sup>59</sup> But if this is indeed the state of the university, how can MacIntyre’s envisioned curriculum be realized without the institution itself necessarily breaking into smaller units in which philosophical consensus may be found?

---

<sup>56</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 256–63.

<sup>57</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 216–36.

<sup>58</sup> MacIntyre, 227.

<sup>59</sup> MacIntyre, 230.

The theoretical objections to MacIntyre's argument are more serious still. They can also be stated more succinctly, since they concern the order of logical reasoning rather than contingent circumstance. Can we indeed speak of "the order of things" as a meaningful whole, as MacIntyre proposes to do? Philosophical reason is quite capable of illuminating the relations between the various sciences and thus of extrapolating from fragments of knowledge to an increasingly adequate picture of the whole of finite being. But as MacIntyre himself insists, the operation of each particular science and the intelligibility of all finite being ultimately depends on its relation to the infinite, uncaused source of being. There is very little that philosophical reason can say about that being, forced to confine itself to a few modest statements of an apophatic nature. As a result, at the very center of any cosmological synthesis of which philosophy is capable there stands a gaping hole analogous to the oculus of the Pantheon, an image of which fittingly appears on the cover of MacIntyre's book on the university. The whole structure rises in perfectly ordered harmony, culminating at its peak in a void which in no way belongs to the structure itself. Even if the mind can in some way complete the arc by way of invisible lines extending along the trajectory it traces out below, it remains the case that the make-up of the pinnacle is incommensurate with the remainder of the dome. MacIntyre is of course well aware of the lack of proportionality between finite and infinite being. "To understand pebbles, cabbages, tigers and angels is to understand what they are, to grasp their essential properties. But God is beyond our understanding. We cannot have the kind of knowledge of him that we have of finite beings, and this at least in part is because we cannot apply to him the distinction between essence and existence."<sup>60</sup> But this necessarily implies that we cannot speak

---

<sup>60</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 85.

of the order of things as if it were a whole, since it does not meaningfully account for God, the condition of its possibility.

This objection, which highlights philosophy's own limits as a discipline, points to another. The limits of philosophy are coextensive with the limits of human intellect. Thus it would seem that, if there is a mode by which the human person may come into relation to that whole which exceeds the limits of finite being, it will not be the human intellect, the operation of which is confined to finite propositions. But this is just as well, because our own human experience suggests that objective knowledge alone does not constitute a whole, as if it were enough merely to know some set of objects, however extensive. Rather it is the operation of subjectivity that makes objects into a meaningful whole, one which points to and gives expression to the freedom characteristic of personhood. This was Nietzsche's fundamental insight: that will, and not merely intellect, is what accounts for the whole. Because, however, he identified this will with the finite human will, he concluded that the whole must consist in culture, which shapes the fragments of Nature into a synthesis that transcends the natural. Even so, his work reflects a telling ambivalence about the capacity of the finite human will to produce such a synthesis, resorting as he does to vague invocations of the metaphysical origins of the genius, which also fails to explain how the existing order in Nature makes such a synthesis possible. Confronting his account with that of MacIntyre opens up the view to a third possibility: that divine freedom, which is itself the source of order in the universe, is also what finally forms its various fragments into a genuine whole. But to speak of divine freedom is to enter unambiguously into the realm of theology, not as a backdrop for the work of philosophy but as the central locus of integration.

## **The Whole in Fragment:**

### Balthasar and the Perception of God's Glory

In our search for the whole, two well-honed critiques of the university have served to clarify the path along which we may, and may not, reasonably hope to discover something that gathers into a unity the various fragments of the world. For if such a thing is to be found anywhere, the university would seem to be a more likely place in which to discover it, since teaching and research are oriented in principle to the whole of being. To the extent that the university has fallen short of this native aspiration, critiques such as those of Nietzsche and MacIntyre indicate the direction in which the more complete fulfillment of its mission may lie, together with the point of integration that such a mission implies. Nor are the two particular critiques we have considered here utterly singular and idiosyncratic. Rather their great value lies in the exemplary way that they pursue to the utmost limit the logic of two characteristic operations of the human person: reason and will. Thus in Nietzsche's account of the unifying possibilities of culture, we see the limits of human action in general, including alternative accounts that might emphasize, for example, social justice or classical liberalism instead. And in MacIntyre's account of philosophy's integrative role, we see the limits of all human thought, which always leaves an unexplained remainder, since even philosophy can ultimately explain only essences and not existence.

The unfinished character of both proposed syntheses suggest that full and final integration can lie only at a more fundamental level, and thus theology. Joseph Ratzinger has



said as much. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that the university as we know it in the West owes its very origins to the advent of Christianity and its theology. “For the university came into being,” claims Ratzinger, “because faith declared the search for the truth to be possible and urged believers to participate in that search, which then in turn demanded a broadening of its scope to include all levels of human knowledge and thus brought forth the various faculties, which nevertheless were all held together, despite the variety of their respective subjects, by their common subordination to the question of truth, the possibility of which, as they all knew, was guaranteed by the faculty of theology.”<sup>1</sup> What precisely was so revolutionary about Christian theology that it could spark such a development? Ratzinger points to the foundational claim of Christology, already evident in the Gospel of John, that in the person of Jesus, the whole of the divine Logos is present. The implications of such a claim are two-fold: first, that the source and origin of all being accords with human reason even if its infinite dimensions exceed the limits of human thought, and second, that the human person is able to come into contact with this infinite reality in Jesus. “When the Gospel of John names Christ the Logos...[it] expresses the conviction that what is reasonable, indeed, fundamental reason itself, comes to light in the Christian faith; it means to say that the very foundation of being is reason.”<sup>2</sup>

In principle, such a theology should be able to reveal what makes a whole of the fragments not just of the university but of the universe, where culture and philosophy have failed to do so. But this does not bring our enquiry to an end, because it is precisely at this point that the problem of fragmentation can at last appear in all its radicality, revealing inherent obstacles to the integration of all things. At issue is not merely the practical problem that theology has

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 151.

<sup>2</sup> Ratzinger, 148.

been marginalized in, and even in large part expelled from, the modern university.<sup>3</sup> More to the point are the changes that academic theology has undergone in order to conform to the norms of modern epistemology. To avoid expulsion from the academy, theology has learned that it “can retreat into a thoroughgoing professionalism and thus prove that it completely measures up to the canon of positivistic reason. In this way it attains the same rank as the other specialized disciplines of scholarship.”<sup>4</sup> But even this historical contingency is merely a reflection of the underlying and abiding tension that uniquely characterizes Christian theology. For it is the claim of Christianity that God communicates his infinite Word to the finite human person in Jesus. Theology, therefore, is not first of all man’s speech about God, but God’s direct address to man. How can the finite being recognize such communication as divine, since it must necessarily take the form of his own finite categories? And even should he be able to recognize it as such, how can he then reflect on and represent what has been communicated to him without reducing it to his own measure, effectively destroying it in the process? In this context, the limitations of human thought and action, which in their own spheres proved unable to effect a synthesis of all things, suddenly seem to threaten theology’s capacity to do the same. If what God seeks to communicate to the creature must necessarily be reduced to the measure of human thought and action, then it is bound to remain fragmented even in its highest forms of realization as religious philosophy and Christian culture. As Hans Urs von Balthasar notes, “In philosophy, man discovers what is humanly knowable about the depths of being; in existence, man lives out what is humanly livable. But Christianity disappears the moment it allows itself to be dissolved into a

---

<sup>3</sup> Ratzinger highlight this fact, as does MacIntyre. Ratzinger, 151; MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 175.

<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics*, 152.

transcendental precondition of human self-understanding in thinking or living, knowledge or deed.”<sup>5</sup>

To come into relation to the whole that God wishes to communicate to his creature thus requires the exercise of a capacity beyond just the will and the intellect. For, only a capacity that enables an encounter with the other precisely as other, without simultaneously reducing it to one’s self, will be adequate for the integral exchange between the infinite and the finite. But this, notes Balthasar, is just what occurs in the “aesthetic sphere... a third, irreducible realm next to that of thought and action.”<sup>6</sup> In the act of perception (αἴσθησις), even that which exceeds the understanding and the abilities of the beholder is made present to him in its integrity. In principle, therefore, it also has the power of attuning him with ever greater precision to those aspects of its form that initially escape his grasp. It is on account of this double effect that Balthasar understands the aesthetic as the decisive juncture for theology, the vital entry point through which God can expand man’s limited horizons to the infinite measure of his own. And what is there, above all, to see in this divine horizon? Love. This is the astonishing revelation made visible in Jesus Christ: that God is Love. It is the essential property of divine love to give itself over to the other in total abandonment, establishing unity in difference. And it is on account of this unifying force that we can at last speak in earnest of catholicity, of the gathering up of all the fragments of the world into a genuine whole. As Balthasar sets out to explain, God’s love accomplishes this great act in a way perfectly suited to the nature of his creature, revealing his love in the flesh, the Whole discernible precisely in the fragment.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 51.

<sup>6</sup> Balthasar, 52.

<sup>7</sup> “The Whole in Fragment” is the literal translation of the title *Das Ganze im Fragment*, Balthasar’s book that treats the problem of time and the fragmentariness of existence. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967).

### Seeing the Form: Theological Aesthetics

If God does in fact will to communicate his own divine unity to the world, and thus to draw its many fragments into one, then this act cannot be anticipated in advance. The matter lies entirely in the realm of divine freedom. There can be no question, then, of stipulating from the outset on the basis of *a priori* reasoning what form such unity might take. In this way, a properly theological account of the whole will necessarily differ in kind, and not just in degree, from those that emerge from the realms of human action and human thought. Accounts of unity according to these two inner worldly modes take as their starting point a particular method and set of premises, from which logically follows a set of steps that will have to be pursued if the stated aim is to be accomplished. If, by contrast, God elects to act in favor of the world's unity, the divine event must first come to pass before it can be recognized as such. But how, in that case, can it be recognized at all? What human faculty could possibly be equal to the task of detecting divine action in the world?

The existence of the Christian faith is itself evidence of an answer to the conundrum. Uniquely among world religions both before and since, the disciples of Jesus came to recognize in a human person the fullness of the divinity. God appeared in flesh—an affirmation so foundational to the Christian faith that it belongs to the Scriptural witness and not merely to the theological writings of a later age. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” says John in the prologue of his gospel. “We have beheld his glory.” (Jn 1:14) Over the course of the centuries, the Christological paradox at the heart of this mystery has prompted unending theological reflection, and with good reason. How indeed can God take on flesh? How can such incommensurate natures be brought into union, and what is the balance between them? Far less attention, however, has been paid to the equally astonishing implications of the second clause,

perhaps on account of a tendency to see it as a mere extension of the mystery. But how is it that John and the other disciples “beheld his glory,” that they perceived in the man Jesus not merely the radiance of human excellence but “glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father”? In what way is the human faculty of perception capable of such an object, which is so out of proportion with things in the created order? That God should take on flesh is one thing, but that man should be able to perceive God precisely in the flesh is quite another. And the latter of the two mysteries grows only greater when it becomes clear that the former is in some way ordered to the latter.<sup>8</sup> It is no mere byproduct of the Incarnation that man should behold God’s glory but precisely an end for which God acted in taking on flesh. He wished to *appear*, confident that man’s power of perception was ultimately equal to the sight.

Of all the evangelists, John is particularly emphatic about the point. As in his gospel, so too do the opening lines of his first letter underscore the act of perception as foundational: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you.” (1 Jn 1:1-3) It is equally evident in the gospel accounts that a great many people see nothing more in Jesus than an unlettered man from the countryside: “How is it that this man has learning when he has never studied?” (Jn 7:15) The crowds press in on him, but few reach out in the conviction that “[i]f I touch even his garments, I shall be made well.” (Mk 5:28) So hidden is his divinity by the unexpected form in which it appears that Jesus can say from the Cross,

---

<sup>8</sup> For the consummate early expression of this mystery in the tradition, see Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against the Heresies: Book III*, trans. Dominic J. Unger and Matthew C. Steenberg, *Ancient Christian Writers* 64 (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), chaps. 11, 16, 19, 22.

