

The Faith-Full Intellect: Catholic Traditions and Instincts About the Human Person and Their Significance for Teaching and Learning

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INTRODUCTION

The question of what place—if any—faith might have within contemporary teaching and learning persists as one of sharp relevance, and one with potential economic significance. Whether it concerns the relationship between religious education and catechesis in schools, or the appropriateness or otherwise of confessional theology in university faculties the challenge can be keenly felt: what, after all, is the point of theology, the use of faith?

In this chapter, this modern questioning of faith in the academic context is first briefly resituated within the current trends of a late modern, post-secular reading of culture, through reflection of qualitative data gained in research with Catholic school leaders in England and Wales. What emerges is the questions of how a distinctively Catholic pedagogy might be drawn from Christian faith concerning the nature of the person.

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To enrich and respond to this question the argument turns to the struggles of Thomas Aquinas in speaking of teaching and learning in the Christian life. Although much of what Thomas writes is concerned to justify study to those who assume the pre-eminence of faith, his account demonstrates a deeply theological and anthropological reading of faith and intellect from which late modern educators can learn. In particular, this chapter seeks to articulate for our own time a theology of the ‘faith-full intellect’ as a fundamental quality of personhood of deep significance to teaching and learning. Such a theology is shown to have a number of implications for educational practice.

THE FAITH-FULL INTELLECT: LEARNING FROM PRE-MODERN THEOLOGY FOR A LATE MODERN PEDAGOGY

Between 2012 and 2014 I was part of a research team researching leadership in Catholic schools in England and Wales. The *Visions for Educational Leadership* (VfEL) project¹ worked with qualitative data from over a hundred school leaders from seven Roman Catholic dioceses across these nations, and used theological action research methods² to attend to what was being embodied, theologically and pedagogically, in the practices of Catholic schools, and of their senior leaders in particular.

The findings were rich and varied; but, notably for the theologian, they included a strong set of reflections around the distinctive nature of Catholic education. Beyond the perennial questions of Catholic ethos and values of the school, there persisted more penetrating questions. In particular, these focused attention on three distinct but inter-related areas: spirituality, ‘whole-person’ formation, and pedagogical relationality. At the same time, the leaders of Catholic schools worked practically and realistically within a state sector which has its own approaches, processes and procedures—approaches increasingly seen by them as involving the instrumentalising of learning.³

Detailed reflection on the data from the project, led the final research colloquium to report that, among a number of key questions and themes, one especially demanding of attention could be expressed: ‘Whether a clearer account of specifically Catholic pedagogy might be given, in particular relating to the faith assumptions concerning the nature and “ends” of the human person’ (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014e). This identified question, recognised as importantly at the service of educational practice in Catholic schools, also reflected the teaching of Vatican II on education that:

a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, [sic] he is a member. (*Gravissimum Educationis* 1965)

Education is not only for the building up of human society, in line with the common good; it is also a formation of the whole person towards his or her ‘ultimate end’. As Christians, this language of the person’s ‘ultimate end’ has a particular paschal content and eschatological flavour, based on our anthropological understanding of human beings as made for friendship with, and in, God, made possible by Jesus’ death and resurrection, and by life in the Spirit.⁴ It is this understanding of the vocation of the human person and their place in God that, *Gravissimum Educationis* tells us, is to inform our educational processes.

The equation can, of course, be read the other way: not only do we draw on an anthropology to shape our teaching, but the way we teach tells us something about what we really believe about people. Our pedagogy always implies an anthropology, a doctrine of the human person; and this embodied anthropology may or may not really reflect what is our Christian belief about people. For example, if, in practice, our educational processes emphasise simply the worth of education in terms of earning more money, or—worse still—achieving the highest grades, we run the risk, whatever our rhetoric, of embodying a theology of the person which is shaped by material attainment only. It is, of course, our *practices*, rather than our words, which form us and those we work with most powerfully.

