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The Catholic School as a *Courtyard of the Gentiles*

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The Courtyard of the Gentiles, an initiative moved forward by Pope Benedict XVI, has provided the Catholic Church with an official forum for dialogue with atheists. The intellectual energy surrounding this initiative can be harnessed to focus on how the contemporary Catholic school addressed its responsibilities to the Catholic community while offering a good education to people of other religious traditions. The Courtyard initiative is an opportunity for the Catholic educational community to re-consider its purpose as an ecclesial agent in a plural society. This article argues that the distinctive content and pedagogy it employs in this endeavor is a bold manifestation of contemporary radicalism in education.

Two key challenges facing the Catholic school today are its uneasy relationship with aspects of contemporary educational thought and the pressing issues arising from the changing demographic of the contemporary Catholic school population (Baumfield, Conroy, Davis, & Lundie, 2012). The Church's ongoing reflection on the aims and purposes of Catholic education in a plural society is an expression of contemporary radicalism that often runs counter to the progressive norms which drive education policymakers (cf. Rymarz, 2012; McDonough, 2009). Additionally, the substantial number of non-Catholic students attending Catholic schools—15.9% of total student enrollment in 2012-2013 (National Catholic Education Association, 2013)—challenges those within the Catholic community who assume that the Catholic school should be reserved for students from Catholic families. Given these crucial socio-cultural factors, it is incumbent upon advocates of Catholic education to find fresh conceptual frameworks to express how the Catholic worldview and its associated educational vision can continue to contribute towards building a good society.

Two projects, both emerging from the pontificate of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, provide resources for maintaining the distinctiveness of Catholic education. First, Pope Benedict's trenchant and robust critique of contemporary trends in education–developed across a number of addresses to various audiences (cf. Benedict XVI, 2007a, 2007b, 2010a, 2010b, 2012)–remains pertinent to all who have an interest in the philosophy and practice of

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Catholic education. Pope Benedict's seminal address on education to representatives of the Diocese of Rome offered the key contours of a wide-ranging vision for contemporary society (Benedict XVI, 2007b). At the heart of this project is the proclamation of an authentic humanism as a contribution to the common good of humanity (Benedict XVI, 2012).

Second, the *Courtyard of the Gentiles* (henceforth *Courtyard*)–a new initiative of the Holy See designed to offer a conceptual space for meaningful encounters between Christians and atheists–is a public manifestation of the Second Vatican Council's plea for a profound dialogue between Christianity and other religious and non-religious worldviews (Second Vatican Council, 1965).

The *Courtyard* is an official recognition of similar and more localised initiatives such as the Oasis initiative of Cardinal Angelo Scola of Venice, which seeks to deepen Christianity's dialogue with Islam (Fondazione Internazionale Oasis, 2013) and the Progetto Culturale [Cultural Project], the Italian Bishops Conference's key reference point for its dealings with an increasingly plural Italy (Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, 2011).

More broadly, the *Courtyard* is aligned with two related initiatives of the Catholic Church: the Year of Faith (which started in October 2012 and ended in November 2013) and the New Evangelisation (Synod of Bishops, 2011; Francis, 2013). In contemporary Catholicism, the New Evangelisation is the favoured term for the cluster of initiatives designed to boost the recovery of Christian culture in traditionally Christian countries: it is not used to refer to missionary outreach in the so-called traditional mission territories.

Together, these initiatives renew the missionary impulses of the Catholic faith as it counters the climate of religious indifference and cultural relativism, which seem so rooted in the prevailing mindset of the West. What unites the *Courtyard*, the Year of Faith, and the New Evangelisation is the possibility of meaningful dialogue with contemporary culture and a related desire to proclaim the Christian Gospel in its fullness. For the Christian, this change in direction is an antidote to a perceived crisis in culture manifested in the pursuit of an individualist agenda over and above the search for the common good (Benedict XVI, 2010b; Synod of Bishops, 2011).

