ABSTRACT
EMMANUEL LEVINAS AND JACQUES MARITAIN ON THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP IN CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Timothy W. Rothhaar
Marquette University, 2022

The purpose of this dissertation is to serve as a steppingstone to a larger philosophy of the Catholic university. Its thesis argues that Catholic universities have lost their way by means of faith, identity, and ethical crises, and in order to recover these we must return to the primordial student-teacher relationship embedded in a Catholic philosophical anthropology. Beginning in the mid-20th century, with roots at the turn of the century, Catholic universities took a decided secular move away from their theological roots beginning with Fr. Theodore Hesburgh’s reimagining of the Catholic university as a corporate entity. As a result, they began to embrace competition with non-Catholic schools in the areas of power and prestige, instead of forming citizens of good character and faith.

While there is more to being Catholic than merely “obeying the Vatican,” the outright rejection of any authority beyond oneself is antithetical to Catholic ethos. Starting with the now infamous Land O’Lakes Statement, Fr. Hesburgh instituted an era of such thinking with what is now called “pluralism” in Catholic higher education, wherein multiple ideologies are or may be present in the running of the Catholic university, paving the way for anyone to think of Catholic education as they please. This idea directly contrasts with Pope St. John Paul II’s Ex Corde Ecclesiae wherein Catholic universities are centers of faith and reason whilst encouraging the building up of laity in the Christian life. Contra both, I argue for a third way between them in order to break up the limiting dichotomy.

To do this, I borrow the base intersubjective ethic from Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and pair it with the theocentric humanistic pedagogy of French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain. I argue Levinas gets at what is central to a Catholic philosophical anthropology in treating the Other, the one who is not me, as one with dignity and so initiated into dialogue. This may sound like a plea to welcome anti-Catholic sentiment simply because it is different, but it is actually a step in recovery towards authentic Catholic education because of the need to re-welcome its own intellectual tradition. To that end, Maritain’s understanding of the student-teacher relationship embodies this ethic such that students are able to voice whatever they please—including Catholic theology—without fear of reprisal and learn wherever their souls lead. So, too, Catholic professors are able to teach virtually anything they please whilst, ultimately, leading students to forming their minds. I conclude by placing my project in the context of all higher education.