

## ARTICLE

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# THE IDEAL OF A CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN A SECULARIZED SOCIETY

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*This paper argues that the progressive, revisionist reaction within Catholic education and schooling, as well as within Catholicism at large, to the challenge of modernity is a mistake. In view of modernity's malaises, it advocates instead the affirmation or reaffirmation of the ideal of traditional Catholicism as the only authentic response for Catholics to modern progress. In order to justify the distinctiveness of a traditional Catholic identity and educational project, the paper offers an outline of a distinctively Thomistic educational philosophy. Its defense of the (re)affirmation of the ideal of traditional Catholic education and schooling in secularized society is neither ultra-conservative nor romantic.*

## INTRODUCTION

Catholic parents and teachers have enormous difficulties in upholding and maintaining a Catholic education in today's enlightened, secularized, industrialized, consumer society. The mission of Catholic education is in competition with other religious and non-religious educational projects for the preservation of its age-old venerable position within a modern multicultural and pluralist society. The aspiration of Catholic schooling to educate the whole person in light of an all-embracing worldview based on divine revelation is challenged by secular and liberal ideology in contemporary Western democracy. The Catholic Church in Western Europe presently faces a decline in the number of people practicing and a disintegration of long-standing ecclesiastical structures and hierarchies. So in their endeavor to safeguard Catholic truths, values, and observances, parents and teachers loyal to Catholicism are swimming against the tide of the modern *Zeitgeist*.

One widespread reaction within Catholicism itself to these and related difficulties lies in the attempt to adapt Catholic doctrine as well as ritual to the demands of modernity and, consequently, to revise traditional Catholic education and schooling accordingly. This paper will argue, however, that this progressive reaction to the challenge of modernity is a mistake. In view of modernity's malaises, such as individualism and hedonism, it will advocate the (re)affirmation of the ideal of traditional Catholicism as the only authentic response for Catholics to modern progress. Catholic educators and schools

should, correspondingly, hold fast to the distinctiveness of their traditional Catholic identity, of which an account will be offered by outlining a distinctively Thomistic educational philosophy. As a final point, the paper will explain why its plea for the (re)affirmation of the ideal of traditional Catholic education in the upbringing of youngsters in modern secularized society is neither ultra-conservative nor romantic. Although the topic dealt with here will primarily be of concern to Catholics, the discussion may also engage other Christian and non-Christian believers as well as non-believers, given the general interest taken in the problem of modernity (or, for that matter, post-modernity) and its possible solutions in the contemporary debate on meaning and value-constitution.

## **ENLIGHTENED MODERNITY AND PROGRESSIVE CATHOLICISM**

The vast majority of Western Europeans living today accept the claim that Catholic education is orthogonal to the modern mind. This claim can, of course, be generalized to include other types of Christian (e.g., Protestant) and non-Christian (e.g., Judaic) education as well. This paper will focus primarily on Catholic education. Traditional religious education and monotheistic religion as such are considered to be unsuited to modernity because they are opposed to the enlightenment ideals that characterize the modern world. In addition, it is claimed that the modern, enlightened mentality is cause as well as effect of the process of secularization. Western culture has undergone a gradual process of secularization over the last 200 years or more. That is to say, religion gradually lost its influence in the realm of Western science and technology, economics, and socio-politics, as well as in the public and even in the private life of Western Europeans. As a general theory, secularization is best understood as a special application of the conception of history as a grand story of the progressive development of human culture (Graham, 1992).

Such a progressive conception is, of course, the kernel of the Hegelian philosophy of history. The dialectic historical process is progressive and finally culminates in the rationalization of Christianity into philosophy. As Feuerbach, Marx, and Comte subsequently argued, such a rational replacement of Christianity – giving a rational form to the truths embodied but obscured within Christianity – in the end entails its elimination. Against the background of this Hegelian conception of history, secularization is thought to be not only inevitable but also desirable. In what follows, the discussion will be limited to the *normative* theory of secularization (i.e., secularism), which holds that the decline of Christianity is highly valuable because belief in the traditional God of theism and other supernatural beliefs (in, for example, miracles and immortality) are ingredients of the unenlightened mind of the Dark Ages. Such a normative theory may be held irrespective of accepting the descriptive claim that the historical process inevitably or, for that matter, contingently moves toward religious decline or, conversely, toward religious revival. As a descriptive claim, the fact of secularization is at present certainly not a global truth. In

light of flourishing Christianity in Eastern Europe, the United States, and especially the Third World (for example, in African countries), secularization is only locally true; namely, true in Western Europe. Particularly with regard to the situation in the U.S. one can even speak about the success story of Catholic education and schooling (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993).

In their defense of the desirability of secularization, those in favor of secularism point to the bloody history and the oppressive ecclesiastical institutions of Christianity. Anti-semitism, the Inquisition, the religious wars, persecutions during the Reformation and other cruel forms of intolerance are considered as crimes against humanity committed in the name of the Christian God. According to the secularists, Christianity is not only responsible for physical pain and death, but also for mental and moral evils. A divine-law conception of ethics conducive to a guilt-ridden form of life stood in the way of mankind's emancipation and autonomy. Moreover, apart from its destructive impact on the flesh and the "heart," Christianity forbids persons to use their head. Faith deprives a person of his capacity for critical reflection. Particularly in the Catholic tradition, a person's capacity to accept unquestioned dogmas and infallible dictates is praised as virtuous. Such dogmatically narrow-mindedness of religious people sharply contrasts with the modern, enlightened mentality. This antagonism becomes especially transparent in an educational context:

