

Article

Catholics, Culture and the Renewal of Christian Humanism

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Abstract: If Catholic educators are to equip students to engage with contemporary culture in a way that is credible and winsome, they need first, to be able to draw upon the living tradition of their faith appreciatively, critically and creatively, and second, to articulate a renewed form of Christian humanism. This paper addresses the second of these prerequisites by taking two steps towards the development of a Christian humanism for our times. First, I propose a rationale for the task of rethinking the case for Christian humanism as a resource for both cultural engagement and for educational practice. Second, I consider three potential sources and guides for becoming confident and competent in communicating this renewal of Christian humanism: Jacques Maritain, Romano Guardini and Pope Francis.

Keywords: culture; Christian humanism; Catholic education; Jacques Maritain; Romano Guardini; Pope Francis



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Catholic educators have always had to draw upon and respond to the cultures in which they are embedded. The transmission of faith and the invitation to participate in God's life never occurs in a cultural vacuum. The language used in Catholic education, the features of the faith to be given salience, the prevailing assumptions about knowledge, the aims of education, pedagogy, curriculum and the teacher-student relationship, even the tone and shape of the theology that underpins and illuminates Catholic education—all these are unavoidably and deeply influenced by the nature of the society and culture which surrounds educational settings in all ages. Every generation of Catholic educators has to find a way to communicate the faith in a manner that is both true to the Gospel and relevant for the culture. In this paper I propose that, in order for the relevance of Christian faith to be made manifest to our culture, what is needed is a renewed form of Christian humanism, drawn upon and fostered in Catholic education in whatever forum and context it takes place, and permeating the spirit of the Church's engagement with the world.

The paper is in three parts. First, I locate Christian humanism against the backdrop of the different ways that Christians have related to culture, the factors that influence the stance they adopt, the misguided turnings made by some Christians and the limitations (from a Christian perspective) of secular humanism. Second, there is an outline of key features that should be present in a renewal of Christian humanism. Third, I propose three guides for the task of developing a Christian humanism fit for our times: Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), Romano Guardini (1885–1968); Pope Francis (1936–).

1. Christians and Culture

Culture is the matrix in which mindsets are formed, and we can be influenced by it in ways that we are unaware of, because its leading perceptions, assumptions, and priorities are taken for granted as both obvious and invisible (just as, for most of us, is the case with oxygen and language, and as water is for fish). To participate in a culture is, to an extent, involuntary; one breathes in ways of seeing and attributions of value without testing them or deciding to embrace them deliberately.

Close connections between religion and culture have been noted by some commentators. For example, the English historian Christopher Dawson considered that religion constitutes the dynamic element in culture as well as providing the unifying force within

it (Dawson 1948). Dawson devoted many of his works to the reciprocal relationship between religion and culture (for an anthology of his essays on this topic, see Dawson 1998) and only a few years before his death he made a strong case for the study of Christian culture to be a major focus for the curriculum in Catholic education (Dawson 1961). The Romanian-American philosopher of culture Virgil Nemoianu (1996) claims that culture is derived from and connected to religion: architecture to temples of worship, drama to religious ritual, universities to acquiring sacred knowledge, music, sculpture and painting to the praise of the divine, indeed science and political economy themselves to categories generated by divine stories. Whatever their origins may have been, many of these human endeavours have since separated themselves in significant ways from the religious matrix from which they emerged.

Over the centuries, Christians have displayed a spectrum of approaches to culture. For some, a desire to engage with, to learn from and to influence culture is a distraction from the primary goal of salvation, which entails avoiding entanglement in the world; in their eyes, culture has no salvific significance. For others, who adopt a slightly less negative view of culture, an interest in culture, whatever its attractions, threatens to tempt us into superficial concerns, for culture is neither central to nor vitally necessary for Christian existence. Is culture a part of God's plan for human development and a contribution to creation, or is it a source of temptation to be resisted or even shunned? For others again, a more positive stance is adopted towards culture: is it fertile ground that is open to conversion? Can culture help Christians to articulate, express, explain and invite people into their faith? Can it be a valuable contributory factor in the process of humanisation and mature and all-round development, and thereby also assist in spiritual growth? Should humanisation and spiritualisation be isolated from one another or are these processes integrally connected?

For Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky, there is an intimate link between, on the one hand, human nature and, on the other, culture; we only know the former via the latter (Florovsky. In Fuller (1957, p. 216)). The direction that human culture takes plays a relevant role in whether human beings turn to the light or to the darkness. Florovsky calls for a balanced assessment of culture's importance. One must avoid the danger of 'being enslaved and seduced by human achievements, by the glories and triumphs of civilization.' This would be to attribute too much weight to humanity's contribution to salvation through cultural achievements. It should not be forgotten that 'A "primitive" man can be saved no less than a "civilized" man' (Florovsky 1957, p. 218). At the same time 'one should also be careful not to minimize the creative vocation of man' (p. 226).

