

Can we have a ‘Second Spring’ of Catholic Higher Education?

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Abstract

The challenges facing Catholic higher education today offer the Church an opportunity to re-think the conceptual framework within which it operates. The educational vision found in the relevant writings of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI offer possibilities for an educational project centered on the role of truth and authority in education. Benedict XVI's recent comments on a perceived “educational emergency” are the latest articulation of a broader concern for the direction in which contemporary education is heading. Within this context, Catholic higher education can act as a spur for the renewal of higher education today by clearly focusing on the role of the liberal arts as the medium for learning what it is to be human and by challenging those whose vision of education is influenced by utilitarianism.

Introduction

The role and identity of Catholic institutions of higher education remain problematic for both the Church and the Academy. The continued existence of institutions of Catholic higher education (henceforth CHE) is a challenge for those who wish to see the removal of religion and its associated ways of thinking from the public square.¹ This leads to the perennial debate on the proper relationship between faith and reason, and the place of contested concepts like authority and truth in the broader educational discourse.

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¹ This is articulated in debates over matters like the exercise of academic freedom and how this freedom, intrinsic to the post-Enlightenment worldview that underpins the modern university, could be reconciled with the perceived confessional nature of Catholic Higher Education. See James Conroy and Douglas McCreath, “The Challenge to Catholic Teacher Education in Scotland,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Enquiry and Practice* 2(33): 318.

To respond to this challenge, advocates of CHE must rearticulate its position as a valid and worthwhile force for the common good of society and eschew any sense of religious exclusivism or fundamentalism based on a fideistic approach to religion. Thus, CHE will play a major and creative role in modern society and will offer its unique vision of integral education to all who share an interest in the flourishing of the human condition. CHE needs, therefore, the intellectual space in which to reconceptualize the mission and purposes of CHE for the mutual benefit of the Church and the Academy.

To achieve a “Second Spring” of CHE, part one of this article explores the writings on education of Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI. These writings provide a fresh and challenging tripartite vision of education for the twenty-first century. For Newman, the twin poles of intellectual development and moral formation are the desired ends of a liberal education in the Catholic university. Newman set his vision amidst his wider concerns about the rise of relativism, which countered the Church’s unique claim to Truth. John Paul II developed Newman’s thesis with special attention to the place of faith and reason in the Catholic university. He saw CHE as a means of dialogue and engagement with wider society in keeping with the Church’s commitment to improving the cultural life of all. In John Paul II’s mind, CHE was a key component of the Church’s social mission. In more recent times, Benedict XVI has drawn on both Newman and John Paul II’s work on higher education to argue for a new humanism in CHE and in higher education more generally. For Benedict XVI, the rediscovery of the proper relationship between faith and reason is the lens through which the human person comes to a fuller understanding of what it is to be truly educated today. This renewed vision of the Academy is an antidote to the contemporary educational crisis that presents a range of profound challenges to CHE and education in general.

In part two, this article suggests that the foundational principle of CHE today should be spearheading the recovery of the liberal arts. This will allow CHE to act as a distinctive voice in the Academy and to take the lead in challenging the instrumentalism and sharp disciplinary that marks much of contemporary higher education. The integral vision of CHE remains a sign of contradiction to the wider Academy and challenges the utilitarian foundations of the modern state.

Authority, Truth, and Catholic Higher Education

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman

Newman's vision of the university, as found in *The Idea of a University*, provides the intellectual map which underpins the Church's dialogue with the academic world and is crucial to a properly nuanced understanding of the scope and purpose of CHE.² The significance of Newman's work derives as much from the historical context in which he was writing as from the content of his work. Although the focus of *The Idea of a University* was the formation of a Catholic university in Ireland, Newman was presenting a radically Catholic alternative to the perceived Anglican dominance of Christian intellectual life in Victorian England. His boldness in so doing demonstrated a substantial degree of intellectual courage, which allowed him to challenge the established view of the foundations of educational structures. CHE today needs to draw on the example of Newman to propose an alternative vision of the Academy for the mutual benefit of the Catholic community and CHE.

Turning to Newman's core vision of CHE, there are two interdependent principles that retain their relevance for contemporary discussions on the most appropriate foundations for CHE.

