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The Cathedral of Being: Re-enchantment and the Writings of the Popes

Abstract

A rarely discussed issue that bears upon the topic of education is that which takes seriously the relationship between medium and message; how is the content of what is taught shaped by the way in which it is taught? It is a question of especial pertinence today when in all areas of pedagogy we find people advocating the use in education not only of computers but on-line access and the wonders of the virtual world as well. The argument of this paper, via the writings of the recent Pontiffs (and more secular authors with a philosophical and political interest in the area), is that the use of computers and on-line technology is deleterious to all education, *but especially to Catholic education*. This is because, while the understanding of real presence and mediation are fundamental to the faith, the idea of insubstantiality and friction-free immediacy are of a piece with virtual technology. As a medium of dissemination the latter cannot help but invest the content of the former with its understanding of presence. The paper also touches upon the economic factors at play in the use of virtual technology as well as the utopian hopes this technology gives rise to, hopes that are fundamentally inhuman and therefore at odds with the Catholic faith. The paper argues its point using the trope of fairyland and the opposition between, on the one hand, enchantment, and on the other, glamour.

The Cathedral of Being: Re-enchantment and the Writings of the Popes¹

Robert Tilley

I. On the Perils of Fairyland

In the spirit of Occupational Health and Safety it might be apposite to open with a warning: if you happen to find yourself in fairyland do *not* eat or drink anything that is offered you for that is a sure way of being stuck there. But then again, some on hearing this will think that being stuck in fairyland would not be too bad a thing given the way in which the modern world, following the lead of Max Weber, has come to be defined by disenchantment.² Though it may sound like a tattoo parlour come to life, a land in which there are elves, Griffins, dragons, wizards, and of course fairies must represent for many, when compared to our disenchanted age, something of an ideal destination; a place of magic and realised delights, a place, in other words, where dreams come true!

This tendency to romanticise fairyland is a rather modern phenomenon, one might call it a case of urban wishful thinking for, if one reads the folk-tales, dips into the myths and legends, then it soon becomes clear that fairies and their companions are not very nice creatures; in fact, they are often malicious tricksters whose idea of fun is to lead a person into slavery then to madness and then, if not to death, then to despair. You could say that fairyland is synonymous with dissimulation; it promises a good deal but you soon learn it does not keep its word. It is cute but also nasty. If we were inclined to speak in a theological temper we might say that the effects of the Fall are felt everywhere, they even reach into the realms of folk-lore and fantasy!

We are misled on matters to do with fairyland and part of the problem is that when we think upon the topic of re-enchantment we think too much of things sentimental and aetherial; of wispy worlds made of mist and mossy groves peopled by the little-folk some with gossamer wings. Even heaven falls under this aetherial tone and, for this reason, we think of the world above as being less solid than that here below, as if to be insubstantial were a necessary description of what it is to be spiritual and romantic.

It is a strange way of understanding things for the reality is quite the opposite; compared to heaven *our* world is aetherial and peopled by shades, or as we might call them ghosts. It is the world to come that is the substance while we, even at our best, are its shadow. So it is that

¹ This paper was originally given as a talk in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. It has been rewritten but the general structure, content, and thesis are the same. It is important to bear this in mind insofar as the attempt was being made to entwine the topic with the place in which the topic was being discussed, hence the reference to architecture at the end of the paper. It ought also to be noted that it was addressed to those whom it was assumed would already be sympathetic to the general tenor of the argument. The intent was to convince them of the need to take what it is that is agreed upon and to press it further, not least in respect of Catholic education.

² Weber famously wrote: "The fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation, and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world.' Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations" 'Science as a Vocation' (1918) in H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds.) *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York, OUP, 1946 (155). Weber's use of quotation marks shows that modernity and disenchantment was not an insight original with him, indeed it can be traced back to the eighteenth century German 'Storm and Strife' and the Romantic response to French rationalism. In the nineteenth century Marx argued that disenchantment was a result of the rise of the bourgeoisie and Capitalism.

when, in *Revelation*, the New Jerusalem comes down to earth it is described in an enchanting way for it is depicted as being the very opposite of wispy and cloud-like; it is a city made up of diamonds, jewels, gems, and sapphires - which is to say of hard, sharp, and solid things.³ It is a view especially apparent in medieval and renaissance art (as well as early modern art), where the painting depicts a scene in two basic registers: the events below, here on earth, and then those that correspond to them above, in heaven. Even though the two registers may, at times, be separated off by clouds, those clouds only serve as something of a border, they serve to *distinguish* the two realms and not to *define* them. The important point is that both the 'above' and the 'below' are depicted in a solid and definite manner, indeed the 'above' is at times, it might be argued, the more solid of the two registers. The sense is of the ultimate harmony of the two registers, one in which, to follow the lead of *Revelation*, the Jerusalem from above and the Jerusalem below are brought together in a union that perfects both. The perfection of all that exists – we might say, the fullness of the very *beingness* of things – is characterised by the integrity of identity that is, I would argue, the real definition of solidity.

II. Anti-Essentialism and the New Gnosticism

This side of the fall the temptation is to succumb to what Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and now Francis have referred to as being a new 'Gnosticism'.⁴ Whatever else this term denotes it refers to the way of thinking that has come to dominate the modern mind, both in its more rarefied philosophical and scientific forms as well as its cultural forms (both high and low).⁵ Informed as it is by a rejection of metaphysics it also expresses, albeit in a dissimulated fashion, the hatred of things material not least of the flesh, to be more precise in distaste for embodiment.⁶ My argument is that it is this 'Gnosticism' that instantiates the disenchantment of the world, a disenchantment that is often made synonymous with modernity. And it might be said that this disenchantment is expressed not only in a loss of belief in a transcendent God (something that is an obvious point to make) but, following on from that, a loss of belief in matter itself!

Foucault famously remarked that the Death of God meant the Death of Man, but we can press this further, it also means the Death of Matter such that all becomes progressively immaterial for all, it is hoped, will become virtual.

³ *Revelation* 21:9-21.

⁴ Pope Francis Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) para. 94. Francis ties this new Gnosticism to a "self-absorbed promethean neopelagianism" (para. 94) and to the free-market culture (para. 54) that goes hand in glove with a "spiritual consumerism" (para. 89). In his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1994), in the essay "Buddha?", John Paul II addresses the popularity in certain theological and cultural quarters (not least New Age) of a "negative soteriology" (85) by which he meant that notion that to be saved one must break all ties with this world, this reality, too go within and, thereby, to even negate oneself. These are, he wrote, simply a revival of "Gnostic ideas" (89) which have always haunted Christianity (89-90), though one might more properly say that they have always been parasitic upon Christianity.