The poet, playwright and literary critic T. S. Eliot also points out two contrasting errors with regard to the relationship between faith and culture. One is the belief 'that culture can be preserved, extended and developed in the absence of religion'; and the other is 'the belief that the preservation and maintenance of religion need not reckon with the preservation and maintenance of culture' (Eliot 1967, p. 102). For him, religion and culture are neither identical nor entirely independent of each other. The right stance of a Christian is to be neither aloof from nor assimilated by contemporary culture.

The response that Christians make to culture depends to a large degree (but not entirely) on the nature of the culture in which they find themselves, and thus of their perception of its benefits and dangers. At different times across history the culture facing Christians has presented alternative calls for allegiance: astrology, emperor-worship, money, military might, hedonism, materialism, racism, a glorified nation-state, an all-encompassing political party, and other forms of idolatry. Therefore, one should distinguish an attitude towards culture in general and responses to a specific culture. Yet, even when they set out to oppose, resist or critique a culture, it is difficult for Christians to avoid drawing upon some of its assumptions and values or to use its language. How else would they be able to communicate meaningfully with those around them? Even Tertullian deployed the wisdom and rhetorical methods of the Greeks in defence of Christian faith, despite his negative stance to the culture of his time.

The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* (#36) lays down a principle to guide Christians in their stance towards culture: 'all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order.' This suggests that earthly realities and human endeavours have a degree of legitimate autonomy. However, the document makes it clear that this does not mean that 'created things do not depend upon God or that they can be used without reference to their creator.' Paragraph 36 of *Gaudium et spes* aims to hold together both an acknowledgement of the derived autonomy of creation (with regard to culture, areas of knowledge and human affairs) and a recognition of the dependence of both creation and humanity on God as source and goal. It ends by saying 'When God is forgotten, the creature itself grows unintelligible'.

Careful discrimination is called for. One should avoid setting up an antagonistic opposition between faith and the world of such a kind that downgrades the worth of human endeavours and which denigrates the products of culture. Additionally, one should be vigilant about becoming so colonised by contemporary trends that one accepts too readily that which undermines or contradicts what is called for by faith. As the writer Gregory Wolfe proposes, 'the distinctive mark of religious humanism is its willingness to adapt and transform culture . . . Transformation, rather than rejection or accommodation, constitutes the heart of the religious humanist's vision' (Wolfe 1997). That work of transformation must be conducted with great care, lest it becomes heavy-handed and destroys rather than elevates what it seeks to improve. The kind of connection without control to be established between Christian faith and secular disciplines and activities needs to be humble as well as confident, receptive as well as engaged, appreciative rather than dismissive (Sullivan 2010). The historian E. Harris Harbison provides a wise warning: 'A possessive and imperialistic Christian ideology may destroy the integrity of liberal learning by the intensity of its radiation . . . The cure for the divorce of liberal learning from Christianity is not "Christianization" of the content of the curriculum but more learned and committed Christians in liberal education shedding what light they can, in humility and devotion to truth, on the wider meaning of the subjects they teach' (E. Harris Harbison 1957, pp. 68–69).

If Christians are to engage constructively and effectively in contemporary society, my considered judgement is that this will not happen if they adopt any of the following four approaches. One inappropriate strategy would be to seek to ally the Church with political power in an attempt to return to Christendom. Not only would this have no chance of success, given the very low numbers of seriously committed Christians who live alongside a much greater number of people having no religious commitments as well as in the midst of those who belong to other religions; it would also clearly contradict the teaching of Jesus as displayed in the Gospels. Christians are not in the business of trying to conquer or to dominate society.

A second disproportionate approach would be for Christians to put all their efforts into harnessing technological tools and new communication media in order to appear relevant to the current cultural context. This would be to misconceive the essentially incarnational, relational and holistic nature of Christian communication. Christians should beware of putting their trust in or relying unduly on anything other than Christ, lest such trust and reliance slip into either accommodation or, even worse, idolatry.

A third response, even though tempting for some, would be to withdraw from the world in order to remain uncontaminated by it and to hold fast in an antagonistic counter-culture seeking to stay huddled and safe in a like-minded and closed-off faith community; we might call this a return to the catacombs or the promotion of an underground church. While persecution of and discrimination against Christians continues to be pervasive in some parts of the world, in the West, by and large, this situation does not prevail. Christians should not be hiding from or ignoring society and its challenges and needs.

The fourth inadequate approach would be to seek to maintain Christian life as a parallel existence, on twin tracks; that is, preserving the practice of Christian faith and membership of the faith community, yet for most practical purposes, for example, with regard to work and the economy, education and leisure, the environment and health, personal relationships and politics, being so fully assimilated into and at home with the culture and its prevailing assumptions that much of life is lived as if God and the Gospel made no difference to their worldview and how this governs their reading of and response to the world. To restrict faith to a private enclave that does not impinge on society or offering anything distinctive to the culture would be to abandon that culture to malign forces and false assumptions. It would make Christian faith seem self-regarding, inward-looking and neglectful of its missionary mandate. Christian life must not operate in two separate compartments, with one living by the Gospel while the other follows the way of the world.