It is this relation of pedagogical practice and theory, and the faith understanding of human person and its educational implications, that is the focus for this chapter. Core to the argument is the exploration of one particular Christian tradition’s approach to the human person and its implications for pedagogy. Significantly, however, the relationship between pedagogical practices and the theology of the person will be, as it were, ‘read both ways’. So, to begin with, I will briefly reflect on aspects of the VfEL project data so as to read out of these senior school leaders’ practices, elements of the embodied theologies of the person which underpin their work. I will then move to the main body of the paper, which explores a number of questions related to teaching, learning and the person in the writing of Thomas Aquinas. By putting alongside each other contemporary understandings of the person and the educational processes, as embodied in current real schools practice, with the pre-modern Thomistic tradition, I hope to show how this earlier thinking may contribute to late modern accounts of Christian pedagogy.

This choice of Aquinas as conversation partner with contemporary practice is not arbitrary. The decision to look to pre-modern thought is a deliberate move on my part, following an instinct that late modern thinking about education, as articulated by our Catholic school leaders, is increasingly working to free itself from some of the less helpful restrictions of post-Enlightenment, modern notions of learning and rationality (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014b). Faced with the instrumentalisation of education, which might be argued to be the logical conclusion of a highly rationalistic and material modern focus on instruction and the role or ‘use’ of the person, many people of faith in teaching are struggling to articulate the ‘something else’ of their experience.⁵ My suggestion is that one place where we might find ways of expressing this ‘other thing’ going on in teaching and learning is through attention to pre-modern understanding; and here Thomas Aquinas, whose own work is so rooted in teaching and learning, and treats explicitly of the questions of what is going on among human beings involved in education, stands out as particularly appropriate.⁶

*The Mystery of Teaching and Learning, the Mystery of the Person:
Reflections from Experience of Education in Catholic Schools*

The exploration of these themes begins with contemporary school practices—practices which, themselves, are ‘bearers of theology’ embodying faith in our own contexts.⁷ The late modern context of education today provides a vivid backdrop against which to hear and learn from the voices of leaders of Catholic schools. In what follows I present some key points from the VfEL data by way of grounding in contemporary teaching and learning the thinking-through of Thomistic approaches which will follow.

In my opening remarks, I recorded how the VfEL research colloquium identified as a key question of the research that of whether a clearer articulation of ‘specifically Catholic’ pedagogy might be given, especially in relation to the nature of the person, faith and the place of education. This question arose particularly through reflection on that perennial question about the ‘distinctiveness’ of Catholic/Christian education. An opening point to note here is that none of those interviewed imagined that Catholic or church schools were ‘inherently better’ than other schools, or that Christian education could really be seen to have the monopoly on good education, good pastoral care of students and so forth. Indeed, some ‘sec-

ular' schools were clearly better in these areas than some Catholic schools (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014d, pp.13–14).

Related to this was the keen sense that, when speaking of the possible 'distinctiveness' of Catholic education, there was little appetite among our participants for a simply counter-cultural model of Catholic education. Our Catholic school leaders simply did not understand why we should think there might be tension between being 'professional', doing their jobs well according to the things asked by society and the state, and their clear and often passionate sense of Christian vocation to their work. To be a good Catholic head teacher was to be a good head teacher (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014a, p.20). On a superficial level, at least, the identification of any 'Catholic distinctiveness' appeared illusive.

At the same time, however, certain characteristics of Catholic teaching can be identified from these school leaders' testimonies. First, and strikingly, there was a strong coherence around the language of 'loving' as best describing the 'vocation' of the Catholic teacher. So, speaking of her work as a head teacher as a vocation, one participant said:

Vocation is about love. I think I am very lucky that I am able to love the kids. (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014a, p.5)

Teachers coming into Catholic schools often remarked on the use of the language of love in the school, and the quality of relationship.⁸ This is summed up by one senior leader's response to the question of Catholic distinctiveness:

I think that one of the things that characterises Catholic schools is the quality of the relationships. I've learned that if you get the relationships right, you can do just about anything with a pupil. You can get them to do just about anything you want. So we're modeling to the children ... We use the word 'love' a great deal. Love for the pupils is expressed freely and easily, and we tell the pupils we love them. They're told in assembly and in more casual ways, in a small group. The word 'love' is used in that way without there being any unpleasant connotations to it. (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014c, p.19)

This enables us to name our first, and most fundamental, theme: that of teaching and learning as *a practice of love*. Certainly for these Catholic

teachers there was a clear witness to their work as embodying a theology of education as loving, and exercise of the theological virtue of charity. This places teaching and learning squarely in that mysterious place of human relationship, friendship and affection, with the implication that it is in the nature of people to learn and grow as individuals precisely when they are bound in relationships of love.