⁵ *Communio*, in its 1997 Winter edition, devoted itself to discussion on this very topic and that in respect of contemporary Catholic theology. Two essays in particular bear upon this paper: M. Figura 'Gnosis and Gnosticism: A Renewed Challenge to the Church'; and K. Schmitz 'The Transfiguration of Gnosticism in Late Enlightenment German Thought'.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger wrote in his 'Faith, Philosophy and Theology' (*Communio*, 11.4, 1984) "We must take a position against the common opposition to metaphysics, which today appears as the only real bond which joins philosophy and theology" (357). It is this rejection that informs what he refers to as the "Gnostic" turn (362). "Faith," he writes, "does not threaten philosophy but defends it against the pervasive threat of gnosis" (362-3). In his book *Truth and Tolerance* (San Francisco, Ignatius Pr., 2004) Ratzinger argues for the continuity between the anti-metaphysical strains in Kant's philosophy and the New Age movement (126-137). This ultimately expresses itself in a desire for the irrational, one in which the autonomous self wants to be rid of itself by aspiring to become one with impersonal energy (127).

For all its affirmation of materialism the modern world hates those limitations consequent upon matter, thus it works to craft matter so that it will become plastic and malleable, subject to our wishes and desires, and this hatred is expressed in the ever-increasing desire to merge the real and virtual worlds.⁷ We might say to annul the borders between hard and soft copy. So much has this come to be the case that it is held to be a given that there is, in fact, no real distinction to be made between what is real and what is virtual.⁸

The virtual world is a world oriented by our *immediate* desires towards the goal of an *immediacy* of response, insofar as that which one wishes for is *immediately* made available, this being the market standard by which value is judged.⁹ In a world where the real and virtual are made one there is no friction to slow the flow of ‘wishformation’ (to coin a neologism) - as soon as one wishes for something there it is! *This* is fairyland, but it is the very opposite of enchantment; indeed, it is antagonistic to enchantment. *This* is the world of magic and alchemy made real, where all the elements are subject to the will and desires of the magician. *Here* there is no fixed meaning for all is subject to the arbitrary whims of the one who calls the shots. In fact there is *no* meaning for all is open to manipulation and thus to trickery – it is a world constituted by a Hermetic ontology where all is informed by the constant play of seeming and change. It is the world of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* on speed.

Both John Paul and Benedict in their official papal pronouncements, as well as in their scholarly and more personal writings, warned of the dangers to humanity of falling under what they called a “technocratic logic.”¹⁰ Through our technology all is possible, we are able to “manipulate all [*things*]” and thereby “seize control of the world.”¹¹ We can dominate creation by having everything, including human life, fall subject to a technocratic and mathematical logic. It is a Gnostic way of thinking for beneath all its rhetoric of affirming life it despises life, it loathes existence, it wants to be quit of friction for, whatever else friction does, it reminds us

⁷ E. Voegelin argues that the ‘Gnostic’ like malleability of reality is endemic to Modernity and informs a good deal of its political theory. See his essay ‘Ersatz Religion: The Gnostic Mass Movements of our Time’ in *Modernity without Restraint* (Vol. 5 of his Collected Works), Columbia, Uni. of Missouri Pr., 2000. The “central importance of the question of immanentization” that characterises Modernity is that of being able to do away with the very beingness of things: “All Gnostic movements” share in “the project of abolishing the constitution of being...Of altering the structure of the world” such that a “new, satisfying world arises” (305). Coming from a different perspective Jean-François Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester, Manchester Uni. Pr., 1984, fp. 1979) wrote: “Modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the ‘lack of reality’ of reality, together with the invention of other realities” (77).

⁸ Or as Jean Baudrillard famously put it there is no distinguishing between the real and the ‘simulacrum’ (*Simulations*, New York, Semiotext(e) Inc., 1987). This is because metaphysics and God are no longer to be countenanced (3) for only the “simulacrum exists” (8). Disneyland is honest and real, all else is a disguise that conceals the simulated nature of all that is (25).

⁹ “Once a man is not able to know truth in itself, but only the usefulness of things for this or that end, then use and consumption will become the measuring stick of all deed and thought; thus the world is nothing more than ‘material for praxis’” J Ratzinger ‘Interpretation, Contemplation, Action: Considerations on the Task of a Catholic Academy’ *Communio* 13, Summer, 1986, (145).

¹⁰ John Paul II *Fides et Ratio*, 1998 (para. 6). See too Benedict against the “technocratic ideology so prevalent today” in *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009 (para. 14). “The technological way of looking at the world is free of values. It searches for what it can do, rather than what it ought to do...What one is capable of doing, one is also permitted to do; this is, for the most part, the way people think today” J. Ratzinger ‘Christian Faith as the Way: An Introduction to Veritatis Splendor’ *Communio* 21, Spring, 1994 (200).

¹¹ J. Ratzinger *In the Beginning*, New York, T&T Clark, 2005 (fp. 1986) pp. 29, 41. *Caritas in Veritate* (para. 17, 51)

that there is a world outside of us that imposes itself on us – and this reminds us that we exist.¹² It is this hatred, Benedict wrote, that constitutes the “disenchantment with creation.”¹³

It is the hatred of friction and the concomitant imposition of reality that informs what John Paul II wrote concerning the ‘Culture of Death’ in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). Here, the hatred of existence is expressed in the killing of the most vulnerable and thus the most dependent and thus the most imposing. After all, the unborn, the elderly and those too ill to care for themselves are an impediment on those expected to care for them; the vulnerable represent friction, obstacles to the wishes of those better placed. Above all else the vulnerable represent the real and the solid – they represent the objective *thereness* of that which refuses to be subsumed into the world of manipulated simulation.¹⁴

Elsewhere, John Paul wrote that everything (including “human nature”) has become devoid of any sense of “given reality”; rather is all creation understood to be a “product of our thought” and the ideal is that all can be freely formed and changed and that by reference to market forces.¹⁵ The goal of our world is that through the combination of our technology and the market economy we can and will transform the world into a place of illimitable freedom and plenty where each self will become its own self-contained cosmos. In the absence of metaphysics proper the hope for the New Jerusalem becomes a hope for a world made virtual and plastic. With due qualification we might put it like this, St John’s *Revelation* elides with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

For the pontiffs the new Gnosticism is based upon and informed by the rejection of metaphysics, particularly Thomistic metaphysics.¹⁶ This is especially evident in the way anti-essentialism has become something of a truism to be accepted by all who want to be understood as contemporary and even progressive. All forms of identity – sexual, familial, religious, political, cultural, or otherwise – are held to be polymorphous, liquid, ever-changing, and it is our computer technology, our *virtual* technology, that best corresponds to this. So it is that following on the heels of genetic modification, eugenics, and the hope for and investment in the development of hybrid and cyborg technology, there is the almost religious hope in a coming ‘singularity’ where the real and the virtual will merge.¹⁷ The hope is that through

¹² *In the Beginning* (99).