Individual conversion and faith community development continue to matter enormously, but do not go far enough. There is a need for Christians to be a leaven in their culture, trying to lift it to a level that is more likely to foster healthy flourishing for all. Christian humanism must contribute to a way of seeing the world in holistic fashion, emphasising the non-separation of sacred and secular and the essential interconnectedness of all dimensions of life and therefore of all areas of knowledge.

It is possible for a person to live faithfully as a Christian without cultural engagement (and sometimes this may be necessary), but it is not the optimal stance. It may be a survival strategy but does not address the need for culture to be enlightened and uplifted by a Christian worldview. It is also possible for a person to be carried along by a culture that is strongly influenced by Christian faith but without this faith necessarily touching down to the level of conversion, communion with Christ, or being personally owned; such borrowed faith lacks a sense of vocation envisaged as participating in God's will for the world.

Humanism comes in various forms, including in patristic, scholastic, Renaissance, German idealist, as well as Marxist, existentialist, atheistic-secular and Catholic-personalist versions. (For overviews of the development of humanist thought, from medieval through to postmodern, see [Klassen and Zimmermann 2006](#); [Zimmermann 2017](#)). Humanists at the time of the Renaissance put strong emphasis on moral and religious training as a preparation for responsible life in society and as orienting them towards their heavenly destination. Great importance was attached to rhetoric and style in matters of communication and to this end classical authors were at the heart of their curriculum ([Kallendorf 2002](#)). Although Latin continued to be the principal language of scholarship, use of the vernacular was rapidly increasing. The role of the state in education was beginning to be acknowledged. Renaissance humanists could be criticised for being elitist, since most of their efforts were directed fairly narrowly towards that restricted proportion of the population with sufficient leisure to profit from limited opportunities for education and who possessed the requisite language skills. It was also usually restricted to males, although some Christian humanists, such as Juan Luis Vives, were in favour of educating girls ([Vives 2000](#)).

Christian humanists today find themselves in contention with some forms of secular humanism, while interdenominational are more muted. At the same time, over many issues there is scope for much cooperation between Christian and secular humanists. Secular humanists are sceptical about religious beliefs and rely on science as the basis for understanding the world. They develop arguments for morality that do not rest on any religious framework. They promote tolerance towards different lifestyles and competing belief systems. They endorse democratic principles and they are committed to many causes now being supported by Christians, such as concern for the environment. They have often been ahead of Christians in advocating women's rights, racial and sexual equality, freedom of speech and education. (For examples of secular humanist thought, see [Nietzsche 1994](#); [Heidegger 1978](#); [Sartre 2007](#); [Herrick 2005](#); [Law 2011](#)).

However, despite displaying openness in many respects, secular humanism today limits such openness unduly by its commitment to immanentism, that is, its rejection

of the possibility of encountering the transcendent and the supernatural. Many, though not all, secular humanists are suspicious of, even insensitive to, mystery, the spiritual and the contemplative dimension. They also tend to neglect much of the wisdom which can still be derived from the past, because of the close association between past learning and religious authorities, organizations and practices (which did indeed have their own blindspots, shortcomings and excesses). In so strongly emphasising the importance of autonomy, they can be inattentive to such features of human life as vulnerability, limitation, finitude and dependence. In their advocacy of rationality, they can be neglectful of the paradoxical and they can be suspicious of claims to truth that rely on non-intellectual approaches to knowledge. They approach education with an incomplete philosophical anthropology, lacking a sound understanding of community and refusing the light of revelation and the help of the church. Secular humanism, despite its commitment to human rights and to addressing multiple forms of discrimination lacks an adequate metaphysical foundation for its claims. Perhaps the stronger claims of secular humanists relate to what they are *against*—superstition, authoritarianism, indoctrination and various types of hostile discrimination, for example, against women, homosexuals, unbelievers—rather than what they are *for*. All of this, of course, can legitimately be contested by secular humanists. (For an intelligent and succinct critique of religious schools from a secular humanist perspective, see [Humanist Philosophers' Group 2001](#)).

A Christian understanding of the world has implications for Christian education. Such an understanding offers an interpretation of the person, of community and the state, of knowledge, culture and communication, of time and history, of finitude, vulnerability and dependence. The shape and tone of any particular form of humanism is influenced by the forces its exponents see as threats to human flourishing: for Renaissance humanism, the barren and futile logic-chopping of scholasticism; for Christian integral humanism of the mid-third of the twentieth century such as that of Jacques Maritain, the dangerous distortions of collectivism in its left and right wing varieties; for Romano Guardini, the mechanization of life brought about by the adoption of the technocratic paradigm; for the fraternal humanism of Pope Francis, radical individualism, consumerism and nationalism; for contemporary secularist humanism, these threats are the malign effects of religion.

