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Alasdair MacIntyre, the Concept of Tradition, and the Catholic University

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This paper considers Alasdair MacIntyre's explication of three rival versions of moral inquiry—encyclopedia, genealogy, and tradition—as a framework for thinking about the modern Catholic university. In applying MacIntyre's analysis to the contemporary situation, the paper argues that "tradition hires" rather than "mission hires" are required to maintain the identity of an authentically Catholic university. At the same time, the paper contends that those faculty who practice moral inquiry in the mode of encyclopedia or genealogy nonetheless contribute to a thriving university. Finally, the paper draws on the theologian Yves Congar to argue that a plurality of traditions exist within the Catholic intellectual tradition.

In his Gifford Lectures delivered in 1988 and published as *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* in 1990, Alasdair MacIntyre outlines three distinctive approaches to moral philosophy: encyclopedia, genealogy, and tradition. He argues for the superiority of tradition against its two rivals. It is interesting that he concludes his lectures with a chapter titled "Reconceiving the University as an Institution and the Lecture as a Genre." Following the publication of *Three Rival Versions*, MacIntyre's thinking about tradition continued to be linked with considerations about the university, and in 2009 he published another book, *God, Philosophy,*

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Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition. MacIntyre's thinking on the concept of tradition as it pertains to the university continues to be essential today, especially in considering the challenges facing Catholic higher education.[1] In fact, given MacIntyre's stature as a Catholic philosopher, it is surprising that his prescriptions for the university have not been more systematically utilized in contemporary discussions about Catholic education. The present paper is an attempt to begin remedying this omission by drawing from MacIntyre's thought on tradition as it pertains to the university and applying it to the contemporary Catholic university. But rather than merely summarizing MacIntyre's thought, I also make some claims of my own pertinent to recent debates on Catholic higher education. Specifically, in addition to sketching a tradition-based justification for a Catholic university, I advance three claims: (1) "mission hiring" must be supplemented by "tradition hiring" if a Catholic university is to maintain its proper aims, (2) the faculty who teach in the modes of "encyclopedia" and "genealogy" are necessary for an integral university in MacIntyre's thinking, and (3) MacIntyre's philosophical method needs be supplemented by theology—in this case, the theology of Yves Congar, O.P.—in order to give the fullest articulation of the meaning of tradition.

The Importance of the Question of Tradition

MacIntyre's consideration of tradition as a form of moral inquiry began, as he explains, through his own experience with the university. He writes that "Collingwood, Aquinas, Engels, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Ayer—let alone Plato, Aristotle, and Lucretius—not only made rival claims, but rival claims about how one should go about deciding between their rival claims. So what was I to do? I would have to find some way of studying philosophy systematically, if I was to situate myself as a rational agent in the moral, political, religious, and scientific conflicts of my time."[2]

Indeed, such is the problem for countless students today. Even where Catholic universities continue to teach "great texts" and expose students to the history of Western thought, it is not always

clear how those students should adjudicate between competing claims. Oftentimes, universities claim that their liberal arts core curricula teach students how to think, but in fact they merely expose students to a variety of competing ideas without forming students who can make judgments about those ideas.[3]

This problem raises the question, What is the "universal" that constitutes the unifying principle of the "university"? Here, I use the word *universal* to mean "exemplary" and "paradigmatic." It should not be confused with mere abstraction. Concretely, I am asking, What is the specific good or end that is pursued by universities and university education? Some thinkers claim that "no general doctrine of universities is possible."[4] Others, holding to a more libertarian argument about the best means for advancing knowledge, seem to uphold academic freedom as the fundamental principle of the university.[5] While these views are widespread, the implications of adhering to them are perhaps not fully appreciated. Adhering to the former means jettisoning the very concept of a university as a institution whereby one ought to discover a coherent philosophical outlook. Adherence to the latter may lead one to respect the importance of freedom in research and teaching, but it still does not equip one to adjudicate between competing claims on reality. If our thinking about the university no longer concerns "universals," or *telē*, should we be surprised by the latest Gallup polls suggesting all-time low confidence in the institution?[6] Should we be surprised that the humanities are dying after so many have proclaimed that they have no universal truths to offer?[7]

