Building a New Christendom:

Jacques Maritain's Critique of Modern Philosophy

Vincent Battaglia

Abstract: *In this paper I discuss Jacques Maritain's diagnosis of modern philosophy, and modern 'secular' culture in general, in his essay entitled 'Christian Humanism'. Maritain's essay was originally published in French in his 1948 work,* The Range of Reason *(Raison et Raisons, Essais Détachés).[1] After a short biography of Maritain with his overall philosophical concerns, I then explain the thesis in his essay 'Christian Humanism' in some detail, including an account of what he describes as the 'secularised' concept of reason. I evaluate his work by providing nine critical reflections. I conclude that whilst Maritain's work has significantly contributed to the progress of metaphysics and the human condition, his social and political theory breaks down because of its idealism and its reliance upon a natural law tradition that claims common principles rooted in human nature are discernible to all, even though agreement about the true good has, in practice, proved elusive.*

Key Words: Jacques Maritain; Christian Humanism; Christian philosophy; human person – nature; secularisation; modernity; Thomism

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF MARITAIN AND A SUMMARY OF HIS PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS

J acques Maritain (1882-1973) was a French philosopher and political thinker, and one of the principal exponents of Thomism in the twentieth century.[2] After a suicide pact was thwarted by reflecting on the philosophical teachings of Henri Bergson, and by the influence of the writer Léon Bloy, both Maritain and his wife Raïssa Oumansoff converted to Catholicism in 1906. Disillusioned by the then spiritual aridity of French intellectual life, and moved by the traumatic events of the twentieth century, Maritain set about to undertake philosophy in an Aristotelian-Thomistic framework, supplemented by his Catholic Christian religious beliefs.

Maritain's social and political philosophy, of which *The Range of Reason* is but one work, draws upon the Judaeo-Christian ethic of faith and morals, key aspects of Thomistic philosophy and the tradition of European liberalism. Maritain rejected 'modernity' – defined as Cartesian and post-Cartesian thought – on the grounds that it rejected the metaphysical pursuit to discover the nature of being in favour of epistemological concerns. An eclectic and prolific writer, and employing a popular style, Maritain sought to engage

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[1] The version I refer to in this paper is published by Geoffrey Bles in 1953: see Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1953).

[2] For a good and concise biography of Maritain and his works see William Sweet, 'Jacques Maritain,' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; http://www.plato.stanford.edu, accessed 24 October 2003.

critically with contemporary philosophy and contemporary society by developing aspects of the 'pre-modern' views of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). In *The Range of Reason*, he seeks to reintegrate metaphysics, ethics and religion with science, a split he attributes to modernity; which is, in effect, an attempt by him to 'reconcile wisdom with science' (87, 179, 204).[3] This reconciliation would be achieved through a 'rediscovery of Being, and by the same token a rediscovery of love [which] means, axiomatically, a rediscovery of God' (87). Many of these themes were taken up in, or preceded by, related works, such as *True Humanism*,[4] *Christianity and Democracy*,[5] and *Man and the State*,[6] published in French in 1936, 1943 and 1951 respectively, and to which I also make some reference in this paper.

A PHILOSOPHICAL EXPOSITION OF MARITAIN'S ESSAY, "CHRISTIAN HUMANISM"

Maritain's essay describes what he sees as a progressive 'secularisation' of society in the modern period, especially in those Western societies built upon the Judaeo-Christian religious heritage. Envisaging medieval Europe as an epoch where faith and reason were harmoniously seeking the one fount of wisdom, Maritain describes the process of the separation of faith from reason that occurred in the modern period, in particular since the Renaissance. He argues that the 'Christendom' of the Middle Ages, which was none other than a 'Christian humanism', had been replaced by an 'anthropocentric humanism' in modernity, where the 'cult of man' (200) had risen to distort what Maritain sees as healthy human living. Maritain employs specifically Christian categories, from the Catholic tradition, to articulate his remedy to the malaise of modernity, namely the need to create a 'new Christian humanism, a new Christendom'. In this 'new Christian civilisation', a metaphysics of being and an epistemology that affirms with certitude the existence and knowability of God, take their rightful place alongside a Christian ethic of love, self-sacrifice and faith. Faith, for Maritain, is of its nature beyond the need for scientific verification, and it is symptomatic of modernity to reject that which cannot be scientifically proven.

I. The Secularisation of the Christian Image of Man

In the first section of his essay, Maritain explains that medieval Christendom was built upon the likes of Paul and Augustine (185), where Christian Europe was united in one faith and one church. This cultural, religious and racial harmony (as presumed by Maritain) first broke down with the Renaissance thinkers, who inordinately elevated human endeavour, and then with the Reformation, whose thinkers inordinately focused on human sinfulness (185). For Maritain, both of these conceptions of man are anthropologically incorrect. René Descartes introduced a fatal flaw into Christian civilisation, namely by asserting that God cannot be known and that the essence of things is unknowable. Descartes' 'great error' was in assuming that human reason alone produced but one undifferentiated science, rather than recognising the different but related 'orders of knowledge' (9-11). For Maritain, this 'scientific imperialism' (11) launched a fatal trajectory in modernity, whereby ontology, and objectivity in philosophy,

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[3] All references in brackets refer to the page numbers of *The Range of Reason* as published by Geoffrey Bles. References to other works by Maritain are suitably indicated.

[4] Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, trans. M. R. Adamson (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970).

[5] Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945).