Working from within and accepting a priori the diagnosis of Pope Benedict, the present article analyses the traditional conceptual frameworks of Catholic education in the light of the broader ecclesial initiatives noted above. Two broad-based arguments frame this discussion. First, the intellectual energy around the *Courtyard* provides a strong and cohesive starting-

point for the recovery of an authentic humanism as the underpinning principle of Catholic education. Second, and driven by the need to find fresh means of expressing the nature and aims of Catholic education in a pluralist culture, the *Courtyard* offers an opportunity for a far-reaching educational project which emphasises the mission of the Catholic school at the intersection of religion and culture.

The article begins by applying a critical lens to the *Courtyard* initiative. It asks whether it is a suitable theme for all sites of Catholic education today. Following this discussion, the article revisits the traditional understanding of the role of the Catholic school in the life of the Church and suggests that a nuanced understanding of the theology of *communio* enables the Catholic school to play a key educational role in the New Evangelisation. As part of this, the article proposes a fresh understanding of a pedagogy of "transmission" as a way to embed the *Courtyard* in the Catholic school. Finally, the article explores an illustrative range of internal and external limitations arising from the possible application of the *Courtyard* to Catholic schooling.

The *Courtyard of the Gentiles*, Catholic Education and the New Evangelization

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has, with varying degrees of success, been engaged in dialogue with various Christian traditions and other religions. What has been missing is an official forum for discussion with non-believers; the *Courtyard* is designed to remedy that lacuna (Landry, 2011). After a preliminary meeting in Bologna in February 2011, the first major *Courtyard* event was held in Paris in March 2011. Paris, the site of an ancient university and the home of the Enlightenment, was chosen in direct response to the Enlightenment-inspired idea that the triumph of reason would lead inevitably to the eclipse of revealed religion. The Paris meeting consisted of encounters between Christian believers and atheists held at the headquarters of UNESCO, the Sorbonne, and L'Institut de France, and ended in the square of Nôtre Dame Cathedral with a televised address by Pope Benedict (Landry, 2011). The pedagogical structure of shared dialogue/discussion followed by an invitation to prayer is the template for all *Courtyard* events as a way to emphasize the Christian commitment to meeting the "other" from a position of faith. There is hence a suitable match between the theory and the practice of the *Courtyard*.

The use of the term *Courtyard* merits further and deeper exploration. It is

related to but distinct from the more common and widely understood term "public square." The *Courtyard* has deep roots in Judaism where a defined physical space within the Jerusalem Temple was set aside to allow non-Jews (Gentiles) to pray, if they so desired (Jewish Encyclopedia, 2011). Interestingly, a display of Latin and Greek inscriptions forbade the Gentiles to approach the inner courts of the Temple on pain of death. The notion of *Courtyard* is, therefore, double-edged: it is an invitation to seek God and to pray, yet could be interpreted as a poor historical example of inter-religious dialogue as it connotes exclusion, as opposed to inclusion. It needs reframing, both pastorally and theologically, if it is to inspire meaningful dialogue today.

The New Evangelization

Pope Benedict's Christmas address to the Roman Curia in 2009 situated the *Courtyard* within the broader processes of–indeed as the first step in–the New Evangelisation (Benedict XVI, 2009). In this particular context, the *Courtyard* has to be understood with reference to the *Letter to the Ephesians* (2:11-12) where Saint Paul writes of a "dividing wall of hostility" which had been broken by Christ. This theologically significant phrase refers to the Temple wall, which kept the Jews and the Gentiles apart. Paul portrays Jesus Christ as the one who has ended the separation between Jew and Gentile and hence has, in metaphorical terms, breached this wall. The *Courtyard* manifests a desire for the apparent hostility between Christians and atheists to be similarly dissolved.

Two important interventions by Pope Benedict provide the intellectual underpinning to the *Courtyard* initiative (Benedict XVI, 2008, 2009). Through these interventions, he is seeking innovative ways of dialogue with a culture of pluralism and its associated philosophical challenges (Habermas & Ratzinger, 2006). Owing to the Enlightenment-inspired project to limit the space for religious worldviews in society, the original meaning of "secular" has been superseded by a new and now commonly-held definition which expresses an incompatibility between the claims of religion and the pursuit of education (Conroy & Davis, 2010). In countering the arguments of those who maintain that a secular society and its related systems of education must, by definition, offer little space for the religious point of view, Pope Benedict reclaimed the roots of the secular (Latin *saeculum*) as a space nested between the "sacred" and the "profane" (Markus, 2006).