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Lk 23:34; cf. 1 Cor 2:7-8) And yet, John in particular is also aware of numerous encounters in which someone is led from not perceiving the divine depths of the man Jesus to perceiving it. The dramatic pattern, which is already evident at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in his dialogue with the woman at the well (Jn 4:1-42), reaches its most iconic expression in the healing of the man born blind, which places the granting of physical sight in parallel with the spiritual recognition of Jesus as the “light of the world.” (Jn 9:5) At first, the blind man knows only that the one who enabled him to gain his sight, whom he did not see physically, was “the *man* called Jesus.” (9:11) Later, in the face of questions by those who insist that Jesus is not from God because he heals on the sabbath, the man is able to go further: “He is a *prophet*.” (9:17) Finally, after ever more strident debate with the Pharisees, he once again encounters Jesus, whom he is able to see physically for the first time. But with Jesus’ help, he will now profess to see even more. Does he believe in the Son of man, asks Jesus. His answer betrays a disposition of readiness and receptivity: “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” (9:36) At this, the divine word rings out in the intimate cadences of a human voice: “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.” (9:37; cf. 4:26) “*Lord*,” he says, “I believe.” (9:38)

If we have come to associate theology above all with an act of the intellect seeking to make sense of the data of revelation, it is a vital corrective to recall that God’s communication to man, and thus theology in its most proper sense (ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ), belongs rather to the realm of perception. As Balthasar points out, this essential fact of revelation is also, therefore, the inescapable starting point and enduring foundation of all theology in its secondary and derivative

sense as human reflection on God's action in Christ.<sup>9</sup> Theology thus involves a certain asceticism from the outset, since there is a natural counter-tendency to refer phenomena straightaway to the forum of the intellect and the will, where the initiative lies squarely with man to convert what he has seen into knowledge or a program of action. "The temptation to reach conclusions," notes Balthasar, "is particularly strong... If one cannot produce satisfactory research results here, then why should he write anything?"<sup>10</sup> Instead, if theology is to correspond to the nature of its object, it will have to adopt the mode proper to perception, namely unconditional receptivity, even if such a state and way of proceeding is initially uncomfortable. It will have to attend to the original phenomenon, which is no less paradoxical than the Christological mystery itself. "The Apostles were transported by what they saw, heard, and touched—by everything manifested in form," observes Balthasar. They "never tire of describing in ever new ways how Jesus' figure stands out in his encounters and conversations; how, as the contours of his uniqueness emerge, suddenly and in an indescribable manner the ray of the Unconditional breaks through, casting a person down to adoration and transforming him into a believer and a follower."<sup>11</sup>

Such an encounter in the order of grace is possible only because of the structure of the natural order, upon which, as Thomas tells us, grace builds.<sup>12</sup> To appreciate, therefore, how the faculty of perception is capable of mediating the encounter with the divine, we must pay attention to the operation of aesthetics in the order of nature. This is not to suggest by any means that the kind of perception made possible in the order of grace is simply continuous with the

---

<sup>9</sup> "[T]heological aesthetic," he argues, "far from being a negligible and dispensable by-product of theological thought, cannot but lay claim to the center of theology as the only valid approach." Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, ix.

<sup>11</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, 2nd ed., vol. 1, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 32.

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, a. 1, q. 8, ad. 2.

natural operation of the faculty. The orders of grace and nature must be distinguished, and it is for this reason that Balthasar is always careful to speak of the “aesthetic analogy”<sup>13</sup> and not of aesthetics *tout court*: “Nowhere does theological aesthetics descend to the level of an inner-worldly aesthetics.”<sup>14</sup> The analogy of being remains the essential reference point for understanding the relation between nature and grace. But this principle, which reaffirms with the Fourth Lateran Council that there is *in tanta similitudine major dissimilitudo*, also implies that a genuine similitude does nonetheless obtain between the two.<sup>15</sup> And what we find in the natural realm is that the most proper object of perception is not merely a mass of sense impressions but a coherent form or figure (in Balthasar’s usage, *Gestalt*). While made up of constituent parts, a form represents an irreducible whole; and while having an outward appearance, it also seems to point to an unseen reality that stands behind the form and constitutes its unity. As Balthasar explains, “We are confronted simultaneously with both the figure and that which shines forth from the figure... [W]e are brought face to face with both interiority and its communication, the soul and its body, free discourse governed by laws and clarity of language.”<sup>16</sup>

Some ages have shown a keener appreciation of this extraordinary feature of perception than others. The classical world could hardly restrain its appetite for ever more instantiations of beautiful forms, convinced that in them one could glimpse something of the invisible. Thus at the headwaters of Western thought it was already possible for the act of natural perception to take on a proto-theological orientation. We find the fullest articulation of this intuition in the *Symposium*, a dialogue that dates to the middle period of Plato’s corpus but which came to be considered something of the final word of his philosophy since it identifies man’s ultimate state of

---

<sup>13</sup> Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 1:475.

<sup>14</sup> Balthasar, 1:407.

<sup>15</sup> See Balthasar, 1:449.

<sup>16</sup> Balthasar, 1:20.



happiness, indeed the point to which all of existence is ordered. That state consists in the rapt beholding of the One, the Good beyond all worldly being which draws the beholder to itself by radiating its unparalleled beauty. But the journey to this exalted state begins with the humblest of experiences, one so narrow and particular as to seem antithetical to the divine horizon: youthful infatuation. The experience of perceiving the beauty of the beloved can be so overwhelming that the young lover imagines he has already discovered the heart of all existence. When, however, he encounters an entirely different form, the beauty of which similarly moves him, he begins to realize that particular instantiations of beauty do not exhaust all the many forms it can take. From this point on, he will be able to seek after beauty in whatever form it is to be found, his ability to perceive it growing ever more refined in the process: from bodies to customs and from customs to theories. “This,” says the philosopher Diotima to a young Socrates, “is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes upward for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs...so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful.”<sup>17</sup> What it is to be beautiful in an unconditional and infinite way, it seems to Plato, must be a single form that accounts for all the partial instantiations of beauty in the finite world. Thus even the lover who is drawn to beauty in its lowliest form will not be satisfied until he reaches Beauty itself. “There if anywhere should a person live his life, beholding that Beauty,” says Diotima. “[I]f he could see the divine Beauty itself in its one form, do you think it would be a poor life for a human being to look there and behold it?” No, concludes Diotima, “if any human being could become immortal, it would be he.”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Paul Woodruff and Alexander Nehamas (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), secs. 211c–211d.

<sup>18</sup> Plato, secs. 211d–212a.

We can leave to one side the obvious ways in which this exercise in philosophical aesthetics departs from the theological phenomenon described in the foundational texts of Christianity. In Plato's understanding, for example, the attainment of ultimate unity can only mean a flight from the world: the whole realm of multiplicity must be left behind. And the love that drives the entire movement is found exclusively on the side of the finite human person. Two features of Plato's account, however, provide lively insight into the operation of the aesthetic faculty which indicate why it is uniquely suited to the encounter of the human with the divine. First, unlike the intellect and the will, the reach of which are limited to the measure of an agent's own abilities, the power of perception enables an agent to come into contact with a reality that entirely surpasses his own limitations. If the lover in Diotima's schematic is first drawn by the beauty of a form well within the scope of his own experience, by the end he finds himself absorbed in the contemplation of something of a different order altogether. Is such a possibility purely mythological? For proof, says Balthasar, one need only think of our experience of hearing a great work of music. "What we encounter in such an experience is as overwhelming as a miracle, something we will never get over. And yet it possesses its intelligibility precisely *as* a miracle."<sup>19</sup> That is to say, we simultaneously experience it as something that lies outside our capacity for invention and yet nevertheless has a definite plausibility about it. The second feature of the aesthetic that Plato's account brings to light is its susceptibility to attunement. In what Diotima imagines as an ascent from lower forms of beauty to higher ones, the lover's ability to discern beauty grows ever more perfect precisely in the process of being exposed to his object in different forms. If the human person is to detect God present and active in the world, it is similarly true that he will have to develop an " 'eye for quality' ...analogous to the eye of the

---

<sup>19</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 52–53.

connoisseur which can infallibly distinguish art from kitsch.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the capacity of the aesthetic to be honed by exposure to its object proves all the more critical in the theological realm, since the object in such a case is by definition utterly unique. For man to recognize God in Christ, the eye for this phenomenon will have to be “bestowed along with the phenomenon itself.”<sup>21</sup> And in such a case, the incomparability of the figure of Christ provides precisely the measure for its recognition. “This discernment is but the perception of the manner in which the God-given form distinguishes and sets itself apart from all others.”<sup>22</sup>

Taking stock, then, we can now see that if God elects to draw the world into his own divine unity, he will have to communicate infinite fullness to the finite creature. And this seems, in principle, impossible. “A whole symphony,” as Balthasar colorfully puts it, “cannot be recorded on a tape that is too short.”<sup>23</sup> But the aesthetic, the human faculty essentially ordered to receptivity, is in fact well-suited to the operation. This is so not because the finite human faculty is itself capable of the infinite. It plainly is not. “[T]he image of Christ cannot be ‘taken in’ as can a painting; its dimensions are objectively infinite, and no finite spirit can traverse them.”<sup>24</sup> There can be no question, then, of the receptive human faculty reaching the ‘end’ of the infinite phenomenon and thus of containing the whole within itself. Such a state would necessarily entail the end of receptivity too, but the suitability of the aesthetic as the forum of divine self-communication lies precisely in its essentially receptive modality. Even so, perception alone will not be enough. The will and the intellect too will be required, first to welcome, and then to make sense of, the sign of God. As such, both the will and the intellect will have to come to share in

---

<sup>20</sup> Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 1:468.

<sup>21</sup> Balthasar, 1:468.

<sup>22</sup> Balthasar, 1:469.

<sup>23</sup> Balthasar, 1:499.

<sup>24</sup> Balthasar, 1:499.

the essentially receptive orientation of the aesthetic. “The prerequisite for sighting the form of Jesus is faith in God, in the very general sense that a person must make space for divine omnipotence—all the space that this form needs in order to unfold fully.”<sup>25</sup> It is for this reason that the theme of receptivity echoes through the prologue of John’s gospel like the refrain of a Greek chorus drawing our attention to the central dramatic tension of the Christ event: “He came to his own home, and his people received him not” (Jn 1:11); “But to all who received him...he gave power to become children of God” (1:12); “And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace” (1:16). But in what form does this fullness appear? In what does it consist? To this we now turn.

### **The Form of the God-Man**

Any attempt to articulate the form of Christ immediately runs up against an intrinsic difficulty of which even the gospel writers are aware, perhaps especially so. “[W]ere every one of the [things Jesus did] to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” (Jn 21:25) Fittingly, this is the final word of the fourth (and final) gospel—a kind of open-ended non-conclusion and one which has a characteristically playful and childlike air about it. Balthasar, who like Georges Rouault on canvas, tried to catch a glimpse of the face of Christ in the numerous literary portraits he penned, is also aware of the difficulty.<sup>26</sup> “Scripture witnesses that the letter cannot keep pace with the fullness of Christ in its attempt to express it.”<sup>27</sup> The most one can do at any one time, then, is to give careful attention to a discrete set of salient features that emerge in the gospel narratives, confident that these and countless others converge on the one same divine ‘I.’ As Balthasar notes, “We shall never be in a position

---

<sup>25</sup> Balthasar, 1:499.

<sup>26</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth Is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 35.

to encapsulate the mystery of this 'I', with its nearness and its distance, in a concept or a formula, for at its heart lies the mystery of the relationship between God, the Absolute, and man, the relative."<sup>28</sup>

Given the distinctive role John's gospel plays in theological aesthetics according to Balthasar, we can perhaps take our bearings once again from his prologue. There he summarizes the whole phenomenon of Christ as a radiance of glory, "glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father." (Jn 1:14) It is a curious formulation, and its strangeness is not easily resolved by understanding it simply as indicating a theophany, though it certainly does that too. Rather, it draws attention precisely to the fact of Jesus' being a Son from all eternity. That Jesus referred to God as his Father is clear in all of the gospels; and that he himself wishes to be understood as Son is also well-attested, though in the synoptics the phrases "Son of man" and "Son of God" (cf. Mt 16:16; 26:63) are more prominent as ways that he refers to himself and others to him. Jesus' reference to himself as "the Son" is most typical of John's narrative, although it does appear in a highly significant passage common to Matthew and Luke: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Mt 11:27; Lk 10:22)

One aspect of this phenomenon is especially noteworthy on Balthasar's telling. In what is a mark of its incomparable nature, the form of the Son has a certain stereoscopic quality to it. As Jesus says repeatedly and in a variety of ways, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn 14:9) The irreducible strangeness of this transparent form, as it were, continues to challenge even his closest disciples to the end of his earthly life. At the Last Supper, even Philip, who readily

---

<sup>28</sup> Balthasar, 28.

recognized Jesus as the Messiah at their first encounter (1:49), struggles to grasp that Jesus reveals the Father in his very self. “Lord,” says Philip, “show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.” (14:8) How easy it is to understand the disciples’ confusion. It is not immediately obvious in the order of nature how a form can communicate not only itself but also an other. But this is precisely what characterizes the form of Christ, the revelation of which will also disclose a possibility latent in the created order. As Balthasar observes, “He *is* what he expresses—namely, God—but he is not whom he expresses—namely, the Father. This incomparable paradox stands as the fountainhead of the Christian aesthetic, and therefore of all aesthetics!”<sup>29</sup> Jesus does not merely leave his disciples before a bald assertion, but rather indicates in his statements about himself how this surprising state of affairs is possible. His entire life is marked by a *not* doing and a *not* having: “I can do nothing on my own authority...I seek not my own will.” (5:30) This negation, however, is not the mark of a pure passivity, but of the most active receptivity and cooperation. He has his own genuine ‘I’ which is not only distinct from that of the Father but which also rings out with all the authority of the divinity. Thus he can say, “My Father is working still, and I am working” (5:17), but also, “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he” (8:28), applying to himself the divine name. In this light, it becomes clear that the negations that are so prominent in Jesus’ statements about himself are at the service of a positive end: that the Father and his will might appear in the world through the Son’s making that will his own.