Having acknowledged the different emphases within Christian humanism, it remains the case that Christian humanists have much in common. They value education highly. They give high priority to classical texts from the ancient world and from Christian tradition, finding in them exemplars of admirable human qualities to be nurtured today. They believe one can combine Christian faith and an authentic relationship with God, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, secular knowledge. Human talents, intellect and creativity are viewed as God-given and to be developed to their fullest. They strive to hold in balance the contemplative and the active life. They downplay a utilitarian approach to education. They give importance to language, to literature and to the aesthetic dimension; traditionally the study of humanities included grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy, rather than logic/dialectic, mathematics, science and technology. Christian humanists usually hold a positive view of human nature, while also emphasising character formation to counter the power of sin. While fully accepting the human need for, and God's offer of, redemption through Christ, they also affirm the already graced nature of creation.

Christian ideas and practices are located in and influenced by the climate of a culture, the pattern of relationships within it, the flow of power and the exercise of authority, the institutions that frame, organize and direct social life, the available resources, tools and technology, the prevailing myths or stories told about who a particular people are and why they do what they do. As indicated earlier, perceived threats and challenges always orient the expression of Christian faith in particular directions, giving salience to some features of faith but putting others in shadow (for that moment at least). The degree of safety felt by the Christian community, its scope for leisure, for disciplined reflection and its capacity for self-critical questioning, and the level of acceptance or rejection by society at large—all play a part in the stance adopted towards a culture. Throughout history Christians

have encountered an ever-changing set of questions, concerns, priorities, technologies and modes of investigation, each of which modifies how they engage with culture. In their various attempts at cultural engagement, they have had to deal with ever changing reference groups that supply employment, grant plausibility, support and authorisation and standards of evaluation.

2. Renewal of Christian Humanism

For cultural impact, Christians need to develop a revitalised form of Christian humanism that equips them to build on the wisdom of their living tradition, embrace what is life-giving in contemporary society, enter into dialogue with those outside the fold, and foster intelligent, open, humble and loving ways to contribute to their culture. The kind of Christian humanism needed will not simply be a return to the past. It should critically appreciate and creatively appropriate “treasures from the tradition” but be alert to blind spots and shortcomings within that tradition and it should be willing to learn from emerging forms of knowledge and from those outside the Christian tradition. This renewed Christian humanism cannot draw only from one denomination, even if for any particular individual it may be deeply rooted in one part of the faith family, just as we note that, even though he came for all humankind, Jesus was rooted in and spoke from his Jewish tradition. Christian humanism today must be ecumenical and receptive to the potential contribution that Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians can bring to our understanding of the constitutive features and the necessary implications of Christian humanism. It should also be in dialogue with secular humanism and humanistic elements in other religious traditions.

A renewed Christian humanism will integrate learning, imagination, and the virtues with a compassionate, humble yet confident spirituality, nurtured by the Church and in dialogue with all people of goodwill. It will be illuminated by Scripture. It will tell a story about humanity’s place in the universe, the complexity and paradoxes of human existence, gifts and vulnerabilities and how to be present to the world with all its challenges, opportunities and needs. Immersed in and fed by liturgical practice, it should have the capacity to critique the Church where her practices undermine the effective communication of the Gospel. It should be sufficiently knowledgeable about the world of work to be able to offer pastoral and prophetic guidance in that context and more broadly to uphold economic justice. A Christian humanism fit for our time must promote a disposition toward civility and encourage responsible citizenship, including attention to conflict resolution. It should support inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, facilitate critical literacy with regard to the use of new media for communication and it needs to display maturity, sensitivity, humility and openness when dealing with personal relationships and sexual identity.

A renewed Christian humanism will also need to consider the relation of human persons to virtual culture and to the role of networks in the information society and the effects of such culture and networks on our sense of identity and belonging as these are modified by a loosening of the influence of time and place. While being people of hope and appreciative of the gifts and goodness present in human beings, Christian humanists also need to hold constantly in view humanity’s fragility, limitations and proneness to sin. Attachment and commitment to Christianity’s living tradition should be accompanied by openness to the gifts and insights of those from other traditions. The desire to indwell and be loyal to what is permanently true and valuable should be joined by a willingness to inject oneself into the fluid and changing circumstances of history.

The task of Christian humanists is to make Christian faith visible in society, intelligible and winsome, presenting an alternative vision of life that is capable of illuminating all areas of existence and of inspiring cooperation with people of other persuasions. It must be robust enough to contend against cultural assumptions and trends that either undermine human flourishing or which promote it in unbalanced ways. Education that is nurtured by a Christian humanist outlook should not only introduce students into a wide range of different forms of knowledge, but also address personal development (in its multiple

dimensions), prepare learners for the world of work, equip them for public service and motivate them to pursue justice and peace. Such education should witness to and invite people into Christian discipleship, and foster an informed ecological consciousness. While being strongly rooted in Christian tradition, it must also be humble enough to learn from those outside the family of faith. Interiority, interconnectedness and openness to transcendence should be evident features of education conducted in the spirit of Christian humanism.¹

3. Sources for Renewal

In their different ways, each of the three sources or guides for the renewal of Christian humanism proposed here embodies a response to their culture that avoids the four wrong turnings mentioned in part one.