Pope Benedict's Critique of Contemporary Educational Thought

Pope Benedict's writings on education demonstrate a desire to find suitable avenues for dialogue with other ways of thinking. This position is rooted in his profound conviction that the medieval quest for God and the subsequent rise of monasticism offered the philosophical and cultural roots of European culture (Benedict XVI, 2008, 2009). Benedict is convinced that overly robust applications of rationalism and utilitarianism in the field of education have, over time, limited the effectiveness of all educational enterprises–from school to university–in the search for ultimate truth. In his addresses to the College des Bernadins (2008), Benedict argued that education must assist the formation of reason as a way of enabling the human person to perceive truth itself. Louis Dupré (2010) has enlarged this line of criticism with the suggestion that the twinning of rationalism and utilitarianism are the doleful consequences of a "reduced concept of reason" (p. 38). Pope Benedict's key educational argument hence is that only the retrieval of a properly-balanced relationship between faith and reason can assist contemporary culture to emerge from its current "educational emergency" (Benedict XVI, 2007b) which is manifested, he claimed, in the advocacy of education at all levels understood chiefly as a training in skills (Benedict XVI, 2010a).

While the *Courtyard* is a meeting-point for debates on the relationship between faith and reason in public life, there has been hitherto little explicit recognition of the link between *Courtyard* and Catholic education. Pope Francis has recognised the value of the "Court of the Gentiles" as a space for peaceful encounter between believers and non-believers (Francis, 2013, para. 257). The *Courtyard*'s promotion of a broader cultural agenda will increasingly afford it the status of a broad-based educational initiative with the potential to shape all forms of Catholic education. It is a contemporary manifestation of the Second Vatican Council's call for meaningful dialogue between religiously-inspired ways of thinking and other philosophical positions (Second Vatican Council, 1965).

Bearing this in mind, the *Courtyard* could be interpreted as a means of pre-evangelisation, in which dialogue around religion in general–and Christianity in particular–is viewed by Christians as the first of many steps leading to acceptance of the Gospel. The concept of pre-evangelisation recalls in part the arguments made by some of the early Christian Fathers, especially St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) who saw the study of Greek and Latin ideas as preparatory to receiving the Gospel (Topping, 2012).

Authentic Humanism

The key area of intersection between the *Courtyard* and the conceptual framework of Catholic education is an "authentic humanism" (Benedict XVI, 2007a). Authentic humanism is rooted in the notion of the human person as a union of a physical body and an immortal soul. This unique anthropological position informs both the dialogue called for in the underpinning principles of the *Courtyard* and the call to rediscover an authentic humanism in Catholic education.

Pope Benedict outlined the key principles of this authentic humanism in a wide-ranging address to university professors in Rome (Benedict XVI, 2007a). Although Benedict's immediate context in this intervention was the interaction between faith and reason in the fertile ideological fields of the university, the generality of the ideas expressed therein can—and should—be usefully applied to Catholic education at any level. The key points are as follows: a) a humanism which studies the human person solely from an anthropocentric level is insufficient; b) the role of reason should be broadened to "embrace those aspects of reality which go beyond the purely empirical" (Benedict XVI, 2007a, para. 5); c) what contribution can Christianity can make to the humanism of the future? These key metaphysical themes penetrate the debates on education today and offer material for further reflection.

