

Human Unity and the Catholic University: Some Notes from the Philosophy of Jacques Maritain

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Abstract

While focusing on the nature and mission of Catholic higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae: The Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities* and *The Presence of the Church in the University and University Culture* are also interested in the relationship between the mission of the Catholic university and the nature of the student as a person. This paper examines how human unity—without which personhood would be meaningless—is an essential foundation of Catholic education, and in this case, Catholic higher education. The focus, however, is not on what unites us as human beings universally, though the Church often refers to our common human nature as a principle of unity. Rather, the paper focuses on our individual unity as human beings: our individual, metaphysical, ontological, and spiritual unity and integrity. The thought of Jacques Maritain is employed as a lens to examine the importance of individual unity, educationally considered. Maritain's philosophy provides invaluable foundations and subsequent implications for a discussion of how the Catholic university, by attending to its intellectual mandate, promotes and enhances this metaphysical, ontological unity of the human person.

Introduction

Many Catholic colleges and universities have revisited their mission and identity since the close of the Second Vatican Council.¹ Furthermore, society and the university have been influenced

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¹ See, for example, David O'Brien, *From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994); Michael Buckley, *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom*,

by a host of philosophical and theological theories and their influence upon the human person.^{1a} A great deal has also been written on the proliferation and the fragmentation of knowledge.^{1b} Since the close of The Council, an increasing number of Catholics have been educated in secular colleges and universities where the quest for philosophical unity has been replaced by an explosion of knowledge. In this context, where diversity in knowledge is upheld at all costs, there is typically no pursuit of unity beyond one's own expertise and specialization. While this explosion of knowledge has undoubtedly expanded our understanding of the created order, it has often challenged the principles of Catholic education. For example, topics such as unity, order, a hierarchy of values, and an enduring human nature are not part of the discourse. Often, in the Catholic university, the conservative response to the diversity of knowledge has been an attempt to impose a common Catholic culture, which in turn isolates this culture within the theological, and particularly, the doctrinal realm. The liberal approach welcomes diversity for its own sake without acknowledging the need for any unifying principles. Ultimately, to be true to its Catholic identity, a Catholic university must be able to show how it contributes to human liberation, freedom, and unity in face of the proliferation of knowledge.

Human unity is usually associated with the unity of the human family. Here it refers to the individual unity of the human person: ontological unity—the individual metaphysical and spiritual unity and

(Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998); James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998); *Higher Learning and Catholic Traditions*, Robert E. Sullivan, ed., (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); and Melanie Morey and John Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

^{1a} See, for example, Cynthia Crysdale, "Horizons That Differ: Women and Men and the Flight from Understanding," *Horizons: The Journal of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life*, 44, 3(1994):345-361; John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996); Alison Le Cornu, "Theological Reflection and Christian Formation," *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 3.1(2006):11-36; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

^{1b} See, for example, Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Mohammed M. Rehman, *The Betrayal of Intellect in Higher Education*, (Toronto: OmniView Publishing, 1997); Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Topics in Education*, edited by Robert Doran and Frederick Crowe, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), see chapters 2-4, & 7; Anthony T. Kronman, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

integrity of the person.² The terms “ontological,” “metaphysical,” and even “spiritual,” are philosophical terms and are worthy of substantial definitions that require reference to their historical and cultural milieu and their relationship to the history of philosophy. In this article, I propose to use the thought of Jacques Maritain as a lens through which to examine how the Catholic university contributes to this metaphysical and ontological understanding of human unity. Much has been written on Maritain’s philosophical method, particularly his philosophy of education. Space does not allow for even the most general recognition of that scholarship. Consequently, this article, with a few exceptions, is based on primary sources: the works of Jacques Maritain.