3.1. Maritain

Maritain explicitly rejected any attempt to restore Christendom and urged constructive involvement in the world, making a significant contribution to the acceptance by the Church of democracy, human rights and pluralism. Guardini and Pope Francis have both confronted the ways that technology and the technocratic paradigm demand vigilance and critique for their effects on mentalities and relationships. All three advocate loving engagement with society and culture (guided by the light of faith) and each one models the integration of faith, life and culture called for in many leading documents on Catholic education ([Congregation for Catholic Education 1977](#), #37; [1982](#), #29; [1988](#), #53).

Maritain wrote on a very wide range of topics: philosophy (with important works on metaphysics, epistemology and ethics), art and poetry, politics and history, religion and modern culture. His advocacy of what he called integral humanism stood against five competing worldviews: medieval Catholic Christendom; atheist and materialist communist totalitarianism; fascist neo-pagan racism; secular liberalism; and the radical dualism of some forms of Protestantism. For his audiences and readers outside of Catholicism, the latter four perspectives had more appeal; but for his co-religionists, it was the lingering hankering for a restoration of the rights and role of the Church in the medieval period that Maritain argued was untenable. The privileged position of the Church had been shattered, first, by the Reformation and then further damaged in the Enlightenment and French Revolution, before the virulently anti-clerical 1905 Law of Separation stripped the Church in France of even more of its powers.

In *True Humanism* ([Maritain 1938](#), pp. 140–47) Maritain depicted five key features of medieval Christendom: it aimed at a maximum degree of unity in society; the spiritual order was served by the secular order; it used secular means for spiritual ends (for example, the exercise of force against heretics so as to protect orthodox doctrine); there was a strong emphasis on hierarchy and social differences, assuming these were God-given; society was oriented towards building an empire for Christ. In his advocacy of integral humanism, Maritain considered these features of Christendom were no longer either possible or desirable in a pluralist context. Instead, he relies on Christianity serving as an animating spirit that permeates society and culture. After flirting with the right-wing Catholic group Action Française, Maritain became alarmed about the ‘inertia which clings precisely to what is dead and done with in the temporal ideal of medieval Christendom’ ([Maritain 1938](#), p. 202). This comment by Maritain has been echoed recently by the French sociologist Emmanuel Todd’s reference to ‘zombie Catholicism’ ([Emmanuel Todd 2015](#)) as one of the factors contributing to right-wing voting patterns in France today.

Maritain’s version of Christian humanism was personalist, communal and peregrinal ([Maritain 1938](#), p. 90). That is, it should address the multiple dimensions of personhood, be open to and inclusive of people with different worldviews and commitments, and carried out conscious of being in the presence of God and aiming for communion with God along life’s journey. Political historian John Carter Wood explains the three key features of Maritain’s integral humanism thus: “‘Communal’ meant subordinating personal and

sectional interests to those of the community. “Personalist” meant enabling the growth of the ‘human person, who has ends that reach beyond society. “Peregrinal” meant recognizing that man is created for a spiritual and eternal destiny and has on earth no continuing city. It would thus be free from illusory hopes of an earthly utopia’ (Wood 2019, p. 90, n. 198). This last (peregrinal) feature distinguishes Christian humanism from secular humanism, for the Christian must judge earthly concerns *sub specie aeternitatis*. There is difference between the spiritual call to a life of grace, oriented to the kingdom of God and the temporal duty to labour in the world and to contribute to its well-being and progress. However, for Maritain, while these two vocations may be distinct, they should not be separated. One works with the whole self in both domains.

When the peregrinal aspect of humanity is taken into account in education, this does not undermine the relative autonomy of the various disciplines of the curriculum but it does open them up to new horizons and to the possibility that they can be launching pads to seeing more than they contain. Thus Maritain suggests that

there are of course no Christian mathematics or Christian astronomy or engineering; but if the teacher has Christian wisdom, and if his teaching overflows from a soul dedicated to contemplation, the *mode* or manner in which his teaching is given ... will convey to the student and awaken in him something *beyond* mathematics, astronomy, or engineering: first, a sense of the proper place of these disciplines in the universe of knowledge and human thought; second, an unspoken intimation of the immortal value of truth, and of those rational laws and harmony which are at play in things and whose primary roots are in the divine Intellect. (Maritain 1957, p. 180)

Maritain lays down a path that avoids a dualism or separation between religious and secular ends by maintaining the two-fold truth that persons are, at the same time, *both* out of joint and wounded *and* yet made for a supernatural end (Maritain 1938, p. 2). If there is sin in the world, Christ has come to save that world. The Church is not co-terminous with the Kingdom of God; thus theocracy is an inappropriate political arrangement. Anthropocentric humanism ignores the peregrinal aspect of human nature at our peril because by forgetting our need for God and the light of revelation it distorts our vision, constricts our aspirations and condemns us to deploy the same tools and strategies in the world as secularists. When this happens, ‘Instead of the spirit of the Gospels vivifying the socio-terrestrial order, the things of the socio-terrestrial order stifle the spirit of the Gospels’ (Maritain 1938, p. 240).