The anti-intellectualism inherent in religion is perhaps the strongest evidence of its opposition to enlightenment, and to many people it demonstrates a deep antithesis between religious belief and the fundamental requirements of a modern education. For the aim of education as we generally understand it is the inculcation of a spirit of critical questioning on the one hand, and on the other the provision of means by which self-generated answers may be discovered, while religion requires subscription to dogma and submission to religious authorities whether ecclesiastical or Scriptural. (Graham, 1992, p. 192)

As a Christian and in particular as a Catholic, one could, in response, show that this defense of secularism is based on a highly selective reading of the facts by pointing at, among other things, Catholic (and other Christian) hospitals and health care, Catholicism's plea for the common good and its joyful and jubilant view of the meaning of life and death, the creation of Catholic universities, and a rich Catholic intellectual tradition. Although any defense of secularism is probably selective, and notwithstanding the Catholic Church's recent recognition of its "faults of the past" (Catholic Church's International Theological Commission, 2000), progressive Catholics (as well as other progressive Christians) share with the secularists both the belief in an inherent tension between traditional religion and religious education on the one hand and enlightened modernity on the other, and the belief in the desirability of modern progress. The reaction of progressive Catholicism to the challenge of modernity – the allegedly scientific, technical, and economic as well as psychological and moral progress – consists then in trying to accommodate the enlightened, modern mind within the bounds of religion. Of course, this

requires rewriting dogmatic theology and refurbishing sacramental ceremony in such a manner as to preserve the spirit of the Bible in a version that would not be offensive to the enlightened, modern mind. So progressive Catholicism does not resist modernity but, quite the reverse, positively evaluates the present modern condition of man and, accordingly, attempts to adapt itself to it by modernizing religion, as well as religious education and schooling.

Like progressive Catholics, ultra-conservative Catholics share with secularists the belief that traditional religion is unsuited to enlightened modernity. But unlike progressive Catholics, they negatively evaluate the current situation and, consequently, they do resist modernity. The ultra-conservative reaction consists then in renouncing the modern world and retreating into the fortified citadel of orthodoxy and its associated formal ritual. The terms progressive and ultra-conservative Catholics are used ideal-typically, that is to say, they are constructed as Weberian ideal-types for theoretical purposes. Although idealized, aspects of Edward Schillebeeckx's theological position, for example, are progressive whereas aspects of Opus Dei are ultra-conservative. Although not Catholic, the best example of the closest approximation of the ideal-type of Christian progressivism is Cupitt (1980). In what follows, revisionism is synonymous with progressivism. One of the best examples at the other extreme is the Society of St. Pius X, founded by Archbishop Lefebvre. In this paper ultra-conservatism emphatically does not mean the same as traditional Catholicism, since ultra-conservative Catholicism involves a perverted use of the Catholic tradition. The crucial difference between ultra-conservative and traditional Catholicism will be clarified further.

By using the progressive/ultra-conservative contrast, we want to identify an important real opposition between two radically different tendencies in contemporary Catholicism, not only in the theory of the clergy and theologians, but also in the practice of lay people. Although set up as Weberian ideal-types for theoretical purposes, the split between a left progressive and a right ultra-conservative wing represents an actual polarization within the Catholic Church of today (Sullivan, 2001). Ultra-conservative groups underscore fidelity, continuity, obedience, and in general a distinctive or exclusive attitude toward modernity, whereas progressive ones emphasize creativity, innovation, liberty, and in general an inclusive or open attitude toward secular culture. Both groups effectively contribute to a damaging polarization within the Catholic Church. Needless to say that the concrete situation of the Church at present is much more complex and subtle than this rough theoretical antithesis of extremes captures. Of course, there are more balanced or healthy forms of conservatism as well as of progressivism possible, which could conceivably be brought under a common denominator to establish a viable center. Indeed, the main purpose of this article is to warn against extremism in the Catholic response to the challenge of modernity and, correspondingly, to argue for an authentic traditional Catholicism as the *via media* between the progressive and ultra-conservative distortions. However, to clearly bring out the issue and to make our point, it is theoretically legitimate to start from a sharp ideal-typical contrast, even if it involves a somewhat crude caricature of both terms.

According to progressive revisionism, the very project of demythologizing the Scriptures and modernizing the ceremonies and observances is justified on the basis of the self-conception of the post-Vatican II Catholic Church itself. Progressive Catholics hold the view that:

after the Second Vatican Council the Church underwent a radical and irreversible change in its self-conception...instead of regarding itself as an autocratic structure primarily concerned with preserving Tridentine orthodoxy through authoritative teaching and priest-administered sacraments, the Church now knows itself to be a community of equals moving uncertainly as a pilgrim body toward a more just social order. (Haldane, 1996a, p. 129)

Revisionists claim that the Church itself has undergone a transformation from a mystic body based on a heavenly, transcendent message to an institution founded on a worldly, moral, and social philosophy. Instead of being a divine vehicle of transcendent truths and values, the Church has become the promoter of an inspirational ideology to realize more social justice in an ecumenical and multicultural world. The hallmark of this transformation is the substitution of a substantive definition of religion for a functional one. As a replacement for defining religion as the belief in a transcendent God, revisionists define religion in terms of its role in society, (i.e., the function which religion has in binding together (*religare*) the members of a community into one coherent whole). Apart from its moral and social functions, religion also plays a psychological role in that it offers a way to cope with the ultimate problems of life, such as frustration, suffering, and death. Progressive revisionism ultimately reduces religion to its mundane functional roles.