¹³ *In the Beginning* (95).

¹⁴ John Paul II wrote that man “is somehow reduced to being ‘a thing’, so too life itself becomes a mere ‘thing’ which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation” *Evangelium Vitae* (1995, para. 22, see too para. 64).

¹⁵ John Paul II *Memory and Identity*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005 (13). See too *Evangelium Vitae* para. 12.

¹⁶ John Paul II in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998) opposes St Thomas to the “immanentist habit of mind and the constrictions of a technological logic” (para. 6 see too para. 88). Thomism is contrary to pragmatism (paras 46 and 89) and the instrumentalisation of reason which is to say its reduction to being a mere utility (47). In sum, Thomism is the defiance of the so-called “end of metaphysics” (55).

¹⁷ There has been not a few books extolling this theme, but by way of example see: M. Chorost *World Wide Mind: The Coming Integration of Humanity, Machines, and the Internet*, New York, The Free Pr., 2011. Chorost writes of the growing “synergy between human beings and the internet” and that soon we will “become a single organism with entirely new powers,” indeed a “new species in its own right” (11). Today, he writes, technology has been “dis-enchanting” for it has pulled people apart, but tomorrow it could be “enchanting” pulling people together (16); Ray Kurzweil is probably the most enthusiastic proponent, see his *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, London, Penguin, 2005. Also M. Saylor *The Mobile Wave: How Mobile Intelligence will Change Everything*, New York, Vanguard Pr., 2012. Mobile technology, writes Saylor, “transforms from a ‘solid form’ to a ‘vapour form’” (9) Physical objects are slowly becoming “software” (ix). We will live in a friction free world for in cyberspace “where software lives, there are no laws of physics to provide an anchor” (14). For a criticism of this line of thinking by one who was there at the beginning of the

biotechnology and nanotechnology all matter, including flesh, will become plastic and malleable, conformable to the wishes of the consumer.¹⁸ It will be the pro-choice world par excellence! It is a world, as John Paul noted, that is inextricably tied to and informed by “a market-based logic.”¹⁹

It is not too difficult to see that the vision of the world made virtual, which is to say the world become fairyland, is, when all is said and done, the world become a market. A world fit for consumption, a heaven for avid consumers. To borrow from John Paul II, it is a world where “*everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining*”²⁰; where the “values of being are replaced by those of having”²¹; Where man “seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption.”²² As with magic, we can, just by wishing for what it is we want, fulfil our immediate desires!

III. The Paradox of Modern Materialism

In the tale that is Modernity there is something of a paradox, which is appropriate for in many of the myths and folk tales the story often turns on a paradox one that often segues into irony. Thus, a man wishes for gold and ends up only able to touch gold for everything he touches turns to gold. The theme this paradox embodies may be hackneyed but it is so because it has lasted, and it has lasted because it is true: *be careful what you wish for as you might get it*. You want a world in which your wishes will come true, where nothing interposes itself between your desires and their being answered to, where everything shapes itself to your will? Better to wish that this world never comes about!

The paradox in the story that is Modernity turns upon its assertion of materialism and what it thought would be a concomitant realisation of freedom.

In the main Modernity can be said to be the rejection of transcendence proper, a view of things that holds that all that exists can be explained by way of immanence – which is to say by way of a closed system. The cosmos is self-sufficient, if only theoretically so, and thus self-explanatory. Although from Nominalism on through to Deism lip service might be paid to transcendence, it is clear that the dominant current was that which carried thinking to a more

virtual craze (indeed he coined the term ‘virtual reality’ among other key computing terms, see Jaron Lanier *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*, London, Penguin Books, 2011).

¹⁸ John Paul II observes in *Evangelium Vitae*: “Nature itself, from being *mater* (mother) is now reduced to being ‘matter’ and is subjected to every kind of manipulation” (para. 22). M. Saylor in his book *The Mobile Wave* writes that the cyber-world into which everything solid is morphing is synonymous with the free market (15-18, 55-59, 67-71). Furthermore, speaking like a true neo-liberal, Saylor observes that the only real impediments to capital in terms of globalised finance “are regulations and laws not laws of physics” (112) for the simple reason that the cyber world is free of any friction. A similar but more tempered approach is taken by the Nobel Prize winning economist Michael Spence in his book *The Next Convergence: The Future of Economic Growth*, New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011.

¹⁹ John Paul II *Fides et Ratio* (para. 46). Benedict writes of this entwining of technology and globalization: “The process of globalization could replace ideologies with technology, allowing the latter to become an ideological power that threatens to confine us within an a priori that holds us back from encountering being and truth.” We would only ever find meaning that is “of our own making” *Caritas in Veritate* (para. 70). Others share much the same view, see J. Tomlinson *Globalization and Culture*, Cambridge, Polity Pr., 1999. Tomlinson traces out how the rhetoric of community and programming is the language of Global Capitalism.

²⁰ John Paul II *Evangelium Vitae* (para. 20).

²¹ *Evangelium Vitae* (para. 23).

²² John Paul II *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979 (3:15). Ratzinger noted that when economic liberalism and free-market theory rules this expresses the uncoupling of man from any given nature, transforming him thereby into “a product planned according to one’s pleasure” *The Ratzinger Report*, San Francisco, Ignatius Pr., 1985 (84).

‘mechanical’ and reductionist way of explaining things. Soon enough the claim came to be made, if only by those thinkers who felt less need for discretion, that Modernity was, in its empiricist and rationalist (and later idealist) manifestations, materialistic. For this reason natural philosophy (or as we call it today, ‘science’) was free from the need to take into account any transcendent factor.

It can be argued that the principle objection to be made against a materialist position is that it is rather difficult to know what in fact is meant by ‘matter’. As Modernity has given way to postmodernity or the less contentious term ‘Late-modernity’ the definition has become no clearer. Indeed, it is rare indeed to find any commentator from any discipline actually address the question of the definition of matter in anything like a clear and thorough way. Certainly there are descriptions of how matter *behaves*, and mathematics fills this need more than adequately so, but as to what matter *is*, well that question is left hanging. It is a question made all the more difficult to answer today what with a century at least of findings and theorising in both physics and cosmology that are, too put it mildly, rather odd.