First, Newman believed that the primary role of the university was the integration of the intellectual and moral formation of the student. For Newman, the teaching of a body of knowledge served as the shared inheritance of the mind, which, when properly taught and assimilated, was a valuable mechanism for enhancing the life of society; thus, the university was the center of this intellectual and moral formation process.³ Furthermore, Newman saw little conceptual common ground between intellectual development and skill development and, crucially,

² John Henry Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929) has been the subject of much informed comment and debate and has spawned similarly titled works that seek both to revisit his vision and to subject it to critique and analysis in the context of the contemporary trends in Higher Education. See for example, the following: Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Idea of a University; A Reexamination* (Newhaven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Dan Maskell and Ian Robinson, *The New Idea of a University* (London: Haven Books, 2001).

³ Newman, *The Idea of a University* Discourse VI, 125. "It [the university] professes to exercise the mind neither in art nor in duty; its function is intellectual culture; here it may leave its scholars, and it has done its work when it has done as much as this."

distinguished between the good and the useful.⁴ This is a clear challenge to contemporary educational approaches to curricular development that often require *a priori* definitions of key skills and competencies as the perceived desirable outcomes of particular programs of study.

Newman's focus on the primacy of intellectual culture led him to reject the drive to utilitarianism in education that he saw as inimical to a good, rounded education. Newman argued that the serious academic study intrinsic to university life led to considering the value of service to others and that without this commitment to the "other," intellectual development was barren.⁵ Newman's call for knowledge as a liberating force would serve as a catalyst for the good university graduate *to fill any post with credit and to master any subject with facility*.⁶ In other words, well-educated graduates can apply their minds to a wide range of activities and thus serve the common good through the intellectual depth they bring to a wide range of professions.

Newman, therefore, proposed a grand vision of the university as an intellectual forum where the study of ideas and of "great books" would act as the raw material for the students' integral formation. There is a communal dimension to Newman's educational vision, possibly inspired by St. Augustine of Hippo's scholarly community at Cassiacium.⁷ Newman's ideal academic community of students and teachers is united by its critical study and analysis of writers and thinkers from a broad range of the academic disciplines. This scholarly activity is a crucial part of an overall formative process in which students are immersed in the knowledge bequeathed by the scholars of the past.⁸ Newman's informal "scholarly community" at Littlemore reflects not only Augustine's community but also the initial testing of an idea that would lead to his plans for the Catholic university in Ireland.⁹

⁴ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Discourse VII, 153. "The useful is not always good, the good is always useful."

⁵ *Ibid.*, 167. "I say that a cultivated intellect, because it is a good in itself, brings with it a power and a grace to every work and occupation which it undertakes, and enables us to be more useful, and to a greater number. There is a duty we owe to human society as such, to the state to which we belong, to the sphere in which we move, to the individuals towards whom we are variously related."

⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁷ St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* translated by RS Pine-Coffin (Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), chapter IX.

⁸ Thomas Norris, *Getting Real about Education* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006), 33-55.

⁹ Michael Ffinch, *Newman: Towards the Second Spring* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 118-119.

To the modern mind, any plan for a small academic community of like-minded scholars might seem to be no more than a self-indulgent and possibly quaint recreation of a bygone age. Although Newman saw the small academic community as the key feature of university life, he rejected any view of academic life in which social and cultural horizons would be limited to the mere contemplation and discussion of ideas and ideals, no matter how exciting this may be to those of a scholarly disposition. For Newman, the necessary *cultivation of the intellect* required a constructive and meaningful engagement with society—an engagement that questioned, analyzed, and, if necessary, contradicted the prevailing social mores and academic trends. In this light, it is wrong to interpret Newman as an advocate of a solipsistic intellectualism, as he was fully aware that a university could not remain isolated from the surrounding culture.

The second key educational principle for Newman was the authority of truth. Newman warned against any form of religious reductionism that elevated the claims of rationality above the claims of religion. Near the end of his life, Newman renewed his earlier calls for an awareness of the challenges facing religion from liberalism.¹⁰ He was responding to those who promoted the Enlightenment understanding of education as an empiricist enterprise based on pure reason.¹¹ Newman concluded that English civil society was in danger of shedding the philosophical and religious backdrop—Christian in origin—that underpinned liberty in favor of ways of thinking which denied the truths of religion and would lead, in turn, to a marginalization of religion. To counter this line of argument, he sought to balance the teachings arising from revealed religion with the workings of reason. Although Newman was writing in favor of a Catholic university, his encomium of liberal education is based on a prior recognition of the limitations of the self-same liberal education.¹² For Newman, the anchor of the Catholic faith prevented reason from sliding into rationalism, and conversely, reason prevented faith from sliding into fideism and an irrational fundamentalism.