However, there are reasons to doubt that the Church in fact underwent a significant change in its self-conception after Vatican II apart from some superficial stylistic changes. Arguably, the ante-Vatican II period and the post-Vatican II period in the history of the Church are directly continuous with each other because the Church has been and still is committed to the same core of unchanging truths and objective values. Pope John Paul II's recent encyclicals, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and *Fides et Ratio* (1998), amply testify to such an unbroken continuity in essential doctrinal teaching. We are in agreement with Haldane when he says that:

one problem in maintaining the revisionist view is that it seems to be at odds with that presented by Pope John Paul II and by Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, both of whom have been concerned to combat what they regard as serious lapses from authentic Catholic teaching. Given some perspectives, to find oneself in disagreement with the occupants of these offices is to have reason to presume that one is in error. (1996a, pp. 129-130)

As a consequence, the progressive reaction of revisionist Catholicism to enlightened modernity is a mistake because it conflicts with the essentials of

the faith as propagated and affirmed with authority by the Church's Apostolic magisterium. Of course, this quick way to condemn progressive Catholicism will be considered as reactionary and question begging from the revisionist perspective. Although this quick way is, given some perspectives, the best way to resolve the dispute, we will additionally set up a longer argument against progressive Catholicism, and in favor of traditional Catholicism (not to be confused with ultra-conservative Catholicism), starting from the malaises of modernity as its first premise. In place of uncritically accepting the belief in the "goods" of modern progress, as progressive Catholics do, and subsequently revising one's own identity, we will suggest that the proper reaction to enlightened modernity consists in being critical of the present modern condition of man and, in view of such a critique, (re)affirming one's identity as a traditional Catholic.

## THE MALAISES OF MODERNITY

The process of secularization and modernization at large in Western Europe since the 17th century has not unambiguously been a process of progressive development. For all the goods it may have produced, modernity also has its shadow and even dark side. Modern individuals have lost something important in comparison with their pre-modern counterparts, namely a significant sacred cosmic and social order in which all creatures had their proper place and by which existential meaning was conferred upon the life and death of man. The paradigm of such a hierarchical, meaning-bestowing order is, needless to say, the Catholic onto-theological worldview of the medieval ages. The decline of this worldview under the impact of modern science and technology has caused the disenchantment of the world. Such a loss of meaning and purpose is connected with what Taylor (1991, p. 1) calls "the malaises of modernity." On the list of these evils of modern progress one can find the following items:

- individualism (self-interest)
- instrumentalism
- consumerism
- materialism
- hedonism

The combination of individualism and instrumentalism in the public domain has given rise to the contemporary pluralistic liberal democratic Western society and its attendant capitalism. Modern value-pluralism and procedural politics make a shared overall view of life as a whole and a substantial theory of the good impossible. The law of the free market not only deprives labor of its inherent qualities, but also institutes economic inequality and social injustice by preserving and even widening the gap between rich and poor, above all between the Western world and the Third World. Now the lack of spiritual and moral aspiration in the public domain and the relegation of questions of value and the good to the private domain, de facto imply that the prevailing vision of human life which is conveyed in modern society is that of the

*homo economicus* (MacIntyre, 1995). What constitutes success in life becomes a matter of the successful acquisition of consumer goods. Not only the drive to have more and more material possessions, but also the hedonist indulgence in food and luxury, are thereby advertised as central virtues. It is not exaggerated to diagnose the current predicament of man in Western industrialized, consumer-society as one of physical and psychological debilitation and corruption, in combination with spiritual and moral emptiness. Major symptoms of this modern quandary are a generalized form of unhappiness and the absence in most people's life of "something to live for" (Singer, 1997).

In his complex and nuanced lecture *A Catholic Modernity?* Taylor (1999) offers a diagnosis of the nature and the value of modernity which is more optimistic. For example, he sees in modern secularist movements such as Amnesty International and Médecins sans Frontières authentic developments of the gospel. In line with his Hegelian optimism, Taylor interprets "this colossal extension of a gospel ethic to a universal solidarity" (1999, p. 30) as the necessary synthesis of, on the one hand, the thesis of the established Christian religion in the *ancien régime* and, on the other, the anti-thesis of the enlightened secular humanism of, for example, Voltaire. Although "some facets of modernity: the espousal of universal and unconditional rights, the affirmation of life, universal justice and benevolence" (p. 35) might be interpreted as "the most valuable gains of modernity" (p. 30), we conjecture that it makes more sense to identify the overall *Zeitgeist* of modern society and culture as one of decadence, symptoms of which are the primacy of self-interest, the hegemony of instrumental reason and ubiquitous consumerist and hedonist materialism. These real evils overshadow the possible gains of modernity. Be that as it may, however, Taylor's analysis is somewhat marginal to the focus of this paper, since he does not address the question of a distinctively Catholic attitude toward modernity as contrasted with an ecumenically Christian one. Moreover, despite the title of his lecture, Taylor analyzes not so much Catholic or even religious attitudes as general ethical ones.

In light of modernity's malaises one is amply justified to be critical of secularism. If modern progress brings in its wake such evils as the ones listed, then it is, as a consequence, far from clear why one should even try to adapt traditional religion and religious education to the enlightened, modern mind. We recommend, therefore, that progressive Catholics should pause and reconsider their revisionist endeavors. Instead of revising traditional Catholicism, one should affirm or reaffirm it. Such a (re)affirmation of one's identity as a traditional Catholic is fully continuous with the given critique of the present modern condition of man and entirely plausible against the background of modernity's spiritual and moral emptiness.