The Human Person, Education, and Unity

On the first page of *Education at the Crossroads*, Maritain secures his educational theory by stating that education cannot commence until it knows who “man” is, both in himself and as the one to be educated.³ As his theory is primarily concerned with knowledge and learning and their integration and application, he also states: “Every theory of education is based on a conception of life and, consequently, is associated necessarily with a system of philosophy.”⁴ Education should also be concerned with “freedom of autonomy.” Maritain distinguishes freedom of autonomy—which he also terms “freedom of independence and of exultation”—from free will or freedom of choice.⁵ Free will and choice are given to reach freedom of autonomy, and he goes on to say, almost poetically: “...freedom of autonomy is so little bound up with freedom of choice that in the supreme act of beatitude the latter finds no room for exercise.”⁶ Accordingly, the “prime goal of education is the conquest of

² For a philosophical treatment of the topics see, John P. Reid, “Marx and the Unity of Man,” *The Thomist*, XXVIII (1964): 259-301. For a theological treatment see, Pope John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis*, (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981).

³ Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1943), 1.

⁴ Jacques Maritain, *The Education of Man: The Educational Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, edited with an introduction by Donald and Idella Gallagher, (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1976), 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶ Jacques Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World*, translated by Richard Sullivan, (New York: Gordian press, 1971), 34.

internal and spiritual freedom to be achieved by the individual person...” And how this is achieved reveals why metaphysical and ontological unity is central to Maritain’s educational theory: such freedom is realized through “...knowledge and wisdom, good will and love.”⁷

Maritain’s distinction between the person and the individual is central to his educational philosophy. Personality, the spiritual dimension of the human being, is that metaphysical and ontological foundation manifested through knowledge, wisdom, good will, and love. These four characteristics are essential to the process of knowing and learning, but personality is also about “unity about self-possession” of “holding oneself in hand” and of “interiority to oneself.”⁸ Individuality and human materiality stand in opposition to universality: “it designates that concrete state of unity and indivision, required by existence, in virtue of which every actually or possibly existing nature can posit itself in existence as distinct from other beings.”⁹ The human person is a composite of individuality and personality, where “instinct and reason meet.”¹⁰ The person possesses a nature, an ontological structure, and is supplied with intelligence. Therefore, a person must put oneself in tune with the ends “necessarily demanded” by human nature.¹¹ The corporeality of individuality, Maritain hastens to point out, is good; though its goodness is precisely in its relation to personality, recognizing that personality and individuality are not two separate entities, but one being.¹² Even in this highly condensed presentation, one senses the prominence of human unity. Personality, because of its spiritual nature and its manifestation through knowledge, intelligence, good will, and love, signifies a “dynamic unity and inner unification.”¹³ However, human persons possess a diversity of powers—intellectual and knowing powers¹⁴—which, in addition to their “psychosomatic unity,” composed of matter and spiritual form, makes them the most complex existents.¹⁵

⁷ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 11.

⁸ Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, translated by John J. Fitzgerald, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 40-41.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 9.

¹¹ Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 86.

¹² See, Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1954), 51-52.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, translated by Mabelle L. Andison and J. Gordon Andison, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 247.

¹⁵ Maritain, *Education of Man*, 52.

Maritain has been accused of being overly cerebral, but there is enough evidence to counter this charge: for example, his conviction that education is essential to freedom and human awakening. In addition, in broadening the humanistic foundations of education, he calls for the recognition of five fundamental dispositions: (1) with regard to “truth;” (2) with regard to “justice;” (3) with regard to “existence”—recognizing its limitations and its possibilities; (4) with regard to “work”—faithfulness and responsibility regarding work; (5) with regard to “others”—cooperation and fellowship, particularly in social and political life.¹⁶

While, according to Maritain, the primary goal of education is the conquest of internal and spiritual freedom, Maritain goes on to say that the ultimate end of education concerns persons in their “personal life and spiritual progress,” and, “not in relationship to the social environment.”¹⁷ And while elaborating on the various educational components—liberal education and the humanities, moral education, the aims of education, and the various stages of education culminating in the university—his educational philosophy is unified by a philosophical anthropology; this anthropology in turn is unified by the ontological and metaphysical physiognomy of the human personality, which aims toward unity.¹⁸

Maritain’s theory of the metaphysical and ontological unity of the human person shapes his philosophy of education. This points to the question: Why should the Catholic university nourish and strengthen human unity? Before that, let us consider Maritain on the metaphysical and intellectual importance of knowing and knowledge and their implications for human unity.