The receptivity which is characteristic of the Son is not limited to the forum of the will, however. Everything the Son has and is he receives from the Father, including life itself. “I live because of the Father” (Jn 6:57), says Jesus, for “as the Father has life in himself, so he has

---

<sup>29</sup> Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 1:29. (emphasis original)

granted the Son also to have life in himself.” (5:26) In addition to the Father’s will and the works he gives the Son to perform (14:10), the Son also receives from him words (3:34), teaching (7:16), glory (8:54), and fundamentally his love (3:35). In his revelation of the Father, therefore, the Son also reveals what is distinctive of his own person. As Balthasar explains, “The Son’s form of existence, which makes him the Son from all eternity (17:5), is the uninterrupted reception of everything that he is, of his very self, from the Father.”<sup>30</sup> It is for this reason that John can sum up the whole mystery of Christ in terms of the all-embracing glory of his being a Son. For the revelation of receptivity in the very heart of the Godhead reaches out to every other aspect of the divine mystery.

Christ’s divine sonship also reveals the meaning of the created order, as indeed it must if creaturely being can be assumed by the eternal Son. In light of the eternally uninterrupted act of the Son’s generation from the Father, the multiplicity of the finite world suddenly appears as a positive work of Providence rather than a threat to the ultimate unity of all things. Indeed, as Balthasar sets out to explain, eyes trained by the contemplation of the Son will be able to see in the apparent fragmentariness of the world an image of eternity. To see how this is so, one can begin with the feature of the created world that seems to sum up in itself the very essence of finitude, that is, time. One of the primary ways we speak of the distinction between the realms of created and uncreated being is precisely in terms of time and eternity, and fittingly so, since the essential limitedness of all finite things is nowhere made more manifest than in the inexorable passage of time. If anything renders the created order a series of fragments, it is this. But the Son eternally receives his being from the Father in a ceaseless act of generation. He is pure receptivity. “Now it is his receptivity to everything that comes to him from the Father that is the

---

<sup>30</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 30.

basis of *time* and *temporality*,” says Balthasar.<sup>31</sup> Far from being antithetical to the integral and eternal being of God, time is a fitting and indeed most remarkable image of the perpetual openness of the divine Son to receive from the Father the whole that he wills to communicate. “It expresses, clearly and precisely, the fact that the Son in eternity makes nothing his own in any way that contradicts its being given to him, continually, ceaselessly, by the Father.”<sup>32</sup> Such an affirmation in no way threatens to conflate the distinct realities of created and uncreated being or to project a worldly phenomenon onto eternity. Time is an image of eternity, not the other way around. But to the extent that it is genuinely an image, the analogy obtains. And the power of this analogy, this real likeness between the Creator and his creation, appears most clearly in the earthly life of the eternal Son which reveals the meaning of created order. What his life reveals about time, the fundamental constituent of this order, is that it has the meaning of love, as intimate exchange between Father and Son. “[H]is possession and experience in this world of that which is his own,” explains Balthasar, “is going to be, not all in one flash, but something received by him, and hence continually offered up to him, given back to him and again received as yet another new gift of love.”<sup>33</sup>

The only thing that renders time fragmentary is sin, a reality completely alien to the Son and to the plan of creation. “God intended man to have *all* good, but in his, God’s, time,” observes Balthasar.<sup>34</sup> Thus the first account of creation in Genesis carefully marks the passage of time, but always in relation to the orderly unfolding of the many good things God prepares as gifts for the human person (cf. Gen 1:29-30). The second account of creation, in a distinct but complementary way, conveys a blissful lack of awareness of the passage of time, calling

---

<sup>31</sup> Balthasar, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Balthasar, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 1:34.

<sup>34</sup> Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 36.



attention to it only when God warns the man and woman against a future possibility: “when you eat from [the tree of knowledge of good and evil] you will die.” (Gen 2:17) In the end, the alternative picture that the serpent paints of the future proves too enticing: “when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods.” (Gen 3:5) Sin always has this character as a breaking out of time and an anticipating by our own efforts the good that God wishes to give us. “[W]e sin,” notes Balthasar, “in order to arrogate to ourselves a sort of eternity, to ‘take the long view’ and ‘make sure of things’.”<sup>35</sup> But in laying claim to eternity and to godlike status, the finite creature has in view only his limited horizon and invariably chooses some limited good in place of the fullness prepared for him by God. He prefers the part to the whole. His sin thus renders the finite world, the original meaning of which is streaming openness to God, into a series of incommensurate shards.

The Son suffers the contradictions of sin “to the end” (Jn 13:1), giving new proof in time of his eternal love for the Father. Since he does this as a human person, he also gives new proof of man’s love for God and shows his brothers and sisters from within their own vantage point how to love God. It is for this reason that the fourth gospel understands the whole earthly life of the Son as oriented toward his “hour” (cf. 2:4; 7:6; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:21,32; 17:1), which is also the decisive hour for all mankind (4:23; cf. 5:25,28). If man has treated passing time as a container to fill as he pleases, the Son goes to the Cross under the strictest obedience to the Father so that time might once again be filled with his love. “[A]s it grows toward fulfillment,” therefore, the time of the Son’s earthly life “assumes into itself the growing emptiness and desolation of the unreal time of sin...not only in order to know it and having known it to overcome it, but in order to fill it with valid meaning.”<sup>36</sup> All the contradictions of sin

---

<sup>35</sup> Balthasar, 36.

<sup>36</sup> Balthasar, 42–43.

amass in force at the Cross, the place where the earthly form of the Son is threatened with disfigurement to the point of erasure. And thus it is precisely there that the Son, who lets himself be led to that point by the Father, can lead mankind out of the place of brokenness and fragmentation. In enduring the clash of all the particular and incommensurate standpoints, the Son reveals “the most active readiness...to step in, according to the Father’s will, on behalf of every individual. In this way, he does not overcome the particular from outside, but, acknowledging what is relatively valid in it, leads it beyond itself from within.”<sup>37</sup>

The reduction of his bodily form to a state of formlessness in the process is itself a revelation. It recalls the extraordinary event which set his whole life on earth in motion, when, as Balthasar puts it, the Son “in seed-like nothingness let himself be implanted in the Mother’s womb by the Holy Spirit, ready and open for every wish that came from the Father.”<sup>38</sup> The Christ hymn that Paul cites in his letter to the Philippians is evidence of the fact that Christians had already begun to contemplate this mystery from the earliest days of the Church. “Christ Jesus,” so they sang, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Phil 2:5-7) But that is not all. Having thus let go of his form once before, he did so again in accepting the formlessness of death. “And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (2:8) On the day of his resurrection, it at last becomes possible to see that this perpetual readiness to submit to formlessness is what makes possible the gift of eternal life to the sinful creature. It also, therefore, becomes the characteristic sign of his boundless love, which stops at nothing to gather all things into one.

---

<sup>37</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 39–40.

<sup>38</sup> Balthasar, 25.

This, then, is the glory of the Son: that he so receives his being from the Father as to stand in a state of perpetual openness to whatever the Father proposes in whatever form it may take. This glory grows only more radiant when it begins to dawn that, in thus revealing the inner divine life to us, he also reveals the intimate state into which we as creatures are invited.

### **Catholicity between Form and Formlessness**

Our search for the whole thus finds its surprising resolution here in the figure of Christ. The readiness to accept every form from the Father as it comes is the participation in the divine fullness that is proper to the creature: the Whole communicated precisely in parts. It is this relationship to the divine totality that Jesus embodies, models, and makes possible in his unlimited availability to receive whatever the Father wishes to give him and to take on whichever form of life in which the Father wishes to institute him. In him and in the way that he opens to the Father, it at last becomes possible to speak of catholicity—of a genuine orientation of all parts to the whole—without an asterisk indicating unresolved questions, such as those that surround the metaphysical origins of Nietzsche’s genius and philosophy’s inability to account in a meaningful way for the existence of the essences it interrelates. But this means that the foundations of catholicity lie neither in the intellect nor in a positive act of the will but in a prior disposition—indeed, the very receptivity characteristic of the eternal Son, who even in his earthly mission let himself be led entirely by the Father. As Balthasar notes, “He did not have a plan of work neatly drawn up but harkened to the inner voice, with an overflowing desire to receive and carry out the Father’s instructions,” a disposition already evident in the most striking of ways in the act of the Incarnation itself.<sup>39</sup> In his embrace of the formlessness of the womb, we

---

<sup>39</sup> Balthasar, 25–26.

see to what degree his life is marked by “an in-difference, a lack of distinction, consisting of pure readiness for God.”<sup>40</sup>

*Indifference*, then, is the enduring foundation of Christ’s orientation to the whole and thus of those who seek to follow him along the way. But this state of readiness, which is characterized by a fundamental lack of form, is ordered precisely to the taking on of definite form, according to what God should desire at any given point. It is in this act of being formed into something quite definite and particular that the individual creature receives an integral place in the divine totality. As Balthasar explains, the “superordinate reality can so inform a subordinate plurality that the latter is lifted up into the former’s unity without being robbed of its distinctive character.”<sup>41</sup> In the case of the human person, who is possessed of a free will, such a principle takes on the special character of an *election*, a free choice to embrace that which God proposes. By choosing what God offers him to choose, the person receives a place in “a whole that transforms his particularities into ministries.”<sup>42</sup> Paradoxically, rather than finding his freedom limited by such a state, “in a way that exceeds all hope, each of his freedoms finds itself in a broad space where, released from all narrowness, it can make its personal contribution to the whole on the basis of the equally personal Spirit of the Whole.”<sup>43</sup> That is, he will discover precisely in his particular task and form of life a view to that totality in which God incorporates him, which does not however mean that he somehow acquires a kind of superhuman oversight of the whole that allows him to float above the particularities, and indeed real difficulties, of the place in which he has been placed. Quite to the contrary, a person so instituted will at last be in a position to experience the enormous weight of the resistance to divine love under which the

---

<sup>40</sup> Balthasar, 26.

<sup>41</sup> Balthasar, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Balthasar, 43.

<sup>43</sup> Balthasar, 44.

created world labors, without seeking to give himself an escape. Having spoken his Yes to God in a quite unlimited way, he will let himself be led where he does not spontaneously prefer to go (cf. Jn 21:18) “If God increases his demands,” says Balthasar, “if the path becomes steeper and harder (until it reaches the foot of the cross), the original Yes expands.”<sup>44</sup> Such an expansion in the face of trial is possible only because a strict and abiding *obedience*, an echo in the life of the disciple of the pure and uncompromising obedience of the Son which is revealed above all at the Cross.

Indifference, election, obedience. These three elements constitute the drama of catholicity in the life of the creature, who is brought into relation to the divine whole along the way opened by the Son. But these are also the central pillars of the Ignatian *Exercises*. And so it is no surprise that Balthasar should have dedicated his book on catholicity to the ‘pilgrim’ saint who learned to ‘find God in all things’ in his contemplation of the figure of Christ. It was his development of a profound theological aesthetic that enabled Ignatius in turn to teach others how to discern the call of “the Eternal King, before whom is assembled the whole world” and whose summons goes forth “to all...and to each one in particular.”<sup>45</sup> The grace one prays for in the Exercises “not to be deaf to his call, but prompt and diligent to accomplish his most holy will” is not only foundational to the life of Christian discipleship but its permanent disposition.<sup>46</sup> In a great oscillation between form and formless readiness, one must be perpetually listening for the call so as to be formed by it anew. “That person has the greatest freedom,” remarks Balthasar, “who can let go of his present form and allow himself to be regenerated in the formless origin, in the

---

<sup>44</sup> Balthasar, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), #95.