Note that we do not claim that the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism is the only possible reaction to the malaises of modernity. Here we are not arguing for a worldwide conversion to Catholicism on the basis of modernity's malaises. However, although there are non-religious as well as other religious reactions possible, we do claim that the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism in view of modernity's evils is the only authentic option

for Catholics. This is so for the simple reason that authentic, traditional Catholicism is incompatible with individualism, instrumentalism, consumerism, materialism, and hedonism. As against progressive Catholics, we maintain that there is an unchanging distinctive Catholic identity and, in view of that, a non-negotiable distinctive Catholic education, both of which cannot be adapted to enlightened modernity or anything else without them ceasing to exist.

Our position can be spelled out by answering the following two interrelated questions: Which Catholic identity? Which Catholic education? Answering these two questions about Catholicism's distinctiveness will at the same time make precise the content of what we mean by authentic, traditional Catholicism and its attendant educational project.

## **THE PROSPECTS FOR A DISTINCTIVELY CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

Among progressive Catholics in particular, there is a marked tendency to downgrade the distinctiveness of Catholic education, as if one should be ashamed to bear witness to the truths and values of one's own Catholic denomination. Aside from some hollow Christian slogans, Catholicism's identity becomes woolly and unfocused in progressive discourse. In an indiscriminate atmosphere of ecumenical and multicultural equality, the distinctiveness of Catholic education becomes blunted and ill-defined.

So, as a crucial step toward the (re)affirmation of an authentic Catholicism in theory and practice, the task of clarifying the distinctiveness of a Catholic identity and education is mandatory:

The sort of clarity which is needed in relation to the distinctiveness of Catholic education needs therefore to go "beyond the edu-babble" [educational slogans]. More specifically, sustained attention to questions of the meaning and justification of central concepts and claims are needed, together with an attempt to delineate an overall substantial framework of Catholic educational thought. This leads naturally to the need for a "Catholic philosophy of education." (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 139)

The prospects for a distinctively Catholic educational philosophy hinge on the future development of a distinctively Catholic systematic account of the nature and role of education and, in particular, a coherent Catholic statement of the aims of education, the personal autonomy of the individual, moral education, and education in religion.

Now the need for a distinctively Catholic educational philosophy includes, as a minimum, the need for a philosophical account of a distinctively Catholic identity. Serious thinking about the nature and purpose of Catholic education inevitably leads to the question of Catholic identity. Let us then first take up the question of the distinctiveness of Catholic identity.



## A DISTINCTIVELY CATHOLIC IDENTITY

On a first approximation, the theological and philosophical articulation of such a Catholic identity imparts a certain distinct and well-defined profile. Let us first take a look at this profile *qua* theology (Carmody & Carmody, 1990; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994):

- revealed truth (and knowledge)
- sacramentality
- traditionalism
- rationalism

God's Word as made known through the Bible offers at heart the good news of salvation for man. The essence of this God-given news of salvation is Creation, Incarnation, Redemption, and Eschatology. Especially the conviction that God became human in Jesus of Nazareth and the doctrine of the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit defines Catholic theology.

Yet no theological principle is more characteristic of Catholicism's identity than the principle of sacramentality. God's presence in human life and His bestowing grace on man are substantially mediated by the seven sacraments of the Church (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony).

For the continuation of God's revelation on earth, faith needs the sustenance of the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. This duality of Holy Scripture and the Apostolic tradition of the Holy Church as safeguarded by the authority of the Pope and the magisterium typically sets off Catholicism from other varieties of Christianity. Although this magisterial aspect of Catholicism, with its attendant *ex cathedra* authority and dogmas, has been the subject of much revisionist criticism, the belief that the Roman Catholic Church is the authoritative vehicle of divinely disclosed truths and values belongs to the very essence of Catholic faith (Haldane, 1997).

However, this traditionalism goes together with the conviction that revelation and reason are essential partners in the living Catholic faith: *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith is reasoned faith. The faith of the Church, in order to ward off blind fideism, has always been open to natural theology on the basis of unaided reason and, accordingly, the Church has always positively evaluated the role of rational inquiry and philosophy, at the least as *ancilla theologiae*. This intimate connection between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, displays itself in the distinctiveness of Catholicism.

Let us then next inspect the profile of Catholicism's identity *qua* philosophy:

- metaphysics of theism
- epistemology of realism
- anthropology of personalism
- morality of virtue-ethics
- social and political theory of moderate communitarianism

Theism is what it is; namely, the claim that there really is a God, (i.e., an eternal personal being which is *inter alia* omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly free). Secularization has not only generated the opposite of theism (i.e.,

atheism; Le Poidevin, 1996), it has also been the source of different varieties of anti-realist theism: projection-theism of Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud, ‘symbolic language-game’-theism of Wittgenstein(ians), “as if”-theism of Cupitt and, last but not least, feminist theism or theology (Clack & Clack, 1998). The progressive, revisionist Catholic typically favors one or another version of this secularized theism. But whatever the merits of these naturalized theisms, they are not compatible with the traditional theism of Catholic faith.

In tandem with a realistic approach to what there is, Catholicism adheres to a realistic approach to knowledge and cognition. The real natures of things and the independent intelligible structure of the world as created and maintained by God are graspable and understandable on the basis of the rational powers of human beings.