Newman's focus on reason in education was his way of articulating his concern over the growth of moral relativism both in religious belief

¹⁰ Newman defines liberalism as “the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion but that one creed is as good as another.” John Henry Cardinal Newman, *1879 Biglietto Speech*, <http://www.newmanfriendsinternational.org/newman/?p=240>.

¹¹ James Bowen, *A History of Western Education Vol. III* (London: Methuen Press, 1981), 168-169.

¹² Ian T. Ker, “Introduction to Newman’s Biglietto Speech,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 6 (Fall 2003), 164-169.

and in education. For Newman, moral relativism led to a skewed intellectual vision in which the rejection of authority and truth placed undue weight on perceived enlightened thinking and a subsequent denial of a shared intellectual and doctrinal patrimony.¹³ Interestingly, in his writings and speeches on education, Benedict XVI later developed the perception of a bias in modern educational philosophy against concepts like authority and truth. Before looking at Benedict XVI's vision of education, however, it is necessary first to examine John Paul II's distinctive contribution to the place of reason in Catholic intellectual life and to its relationship to the common good.

John Paul II

John Paul II's masterwork on the relationship between faith and reason, *Fides et ratio*,¹⁴ was foreshadowed by *Ex corde Ecclesiae* in which he linked the value of serious academic study with the Christian obligation to be of service to the human race.¹⁵ The link with the Newmanian ideal is clear, even though the context is different. Newman was writing in a world in which, despite philosophical challenges from anti-religious forces, Christianity provided the cultural underpinning of society.¹⁶ By contrast, John Paul II employed a wider lens and applied the debate on the relationship between faith and reason to university life as a way to counter the more serious allegation that the university *qua* university was irreconcilable with revealed religious faith.¹⁷ For John Paul II, the Catholic university worthy of its name is not a religious

¹³ Christopher Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education* (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 87.

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, "Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html.

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, "Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html. *Ex corde Ecclesiae* is divided into two parts. Part One is an eloquent exposition of the identity and mission of the Catholic university and delineates the vision of this search for truth as preparatory to the service of the Church and the world. Part Two deals with legal norms and principles.

¹⁶ Stephen McKinney, "Mapping the Debate on Faith Schooling," in *Faith Schools in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Stephen McKinney (Edinburgh: Dunedin Press, 2008), 1-3.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, sec. 17: "In promoting this integration of knowledge, a specific part of a Catholic University's task is to promote *dialogue between faith and reason*, so that it can be seen more profoundly how faith and reason bear harmonious witness to the unity of all truth."

enclave where rationality is an unwelcome guest but instead the host of a mutually beneficial interplay between faith and reason.

Like Newman, John Paul II affirmed service to the “other” as a core feature of CHE. John Paul II identified that the promotion of knowledge and intellectual culture is inseparable from the obligation to live virtuous lives. The philosophy underpinning this assertion leads us to conclude that a Catholic educational institution is an agent of social change; that is, the culture of the intellect cannot be separated from the obligation to charity and to the fostering of social justice.

John Paul II built on and developed the link expressed by Newman between study and service and located this relationship in the wider domain of Catholic Social Teaching.¹⁸ Furthermore, John Paul II argued that Catholic universities are the natural successor to the medieval universities, where academic study in preparation for the professions was seen as a service to humanity. John Paul II sees the contemporary Catholic university and, by implication, the Catholic Intellectual Tradition as servants of the human race with the fruits of scholarship as the means of addressing the human person’s eternal quest for meaning and truth.¹⁹

The Catholic university, therefore, is not a neutral space in which students are taught ‘to think’ and to construct meaning solely from their own interpretation of events and ideas from past and present. The inclusion of theology—the *regina scientiarum*—as a key component of the research culture of the Catholic university ensures the connection with the numinous; moreover, the study of theology links the human dimension of university life with the search for truth, beauty, and goodness.²⁰ John Paul II reminded theologians of the need to show respect for the unity of knowledge and for the Catholic tradition by working under the

¹⁸ Ibid., sec 2. His statement that the university is where students learn “to think rigorously so as to act rightly and to serve humanity better” provides both a concise summary of Newman’s ideals and demonstrates the link between the Church’s teaching on the value of higher, and indeed all, education and its traditional advocacy of social justice.