<sup>46</sup> Loyola, #91.

nothingness of the seed-cell—his original vocation, which has always remained fresh!”<sup>47</sup> It is just such a freedom that one encounters in the life of Ignatius and that accounts for his role in facilitating the formation of so many others—a “universal molder of men because he himself remained universally pliable.”<sup>48</sup> Thus in retrospect it is no surprise that the Order he founded quickly became involved in education, even if such a mission was not immediately clear to him and his first companions. Nor is it difficult to see, in light of the encounter with Christ made possible by the Exercises, what inevitably became the most distinctive feature and integrating center of that education. Indeed, the catholicity of an education is still to be found where Ignatius and his first companions sought it: in the cultivation of a profound theological aesthetic, which alone is capable of perceiving the whole in the midst of fragments.

---

<sup>47</sup> Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> Balthasar, 26.

## **A Sense for the Whole :**

### Ignatius and the Founding Intuition of Jesuit Education

One of the most extraordinary documents that survives from the earliest years of the Society of Jesus is also one that, until recently, has remained largely overlooked in the numerous studies of Jesuit education. It is the letter which Pierre Favre wrote in May 1541 to the first group of scholastics that Ignatius Loyola sent to the University of Paris to undertake the studies necessary to be fully incorporated into the Society.<sup>1</sup> While Ignatius and the first companions had originally imagined that those joining the Society would, like them, have already acquired “sufficient learning” for the Order’s *consueta ministeria*, they quickly “found it a quite difficult matter to increase the numbers of this Society with such good and learned men.”<sup>2</sup> They decided therefore to “take another path, that of admitting young men whose good habits of life and talent give hope that they will become both virtuous and learned in order to labor in the vineyard of Christ our Lord.”<sup>3</sup> The group at Paris thus represented a vital experiment for the future of the Order and the first venture of the Society of Jesus into the field of education: the Society itself would see to it that these and other young men acquired the requisite learning. In what did such

---

<sup>1</sup> *Monumenta Fabri*, 102-106 (Epist. 35). There are two English translations in print: Pierre Favre, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre: The Memoriale and Selected Letters and Instructions*, trans. Martin E. Palmer (Saint Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 323–26; Cristiano Casalini and Claude N. Pavor, eds., *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540-1616: A Reader* (Boston, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, Boston College, 2016), 37–39.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Padberg, ed., *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 130, #380.

<sup>3</sup> Padberg, 132, #380.

learning consist? And is it possible to discern, already here at the origin of a long and storied educational tradition, “a specific Jesuit concept of education?”<sup>4</sup>

The choice to send the young men to the University of Paris supplies part of the answer. The curriculum there remained firmly scholastic in content, with pride of place given to the philosophy of Aristotle and, at its apex, the theology of Thomas Aquinas and to a lesser extent Peter Lombard. Indeed, the Jesuit *Constitutions* would eventually identify “the scholastic doctrine of St. Thomas” as the one to be followed above all on account of its having been “deemed...more solid and safe.”<sup>5</sup> At first glance, then, it might well seem as though Jesuit education began as a development wholly within scholasticism, and not a particularly innovative one at that. But even by the time the first companions had arrived in Paris a decade earlier, the University had already adopted certain practices developed in Renaissance humanist circles as well, including most notably the commitment to “an organized plan for the progress of the student through increasingly complex materials and a codification of pedagogical techniques designed to elicit active response from the learner.”<sup>6</sup> These features too became known as elements of the *modus parisiensis*, even if they owed their development in part to the activity of humanist figures outside of France.<sup>7</sup> Renaissance humanism, in fact, would eventually prove even more influential in shaping Jesuit education than scholasticism once the Society opened its classrooms to non-Jesuit students, few of whom went beyond the foundational subjects of the *studia humanitatis* to study philosophy and theology.<sup>8</sup> If scholastic content and, to a certain degree, method continued to structure studies at the highest levels, it is nevertheless the case that

---

<sup>4</sup> Casalini and Pavor, *Jesuit Pedagogy*, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Padberg, *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, 182, #464.

<sup>6</sup> John W. O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 217.

<sup>7</sup> O’Malley, 217.

<sup>8</sup> John W. O’Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate? Studies in Jesuit History* (Brill, 2013), 181–98.



“the fundamental humanistic philosophy of education...provided the Jesuits with the core values for their pedagogy,” especially in regard to the vast majority of students in their schools.<sup>9</sup>

Once again, then, the question arises whether Jesuit education is not basically a derivative phenomenon. Does it represent at bottom an appropriation of existing educational ideals and methods, distinguished only by an innovative organizational effort that enabled their replication on the grand scale? If so, the story of Jesuit education may well be one of great historical and sociological interest but not of theological significance in the strict sense. It will have influenced the development of educational systems and perhaps even the course of history but not have disclosed for us new vistas of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

Here is where Favre’s letter proves invaluable, pointing to the genuine theological *novum* at the heart of Jesuit education: the primacy it accords to theological aesthetics. Beyond sheer acquisition of knowledge and even beyond character development, the first Jesuits conceived education as finally ordered to the relishing of God’s glory made manifest above all in the Cross, which itself made possible a correct perception of God’s presence in all creaturely being. Favre encourages the scholastics to keep this perspective always in mind in the course of their studies, framing his letter at both beginning and end by reference to a key word that each of them would instantly have recognized as central to the Spiritual Exercises: in Spanish, “*sentir*,” and in Latin, “*sentire*.” Writing mostly in Spanish except when citing texts more commonly known to his readers in Latin, Favre announces the theme of his letter in terms of a “desire of mine and of the entire Society” that the scholastics “not extinguish the spirit of holy sensing [*el espíritu del santo sentir*] with the spirit of knowing [*el espíritu del saber*].”<sup>10</sup> The word “sentir” is famously difficult to render in English owing to its multiple connotations, which include feeling,

---

<sup>9</sup> Casalini and Pavar, *Jesuit Pedagogy*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> My translation. *MonFabri*, 102.

perceiving, thinking, understanding, and sensing; and the two published English translations of the letter opt instead for a combination: “thinking and feeling.”<sup>11</sup> But the context here makes clear that Favre is deliberately setting *sentir* in opposition to the specifically rational-intellectual operation *saber*, so reference to “thinking” perhaps muddies the waters. Favre is not encouraging the scholastics to cultivate a disposition of thinking as against knowing. (What would that even mean?) Rather he is reminding them of a dynamic from the Spiritual Exercises that would have been intimately familiar to them: after having considered something using the three powers of the soul (memory, intellect, and will), the exercitant refers it finally to the realm of the spiritual senses, which enables one to perceive more of the mystery than man’s reason can reduce to propositions.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the attuning of one’s natural senses to the supernatural reality of which they are also capable constitutes, after the election, the central drama of the Spiritual Exercises and is ordered to introducing the exercitant to a permanently new mode of being in the wake of the retreat. As Karl Rahner has noted, “No one who has really grasped Christ with his senses can be turned aside by anything else.”<sup>13</sup>

We know from his *Memoriale* that, at the time he wrote this letter, Favre was actively engaged in giving the Exercises in Regensburg, as indeed he did throughout his years of apostolic activity. He also continued to find much fruit in making meditations from the Spiritual Exercises himself, among them notably the one on “the five senses,”<sup>14</sup> and found new strength “from the hand of the Holy Spirit” in the form of “more knowledge and feeling [*sentimento*]” in

---

<sup>11</sup> Casalini and Pavur, *Jesuit Pedagogy*, 29. Martin Palmer renders it with a substantive as “thought and feeling.” Favre, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, 324.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the “application of the senses” in Weeks 2-4. Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, ##121, 204, 226.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Rahner, *Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*, vol. 16, Theological Investigations (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 88.

<sup>14</sup> See Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, ##247-48.

his customary methods of prayer.<sup>15</sup> But nothing gives so clear a picture of what Favre had in mind when exhorting the scholastics to maintain the spirit of holy *sentir* than a text from the Exercises that would have served as a daily reference point for him in his apostolic work: Annotation #2. In this instruction, the director of the exercises is encouraged to keep his explanations to the exercitant as concise as possible. “The reason for this,” as the annotation explains, “is that when one in meditating takes the solid foundation of facts, and goes over it and reflects on it for himself, he may find something that makes them a little clearer... Now this produces greater spiritual relish [*gustus*] and fruit than if one in giving the Exercises had explained and developed the meaning at great length.” This remarkable and innovative insight is then stated in the form of a principle: “For it is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the intimate understanding and relish [*sentire ac gustare interne*] of the truth.”<sup>16</sup> A more literal translation, which would render the key phrase as “interior sensing and tasting,” makes even clearer the way the contrast at issue in Annotation #2 parallels exactly the construction that Favre uses in his letter to the scholastics. Indeed, it appears as though Faber may even have intended to quote, or at least paraphrase, the Exercises in the closing line of his letter, in which he prays, “May our Lord grant us to sense him [*sentire de eo*] in the love of God and the passion of Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

Favre’s experience in the apostolate had confirmed for him the necessity of cultivating a profound theological aesthetic over even the most thorough mastery of propositional logic.

Working in the German lands at the height of tensions between Lutherans and Catholics, he had

---

<sup>15</sup> Favre, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, 76-77 (MonFabri §22).

<sup>16</sup> Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #2.

<sup>17</sup> My translation. *MonFabri*, 106. The pertinent part of the phrase is in Latin, which Favre typically reserves for quoted text, usually from the Vulgate. Since this phrase is not to be found in Scripture, we can posit that Favre was alluding to another familiar text, the most likely candidate for which is the Exercises.

witnessed the inability of scholastic style debate to settle the questions dividing Christians. As he told the Jesuit students in Paris, “Words and arguments no longer suffice to convince the people here.”<sup>18</sup> What the Church needed was rather radiant witnesses to Christian life that would draw people to a more lively practice of the faith, from which position mutual agreement and understanding would more readily flow. For this reason, wrote Favre, the scholastics “would do well to urge the scholars in Paris to pursue the life-giving spirit of letters by means of a life that is *visibly* dedicated to Christ, if they are to win to the faith those who have fallen.”<sup>19</sup> The commission has an almost breathtaking quality about it: that these students should have something not merely to receive from, but to transmit to, the scholastic doctors of the university. But of course this could be done only in the same spirit of humility which characterized the conviction itself. “With the world having reached such a state of unbelief,” wrote Favre, “what is needed are arguments of deeds and of blood; otherwise, things will only get worse and error will increase.”<sup>20</sup>

With the benefit of another year and a half of experience in the apostolate, Favre would go on to articulate more fully in his *Memoriale* the ordering of operations already implicit in his letter to the scholastics, from aesthetics to ethics to logic. The insight is remarkable, because it runs precisely counter to the presumption of Favre’s age, and perhaps our own, that logic is the starting point, from which flows ethics, and at last (as if an afterthought) aesthetics. Favre came to his conclusion by reference to the negative example of the heretics, who professed to act on the basis of logical reasoning, but in whom Favre noted a prior change in the realm of ethics. “I began to realize,” writes Favre, “how those who abandon the Church begin by becoming more

---

<sup>18</sup> Favre, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, 326.

<sup>19</sup> Favre, 326. (emphasis added)

<sup>20</sup> Favre, 326.

and more lukewarm in the performance of the works and practices which correspond to the graces and different gifts of God.” The result of this change in practice is a loss of contact with the whole complex of external inputs that make up the Catholic communion and that make sense of the propositions of the faith. “As a consequence,” observes Favre, “they regard as negligible and worthless anything they do not recognize as having been acquired by their own judgment.” Even if their gaze is thus fixed on the realm of reason, their base of operation is in fact the ethical, as they “begin to cherish a will to seek after and found a faith based on their own personal judgment.” Reason becomes the servant of the individual will, but in a way that remains unconscious. “They look for reasons and examine them, each on its own account. They search both the Scriptures and interpretations of them, deciding themselves what meaning to adopt. Thus they put together their own faith—better called their opinions and their errors.”<sup>21</sup> It was Favre’s developing sense of this fundamental dynamic that prompted him, already in 1541, to remind the Paris scholastics of the importance of cultivating not only a holy aesthetic but also the moral life. “If only we could reach the point where those who are so eager to build up the Catholic faith would also begin by their words and life to reconstruct and build up the fabric of morality—especially now, when mere learning is so ineffective against the heretics.”<sup>22</sup>

His experience in the apostolate thus confirmed for Favre that knowledge of the truth depended on the integrity of one’s moral life, and that one is drawn to such a life in turn by the perception of its goodness. On the basis of this alone, one might have the impression that, for Favre, while the ability to perceive true beauty was foundational, knowledge nevertheless remained the highest possibility of the human person and that therefore the *logical* enjoyed a certain priority over the *ethical* and the *aesthetic*. Such a position would bring him solidly into

---

<sup>21</sup> Favre, 195 (MonFabri §218).