It has been suggested that Maritain’s advocacy of a new stance for Christianity, supportive of democracy and championing human rights, represented a decisive stage in the transition in Catholic thought that took place between the Syllabus of Errors in 1864 (condemning many features of liberal and democratic thought) and the Declaration on Human Dignity made by the Second Vatican Council in 1965 (Chenaux 2006, p. 9). As Chenaux points out (p. 25), until the eve of the Second World War, the rights of man had been considered by the Catholic Church to be contrary to the rights of God. Maritain played a vital role in the subsequent shift away from this stance. As H. S. Jones (2019) shows, Maritain also played (along with other Catholic writers in the 1930s) a major role in promoting the use of pluralist language when speaking about society and politics. This was a significant reversal in Catholic thinking which had taught that ‘error has no rights’ and therefore that concessions to pluralism were inimical to upholding the truth. For Maritain, a society of free persons needed to be pluralist in the sense that it ‘rests on a recognition that the development of the human person normally requires a plurality of autonomous communities, each of which possesses its own rights, liberties, and structures of authority’ (Jones 2019, p. 8). Of course, what he had in mind was the need to resist both left and right wing expressions of the totalitarian state as well the less intrusive, but still pernicious, assumptions of the liberal and secular state (for example about being the sole provider of education). Pluralism would allow churches to speak out in, and contribute to, the public sphere. Maritain’s growing acceptance that a modern political order must allow

the coexistence of a range of rival “spiritual families”—something that would not have been countenanced by the Catholic Church before his time (except when it had no choice in the matter)—only received official church approval at the Second Vatican Council, most notably in the Declaration on Human Dignity.

Although Maritain went on to write about education—drawing upon his Catholic tradition and his great love of St Thomas Aquinas, and defending the rights and role of the Church and of the family—in recognition of the plural nature of society, he was careful to construct an educational philosophy in such a way as to reach out to those who did not belong to his faith. In *Education at the Crossroads* he wrote about the nature of human beings, the aims, paradoxes and dynamics of education, the fundamental dispositions to be fostered and the norms to serve as guidelines. He also wrote about the humanities and liberal education and the close connection between integral humanism and integral education. Perhaps the most fertile themes he touched upon in this little book were the difference between personality and individuality, the conquest of internal freedom as a life-long goal and the need for formation of the will if such freedom was ever to be achieved (Maritain 1943).

3.2. Guardini

After working briefly at the University of Breslau, the Italian-born German Catholic priest Romano Guardini served as a professor of Philosophy of Religion and Catholic Worldview at the universities of Berlin (1923–1939), Tübingen (1945–1948) and Munich (1948–1962). He was one of the earliest Catholic thinkers to articulate the nature of a worldview (Guardini 2019). Particularly aware of major cultural shifts, he wrote about the impact of the industrial and technological revolutions, as well as the growth of scientific knowledge, socialism and secularization and their implications for Christians. Although he saw serious threats to Christian faith in many cultural trends, his response was always to recognize what was positive in them before also (and necessarily) condemning what was destructive and dehumanising. For Guardini, it was important to understand the new era, its mindset, its goals, its fears and its hopes, in order to be in a position to influence it constructively.

Unlike Maritain, Guardini did not write about church-state relations with regard to education. He did, however, explore the depths of human experience and in this way contributed to a Catholic philosophical anthropology which understands the human person in the light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Far from thinking that maturity and freedom means outgrowing religious beliefs and disavowing God, which was becoming a more prevalent belief in his society, for Guardini ‘a human being’s self-agency does not compete with God’s self-agency, rather grace ignites and strengthens the human will’ (Krieg 1997, p. 170). This cooperation or synergy between humanity and God in the life of the individual has implications for Christian engagement in culture, so long as certain other Christian insights about personhood are kept in view. First, the person always remains a mystery, irreducible to his or her component elements; there is always more to know about a person, just as there is more to know about God. Second, human dignity does not rest on any achievement or the possession of special gifts, but simply for who they are, not for what they can do. Performativity—the constant attention to what a person is able to do, as if this is a sign of their worth—would have been anathema to Guardini. Third, the ultimate foundation of human dignity and worth is the fact that their source and goal is God (Guardini 1998).