No contemporary reference to humanism can omit reference to the historical notions of humanism exemplified by such historically important figures as Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) and Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536). In very broad terms, the early humanists were inspired by classical learning and sought to promote new learning by drawing on these rich roots (cf. Bowen 1975). They were motivated by a desire to re-connect Christian thought, allegedly sullied by centuries of unnecessary theological accretions, to the allegedly pristine sources (*ad fontes*) of the early Hebrew and Greek versions of the Scriptures (Bowen, 1972). Erasmus in particular was concerned with retrieving the original text of the New Testament (Dupré 2010). Of course, this return to the sources is limited if it becomes solely an exercise in antiquarianism. At its best, however, it is a manifestation of a rich hermeneutic of conservation and innovation, which finds inspiration in open engagement with the past as a grounding for new developments in knowledge and understanding. By applying this crucial hermeneutic to contemporary intellectual life, Pope Benedict is redrawing the conceptual boundaries of modern education—and not just Catholic education—which, he believes, are in danger

of dissolution in the waters of relativism and utilitarianism. To remedy this situation, Pope Benedict argues for the recovery of a wider understanding of reason as the God-given faculty to discern what is good, true and beautiful. As such, reason cannot be totally obscured or eliminated by insights from positivism. The call to enlarge the scope of rationality is driven by a desire to save humanity from the alleged dangers of relegating religious belief to the subjective realm (Benedict XVI, 2008). In educational matters, the great metaphysical questions and the search for truth and wisdom cannot be wholly accommodated by educational policies driven principally by a desire to find and test hypotheses. Pope Benedict's plea for a retrieval of authentic humanism is a call for all sites of education to serve as places of encounter with an expressed intellectual heritage: they are not merely training-grounds where marketable skills are acquired. It is hence a radical commitment to authentic humanism, which will serve as the key point of intersection between the ideals of the Courtyard and the conceptual framework of the Catholic school in a plural society

To consider how the *Courtyard* can be applied specifically to the Catholic school, it is important to explore: a) how the Catholic school is an expression of *communio;* and b) how the pedagogy of the Catholic school must be distinctive.

Revisiting the Traditional Understanding of the Catholic School, The Catholic school today: An expression of *communio*

The Church is a sign and instrument of communion with God and "reconciliation of men with one another" (Synod of Bishops, 1985, no. 2). A suitably informed understanding theology of *communio* rejects rigidly stratified models of the Church in favour of the Church as a dynamic and organic body–albeit hierarchically ordered—whose members have a range of different and interdependent functions (Dulles, 2002). Therein lies ample scope for encouraging dialogue with those who are not part of the Church but who are curious and wish to know more about the intellectual and cultural heritage of which the Church is a guardian. The *Courtyard* reflects the widening of the bonds of communion and hence offers a theologically nuanced way of underpinning any fresh initiatives in this field. There is an inspiration for this way of thinking in the challenging concept of the "anonymous Christian," the term used by in the 1960s by the Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner (1904-1984), to describe those of other religious traditions who did not recognise

the divinity of Jesus Christ but whose life was aligned with the tenets of Christianity (1966).

Building on the attractiveness of *communio* as an ecclesiological model for a plural society, Pope John Paul II (2001) proposed a wide-ranging "spirituality of communion" (p. 43). ("Spirituality" is used here in precise terms as a way to integrate theological themes in the daily life of the believer.) Pope John Paul II's intervention, when applied to the broader world of Catholic education, encourages a genuine plurality in how the doctrinal heritage of the Catholic tradition is expressed in its network of schools. It allows for, and indeed demands, some rethinking of how the *modus operandi* of the Catholic school can continue to conserve and transmit the deposit of faith while remaining open as a space for dialogue with those wedded to other ways of thinking.

Church teaching on the ecclesial identity of the Catholic school is clear. The important post-Vatican II documents on education anchor Catholic education firmly in the Church's mission to evangelise (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, no. 73; 1988, no. 44). A more recent document on Catholic education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007) makes three important claims in this regard:

1. The Catholic school is an "ecclesial subject" (no. 3). It lies at the heart of the Church's mission.
2. The Catholic school is an educating community designed for integral formation (no. 13).
3. The Catholic school is in *communio* with the parish, diocese, ecclesial movements and the universal Church (no. 50).

It is reasonable to suggest that careful consideration of the *Courtyard* model fosters the intellectual freedom to re-consider how the Catholic school can play an effective educative role in a plural society. While the imprint of Catholic thought on wider society varies across cultures, further and deeper reflection on the theology of c*ommunio* as applied to the Catholic educational institution allows us to consider the possibility, indeed the desirability, of having different models of the Catholic school within a plural society. Some examples of these models are: schools run by dioceses and fully under the management of the local Ordinary; schools run by charities and trusts which desire to be recognised as Catholic by the local Ordinary; schools run and funded by the state with legal safeguards for the Catholic identity of the school. Common to all three models should be some distinctiveness in pedagogy.