[6] Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951).

would be sidelined in favour of an attitude that promoted the independence of human reason from objective truth, which for him is ultimately sourced in God. With the advent of the Enlightenment, and with philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, an 'anthropocentric humanism' emerged (186) whereby man was seen as the shaper of his own destiny and the saviour of himself. With these philosophers, faith became purely subjective, 'merely something measured by human feeling or human needs' (200).[7]

Thus, Christian faith was sidelined, even if Europe maintained its Christian façade (186). Modernity was on an irreversible process of secularisation of Christian society. The Enlightenment conceived of man as not needing 'grace, miracle, or revelation, and was [instead] made virtuous and just by his own good nature' (185). The man of Rousseau 'was to be redeemed and set free, not by Christ, but by the essential goodness of human nature' (185). The Gospel had been replaced by 'human Reason or human Goodness', where 'Human Nature' would promise and deliver 'what had been expected from the virtue of God giving Himself to His creatures' (186). Modernity made 'divine promises' to man, that 'science … would liberate man and make him master and possessor of all nature', promising 'earthly peace' in 'the Kingdom of Man, … in which we would become the supreme rulers of our own history' (186).

II. The Modern Man

In this second section of his essay, Maritain explains that the secularised concept of reason is at the root of the breakdown of Christian society. Modern man had engineered a 'progressive loss … of all the certitudes coming either from metaphysical insight or from religious faith' (186). 'Philosophic Reason', he argues, appropriated the proper domain of traditional theology yet was unable to provide the same certitude or make the same claims (186). Indeed, 'the failure of philosophic Reason' was that it was 'unable even to maintain its own metaphysical pretence' in that it was obliged to make a 'positivist denial' of the rôle of metaphysics (186).[8] That is, modern philosophy had admitted that it cannot probe into the innermost nature of reality but could only study observable phenomena, and as such it has been a failure in Maritain's view. Philosophical reasoning had been unable to make ontological claims, philosophy had lost its status as a science, and reason's rôle was reduced to the study of observable phenomena, such as in the science of mathematics.

Maritain lamented this conception of human reason and of philosophy in particular. He describes modern man as knowing truths 'without *the* Truth' and was 'incapable and afraid of any supra-temporal truth reached by Reason's metaphysical effort or of the divine Truth given by the Word of God' (187). Modernity's problem lay in its rejection of traditional Christian philosophical and theological positions, such as human dependence on God, the redemption of humanity by Christ, the existence of evil, the existence and immortality of the soul, the concept of the common good, the importance of free will, and the virtues of justice and charity (187). In the place of these concepts, modern man had proposed a 'godlike infinite autonomy of the human will', had denied the existence of evil and the soul on the grounds that they were unscientific and pre-scientific, and cultivated an ethic based on the pursuit of individual satisfaction (187). Elsewhere Maritain criticises the 'optimistic rationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' which was 'more incapable than faith of ensuring the spiritual unity of mankind, and the dream of a

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[7] On the philosophical failures of Renaissance thinkers, modern philosophers and of Reformation theology, and the rise of their 'anthropocentric humanism', see also Maritain, *True Humanism*, 7-26; Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 14-15, 28.

[8] On positivism as a philosophical school see Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 3-4

"scientific" creed uniting men in peace, and in common convictions about the aims and basic principles of human life and society, vanished in contemporary catastrophes' (166).[9]

Maritain describes modern democracy as emptied of justice and love, and 'tended to become an embodiment of the sovereign will of the people in the machinery of a bureaucratic state [that] was more and more irresponsible and more and more asleep' (188). Humanity had falsely placed its hopes in 'machinism', which would eventually 'enslave him', because such hopes are not built upon proper philosophical foundations (187). The rejection of any final end, which is the basis of Maritain's Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, would be fatal not only to the sense of happiness but also to the notion of human rights, because the final end directs human action (188). In any event science alone cannot provide humankind with ends, as this is the domain of wisdom (178). Thus, Maritain is suggesting that philosophy and ethics go together, and reason is able to link them through the natural law in a way that overcomes the Humean 'is-ought gap.'[10]

III. The Crisis of Our Civilisation

As a result of these philosophical trends, Maritain has diagnosed the secularised Christian man as being impoverished. Twentieth century man has inherited from modernity 'the wrong ideology… and [a] disfigured image of man' (189). There had become a split between the nominal Christian world and the Christian basis underlying it; 'thus this world had seemed empty of its own principles' (189). Christian civilisation, despite still bearing the marks of a 'sacred heritage of human and divine values' built upon the struggle for democratic freedom, the Judaeo-Christian tradition and on classical antiquity, had become utilitarian, capitalistic and individualistic (189). At the root of this 'insubstantial ideology' (189) was a loss of the 'sense of Being' and the 'sense of Love' (189). Again, Maritain is suggesting that societal renewal needs to be sourced both in metaphysics and Christianity.

IV. Marxist and Racist Delusions

In this section of his essay Maritain describes what he sees as some of the 'great revolutionary movements' (189) that resulted from the secularised concept of reason. These movements have worked toward a 'definitive break with Christian values', both doctrinally and in relation to 'an existential opposition to the presence and action of Christ at the core of human history' (189). At the root of these movements was 'the unfolding of all the consequences of the principle that man alone, and through himself alone, works out his salvation' (190).

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[9] This sentiment is repeated in Maritain, *Man and the State*, 108-109. In *True Humanism* Maritain criticises the apotheosis of nature in Rousseau's philosophy, the apotheosis of humanity in the philosophy of Auguste Comte and the apotheosis of the state in Georg Hegel's philosophy. He sees all these philosophies, or versions of humanism, as failing in their anthropology by viewing man as a 'purely natural being'. Instead, man, for Maritain, 'is at once a natural and a supernatural being': Maritain, *True Humanism*, 3, 15-16. 'True religion', for that matter, 'transcends all civilisation and every culture; it is strictly universal': Maritain, *True Humanism*, 90.

[10] In *Man and the State* Maritain says that since the seventeenth century the concept of natural law has been repeatedly misunderstood by philosophers and has, not surprisingly in his opinion, brought about a simultaneous discrediting of human rights properly understood. Indeed, 'this philosophy of rights ended up, after Rousseau and Kant, by treating the individual as a god and making all the rights ascribed to him the absolute and unlimited rights of a god': see Maritain, *Man and the State*, 80-84. Maritain then proceeds to define the natural moral law along Neo-Thomistic lines, distinguishing it from the law of nations (*jus gentium*) and the positive law: Maritain, *Man and State*, 84-101.