This theme of love is in danger of being just too bland sounding—and, indeed, risky; but it is worked out in the data in a number of telling ways. A second theme can be identified here: that of the *humility* or *kenosis* of the teacher before the pupil. One of the recurring characteristics we identified is the sense of *wonder* that the teacher has about the ones they are teaching—a sense of humility before these other mysterious people, in whom thoughts, feelings and insights are clearly at work beyond the simple instruction or influence of the teacher themselves (a theme, which as we shall see, resonates deeply with Aquinas’ pedagogy):

I teach Year 6 and sometimes what those children come out with is absolutely stunning and it leaves you almost speechless. Maybe as teachers we can be a little bit patronizing towards children and then these children will just reveal who they are, the real child, and you are just blown away by their relationship with God and with the world that they live in. (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014c, p.19)

So, education as a practice of love is characterised by a practice of humility before the mystery of the learner, an openness to their uniqueness and inherent dignity and wisdom as made in God’s image. This trait is one the researchers came to name as ‘kenotic’. We used it specifically to refer to that apparent ability our teachers had to be empty enough of themselves and their own sense of how things *should* be, to be able to receive from the learners how things *might be*, or, indeed, how this really *are*.

It is this kenotic quality that is reflected, too, in what was seen as a characteristically Catholic instinct not to ‘ram things down people’s throats’ (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014c, p.20). Rather:

We say ‘this is what we believe and this is why we believe it and you can either accept that or not.’ Everybody has their own faith journey and everybody will go places in their own way. People have to be allowed to question and they have to be allowed to journey and they have to be allowed to

develop their relationship with God in their own way. We teach the children that there is a God who loves them deeply and who is always there for them. Your religious life is about the relation that you develop and how do you develop that. Through conversation, through prayer, through going to Mass, whatever that may be. It is about deepening that relationship and these are the ways that you can do it. People will either accept it or they won't and you have to allow people that choice. (Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service 2014c, p.20)

This leads us to a third theme or characteristic—that of *freedom* as the necessary context for learning. For our teachers here reflected a sure-founded Catholic instinct for this necessity of the freedom of the person in learning, and the sense of journey that must accompany this sense of freedom.⁹ Knowledge, and that strange kind of knowing that is faith, can never be *made* to happen. It is both deeply personal and essentially communal, as people converse together and so come by free assent to truth.¹⁰

It is this relational, kenotically respectful context which provided for our research participants the clearest locus for the communication of faith and truth in schools. Essentially, whilst many of our school leaders felt it important that religious education was properly and rigorously taught as a serious subject with proper content, this was not the place where the Catholic nature of the school resided. Nor was it a matter of how many Catholics attend these schools, or how many teachers were 'practising' their faith. What was glimpsed, again and again, was something more subtle, more pervasive, more personal and inter-personal: a practice of love which enabled a process by which each learner could take the next step closer to the truth of things—a process which has its form not in procedures or policies, but in the mysterious realm of human relationships, and the hit-and-miss experiences of communication around things known and, as yet, unknown. This identification of relationship as the proper educational context can be recognised as a fourth anthropological theme in the data. A such, it is the theme that brings together the other three—love, kenosis and freedom—in describing how these Catholic school leaders embodied their educational work.

It is this embodiment of a vision of education in our own time, based on a faith concerning the human person, that I now want to explore through the theology of education offered by Thomas Aquinas. My suggestion is that the instincts we see in our contemporary educational practices—around love, humility/kenosis, freedom and relationship—are

deeply Catholic and faith-full instincts, resonating powerfully with a longer tradition. The ways in which Aquinas sets out the strands of this tradition can enable us, today, to nurture these instincts, and give them clearer and more confident articulation in our handing on of them to new generations of Christian educators, and in our voicing them in a culture of education which is often in danger of losing these essential insights.

