Fr. Stravinskas (left) speaking to several members (below) of the 2017 Institute on the Role of the Priest in Today’s Catholic School.

ANNOUNCEMENT
The 4th annual Institute on the Role of the Priest in Today’s Catholic School will be held at Seton Hall University from July 16-19.

Mark your calendar, and stay tuned for further details!
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Today’s First Reading would seem to be ideally chosen for Catholic school teachers. Ezekiel is confronted with a vision of a field of dry, dead bones and commanded to prophesy over them, so as to bring them back to life. Isn’t that the situation in which we find ourselves in the secularized West? Unfortunately, like the Chosen People of old, most of our contemporaries don’t realize that they are dead and that the culture is moribund. It is our task to demonstrate to them just how lifeless the whole culture is. Were it otherwise, how would one explain the vast array of children with learning disabilities of every kind; the couches of psychiatrists constantly filled; the suicide rate (especially among the young) the highest in our history? Too often, we Catholic educators have been intimidated into silence in the face of what is in reality an “anti-culture,” lest we appear “out of it” or “uncool.”

Back in the silly – and stupid – sixties, we were told that if we could shake off the shackles of religion and morality, we would experience true and complete happiness. Religion, we heard, was an albatross, an inhibition, an obstacle to human fulfillment. Well, the shackles were certainly removed, and the result has been a disaster. With the depressing signs all around us, we are in an ideal position to be educators, in the root Latin sense of the word, “educere,” to lead out – leading our students out of the misery and shackles of a godless modernity. We must convince them – being convinced first of all ourselves – of the truth put forth so powerfully by Pope Benedict XVI in his inaugural homily, which in turn was harking back to the inaugural homily of Pope John Paul II:

At this point, my mind goes back to Oct. 22, 1978, when Pope John Paul II began his ministry here in Saint Peter’s Square. His words on that occasion constantly echo in my ears: “Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ!” The Pope was addressing the mighty, the powerful of this world, who feared that Christ might take away something of their power if they were to let him in, if they were to allow the faith to be free. Yes, he would certainly have taken something away from them: the dominion of corruption, the manipulation of law and the freedom to do as they pleased. But he would not have taken away anything that pertains to human freedom or dignity, or to the building of a just society.

The Pope was also speaking to everyone, especially the young. Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? And once again the Pope said: No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we
receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life.

That, my friends and colleagues, is our holy vocation, our noble calling – to teach those committed to our care that in following Christ and His Church, we lose nothing that is “free, beautiful and great” – and gain much more besides. However, every Catholic educator must understand his or her calling and glory in it. Just what kind of understanding will enable you to be effective proclaimers of Gospel living and Catholic truth?

First of all, before becoming a teacher, one must be a student, a disciple. An old Latin adage instructs us: “Nemo dat quod non habet” (No one can give what he doesn’t have). One must enroll oneself in the School of Jesus and, having gone through a thorough education in the faith and a serious formation in virtuous living, only then will one be able to teach others. Here’s what the Congregation for Catholic Education said in 1977:

By their witness and their behaviour teachers are of the first importance to impart a distinctive character to Catholic schools. It is, therefore, indispensable to ensure their continuing formation through some form of suitable pastoral provision. This must aim to animate them as witnesses of Christ in the classroom and tackle the problems of their particular apostolate, especially regarding a Christian vision of the world and of education, problems also connected with the art of teaching in accordance with the principles of the Gospel. (“The Catholic School,” n. 78)

Only once we are evangelized can we become evangelists. Only once we become disciples can we be credible teachers. In this regard, it is worth recalling the insightful observation of Pope Paul VI in Evangelii Nuntiandi, his 1975 apostolic exhortation: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (n. 41). Or, as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council before him put it in their Decree on Christian education, Gravissimum Educationis:

... let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world. Intimately linked in charity to one another and to their students and endowed with an apostolic spirit, may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher. Let them work as partners with parents and together with them in every phase of education. ... Let them do all they can to stimulate their students to act for themselves and even after graduation to continue to assist them with advice, friendship and by establishing special associations imbued with the true spirit of the Church. The work of these teachers, this sacred synod declares, is in the real sense of the word an apostolate most suited to and necessary for our times and at once a true service offered to society. (n. 8)

St. John Paul II, the great apostle of Catholic education – who often referred to Catholic schools as the very “heart of the Church” – in a 1996 discourse to the International Office of Catholic Education likewise addressed our topic in great detail:
It is of supreme importance that these educators, who have come of their own accord to offer their services in a Catholic institution or have been recruited by the administration of the school, have a precise vision of a Christian education based on the Gospel message. It is a sacred duty for all to bear witness individually and, at the same time communally, to their faith. Each one, in the discipline he teaches, will know how to find the opportune circumstance to have the youth discover that science and faith are two different yet complementary readings of the universe and of history. Catholic education must be outstanding for the professional competence of its teachers, the witness of their strong faith and the atmosphere of respect, mutual assistance and Gospel joy which permeate the entire institution.