For Guardini, everything and everyone created has to be understood in the light of Christ. Although there always remains a gulf between Creator and creation, there is also always a close connection because, as Guardini affirms, ‘God is the Creator, in whom I have the foundation of my being; in Whom I am more myself, than in myself alone’ (quoted by Gorevan 2019, p. 429). A theology of creation provides an authentic basis for overcoming the gulf that can open up between faith and life. As Guardini saw it, ‘Religion had taken refuge in inwardness and left the world to its own devices’ (Gorevan 2019, p. 430). Gorevan

immediately goes on to quote Guardini again: 'The riches of revelation are inexhaustible, but we have to put our questions to them, and these questions come from the reality of the world.' God releases human beings from slavery to nature and subjugation by their own internal drives in order to invite them to respond freely and with their whole selves to share supernatural life. Untethered autonomy was, in Guardini's view, likely to lead either to idolising some aspect of the world, and thereby being taken captive by it, or to treating the world as the sphere of our control and mastery, and thereby subjecting it to our abuse and selfish manipulation.

He provides a bridge between the world of faith and that of culture, a pathway leading back and forth between a life of prayer and engagement in the world. He did so as a person who was immersed in Christian humanism. When he retired in 1962 he was awarded the Erasmus prize for his work on behalf of Christian humanism throughout Europe. A gifted linguist, not only was he was fluent in German and Italian, due to his family background, but also in Latin, Greek, French and English. Steeped in classic literature he could also read Dante, Shakespeare and Stendahl in their original languages. His writing on such diverse figures as Plato and Pascal, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche, Freud and the Buddha equipped him to comment sympathetically yet perceptively about a wide range of aspirations, orientations and developments swirling around in the culture of early through to mid-twentieth century culture.

Robert Krieg claims that Guardini 'played a major role in leading Catholicism from Pius IX to John XXIII, from the knowing stance of the First Vatican Council to the listening stance of the Second Vatican Council' (Krieg 1997, p. 22). His close listening to the deeper movements rippling beneath the surface of the culture in which young people were growing up fed into his central interest in developing youth ministry (Guardini 2020). In this work he linked community, culture, worship, and education, encouraging folk dancing, hiking and sports, poetry and literature, concerts and stage plays (Krieg 1997, p. 60).

Two further points about Guardini are pertinent here, because both are vital for appreciating the influence of Guardini on our third source for the renewal of Christian humanism. The first of these is the highly sophisticated analysis Guardini gives to the operation of polarities in human life. He examines contrasting aspects of life in tension with one another and shows how it is necessary to hold both poles together and seek to do justice to both. Such poles include interior and exterior aspects of life, affirmation and correction, commonality and otherness, dynamic expansion and conservation, stability and flux (Guardini 2010). These poles are always in tension with one another, but one does not contradict the other. (For an application of this theory of polarity to Christian pedagogy, see Sullivan 2018). As we shall note (below) the operation of polarities has been taken further and applied to the Church by Pope Francis.

Second, Guardini addresses the technocratic paradigm and its baleful effects on social values and culture (Guardini 1998), a theme also embraced by Pope Francis. 'The technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, . . . as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape' (Guardini 1998, p. 55). In its ruthless objectivity and false promises of mastery over nature, it tends to unleash powers that distort humanity's relation to nature and which undermine authentic freedom and a true estimation of the relative worth of the goods of life. When technology is used in service of an economy of uncontrolled greed which promotes endless growth, power becomes demonic because it has become separated from its source in God. Very quickly, technological innovations, which were intended to alleviate suffering or tedium, tend to take over the lives of their users and then people find that their thinking and valuing has been re-directed to serve the logic of the machine. The technocratic paradigm affects all the dimensions and relations of human beings—with self, others, creation and God. It assumes that human power is, in principle, unlimited; it encourages a consumerist and throwaway mentality; it privileges domination and manipulation over appreciation and receptivity; it downgrades ways of knowing that do not replicate narrow forms of rationality and empiricism; it absolutizes this world while neglecting, if not denying, any openness or responsiveness to the realm of

what transcends it. For Guardini, a Catholic worldview requires of us both commitment to and detachment from the world, a combination of affirmation and denial of its claims upon us. For him the believer already stands, through her or his faith, even in the midst of everyday life, in a mysterious way beyond that everyday world (Guardini 2019).

3.3. Pope Francis

Pope Francis has emphasised several key themes since taking office. These include mercy, closeness to the people, discernment, accompaniment, hospitality towards migrants, dialogue with people of other cultures and religions, decentralisation of decision-making, joy in responding to and sharing the Gospel, pastoral efficacy rather than doctrinal orthodoxy, and a holistic approach to care for environment, climate, people and creation. Some of these themes relate more to issues internal to the Church while others focus more on the Church's stance towards contemporary culture. For the purposes of this paper on the renewal of Christian humanism, my comments on Pope Francis will focus on two major topics where he was deeply influenced by Guardini: first, the importance of holding polarities together in fruitful tension, rather than collapsing the tension by a one-sided embrace of one pole over another; second his critique of the technocratic mindset. Through these two elements drawn from Guardini, it may be claimed that Bergoglio/Francis was provided with tools he has drawn upon in his prescriptions both for how the Church should deal with internal divisions which threaten to slip into polarization and for how the Church should seek to serve the world by engaging with contemporary culture. Then, I lay out some of the ways that Pope Francis has given a new inflection and tone to Christian humanism.