Education as "transmission": the distinctive pedagogy of the Catholic school

The *Courtyard* values dialogue between Christians and those who hold other positions. In this and in other areas of contention, fruitful dialogue, however, requires a clear understanding of one's own philosophical, cultural and theological tradition(s) and a commitment to present this worldview to a variety of audiences. The curriculum of the Catholic school is a vehicle for the communication of Catholic thinking. By definition, a Catholic school should propose a theologically-conditioned approach to knowledge and education (Piderit & Morey, 2012). The so-called "Catholic curriculum" is a public way of organising the inherited knowledge traditions of the Church as one of its distinctive contributions to the common good of society (Davis & Franchi, 2013).

The *Courtyard* approach to schooling illustrates how the different academic disciplines reflect an authentic humanism and hence becomes a vehicle for the public expression of the doctrinal tradition (the heritage) of Catholicism. It seeks to develop this body of knowledge by ongoing reflection on, and active engagement with, developments in contemporary educational philosophies and practices. This doctrinal heritage encompasses not just the Catholic theological tradition but embraces the sum of human achievements in the arts and sciences.

Of course, the very notion of an accumulated wisdom meriting transmission is a contested concept. The continuing influence of educational philosophies rooted in constructivist epistemology makes some educators ill at ease with the transmissive approach inferred above (cf. Fox, 2001; Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). Catholic education is not immune to the influence of so-called progressive norms in pedagogy and it has been argued elsewhere that the "conventional Catholic religion pedagogy contravenes the progressive norms that are present elsewhere in the school" (McDonough, 2009, p. 197). For the authentic Catholic educator, the contravention, or at least the questioning of the fashionably progressive norms—such as the gamut of activities clustered under the umbrella of constructivist and discovery-based teaching theories (Kirschner et al., 2006)—might be seen as a strength of Catholic schooling.

While the present article cannot accommodate a wider exploration of the relationship between progressive norms and Catholic educational thought, the *Courtyard* requires a systematic teaching of Catholic thinking set within a rich body of content-knowledge. In pedagogical terms, Catholic

education should embrace a wide-ranging pedagogy centred on recovering a notion of education understood as the transmission of shared intellectual traditions. Catholic education, acting as the guardian of the critical educational traditions of the West, will hence conserve this traditional pedagogy as a gift to both present and future generations of educators. The understanding of "critical" used above goes far beyond any interpretations based on the ripples of Freirian pedagogy. Rather, it understands "critical" as a function of an enlightened and wonder-filled intellect, which cuts through the sometimes over-stated *sic et non* of dialectic (Lathangue, 2012). It is the call to embrace that which is indispensable (i.e. critical) to a good life.

This pedagogical approach applies across the curriculum and is a direct product of the hermeneutic of conservation and innovation mentioned above. It requires a corps of teachers who are themselves immersed in the wells of intellectual culture and who recognise the value of our cultural inheritance for the integral development of young people. As with all innovative educational proposals, there is a need for caution and nuance in their implementation. A pedagogy of transmission cannot, and must not, be synonymous with the drilling in of decontextualized facts; neither can it be aligned with anti-intellectual, neo-Gradgrindian training in a limited range of subjects determined by the so-called 'needs' of employers and government agencies (Davis & Franchi, 2013). Rather, a pedagogy of transmission as here understood flows from and is inspired by the human need to rely on others for help and guidance: it is a recognition of our mutual dependence across the generations. The indispensable foundations of learning offer well-trodden paths of knowledge for the young people of today, allow them to insert themselves into the history of ideas and open intellectual doors which otherwise would remain dangerously closed. This approach is far-removed from frameworks of schooling conceived in utilitarian terms, soaked in the language of learning outcomes and submissive to a neuralgic culture of self-esteem which seeks to construct, not find, truth.