MacIntyre argues, by contrast, that education at the university needs be understood within a coherent framework. In the end, MacIntyre's inquiry is about the nature of philosophical investigation itself. MacIntyre cites Plato to argue that philosophy can begin only when it is preceded by a set of agreed-upon principles: "What emerged from Socrates' confrontation with Callicles in the *Gorgias* was that it is a precondition of engaging in rational enquiry through the method of dialectic that one should already possess and recognize certain moral virtues without which the cooperative progress of dialectic will be impossible."[8]

I mention both principles and virtues, for both are necessary for the beginning of fruitful discourse. On the level of principle, Josef Pieper, like MacIntyre, points out the necessity of *tradita* for any kind of coherent philosophical thinking and shows that this understanding reaches back to antiquity.[9] In a more recent text, Alan Jacobs extols the importance of "like-heartedness" for enriching discourse.[10] It is necessary, Jacobs claims, for would-be interlocutors to share habits of openness and listening. In other words, a necessary virtue for philosophical inquiry is the mutual love and pursuit of truth. The way MacIntyre understands principles and moral virtues is as the foundation of an intellectual tradition. At any rate, before we consider the application of MacIntyre's thinking about tradition to the contemporary Catholic university, we have to briefly explicate his view of tradition alongside the rival modes of encyclopedia and genealogy.

Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry

In *Three Rival Versions*, MacIntyre first describes an encyclopedic learning approach by situating the Gifford Lectures within Adam Gifford's historical project. Gifford willed that those who would give the lectures should "treat their subject as a strictly natural science."[11] MacIntyre explains that Gifford was a proponent of a mode of inquiry that extolled the universality of reason, the inevitable progress of reason in revealing the truth about the world, and the applicability of scientific methodology to discern truths in inquiries, both natural and human. MacIntyre writes of Gifford and those of his generation, "They assumed the assent of all educated persons to a single substantive conception of rationality. . . . They understood the outcome of allegiance to the standards and methods of such a rationality to be the elaboration of a comprehensive, rationally incontestable scientific understanding of the whole, in which the architectonic of the sciences matched that of the cosmos."[12]

The encyclopediast holds that reason and scientific method can definitively separate opinion from knowledge in a universally accessible way. No one in the contemporary academy however, claims MacIntyre, holds to the encyclopedic mode. Yet, there are

still three remnants of this mode present in the contemporary academy. These modes need not be mutually exclusive. The first consists of that person who believes that "every rationally defensible standpoint can engage with every other, the belief that, whatever may be thought about incommensurability in theory, in academic practice, it can safely be neglected."[13] Thus, the person who holds to a libertarian view of academic freedom falls into a modern version of this mode.

A second heir to the encyclopedic mode of inquiry is the person who thinks her mode of study is comprehensive or definitive of the whole. In contemporary times, this attitude is often reflected in the work of social scientists who are convinced that their science removes the need for political deliberation and prudence. One might even define such application of social scientific inquiry as a kind of "technical tyranny."[14]

Finally, yet another heir to this mode of inquiry in the contemporary university is that understanding which simply dismisses those "nonscientific subjects" as incapable of producing any real knowledge distinct from opinion or ideology. Hence, an example is the widespread belief that only STEM fields produce true knowledge as a partial explanation for the precipitous decline of the humanities.

While the encyclopedic as a mode of inquiry seeks to employ reason and scientific method to uncover universal truths, genealogy as a mode of inquiry seeks to disabuse the notion that reason advances knowledge in any way or that it can even come to know any truths-as-such. MacIntyre, holding up Nietzsche as paradigm for the genealogical mode, writes, "Nietzsche, as a genealogist, takes there to be a multiplicity of perspectives within each of which truth-from-a-point-of-view may be asserted, but no truth-as-such, and empty notion, about *the* world, an equally empty notion."[15] This mode of inquiry is very much alive and well in the contemporary university. This mode often highlights the historical equation of truth with power and decries the abuses borne from such allegedly rational structures. Such a mode militates against any conception of rational progress as well as any type of canon or authority in

the presentation of texts. MacIntyre writes that in this view, "[reason] is the unwitting representative of particular interests, masking their drive to power by its false pretensions to neutrality and disinterestedness."[16]