¹⁹ Ibid., sec 4.

²⁰ Ibid., sec 19: “*Theology* plays a particularly important role in the search for a synthesis of knowledge as well as in the dialogue between faith and reason. It serves all other disciplines in their search for meaning, not only by helping them to investigate how their discoveries will affect individuals and society but also by bringing a perspective and an orientation not contained within their own methodologies.”

authority of the bishops.²¹ This is where the challenges of the Catholic counter-culture become acute as the interface between faith and reason seems to clash with the accepted freedom of the academic to research without the burden of perceived external limits.²²

John Paul II also argued that a Catholic university has a role in the Church's wider process of evangelization.²³ Given the traditional understanding of evangelization as the proclamation of the *good news* to the nonbeliever and the more nuanced contemporary understanding of evangelization as part of wider catechesis, this places the Catholic university at the heart of the Church's faith-formation processes.²⁴ The commitment to evangelization reminds the Catholic community that the catholicity of any Catholic institution of higher education does not depend solely upon the provision of a suitable course in the Sacred Sciences but also upon the broader contribution the institution makes to the life of the Church and to the fostering of Catholic intellectual life in particular.

John Paul II's vision of CHE, therefore, is best understood as a unique faith-inspired academic field where the study of wider cultural ideas is woven into an innovative, faith-inspired project with a dual purpose: contributing to the flourishing of humanity and promoting meaningful dialogue with people of all religious traditions and of none.²⁵ While the Gospel messages of charity and service are offered as a leaven that will enrich the whole university community, there is a clear commitment to the distinct contribution that Catholic universities and, by implication, all Catholic academics can make to the *treasury of human knowledge*.

However, these ideals need concretizing. John Paul II suggests that four *characteristics* should underpin CHE. These characteristics are designed to ensure that the Catholic university remains faithful to the mission of the Church while retaining a firm anchor in the academic world. Furthermore, they serve as a reminder that the values of Catholic academic life should permeate the whole university community and, crucially, are seen as a service to all. These *characteristics* of a Catholic university are outlined as broad thematic headings to be adopted by

²¹ Ibid., sec 20.

²² Ibid., sec 29.

²³ Ibid., sec 49.

²⁴ Pope Paul VI, "Evangelii nuntiandi." http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html, sec 75.

²⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, sec 5.

Catholic universities if they are to retain their special identity as Catholic institutions of higher learning.²⁶ These four *characteristics* are signposts to guide and to protect the mission of CHE and its associated institutions and remind the Catholic university of its ecclesial mission as well as its role as an academic community devoted to scholarship.²⁷

Benedict XVI has referred to this interplay between scholarship and faith as the keystone of the Church's contribution to the search for meaning in education. As an accomplished scholar in his own right, Benedict XVI is immersed in the intellectual and cultural tradition of Christianity. This has afforded him a unique perspective on the place of CHE in the Church and the Academy, as will be presented in the next section.

Benedict XVI

Benedict XVI has drawn on Newman's *Idea of a University* and John Paul II's *Ex corde Ecclesiae* to address contemporary trends in education that challenge the very foundations of authority and truth. Benedict XVI's particular contribution to this debate is his vision of education as the search for a "new humanism" as an antidote to the crisis in modernity arising from the "question of man." This is part of a wider educational emergency in which the conceptual framework of modern education, recalling Newman's concerns, is predicated on relativism and utilitarianism.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., sec. 13: "These characteristics are: a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such; a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research; fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church; an institutional commitment to the service of the People of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life."

²⁷ Ibid., sec 10: "In addition to Catholic Universities, I also turn to the many Catholic Institutions of higher education. According to their nature and proper objectives, they share some or all of the characteristics of a University and they offer their own contribution to the Church and to society, whether through research, education or professional training. While this Document specifically concerns Catholic Universities, it is also meant to include all Catholic Institutions of higher education engaged in instilling the Gospel message of Christ in souls and cultures."

²⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to Participants in the First European Meeting of University Lecturers," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070623_european-univ_en.html.