The first of these two elements drawn from Guardini—his understanding of polarity—gives Pope Francis both a guiding principle and a methodology for approaching relationships within the Church. If these relationships are not conducted properly, the Church's witness to the world is undermined and obscured by her poor example. In his intellectual biography of Pope Francis, Massimo Borghesi claims that 'the idea of polarity guides the entire Bergoglian system of thought' and that it functions as 'the hermeneutical key that fuels a "catholic" system of thought' (Borghesi 2018, pp. 134, 141). In interviews Pope Francis has referred to many different types of polarity: contemplation/action, people/hierarchy, strength/gentleness, primacy/synodality, masculine/feminine, past/present. To these must be added the basic bipolarity between theology and pastoral care. Additionally, just as was the case with Guardini's treatment of the polarities between liberal individualism and socialist collectivism, so too Pope Francis finds a resolution in the kind of solidarity which preserves the individual and promotes the common good. Pope Francis's appreciation of the necessary part played by each pole, in the pairs just listed, leads him to adopt what we may call a chastened confidence, to step back from seeking an easy closure by favouring one pole over another; he is ready to adopt a provisional position of patience in the presence of complexity.

As for the second element, Guardini's critique of the technocratic paradigm and the danger of uncontrolled power is picked up and pursued further by Pope Francis, who relates it not only to dehumanising tendencies in society but also the devastation of the environment. In *Laudato Si* he argues that there is a direct link between these two. 'There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology ... We cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships' (Pope Francis 2015, #118, #119). In contrast to capitalism's constant pressing for unending growth, he calls for self-limitation and restraint because an integral ecology must bring the environmental, economic and social into harmony (#137). Furthermore, to a degree not seen before in earlier Christian humanists, Pope Francis gives a strong future orientation to the responsibility of Christians: 'The notion of the common good also extends to future generations ... The world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us' (#159).

If ecological conversion operates as one major strand of Pope Francis's teaching, fraternal humanism serves as its counterpart in human relationships and in education (Congregation for Catholic Education 2017). In this very brief and underdeveloped document an initial mention is made of key features of fraternal humanism: a culture of dialogue, inclusivity, solidarity and globalizing hope. The full meaning and implications of these terms for church and world is left for later documents. Much more substantial is Pope Francis's 2020 encyclical on fraternity and social friendship, *Fratelli tutti*. Here, he sets out the Church's role: 'to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity, to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation' (Pope Francis 2020, #276). This is a vision of faith feeding humanisation and human flourishing, a pastoral inflection of Christian humanism, rather than the intellectual emphasis of former versions of Christian humanism. He offers a critique of digital culture as reinforcing individualism and confusing connectivity with community, as manipulating truth and failing to promote generosity (#43). Throughout he promotes the virtues of solidarity and social friendship, while lamenting the loss of civility and the degradation of political discourse. The Christian humanism advocated here is urged to remain vigilant and critical in the face of nationalism, xenophobia and hostility to migrants and refugees. Pope Francis weaves together—as qualities which contribute to social friendship—openness, encounter, peace, justice, truth and forgiveness.

In his addresses to teachers from Catholic schools on in-service days, when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Bergoglio had already given strong emphasis to social friendship and solidarity as major fruits of education in a Christian humanist spirit.

Let us not allow the individualistic and competitive mentality rooted in our urban culture to end by colonizing our school as well . . . Many institutions promote the formation of wolves, rather than of brothers; they educate for competence and success at the cost of others . . . Our specifically Christian contribution is *an education that witnesses to and realizes another way of being human* (Bergoglio 2005, pp. 28, 61, 62).

He then asked the teachers to reflect on the level of fraternal solidarity they could see being lived out between educational institutions, among teachers, among students, and between teachers and students (pp. 40–41).

4. Conclusions

The three sources for the renewal of Christian humanism that I have identified, taken together, demonstrate that it is possible to avoid each of the four approaches to the relationship between Christians and culture I critiqued in part one of this paper: conquest, pinning excessive hopes on technology, withdrawal, and living as if faith and our engagement with the world operate in two separate compartments in isolation from one another. The first stance ignores the reality of pluralism and fails to respect those outside the faith as children of God, bearers of God's image and endowed with their own divinely bestowed gifts. The second stance displays a utopian, naïve and unwarranted trust in forces that have been shown to colonise our lives to an alarming degree. The third strategy retreats from the responsible social action called for by love of neighbour. The fourth mode of living promotes practical atheism, reducing God's role to the realm of a private option, unintegrated into the whole spectrum of human existence. Maritain, Guardini and Pope Francis, albeit with different emphases, combine devout Christian conviction with love of the world. They avoid watering down the faith while enabling it to act as a leaven in society. In relation to culture, what is required by Christians is a combination of affirmation and negation, of appreciation and of critique.

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Note

- ¹ Perspectives that are inadequately represented here, because of the author's limitations and lack of necessary first-hand experience, and which are needed to fill out the case for a renewed form of Christian humanism, include gender, race, disability and the global south.

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