Human beings themselves are rational animals, (i.e., psychophysical unities). As persons they are not bodies plus souls (as dualism holds), nor just bodies (as materialism holds), nor just souls (as idealism holds): human persons are rationally animated bodies.

The nature of human persons is directed toward their (transcendent) well-being and happiness. For this completion and perfection – the realization of man’s potential as an image of God – the exercising of the cardinal (temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice) as well as the theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) are indispensable.

Human beings are not only rational and ethical animals, they are also social and political animals. Without denying human individuality, Catholicism insists that the possibility of realizing oneself as a person crucially depends upon one’s participation in the communal life of the collectivity of which one is a member. One’s individual good is irreducibly dependent upon the common good. But although persons are in part socially and politically constituted, they stay in possession of a pre-social potentiality and an intra-social freedom of choice.

It has become transparent by now that the sketched philosophical profile is exactly that of *Aristotelian Thomism* (Carr, Haldane, McLaughlin, & Pring, 1995). This profile marks out the distinct and canonical form which Catholicism’s philosophical identity acquired in the late Middle Ages. Though sometimes disputed, it represents most adequately the central or basic philosophical tenets of the Catholic *Weltanschauung*. Admittedly, this espousal or reclamation of (Aristotelian) Thomism as the authentic source of the distinctively Catholic identity stands in need of further justification. Although matters are extremely complicated both historically and systematically, the rationale for such a reclamation partly but essentially comprises the following considerations.

First, there is the magisterial instruction. Despite the fact that Pope John Paul II writes that “the Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonise any one particular philosophy in preference to others” (1998, par. 49), the Pope himself lays emphasis on the lasting actuality and enduring centrality of St. Thomas Aquinas in the history of the dialectic between faith and reason. Given the papal exhortation that philosophy ought to recover the sapiential dimension of the discipline, to establish and maintain epistemological realism and to achieve genuinely metaphysical range, Thomism has the best claim

to be the philosophy of Catholicism because it synthesizes these obligations in an exemplary and unrivaled way. Inasmuch as spiritual wisdom and the search for the meaning of life require as their ultimate ground a robust epistemological and metaphysical realism, Thomism's claim is surely defensible.

Second, in light of the magisterial instruction, there are the theological and philosophical concerns. In fulfilling the requirements and tasks as identified by the Pope, no Catholic philosophy (and theology) can sever the essential links between revealed truth, spiritual reflection, reason, and metaphysical realism. Too many religious thinkers, including Catholic ones, in the modern as well as contemporary period succumbed to the pressures of modern science and the enlightenment when they slid into the doctrine of deism or, alternatively, that of fideism, mistakenly severing in one way or another these essential links. In sharp contrast with these erroneous doctrines and even more radical ones such as post-modern deconstructionist and secular theology (Crockett, 2001), Thomism offers the best guarantee to keep the essentials of the Catholic faith together.

Just as there cannot be a Catholic religion without God, there cannot be a Catholic philosophy without metaphysical realism and realist theism. Absolutely central to the Thomistic synthesis is its metaphysics of realism and attendant epistemology of truth as correspondence (*adequatio rei et intellectus*). Evidently, Thomistic realism has nothing to do with reductive scientific realism as it draws upon Aristotelian realism of substances and in-built essences to rationally elucidate a Christian theistic worldview. Arguably, such an Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics is both coherent and credible (Haldane, 2002). As against anti-realist trends, Thomistic theism gives a literal interpretation of God's existence and an analogical interpretation of His nature, without recourse to nothing but metaphor (Davies, 1993). One important corollary of this robust realism is Thomism's insistence on the face-value reading of the Gospels: nothing less than a truth-seeking supernatural account of the historical events that occurred in first-century Palestine during the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ and Son of God, will do.

Third, and as a preamble to the next subsection, there is the educational issue. On the high and turbulent seas of education the educator needs an anchor. Accordingly, to face the secularized world with open eyes and to confront the daily problems of school life, Catholic teachers need something stable for their own self-confidence and the trust of pupils put in them. Arguably, only Thomism offers Catholic educators and teachers a clear delineation of who they are and what they stand for as Catholics based on a non-negotiable body of unchanging truths and objective values. Moreover, the document of the Catholic Church's Congregation for Catholic Education *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1998) urges the necessity of undertaking the task of clarifying the distinctiveness of Catholic education in light of a distinctively Catholic identity. Given the magisterial, theological, and philosophical considerations touched upon, the Thomistic synthesis is the best candidate to occupy this distinctive place. While recognizing that ultimately more needs to be said about the rationale for reclaiming Thomism as the canonical expression of authentic Catholicism, we are content to leave matters at this preliminary level for the purposes of the present paper.

## A DISTINCTIVELY CATHOLIC SCHOOLING

With the distinctively Catholic identity, a doctrinally and Aristotelian-Thomistically informed and disciplined identity, in place, let us take up again the question of the distinctiveness of Catholic education. Now given that education in general is a deliberate process of authoritative transmission of truths and values or, in short, the conservation of tradition (Haldane, 1995), Catholic education, as a consequence, consists of the transmission of Catholic truths and values or the conservation of Catholic tradition. Accordingly, the answer to the question “What makes education or a school Catholic?” essentially depends upon the Catholic truths and values – the Catholic tradition – as outlined in the foregoing theological and philosophical profile of a distinctively Catholic identity. So the distinctiveness of Catholic education is founded upon the distinctive identity of Catholicism, and in the context of schooling, this identity should be reflected in the whole curriculum and the ethos of Catholic schools.