Marxism's dialectical materialism is seen as the best example of the trend of secularised reason. In this system, Maritain argues, man is required to give up his personality to the collective body, 'whose supreme destiny is to gain dominion over matter and human history' (190). The image of man is redefined as he is no longer possessed of human rights and is called, through the practice of self-discipline and the virtue of charity, to an eternal destiny (190). The 'thirst for communion' is misplaced because the Marxist seeks it in economic activity, that is, in material and class-conflictual terms (190). Marxism is simply the best example of 'rationalistic reason wind[ing] up in intoxication with matter', which in the end is short-sighted because it enters upon a 'process of self-degradation' (190).

The second trend in secularised reason manifests itself in an opposite direction to Marxism, because it is 'reacting against any kind of rationalism and humanism' (191). It is characterised by pessimism, social and biological evolutionism, biological and psycho-sexual reductionism, and a 'hidden resentment against Reason and human dignity' (191). The best exponents of these views are Fyodor Dostoevski, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud (191).[11] Maritain argues that this trend resulted, and was best exemplified, in Nazi racism and Communism (191-192). Both Nazism and Communion are built upon an ethic of human despair and an utter rejection of God (191). Racism 'rejects all universalism and breaks even the natural unity of the human race', whilst Communism, 'viewed as the final state of anthropocentric rationalism', substitutes a false universalism for the true universalism of Christianity (192). This section of Maritain's essay in part highlights his concern to promote universal human rights and democracy based on a Judaeo-Christian ethic.[12]

V. The Idea of a New Christian Civilisation

In the second half of his essay (sections V to VII) Maritain outlines his solution to the problem of modernity and its heritage of secularised reason. He is clear that 'the only way of regeneration for the human community is a rediscovery of the true image of man and a definite attempt toward a new Christian civilisation, a new Christendom' (193). *True Humanism* describes this humanism as 'integral', in that the human person is defined as having both an earthly existence (endowed with grace and freedom) and a divine destiny.[13] Maritain argues that 'a world of genuine humanism and Christian inspiration must be built' (193). He acknowledges, however, that this task is enormous (193).

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[11] The identities of the exponents of these views are not made clear in the text, except for Dostoevski, who is explicitly named, although he is speaking of the 'profound intuition of Dostoevski' in his work *The Possessed*: see *True Humanism*, 53. The idea of the 'human species … sprout[ing] by chance on the genealogical tree of the monkeys' suggests Darwinism, whilst the idea of spiritual feelings and activities etc. being 'the sublimation of sexual libido or an outgrowth of matter' appear to suggest the works of Freud (see 191). The idea of 'resentment' appears to suggest the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, although in *True Humanism* he uses the idea of resentment to describe Marxism as an 'atheist ideology' 'which has a profound sense of resentment not only against the Christian world but … against Christianity itself': *True Humanism*, 33. Elsewhere in *The Range of Reason* he describes the views of Karl Marx, Ludwig Feuerbach and Nietzsche on God (97), as well as the 'merely rational notions of God' in the works of Gottfried Leibniz, Baruch Spinoza and Hegel (110-111).

[12] In *True Humanism*, Maritain describes the process of secularised reason, which culminated in Nietzsche's proclamation of the 'death of God' and which found its best expression in 'contemporary Russian atheism', as requiring mankind to make a fundamental choice between atheism and Christianity. 'At the end of the dialectic of anthropocentric humanism we find before us two pure positions: atheism and Christianity': Maritain, *True Humanism*, 27f.

[13] See Maritain, *True Humanism*, 64-65, 81, 84-87, 156. Maritain describes his 'new Christendom' as follows: 'There is only one integral religious truth; there is only one catholic Church. … In speaking of a new Christendom, I am therefore speaking of a temporal system or age of civilisation whose animating form will be

Maritain recognises that modern philosophy has contributed to the development of the human condition, but 'modern times have sought many good things along wrong tracks' (193). It is not clear exactly what modern philosophy has contributed to the advancement of the human race, but it appears to have been in the area of the development of human rights (188) and truly human values (193), and the proper separation of church and state (193). In the Middle Ages there was a false union between the temporal and the sacred, where 'philosophical and scientific reason and the reigning powers' were instruments of religious faith and the church (193; cf. 165-166).[14] The autonomous nature of the temporal order is 'normal' (193) and to be welcomed, although the problem today is that there has been a progressive severance of 'earthly civilisation from evangelical inspiration' (194).

In the 'new age of Christendom' there will be a 'reconciliation' of 'secular Christian civilisation' with 'spiritual things, religious faith, and the church' (194). Reason, and other 'temporal things,' will enjoy its autonomy from the sacred sphere, yet be informed by it. In this way, Maritain suggests, 'a Christian philosophy of life would guide a community vitally' and not only in a 'decorative' manner, where society will be constituted by the key ethical principles of human rights, the dignity of the human person and the common good (194). Fundamental to this vision is a recovery in the belief of the importance of God. 'Anthropocentric humanism' will be replaced by a 'theocentric or integral humanism which would consider man in all his natural grandeur and weakness', man who is 'inhabited by God' and who is both prone to sin and to grace-filled actions (194).[15] In this 'humanism of the Incarnation' reason serves to 'tame' all that is 'irrational in man', and is in turn 'vivified' by the 'supra-rational' (i.e., theology) (194). Christian humanism would thus be concerned for the welfare of all people, respecting both their temporal and spiritual needs, and would be socially responsible (194). The 'materialistic-individualistic' character of modern secular society would be replaced by a 'Christian-personalistic democracy' (194-195). Conscientious decision-making, religious freedom, and Christian ethics would permeate the social life of people (195).