Naming the Mysteries: Some Responses from Thomas Aquinas

Some Insights on 'Intellect'—Summa Theologiae Ia. 79.4, 8 & 10; 2a2ae.8

Before giving some account of how Aquinas understands and describes teaching and learning, it is as well briefly (and so inadequately) to say something about the language of 'intellect'. *Intellectus* is a pervasive term in the *Summa's* account of the person, and it is all too tempting simply to translate this as 'intellect'. However, in English 'intellect' and 'intellectual' tend to carry with them a rather abstracted, cerebral and even pejorative meanings (especially for the deeply pragmatic sensibilities of the English!); we are suspicious that 'the intellectual' concerns only an elite group, and a removal from what is most down to earth.

This is not how *intellectus* functions in Aquinas' thought—and it is, in part, for this reason that the (admittedly interpretative) translation of the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa Theologiae* generally translates *intellectus* as 'understanding'. For intellect in the Thomistic anthropology refers to that peculiarly human quality of the person to make meaning from sense and intelligible impressions. It is the intellect that is capable of *seeing things as they truly are*—a key concept for Aquinas. Such seeing of truth is not always, or even frequently, an immediate grasping of that reality, but rather describes as the ultimate agency in the person which enables understanding.

As such the intellect is a 'power of the soul' (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia 79.4), whilst not, we should note, being its essence. The essence of our humanity doesn't depend on intellect, but intellect depends on our created humanity, our im-mattered soul. As the means by which human beings grasp the nature of things as they are, it is not to be confused with intelligence or reason. Reason and intelligence are not intellect themselves.

They can, however, be seen as movements belonging to the intellect—the means by which the intellect moves from not knowing to knowing a reality (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 79.8, 79.10). *Intellectus* is not in itself the struggles of cleverness, learning and so forth; but is more to do with a restful knowing of things, wisdom, an ability to look, gaze upon, and *see*. Elsewhere, in the question entitled ‘The Gift of Understanding (*de dono intellectus*)’, Aquinas describes *intellectus* like this:

Understanding’ (*intellectus*) implies a certain intimate knowing...intellective knowledge penetrates as far as the essence of a thing, its objective interest being ... what a thing really is. (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 8.1)

These brief observations are included here largely to guard against certain misunderstandings of what is meant by Aquinas’ insistence on the idea that human beings are ‘intellectual’. Clearly, from this question of the *Summa Theologiae*, this is not a matter of saying human beings are all about their academic achievements, their cleverness, their abstraction from the material. Rather, to be intellectual—as, for Thomas Aquinas all human beings must be—is simply to participate in the world, using our senses and whatever reasoning faculties we have, in such a way that we catch glimpses of what it really is. People are creatures who seek to understand, albeit in limited ways, the way things really are. We are creatures who can know *that things are*, and wonder about this.

For this to be true means it is true for all people, even those who, in our own time, we might describe as ‘intellectually impaired’. For Aquinas’ anthropology those with learning disabilities are better described (if they must be described at all) as living with an impairment of intelligence or ability to reason; the intellectual function of *seeing what is* is of a different quality, and present, in some way, even if at rest, without the movements of intelligence and reason.¹¹

So, all our students are intellectuals!—if we mean by that they are all looking to know, to see what is really there. We share in common with them that quality of being human which is seen in every ‘aha!’ moment, every ‘light bulb’ moment, that takes place—moments not exclusively (or even generally?) found in the formal classroom. It is this ‘illumination of the intellect’ which is foundational for Aquinas’ development of a distinctive pedagogical approach. It is to this we now turn.

Aquinas on Teaching and Learning—Summa Theologiae 1a 117.1; 2a2ae 181.3; de Veritate Q. 11

Thomas Aquinas treats explicitly the question of teaching and learning at a number of points in the *Summa Theologiae*, as well as in *de Veritate* and *de Magistro*. One especially clear instance of this comes in Question 117 of *Summa Theologiae* 1a which asks in its first article: ‘Can a man teach another man, causing him to know?’¹²

In the *Summa*, this question is asked in the wider context of explorations of how the world works, what makes things happen—agency, in other words. This question about education is the first to be considered under ‘human activity’—that is things people do which effect a change.