In what follows, the account will mainly concentrate on Catholic schooling. Catholic education is, of course, broader than the somewhat formal Catholic schooling by Catholic teachers in Catholic institutions. Still, for Catholic parents as well as their children, Catholic schooling is a crucial and essential part of Catholic education at large. Apart from Catholic schooling, Catholic education – raising one’s children according to the Catholic tradition – in *all* the domains of human life includes, besides much else, the parents’ duty to provide for physical and spiritual needs, as well as to educate in the virtues and in the faith (by being a virtuous example, going to mass, and praying together).

In a distinctively Catholic school, Catholicism’s identity should permeate the following facets of its curriculum and ethos (Groome, 1996):

- the content of the curriculum
- the process of teaching
- the climate of the school.

Against the background of a distinctively Catholic identity, McLaughlin enumerates more specifically three related general features that are distinctive of the curriculum and the ethos of Catholic schooling:

Catholic education, and the Catholic school, is therefore distinctive in virtue of [1] its embodiment of a particular view about the meaning of human persons and of human life, [2] its aspiration to engage in a certain kind of holistic influence, and [3] its concern with the formation of its students in its own religious and moral tradition. (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 145)

Catholic schools embody a view about the meaning of human persons and of human life in that they represent a particular philosophy of life, living according to Catholic truths, values, and tradition, shared by pupils and teachers alike. Within the framework of personalism, virtue-ethics, and moderate communitarianism, human life is interpreted as a journey toward its transcendent destiny in God. As revealed by God’s word, humans exist for the sake of

God's glory and their way toward salvation is facilitated by God's grace, especially by means of sacramental, life-invigorating ceremonies and observances.

Catholic schools, furthermore, aspire to a holistic influence in that they seek to infuse the whole curriculum and the ethos with the Catholic unifying vision. The Catholic character of a school is not something extra appended to the otherwise neutral content of the curriculum, to the otherwise instrumental process of teaching and the otherwise non-ideological climate of the school. The distinctively Catholic inspiration of a school leaves, on the contrary, its internal mark on the whole curriculum and the ethos of that school. In light of the message of salvation by faith, the metaphysics of theism, and the epistemology of realism, the Catholic curriculum endeavors to integrate the elements of nature, culture, morality, science, and faith within one synthetic view of the total truth. Although the scientific disciplines keep their autonomy, they are not left alone as disintegrated specialisms. Quite the reverse, they are taken up as essential ingredients of an integrated and systematic Catholic study of the world.

Catholic schools, in addition, give a religious and moral formation. Central to the ethos of Catholic schools is the transmission of the rich religious and moral tradition of the Catholic Church. The pupils' intellect and character are religiously and morally formed by means of catechism, study of the Scriptures, and Catholic practices, such as going to mass and praying. Throughout the establishment and further development of religious faith and moral character in the context of the living tradition of the Church, with its emphasis on the rational basis of the Catholic faith, pupils' autonomy and their freedom of conscience are acknowledged within the boundaries of authentic Catholicism.

Now these general features clearly set Catholic schools with their curriculum and ethos as distinctive, apart from the non-religious public or common schools which are thought of as paradigmatic in pluralistic liberal democratic societies:

The contrast between public education [schooling] and the distinctive features of Catholic education...can be readily brought into focus. With regard to (1), the respect in which public education cannot presuppose a particular "philosophy of life" is clear. Any aspiration of public education to exert a holistic influence of the sort indicated in (2) gives rise to difficulties arising from its lack of ability to invoke an overall view of human good or perfection. There is no easily available "overall point of view" from which "integration of perspective" can be achieved. With regard to (3), public education has a clear role in the development of moral character, although it can assume the truth or acceptability of only the "common" or "public" values of the pluralist society. It lacks, however, the mandate to exert wide ranging influence across the moral domain as a whole. On matters of religion, public education is either silent, or sees its role as one of illuminating the religious domain in general for reflective consideration and judgment. (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 146)

Not surprisingly, progressive Catholics are to a large extent in agreement with secularists about this pluralistic, common curriculum and ethos. Impressed by the value-pluralism and truth-relativism of modernity, revisionist Catholics show a tendency to align the curriculum and the ethos of Catholic schools with that of public schools. This tendency to commonality can even be discerned with regard to “educating in the faith” because revisionism no longer identifies religious education with Catholic catechizing. Progressive Catholicism, quite like the neutral ideology of public schools, “sees its role as one of illuminating the religious domain in general for reflective consideration and judgment” (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 146). As a result, religious education is either reduced to secularized ethics dressed up in religious metaphors or, alternatively, it is weakened to comparative philosophy of religion in which Catholicism is only one option – at best the preferred one – among many others (e.g., Hinduism and Buddhism). Therefore, progressive Catholics are blurring the boundaries not only between Catholic schools and public schools, but also between religious education, secularized ethics, and comparative philosophy of religion.

As against this erroneous trend, we have shown what it means to hold fast to the distinctiveness of Catholic schools and education as anchored in the distinctive identity of Catholicism itself. Admittedly, we have only shown in an abstract or theoretical way what it means to hold fast to the distinctiveness of Catholic schools and education. The further exploration of the concrete or practical significance of the indicated aspects of Catholic distinctiveness for teachers and educational leaders is beyond the scope of the present paper. McLaughlin (1999) and Sullivan (2000) offer the beginnings of a subtle examination of the appropriate response of the Catholic teacher and educator in the classroom and in school leadership to the claims of a distinctively Catholic educational philosophy.