Human Unity Intellectually Considered

It is precisely because knowledge is primarily intellectual, immaterial, and abstract in nature that the Catholic university—indeed education at any level—must promote the ontological and metaphysical unity of the person. Human unity is essentially metaphysical in nature, and is based upon the ontological relationships and interrelationships of the constituent elements of the person. Also, human unity presupposes

¹⁶ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 36-38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸ Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself About the Present Time*, translated by Michael Cuddihy and Elizabeth Hughes, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 179.

human nature, which is primarily intellectual.¹⁹ The object of this intellectual nature is being and, while there may be those who dispute the nature of being, there can be no dispute that what we come to know is being. Maritain devotes large sections of his philosophical corpus to the immateriality of intellectual knowledge, and he asks: what is meant by “the intelligibility of things, their capacity to be grasped by the intellect, their adaptability to knowledge.”²⁰ By intelligibility, he means knowledge by the intellect,²¹ and he says, in his magnum opus, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, that intelligibility makes an actual reality available to the intellect, and is made available through the first act of perception and judgment.²² Maritain states: “We shall consider being from the standpoint of intelligibility; that is to say, we shall consider being so far as it is adapted to enter the mind, or is capable of being apprehended by the intellect.”²³

To say that one knows, has knowledge, or has learned something is to claim that the knowledge of the external world, gained through the senses, has in some way been acted upon by the intellect. The intellect has extracted being from sense knowledge, and that knowledge has been made immaterial and yet present in the mind, enabling the claim that one knows or has learned something.²⁴ Intellectual knowledge is “completely immaterial” and the intellect is able to know being and truth because, “in order to be known, the object known by the intellect has been stripped of an existential condition of materiality. This rose, which I see, has contours; but Being, of which I am thinking, is more spacious than space.”²⁵

Maritain’s epistemology permeates across his writings, and he reminds us that reasoning is a “*complex act*, and though one or undivided... it is not *simple or indivisible*.”²⁶ Of interest here is that his stress on the

¹⁹ See Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, translated by Harry L. Binsse, (New York: Gordian Press, 1972), 3.

²⁰ Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to the Basic Problems of Moral Philosophy*, (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc, 1990), 30-31.

²¹ Jacques Maritain, *Introduction to Philosophy*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), 140.

²² See Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge*, translated by Gerald B. Phelan, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 77.

²³ Maritain, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 143.

²⁴ “...to be able to know something, the knower must be devoid of the actual physical reality of the thing known.” Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Texture of Being: Essays in First Philosophy* Paul O’Herron, ed., (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 208.

²⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Range of Reason*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), 55.

²⁶ Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Logic*, (London; Sheed and Ward, 1937), 2.

immateriality of the intellect and knowing depends upon a presupposed acceptance of the metaphysical unity of the human person; for nothing can be conveyed to the human person except through the intellect.²⁷

For those concerned that Maritain is overly intellectualizing human nature and knowing, he acknowledges, in his fifth misconception of education, “intellectualism,” the danger in overemphasizing “dialectical or rhetorical skills” or abandoning “universal values.”²⁸ The centrality of the intellect in knowledge and learning does not mean that the knowing process is only cerebral, resulting in a “selfishness of the mind which comes about when intelligence is both separated from things—occupied only with handling and moving of ideas and words—and separated from the emotional and affective tonus of life.”²⁹ Indeed, he says that the final aim of education is to prepare one for “wisdom.”³⁰

That knowledge we call wisdom, which penetrates and embraces things with the deepest, most universal, and most united insights. ... Education and teaching can only achieve their internal unity if the manifold parts of their whole work are organized and quickened by a vision of wisdom as the supreme goal, so as progressively to make youth capable of sharing to some degree in the intellectual and moral fruits of wisdom.³¹

Human knowing is spiritual in nature, dependent upon but transcending the senses. And while “the first principle of all human work is reason,”³² knowing and learning is more than just intellectualism. Education aims at freedom, internal freedom, which depends upon the learning, acquisition, and internalizing of truth. Truth is more than “ready-made formulas;” it is an “infinite realm...and each fragment of which must be grasped through vital and purified internal unity.” The task of unifying “our internal world” is not easy, but educators can never renege on their responsibility to strive for the organic unity of education and to bring to realization the “aspiration of the mind to be freed in unity.”³³

²⁷ See Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1953), 400.