In the light of the pedagogy proposed above, a Catholic school's key contribution to the New Evangelisation lies precisely in its openness to the transcendent and, crucially, in its distinctive approach to the teaching of religious education. The pedagogy of transmission as articulated above, and when applied to the curriculum of religious education in the Catholic school makes for a systematic and theologically robust subject worthy of its place in any rigorous academic system. A brief illustration follows.

Religious education: a Courtyard approach

Contemporary Church teaching on the aims of religious education in the Catholic school has suggested that faith formation is a proximate, as opposed to a primary, aim of religious education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, 2009). The primary aim of religious education in the Catholic tradition is to deepen knowledge of the Catholic Christian tradition in philosophy and theology and show how these fundamental bodies of knowledge are related to, influence, and are challenged by broader cultural developments (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2009, 2013). A pedagogy of transmission is implicit in this vision and a religious education curriculum thus understood would offer faith formation for students who were already practising Catholics in the school. Additionally, it would serve the New Evangelisation by offering an educationally valid engagement with the Catholic tradition to those who no longer practise the Catholic faith and to those who have worldviews rooted in other ways of thinking.

This mode of operation aligns itself satisfactorily with the aims of the *Courtyard*: knowledge is proposed and belief is not assumed. Nonetheless, some more general areas of possible conflict can be glimpsed.

Limitations of the *Courtyard* for Catholic Schooling

Any new proposal for Catholic schooling must, of course, value and build on its distinguished heritage. A key argument of the present essay is that models of reform built on rupture, not continuity, cannot be accommodated within the Catholic understanding of doctrinal and cultural development. This section will explore the limitations of the *Courtyard* as a model for Catholic education from both an internal (Catholic) and external (secularist) perspective. It will suggest how these limitations can be addressed.

Limitations from a Catholic perspective

If the *Courtyard* is allowed to remain a rather specialised theological idea without significant traction beyond a small group of *cognoscenti*, it will become no more than an intellectual exercise with little practical application in the life of the Catholic school. In such cases, it would militate against an understanding of Catholic schooling as the integral formation of the human person in the context of Christian anthropology Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, 2009). Any rethinking of the rationale of Catholic educa-

tion in light of the *Courtyard* has to bear in mind the need for caution and prudence: an unsophisticated presentation of the theological and intellectual energy of the *Courtyard* could lead to genuine concern about its appropriateness for a Catholic school. Some Catholic educators would, rightly, be wary of an approach to Catholic education that seems to place less emphasis on the necessary ecclesial dimension of the Catholic school and the concomitant mission to proclaim the Gospel (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 1988, 2007, 2009).

A related argument is that a Catholic school lacking such confidence in its ecclesial identity would not be in a position to fulfill its obligations to the wider Catholic community (Code of Canon Law, 1983, Nos. 796-806). The Catholic school that distances itself from its ecclesial mission would be in danger of embracing a culture of pluralism in which expressions of religious faith are seen as no more than carefully-managed cultural outlets with little positive impact on the wider workings of society. The Catholic school (or any other religiously-inspired form of schooling) cannot shed its foundational principles. Nevertheless, the idea of education as engagement with the heritage of accumulated wisdom—a key pedagogical feature of Catholic education—can be attractive to those who use shorthand terms like "history of ideas" or "great books" to express what is, essentially, a similar vision of education to that proposed by the Catholic tradition. For example, the *Great Books Foundation* is a U.S.-based educational foundation which promotes the rediscovery of great books as the source of a good education (http://www.greatbooks.org). The *Great Books Academy*, also based in the US, is a similar venture and lists as its permanent faculty the authors of the great books of the western intellectual tradition (http://www.greatbooksacademy.org). (Indeed, North America is home to many Catholic liberal arts colleges that have adopted this approach.) Paradoxically, Europe, despite its many and varied Catholic universities, has not re-embraced the liberal arts tradition to such an extent. Two recent initiatives suggest a modest recovery of this approach. Incorporated in 2010, the New College of the Humanities in London—the brainchild of the philosopher A.C. Grayling—manifests an understanding of education in the liberal arts which draws on the best of human thinking (www.nchum.org) and would be a good, if obviously incomplete, model for a university inspired by the *Courtyard* approach. The Benedictus College of the Liberal Arts, also based in London and founded in 2010, advertises itself as "the first Catholic liberal arts college in the UK" and is inspired by the educational vision of Blessed John Henry Newman (http://www.benedictus.org.uk/index.php).