Benedict XVI shares the concerns over the definition and role of authority in education which the German Jewish philosopher, Hannah Arendt, identified in the 1950s. For Arendt, this crisis in authority in education was a particular manifestation of a broader crisis in tradition which had jettisoned the Judaeo-Christian heritage of modern Europe.²⁹ Benedict XVI's concerns over education are not limited to perceived challenges of relativism and utilitarianism in Catholic institutions but, in keeping with Newman and John Paul II, reflect a wider concern for the role of faith, reason, and authority in education and society. Benedict XVI has an exalted vision of the Academy in which scholarship founded on truth counters the moral confusion and the fragmentation of knowledge that marks contemporary education.³⁰

Benedict XVI's overall vision of education is profoundly Newmanian in its concern for the unity of intellectual and moral formation. His homily during the Beatification Mass for Newman offers an accurate summary of Newman's and indeed of Benedict XVI's own educational vision:

Firmly opposed to any reductive or utilitarian approach, he [Newman] sought to achieve an educational environment in which intellectual training, moral discipline and religious commitment would come together.³¹

Benedict XVI sees the weaving of these separate strands as an antidote to the societal fractures that have come from an over-emphasis on utility in education. To understand better the depth of Benedict XVI's educational thought, it helps to see it through a wider lens. Benedict XVI is writing in the context of a recent initiative of the Italian Bishops' Conference, an initiative designed to address the myriad challenges to Catholic education from those who reject both authority and the role of education as the means of conserving a shared cultural patrimony.³² The Italian Bishops' use of the term 'la sfida educativa' (the educational

²⁹ Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Education" in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

³⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Catholic Educators," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080417_cath-univ-washington_en.html.

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Mass with the Beatification of Venerable Cardinal John Henry Newman, Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100919_beatific-newman_en.html.

³² Comitato per Il Progetto Culturale della Conferenza Episcopale Italian, *La Sfida Educativa* (Bari: Laterza, 2010).

challenge or emergency) underlines the gravity of the situation in the eyes of the Italian Church.

Two key themes appear in Benedict XVI's articulation of this "educational emergency." First, Benedict XVI takes up Newman's critique of "education as utility" to remind us that education understood solely as the transmission of specific skills and a search for information which ignores truth does not accord with the deeper meaning of education as integral to human development.³³ Benedict XVI sees this reductionist view of education as lying far from the traditional scope and depth of university culture.

Second, Benedict XVI challenges the prevailing relativism of contemporary society in which it is deemed authoritarian to speak of truth.³⁴ For Benedict XVI, this situation of practical relativism destroys the credible authority by which praxis is guided.³⁵ In explaining how this affects the fundamentals of education, Benedict XVI echoes Arendt's analysis of the crisis underpinning the roots of authority to suggest that authority is best understood as the fruit of experience and competence.³⁶

To reclaim the ground lost to relativism and to the concomitant denial of authority in education, Benedict XVI appeals for a rediscovery of the core values of education. This project requires educators who are witnesses of authentic values and who promote a full and integral formation in the light of the vision of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God.³⁷ This focus on the core human values allows the student to be drawn closer to the divine reality as the source of all knowledge.³⁸

³³ Pope Benedict XVI, "Presentation to the Diocese of Rome of the Letter on the Urgent Task of Education," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080223_diocesi-roma_en.html.

³⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070611_convegno-roma_en.html.

³⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Catholic Educators."

³⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to Participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome."

³⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to members of the Italian Episcopal Conference on the Occasion of the 58th General Assembly," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080529_cei_en.html.

³⁸ This echoes, albeit faintly, Saint Augustine of Hippo's claim that catechumens who are well versed in the liberal arts are ready to hear and understand the Gospel. Saint Augustine of Hippo, *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing), chapter 8.