It may surprise the modern reader that the question of whether a person can cause another to know—that is teach them something—is at all contentious; but the argument here makes clear just how strange a thing we are dealing with. Aquinas’ first move is to name the ways in which a person *cannot* teach another, drawing both on scripture and a variety of philosophical arguments (the four points *Ad Primo*). So, he first quotes Matthew 23:8—a verse that has key importance in his treatment of teaching and learning in *de Veritate* Q. 11 and at the start of *de Magistro*.

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students...Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. (Matt 23:8,10)

His next three points against the idea of whether one person can cause another to know reveals something not only of his understanding of what knowing is, but also something of his anthropology. So, knowledge cannot simply be transmitted as if it were something like heat—a general property moveable from one person to another. Nor can a teacher really *act* on the intellect of another, causing it to see something, effecting change in any straightforward way. Whatever is going on between a teacher and a pupil it cannot be like other kinds of caused change; rather, as he says in the *Responsio*, ‘it must be said that the one who teaches causes knowledge in the one who is taught in another way altogether’ (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 117.1).

The way Aquinas attempts to articulate this mysterious event of teaching and learning is informative, not least of all for the analogies upon which he draws to illustrate his point. In terms of his Aristotelian account of the intellect, he can assert that the passive intellect of the human being

‘is in a state of pure potentiality’, and that what happens when a teacher provides that intellect with things to see and grasp is that a move is made from potentiality to actuality. This doesn’t make ready sense to most contemporary minds; but the analogy used to illustrate it does—that of medicine and healing.

So, effects or change can come from purely external sources, like the house that is built by art alone, or through a combination of internal and external sources—like the sick person being restored to health by medicine and/or nature’s power. In this last example, art imitates nature, as medicines work in ways learnt from nature’s own healing powers. But this external agency of medicine is not the primary agent in the healing process, but rather simply aids the principal agent, natural healing (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 117.1).

In the same way learning involves both internal and external agency. This puts the teacher in a very particular relation to both the learner, and to the knowledge that is being shared and explored. The conclusion made at the end of the *Responsio* here is worth quoting:

the teacher provides only external help, in the same way as the physician who heals. And just as the internal nature is the main cause of the healing process, so also the internal intellectual illumination is the main cause of the knowing process. Now both of these come from God...It is through this light that everything is made clear to us. (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 117.1)

And later:

The teacher directly causes neither the illumination which makes things intelligible in the learner, nor the intelligible impressions, but he moves the learner by his teaching so that the latter forms intelligible concepts by the power of his own mind, when the signs of these concepts are put before him from outside. (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 117.1)

All this tells something about how Aquinas understands human intellect and its humanity and potentiality. It is on this understanding that the rather mysterious activity of teaching is founded. The same argument is made in rather more clearly Christian theological ways in *de Veritate* Q11, where the Matthean text referred to above becomes central. Here again, it is clear that it is not—and cannot be—the teacher who makes another know. Rather a person may be called teacher analogously, in so far as she

enables that illumination of intellect which is the act of the Holy Spirit alone—for there is only one teacher, that is the Lord.

This is an anthropology where the autonomy of the person is central (no teacher can cause me to know), and yet where the relation of persons is the proper and usual (though not always essential?) place of learning. Resonances with our contemporary school leaders' practices and understanding are clearly felt here. Aquinas offers into our own time a clearly articulated account of teaching and learning as a properly mysterious, inter-personal process which necessarily involves the activity of the illuminating Spirit. And, we should note, this is *not* about faith or religious knowing, but about *all* knowing. The human activity of teaching and learning—whether parentally in the home, or practically in the workshop, or scientifically in the laboratory, or academically in the lecture theatre—is necessarily of this self-transcending yet personal nature. And it always involves God.