Maritain explains that in this 'integral humanism' there will be a 'political ideal of justice and civic friendship, requiring political strength and technical equipment, but inspired by love' (195), yet he provides, in this essay at least, few specific details about exactly how such a society will operate. What is clear from Maritain's writings, however, is that the new humanism would be 'secular', in the sense that there would not be a spiritual and political unity in the governance of society as in the 'sacral' age, but would nonetheless be animated by the Gospel (whose virtues encompass all that is good in classical Greek humanism).[16]

VI. The True Image of Man

In this section Maritain provides a Christian anthropology of man in his proposed integral humanism, and he does so along Thomistic lines. He says that man is comprised of spirit and matter, even if his body has evolved from animal forms, and endowed with an immortal soul (195). All people are born with original sin, but saved through Christ, and

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Christian and which will correspond to the historical climate of the epoch on whose threshold we are': *True Humanism*, 126.

[14] On the theme of the separate spheres between church and state, and relationship between them both today and in history, see Maritain, *True Humanism*, 88-104; Maritain, *Man and the State*, 147-187.

[15] On 'theocentric humanism' see also Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 93-96, 202-204.

[16] See, for example, Maritain, *True Humanism*, 156; Maritain, *Man and the State*, 108.

God's own charity infuses the human person to enable him to return love to God and to love his fellow man (196). 'Man's dignity is that of an image of God', and man is 'made for truth, capable of knowing God as the Cause of Being by his reason' (195). Here Maritain is upholding Aquinas' natural law theory by according reason not only the ability to recognise the Creator God but also with the ability to derive rights and duties from the natural law (195). Natural law is of course only a participation in the eternal law (196). Reason progressively helps man to dominate 'his own animality and the material universe' but progress in the spiritual life, including victory over the power of evil, requires grace and charity (196). Man is called to eternal life, and to live now in the anticipation of it through self-sacrificing love for another person (196).

Maritain also speaks of the communitarian nature of human life. In this new civilisation, 'the man of Christian humanism knows that the political life aims at a common good which is superior to a mere collection of the individual's goods and yet must flow back upon human persons' (197). Thus, the common good is also centred on the flourishing of the human person, not 'machinism', a flourishing characterised by freedom and the enjoyment of 'the fruits of culture and the spirit' (197). Maritain lists some duties of those in charge of the common good, namely that they must be elected, accountable to the people, conscientious, and just (197), all values that reflect his Christian liberal democratic humanism. In short, society should be 'integrally human … and of evangelical inspiration' (197).

VII. The Vertical Movement and the Horizontal Movement in Man's Life

In this last section, Maritain speaks about the nature of Christian life in the new Christian civilisation. Human beings are reminded that all actions are teleological, directed as they are to God, the ultimate end (197). Thus life has meaning and direction for the Christian humanist. Perfection in this life is to be sought, but not in some kind of stoic athleticism, 'but rather [through] the perfection of love, wherein lies perfect freedom (197-198). There should, however, not only be 'a vertical movement toward divine union' but to a 'horizontal movement' towards fellow man, which in fact 'helps the vertical movement of souls' (198). The 'horizontal movement 'concerns the evolution of mankind and progressively reveals the substance and creative forces of man in history' (198). In this way, Maritain claims that Christian humanism 'emancipates' man 'from human servitude and misery as well from the constraints of material nature' (198). Maritain's democratic political philosophy proposed in his essay hopes that, if it is implemented, 'the existential state of human life and the structures of civilisation will draw nearer to their perfection, the standard of which is justice and friendship' (198). And for this, the Gospel is required (198).

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF "CHRISTIAN HUMANISM"

I make the following comments about Jacques Maritain's essay, 'Christian Humanism', by way of critical evaluation. Whilst I focus on this essay, I note that he has numerous other works that may provide a more mature, or revised, reflection on the same subject matter as the essay under discussion.

I.   First, Maritain speaks in generalities. He proposes nothing less than an alternate vision of society, but he remains at the conceptual level only. For example, he concludes his essay by stating that the new Christian civilisation 'requires not only the development of powerful technical equipment and … a firm and rational politico-social organisation in

human communities' (198), but he does not provide further details. He does not identify those social institutions that require change, and the notion of 'technical equipment' remains unclear. It is also unclear as to how the differing philosophical schools *within* Christianity would be reconciled, or rejected, in the attempt by Christians to reclaim the Christian heritage lost by modernity. Is this a rôle for the magisterium of the Catholic Church? This lack of specificity does not vitiate his vision, but it does detract from it being better understood and realised.

II.   Second, it would appear that some of Maritain's views about society and contemporary culture are anachronistic, at least from today's vantage point. Maritain wrote *The Range of Reason* in a post-war context, where perhaps there was a new optimism among Christians following the defeat of the anti-Christian ideologies of Nazism and Fascism and the flurry of hope offered by the newly constituted United Nations. Perhaps also Maritain expressed some anxiety on account of the spectre of a new world dominated by the 'Cold War' and the arms race. In any event, the world has changed much since, particularly in the areas of cultural and religious values. Part of his work is also necessarily limited because it was a response to philosophical and theological issues of his day.[17] His language, such as the idea of a 'new Christendom', albeit one where the sacral connection between throne and altar has been severed, perhaps reflects a nostalgic longing for a lost era.[18] Part of his social and political philosophy thus appears dated, although some of his ideas have borne practical fruit in the society in which he lived, and his work continues to carry some influence today.[19]

III.   Third, it is difficult to see how Maritain's 'new Christendom' could be implemented in societies, especially Western ones, where there has been a profound, and perhaps irreversible, decline in adherence to religious beliefs of any sort, let alone traditional Christianity or, more specifically, Catholicism. Even during the time that Maritain wrote his essay, the world was characterised by mass post-war migration, where the idea of a 'one church/one state' was neither possible nor desirable. Today we live in multi-cultural and multi-faith societies, and even liberal democratic societies would find it difficult to countenance the dominance, explicit or implicit, of a single socio-politico-religious system upon a nation of many faiths and races, even if such a system was derived from natural law principles. Natural law theory suffers from its inherent tension between claiming universality and objectivity yet being open to change and cultural variation.[20]

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[17] See, for example, his response to a Mr Sidney Hook, which occupies Chapter XII of *The Range of Reason*.