²⁸ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 18.

²⁹ Maritain, *Education of Man*, 55.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

³¹ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 48.

³² Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, translated by Joseph W. Evans, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 49.

³³ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 12, 47.

Human Unity and the University

Like most philosophers of education, Maritain is more concerned with theory than with practicalities (important though they are) such as curriculum and lesson plans. Yet, the third chapter of *Education at the Crossroads*, “The Humanities and Liberal Education,” is his most detailed plan, and takes students from the school, through college, culminating in the university. The broad basis of education is set during the school and college years. For Maritain, college education culminates in a bachelor’s degree in the liberal arts, thus preparing the student for the specialized world of the university. His distinction between “natural intelligence” and “the intellectual virtues,” reveals how he envisages this educational progression. Natural intelligence—the focus for the school and college—is neither scientific nor philosophical. It is universal knowledge best exemplified in a basic liberal education, whereas the intellectual virtues are a *habitus*, or disposition, preparing the student for a specialized field of knowledge.³⁴ The broad foundation of liberal education in the school and college is the indispensable groundwork for the specialized world of the university. Liberal education is knowledge for its own sake: knowledge of truth and beauty. It moves one toward freedom and wisdom. Consequently, liberal education enhances and nourishes the internal unity of the student.³⁵

The four years of undergraduate liberal education, built upon levels of subjects and various repetitions,³⁶ aims at the universality and unity of knowledge, or “natural intelligence,” which “is less a question of sharing in the very activity of the scientist or the poet than of nourishing oneself intellectually on the result of their achievement.”³⁷ The university has a twofold task: it must continue with the universality of knowledge as well as introduce the student to specialized knowledge or the “intellectual virtues.” Thus, “...the aim of the university is to achieve the formation and equipment of the youth in regard to the strength and maturity of judgment and the intellectual virtues.”³⁸ The university concentrates on four orders: the first covers “useful arts and applied sciences;” the second “medicine, economics, politics and education;” the third “speculative sciences and fine arts” and the subjects of the “liberal arts;” the fourth is the order of “religion, theology, philosophy, and

³⁴ Maritain, *Education of Man*, 48-49, 72, 73.

³⁵ Maritain, *Range of Reason*, p.3 and Maritain, *Education of Man*, 84.

³⁶ See Maritain, *Crossroads*, 67-68.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 106. See also, 106-107.

ethics.”³⁹ Such unity and universality are dependent on a “hierarchy of values,” and there is no unity or integration in knowledge without such an order. Within this hierarchy, Maritain makes a distinction between “knowledge and love of what is above time” from “knowledge and love of what is within time.”^{39a} Furthermore, in the intellectual realm, “wisdom, which knows things eternal and creates order and unity in the mind, is superior to science or to knowledge through particular causes; and the speculative intellect, which knows for the sake of knowing, comes before the practical intellect, which knows for the sake of action.”⁴⁰ In commenting on the structure of the curriculum, he also distinguishes between subjects “of most worth”—the main value of which is knowledge-value...and subjects—those whose knowledge is of “least-worth”—the main value of which (I don’t say the only value) is that of training.” He places the former in the category of learning and the latter in the category of play, broadly and educationally understood.⁴¹ While these distinctions of knowledge pertain primarily to a general liberal education, they are the foundation upon which the specialized world of the university is secured.