*The Faith-Full Intellect: Learning, Contemplation and Holy Living—
Summa Theologiae 2a2ae 188*

It is tempting to leave, for the purposes of this paper at least, our forays into Aquinas' pedagogy there; we already have a good deal to think about in relation to our own contemporary practice, as correspondences between Aquinas' pedagogy and the instincts described through the VfEL research become clear. However, I think it would be a particular disservice to Aquinas' account of intellect, teaching and learning if it were omitted that he sees in these mysterious processes of coming-to-know something profound: something of the person's movement Godward, into faith. The human intellect is, in its fundamental orientation, a faith-full intellect, orientated to the knowing of God, even as one unknown (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a 12.13). Here, perhaps, Aquinas can lead those of us working in contemporary teaching and learning into a deeper and more confident place, in which our *vocation* as Christians can find enriching articulation in our work.

One way of illustrating this is through the account given in the *Summa Theologiae* to the apparently innocuous question: 'whether a religious institute should be founded for study?' (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 188.5).

In his own context, this question is part of a much longer reflection on the nature of religious life, a reflection informed by the sometimes-furious debates that ranged around the 'new' mendicant orders. In particular, the Order of Preachers had some work to do in justifying their involvement in

academic theology on their arrival on the university scene in Paris. Surely, it is proposed, study is inimical to religious life as it causes dissension improper to Christian community, and involves the student in ‘Gentile’ or pagan (perhaps, for our time, ‘secular’) studies alien to the Christian religion. Further, there is a tradition discernible in scripture that Christian virtue is not to be gained through human powers of knowing but through the powerful work of the Lord on us.¹³ Study, it seems, is simply a worldly necessity for those enmeshed in the material concerns of life, and isn’t, in itself, a Christian thing at all. There is here a distinctly counter-cultural account of Christian teaching and learning emerging.

It is Aquinas’ thoughtful response to this that draws us into a deeper place, from which to enquire about the relation of thinking and believing which places pedagogy firmly within the Christian life. For in the *responsio* to the question St. Thomas argues that study builds up religious life in three key ways: by promoting contemplation; as a necessary work for preaching and the apostolates of conversion and teaching; and as a powerful help in the forming of persons in the virtues appropriate to religious life. Of particular importance, for our purposes, is the observation that study disposes us to contemplation through the ‘illumination of the intellect’ (*illuminando scilicet intellectum*), leading us to the consideration of divine things. Teaching and learning are a part of the way towards that mysterious ‘knowing’ (in a sense) of God, which is faith. Teaching and learning are orientated towards contemplation of the things of God—which is to say, of things as they most truly are. Whilst teaching and learning are seen as materially necessary for the carrying out of particular activities (preaching, teaching, apologetics), the pedagogical dynamic is fundamentally rooted in the movement towards knowing God, and shaping us along the way in all manner of virtues:

it [study] helps to avoid concupiscence of the flesh ... it turns the mind from lascivious thoughts and mortifies the flesh through the labour of study ... it eliminates the desire for wealth ... it teaches obedience. (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 188.5 *responsio*)

What we have before us in all this is a careful but firm argument—an argument reclaiming the work of the *intellectus*, the work of thinking and understanding, teaching and learning, for the life of Christian discipleship and living faith. For this work of thoughtfulness, Aquinas argues, when it is undertaken in Christian charity, admits of no harmful dissension, but

rather builds up, promoting harmony; as obedient to the truth (and so reflecting the characteristics of humility or *kenosis*), this Christian study, far from leading us into pagan or secular ways, draws us closer to the heart of the true, which is godliness (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 188.5 *ad* 2, 3). This question of the *Summa* helps to clarify the perennial Christian instinct towards education, teaching and learning as a thoroughly Christ-like vocation, for it demonstrates that teaching and learning, whatever its focus content or subject area, is a place of encounter with the ways in which God works within all human beings to draw them into deeper knowing of how things really are, and so, ultimately, towards that relationship with God which is faith.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been framed as an initial theological response to a practically felt need for a clearer account of ‘Catholic pedagogy’. In particular, it involved my following a hunch that what I was encountering in the testimonies of a great many Catholic school leaders was an implicit anthropology, and a largely implicit sense of what they were dealing with in teaching and learning, that had more in common with what I know of the pre-modern theology of Thomas Aquinas, than with the prevailing modern and more materialist (instrumental) educational culture. The task now is to open up a conversation as to whether and how the inevitable gap between Aquinas and contemporary language and thought might be fruitfully bridged.