Benedict XVI makes the interesting claim that Catholic education is a work of mercy designed to offer an alternative vision of education that allows the human person to flourish. The focus on love recalls his first Encyclical *Deus caritas est* in which he reflected on love as the force guiding all Church activity.³⁹ In this vision, the mission of the Catholic educational institution is to form students in accordance with the integral anthropological vision of the human person which flows from Christianity.^{39a}

In the specific case of CHE, Benedict XVI suggests that a renewed merging of intellectual charity and prophetic witness within the university community will lead to an integrated vision of learning at the heart of the university. These academic values point toward Christian hope in the context of the counter-cultural mission of the Catholic university:

The Church's mission, in fact, involves her in humanity's struggle to arrive at truth. In articulating revealed truth[,] she serves all members of society by purifying reason, ensuring that it remains open to the consideration of ultimate truths. Drawing upon divine wisdom, she sheds light on the foundation of human morality and ethics, and reminds all groups in society that it is not praxis that creates truth but truth that should serve as the basis of praxis. Far from undermining the tolerance of legitimate diversity, such a contribution illuminates the very truth which makes consensus attainable, and helps to keep public debate rational, honest and accountable.⁴⁰

This appeal to the primacy of truth as the basis of praxis is precisely the opposite equation to rationalist thought, which rejects all except that which is supported by empirical evidence. An example of this is the popular focus on group discussions as a way of constructing meaning from texts. This sounds similar to, but is conceptually far from, the traditional academic seminar in which the great thinkers were discussed in the context of the history of ideas.

Benedict XVI is calling for a radical rethinking of the aims and purposes of Catholic education to act as an academic counterweight to other

³⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Deus caritas est: Encyclical Letter on Christian Love," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html.

^{39a} Pope Benedict XVI, "Address to members of the Italian Episcopal Conference on the Occasion of the 58th General Assembly," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080529_cei_en.html.

⁴⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Catholic Educators."

ways of thinking which have minimized the contemplation of the true, the good, and the beautiful.⁴¹

In summary, the connecting thread among Cardinal Newman, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI's visions of higher education involves the question of Truth and the proper relationship between reason and revelation in the conceptual framework of Catholic higher education. Knowledge and moral formation are the key outcomes of this university-centered educational process. Looking ahead, CHE needs to consider ways in which the search for truth and meaning can reignite Catholic intellectual life and offer a distinctive vision of education for the modern world. Some concrete suggestions as to how this can be done follow.

Restoring the Fabric of Catholic Higher Education

The Liberal Arts as the Conceptual Key to Catholic Higher Education

This article has argued that CHE provides an intellectually robust prism through which contemporary culture can be critiqued. Newman, as we have seen, was promoting a view of knowledge as dynamic, not static; he saw knowledge's potential to affect change in the circles in which graduates move. The formation of this corps of educated, active citizens, aware of the need to contribute positively to society, affect change, and facilitate social improvement accords with the mainstream of Catholic Social Teaching.⁴²

The coalition of disciplines that comprises the liberal arts today provides a radical vision of the pursuit of knowledge as a good in itself and would allow a broader and loftier vision of education to counteract educational approaches driven by narrow specialization and the setting of career-focused goals.⁴³ It is argued here that CHE's key contribution

⁴¹ See for example, Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake* (Michigan: Brazos Press, 2009).

⁴² Newman was anticipating the link between Catholic education and good citizenship, which would be proposed by Pope Leo XIII in the late nineteenth century. See Pope Leo XIII, "Sapientiae Christianae: Encyclical letter on Christians as Citizens," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_10011890_sapientiae-christianae_en.html.

⁴³ Mark William Roche, *Why Choose the Liberal Arts* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 40: "The student who experiences the intrinsic value of education develops autonomy, whereas the student whose education serves only an external purpose—a remunerative position or external accolades and recognition for accomplishments—lacks that privileged element of freedom."

to higher education lies in the active promotion of a liberal-arts-oriented education for the modern world.

This is not to suggest a direct importation of medieval terms like *trivium* and *quadrivium* into the syllabi of the modern Academy.⁴⁴ It does suggest, however, that a broad-based curriculum focused on the study of great ideas and great thinkers in the Arts and Sciences is the necessary and desirable foundation of CHE. The goal of integral formation of the student arises from an assimilation of this body of knowledge in the context of a scholarly community in which an implicit and explicit Catholic culture provides a structural unity to life on campus.⁴⁵

CHE, therefore, is an agent of civilized values and eternal wisdom, which employs the liberal arts as the principal medium for the teaching of this wisdom. Bloom's controversial call for universities to act as civilizing agents for uncivilized undergraduates jars our sensibilities as much today as when it was first written in the 1980s.⁴⁶ Despite its bluntness, Bloom's comment remains significant, especially to CHE, whose mission is to offer an alternative experience to utilitarian and career-centered higher education. A true liberal arts education allows young people to explore intellectual ideas in a shared atmosphere of scholarship and accords with Newman's call for broader and deeper scholarship, which will, paradoxically, be more valuable to society than learning that is designed explicitly to be useful. This is not to deny the value of specialization and professional training but instead to remind the wider community of the communal value of well-stocked minds and a love of learning, both of which enhance further the necessary vocational and professional training which society needs.⁴⁷