<sup>22</sup> Favre, 326.

line with the scholastic doctors in Paris, distinguished only perhaps by his claim that the correct operation of the rational faculty depended on good order in the realms of the ethical and the aesthetic. But what is remarkable about Favre's letter to the Jesuit students in Paris is the clear primacy he accords to a theological aesthetic, to which even the whole order of the logical must ultimately be referred. In such a framework, a well-trained aesthetic appears as both foundation and summit of human wisdom and thus of education.

We see this paradigm at work in the practical method Favre proposes that the scholastics follow in their studies: to "have as [their] review tutor the supreme master and ultimate interpreter of learning...the Holy Spirit."<sup>23</sup> In what sense could this possibly qualify as a practical method? It sounds, especially to modern ears, like mere spiritualizing rhetoric. Inspiring perhaps and pious, but not at all practical. But when one understands the role a review tutor played in the University of Paris as well as the Biblical account of the Holy Spirit's operation on which Favre draws, both the practicality and spiritual richness of his advice become clear. The Holy Spirit, writes Favre, is the one "in whom whatever is known is known well, and without whom, *whoever knows anything does not yet know in the way he should know it* [1 Cor 8:2]."<sup>24</sup> As the Biblical context here makes clear, consulting with the Holy Spirit in prayer is the guarantee that one knows something correctly, because He always supplies the definitive measure, which is love. "Knowledge puffs up," explains St. Paul, "but love builds up." (1 Cor 8:1) Within the University of Paris, it was similarly the *repetitor*, or review tutor, that helped ensure that one had understood a lesson (*lectio*) correctly and could more surely retain it by reviewing its principal points. A student would typically meet with his review tutor for a

---

<sup>23</sup> Favre, 324.

<sup>24</sup> Casalini and Pavur, *Jesuit Pedagogy*, 38. (emphasis added to indicate Scripture citation)

*repetitio* each night before praying Compline.<sup>25</sup> In urging the Jesuit students to have the Holy Spirit as their review tutor, Favre was thus indicating that they should refer all their studies finally to God in prayer, asking him to provide the correct measure by which all was to be judged and understood. In this way they could be sure to “keep his spirit not only through the [*sentir*] of the will and the heart, but also by means of the knowledge of understanding.”<sup>26</sup> Most strikingly, when Favre sums up once again his advice to the scholastics, he makes it clear that this act of holy sensing is to be done not only after a lesson but also before. “[W]hat I am asking of you in the Lord is that you always prepare your lessons through so great a teacher and later review them with him as well.”<sup>27</sup> Referring all lessons to the Spirit would thus constitute the foundation and summit of their education.

### **Origins: the Education of Ignatius**

Favre’s instruction to the Jesuit students in Paris ultimately traces its origins to the intense period of instruction that Ignatius himself received at the hands of the Spirit some two decades earlier in Manresa. In his autobiography, Ignatius describes that decisive year as a time in which “God was dealing with him in the same way a schoolteacher deals with a child while instructing him.”<sup>28</sup> He goes on to relate five examples to illustrate the way in which God was teaching him, each of them centering on an experience in which mysteries of the faith were conveyed to him by means of his senses. It was a period in which Ignatius had become increasingly conscious of sensory experience and of the ways in which his spirit could be moved by it. Indeed, he begins the chapter on the year in Manresa by describing a phenomenon that

---

<sup>25</sup> Philippe Lécrivain, *Paris in the Time of Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Ralph C. Renner (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2011), 59.

<sup>26</sup> Casalini and Pavur, *Jesuit Pedagogy*, 38. See *MonFabri*, 103.

<sup>27</sup> Casalini and Pavur, 38.

<sup>28</sup> Ignatius Loyola, *A Pilgrim’s Journey: The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Joseph N. Tylenda (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 74, #27.

started to occur with great frequency at that time, how “in full daylight he saw a form in the air near him.”<sup>29</sup> As with so many of these experiences, Ignatius finds himself at a loss to describe it with precision, belonging as they do more to the realm of perception than cognition. “He did not understand what it really was, but it somehow seemed to have the shape of a serpent and had many things that shone like eyes, but were not eyes.”<sup>30</sup> What he was eminently aware of, though, was how much pleasure he took in gazing upon the form. It “gave him much consolation because it was exceedingly beautiful,”<sup>31</sup> and “the more he looked upon it, the more his consolation increased.”<sup>32</sup> The converse was also true. “[W]hen the object vanished he became disconsolate.”<sup>33</sup>

It was not until Ignatius had experienced the fifth of the events he mentions that he finally realized that this vision was from the evil spirit. And it is of utmost significance how he came to this understanding: through the training of his senses to recognize true beauty. While pausing for a moment of rest on his way to make a devotional visit to a church, “the eyes of his understanding were opened, and though he saw no vision, he understood and perceived many things, numerous spiritual things as well as matters touching on faith and learning, and this was with an elucidation so bright that all these things seemed new to him.”<sup>34</sup> The grace was so immense, reported Ignatius, that he felt sure he received more from God in that one moment than in the sum of all the other graces in his life. The key for our purposes is what happened next. “[H]e went to kneel before a cross...to give thanks to God, and there that vision appeared to him—the one that had appeared many times before and which he had never understood—that is,

---

<sup>29</sup> Loyola, 65, #19.

<sup>30</sup> Loyola, 65–66, #19.

<sup>31</sup> Loyola, 65, #19.

<sup>32</sup> Loyola, 66, #19.

<sup>33</sup> Loyola, 66, #19.

<sup>34</sup> Loyola, 79, #30.



the object...that seemed most beautiful to him, with its many eyes.”<sup>35</sup> But suddenly, in juxtaposition to the cross, the definitive measure of beauty, he could at last perceive the truth about the object that had long fascinated him. “Kneeling before the cross, he noticed that the object was without the beautiful color it usually had, and distinctly understood, and felt the firm agreement of his will, that that was the evil spirit.”<sup>36</sup>

This key moment marked the culmination of Ignatius’ instruction, but the four other examples he relates helps to complete the picture of “how God dealt with him” and how central a role sensory experience played in this education.<sup>37</sup> He came to a more intimate understanding of the Holy Trinity, creation, the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and the humanity of the divine Son above all by receiving the grace of seeing or perceiving each of these mysteries, yet always in ways that exceeded his ability to explain. His perception of the Trinity illustrates how different senses intertwined with the act of understanding to produce an experience so powerful that it “remained with him for the rest of his life” and moved him to such a degree in the moment that “he sobbed so strongly that he could not control himself.”<sup>38</sup> In what, then, did the experience consist? It seems to have begun by his puzzling over the mystery of how the three persons can in fact be one, something which necessarily exceeds the powers of reason. But an analogy from the realm of sound suddenly manifested a way in which three can be one, namely the notes of a chord. Ignatius recalls that he was just outside the Dominican church when this happened, leading one to wonder whether the physical sound of the organ might not have prompted what he then heard in a spiritual way. In any case, his description of the experience strikingly blends the modalities of reasoning, seeing, and hearing all together in a single event: “his *understanding*

---

<sup>35</sup> Loyola, 79, #30.

<sup>36</sup> Loyola, 79, #31.

<sup>37</sup> Loyola, 74, #27.

<sup>38</sup> Loyola, 75–76, #28.

was raised on high, so as to *see* the Most Holy Trinity under the aspect of three keys on a *musical instrument*.”<sup>39</sup>

He similarly struggles to describe precisely how he experienced the other moments of illumination and to reduce their content to propositional terms. In relation to creation, “he seemed to see a white object with rays stemming from it, from which God made light.”<sup>40</sup> In relation to the Eucharist, the elevation of the actual host during Mass provided the physical context in which “he saw with inward eyes...some white ray coming from above.”<sup>41</sup> By contrast, the many times he “saw with inward eyes the humanity of Christ,” it seems to have been without any physical prompting but rather “appeared to him as a white body...[without] differentiation of members.”<sup>42</sup> In all of these experiences, he forthrightly confesses that he does not know “how to explain these things” while also feeling certain “that God...imprinted [them] on his soul.”<sup>43</sup> So certain was he of the reality and power of these experiences, in fact, that he recalls feeling at the time a bold conviction that remained with him ever after: “If there were no Scriptures to teach us these matters of faith, he would still resolve to die for them on the basis of what he had seen.”<sup>44</sup>

### **The Spiritual Exercises as *Schola Affectus***

“*What* he had seen,” as it turns out, was less important than *that* he had seen. And Ignatius seems to have understood this, assiduously keeping notes throughout his time in Manresa in “the book that he guardedly kept with him and that afforded him much consolation.”<sup>45</sup> He would from time to time “jot down a few items” about methods of prayer in

---

<sup>39</sup> Loyola, 75, #28. (emphases added)

<sup>40</sup> Loyola, 76, #29.

<sup>41</sup> Loyola, 77, #29.

<sup>42</sup> Loyola, 77, #29.

<sup>43</sup> Loyola, 76, #29.

<sup>44</sup> Loyola, 77–78, #29.

<sup>45</sup> Loyola, 63, #18.

which he had found fruit and about insights he was slowly accruing about the movement of various spirits and how to discern them.<sup>46</sup> By 1526, a mere three years after his stay in Manresa, Ignatius was already proposing meditations to his fellow students and others in Alcalá, a practice he continued refining even as he repeatedly encountered resistance from Church censors. Ignatius recalls that, when suspicions at last came to a head in Salamanca, he submitted to a panel of Dominican judges “all his notes, which were the Exercises, for examination,”<sup>47</sup> indicating that he had already consolidated by then *grosso modo* the set of instructions for “explain[ing] to another the method and order of meditating and contemplating.”<sup>48</sup> It was in this form that the education Ignatius had received in Manresa would be mediated to Pierre Favre and the other companions at the University of Paris whom he “won to God’s service through the Exercises.”<sup>49</sup>

As this comment reveals, Ignatius understood the election of a state of life as the central drama of the Exercises. Indeed, the subtitle he gave the book indicates as much, specifying that “their purpose [is] the conquest of self and the *regulation of one’s life* in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment.”<sup>50</sup> But the essential means by which such a choice may be made in true freedom and in a final way is the operation of the spiritual senses, which must be trained above all to conform to the “sensitivity of Christ.”<sup>51</sup> This attunement of the senses amounts in turn to the enduring legacy of the Exercises in the life of the exercitant, since long after the completion of the retreat, it is the use of these senses that enable the fruitful fulfillment of the exercitant’s mission in the world.

---

<sup>46</sup> Loyola, 63, #18.

<sup>47</sup> Loyola, 130, #67.

<sup>48</sup> Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #2.

<sup>49</sup> Loyola, *A Pilgrim’s Journey*, 150, #82.

<sup>50</sup> Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #21. (emphasis added)

<sup>51</sup> Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 1:370.

How then do the Exercises accomplish this honing of the senses? They do so, first of all, by employing the senses to construct the setting for prayer, with the result that meditation is no longer confined to the internal forum but rather leads the exercitant outside of himself into an encounter with the other, and indeed ultimately with the God who is Wholly Other. In the Exercises, prayer always occurs in a definite place, and as a prelude to the act of meditation itself, the exercitant must see this place. “When the contemplation or meditation is on something visible,” explains Ignatius, we must first “[see] in the imagination the material place where the object is that we wish to contemplate.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, so important is this composition of place to the act of meditation that, even when “the subject matter is not visible,” the exercitant must still endeavor to see a physical setting that corresponds to the tenor of the subject matter.<sup>53</sup> Having thus gone outside of himself, the exercitant can now enter into a genuine encounter, and in the succession of such events from one meditation to the next, does not merely consider them with the intellect but comes into the very presence of actors making their choice for or against God. For this reason, Ignatius emphasizes in the prefatory annotations to the Exercises how important it is for the exercitant to keep in mind the intersubjective nature of key moments in the meditations: “when in acts of the will we address God our Lord or his saints either vocally or mentally, greater reverence is required on our part than when we use the intellect in reasoning.”<sup>54</sup>

The senses not only make possible the Exercises’ fundamental dynamic of encounter, they also convey the central mystery of the Word-made-flesh according to the dimensions proper to it. If human reason struggles mightily to articulate an account of how flesh is capable of receiving the Word and of being assumed by him, the sensory powers of the flesh can

---

<sup>52</sup> Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #47.

<sup>53</sup> Loyola, #47.