Although both London-based institutions have quite different aims, there is scope for dialogue between Catholic and secular educators given the shared understanding of the value of the liberal arts for human flourishing.

Another potent internal criticism could be made against the configuration of religious education as described above, in which faith development is a secondary curricular aim. A strong case might be made that such a distinction between catechesis and religious education, although sanctioned in Church teaching, is, in reality, unhelpful and that a unity of pedagogical approaches across all sites of religious formation is an essential reflection of the fabric of Catholicism. At the heart of this line of thinking, the notion of prayerful encounter with doctrine demands that said doctrine be taught within an atmosphere of illuminative faith and supported by a range of traditional Catholic devotional practices. The *Courtyard* approach gives the impression of favouring dialogue over explicit faith-commitment and of a possible bias towards cognitive learning over a more integrated approach.

Criticisms such as those expressed above act as a brake on any sense of haste in the application of the *Courtyard* to Catholic schooling. They remind the wider educational community that Catholic education's dialogue with other educational agencies must reflect a non-conditional attachment to a specific worldview. They call the Catholic educational community to careful consideration of whether change is a reflection of a genuine organic development in ideas or, a sign of a rupture in thinking with roots in a precipitate desire to embrace unconditionally the tenets of cultural pluralism and a so-called inclusive approach to education.

Limitations from a secularist perspective

A key argument against the *Courtyard* model of Catholic schooling is that it is no more than another form of traditional evangelisation/faith proclamation under a different name. For the avowed secularist, it would be intellectually dishonest to portray the *Courtyard* as anything other than an opportunity of using the school and its captive audience of pupils as a site for the proclamation, no matter how cautiously portrayed, of a distinct religious message. This objection is rooted in a view of education as an exercise in reason which, *pace* Pope Benedict's claim to the contrary, is impeded, not assisted, by insights arising from religion.

Any contribution to the discourse on Catholic schooling, however it may be framed, needs to take note of the on-going and often neuralgic academic debate on the place of so-called "faith-schools" in a plural society. Opposition to faith-schools comes principally from two sources: (a) those who are hostile to religion in general and who, unsurprisingly, reject the idea that religion can have a positive influence on education; and (b) those who are open to the contribution that religion can make on public life but who maintain that the school must be a place of neutrality, especially in religious matters (Hirst 1981; Leahy 1990).

Given the wide-ranging debate on the place of faith-schools in a plural society, it is not surprising that the conceptual framework of religiously-conditioned educational systems cuts across the worldview(s) emergent from other ways of thinking. We should not be afraid to claim that a genuinely plural society will struggle to accommodate worldviews that differ in fundamental attitudes. As such, the existence of social and cultural avenues designed to promote civilised debate and shared understanding on religious, philosophical, and ethical matters on such matters is to be welcomed.

The critique of the complex political and cultural matrices undergirding the operation of faith schools is a case in point here (Cairns, 2009; McKinney, 2008; MacMullen, 2007). The debate on faith-schools often reflects an overt dislike of organised religion and its alleged negative effect on humanity (Grayling, 2003, 2010). Following the logic of this position, if religion is such a negative force in society, the influence of religion and religious ways of thinking on young people should, of course, be challenged in robust terms. Given the less than smooth contours of this debate, it is no surprise that a climate of hostility towards religion has facilitated a situation in which Catholic schools–the most visible of faith schools–continually have to deal directly with explicit challenges to their underpinning principles and to the viability of their particular worldview (Arthur 2009; Arthur, Gearon, & Spears, 2010).