The atomization and the fragmentation of knowledge were of concern to Maritain as well, and in *Reflections on America*, he says:

Illusion number four: Every professor is liable to meet young men or young women who loathe, in the name of equality, the very notion of any kind of hierarchy—even if it is a question of the degrees of knowledge (it is offensive to say that wisdom is superior to science, or philosophy to chemistry).⁴²

The progression of education from early childhood to the university moves towards the goals of unity and universality, but there is no unity without distinctions.⁴³ The unity of the sciences, and the role of philosophy in unifying the sciences and the curriculum, also occupies Maritain’s attention. Suffice it to say that he recognizes the “multiplicity of the fields of knowledge,” making unification difficult. The increase in the fields of knowledge can lead to the atomization of life. Expanding on

³⁹ Ibid., 77-78.

^{39a} Maritain, *Education of Man*, p. 53.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁴¹ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 55.

⁴² Jacques Maritain, *Reflections on America*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 134.

⁴³ See Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, ix.

the controversial topic of a “Christian Philosophy,” he laments the breakdown of Christian unity, the unity supplied by philosophy, theology, and the wisdom of the contemplatives.⁴⁴ The university, therefore, must pay special attention to the study of philosophy and theology, those disciplines that seek order based upon the life of reason and faith. He also calls for the establishment of “Schools of Spiritual Life,” distinguished by particular traditions but open to all.⁴⁵

In considering the role of human unity, especially in the context of Catholic higher education, a few more of Maritain’s philosophical principles relating to human unity are important to consider: “the primary rule is to foster those dispositions which enable the principal agent [the student] to grow in the life of the mind;”⁴⁶ “the whole work of education and teaching must tend to unify, not to spread out . . . it must strive to foster internal unity...;”⁴⁷ “teaching [must] liberate intelligence instead of burdening it...;”⁴⁸ “there is no unity or integration [in education] without a stable hierarchy of values.”⁴⁹

Human Unity and the Catholic University

The Church nourishes individual unity in various ways throughout all stages of life. It does so morally, spiritually, socially, and intellectually. Secured on these foundations, the Church comments on human unity as manifested through choices and actions across the diversity of human experience. Thus, based on its understanding of human unity, it can comment upon cultural, scientific, economic, social, ethical, political, educational, and a host of other issues. And, based on this foundation, the Church can also respond to theories and systems that either enhance or violate this unity. How is unity enhanced or violated? Human choices and actions are essential means of communicating human unity: persons reveal themselves through choices and actions, themes that dominate the philosophical works of the late Pope John Paul II.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ See Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, translated by Edward H. Flannery, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 32.

⁴⁵ See Maritain, *Crossroads*, 82, 85.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁹ Maritain, *Education of Man*, 53.

⁵⁰ See Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, translated by Andrzej Potocki, (London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 85, 191, 197. See also, Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, translated by Theresa Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 166, 198, 202.

Catholic education enhances human unity in ways appropriate to its intellectual mission: it must teach the student how to think, for intelligence is the very basis of the Christian life.⁵¹ While schools and universities must educate the whole person, they are primarily concerned with the education of the intellect and, by enlightening the intellect, the education of the will. While Maritain recognizes the intellectual mandate of institutional education, he affirms the primacy of the will in the moral life, and he says that “it is better to will and love the good than simply to know it.”⁵² In ultimate terms, “the shaping of the will is thoroughly more important than the shaping of the intellect.”^{52a} However, this intellectual mandate is not meant to disintegrate into educational snobbery; that is, an Epicurean model where knowledge is viewed as a speculative ideal without engaging the intellect and the heart.⁵³ In spite of Maritain’s insistence on the ultimate importance of the will and its education to love and choose the good, he says that “intelligence is in and by itself nobler than the will...for its activity is more immaterial and universal.”⁵⁴

The Introduction to *Ex corde Ecclesiae* states that the university is “an incomparable center of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity.”⁵⁵ Knowledge stands in relationship to the good of humanity, particularly the “cause of truth,” which encompasses primarily the truth of the created order, but also the truth: God. This proclamation of truth is a “disinterested service,” without which “freedom, justice, and human dignity are extinguished.”⁵⁶ Ultimately, one achieves one’s full humanity in relationship to God, so the Catholic university must situate research, teaching, cultural dialogue, and evangelization within that fundamental relationship. This concern for truth is echoed in *Veritatis splendor’s* warning of the dangers when universal truth is denied, which in turn leads to individualism and the inevitable denial of human nature.⁵⁷ Maritain reminds us that it is precisely because the university is devoted to specialized and particular subject

⁵¹ See Maritain, *Education of Man*, 137.