<sup>54</sup> Loyola, #3.

nevertheless provide vital conduits for the communication of that surplus of the Word which exceeds the limitations of a rational account. Thus at the end of most days of the Exercises, there is prescribed a meditation employing the “application of the senses.”<sup>55</sup> In the three or four meditations earlier in the day, the exercitant will have employed discursive reasoning to consider what the actors are doing and to reflect on himself. But at the end of the day, the senses become the privileged means by which the exercitant enters into the same mystery. He seeks to “see the persons...hear what they are saying...smell the infinite fragrance and taste the infinite sweetness of the divinity...[and] apply the sense of touch, for example, by embracing and kissing the place where the persons stand or are seated.”<sup>56</sup> In each case, the disposition of the exercitant remains highly active, but this activity is perhaps best described as an ardent cultivation of receptivity, owing to the inherently receptive quality of the senses, which cannot function except by being oriented outward in relation to the other. In this way, the exercitant strives for a streaming openness to the Word, “always taking care to draw some fruit.”<sup>57</sup> This same posture is required of the exercitant even when he is required to go to that place devoid of the presence of God so as to sense precisely this absence in Hell: “to see...the souls enclosed, as it were, in bodies of fire,” “to hear the wailing...and blasphemies against Christ,” “with the sense of smell to perceive...the filth and corruption,” “to taste the bitterness of tears, sadness, and remorse,” and “with the sense of touch to feel the flames.”<sup>58</sup>

The receptivity of the creature to a reality that is consonant with his reason, but that also exceeds its capacities, is also the basis for the vital role the senses play in the Exercises’ account of how to make an election. Indeed, according to Ignatius’ understanding, even when one must

---

<sup>55</sup> Loyola, ##121, 204, 226.

<sup>56</sup> Loyola, ##122-125.

<sup>57</sup> Loyola, #125.

<sup>58</sup> Loyola, ##66-70.

make a choice on the basis of reason, one must nevertheless refer the matter to the spiritual senses in the sight of God at both the beginning and end of the process. This is because the “love that moves and causes one to choose must descend from above, that is, from the love of God;” otherwise, one might be unwittingly acting on the basis of some other love or attachment, which by definition is not properly ordered.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the process of choosing must begin with an act of perceiving: “before one chooses he should perceive that the greater or less attachment for the object of his choice is solely because of His Creator and Lord.”<sup>60</sup> After having considered by the light of one’s reason what to do, one must refer the matter once again to the realm of the senses, asking God to confirm the decision by the perception one has of the movements in one’s own spirit. “After such a choice or decision,” explains Ignatius, “the one who has made it must turn with great diligence to prayer in the presence of God our Lord, and offer Him his choice that the Divine Majesty may deign to accept and confirm it if it is for His greater service and praise.”<sup>61</sup> This dynamic of referring all rational enquiry to God in prayer both at the beginning and end undoubtedly formed the background for Pierre Favre’s advice to the Paris scholastics to consult with the Holy Spirit about each of their lessons as one would with a review tutor, and to do so both before the lecture and afterwards.

The Exercises’ school of the heart reaches its apex in the final meditation, which opens vast new horizons toward the ever greater God and simultaneously reveals his intimate closeness to his creatures. Employing the senses once again, the exercitant sees how God demonstrates his great love by giving the exercitant the whole created order in all its variety, and even more than that his very self in Jesus Christ.<sup>62</sup> In a remarkable way, God dwells in each of these creatures by

---

<sup>59</sup> Loyola, #184.

<sup>60</sup> Loyola, #184.

<sup>61</sup> Loyola, #183.

<sup>62</sup> Loyola, #234.

constantly holding them in existence and by conferring on them the features proper to each one, with all of these excellences coming together in man.<sup>63</sup> Even more remarkably, God labors “for me,” the exercitant, in all these creatures.<sup>64</sup> And because the Creator also always exceeds the limitations of the created order, the exercitant must see how God transcends these very creatures to which he is intimately present.<sup>65</sup>

Two features of this culminating meditation are significant for our investigation of the role of theological aesthetics in Jesuit education. First, it affirms that “sensation [*sentire*],” upon which so much in the Exercises depends, is a property which the human person shares in common with “the animals,” and is in fact the distinctive way in which God dwells in them.<sup>66</sup> What is distinctive of man, by contrast, is “understanding.” But it is also the case that man is the creature in which is summed up every class of excellence, as God “dwells in me and gives me being, life, sensation, intelligence.” While Ignatius can thus affirm the Aristotelian anthropology that he learned at university, he also manifests an ability to transcend it in the direction indicated by the Biblical understanding of the unity and integrity of man’s various properties. As Hans Urs von Balthasar points out, “The Bible locates man’s ‘essence’ not primarily in what distinguishes him from other existing beings, but in his concrete and indivisible wholeness.”<sup>67</sup> In this way, even sensation can be a decisive means by which God can accomplish in man that which man alone among all the creatures is capable of, namely reception of the divine life that is communicated to him.

---

<sup>63</sup> Loyola, #235.

<sup>64</sup> Loyola, #236.

<sup>65</sup> Loyola, #237.

<sup>66</sup> Loyola, #235.

<sup>67</sup> Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 1:371.

Second, what moves man to action is seeing how God himself acts. God has given ample proof of his love for the creature in giving, dwelling, and laboring in creation “for me,” because as the introductory note to the exercise indicates, “love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than words.”<sup>68</sup> But love elicits love. That is, as soon as the motive of the deed is seen properly for what it is, the love of the lover necessarily calls forth love in the beloved, resulting in “a mutual sharing of goods.”<sup>69</sup> And so the final word of the Exercises is the prayer of self-offering of the exercitant, who wishes to be conformed entirely to that definitive form of being revealed to him in and by his “Creator and Lord.”<sup>70</sup> As in the application of the senses that the exercitant has learned to employ in his meditations, so too here the action of the creature is marked fundamentally by a disposition of active receptivity. This disposition is made evident not only by the way in which the offering is made (“as one would do who is moved by great feeling [*multo cum affectu*]”)<sup>71</sup> but also by the content of the offering itself, which expresses a readiness to be made an instrument for use by God (“All is yours, dispose of it wholly according to your will”).<sup>72</sup> Having been trained to perceive the divine drama as it unfolds, all the exercitant’s acting and willing now take on the character of a response to what he has seen. And what he has seen above all is his Creator and Lord making a total gift of himself in all things, a movement that

---

<sup>68</sup> Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #230.

<sup>69</sup> Loyola, #231.

<sup>70</sup> Loyola, #5, 15, 16, 20, 38, 39, 50, 52, 184, 316, 317, 324, 351. Hugo Rahner has shown how this distinctive way of referring to Jesus expresses in microcosm “the underlying structure of Ignatian theology—above, below, middle.” Hugo Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>71</sup> Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #234.

<sup>72</sup> Loyola, #235. For an extended discussion of the salience of instrumentality in Jesuit thought, see Christopher van Ginhoven Rey, *Instruments of the Divinity: Providence and Praxis in the Foundation of the Society of Jesus* (Boston: Brill, 2014).



reaches its climax in the Cross.<sup>73</sup> Thus the exercitant asks “that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty.”<sup>74</sup>

### **Education’s Coherence (and Man’s)**

Do not extinguish “the spirit of holy sensing” with the “spirit of knowing,” wrote Pierre Favre to the Jesuit students in Paris. What finally is at stake in this exhortation? First of all, the very coherence of their education. What was to make sense of all the various aspects of their studies, its ultimate horizon? Was it an ever more comprehensive grasp of the truth? That was, after all, the answer supplied by Thomas and much of the scholastic tradition. But Renaissance humanism gave a different answer: education is above all ordered to ethical development, such that knowledge of the truth is oriented finally to personal appropriation of the good, which is itself manifested in action. The Jesuits proposed yet a third point of coherence, the beautiful, and in so doing achieved the inner synthesis of these two opposed traditions of education, incorporating and including them in a movement toward the place the Jesuits understood to be the definitive vocation of creatures: a simple gaze directed to their Creator and Lord who would himself draw them into his activity and disclose ever new horizons of his truth.

Truth, goodness, and beauty. These are the transcendental properties of being which, together with unity, can be predicated of all that exists. And thus to conceive education in these terms necessarily implies a conviction about the coherence of man himself, an account of his ultimate end. At first glance, Thomas’ articulation of man’s final happiness appears highly consonant with the Jesuit account to the extent that it relies on the language of vision, but it

---

<sup>73</sup> Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #53.

<sup>74</sup> Loyola, #233. For more on the significance of the concluding meditation of the Spiritual Exercises for Jesuit education, see Michael J. Buckley, *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998).

quickly becomes clear that the scholastic doctor can mean this only in an analogical sense. “Final and perfect happiness,” claims Thomas, “can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”<sup>75</sup> Despite the reference to seeing, what this amounts to is not so much a beholding of the ever greater glory of God as an act of the understanding, which is conventionally associated with vision in the sense of “in-sight.” The development of his argument makes this clear. He goes on to say, “If therefore the human intellect, knowing the essence of some created effect, knows no more of God than ‘that He is’; the perfection of that intellect does not yet reach simply the First Cause, but there remains in it the natural desire to seek the cause. Wherefore it is not yet perfectly happy. Consequently, for perfect happiness the intellect needs to reach the very Essence of the First Cause.”<sup>76</sup> For Thomas, then, man’s final happiness consists in an act of the understanding, which is indeed the only way one can ‘see’ an essence. One might well have asked the scholastics whether man’s happiness is thus destined to be forever suspended and finally unreachable, since the finite creature can never definitively comprehend the infinite God.

In fairness, there already existed within the scholastic tradition itself an alternative account of man’s final happiness in the work of Bonaventure. For the great Franciscan doctor, who like Thomas taught for a time in Paris, the whole purpose of growth in wisdom is “that we become good.”<sup>77</sup> And this development in goodness has a very particular trajectory. It is ultimately oriented, says Bonaventure, toward growth in love. As Joseph Ratzinger, who specialized in the thought of Bonaventure as a young theologian, explains, “for Saint Bonaventure the ultimate destiny of man is to love God, to encounter him, and to be united in his

---

<sup>75</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, q. 3, a. 8, co.

<sup>76</sup> Aquinas, I–II, q. 3, a. 8, co.

<sup>77</sup> *Breviloquium*, Prologue, 5. Quoted in Pope Benedict XVI, *Holy Men and Women Of the Middle Ages and Beyond* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 52.

and our love. For him, this is the most satisfactory definition of our happiness.”<sup>78</sup> This alternative avenue within the scholastic tradition did not at last win the same scope of influence as the theology of Thomas. But in the context of the present study, it is nonetheless worthy of note how “the loftiest category for Saint Thomas is the true, whereas for Saint Bonaventure it is the good.”<sup>79</sup> For it is precisely the question of which transcendental enjoys primacy that is at issue in the appearance of Jesuit education on the scene some three centuries later.

In the hundred or so years leading up to that moment, the Renaissance humanists would similarly espouse the category of the good above all. But they did so not from within scholasticism as Bonaventure did, rather as a scathing critique from outside. The humanists, remarks Paul Grendler, “found the intellectual training inherited from the late Middle Ages inadequate and objectionable.”<sup>80</sup> The clearest proof of this, they claimed, was the poor standard of Latinity produced by students trained in the *ars dictaminis* with its rule-based method characteristic of scholastic thought. Rather than the transmission of an impenetrable thicket of rules, a good education required exposure to great (especially Latin) literature from the classical age. For the humanists, what was at stake was not merely the quality of one’s prose, but the very ethos that radiated from the pages of the ancient texts and that constituted an education of its own. As John O’Malley has noted, they “believed that the style and content of the ancient Latin authors like Cicero and Virgil held the key for a cultural revival in which good literature and good morals would go hand in hand”<sup>81</sup> and that, contrary to the scholastics, “the true aim of

---

<sup>78</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, 53.

<sup>79</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, 53.

<sup>80</sup> Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science ; 107th Ser., 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 117.

<sup>81</sup> O’Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate?*, 183.

education was not learning for its own sake but the formation of character, which is what the study of the best literature would produce.”<sup>82</sup>

The Jesuits found much to praise in Renaissance humanism and the pedagogical approach it gave rise to, especially for the foundational stages of education that would eventually constitute the bread and butter of most Jesuit schools. But it is also important not to overstate the dependence of Jesuit education on humanist techniques, which the Society merely treated as a fruitful means to be incorporated into a broader educational vision with distinct foundational commitments. If the Society could affirm with humanism that the ethical, and not just the logical, was an essential element of education, it nevertheless accorded primacy to neither the good nor the true, but the beautiful. The point of coherence for education, as indeed for man himself, lay in a profound theological aesthetic, which alone had the capacity to bring the other two transcendentals into a unity. The letter of Pierre Favre gives us a glimpse at the dawn of Jesuit education of its striking ability and commitment to incorporate traditions that were in fact set in opposition to one another. For, Favre claims Thomas as an example of precisely the disposition of holy *sentir* that he exhorts the Jesuit students to cultivate. “Saint Thomas,” he tells them, “was eager not only to review in prayer his lessons in whatever science or area of learning he was studying, but even to go over them with his inmost teacher before going to hear them with other instructors.”<sup>83</sup> The fact that key articles of the *Summa* sit uneasily with the Jesuit understanding of the primacy of theological aesthetics is beside the point here. What matters is that Favre and the early Society believed that the propositions of Thomas and scholasticism could in large part be saved.<sup>84</sup> So too with humanism’s commitment to the study of letters. In the course of his own

---

<sup>82</sup> O’Malley, 184.