Is matter what rocks are made of? What gas is made of? What water is made of? What particles are made of? What it is gravitational waves left over from the Big Bang are made of? What field events are made of? What genes are made of? What the brain is made of? What consciousness is made of? What subjectivity is made of? What dispositions are made of? What all these things and more are made of? If the answer is yes to these questions, then it is understandable that we might be suspicious that the term ‘matter’ is little more than a disguised synonym for ‘everything’?²³ And if this is the case then we might conclude that the term is meaningless for the statement ‘matter is everything’ simply translates into the tautology ‘everything is everything’. We would, however, be too hasty to dismiss the term outright for there is, in fact, one aspect to it that is not tautological. Whatever else the term ‘matter’ might mean to those who have made a virtue of their being materialists, it means *non-transcendent*. Hence, often the more meaningful term ‘monist’ is used instead of ‘materialist’.

The sting in the tail of this story, the place that paradox turns to irony, the turn that hints at the moral, is that as Modernity grows increasingly non-transcendent, as it grows increasingly

²³ A good example of this can be found in the philosophy of consciousness. Take by way of example the theories of John Searle as delineated in *The Rediscovery of Mind* (London, The MIT Pr., 1992). Searle is an atheist – or at least at the time of the writing of this book he was – but opposes the ‘nothing-but’ reductionism of writers like Daniel Dennett and David Armstrong who argue that mind is nothing-but-brain. Searle’s argument is that what these philosophers do not recognise is that there are different material systems, hence there is a first-person order of matter and a third-person order, such that it is equally true to say that consciousness is one form of matter and so too a rock. Searle certainly has the better of the argument with people like Dennett only he doesn’t seem to realise that this line of thinking cannot help but lead back to panpsychism. That is, the philosophy often associated with forms of pantheism that argues that all matter is conscious. On how widespread this theory has been in Western philosophy see D. Skrbina *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge, The MIT Pr., 2005). Panpsychism and its cousin ‘pantheism’ were entwined with the rise of the immanent, that is to say anti-transcendent, philosophy-theology of pantheism from Spinoza on. Indeed, pantheism used to be called ‘Spinozism’ in the eighteenth century, see T. McFarland *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, Oxford, Oxford at the Clarendon Pr., 1969. Recently, Galen Strawson in his essay ‘Real Naturalism’ in *The London Review of Books* (26/9/13) has argued for the credibility of panpsychism over other forms of monist materialism. I would suggest that panpsychism will be the philosophy and theology that the Church will have to confront in the near future for blended with environmental mysticism and forms of scientism it will seem to many to be the answer a disenchanted world has been looking for. Although there is nothing new about panpsychism there is, I think, a new component to this philosophy today. When we read the likes of Ray Kurzweil the advocate of the coming singularity he, and others, argue that *we will create* a panpsychic world for through our merging with the virtual world and through nanotechnology we will infuse matter with spirit. That is, if matter is not panpsychic now then it will be soon enough and that through our technology!

‘immanentistic’ and in *this* sense materialistic, *matter becomes correspondingly less material*. By this is meant that matter becomes less and less solid, less and less fixed, less and less a given such that it loses what we might call *thingness* and, as noted above, it loses its *thereness* as well! With the death of metaphysics and the death of God and the death of the author and the death of the subject and the death of man, one more death can be added to the list of Post-mortemism’s casualties, the death of matter. There is a loss to matter’s integrity and to its identity proper and matter becomes ‘non-thing in non-place’.

Matter becomes increasingly less material, becomes more like a mathematical code, and thus it comes to resemble, more and more, the virtual world we have set ourselves to create.²⁴ That *we* might be the principle agents of this loss of solidity is by the point, after all if there is no transcendent reference to be appealed to, then humanity and consciousness are likewise matter, hence we are that matter that works on matter to make of matter something all the more plastic and malleable. Materialism ends in the loss of the very materiality of matter and we, it seems, are the principle means of that loss. We are the means by which the cosmos becomes fairy-land!

In all its long ages and complex history the cosmos has led up to us, not as the Anthropic Principle might have it so that the cosmos, through us, can know itself, but rather to have us render it immaterial. When man set about building the tower of Babel in order to reach up into the heavens, it was recorded that God said that unless he went down and put a stop to it what things would man not be capable of! Nothing, God observed, would be impossible for man.²⁵ Unless God comes down, which is to say, breaks open our immanentistic system we will dissolve all things including ourselves.

It is something of scholarly truism that Modernity is described as being the loss of enchantment insofar as the cosmos was once understood in a symbolic fashion but today it symbolises nothing except what we project upon it. Whereas the cosmos was once replete with meaning, deferring to God, now it becomes mere stuff that defers only to the wishes of those who have the power to shape it to their own ends. Whereas prior to Modernity *being* was as semiosis in that all creation signed that which was other to it, with the rise of Modernity *being* signs nothing except a nature that, being empty of inherent meaning, can be shaped to whatever end one wants to shape it. The sign only ever signs itself hence all is increasingly understood to be simulation. From being other-referential *being* becomes self-referential. With the loss of transcendence, meaning and *being*, is and ought, are separated one from the other and then all are collapsed together falling now under the logic and dictates of pragmatism and utility and their handmaid positivism.²⁶

²⁴ This is the theme of the trilogy of the *Matrix* films. The telling thing is that though it may have been the case that the writers and director meant the trilogy as a critique of modern Gnosticism (though I am not sure if it was a critique or something of a recommendation) the popular response to it was to see it as descriptive of what could be an ideal world. The feeling that all is malleable, from memories and the sense of self through to the ability to shape matter and time, was a recurrent one up to the mid to late 2000s – one thinks of *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, *Vanilla Sky*, *Truman Show*, *Dark City*, *Minority Report*, *Synecdoche New York*, *Inception*, and other films besides. It might be argued that they express a deep cultural anxiety attendant upon this our hyper-consumerist age in that, like the financial market, everything is liquid and all is mere appearance. Beneath the appearance of solidity all is the void.

²⁵ *Genesis 11:6*.