[18] Maritain's respect for the humanism of the Middle Ages is a dominant theme in *True Humanism*. He describes medieval Christendom as being particularly marked by 'the *unconscious and unreflecting simplicity* of man's response to the effusion of Divine grace' and where there was an ascent 'of the intellect towards its object, of the soul towards perfection, of the world towards a social and juridical structure unified under the reign of Christ' (Maritain's italics): Maritain, *True Humanism*, 7. He wishes to save the Christian '"humanist" truths which have been disfigured by four centuries of anthropocentric humanism': Maritain, *True Humanism*, 64. Maritain goes on to say that 'the Middle Ages had a 'sense of unity' between 'the rhythm of religion for church services and occasions, [and] the rhythm of naturalism in the affairs of the world and of secular life': Maritain, *True Humanism*, 71.

[19] Maritain was actively involved in drafting the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and his work influenced a number of national declarations of rights, such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the preamble to the Constitution of the Fourth French Republic of 1946: Sweet, "Jacque Maritain," 3, 12. Chapter XIII of *The Range of Reason* is in fact a reprint of his address to the second international conference of UNESCO.

[20] Maritain admitted that 'man's knowledge of the natural law increased little by little as man's moral conscience has developed' and that knowledge of this 'unwritten law has passed through… diverse forms and stages': Maritain, *Man and the State*, 90. Maritain, however, regards the precepts of the natural law as 'immutable', although there is 'progress and relativity as regards human awareness of it': Maritain, *Man and State*, 103. A full description on the shortcomings of the natural law theory is beyond the scope of this paper.

Evidence would suggest that reason alone has been unable to produce a binding set of universally applicable principles; even natural law theorists themselves cannot agree on the entire content of the natural law. True knowledge in any event is not by way of mere rational application, but through inclination, a 'vital knowledge by connaturality or congeniality.'[21] 'Connaturality' remains a vague concept upon which to build universal knowledge.[22] This may mean that Maritain's vision is ultimately unachievable, even by sympathetic Catholics and Neo-Thomists alike, and this is something that Maritain considers as possible, at least in the short term (217-218).[23]

Maritain seemed to have anticipated the objection of cultural and religious pluralism (see 165-171, 180-184), by stating that humanity could agree upon certain basic tenets of a 'practical democratic faith', such as 'truth and intelligence, human dignity, freedom, brotherly love, and the absolute value of the moral good', even though people may have different or conflicting 'metaphysical or religious outlooks' (167).[24] He says that whilst this 'common faith' can be built without all citizens having the same religion, it 'cannot be justified, nurtured, strengthened, and enriched without philosophical or religious convictions, whether theological, metaphysical or naturalistic' (169). In this scenario, every religion or belief system would need to argue out the truths of their claims in the marketplace of ideas (170). The problem remains, however, that many values of liberal societies today are plainly irreconcilable with the humanist and personalist values of Maritain, and increasingly it is becoming difficult for people in heterogeneous societies to agree on the good.[25] Everyone comes to philosophy from a tradition, of which there are many in society today and natural law theory is but one; there is no such thing as a 'neutral' approach to human thinking.[26] Even agreement on a list of 'human rights' or 'democratic values' does not mean that consenting parties agree on how such terms are to be understood.[27] This criticism respects Maritain's attempted universalism but challenges whether such a vision is achievable given the diversity of creeds, beliefs and philosophies in contemporary society. Thus, any realisation of a 'new Christendom' would need to be flexible to the extent that it allows for an inevitable pluralism, and would need to be open to the claim that many of its articulated values, may, in the end, be more 'Christian' than 'humanist', and therefore less universally appealing and realisable.

IV.   Fourth, Maritain's essay can be read as a lamentation of the passing of a glorious Christian history, and a concomitant discomfort with a changing society. His vision of society appears to reflect what Bernard Lonergan would call a 'classicist' worldview, where the world is envisaged as static, fixed, governed harmoniously by immutable laws, and where truth is discovered deductively through the application of

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[21] See Maritain, *Man and the State*, 91-92. *The Range of Reason* dedicates an entire chapter to the idea of knowledge through connaturality (22-29).

[22] Sweet, "Jacques Maritain," 10, 12.

[23] See also Maritain, *True Humanism*, 239-240, 248-249.

[24] See also Maritain, *Man and the State*, 76-79.

[25] Thaddeus J. Kozinsky, 'Jacques Maritain's "Democratic Faith": Heretical or Orthodox?' (2002), 2, 4; http://jkalb.i-networx.de, accessed 28 October 2003.

[26] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 348, 350, 367, 369.

[27] Kozinsky, 'Jacques Maritain's "Democratic Faith",' 5. Maritain in *Man and the State* acknowledges that an agreement on a list of rights does not imply agreement as to rational justification, but nevertheless he regards it as possible for parties to come to an agreement as to *practical action*. He also argues that humanity should attempt to come to an agreed rational foundation of human rights, which he believes is ultimately sourced in the natural law: Maritain, *Man and the State*, 76-84, 106-107.

abstract, universal and objective principles.[28] A 'classicist' worldview would explain his objections to 'Modernism' in the Catholic Church, and his rejection of some of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).[29] His discussion of the natural law's precepts as 'universal and invariable' and 'immutable' in *Man and the State* also evidences this classicist position.[30] In *True Humanism* he envisages the 'new Christendom' as merely applying 'the principles of Christian civilisation' to new historical circumstances.[31]

The alternate view is to conceive of the world as dynamic and evolving through historical development, where there is progressive growth and change derived inductively as empirical evidence changes. Whilst Maritain recognises the progression of ideas and of the church, the diversity (and progression) of cultures and the value of human experience to some extent, his philosophical ideas about the human good are largely based on natural law principles that derive from reason's 'participation' in the 'eternal law' of God.[32] The twentieth century, on the contrary, witnessed massive social upheaval and the awakening of new levels of historical and social consciousness. Any purported certainties characterising bygone eras have been lost to time. Even the Catholic Church, perhaps appearing to Maritain as monolithic and the self-assured interpreter and guardian of unchanging moral law, experienced enormous change following the Second Vatican Council. This criticism therefore challenges Maritain's global mindset.