To achieve Newman's necessary integral formation, the intellectual foundation provided by the liberal arts needs complementing by a pastoral approach to study which stems from the faith commitment of members of the academic staff and from their profile as scholars. The pastoral

⁴⁴ In the medieval schema of education, the *trivium* of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric preceded the subject-based *quadrivium* of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. This arrangement was preparatory to the study of philosophy and theology.

⁴⁵ A simple example of this Catholic culture would be regular worship and the promotion of outreach programs. For a more comprehensive view see Roche, *Why Choose the Liberal Arts*, chapter 3.

⁴⁶ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Touchstone, 1988), 341.

⁴⁷ Roche, *Why Choose the Liberal Arts*, 98: "The intellectual virtues cultivated in a liberal arts context do not simply encourage individual success; ideally they make the liberal arts graduate better prepared for life as a citizen of the collective, on whose judgments and actions the flourishing of a society or a state may depend."

dimension of university life revolves around the key concept of *service*, understood as the foundational principle of Catholic leadership. Catholic academics are called to serve the Church and the wider educational community and, by extension, to act as a force for good in society. This “authority of service” needs concrete evidence in relationships between staff and students, within the curriculum, and in the academic profile of the staff.

How can this be done? Catholic academics enhance their own academic profile by a considered and scholarly reflection on the implications of the university as a “community of scholars.”⁴⁸ In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity and drawing on an applied understanding of the theology of *ecclesial communion*, Catholic academics should reflect on the roots and nuances of their professional identity as Catholics who have been called to work in academic life.⁴⁹ As this growth in understanding takes root in their professional and spiritual life, members of academic staff reassess continually their approach to the search for knowledge and pedagogy in the light of Christian principles; this leads to reflecting not just on their own professional identity but also on the foundational structures of their institutions.⁵⁰

This process of self-reflection cannot avoid the question of the wider financial net that surrounds university research today. In keeping with the arguments this article presents, research for the Catholic academic is a progressive uncovering of the mystery of life and of God in creation; it cannot, therefore, be reduced to narrow outcomes determined by the funding requirements of a particular project. An example of this tension can be found in determining the place of research in theology and in associated religious studies. In CHE, scholars offer a vision of scholarship that is at the service of the Truth and counters those who see higher education as solely the building of the critical faculties. To some, this might seem like unwelcome thought control; for the Catholic scholar, it

⁴⁸ The origins of the university as a “community of scholars” can be traced to medieval times. Arising from the monastic and Cathedral schools of the time, the first universities were founded by ecclesiastical authorities (for example, the University of Bologna, founded in 1088) but evolved gradually into a *self-governing community of scholars* gathered in colleges authorized by Bulls from the Pope or Emperor. See also, Francis Wade, *The Catholic University and the Faith* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1978); Ronald Barnett, *The Idea of Higher Education* (Bury St. Edmunds: The Society for Research into Higher Education and the Open University Press, 1990), 19.

⁴⁹ Michael Schmaus, *Dogma 4 The Church: its Origin and Structure* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1995).

⁵⁰ Kevin Hughes, “The ‘Arts Reputed Liberal’: Augustine on the Perils of Liberal Education,” in: *Augustine and Liberal Education*, eds. Kim Paffenroth and Kevin Hughes (England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000).

allows him or her to bring to fruition the unity of intellectual and moral formation.