⁵² Maritain, *Crossroads*, 22.

^{52a} *Ibid.*

⁵³ Maritain, *Education of Man*, 104, 88.

⁵⁴ *Crossroads*, 22.

⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae: The Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities*, The Congregation for Catholic Education, (Rome, 1990), articles 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, article 4.

⁵⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor: The Splendor of Truth*, (Sherbrooke, QC: Éditions Paulines, 1993), article 32.

matter that truth must be the “atmosphere and the inspiring force... both speculative and practical truth.”⁵⁸

Ex corde acknowledges the independence of disciplines and research, and it calls upon all concerned to be respectful of such freedom. However, subjects are to be taught systematically and—since all knowledge is understood in the context of the good of humanity, particularly in relation to truth and ultimate truth—disciplines must be invited to dialogue with one another. Given the unifying nature of truth and its relationship to knowing and knowledge, philosophy and theology have a special guiding role in the “higher synthesis of knowledge,”⁵⁹ particularly in technological societies where ethical and moral issues must be brought into relationship with the human person. Accordingly, the Catholic university understands a “priority of the ethical over the technical, of the primacy of the person over things, of the superiority of the spirit over matter.”⁶⁰ Through its realization of these principles and its dedication to truth, particularly the message of Christ and the subsequent dignity of the person, the Catholic university promotes the unity of the person, one that is enhanced by the spirit of freedom, charity, and dialogue. Also, *The Presence of the Church in the University and University Culture* lists some of the threats to human unity: “a relativistic liberalism [and] scientific positivism,” as well as “materialistic and atheistic ideologies.”⁶¹

As with Maritain, these two documents establish a broad anthropological foundation that secures the nature and mission of the Catholic university. Through knowledge and learning, the student establishes a relationship with the created and the uncreated orders. *Ex corde* relates the intellectual mandate of the university to these orders by a dedication to a “universal humanism,” and “to the search of all aspects of truth in their essential connection with the supreme Truth, who is God.”⁶² The systematic approach to knowledge and learning and “integration of knowledge,” is a means of countering “the rigid compartmentalization... within individual academic disciplines.”⁶³ The university teacher is essential to integrating knowledge and learning in the context of a “coherent world vision’ nourished” by the principles of an authentically human

⁵⁸ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 79-80.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, article 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, article 18.

⁶¹ *The Presence of the Church in University and University Culture*, Congregation for Catholic Education, (Rome, 1994) I.1 & I.7.

⁶² John Paul II, *Ex corde*, article 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, article 16.

life.”⁶⁴ Maritain also emphasizes the role of the teacher’s vision in shaping the student’s vision, particularly concerning the purpose and direction of life. He warns of the dangers when teachers’ minds are in a “state of division and anarchy,” preventing them from possessing and communicating “wisdom and integrated knowledge,”⁶⁵ a theme echoed in *Ex corde* by its stress on a “hierarchy of values.”⁶⁶