V.   Fifth, to the extent that Maritain's principle themes in *The Range of Reason* proffer more than a nostalgic lamentation, the question arises as to whether the ideas expressed therein are new. Novelty of itself is not a virtue; rather I am reflecting on his contribution to human political thought. Maritain himself admits that his own philosophy in relation to God's existence is not new (89). The novelty of this work cannot lay in his diagnosis of the paradox of Christians living in the 'two worlds' of earthly existence and 'heavenly anticipation'; he is preceded by numerous other Christian writings, particularly Augustine's *City of God against the Pagans* written some sixteen hundred years ago. Many of Maritain's contemporaries also spoke of the danger to the common good caused by an abandonment of fundamental religious values.[33] Maritain's novelty would therefore lay in his diagnosis of the shortcomings of modern philosophy, and his insight into the dangers of 'particularistic' secular creeds, such as Communism and Nazism. In any event, Maritain's love of Thomism as a rich and adequate philosophical foundation would perhaps suggest that he was not particularly interested in developing a new systematic philosophy.

VI.   Sixth, Maritain's 'philosophy of civilisation' may appear to be unattractive, and perhaps even incoherent, to those who do not accept his Neo-Thomist, and/or Catholic, philosophical categories. Many of the arguments in his essay derive from a specifically Christian understanding of the social order and of the human person. It is theistic and his theism, whose deity is specifically named as the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition,

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[28] Bernard Lonergan, S.J. was a philosopher and theologian in the Catholic tradition. He develops his theme of the 'classicist' worldview in a number of his works. See, for example, Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), 124, 302, 326, 338-339, 363.

[29] See Sweet, "Jacques Maritain," 3, 12. His criticism of the religious reforms of the Second Vatican Council are contained in his work, *Le paysan de la Garonne*, published in 1967.

[30] See Maritain, *Man and the State*, 98, 103.

[31] Maritain, *True Humanism*, 133.

[32] See also Maritain, *Man and the State*, 96-97.

[33] These writers included John Courtney Murray, Christopher Dawson and Lord Patrick Devlin: see Jude P. Dougherty, "Maritain on Church and State," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 9 (Winter 1982): 398-399.

would present a barrier to atheists and non-Christians alike. Indeed, large sections of *The Range of Reason* speak of Christian faith, as sourced in the Bible and in the lives of Catholic saints (see, for example, 97-117, 125-126, 203-226). Describing natural law as but a 'participation in the eternal law' is perhaps a theological rather than philosophical statement, in which case God provides the motivation for action and not reason itself.[34] Furthermore, the experience of profound ideological disagreement on values and goods in contemporary Western societies would require a more explicit reference to the Christian basis of the 'democratic charter' in order for Maritain's vision to work.[35] Maritain is, of course, permitted to hold up a vision of the world based on Christian philosophy and theology, but the more he relies on Christianity the less appealing it becomes to those who do not accept its precepts and foundations. In addition, so much of his social and political theory is built upon Christian values and principles such that the removal or rejection of this basis would shake its whole edifice.[36] Maritain's methodology is consistent with his claim that theology is a science (4), and that the 'divine law' promulgated with revelation supplements the natural law and discloses religious truth which is otherwise inaccessible to reason alone.[37] As such he may be regarded as a 'Christian philosopher.'[38] Maritain's methodology becomes more culturally and philosophically acceptable, however, if it can be defended on the basis that he is espousing universal philosophical principles, built upon the natural law and a general notion of theism.

VII.   Seventh, Maritain can be interpreted as being idealistic. I do not mean philosophic idealism, which Maritain considers and rejects (15, 86, 96), but an idealism that views the world and human nature with insufficient realism. He is idealistic about the ability of diverse people of good will coming together to build a society based on common values. He is quite optimistic about Westernised peoples having a *volte-face* and deciding to reclaim spiritual and religious roots.[39] In historical terms, Maritain appears to glorify the presumed harmony, in terms of both faith and reason and the church and state, in the scholastic era of Thomas Aquinas.[40] He also views the positive developments in Western history as mere manifestations of the 'evangelical ferment acting in human history' (188) present in those societies, thus attributing supra-historical interpretations to human

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[34] Sweet, "Jacques Maritain," 10.

[35] Cf. Kozinsky, 'Jacques Maritain's "Democratic Faith",' 5-10. For elements of the 'democratic charter,' see Chapter V in *Man and the State*.

[36] In *Christianity and Democracy*, 37-49, Maritain describes how the 'true essence of democracy' is none other than Christianity.

[37] In *True Humanism*, Maritain admits that there is 'higher science' than the 'philosophy of man' which is 'given by faith and theology': Maritain, *True Humanism*, 236. This follows the traditional position of seeing philosophy as the *ancilla theologiae*.

[38] Indeed, Maritain describes himself as a 'Christian philosopher': *Man and the State*, 147. On the question about the relationship between Christian revelation and reason see Avery Dulles, 'Can Philosophy be Christian?', *First Things* 102 (April 2000): 24-29. Dulles' article is a commentary on Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical, *Faith and Reason*: see Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical Letter (1998), passim, http://www.vatican.va, accessed 17 October 1998.