To ensure that this fidelity remains ever fresh, both academic staff and students need continual doctrinal formation. Intrinsic to this is the public witness to the way of Christ that shapes all aspects of an institution's life, both inside and outside the lecture hall. Although an individual's personal faith commitment cannot, and should not, be measured and although we accept that there are many shades of faith commitment, radical divergence from this integrated Christian vision weakens the Catholic identity of the institution and, far from advancing freedom, as may be claimed by some, opens the door to moral and intellectual confusion.⁵¹

That teaching is enhanced when supported by scholarly foundations and integrated into the wider body of our shared scientific and cultural patrimony is axiomatic. The recovery of the liberal arts is a spur to Catholic academics to look afresh at the stream of knowledge and culture entrusted to present generations from across the academic disciplines. The Catholic academic community will find inspiration from this *treasury of human knowledge* in the history and philosophy of Catholic education: the educational and catechetical works of writers such as Clement of Alexandria, Chrysostom, Augustine, Gerson, De La Salle, Jungmann, Kevane, and Groome provide the hidden intellectual territory which awaits exploration by the scholars of today.⁵² Owing to their sustained and often fresh insights into teaching and

⁵¹ Pope Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Students and Teachers of the 'Libera Università Maria Santissima Assunta,'" http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20091112_lumsa_en.html.

⁵² See for example, the following: Clement of Alexandria, "The Instructor," trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *Ante-Nicene Library Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325 Part Four* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1867); John Chrysostom, "Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up Their Children," in *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire*, ed. M. Laistner (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967); Augustine of Hippo, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher* ed. Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995); Jean Gerson, "On Leading Children to Christ," trans. by Robert Ulich, in *Basic Writings in Christian Education*, ed. Kendig Cully (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960); Carl Kochet, *John Baptiste de la Salle: The Spirituality of Christian Education* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2004); Josef Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith* trans. by A. Fuerst (London: Burns and Oates, 1965); Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education—Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980); Eugene Kevane, *Jesus the Divine Teacher: What the Prophets Really Foretold* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2005).

learning in the distant and recent past, this fertile back catalogue of works on education from within the Catholic tradition merits a wider audience. More importantly, they are in themselves texts that deserve to be studied by young people today, especially those who hope to become Catholic educators.

Relationship with the Polity: A Challenge for Catholic Education

There remains the crucial question of how a confessional approach to education can be reconciled with the modern secular state. While a secular society's commitment to diversity should, by definition, welcome the distinctive vision offered by Catholic education, there is a danger that this welcome is conditional on an acceptance of a vision of education that owes more to particular ideologies than to Christian anthropology. In other words, if "secular" is understood as a broadly neutral term, then open discussion and constructive dialogue may lead to some form of shared understanding between the state and CHE. However, a secularism understood as an ideology that desires to marginalize religious thinking would be a more problematic partner in dialogue.

In this latter construction of diversity, some tolerance of religious commitment within the tight parameters set by governing bodies is seen as evidence of these bodies' commitment to diversity. One must wonder if this level of tolerance would, in the long-term, be amenable to Christian educational structures if said institutions were to question seriously their economic and philosophical foundations and their role in the economic map of the country.

The broader question regarding the limits of accommodation between faith-based education and secular government remains open. Catholic education, as an agent of tradition and a repository of divine wisdom, must operate in keeping with the fundamental principles of Catholic tradition.⁵³ This relationship may lead to some challenging questions on the limits to integration and, crucially, on how Catholic education in general responds to political pressures when the prevailing political orthodoxy is in conflict with Catholic values and tradition. In other words, how hospitable is the polity to the values and practices of Catholic education and, ultimately, to Catholic Christianity itself?

⁵³ Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Catholic Educators."

Concluding Remarks

This article has offered a way forward for CHE based on the best traditions of the past. The tripartite analysis of the crisis in modern CHE allows the Church to find in its historical resources a way forward based on the recovery of the liberal arts. This will position CHE as a powerful agent for change in higher education as a whole.

The fruitful dialogue between CHE and secular universities is something to welcome. Future research priorities in this field should be focused on how CHE can continue to be enhanced both by the wider context of university life and by a heightened awareness of the *theological* backdrop of its identity and mission in the context of the vision of the university as a community of scholars.

In response to claims that students in CHE are no different in social habits and tastes than other students, this article claims that good education will affect change in ourselves and in those around us.⁵⁴ All educators are passing valuable knowledge to their fellow men and women. They are initiating them into the various narrative discourses of our disciplines. Even in a world awash with technology and moving toward e-learning, effective teaching and learning cannot discount personal contact as part of the educative process. This is especially true with regard to the intellectual, spiritual, and moral formation processes of CHE. If Catholic education is primarily a search for virtue through knowing God in Jesus Christ, then this would suggest that we find this virtue if we are prepared to search (and be found) as part of the community of the Church.

⁵⁴ This point is explored in Melanie Morey and John Piderit S.J., *Catholic Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2010), 3-7.