²⁶ Here would be the place to argue for a Christian concept of matter, one predicated upon and expressive of the nature of being as semiosis. This is to say that all created being defers as a sign to that which it is not, namely to God. Thus, all creation is semiotic in nature. This applies not only by way of teleological orientation, where time defers to eternity, but materially as well. All matter is per se symbolic (something that informed the exegesis of pre-modern Christian commentators) and it is in this sense that all creation is a text of God in that it

Though we are well on our way, nevertheless, in the best tradition of the myths and folk tales, we are brought to a halt and, in order to journey further, we must answer a riddle. To us the Sphinx puts this question: which system is best suited to, best adapted to, best able to further this self-referential and plastic state of affairs? Playing the role of Oedipus we ponder a while and then the answer comes to us; the most pragmatic and successful of all immanent systems, the one that best accords with the anti-essentialism of Modernity, is *Capitalism*, and this, especially so, in its form of neo-liberal market theory and its attendant expression consumerism. If it is true that matter has become so much stuff to be shaped by our desires, then, without any question, the most successful system to answer to the demands of our desires, the one that offers up an endless array of consumer goods well, that is *Capitalism*. Capitalism is the economic and all-embracing philosophy that has turned our world into fairy-land! Everything that it touches, like some latter day Midas, turns not to gold but to liquid; no rather to plastic – no, to insubstantial ether with gossamer wings to boot! As Marx and Engels famously put it in *The Communist Manifesto*, “All that is solid melts into air.”

In fairyland every wish is granted, every delight is promised, magic reigns and magic makes everything easy; ask for it, believe with all your might that you will get it, believe as strongly as you can, and it shall come to you!²⁷ In fairyland there is every inducement to succumb to temptation – but as was noted at the outset of this paper, you would be well advised *not* to eat or drink anything given to you.

Every ideology operates by inculcating the notion that resistance is futile; only the myths and folk-tales had another tale to tell, one that *was* about resistance because it was about renunciation and even suffering. The hero or heroine would resist the siren song of their desires and the promises that their wishes would all be fulfilled. They would steel themselves against temptation. Now here’s the thing, here’s the important distinction to make: it was not enchantment that they resisted but *glamour*. The work of enchantment was to free oneself from fairyland, from the glamour that would enslave one.

IV. The Charm of Glamour

‘Glamour’ is the effect a spell has when it enslaves a person.²⁸ The spell often works by way of playing upon one’s desires, seducing one into a drugged-like state where, by reason of

defers for its meaning to its author, God. To the degree that matter is divorced from this its proper nature, that it is made to be ‘mere stuff’ the meaning of which is imposed by us, to this degree it falls from being and loses its integrity and thus solidity. Matter becomes synonymous with formlessness and in our age it becomes a means to plastic virtuality.

²⁷ This is the reasoning that informs New Age and New Age is the spirituality of Capitalism *par excellence*. By way of example see Helen Schucman’s *Course in Miracles* (a series of courses from 1965 through to 1972, later published in 1975), Neal Walsch’s series *Conversations with God* (hailing from the 1990s) and Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret* (from 2006), the latter having been promoted by no less a figure than Oprah Winfrey. The principle being that we are all God and as God is all the universe then we are also the universe, we only need to realise it and if we want something then we need only learn to want it with zeal and ask for it from ourselves and we will have it! See the comments in the Pontifical Council for Culture and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue *Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the ‘New Age’* (2002) especially 6:1 ‘Create your own Reality’. It concludes on this matter by noting that the ‘transcendence’ promised by New Age is not what a Christian might understand by it: the “fundamental difficulty of all New Age thought is that this transcendence is strictly self-transcendence to be achieved within a closed system” (6:1). One could argue that this applies to a good deal of Western philosophy and spirituality and not just New Age.

²⁸ C. Dyhouse in her book *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London, Zed Books, 2011) cites the Oxford English Dictionary to the effect that ‘glamour’ meant a “delusive charm, and was used in association with

being unable to reason, one ends up passive and vacant, one's will controlled by other forces, kept under the spell by the promise of even greater pleasures.

Celebrity culture is glamour, properly so, and thus it expresses most clearly the power of fairyland. We live in a land where human beings become brands and willingly sell themselves, debasing themselves in order to gain the status of a celebrity. They make of themselves something immoral, justifying this by labelling their behaviour 'transgressive' when, in fact, it conforms to all the dictates of the market. So it is that overcome by glamour they accept their status as a standardised product, losing their soul in the process, a loss that is evident in the fact that they have become clichéd and risible; they become insubstantial. Most wondrously of all this is done in order to be admired by others *who think it a good thing to desire a similar fate!*

In a world of glamour all is effortless and easy; you are free from obedience to codes of morality or doctrine, free from the demands of chastity – free from essence such that you can be whatever it is you want to be, though strangely enough you only ever end up wanting to be like another 'glamoured' celebrity. Glamour operates where matter is made immaterial and the goal is to become insubstantial. Glamour is a world made of magic in which all is virtual and thus friction free, where you can get what you want simply by wishing it to be so.

What promises glamour makes! On offer is a virtual world where technology will not only answer to your every desire it will, if your passions happen to be lagging, provide you with the means to feel again the desires of your youth! It will both provide your fantasies *and* fulfil those fantasies, you will have to do nothing yourself except sit back and be entertained. There will be a 24/7 immediacy where no other real human is needed to mediate an answer to your passions – it will be just you and your cyborg; a world made fit for technologically facilitated masturbation.²⁹

But strip the glamour away and *this* is what you are left with: the market in souls made plastic and inane. When Marx and Engels wrote that "All that is solid melts into air, all that is sacred is profaned" they could have been talking of fairy-land, only they were referring to the process by which Capitalism dissolves all meaning and value except the value of capital itself (and even then there is always the ever present spectre of inflation to threaten capital value as well).

So what now?

When Jesus said to St Peter that on him he would build his Church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it, Jesus did not present a picture of the Church as an impregnable city on a mountain top besieged by the forces of hell; quite the reverse. The picture Jesus presented was of the Church on the move besieging and then storming the city of hell – *it is*

witchery and the occult." In the 19th century it came to mean that which is "dangerously alluring" such that it will lead one away "from virtue" (11). In the 1920s on it is used to describe the "magic of new technologies" not least those used in beauty products and associated with celebrity (20-26).

²⁹ The myth that those who pump the coming singularity promote is that the virtual world facilitates communication, hence the misleading term 'social media' a good example as any of double-speak. See the criticisms made by Andrew Keen in his book *Digital Vertigo: How Today's Social Revolution is Dividing, Diminishing, and Disorienting Us* (New York, St Martin's Pr., 2012). The language of the "social", Keen writes, aims for a "radically transparent network of 'frictionless sharing'" (65), but in reality it fragments real social relations (66). The social-media helps create a plastic self that reflects "the perpetual flux of social media's myriad systems of information" (69). Keen's answer to this is, in my opinion, rather lame. He looks back to of all people John Stuart Mill and the hope in individualism (184).