<sup>83</sup> Casalini and Paur, *Jesuit Pedagogy*, 38.

<sup>84</sup> The Exercises themselves counseled such a disposition. See Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, #22. For the official embrace of Thomism, see Padberg, *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, 182, #464; Claude

schooling, confesses Favre, he (like the humanists) “thought it was enough for us to be taught the beginnings and the ends of letters and at the same time what kind of means they are in themselves.”<sup>85</sup> But this meant only the need for recalibration in light of the true end, not the wholesale dismissal of the importance of literary studies. For then one could “grasp though the truth of letters the good that they teach.”<sup>86</sup>

### **Conclusion: Reaping the Fruits of *Ressourcement***

In the end, it is difficult to assess the effect of the Jesuits’ core educational innovation in a comprehensive way. For it was oriented from the beginning toward fruitfulness in a realm that goes mostly unseen. But the discovery of aesthetics as the essential point of coherence for education also seems to have produced much visible fruit in the effect it had on the ability of those thus educated to recognize the presence, and indeed glory, of the Creator in the vast range of creatures. It was this revelation, mediated especially by the culminating meditation of the Exercises, that enabled and inspired Jesuits and their students to venture untroubled to all corners of the earth and into all the realms of creaturely being. This included the cultivation of drama and music, for which Jesuit schools and apostolates became so renowned, but also intensive research in the sciences and profound engagement with non-European cultures.<sup>87</sup> The fact that most students in most Jesuit schools never made the Exercises themselves is quite beside the point. It was enough for Jesuits who had cultivated a spirit of holy *sentir* to mediate to their students a

---

Pavur, trans., *The Ratio Studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005), #175.

<sup>85</sup> Casalini and Pavur, *Jesuit Pedagogy*, 38.

<sup>86</sup> Casalini and Pavur, 39.

<sup>87</sup> See John W. O’Malley et al., eds., *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); John W. O’Malley et al., eds., *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

sense for the transparency to the Creator of any activity in which they were engaged.<sup>88</sup> And indeed, this constitutes a permanently valid way of articulating the distinctive approach of Jesuit education: to train the natural senses to recognize manifestations of worldly glory so that they may be prepared to perceive in God's self-emptying love the definitive measure of all glory, the source and final end of all creation.

This is a demanding standard and one that was bound to be put to the test repeatedly over time. Indeed, Jesuit education is every bit as "exposed a peak" as the "steep and narrow charism given to Ignatius," from which it derives.<sup>89</sup> Already by the generalate of Claudio Acquaviva, the Society's official *Directorium* for the Spiritual Exercises had adopted a less mystical interpretation of the application of senses, explaining it not as a higher form of prayer than the earlier meditations, but as a less demanding exercise suitable to the end of a long day of prayer.<sup>90</sup> Given that Jesuit education depends to so great an extent on the logic of the Exercises, such a change was bound to have broader repercussions. To this day, the temptation to resort to a more immanent and anthropocentric vision remains. Proposals, for example, which stress character building and leadership development above all enjoy broad popularity for much the same reason that humanistic education did.<sup>91</sup> Since the 1970s, the growing consciousness of global economic inequality and human rights violations has raised the question of justice in a novel way. But

---

<sup>88</sup> As Hugo Rahner has noted, for Ignatius "[a]ll things which are not God are grasped, each in its inmost being, as something transparent, through which God shines forth." Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian*, 9.

<sup>89</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern World*, ed. Joseph Fessio, Brian McNeil, and John Riches, vol. 5, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 113.

<sup>90</sup> Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 1:368.

<sup>91</sup> Recent scholarship has sought to balance the overly rosy received view of humanism, arguing that it overtook scholasticism because it "fitted the needs of the new Europe that was taking shape, with its closed élites, hereditary offices and strenuous efforts to close off debate on vital political and social questions." Anthony Grafton, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986), xiv.

nanced efforts at an adequate response, such as that of Fr. Gen. Pedro Arrupe, have frequently been subject to superficial acts of appropriation which adopt the language of “men and women for others” without indicating its essential point of reference in the one man who acts “*pro nobis*” in the Bible and “for me” in the Exercises.<sup>92</sup>

Even so, we are now in a better position than at any time since the early years of the Society to understand the originality of Jesuit education and to consult the founding vision for inspiration in our own day. Thanks to the Society’s *ressourcement*, set in motion by the 24<sup>th</sup> General Congregation (1892), we have a vast trove of documents from the founding era that provide vital glimpses of the emerging educational tradition. Perhaps as telling as the letter of Pierre Favre to the Jesuit students in Paris is one from Ignatius to Francis Borgia, who would eventually succeed him as the third superior general. Writing in 1545, Ignatius undertakes to console the devout duke by explaining what he has understood about how we come to sense God present in all things. “As I consider,” writes Ignatius, “how persons who go out of themselves and enter into their Creator and Lord possess a constant awareness, attention, and consolation, as well as a perception [*sentir*] of the way in which our entire eternal Good is present in all created things, giving existence to them all and preserving them therein by his own infinite being and presence, I readily believe that Your Lordship finds consolation in the greater number of them and in many others as well.”<sup>93</sup> This is the vision of the final meditation of the Exercises and represents what Ignatius has understood about the ultimate happiness of man. Having been introduced into this exalted sense for God’s all-pervasive presence, the creature can find no greater gladness than the opportunity afforded him by this state to share in the mutual exchange

---

<sup>92</sup> Pedro Arrupe, “The Promotion of Justice and Education for Justice,” trans. Horacio de la Costa (Society of Jesus, August 1, 1973), [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/arr\\_men\\_en.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/arr_men_en.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> Ignatius Loyola, *Letters and Instructions*, ed. Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg, and John L. McCarthy S. J. (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 124–25.

of love. “For to persons who love God wholly, all things are a help and aid for meriting more and being more closely united by intense charity with their very Creator and Lord.”<sup>94</sup> Remarkably, Ignatius refers to this state of being as a “school,” indicating the summit to which the whole of Jesuit education is oriented. “I strongly desire in our Lord,” he tells Borgia, “that inasmuch as he in his infinite and accustomed mercy is making Your Lordship too a scholar in this holy school... Your Lordship would labor and make every possible effort to recruit numerous fellow pupils.”<sup>95</sup> Nor does Ignatius fail to make the link to the Society’s schools in the process. In fact, in answer to Borgia’s request to help him in the way he judged best, Ignatius asks that the duke “deign to assist me by assuming the administration and completion of a house or college that it is desired to set up there [in Gandía] for the scholars of this Society.”<sup>96</sup> For Ignatius understood that it was the will of the Divine Majesty that the colleges of the Society and the school of living in God’s presence be one and the same.

---

<sup>94</sup> Loyola, 125.

<sup>95</sup> Loyola, 126.

<sup>96</sup> Loyola, 126.



## Education for Catholicity

Those responsible for Catholic education have never been satisfied to understand it merely as education provided by Catholics or in an institutionally Catholic context. Rather they have insisted on pointing to a unifying element that gives it coherence, that makes of all its various pieces a genuine whole. Until the Land O' Lakes meeting in 1967, “[s]cholastic philosophy retained its place as the linchpin of curricular integration” in the vast majority of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Buttressed by the revival of Thomism in the wake of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879, the Neoscholasticism of the universities privileged philosophy even over theology on account of the conviction that “most of the evils of the modern world, social and political as well as religious, took their origin from the misuse of human reason.”<sup>2</sup> At the very end of this period, in 1953, a minor alternative tradition developed in response to the proposal of the great English Catholic historian Christopher Dawson that “the study of Christian culture” was uniquely capable of integrating the curriculum.<sup>3</sup> Among all the phenomena studied in the university, culture “alone constitutes an intelligible field of historical study since no part of it can be properly understood except in relation to the whole,” Dawson explained.<sup>4</sup> The long history of Western education showed some

---

<sup>1</sup> Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 164.

<sup>2</sup> Gleason, 108.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Dawson, “Education and Christian Culture,” *Commonweal* 59 (December 4, 1953): 216.

<sup>4</sup> Dawson, 217.

understanding of this principle, but “for centuries higher education had been so identified with the study of one particular historic culture—that of ancient Greece and Rome—that there was no room left for anything else.”<sup>5</sup> While having an essential relation to Greco-Roman antiquity, Dawson argued, Christian culture extends well beyond it. The true breadth of this culture had to be appreciated if Christian education was to survive now that the “old domination of classical humanism has passed away, and nothing has taken its place except the scientific specialisms which do not provide a complete intellectual education, but rather tend to disintegrate into technologies.”<sup>6</sup>

Both approaches were swept away by the gathering sense of crisis that finally came to a head in 1967. Already by the turn of the century, Harvard had removed Boston College and other Catholic institutions from a list of approved schools whose graduates could enter Harvard Law School without taking an entrance exam; and in 1901, the president of Notre Dame warned in a major speech to the Catholic Educational Association that “Catholic colleges were in the company of the nation’s most backward institutions of higher education.”<sup>7</sup> Under immense pressure to modernize and to conform to the standard set by their secular peers, Catholic universities almost without exception opted for the approach articulated in the Land O’ Lakes statement, which privileged neither philosophy nor culture, nor indeed theology, but rather the model common to all modern institutions, modified only by the affirmation that theology still merited a place in the university. But without a clear sense of how theology was to be related to the work of the university as a whole, theology inevitably assumed the same status as any other discipline, thus depriving it of the power of integration. The decision came at a cost. Whatever

---

<sup>5</sup> Dawson, 216.

<sup>6</sup> Dawson, 217.

<sup>7</sup> Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 1995, 45.

personal synthesis individual students are able to effect for themselves or individual faculty members are able to promote in their classrooms, at the level of the institution as a whole Catholic education has come to mean little more than education provided by Catholics or in a Catholic context.

While the oldest and largest of Catholic universities in the United States still pursue the same essential strategy of Land O' Lakes, deep dissatisfaction with this settlement is also evident some fifty years later, as is a desire to think once again about what makes an education Catholic. Reform efforts have taken a variety of institutional forms, ranging from the founding of new colleges to the development of new initiatives within existing institutions. Almost all of them, however, are marked by the same two approaches identified before Land O' Lakes, taking either philosophy or culture to be the point of integration. Thus a new institution like Thomas Aquinas College offers a curriculum devoted exclusively to the study of the Great Books, integrated by the philosophical system of St. Thomas. Meanwhile the Catholic Studies Program at University of St. Thomas, together with the programs it has inspired at other institutions, provides interested students a supplementary curriculum focusing on great works of Christian culture from literature and history to art and architecture, philosophy and theology. Of the two approaches, it is the one founded on culture that seems especially in the ascendant, having sparked both more efforts at institution building and a larger body of literature. Such literature, moreover, makes clear that the two approaches represent strict alternatives. As one author puts it, "Catholic culture and history, not philosophy, should order the Catholic curriculum."<sup>8</sup> To these two prevailing approaches can

---

<sup>8</sup> Glenn W. Olsen, "Christopher Dawson and the Renewal of Catholic Education: The Proposal That Catholic Culture and History, Not Philosophy, Should Order the Catholic Curriculum," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 14. See also, e.g., Don J. Briel, "Looking Back at Newman," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 21, no. 3 (June 30, 2018): 21–34; Matthew Gerlach, ed., *Renewal of Catholic Higher Education: Essays on Catholic Studies in Honor of Don J. Briel* (University of Mary Press, 2017).

be added one more, which is based on the conviction that the Church itself, especially in its Magisterium, is what constitutes the integrating center of any education. While this same conviction is shared to some extent by institutions committed to the other two approaches, it is particularly evident in institutions like Franciscan University of Steubenville, the curriculum of which emphasizes neither philosophy nor culture so much as a general ecclesial orientation.