[39] An example of his religious optimism is worth citing. Writing in 1943, when he regarded the defeat of the Germans in war as likely (7), Maritain proclaimed that 'in the depths of human conscience a powerful religious renewal is in preparation, which concerns and will restore to their vital sources … all the believers of the great Judaeo-Christian family … and will bring forth common fruits': Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 26.

[40] For an account of the fashionable 'medievalism' amongst some European intelligentsia, and some of the cultural influences shaping Maritain's new Catholic faith see John Hellman, 'The Humanism of Jacques Maritain', in *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, ed. Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987): 117-132.

activities, many of which were undertaken by people hostile to Christianity.[41] Such conceptions are historically naïve because they do not take into account, for example, the 'investiture disputes' between king and pope, the criticism levelled at Aquinas even by his contemporaries, the growing dissatisfaction with the institutional church by lay folk, and so on. Maritain also appears to give insufficient regard to the plurality of views (both philosophical and theological) in the Catholic Church, not only in his day but also throughout history. Implicit in his history of philosophy is the idea of the progress of the temporal order,[42] especially insofar as 'democratic values' have emerged therefrom, yet he also criticises the emergence of Christian denominationalism and widespread atheism as somehow extrinsic to temporal progress.[43] This criticism therefore challenges the degree of Maritain's historical consciousness. Whilst he specifically accepts that philosophy, especially political philosophy, needs to take into account 'historical information and social and political experience' (171), it would appear that he takes an idealistic, romantic or highly selective view of human nature and human history.

VIII.   Eighth, Maritain's limited historical consciousness does not give sufficient credit for the contribution made to the development of contemporary society and to his own philosophical ideas by those he calls 'modern' philosophers or proponents of 'secularised reason'. Whilst he acknowledges that modern philosophy has positively contributed to some aspects of contemporary society, he fails to fully credit many of the values upon which he bases his Christian democratic liberalism to modern philosophers and modern movements. Furthermore, these philosophers incurred opposition from the Catholic Church in their day, even though many ideas, short of philosophic liberalism itself, were later to be adopted by the Catholic Church. Instead, he tends to see that many of the universal and perduring ideas in modern writings are actually sourced in the Gospel itself.[44] At other times, however, he appears to attribute human achievement not to divine inspiration but to the progressive evolution of the natural moral law through knowledge of 'the root inclinations of human nature.'[45] Thus, there is a tension in Maritain's writings as to whether his methodological sources are Thomistic or liberal, especially in his

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[41] For example, in *Christianity and Democracy* Maritain interprets the French Revolution in a positive manner in that it effused 'the sense of freedom and the sense of social justice [that] have convulsed and vitalised our civilisation', yet despite the 'suffering and disorder it may have occasioned … the natural growth of civilisation and the inner work due to the evangelical ferment continued within it'. Thus, even within secular and sometimes catastrophic events, Maritain interprets the seed of the gospel as 'fructif[ying] in the modern world': Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 15. Elsewhere in the same work Maritain says that 'the democratic impulse has arisen in human history as a temporal manifestation of the inspiration of the Gospel': Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 25.

[42] See, for example, Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 30-31, where he says that through 'evangelical inspiration' there is a 'forward march of humanity.'

[43] Kozinsky, 'Jacques Maritain's "Democratic Faith",' 3.

[44] For example, in *Christianity and Democracy* Maritain states that 'democratic democracy is linked to Christianity and that the democratic impulse has arisen in human history as a temporal manifestation of the inspiration of the Gospel'. He adds that on the one hand he acknowledges that 'rationalists' in France proclaimed 'the rights of man and of the citizen', Puritans struck the 'last blow at slavery in America', and 'atheistic Communists' in Russia abolished the 'absolutism of private profit', but on the other hand 'the last process would have been less vitiated by the force of errors and would have occasioned fewer catastrophes if it had been performed by Christians': Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 24-25. This is an example of the elevated distinction he accords to the inspiration of the Gospel in the Western history of philosophy.

[45] For example, in *Man and the State* Maritain states that the 'great achievement indeed of the eighteenth century has been to bring out in full light the *rights* of man as also required by the natural law. That discovery was essentially due to a progress in moral and social experience, through which the root *inclinations* of human nature … were set free, and consequently, *knowledge through inclination* with regard to them developed' (Maritain's italics): Maritain, *Man and the State*, 94.

discussion on 'human rights', although one can conclude that Christianity and liberal values are reconcilable without resulting in a wholesale adoption of philosophic liberalism as such.[46] In many ways this is a debate affecting all Catholic theorists who use rights-based language.[47] Catholic scholars would agree that, historically speaking, the origin of secular human rights is sourced in liberal modernity and, as a set of abiding moral principles, was only formally adopted by the Catholic Church in the late twentieth century.[48] The idea of religious freedom, for example, was re-thought only with the Second Vatican Council in 1963,[49] and the 'social doctrine' of the church, which promotes the dignity of the human person among other principles, was born only in 1891.[50] Maritain's views, however, were directly or indirectly influential in the formulation and reformulation of Catholic social ethics, particularly as articulated by Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) and Pope John Paul II (1978-2005).[51]

IX.   Lastly, Maritain calls for a reversal of 'modernity's turn to the subject' through the reconsideration of a metaphysics that makes intelligible and coherent claims about the 'being of things' (7).[52] This is arguably his most original philosophical contribution in *The Range of Reason*. It is not surprising that Maritain insists on a *simultaneous* recovery of metaphysics and morality because many Catholic religious beliefs are understood in philosophical categories; Jerusalem must borrow from Athens.[53] In terms of metaphysics, Maritain maintains that 'the critique of knowledge is part of metaphysics' (29), and seeks to rehabilitate as genuine but different sciences both theology (against Descartes) and metaphysics (against Kant) (4, 7). Science and philosophy both give us knowledge about the real, but the former does so 'empiriologically' (analysing observable phenomena) and

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[46] For a discussion on this aspect of Maritain's writings, and as to whether he got himself into a 'conceptual muddle', see Michael Moreland, 'Jacques Maritain, Thomism and the Liberal-Communitarian Debate', in *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (Mishawaka: American Maritain Association, 1999), passim.