*the gates of hell that will not hold out against the Church.*³⁰ It is the Church that dispels glamour by reason that it puts fairy-land to flight. It is the Church that puts the lie to ideology and reminds us that resistance is not futile. But practically speaking how are we to contribute to this work of the Church?

The answer begins at home, which is to say here in our Cathedral, St Mary's Sydney. More specifically, here in *this* series of talks, for the aim of this series has been to discuss what things might inform a truly Catholic education. What things might be taught that Catholics might be armed with the weapons they need to resist and defy the seductions of fairy-land? More fundamental still we ought to ask not so much as to what things should be taught, though that of course is essential, but in what way ought they to be taught? What means ought we to employ such that our means correspond to the content of what it is we are teaching?

V. Teaching the Substance of Things

In his meeting with Catholic educators, Benedict XVI underlined the fact that education in the Catholic Church is one of the Church's "highest priorities."³¹ It teaches freedom but not as Modernity understands it, for this freedom is not a freedom from essence, but rather a freedom *to conform* to one's proper essence. In other words, a freedom to accord with *being* not to oppose *being*. To put it in the terms used in this paper: a freedom to make things solid and, thereby, to again make of the world an enchanted place. This freedom is "not an opting out. It is an opting in – a participation in Being itself," contra "giving way to cold pragmatic calculations of utility which render a person little more than a pawn on some ideological chess-board."³² A Catholic education is the opposite of "rejecting metaphysics," and thus with confidence "Christian educators can liberate the young from the limits of positivism and awaken receptivity to the truth."³³ A Catholic education sets itself to oppose "the satisfaction of the individual's immediate wishes."³⁴ In short, a Catholic education should be, in the form of its delivery and in its content, something fundamentally opposed to the values of the market.³⁵

³⁰ *Matthew 16:18*.

³¹ Benedict XVI *Meeting with Catholic Educators* (Given at the Conference Hall of the Catholic University of America in Washington DC Thursday, 17th April 2008 (2).

³² *Meeting with Catholic Educators* (3).

³³ *Meeting with Catholic Educators* (3).

³⁴ *Meeting with Catholic Educators* (4).

³⁵ As Benedict notes much education mirrors the world around us and so: "We observe today a timidity in the face of the category of the good and an aimless pursuit of novelty parading as the realization of freedom" (4). As an example of what a Catholic education should *not* be like I would single out G. Whitby's *Educating Gen Wi-Fi: How to Make Schools Relevant for 21st Century Learners*, Sydney, ABC Books, 2013. Whitby is an enthusiastic proponent of the use of IT in schools not least because it is best suited to 'speed': "Speed has become the focus of this generation; how quickly something can be done is often more important than how accurately it is done" (93). He cites approvingly research done at the Palo Alto Research Centre in California which found that the "attention span of these digital learners (between 30 seconds and five minutes) equalled that of top managers who operate in the world of fast context-switching." The conclusion being that what we might see as being a weakness, which is to say diminished attention spans, is in fact "suited for jobs of the future that require the ability to work on various tasks simultaneously" (94). Education and business finally fully merge through the wonderful world of digital technology! What Whitby doesn't tell his readers is that the Palo Alto Research Centre (or PARC) was founded by Xerox and is a subsidiary of Xerox. Among its other clients that it serves with its research are Samsung, Fujitsu, NEC and other big corporate names in the field of IT. That those intimately involved with the IT industry might want to put a positive spin on the effects of computers in education, in that it helps to meet the demands of business for people with short-attention spans, is not an issue that Whitby raises.

It is here that I want to suggest an approach that in my opinion will enable Catholic educators to best answer to what it is Benedict argued that a Catholic education ought to do. In order to do so I want to begin by calling to mind Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum "The medium is the message."³⁶ In the context of education we can translate this into the following: the means by which we teach a subject will inevitably end up shaping what it is we teach, be it for good or for bad. The means of dissemination must correspond to that which is being disseminated. For example, the sacred texts of the world were not written in order to be indiscriminately disseminated through the medium of the market; they were written for the communion itself and were thus to be read under the guidance of those vested with authority. Whether or not we think it a good thing, the fact of the matter is that the medium of the market has what might be called a secularising effect on the way in which the sacred text is read and understood.

The way in which we teach a topic will have an effect on the way in which we convey *the substance* of the topic. Our technology – again be it for good or for bad – will shape what it is we teach.

To cut to the quick, if we rely on computer technology then what we will teach will be shaped by the virtual world and its antipathy to friction, it will answer to the requirements of ease and entertainment. The logic of the technology will tend towards not just a dumbing down of the content (for such is the nature of the medium that content is adapted to the demands of ease of reception by way of an accent on visual stimulation, bite-sized bits of information, and the requirement to entertain) but also to the sense that what is taught is like the medium itself, namely of the order of being insubstantial. If we teach by way of the virtual then what it is we teach will begin to take on the hue of the virtual. If the medium is oriented towards immediacy and ease of access, then the content, in a like manner, will be shaped to facilitate immediacy and ease of access. All will be oriented towards the ideal of a friction-free engagement.

As a colleague at the Catholic Institute of Sydney put it when we were discussing on-line education, "If we being Catholics do not believe in real presence then who will?" The *real* presence of a lecturer and tutor in a *real* classroom, the *real* presence of hard-copy books and journals, the demands of *real* discipline, all go towards making up a substantial and thus solid education where the truths of the faith have a better chance of being taught than when these truths are disseminated by way of the computer mediated interaction that is the virtual world.³⁷

³⁶ In his *Understanding Media* (London, Sphere Books, 1967, fp. 1964), McLuhan wrote: "In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message" (15). McLuhan is, in fact, a good example of a fine mind being gulled by technological hopes and being, thereby, a baneful influence on others. His argument was that earlier technology was fragmenting while 'electo-magnetic' technology (TV, radio, and so forth) is uniting. Electronic technology will bring about "instant speed" thereby joining all people into a new "creative configuration" (20), one characterised by "wholeness, empathy and depth of awareness" (13). He wrote earlier in his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967, fp. 1962) that electronic technology would bring about a "simultaneous field" one that he terms the "global village" (31). This field or village is an "organic interdependence of men in the electronic age" (65). Not least for this reason McLuhan proved to be very influential on what has come to be known as the 'Californian Ideology' (a term coined by R. Barbrook and A. Cameron in their article 'The Californian Ideology' in *Mute*, No. 3, Autumn 1995). It is this ideology that arose out of Silicon Valley in the late 1980s and was a mixture of technological utopianism and the economic theories of Ayn Rand. It was also this ideology that bled into the hopes for the coming 'singularity' and 'hive-mind'.