For Maritain, the university imparts universal and specialized knowledge all bound together by the “qualitative and internal hierarchy of human knowledge...grouped and organized according to their [the arts and sciences] growing value in spiritual universality.”⁶⁷ Both documents on the Catholic university are also concerned with the compartmentalization of knowledge and the resulting strain upon the synthesis and integration of knowledge, a strain that increases when early specialization and professional studies are isolated from what Maritain calls “natural intelligence.” While the university must prepare students for professional life, the increasing erosion of a liberal and humanistic foundation has isolated professional education, not simply through early specialization and compartmentalization, but by striking at the unity of knowledge: the intellectual hierarchies and the hierarchy of values that govern this unity. The diversification of knowledge, particularly professional knowledge, each with its own method, investigation, and truth claims are all forms of the “intellectual virtues,” and are essential to university specialization. However, these virtues are dependent upon a broad foundation of “natural intelligence” without which, says *Church and University Culture*, we see only a “fragment of reality;”⁶⁸ such fragmentation stands in opposition to the “organic vision of reality” that *Ex corde* is eager to promote.⁶⁹ Such fragmentation strikes at the heart of human unity and calls into question the meaning and purpose of a unified life. The proliferation of knowledge creates an abundance of meaning but, when it is unable to be intellectually unified in the human person, this abundance results in a narrowing of knowledge and learning. Both these university documents and papal teachings since John Paul II have been concerned with the crisis of identity in education, a crisis propelled by challenges to the nature of the human person as well as the purpose of institutional education, particularly its intellectual

⁶⁴ Ibid., article 21.

⁶⁵ Maritain, *Education of Man*, p. 59.

⁶⁶ John Paul II, *Ex corde*, article 46.

⁶⁷ Maritain, *Crossroads*, p. 77.

⁶⁸ *Church in University Culture*, 18.

⁶⁹ John Paul II, *Ex corde*, Article 20.

mandate. Concern has also been expressed regarding the erosion of the relationship between faith and reason, and an encyclical is devoted to this theme.⁷⁰ Maritain says that “faith itself, in order to find normal conditions for its exercise, needs to dwell in an intelligence....An intellect patterned exclusively on the mental habits of technology and the natural sciences is not a normal climate for faith.”⁷¹ It is to encourage this normal climate of learning that leads the Catholic university documents to call for the widening of the university’s educational enterprise, one that understands the complexity of personhood, with regard to knowledge and learning and their implications for the relationship between faith and reason. A Catholic university loses its intellectual mandate when reason becomes associated solely with the observable and the measurable.⁷² The dangers of this association are considerable, and education, particularly higher education, has increasingly come to be defined by these two categories.

There is a danger that the intellectual mandate of education—the primacy of the intellect in the knowing process and the need for knowledge to be unified within the person—can lead to intellectual pride. History is strewn with examples whereby human unity is secured only within the self and, more dangerously, with the self as its only referent. Maritain has emphasized, as seen above, the expansive nature of knowledge and learning, particularly its relationship to truth and wisdom. However, the proliferation of knowledge can leave the person more divided than ever, separated from oneself, and “matter, a principle of division, can engender only division.”⁷³ Human unity, Maritain goes on to say, while secured in the human person, is not found ultimately within the self but outside and above the self. Unity is found by clinging to first-principles and to an order that transcends the self:

Nothing is more illusory than to ask immanentism to reconcile man with himself. Man becomes reconciled with himself only on the cross, which is hard and exterior to him: that cross to which he is nailed. Objectivity is the first condition of unity.^{73a}

⁷⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Rome, 1998.

⁷¹ Maritain, *Range of Reason*, 210.

⁷² See Pope Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections*, lecture at the University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006.

⁷³ Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Joseph Evans and Peter O’Reilly, (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 61.

^{73a} *Ibid.*

In preparing students for professional life and the perennial responsibility of earning a living, the university can also fall into the trap of associating education solely with action. Maritain, following his teacher St. Thomas Aquinas, affirms that teaching belongs to the “sphere of the active life,” but recognizes the dangers when teaching is burdened by the “encumbrances peculiar to action,” and when it is separated from higher sources: wisdom and contemplation.⁷⁴ And he says that to live one’s life limited to knowledge of “phenomena” and devoid of knowledge of “ultimate realities...which is privilege and duty for human intelligence, is to live more miserably than animals, which at least tend with instinctive and buoyant certitude towards the ends of their ephemeral life.”⁷⁵

External activity—choices and actions—expected from one who is educated must “overflow from an abundance of internal activity, by which [one] is united to truth and the source of being.” Choices and actions result either in the person sliding down the “slope of individuality” or continuing to be unified through personality.⁷⁶ The external activity demanded by an educated person can also lead one to limit the powers of reason to the “mathematical reading of sensory phenomena,”⁷⁷ and confining everything else to a universe of relativism with the slogan: “whatever I choose is right.”⁷⁸