Each of these approaches offers some advantage or another over the Land O' Lakes settlement, but none of them is finally capable of rendering an education catholic in the most profound sense of drawing all things into a genuine whole. With the aid of revelation, philosophy can trace, at least in broad outline, a general order of all things. But even in the face of merely finite being, the human intellect fails to comprehend the whole in anything other than the most abstract of ways; and when it comes to the question of existence and not merely essences, the intellect reaches an absolute wall. Why indeed does something exist rather than nothing? It is not enough to give the answer that God is existence itself. If there is such an absolute Being, the existence of finite being grows only more puzzling. In such a case, we would need to have reference to the divine will and not merely the intelligible order of things. Cultural approaches emphasize, with relative correctness, the salience of the will, though at least in the case of Nietzsche this advantage over philosophy is limited by his attention to the human will in place of the divine. The study of Christian culture, on the other hand, depends for its coherence at least implicitly on a fundamental reference to the divine will. It is the cooperation with this will by faithful people over time that gives rise to products of culture worthy of study, each of which provide some glimpse of a unity that lies beyond them in God. But precisely this pointing-beyond-itself indicates that the whole is not to be found in culture. There is, therefore, a practical danger in proposing to treat Christian culture itself as the integrating center: that of mistakenly

identifying the whole either with the glories of an irretrievable past or with that which we ourselves can achieve in the present age.<sup>9</sup>

To the extent that they point beyond themselves, both philosophy and culture indicate where true catholicity lies, namely in God himself. It is the intimate relation to this fullness in God that makes the Church itself catholic, orienting it to a whole that lies beyond it and that vastly surpasses the limitations of its finitude. On this basis, some Catholic universities have thought it enough to invoke an “abstract ecclesial disposition” as the guarantee of an education’s catholicity.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as Balthasar notes, such a position is consistent with “the ordinary Catholic understanding, according to which the Magisterium provides a unity sufficient to gather up the multiplicity of dogmas to be believed.”<sup>11</sup> While perhaps intuitive and well-intentioned, this position overlooks the fact that the Magisterium is not the source of its own unity. “The Church’s formal authority, like Christ’s, is ultimately credible,” explains Balthasar, “only as the manifestation of the majestic glory of divine love. But this gives it real credibility.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the fruit of the revelation of divine love is a deeper obedience to the Church, not on its own account but on account of the fullness of Christ’s life that radiates through it. Institutions, therefore, must do more than simply cultivate a fidelity to the Church. They must facilitate the cultivation in their members of the very disposition that is characteristic of the Church itself:

---

<sup>9</sup> Dawson, who is supremely well-balanced on this question, can nevertheless be given a voluntaristic reading on the basis of passages such as the following: “when we look back one hundred and twenty years and see what has been accomplished both in England and in America, we shall see that there is no real ground for pessimism. A new world of Catholicism has been created out of almost nothing. The achievement is greatest in the United States of America and it is in America that there seems the best prospect for the development of a Catholic culture, owing to greater material resources and to the existence of Catholic universities.” Dawson, “Education and Christian Culture,” 220.

<sup>10</sup> Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Balthasar, 147–48.

<sup>12</sup> Balthasar, 148.

catholicity. As Balthasar recalls, “Origen calls such a soul ‘*anima ecclesiastica*’: a soul with the dimensions of the Catholic Church.”<sup>13</sup>

How does one cultivate the disposition of catholicity? By contemplating the eternal Son, who receives all things from the Father and who reconciles the world to him. Education finds its integrating center here in the development of a profound theological aesthetic, which alone is capable not only of orienting the intellect to its infinite end but also of engaging the will in the divine drama that draws it beyond the narrow horizon of one’s own life. Paradoxically, it is just such a disposition that makes it possible for God to institute one in a particular form of life and to give one a specific and limited mission. The view of the whole gives the fragments their definitive meaning. Pope Francis never tires of returning to this point, which he learned from Ignatius Loyola: “This virtue of the large and small is magnanimity. Thanks to magnanimity, we can always look at the horizon from the position where we are. That means being able to do the little things of every day with a big heart open to God and to others. That means being able to appreciate the small things inside large horizons, those of the kingdom of God.”<sup>14</sup> It remains an urgent task to specify how such a disposition, which formed the fundamental background of Jesuit education from the beginning, can be promoted in a concrete educational program for our own age. But this is a task that exceeds the scope of the present study.

At the end of John’s gospel, he recalls a time after the Resurrection of Jesus in which the disciples are unsure what to do. Having already encountered the risen Lord on several occasions, they are together back in Galilee unclear about what lies ahead. Growing restless, Peter decides to go fishing. He thus returns to an activity that is familiar and well within his power to

---

<sup>13</sup> Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” ed. Antonio Spadaro, *America* 209, no. 8 (September 30, 2013): 17.

accomplish, but also one redolent of his life prior to the definitive encounter with Christ. After fishing all night, Peter and the disciples who went with him have nothing to show for their labor. At precisely the moment when their frustration must have peaked, someone calls from the shore, asking whether they have caught anything. A terse reply: “No.” Cast your nets one more time, says the man. “So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish.” (Jn 21:6) It is this overwhelming revelation of fullness that indicates to John that “[i]t is the Lord!” (21:7) Two more times in the narrative, he emphasizes that the net was “full of fish” (21:8), indeed “full of large fish” (21:11). And the most remarkable thing of all: “although there were so many [fish], the net was not torn.” (21:11)

How frequently does the Church find itself in just such a moment. Frustration mounts as the night passes with nothing to show for so much labor. One need not have acute spiritual perception to detect traces of just such futility in contemporary Catholic higher education. But a contemplative gaze is indeed required to discern what the Lord is asking of the Church in this moment. Only such an eye for the catholic whole can see that, like the net full of large fish, even something quite small is capable of drawing all things into one. Nor is it likely to appear as great and impressive as the institution-building gambits that we have pursued for the past five decades. For in seeking wholeness in the only place it can be found, the one who contemplates the Son will inevitably become just as puzzling to the world as he is:

The existence of the lover in time is...a mystery for the world, because his existence does not seem less fragmentary than any other; perhaps it seems even more fragmentary. For it makes no effort to form itself completely in time... What is given into his hands to administer is more than he can ascribe to himself: he can therefore only distribute it as something from elsewhere which has mysteriously come into his possession. Wholeness streams and shines through the fragments.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 99, 101.

## Bibliography

---

- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Christian Classics, 1981.
- Arrupe, Pedro. “The Promotion of Justice and Education for Justice.” Translated by Horacio de la Costa. Society of Jesus, August 1, 1973.  
[http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/arr\\_men\\_en.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/arr_men_en.pdf).
- Arum, Richard, and Josipa Roksa. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Aviram, Aharon. “Nietzsche as Educator?” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 25, no. 2 (1991): 219–34.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *A Theological Anthropology*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967.
- . *A Theology of History*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994.
- . *In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.
- . *Love Alone Is Credible*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005.
- . *Seeing the Form*. Edited by Joseph Fessio and John Riches. Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. 7 vols. The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009.
- . “The Absoluteness of Christianity and the Catholicity of the Church.” In *Man Is Created*, translated by Adrian Walker, 5:410–41. Explorations in Theology. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.
- . *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern World*. Edited by Joseph Fessio, Brian McNeil, and John Riches. Vol. 5. 7 vols. The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983.
- . *Truth Is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987.
- Berkowitz, Peter. “‘Anti-Education’: What Nietzsche’s Critiques of Education Can Tell Us.” *Commonweal*, January 29, 2016, 27.
- Bingham, Charles. “What Friedrich Nietzsche Cannot Stand about Education: Toward a Pedagogy of Self-Reformulation.” *Educational Theory* 51, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 337–52.
- Briel, Don J. “Looking Back at Newman.” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 21, no. 3 (June 30, 2018): 21–34.
- Buckley, Michael J. *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1998.
- Caldecott, Stratford, and Ken Myers. *Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-Enchantment of Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2017.
- Casalini, Cristiano, and Claude N. Pavur, eds. *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540-1616: A Reader*. Boston, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, Boston College, 2016.
- Collini, Stefan. *What Are Universities For?* New York: Penguin, 2012.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Dawson, Christopher. “Education and Christian Culture.” *Commonweal* 59 (December 4, 1953): 216–20.
- Delbanco, Andrew. *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.



- Deresiewicz, William. *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*. New York: Free Press, 2014.
- Dulles, Avery. *The Catholicity of the Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Edmundson, Mark. *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Egginton, William. *The Splintering of the American Mind: Identity Politics, Inequality, and Community on Today's College Campuses*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2018.
- Favre, Pierre. *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre: The Memorials and Selected Letters and Instructions*. Translated by Martin E. Palmer. Saint Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.
- Ferruolo, Stephen C. *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985.
- Gerlach, Matthew, ed. *Renewal of Catholic Higher Education: Essays on Catholic Studies in Honor of Don J. Briel*. University of Mary Press, 2017.
- Ginhoven Rey, Christopher van. *Instruments of the Divinity: Providence and Praxis in the Foundation of the Society of Jesus*. Boston: Brill, 2014.
- Gleason, Philip. *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- . *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Golomb, Jacob. "Nietzsche's Early Educational Thought." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 19, no. 1 (1985): 99–124.
- Grafton, Anthony. *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe*. London: Duckworth, 1986.
- Gray, John. "Anti-Education by Friedrich Nietzsche." *The Guardian*. January 8, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/08/anti-education-on-the-future-of-our-educational-institutions-friedrich-nietzsche-review>.
- Grendler, Paul F. *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600*. Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science ; 107th Ser., 1. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- . *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.
- Hart, Thomas Edward. *Nietzsche, Culture and Education*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009.
- Haskins, Charles Homer. *The Rise of Universities*. New York: Holt and Company, 1923.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Hesburgh, Theodore M. "Looking Back at Newman." *America* 106 (March 3, 1962): 720–21.
- Irenaeus of Lyon. *Against the Heresies: Book III*. Translated by Dominic J. Unger and Matthew C. Steenberg. Ancient Christian Writers 64. New York: Paulist Press, 1992.
- Johnston, James Scott. "Nietzsche as Educator: A Reexamination." *Educational Theory* 48, no. 1 (1998): 67–83.
- Kerr, Clark. *The Uses of the University*. 5th ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Kronman, Anthony T. *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given up on the Meaning of Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

- Lécrivain, Philippe. *Paris in the Time of Ignatius of Loyola*. Translated by Ralph C. Renner. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2011.
- Lewis, Harry. *Excellence Without a Soul: Does Liberal Education Have a Future?* New York: PublicAffairs, 2007.
- Louth, Andrew, ed. *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*. Translated by Maxwell Staniforth. New York: Penguin Classics, 1987.
- Loyola, Ignatius. *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola*. Translated by Joseph N. Tylanda. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001.
- . *Letters and Instructions*. Edited by Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg, and John L. McCarthy S. J. Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006.
- . *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*. Translated by Louis J. Puhl. 1st ed. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- . “Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices.” In *Higher Learning & Catholic Traditions*, edited by Robert E. Sullivan, 1–22. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.
- . *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.
- . “The End of Education: The Fragmentation of the American University.” *Commonweal* 133 (October 20, 2006): 10–14.
- . *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991.
- McCluskey, Neil G., and Theodore M. Hesburgh, eds. *The Catholic University: A Modern Appraisal*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970.
- Newman, John Henry. *The Idea of a University*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Anti-Education: On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*. Edited by Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon. Translated by Damion Searls. NYRB Classics, 2015.
- . *Complete Works*. Edited by Oscar Levy. Vol. 3. 9 vols. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964.
- Olsen, Glenn W. “Christopher Dawson and the Renewal of Catholic Education: The Proposal That Catholic Culture and History, Not Philosophy, Should Order the Catholic Curriculum.” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 13, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 14–35.
- O’Mahoney, Paul. “Anti-Education.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 25, no. 5 (December 1, 2017): 744–48.
- O’Malley, John W. *Saints or Devils Incarnate? Studies in Jesuit History*. Brill, 2013.
- . *The First Jesuits*. 1st ed. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- O’Malley, John W., Bailey, Gauvin A., Harris, Steven J., and Kennedy, T. Frank, eds. *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.
- O’Malley, John W., Gauvin A. Bailey, Steven J. Harris, T. Frank Kennedy, and Johann Bernhard Staudt, eds. *The Jesuits II: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540-1773*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

- Padberg, John W., ed. *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.
- Pavur, Claude, trans. *The Ratio Studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005.
- Peters, Michael. "Nietzsche, Poststructuralism and Education: After the Subject?" *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 1997): 1–19.
- Plato. *Symposium*. Translated by Paul Woodruff and Alexander Nehamas. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.
- Pope Benedict XVI. *Holy Men and Women Of the Middle Ages and Beyond*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012.
- Pope Francis. "A Big Heart Open to God." Edited by Antonio Spadaro. *America* 209, no. 8 (September 30, 2013): 14–38.
- Rahner, Hugo. *Ignatius the Theologian*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991.
- Rahner, Karl. *Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*. Vol. 16. Theological Investigations. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008.
- Rosenow, Eliyahu. "Nietzsche's Concept of Education." In *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*, edited by Yirmiyahu Yovel, 119–31. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 1986.
- . "Nietzsche's Educational Dynamite." *Educational Theory* 39, no. 4 (1989): 307–16.
- Treadgold, Warren. *The University We Need: Reforming American Higher Education*. New York: Encounter Books, 2018.
- Wei, Ian P. *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, c.1100-1330*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.