Finally, we come to MacIntyre's concept of tradition, the third mode of inquiry. As mentioned at the outset, MacIntyre's concern is with how to adjudicate between competing claims or ideas. He concludes that such adjudication of competing claims can occur only within the context of a tradition. Encyclopedia holds that reason is universally accessible, binding, and objective. Genealogy holds that reason is merely a mask for power and control. MacIntyre writes, "What this alternative conceals from view is a third possibility, the possibility that reason can only move towards being genuinely universal and impersonal insofar as it is neither neutral nor disinterested, that membership in a particular type of moral community, one from which fundamental dissent has to be excluded, is a condition for genuinely rational enquiry and more especially for moral and theological enquiry."[17] Tradition is a reasoned inquiry that takes place within a moral community.

Here, MacIntyre continues the work of his seminal text *After Virtue*. There, he writes that we "cannot . . . characterize [human] intentions independently of the settings which make those intentions intelligible both to agents themselves and to others."[18] For MacIntyre, tradition is a "historically extended, socially embodied argument" about what constitutes the good life.[19] This argument is always embedded in communities or institutions that adhere to a common set of practices; apart from this embeddedness, actions are unintelligible. Yet, it is not only the embeddedness that makes action or inquiry intelligible but also the fact that it is oriented toward a particular *telos* or end. We can measure the ultimate rationality of particular moral claims only insofar as they help persons to achieve goods constitutive of a good life as articulated by the moral community to which they belong. The explanation not only sets the foundation for evaluating moral claims but also offers the reason for the state of contemporary moral discourse. It is not simply that members of society cannot adjudicate between

competing moral claims; shorn of a tradition within which those moral claims become intelligible, contemporary moral discourse is really nothing more than an expression of individual preferences.

The tradition that MacIntyre describes in *Three Rival Versions* is theistic. He writes of the theism of Thomas Aquinas and the Catholic tradition more broadly that "[f]or such theism has as its core the view that the world is what it is independently of human thinking and judging and desiring and willing. There is a single true view of the world and of its ordering, and for human judgments to be true and for human desiring and willing to be aimed at what is genuinely good they must be in conformity with that divinely created order."[20] Catholics belong to a tradition. They are members of a moral community that possesses a set of practices ordered toward living well and offering fitting worship to God engaged in a historically extended argument about the good life that conforms to the divinely created order.

How, then, does this concept of tradition relate to an understanding of the university? MacIntyre follows John Henry Newman, who argued in *The Idea of a University* that all the disciplines at a university must be ordered toward understanding that divinely created order upheld by the tradition: "What educates is knowledge of several disciplines, such that one comes to understand both the indispensability of each for an overall understanding of the order of things and the limitations of each. The superficial generalist is as much the product of a defective education as the narrow specialist."[21] Each discipline contributes to a knowledge of the order of things, but each is also limited in its own way. These limitations necessitate knowledge of more than one discipline.

But what is also essential to this view is that theology is treated as the "key discipline," for according to MacIntyre, "unless theology is given its due place in the curriculum, the relationships between disciplines will be distorted and misunderstood."[22] The reason for this is that the object of study of theology is God, the creator of that order which tradition studies. Theology is the discipline that most clearly sees the relationships of the other disciplines to one another and toward the ultimate object of its own

study and thus of their relationships toward reality itself. It is only within this context that we can understand the meaningful kinds of questions that can and should be asked in the contemporary curriculum. According to MacIntyre, "The crucial questions are: In what then does the unity of a human being consist? And what is it about human beings that enables them to ask this question about themselves?" He goes on to say, "But these are questions, in Newman's idiom 'philosophical questions,' which can only be asked by students who have a more than superficial grasp both of the relevant disciplines and of how they relate to each other."[23]

It should be noted that in making these claims, both MacIntyre and Newman were not arguing on behalf of Catholic universities alone but universities in general. Both men offer further arguments for why universities as such require theology in the curriculum, but here is not the place to summarize those arguments. Rather, this paper specifically focuses on the contemporary Catholic university. Catholicism recognizes the need for a discipline beyond philosophy because it recognizes the existence of Divine Revelation, which informs and supplements human knowledge.[24] Given this sketch of the concept of tradition and its relationship to the university, it is now possible to consider specific prescriptions relevant to the contemporary Catholic situation.