A popular line of argument against faith schools centres on the desirability of neutrality in education (Norman, 2012). The definition of neutrality is key. On one level, neutrality can be aligned with the original understanding of *saeculum* (the Latin root of "secular"), which, as we have seen, is a space for free and open discussion of public affairs. This configuration of public neutrality would seem to chime with the approach fostered by the *Courtyard*. An authentic neutrality hence allows for, and indeed demands, a fair hearing for the religious worldview within the common school. On another level, an attachment to neutrality in education is problematic if, given the significant

shift in meaning of "secular," expressions of "neutrality" offer, implicitly or otherwise, an educational vision which is conditioned and shaped by moral relativism. In its extreme version, this combines a constructivist curricular vision with an attachment to a so-called inclusive political correctness that sees the school as a powerful driver of a progressive-minded and Enlightenment-inspired worldview. Such a system is just as systematic and philosophically-conditioned as those rooted in a religious faith and affords neutrality the status of a philosophical creed which cannot accommodate worldviews which question its own singular interpretation of liberal education.

Another common objection to faith-based education is that it affords insufficient space to a critical approach to knowledge (Hand, 2003). In this understanding of the discourse, the faith-based school fosters an unthinking attachment to what cannot be demonstrated as true. Suffice it to say that the authentic Catholic educator would not dismiss this argument without due consideration of the question of criticality, broadly understood. Indeed, this article has proposed a richer understanding of "critical," which embraces the traditional *sic* et *non of* dialectic and recognizes the importance of a shared intellectual heritage as a foundation for a good education.

Related to this is the notion of the autonomy of the classroom in matters to do with religious education (Leahy, 1990). This declaration of autonomy is shorthand for an approach to religious education that is not rooted in adherence to particular claims to religious truth, but that favours a more detached exploration of wider religiously-inspired ideas and ideals (Leahy, 1990; Jackson, 2004; Wright, 2007). This approach to religious education, which is conceptually close to the *Courtyard* model, has many significant strengths: it takes religion seriously; it integrates religion with social and cultural developments and seeks to promote closer cultural links through the study of religious ideas across a range of contexts. Its resemblance to the original meaning of "secular" offers possibilities for further conceptual development but its lack of a proper grounding in theology is ultimately problematic for a Catholic school called to manifest a vibrant ecclesial identity.

Concluding Remarks

This article has argued that the ideas contained in the *Courtyard of the Gentiles* offer Catholic education an innovative means of dialogue with other ways of thinking. A revitalised understanding of the Catholic school strengthens its academic credentials, offers it a new mode of engagement

with those who hold other worldviews, and allows the school to play a distinctive role in the New Evangelisation for which the Church has called.

In response to those who claim that Catholic schools are places of uncritical reception of a particular non-verified view of the human condition, the *Courtyard* actively seeks to promote open spaces for dialogue in society. Furthermore, the *Courtyard* would regard all educational institutions as "public resources" (Brighouse, 2008, p. 88) where people with different views can meet and share dialogue and experiences in a spirit of conviviality, not rancour.

The Catholic school thus understood is a centre of contemporary radicalism in educational thought. It is comfortable with a pedagogy of critical transmission which encourages an openness to new ideas and promotes a robust engagement with the received wisdom/heritage in the arts, sciences, and religion. This final element–religion–is where the Catholic school can make its claim to act as a contributor to the New Evangelisation: its presentation of Catholic thought to all is an invitation to engage fully with the knowledge presented therein.

A key aim of the *Courtyard*–inspired model of Catholic schooling will be a desire to use the neutral space with two aims: (a) to offer Christianity as a contribution to humanity's search for meaning; (b) to enhance what is known as "religious literacy" and thus ensure that the heritage of religion is not regarded as a museum piece but as a vital element in the on-going development of a good society.

Looking ahead, there is a need for a wider research focus on how the Catholic school can address its double role as an ecclesial agency and a public resource. Is it the case, for example, that the Catholic school and university, despite the recent initiative of A.C. Grayling in setting up the *New College of the Humanities*, will become the sole guardians of the cultural heritage of the west? Indeed. is this culture worth preserving in an atmosphere of globalisation and philosophical challenges to established means of authority? The *Courtyard* model is, I suggest, a means to preserve our shared intellectual story and build a civilised society for people of all religious and philosophical traditions who will stand on our shoulders in the centuries to come.

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