[47] For example, Alasdair MacIntyre, a Catholic philosopher, criticises the introduction of rights-based language in Catholic social and philosophical discourse as both inconsistent with traditional Catholic philosophy and as being built upon an individualism rooted in philosophic liberalism. For a discussion of the approaches of Maritain and MacIntyre see Deborah Wallace, 'Jacques Maritain and Alasdair MacIntyre: The Person, the Common Good and Human Rights', in Sweetman (ed.), *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism*, passim.

[48] For example, in terms of listing human rights, many of the provisions in the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948 was only adopted *en masse* by Pope John XXIII in his 1963 encyclical, *Peace on Earth* (*Pacem in Terris*): see Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, Encyclical Letter (1963); http://www.vatican.va, accessed 17 March 2003.

[49] See the Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*) in the decrees of the Second Vatican Council. The document is available in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975). One of the principal authors of the Declaration was John Courtney Murray, a colleague of Maritain. For a summary of Murray's reflections on the development of this doctrine see John Courtney Murray, 'The Issue of Church and State at Vatican II', in *Religious Liberty: Catholic Struggles with Pluralism*, ed. J. Leon Hooper (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), passim.

[50] Catholic scholars and the teaching authority of the Catholic Church describe the 'social doctrine' of the Catholic Church as being born in the seminal encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *On the Condition of the Working Classes (Rerum Novarum)*, NCWC translation (Jamaica Plain: St. Paul Books and Media, 1981).

[51] Sweet, "Jacques Maritain," 12; Hellman, 'The Humanism of Jacques Maritain', 130-131. Pope Paul VI in his 1967 encyclical *On the Development of Peoples* quotes Maritain's humanism approvingly, and Pope John Paul II in his 1998 encyclical, *Faith and Reason*, expressly acknowledges the philosophical research of Jacques Maritain: see Pope Paul VI, *On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio),* NCWC translation (Jamaica Plain: St. Paul Editions, 1967), 20, 42, and *Fides et ratio*, no. 74.

[52] For a concise summary of Maritain's epistemology utilising his primary works on this subject matter, see Sweet, "Jacques Maritain," 4-6.

[53] Dougherty, "Maritain on Church and State," 401.

the latter ontologically (analysing the 'inner nature' of things) (8). He admits of different 'orders of knowledge' – empiriological, mathematical, natural philosophy and metaphysics – which operate to give us different knowledge about the real (9-10). Maritain then proceeds to expound a 'objective and realist' position of epistemology that claims that what the mind knows is identical with what exists (11-15). This position is, he says, in contrast to the nominalist influences found in Kantianism, idealism, pragmatism and positivism. Maritain's epistemology extended beyond science and philosophy to include that knowledge found in faith, mysticism and poetry/art (16-29). His discussion on social and political philosophy has been able to keep in public discourse some important questions, such as the rôle of religion in public life, the nature and purpose of human goods and of the common good, as well as philosophical/theological questions about the purpose and nature of man.[54] A detailed discussion of his metaphysics and epistemology is beyond the scope of this paper.

CONCLUSION

In *The Range of Reason*, Maritain states that he affirms 'that the idea of man propounded by the metaphysics of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas is the rational foundation of democratic philosophy, and that Gospel inspiration is its true living soul' (170). These twin beliefs form the foundation of his essay on 'Christian Humanism'. Maritain laments and criticises the 'general paganisation of our civilisation' (195), not only because it has removed Christian faith from the pursuit of true wisdom, but because, in his view, humanity has been diminished as a result of the process. Maritain's solution is to work for a new Christian commonwealth built upon both faith and reason, where both work together in harmony in the pursuit of the '*sacred* nature of truth' (16), and whose form takes the shape of an American-style democracy.[55] Practically speaking, this would mean that both the church and the state have their proper domains, where they both contribute to a communal, personalist, peregrinal and pluralistic democracy.[56] The state both promotes the (temporal) common good yet protects the material and 'spiritual' rights of the individual person. His Thomistic approach also affirms the goodness of nature and of humanity in particular. Maritain's vision is therefore at once person-centred and desirous of promoting ultimate human fulfilment. It also seeks human progress in a collaborative manner and in such a way that truth becomes rationally accessible. Maritain's vision breaks down, however, because of its idealism and its reliance upon a natural law tradition that claims common principles rooted in human nature in the context of a contemporary reality of radical cultural, religious and philosophical pluralism, where agreement about the good has proved elusive. Nonetheless, Maritain is right in his attempts to end modernity's limitation of rational thought to the study of natural phenomena and he has contributed to the renewal in the study of being. His metaphysics and Christian faith has helped to put the question of objectivity back into contemporary philosophical discourse. Maritain is also to be commended for his genuinely humanist and

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[54] Ibid, 401-402.

[55] The model of American-style democracy is clear in aspects of the works considered in this paper. For example, see Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 21-23, 38-39, 61-62.

[56] Eduardo J. Echeverria, "Nature and Grace: The Theological Foundations of Jacques Maritain's Public Philosophy," *Markets & Morality* 4. 2 (2001): 10; http://www.action.org, accessed 28 October 2003. For a discussion of the communal, personalist, peregrinal and pluralistic aspects of the new Christian civilisation see Maritain, *True Humanism*, 127-133, 157-161.

personalist vision of man and society, one that has helped to mend a human race fractured by the catastrophic events of the twentieth century.

Author: *Vincent Battaglia has an Honours degree in theology from the Sydney College of Divinity.*

Email: *vincebattaglia@optusnet.com.au*