On the Insufficiency of Mission Hiring

It is important to note that presently there is no univocal understanding of mission hiring, given the great number of Catholic colleges and universities and the different perspectives and visions of the Catholics who seek to build them up and preserve them. Recent reflections in *Commonweal* reflect this plurality of views. The reflections begin with John Garvey and Mark W. Roche offering their respective takes on "What Makes a University Catholic?" Garvey, following *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, argues for a preponderance of Catholic scholars at a Catholic university and shows how such a preponderance of Catholic voices does not violate academic freedom, while Roche advises how to create a university culture such that exemplary "mission hires" can be recruited to the university.[25]

David O'Brien quickly entered the fray, arguing that given the varied views of so many different Catholics, merely hiring good numbers of self-identified Catholics does not answer the question of what mission it is that they are hired to support.[26] Joshua Hochschild finally sought to further clarify and "demystify" what is called hiring for mission by offering his readers specific questions he would ask a potential hire. Some of these questions deal with how the candidate engages the tradition of Catholic thought and how the candidate views the relationship between Catholicism and the intellectual mission of the university.[27] These questions are meant to show that the potential candidate has a personal investment in the Catholic intellectual tradition rather than simply identifying as a Catholic. All these reflections make important contributions to understanding mission hiring, and Hochschild's piece, in particular, begins to showcase the kind of approach one would take after a friendly appropriation of MacIntyre's thought. It is my goal in this section to use MacIntyre to stake out a more defined intellectual claim with regard to Catholic hiring by distinguishing between a "mission hire" and a "tradition hire" and showing how the former bereft of the latter is unable to sustain an authentically Catholic university.

Broadly speaking, a mission hire constitutes a hire who demonstrates concrete support through the individual's professional activities for the mission statement of the university. At those Catholic universities that fully embrace their mission, the mission statement will declare commitment to the Catholic identity of the school as well as to an intellectual formation in the liberal arts. As a rule, Catholic universities require faculty who are committed to Catholic identity and liberal arts education. But given MacIntyre's analysis of the three modes of moral inquiry, we cannot presume such hiring to be sufficient. A Catholic university committed to mission hiring will ensure hires who demonstrate commitment to the ideals of the institution, but such hires do not necessarily guarantee the coherent Catholic education promised through the mode of what MacIntyre calls tradition.

Consider two different kinds of mission hires: The first is a philosophy professor who belongs to a non-Catholic Christian

denomination and is committed both to the religious and liberal arts mission of the university but understands the work in his field as completely autonomous from any considerations of faith or theology. The second is a STEM professor who is a devoted and practicing Catholic and is open about her faith but is not conversant with the Catholic intellectual tradition as it pertains to her field. Both kinds of hires are absolutely essential to the Catholic university and contribute much to their institutions and to their students. They constitute mission hires. But if the *telos* of the Catholic university is to allow students to ask questions about the unity of the human being and to present them with a compelling vision of the whole of reality as understood by the Catholic tradition, then it is essential that the university also intentionally hire faculty conversant with that tradition, who understand the relationships of the disciplines to each other and to the cornerstone discipline of theology. These two potential hires do not constitute tradition hires.

Consider another way of looking at the distinction between mission and tradition hiring. It is entirely possible to conceive of a scenario where students major in a field like psychology or political science where they are educated by professors who demonstrate a commitment to the mission of the university, but these students do not take a course that considers the best findings of contemporary psychology in light of Catholic theological anthropology or one in Catholic political thought. So too, it is entirely possible for one to receive a stellar physics education from mission hires without considering how physics as a discipline provides an important part of the whole of reality that is integrally described by theology. Tradition hires ensure that Catholic university students not only receive an education that is committed to the liberal arts and to religious faith but also receive an education in that tradition which offers a compelling view of the whole, one that enables students to see themselves most clearly in relation to God and to other human beings.