## THE IDEAL OF TRADITIONAL CATHOLICISM

With the distinctiveness of both Catholic identity and Catholic schooling as the basis of a distinctively Catholic educational philosophy in place, the plea of this paper for the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism in theory and practice acquires its precise content and significance. It was urged that this affirmation or reaffirmation is the only authentic, live option for Catholics in view of modernity’s malaises because authentic, traditional Catholicism is unable to coexist with individualism, instrumentalism, consumerism, materialism, and hedonism. We now want to strengthen our case by arguing that such a (re)affirmation is neither reactionary, ultra-conservative nor quixotic, romantic. This argument as to the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism holds *mutatis mutandis* also for the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholic schooling and education, since the distinctively Catholic identity is foundational for the distinctiveness of a Catholic educational philosophy.

## IN DEFENSE OF OPEN TRADITIONALISM

Both progressive and ultra-conservative Catholics share with the secularists the presumption that traditional religion (i.e., Catholicism) and religious (i.e., Catholic) education are orthogonal to enlightened modernity. Although they both accept the same presumption, the reactions of progressives and ultra-conservatives to the challenge of modernity are radically different. Whereas the first think that Catholicism can be made compatible with modernity by modernizing traditionalism, the latter think that the tension is irreconcilable. Unlike progressives, ultra-conservatives negatively evaluate the present modern condition of man and, as a result, they renounce the modern world and retreat into orthodoxy and (ante-Vatican II) formal ritual. By turning traditionalism into a formulaic and rigid set of almost sectarian beliefs and practices, and by closing it off from the real, modern world, ultra-conservatives abuse and pervert traditionalism. Now this ultra-conservative insulation from the world and hiding in a religious ghetto is an inappropriate and even mistaken reaction as it is premised upon a false interpretation of the presumed tension between traditional Catholicism and modernity. This claim can be justified as follows.

Admittedly, there exists a substantial friction between traditional Catholicism and the modern mind. However, this friction is only a particular instance of the general friction between the continual aspirations of Catholicism and the nature of human psychology. The antagonism between the unvarying ambitions of Catholicism and the factual human condition is not peculiar to the present modern time. Such an antagonism is of all times. That is to say, there always has been and still is a marked tension between the message of Catholicism and the human mind as such, of which the modern tension is only one instance. Although conditions may in one historical period be harder or, conversely, more facilitating than in another, Catholic truths and values are not only discordant with the modern mind but also, to a considerable extent, with the pre-modern mind.

In light of this continuous friction throughout history between traditional Catholicism and human nature, especially the nature of human psychology, we conjecture that it is more accurate to describe the history of Catholicism's journey as the ongoing story of the confrontation between the ideal of traditional Catholicism and the reality of man's existence on earth. In speaking historically about the ideal of traditional Catholicism, we make abstraction from the early church and the patristic period (with, for example, Augustine of Hippo as key theologian) in the history of Christianity. In the context of this paper, the discussion is limited to the traditional theological and canonical Aristotelian-Thomistic form – the ideal acquired in the Middle Ages and still possessed. This ideal of traditional Catholicism always has been and still is the ultimate guide for the perfection of the factual human condition. Humans have a fallen nature, yet as sinners they try to live up to the ideals of Catholicism in the expectation of their salvation. The full realization of the Catholic ideal is not an earthly matter as it awaits its completion by God in heaven. Living the life of a Catholic is striving to live in accord with an ideal of human life as revealed by God and set forward by the Catholic Church:

The ideal of human life as a religiously informed journey to God; one involving a continuing struggle to get and then to stay on course toward an eternal destiny...what we should seek continuously and earnestly is supernatural assistance, help to lift us up from would-be independence to an order of blessedness. It is only that intervention which imparts grace and draws us closer to God...contemplating (in the light of reason, experience and authoritative doctrine) this idea of life as a journey induces an unshakeable sense of divine purpose and of personal responsibility to answer the call to sanctity....To help us in that we have been given a revelation and a Divinely instituted and protected community of faith: Holy Scripture and Holy Church — so I believe. (Haldane, 1996b, pp. 211-122)

Ultra-conservatives go astray when they interpret the tension between traditional Catholicism and modernity as absolutely unique and unparalleled in history, as if living up to the ideals of Catholicism was an easy matter in pre-modern times. Since the friction between traditional Catholicism and modernity is only one particular instance of the general opposition between ideal and reality, ultra-conservatives deceive themselves when they shut their eyes for the modern world and melancholically try to re-establish an isolated, unbroken medieval world cut off from the evils of modernity. Ultra-conservatives, moreover, vainly assume that they can fully realize the Catholic ideal in their closed medieval world.

In contrast, our plea for the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism acknowledges the enduring friction between ideal and reality, and subsequently, it urges the task of trying to implement the ideal of traditional Catholicism as perfectly as possible in the real, modern world. Notwithstanding the hard battle, the good news of man's salvation should be brought to the world. Accordingly, the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism in consideration of modernity's malaises, we recommend, is not a reactionary but a living and open traditionalism. Sullivan (2001) offers a sensitive and comprehensive treatment of such a living Catholic tradition and its attendant educational project.