Part of Maritain’s genius lies in the pervasiveness of his philosophical principles. In his work *Art and Poetry*, he refers to the “substantial unity of the metaphysical personality,” and says that such a personality “which is the subsistence of the spiritual soul, does not realize itself in action, does not become a moral personality except by the formative sap of intelligence and love of their virtues.”⁷⁹ Thus, we return full circle to Maritain’s fundamental claim that human unity, manifested through freedom of autonomy, is manifested through knowledge and intelligence, good will and love—a claim that binds all the phases of institutional education.

⁷⁴ See *Ibid.*, 110-111.

⁷⁵ Maritain, *Crossroads*, 116-117.

⁷⁶ Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, 152, 52-53.

⁷⁷ Maritain, *Range of Reason*, 186.

⁷⁸ William Gairdner, *The Trouble With Democracy: A Citizen Speaks Out*, (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001), 145.

⁷⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Poetry*, translated by E. de P. Matthews, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1943), p.52.

Conclusion

Catholic education is secured upon three pillars: parents, the Church, and the educational institution. Each undertakes the task of ensuring unity in its own way, and all these ways are essential to human unity. Maritain's works and the Church documents cited provide important reasons why the university must strive for human unity, and how it must do so based upon its intellectual mandate. The universality of these principles, based on a common human nature and a common way of coming to know through the senses, renders the Catholic university to be uniquely positioned to promote human unity, even amid the increasing pluralism and intellectual diversity of society. In protecting and enhancing such unity, the Catholic university contributes to enriching the citizen's participatory political life, based upon its philosophical anthropology and the resulting duties and responsibilities of the person as citizen. Indeed, because of the lack of philosophical and theological unity in pluralist societies, the citizen's individual unity becomes the essential means of realizing the common good.

The Degrees of Knowledge is the subtitle to Maritain's most famous work. In its principal title *Distinguish to Unite*, Maritain distinguishes between the various degrees of knowledge—physical, mathematical, and metaphysical—and hierarchies of knowledge. He also distinguishes among the three degrees of wisdom—theological, contemplative, and mystical. His distinctions and his pursuit of unity provide the answer to a mistaken criticism, that of dismissing knowing and knowledge as merely intellectual. Such a dismissal seems to suggest that one can come to know and understand apart from the primary governing and distinguishing faculty of the intellect. Knowledge and knowing are undoubtedly different: the love a child experiences from a parent; appreciating a piece of music; being lost in the beauty of a sunset; reading a text in philosophy; enjoying a bowl of ice cream; silencing the mind while in contemplation and meditation; feeling the smoothness of a fabric. All these activities provide knowledge of some kind. The unity of knowledge and the primacy of the intellect do not reduce all knowledge to intellectual knowledge. Such a unity, however, does recognize the role of the intellect in making distinctions between the various kinds of knowledge and uniting knowledge in the human person. By remaining faithful to its intellectual mandate, the Catholic university contributes to the unity of the human person while recognizing that it plays a part in the overall task of human unity. Other agencies of society (family, the Church, and myriad influences to which one is exposed) either enhance or diminish unity. But in all of them,

the intellect performs its invaluable function of distinguishing and uniting, or failing to distinguish and to unite. Failure or success, of course, depends on how the intellect has been educated.

In being vigilant to its intellectual mandate, the Catholic university broadens “our understanding of rationality vital in facing the challenges of contemporary culture” which are ill served by the “irrational attempts to limit the scope of reason.”⁸⁰ By securing human unity through its intellectual mandate, the Catholic university contributes to the synthesis of faith and culture, one that reveals the Scylla and the Charybdis of the secular university: on the one hand, a narrow specialization isolated from the diversity of knowing and knowledge, and on the other, a narrow conception of reason which denies the complexity of human nature and, ultimately, of human unity.

⁸⁰ Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the First European Meeting of University Lecturers*, (Vatican City, 23 June 2007).