To be clear, I have nothing but praise and admiration for the many mission hires that keep Catholic universities vibrant and alive. The distinction in this section simply aims to make the point that if Catholic universities are to offer contemporary students and

their faculty a real alternative to the great mass of ideas and arguments that confront them—if they are to offer them a real means by which they can exercise judgment between competing claims—then they will have to hire faculty who are educated into a real tradition of inquiry. But one can be educated into a tradition only by those who have already been educated into that same tradition. If the Catholic university is to remain a university, it will provide for education in the tradition that acts as its unifying principle. And, for the Catholic university, the mode of tradition must be incorporated into its self-understanding. Catholicism and dedication to the liberal arts need be seen not merely as personal commitments by individual faculty and staff—as important as this may be—but as a coherent institutional commitment that understands Catholic teaching about the world and the human person as absolutely inseparable from the intellectual project of the university.

Beyond hiring for tradition, it behooves a serious Catholic institution to form its existing faculty. Given the state of contemporary university training and dearth of faculty trained into a tradition of intellectual inquiry, the Catholic university must invest in the mission training of its faculty just as it does in their professional formation. A serious institution will ask how it can invite mission-interested professors to more deeply reflect on the intellectual and spiritual tradition of the university. It will also creatively explore how it might help mission hires to transition to tradition hires by allowing those hires to think about their work in light of Catholic theology and the other disciplines. These programs should support faculty from all the different modes of inquiry by presenting mission in an inviting and intellectual manner. It would be essential for a Catholic university invested in its intellectual tradition to examine mission engagement as part of the tenure-granting process. Finally, hiring and training for tradition requires supporting a curriculum that enacts the practices that the foregoing considerations hope to foster.

University Faculty and the Three Rival Versions

One might conclude from the foregoing considerations that a MacIntyrean approach would necessitate a Catholic university to

exclusively hire tradition hires, or at least a mix of mission and tradition hires. Some Catholic schools take this approach, and in doing so they may laudably ensure for their students a cohesive education in the Catholic intellectual tradition. But this approach is not MacIntyre's. Although encyclopediasts and genealogists are unable to educate students into the same unified view of reality, they nonetheless have an important and valuable role at MacIntyre's university. This is because for MacIntyre, the university should be "a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict, in which a central responsibility of higher education would be to initiate students into conflict." Furthermore, "[i]n such a university those engaged in the teaching and enquiry would each have to play a double role. For on the one hand, each of us would be participating in conflict as the protagonist of a particular point of view, engaged thereby in two distinct but related tasks."[28] These two tasks are to advance inquiry from within the mode particular to each faculty member and to enter into intellectual disputation with the other rival viewpoints.[29]

MacIntyre's prescription would lead to not only a more efficacious university but also a more honest one. Rather than proclaiming total neutrality in the presentation of texts and ideas, faculty could be more honest about which mode or tradition they follow when they present their material. At a Catholic university, such a model would ensure education rather than mere catechesis, since students would still have to make a judgment about the particular claims advanced by the those teaching out of rival modes. The difference is that the students would be more cognizant of the different modes of inquiry, their starting principles, and their relationship to one another. As well, at a Catholic university, students would not merely be exposed to a smattering of Catholic theology and philosophy but also be educated into a tradition of inquiry that allows them to see the relationship between the academic disciplines and the Catholic faith.

Transforming the Catholic university into a place of "constrained disagreement," or *disputatio*, to use the scholastic term, not only is more honest but also aids in the institution's Catholic mission. In

commenting on his time at the philosophy department at Boston University, MacIntyre writes, "The Boston University department in the 1970s had three striking characteristics. First, it was a meeting place for philosophers of radically different points of view. Secondly, an unusually large number of its members were also at work in some other discipline or practice. And thirdly, and consequently, the conversations between us, some generated by conflict, some by cooperation, enabled us to learn a great deal from each other. My education began all over again."[30]

So too at a Catholic university exposure to alternative modes of inquiry should serve both to expose students to the world around them and to sharpen the critical thinking and reasoned argument of those who operate within the Catholic intellectual tradition. But even beyond this point, there are particular lessons that those who engage in tradition learn from those who are adherents of rival viewpoints.