## **“THE AWE AND EXACTITUDE THAT BELONG TO RELIGIOUS RITES”**

Progressive Catholics will, not surprisingly, allege that the ideal of an unbroken Catholic form of life in which persons, families, and communities take their inspiration from the Holy Scripture and the Church is absolutely unattainable and completely anachronistic in these days of individualist and hedonist modernity. Given the factual relativization, trivialization, and fragmentation abounding in the present modern age, the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism – even as a living and open traditionalism – sounds too romantic and quixotically naïve in the ears of progressives. According to progressive Catholics, the only realistic answer to the challenge of modernity consists in



the adaptation of Catholicism to the modern mind by significantly revising traditional Catholic doctrine and ceremony. This progressive reaction takes for granted not only the idea that there exists a special tension between traditional Catholicism and the conditions of life in enlightened modernity which are, according to the revisionists, beyond compare with those in other historical periods; it also takes for granted the idea that the goods of modernity outweigh its evils.

However, the progressive reaction is equally inappropriate and even mistaken as it is premised upon both the same false interpretation of the presumed tension between traditional Catholicism and modernity, exposed above in connection to the ultra-conservative reaction, and as it is premised upon an uncritical acceptance of the belief in the goods of modern progress. Progressive Catholics neither fully acknowledge the historically ongoing friction between ideal and reality nor the devastating malaises of modernity. Moreover, as remarked at the end of section 2, the progressive reaction of revisionist Catholicism errs as well in that it contradicts the essentials of the faith as laid down by the Church's Apostolic magisterium. Apart from these erroneous presuppositions and tendencies, we want to point out, moreover, in response to the accusation of romanticism, a wrongheaded progressive interpretation of the nature of human psychology in relation to religious life.

Progressive Catholics essentially defend their so-called realistic solution to the problem of modernity by arguing that if Catholicism does not revise itself to meet the demands of modernity, then it certainly will lose its appeal for the modern mind and, consequently, it undoubtedly will perish. For that reason, they claim that the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism we insist on, amounts to the certain death of Catholicism. Now this progressive argument rests on a mistaken psychology of religion. This claim can be justified as follows.

Progressives naïvely assume that they can fully realize revisionist Catholicism in the modern world by bringing the ideal of traditional Catholicism down to earth. In order to bring Catholicism into line with the modern mind, the revisionists interpret the Scriptures as metaphorical narratives and relax ceremonial formality. In this revisionist process, the ideal of traditional Catholicism is played down and internally eroded. By making the Catholic ideal more humanistic, it is, however, at once made sloppier, poorer, and less an object of reverential wonder. Here we put forward the psychological hypothesis that the impact of revisionist Catholicism on the human mind is much lower than that of traditional Catholicism because humanistic revisionism lacks the magnificence of accurate transcendent doctrine as well as the invigorating power of strict sacramental observances, both of which traditionalism possesses. This hypothesis is an application of George Eliot's insightful and penetrating remark that the psychological appeal of religion essentially depends upon its accuracy and rigour: "the awe and exactitude that belong to religious rites" (Eliot, 1859/1985, p. 104). Hence, the constitution of human psychology is such that we cannot stand in awe of the Catholic form of life without the exactitude of its doctrine and ritual.

If there is some truth in Eliot's remark, revisionist Catholicism, as a con-

sequence, certainly will lose its grip on the human mind. Accordingly, “the awe and exactitude that belong to religious rites” can only be maintained by upholding the full-blooded ideal of traditional Catholicism. For the psychological implementation of this ideal at home and in the classroom, parents and teachers should, among other things, make use of the (concise) catechism to instruct children in Catholic doctrine (e.g., the tenets of incarnation, trinity, transubstantiation) and they should draw upon biblical stories to stimulate the religious imagination as well as the symbolic consciousness of the youngsters. They also should put more emphasis on the joyful and invigorating aspects of Catholicism than on its deterrent aspects such as guilt and (eternal) punishment.

When religious doctrine is demythologized and religious ritual modernized as in revisionism, religion will lose its impact on the human mind and so it will finally wither away and die out. Consequently, the (re)affirmation of traditional Catholicism, we urge, is not a romantic escape but, quite the reverse, the only viable and realistic way to propagate Catholicism into the future. Due to limitations of space, we shall have to address elsewhere the important objection to the just given argument that progressive revisionism is based not so much on a functional motive to make Catholicism psychologically more agreeable to the modern mind as that it represents a more adequate understanding of Catholicism’s truth, or that it brings Catholicism more in line with the original and uncontaminated aspirations of early Christianity.

## CONCLUSION

There are two ways of betraying traditional Catholicism. The first, blatant kind of betrayal consists in modernizing traditional Catholic doctrine and observances so drastically that the original is changed out of all recognition; the second, subtler kind of betrayal involves reducing Catholic tradition to the repetition of hollow formulas and purely formal rituals. This paper has put forward a plea for the loyal and authentic affirmation or reaffirmation of the ideal of traditional Catholicism and, in view of that, of traditional Catholic schooling and education as based upon the distinctiveness of a Thomistic educational philosophy. Our *via media* between the progressive and the ultra-conservative distortions is an open and realistic traditionalism that in full awareness of the gap between ideal and reality strives for perfection in the historical condition of enlightened modernity. Admittedly, much more needs to be said about the concrete or practical implications of the (re)affirmation of the ideal of traditional Catholic education and schooling for Catholic educators and teachers in a secularized society. However, this much larger project, namely the detailed elaboration of a distinctively Catholic-Thomistic educational philosophy, is beyond the scope of the present paper, and must be left for further research.

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