As a starting place for this conversation I want to end this chapter by making the claim that a renewal of pedagogy along the lines set out by Aquinas can enable us to give clearer articulation to those instincts we observed in contemporary Christian (Catholic) teaching practice. For as we have seen, Aquinas’ account gives a particular and proper place to the *mysterious* in teaching and learning, as our coming to know is always caused by illumination of intellect which, whether natural or supernatural (*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae 188.5 *ad* 2, 3), is of God. Not only this but—like our contemporary practitioners—the *Summa* locates this mysterious process in an interpersonal relational context, in which both the interiority of the learner and their need for relation with the one named (analogously) ‘teacher’ are thoroughly implicated. This pedagogical relationship is characterised by humility and self-emptying before the other, and an enabling of their greater freedom: these are the traits of that practice of

love which is education. And Aquinas tells us more: this relational practice—a practice of love enacted by the Christian teacher/learner—is orientated to that deeply human end, communion in God.

What difference this makes in educational practice itself remains to be seen. It is only when practitioners themselves respond to what I have set out here that we will really be able to give embodied form of this thinking. But, by beginning with testimonies from practice, I have demonstrated that, in fact, much of this Thomistic pedagogical tradition is already being lived—in part, at least, and perhaps largely unconsciously—by many in Catholic school education. This encourages me to believe that Aquinas’ understanding of teaching and learning, or something very like it, can contribute to the naming of those hidden graces already at work in Catholic education; and, in naming them, can bring these graces more clearly to light, to be celebrated, recognised, handed on and shared more widely.

NOTES

1. The papers and reports referred to in what follows can be found at [Theologyandactionresearch \(2016\)](#).
2. The key text explaining this approach is Cameron et al. (2010). Other publications in the field are Sweeney (2010), Watkins (2012), Watkins and Cameron (2012), Watkins and Shepherd (2013), Watkins (2014) and Watkins (2015). See also [Theologyandactionresearch \(2016\)](#).
3. This tendency towards an instrumentalised view of education has been widely recognised, as has its tension with Christian traditions around teaching and learning. See McKinney and Sullivan (2013), esp. chaps. 13 and 14, and Whittle (2015), which draws attention to the notion of ‘unsolvable mystery’ as central to Catholic pedagogy. The position of church schools in relating to both church and wider society/state is thoughtfully explored in Sullivan (2011), pp.101–116, whilst Philip J. O’Connor offers a more personal reflection on the same questions in O’Connor (2015). Our research participants’ account of this can be seen in Heythrop Institute and Catholic Education Service (2014b).
4. For example, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 356–7; 1694–5.
5. That sense of ‘unsolvable mystery’ identified in Whittle (2015).
6. Of particular help in understanding Aquinas’ pedagogy are White (1958) and Mooney and Nowacki (2011).
7. This conviction that practices embody theologies is foundational to theological action research projects. See Cameron et al. (2010), pp.51–53.

8. It is notable that this resonates strongly with much contemporary academic writing in Catholic pedagogy: for example, McLaughlin (2008).
9. Again, the theology embodied by teachers here strongly reflects Catholic traditions around education. See Watkins 2013.
10. Vatican II, Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* 3: ‘Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth. Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it.’
11. Aquinas’ profound account of people with what we would call ‘intellectual impairment’ or ‘learning disability’ is a good remedy against any misunderstanding of his position concerning the ‘intellectual’ nature of *all* human beings. See Berkman (2013).
12. A similar question opens *de Magistro*, and is discussed in *de Veritate* Q. 11.
13. Aquinas references Psalm 70: 15–16, with a gloss from the *Interlinear* of Peter Lombard. Whilst this is not hugely convincing to the contemporary reader, it is an argument with which we are nonetheless familiar, and into which scripture is often drawn, albeit sometimes in rather naïve ways.

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