From the honest encyclopediasts we learn the importance of civil discourse.[31] Organizations such as Heterodox Academy that operate out of the encyclopediast mode call our attention to the importance of protecting academic freedom in the syllabus and in the classroom and promoting free and rational debate between members of the academy. In our present age of ideology and division, all can hope to learn from this model. In contrast, the genealogist potentially calls attention to the injustices of the past and present and challenges the academy to face these injustices in its work.[32] Although the temptation to reduce the pursuit of truth to social activism is one to be avoided, the truth pursued at the Catholic university can never be separated from the social concerns of the Catholic Church.[33] The genealogist reminds Catholics of their obligations to the marginalized. At its best, the mode of tradition should incorporate the concerns of genealogy to social justice and the concerns of encyclopediasts to freedom of inquiry in the pursuit of knowledge while preserving its own commitments. I conclude by making the observation that many faculty of the genealogist or encyclopedist cast of mind often contribute greatly to the education of Catholic university students and provide necessary

support to the work of the institutions to which they belong. This is to say nothing of other, non-Catholic traditions whose intellectual frameworks often complement and enrich the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Tradition and the Discipline of Theology

Of interest is that one of the criticisms leveled against MacIntyre is that he is a moral relativist.[34] MacIntyre's argument is that one can adjudicate between rival moral claims only when one thinks within the context of a tradition that has identified a *telos* for its inquiry and establishes standards of rational justification for evaluating its moral claims. But then the question that arises is, How does one adjudicate between rival traditions? If one interprets MacIntyre (wrongly) as being indifferent to this question, then the charge of being a moral relativist becomes clearer.[35] But MacIntyre is not indifferent to the question. Rather, he prescribes moral thinkers (1) to attempt to understand the telos and rationality of the rival tradition as if it were their own and (2) to consider the limitations of the particular tradition in question and ask oneself whether a rival tradition can address those limitations more adequately. In other words, the superior tradition for MacIntyre is the one that is able to provide the best and most complete rational standpoint. I do not wish to gainsay MacIntyre's thinking on this point. But since we are speaking of the Catholic university and the Catholic intellectual tradition, a more firm ground is available to us.

Earlier I cited MacIntyre's claim that Socrates's encounter with Callicles demonstrates the necessity of shared moral commitment for the efficacy of dialectical engagement. But perhaps the clearest articulation of the problem MacIntyre wishes to address comes from Aristotle. In *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle argues that it is the syllogism that produces demonstrative knowledge.[36] But in any syllogism, the premises must be known with certainty and better than the conclusion. If the premises are not known, then they must be demonstrated, but this cannot proceed *ad infinitum* if we are to have knowledge. Therefore, we must know some of these first principles sans demonstration. The Catholic believes that the first principles of

theology are provided by Divine Revelation.[37] Thus, the Catholic holds to the coherence of Catholic tradition not merely because of its rational coherence but also because of trust that its first principles have a divine source, God, and are to that extent infallible.

This is not the only contribution that a theological understanding contributes to MacIntyre's project. The *disputatio* that MacIntyre credits to furthering his education at Boston University need exist not only between rival modes of moral inquiry but also within the mode of tradition itself. How can such disagreement exist within a tradition that has a common *telos* and shared standards of rational justification? Catholic theology distinguishes between "Tradition" and "traditions." The Dominican theologian Yves Congar invokes Charles Péguy to explain the distinction, saying that "[t]his idea springs from Péguy's conception of revolution and reform as 'the appeal made by a less perfect tradition to one more perfect; the appeal made by a shallower tradition to one more profound; the withdrawal of tradition to reach a new depth, to carry out research at a deeper level; a return to the source, in the literal sense.'"[38] Tradition means "to hand over," and apostolic tradition in Catholic belief refers to the handing over of divinely revealed truth. Indeed, "[t]aken in its basic, exact and completely general sense, tradition or transmission is the very principle of the whole economy of salvation. . . . Thus the economy begins by a *divine* transmission or tradition; it is continued in and by the mend chosen and sent out by God for that purpose. The sending of Christ and of the Spirit is the foundation of the Church, bringing her into existence as an extension of themselves."[39]

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, states, "This sacred tradition, therefore, and the Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face."[40] Tradition makes Christ and His teaching in the Catholic Church present.