³⁷ There are a number of good books on this subject written largely from a secular position, which does not speak well of religious theorists, especially Catholic, who ought to be in the forefront of opposing the use of things IT in the classroom. By way of example see: T. Brabazon *Digital Hemlock: Internet Education and the*

So it is that I would argue that the accent in Catholic education, and this especially so in primary and high school (but also in under-graduate courses and many post-grad courses too), should be on excluding, as much as is possible, all computer-ware from the classroom. Certainly, there can be classes that teach so-called computer literacy, but these classes ought not to be allowed to influence any of the other classes. To be blunt, computer courses should be quarantined so as keep the medium from infecting the other more important disciplines. On-line education, indeed most if not all computer-facilitated education, is by reason of the technology that grounds and informs it oriented away from *being*, away from the integrity of identity and the presence of solidity, away from the sense of essence and substance. In this it is of a piece with modern capital, modern markets, and modern entertainment for these too are informed by the logic of anti-essentialism. By its nature this education will indulge a student and thereby encourage their conceits, it will have them believe that they are engaged in research and even critical analysis when they are simply cutting-and-pasting, moving content screen to screen. It inculcates an inability to focus, it encourages distraction, and it breeds impatience. It is entertainment not enlightenment. It is a friend of the market but an enemy of self-discipline.

And there is no revolution proper without discipline.

Fairyland is so powerful for it destroys discipline. It has many means to indulge the passions and keep a person passive, to sap their will, lull them to sleep, and, when they wake up, fifty years later, their life wasted having been spent on being entertained in the virtual world of make-believe, *then* does the viciousness of fairy-land become apparent, for it is *then* that the glamour lifts and all that is left is despair.

A Catholic education is not about indulging the passions but about emulating *the* Passion. It is to learn something hard and difficult and thereby to learn something of the substance and solidity of things. And, strange as it may seem, it is to learn something about enchantment.

VI. Enchantment, Wonder, and the Cathedral of Being

Enchantment is found in the apprehension of the very beingness of *being*, of the very mystery of *being* itself – why it is there is *being* and not non-*being*.³⁸ Enchantment is of a piece

Poisoning of Teaching, Sydney, UNSW Pr. Ltd., 2002. “Lectures,” writes Brabazon, “are a multi-literate form, involving sound, vision and gestures. The best of lectures are sheer artistry, and to dislodge their role in the rush to the web is to destroy one of the oldest, most motivating forms of teaching. Good teaching is not technologically dependent” (63). Frank Donoghue in his book *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (New York, Fordham Uni. Pr., 2008) charts the nexus between the move to on-line learning, big business, and the rise to dominance of managerialism over academic work in the Universities. He notes how the for-profit universities “have been the pioneers and leading proponents of on-line learning” (95). Further, that they are “bonded to the business world” and “operate as businesses themselves” (97). David Noble in his article ‘Technology and the Commodification of Higher Education’ (*Monthly Review* 53:10, March 2002) details how on-line learning came into its own in order to meet the needs of the defence forces in the 1990s. And how the defence establishment has, like business would later on, shaped the content, curricula, and methods of the courses provided (3-4). Richard Hil in his book *Whackademia: An Insider’s Account of the Troubled University* (Sydney, UNSW Pr. Ltd., 2012) gives examples from a number of universities in Australia where the accent on on-line learning has gone hand in glove with the undermining of the rights and job security of academics across the board, alongside the accent on the dumbing down of standards and requirements in courses.

³⁸ “The philosopher who learns humility will also find courage to tackle questions which are difficult to resolve if the data of revelation are ignored – for example, the problem of evil and suffering, the personal nature of God

with wonder, and philosophy proper begins with wonder, and it ought to be theology that both complements and perfects this sense of wonder. The sense of wonder first and foremost attends the givenness of things to be; their very being-there independent of our will or wishes. Whereas in the virtual world all is able to be manipulated in accord with our increasingly superficial desires, in the world that is wondrous and thus enchanted, there are obstacles, there is friction, there is also the sheer astonishment that things outside of my own wishes and desires exist, independently so.

And this brings us even closer to home, to this Cathedral.

To teach as a Catholic, said Benedict in his address to the Catholic Educators, “is a question of conviction – do we really believe that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear?”³⁹ The shape of this mystery is one that is revealed in the architecture of the Cathedral. Cathedrals are in a schematic shape of a man by reason that the Cathedral shapes the Cross.⁴⁰ It is the Cross of Christ the crucified Lord that reveals the true nature of both God and man; for man is the Image of God and Jesus is the express Image of God. Both God and man are known, as the pontiffs aver, in the giving of themselves to others, here is the mystery that sacrifice and renunciation intimate; that in losing our life we find it.

If we think upon the legends, myths, and tales (historical and otherwise) that move us we will see that more often than not they turn on renunciation and sacrifice as well as on discipline and perseverance. It is in these stories that we get a sense of substance. It is this, in fact, what all of us desire for we all fear the void that is insubstantiality, no matter how brave a face we put on it. No matter, that is, how much we valorise it by identifying anti-essentialism with freedom we instinctively know that the void is the place of unclean spirits. A key element in many of these tales is that of the quest, and if it is a theme that has become somewhat hackneyed then it is so because it has lasted, and it has lasted because it speaks of something true and inexhaustible. In other words, it is something that can be told again and again for it is a theme as inexhaustible as the soul itself. It captures the very sense of what it is to be truly and substantially human, to be something more than a plastic brand. What’s more, the story of the quest captures what it is to be truly free; a freedom not from substance but rather to become substantial, to leave the world of the shades behind and to make our way out of the underworld.

The freedom of the quest is, to borrow from Benedict, the freedom to search out and participate in *being*. All teaching should be conducted as if the student (and teacher) were on just such a quest, which is why learning requires the discipline and perseverance, the sacrifices and renunciations that every quest requires. Infotainment simply does not cut it. The sense of the quest proper cannot be conveyed by virtual technology, for as has already been noted the medium is predicated upon principles that are the very contradiction of those things required of a quest. Above all else we might say that gravity is of the essence of the quest, things serious and demanding, things substantial, things heavy that come with friction.