But Congar clarifies that tradition is not merely a "passive deposit." It "is *incorporated* into a *subject*, a *living* subject."[41] He

goes on to argue that "[i]t is not enough to say there is a living subject; it must be added that this subject lives *in history* and that historicity is one of its inherent features, without, however, implying that its truth is relative or that it is nothing more than the changing thought of men. Tradition implies and even tolerates no alteration in its objective content."[42]

While the deposit of faith remains unchanging, it is the task of the Catholic Church—and of theologians—to respond to the questions and concerns of their respective times and to speak eloquently to the questions of their day. Theology as a discipline seeks to apply human reason to divinely revealed principles so as to increase our understanding of the human relation to God, but theology or the multiple theologies that have been produced by the Catholic Church also represent traditions of inquiry within a larger Tradition of settled first principles. Augustine, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas have all given birth to separate traditions of theological inquiry, but these traditions are all in line with the sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church because all begin from first principles found in the deposit of faith. They represent a plurality within a unity.

Such theological traditions fall under MacIntyre's definition of tradition as a "historically extended, socially embodied argument." And while MacIntyre's appropriation of Thomism certainly represents a tradition "incorporated into a living subject," he judges the superiority of Thomism by its ability to subsume the concerns and more adequately answer the questions of its rival tradition—namely, Augustinianism.[43] One may find this argument convincing, but given Congar's treatment of traditions, one need not settle on a monolithic tradition within the wider Catholic tradition. Thus, while the Catholic university should be a place of "constrained disagreement" for faculty who adhere to different rival versions of inquiry, it can also be a place of willed Catholic pluralism where tradition hires advocate for different schools within the wider tradition while remaining faithful to that broader tradition.

Alasdair MacIntyre's thinking on tradition and the university remains as fruitful as ever for the Catholic university in contemporary times. An application of his thought to the outstanding

problems of the Catholic university allows for the university to simultaneously stay true to its fundamental identity and intellectual charge while also becoming a place of open debate and encounter with viewpoints that exist outside the formal thinking of the Catholic Church. For these reasons, MacIntyre's thought is to be commended.

In the end, such proposals regarding universities will be successful only to the degree that those persons who devote themselves to the institution also devote themselves to one another. Any successful Catholic university requires trust among its members, a mutual commitment to the pursuit of truth, and—dare I say—love and friendship. As Jacques Maritain observes in his own reflections on the possibility of philosophical cooperation,

> All that can be said on the question can be summed up in the philosophical duty of understanding another's thought in a genuine and fair manner, and of dealing with it with intellectual justice. This already is difficult—and is sufficient, if only we are aware that there cannot be intellectual justice without the assistance of intellectual charity. . . . In other words, what essentially matters is to have respect for the intellect, even if, in its endeavors, it appears to us as missing the point, and to be attentive to disentangling and setting free every seed of truth, wherever it may be.[44]

Notes

1. One writer who summarizes some of the many challenges is Timothy O'Malley, "What's Next After Catholic Colleges Collapse?," *Church Life Journal: A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life*, October 29, 2019, accessed March 5, 2025, https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/what-comes-next/. O'Malley addresses the lack of faith in the Catholic intellectual project and how it has been replaced with an instrumental view of education.
2. Alasdair MacIntyre, "On Not Knowing Where You Are Going," Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 84, no. 2 (2010): 62.

3. See Luigi Giussani, "Loyalty to 'Tradition': The Source of the Capacity for 'Certainty,'" in *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 28–41.
4. J. M. Roberts, "The Idea of a University Revisited," in Newman After a Hundred Years, ed. Ian Ker and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 222, as cited by Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Very Idea of a University: Aristotle, Newman, and Us," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 57, no. 4 (2009): 347.
5. E.g., Brian Leiter, "Why Academic Freedom?," in *The Value and Limits of Academic Speech: Philosophical, Political, and Legal Perspectives*, ed. Donald Alexander Downs and Chris W. Suprenant (Routledge, 2018), 31–46.
6. Megan Brenan, "Americans' Confidence in Higher Education Down Sharply," Gallup, July 11, 2023, accessed March 5, 2025, https://news.gallup.com/poll/508352/americans-confidence-higher-education-down-sharply.aspx.
7. MacIntyre presciently writes in 1990, "Or can fundamental debate on moral and theological questions now only be carried on outside the constraints of the conventional academic system, in waging a kind of guerrilla warfare against that system?" MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 221.
8. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 60.
9. Joseph Pieper, *Tradition: Concept and Claim* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2008 [1970]), 33–34. As I will show, MacIntyre's thought connects the Thomist tradition with the tradita of Christian Revelation. While recognizing the inaccessibility of Revelation to unaided human reason, Pieper nonetheless points out the "common content" between Plato, Aristotle, and the "Christian proclamation." In another work, he writes, "This denial [of world as creation] means not only a break with the sacred tradition of Christianity, but also with the ontological teachings of the great Greek thinkers, which really means a break with the roots that inevitably determine one's own thinking down to the formulation of one's philosophical question and all related verbal expressions." Cf. In *Defense of Philosophy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992 [1966]), 75–76.
10. Alan Jacobs, *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* (New York: Currency, 2017), 62.
11. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 9.
12. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 23–24.
13. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 171.

14. See Christopher Justin Brophy, "Scientism, Certitude, and the Recovery of Politics," Nova et Vetera 21, no. 1 (2023): 239–48.
15. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 42.
16. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 59.
17. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 59–60.
18. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007 [1987]), 206.
19. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.
20. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 66–67. Certainly, since human beings do not see sub specie aeternitatis, we do not have access to this single, true view. We do believe in the coherent ordering in the world and that humans have some access to this through reason and Revelation.
21. MacIntyre, "The Very Idea of a University," 348.
22. MacIntyre, "The Very Idea of a University," 348–49.
23. MacIntyre, "The Very Idea of a University," 355.
24. Thomas Aquinas, ST Ia q. 1 a. 1.
25. John Garvey and Mark W. Roche, "What Makes a University Catholic?: An Exchange on Mission & Hiring," *Commonweal*, January 26, 2017, accessed March 5, 2025, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/what-makes-university-catholic.
26. David O'Brien, "Mission Before Identity: A Response to John Garvey and Mark Roche," *Commonweal*, March 18, 2017, accessed March 5, 2025, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/mission-identity.
27. Joshua Hochschild, "The Catholic Vision: Hiring for Mission: More Than 'Counting Catholics,'" *Commonweal*, May 8, 2017, accessed March 5, 2025, https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/catholic-vision.
28. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 230–31.
29. One might read the ensuing section as a commentary on Christopher Haw's thoughtful piece "Agonistic Education: Conflict and Centered Pluralism in Catholic Higher Education," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 39, no. 1 (2020): 37–64. The present paper lays out a template for a productive agonism to exist at Catholic universities as well as a form of "centered pluralism." At the same time, I believe the present paper offers the intellectual resources to more firmly center Catholic thought and gives more warrant for confidence in the Catholic intellectual tradition.
30. MacIntyre, "On Not Knowing," 66.
31. For an excellent account of the concept of civility and its various forms, see Teresa M. Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

32. Nietzsche's treatment of "critical history" provides a rather balanced view on the use and abuse of this type of historical method. See UT II.2.
33. "The Christian spirit of service to others for the promotion of social justice is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. The Church is firmly committed to the integral growth of all men and women." John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 34, August 15, 1990, accessed March 5, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html.
34. See the prologue "After Virtue after a Quarter of a Century," in MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, ix–xvi.
35. MacIntyre responds to this in the most recent prologue of *After Virtue*, but his most developed response to this critique is *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
36. Aristotle, APo. I. 2–3.
37. Thomas Aquinas, Ia, q. 1, a. 1.
38. Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004 [1964]), 6.
39. Congar, *Meaning of Tradition*, 10.
40. Dei Verbum 7, November 18, 1965, accessed March 5, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.
41. Congar, *Meaning of Tradition*, 112.
42. Congar, *Meaning of Tradition*, 114.
43. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 58–81. They are also not contrary to the basic universal principles that John Paul II discusses in his encyclical Fides et Ratio.
44. Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Scribner, 1952), 44–45.