A side issue that has been raised in this series of talks, and one that has been increasingly raised in other Catholic circles, is that of Church architecture, and not just Church architecture but the

and the question of the meaning of life or, more directly, the radical metaphysical question, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing’ John Paul II *Fides et Ratio* (para. 76).

³⁹ *Meeting with Catholic Educators* (2).

⁴⁰ R. Scott *The Gothic Enterprise: A Guide to Understanding the Medieval Cathedral*, Berkeley, The Uni. of California Pr., 2003. Scott speaks of the “cruciform footprint” (18) and that there is an accent on the Incarnation in the Gothic Cathedral (68).

kind of architecture that should house the Catholic academy. Here we cannot do this subject the justice it deserves but I would argue that too much contemporary Church architecture has the whiff of nostalgia about it, as if the copying of things Gothic will restore a sense of the sacred to a liturgy that has suffered under the misguided idea that the adoption of the secular and profane will somehow result in relevance. Yes, we all know that the result of this idea was the very opposite of what was hoped for, so it was that much of modern theology mirrored its architecture; it became irrelevant and ugly not least because it strove so hard to be nice. In short, it made all things easy and thereby disposable.

Having said that, however, a retreat into nostalgia will not do, not least because since at least the late 1990s a feature of contemporary architecture has been, in certain quarters, a pandering to this nostalgia for things again to be made sacred by way of the all too easy adoption of things taken from the past. The market rules and the results are little more than kitsch. In my opinion what we see is insincerity pretending to substance. In fact, what is built looks like the last gasps of postmodernism. Postmodernism proper was not nostalgia (that in fact was a mark of Modernism as seen in the writings of Baudelaire, the Symbolists, and other lesser luminaries), and its use of pastiche and the deliberate confusion of styles and times was a sincere love of, display of, and reflection on contemporary culture. But this is not the case with a number of contemporary Church buildings for those who commission them affect to despise the modern and postmodern, only in aping the past they are pretending to be old when they are newer than anything they affect to despise. Furthermore, one might be forgiven for asking what exactly are we up to now, the neo-neo Gothic revival, or the neo-neo-neo Gothic revival, or am I out by a few neos?

For what it's worth my opinion is this, in light of the argument of this talk, if we are to have a revival then let's have a *Romanesque* one, albeit one that has learnt from modern Brutalism but has overcome its incipient iconoclasm by way of a heavy dose of Anselm Keifer.

If the complaint is made that such architecture would for many of the faithful be ugly and incomprehensible then the faithful must be asked what is it that they are looking for, something easy and cosy? Perhaps something that does not demand of them thought and contemplation? It is a time honoured truism that beauty demands effort while kitsch is mere decoration; one elevates the soul, the other debases it. The truism might be translated thus: the quest is difficult, shopping is easy.

Finally, the paradigmatic model of the quest for much of western thinking has been that of the romances of the Grail and, how ever much the romance has been abused even debased and trivialised, its enduring appeal testifies to how *the way* is the way that is guided by that which the Cathedral represents – the sacrifice of Christ, the real presence of his flesh and blood. Benedict wrote of the Eucharist that it: “Penetrates to the heart of all being, [*it is*] a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all.”⁴¹ Forget the delicacies of fairyland *that* is the food and drink of enchantment.

⁴¹ Benedict XVI Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007) 1.11.

Postscript

On 7/4/2014 a document was published and sent out to interested parties under the aegis of Cardinal Grocholewski on behalf of the Congregation for Catholic Education entitled *Instrumentum Laboris* (Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion). The document represents a consultative process the aim of which is to clarify issues for a Global Convention to be held in Rome on 18-21 of November 2015 on the subject of education. As the topic of the document concerns those discussed in the present paper I thought it fit to briefly address the issues raised.

The document details issues and proposals for Catholic education at all levels including tertiary. Among its points is that there is a “sacramental nature” to Catholic education (4), hence all such education should revolve around the memory of God made flesh (8). For this and other reasons education must be thought about against the background of a distinctly Catholic theory of anthropology (9), the consequences of which entails that education is about personal relationships (9) and a sense of belonging (7), and these can only occur within a climate of solidarity (6). Following on from this, education must be open to pluralism (10), albeit a pluralism based upon a specific Catholic identity (17), which identity involves a sense of justice and the service of the common good (8). With the foregoing in mind, Catholic education must not be subservient to economic power and the demands of business (3), nor for that matter to the privatization of knowledge (9) – which is to say to the kinds of demands that emanate from institutions such as the World Bank (12). This approach will exclude schemes that involve “mass education” (6) – why? The document does not explain, but I think the logic is that schemes predicated on mass education express the kind of economic subordination that leads to standardisation, and this in turn answers to the dictates of the market. Whatever it is, it is antipathetic to a true Catholic pluralism. The document allows that yes there should be an engagement with business and the professions so as to aid students who want to start their own businesses (8), but the tone is such that it is understood that this aid ought not to corrupt the discipline of education itself.

The document notes the need for critical reflection on the use of on-line technology (12, 14, 15) and it expresses the opinion that this resource can enrich our knowledge (17). In light of the argument of this present paper my argument is that this acceptance of on-line technology in education, albeit employed with a critical eye, represents a possible source of fundamental conflict in respect of the documents stated aims. On-line computer education *as a medium* changes the very nature of education, and this especially so where that education is meant to look to the Incarnation and the sacraments as both its source and orientation. By encouraging an insubstantial sense of the world and, thereby, a sense of the malleability of the world, on-line and disparate forms of virtual pedagogy inculcate a sense of the world as being conformable to the individual’s immediate desires. It is thus corrosive of solidarity and personal relationships in the same way that pornography is corrosive of real intimacy. As a medium the computer is well attuned to the demands of contemporary market and consumer economics, which is to say to mass education and its demands - but these demands are ones that dissolve academic standards proper. They are demands that inculcate an ideology antipathetic to a sacramental understanding of the faith.

On-line teaching cannot help but inculcate ‘on-line thinking’ and this thinking is, more often than not, in line with the false universalism attendant upon contemporary globalism - a globalism that pretends to universalism insofar as that universalism is predicated on the need for capital to have no barriers. As the Catholic faith is truly universal and thus inculcates a true

sense of substance then, ultimately, it will find itself more and more at odds with this contemporary form of globalisation. The problem will then be how many of the faithful have been formed in their thinking by this antipathetic form of universalism so-called.

Much more can be said on this topic, but I think that if we are to have a truly Catholic education then we must think about how it is the truths of the faith are to be best disseminated such that the medium of their dissemination best accords with the content being disseminated. If ours is a sacramental religion then our education should reflect this truth.

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