Notice how the sainted Pope weaves together several threads: personal commitment to Christ, professional competence, permeation of the curriculum with religious and moral values (in other words, religion isn’t only taught in a half-hour religion class) – all leading to an atmosphere of genuine Christian life.

Pope Francis the Jesuit, himself a former high school teacher of Latin and chemistry, in a 2014 address to the Congregation of Catholic Education spoke at length about the importance of a proper preparation of “formators” in our Catholic schools. After stating the obvious need for such teachers to be academically qualified, he also calls for them to be “coherent witnesses.” And how is that achieved? He tells us:

For this, an educator is himself in need of permanent formation. It is necessary to invest so that teachers and supervisors may maintain a high level of professionalism and also maintain their faith and the strength of their spiritual impetus. And in this permanent formation too I would suggest a need for retreats and spiritual exercises for educators. It is a beautiful thing to offer courses on the subject, but it is also necessary to offer spiritual exercises and retreats focused on prayer! For consistency requires effort but most of all it is a gift and a grace. We must ask for it! Isn’t that what we are doing today?

The Pope mentions prayer as an essential ingredient of the life of a Catholic educator. This is a strong echo of the admonition of the Venerable Mother Luisita, foundress of the Carmelite Sisters of Alhambra, who asserted – without fear of contradiction: “Do not simply be good teachers. Be souls of prayer or you will have nothing to offer the children.”

In a conversation with students of Jesuit schools in June of 2013, Pope Francis zeroed in on the essential role of teachers, all the while encouraging them not to lose hope in the face of what Pope Benedict termed “an educational emergency,” that is, a worldwide pedagogical meltdown. Francis said:

Do not be disheartened in the face of the difficulties that the educational challenge presents! Educating is not a profession but an attitude, a way of being; in order to educate it is necessary to step out of ourselves and be among young people, to accompany them in the stages of their growth and to set ourselves beside them.

Give them hope and optimism for their journey in the world. Teach them to see the beauty and goodness of creation and of man who always retains the Creator’s hallmark. But above all with your life be witnesses of what you communicate. Educators... pass on knowledge and values with their words; but their words will have an incisive effect on children and young people if they
are accompanied by their witness, their consistent way of life. Without consistency it is impossible to educate! . . .

Thus collaboration in a spirit of unity and community among the various educators is essential and must be fostered and encouraged. School can and must be a catalyst, it must be a place of encounter and convergence of the entire educating community, with the sole objective of training and helping to develop mature people who are simple, competent and honest, who know how to love with fidelity, who can live life as a response to God’s call, and their future profession as a service to society.

I trust you did not miss his emphasis yet again on the need for a consistent witness of life on the part of Catholic school teachers. But he also stresses that this is a communal enterprise; to his way of thinking (and the Church’s), this involves parents as well and especially. And don’t miss his emphasis on providing young people with a perspective of hopefulness – in a world so driven to hopelessness and despair.

In another meeting with teachers, Francis observed that teachers are not generally well paid. While all of us would like to see that situation improved, let me also make a few comments in that regard. When I was a high school administrator, during Catholic Schools Week, we always had a teacher appreciation day, in the lead-up to which I distributed a faculty list to the students, identifying the teacher’s field, the salary that person received from us, and what that teacher would earn in the government school down the block. Some of the teachers did not like the practice and thought it potentially demeaning. I disagreed. Why? Because, invariably, students would go up to a teacher and say, “Mrs. Jones, you mean to tell me that you could make $10,000 a year more by just walking down the road? Why do you stay here?” Those questions became “teachable moments,” allowing the teacher to explain that he or she was in a Catholic school, not to make money, but to share a Christian vision of life, thus inviting the whole school community to life on high with Christ for all eternity. In our materialistic culture, that kind of witness is invaluable. At a practical level, I should also mention that there are trade-offs in life: If you enter a Catholic school at eight in the morning with four limbs, your dignity and a lesson plan, I can pretty well guarantee that you will leave at three with four limbs, your dignity and a completed lesson – plus so much more.

You will recall that in one Pope Francis’ talks, he urged teachers not to give in to discouragement. Permit me to piggy-back on that idea in three ways.

First, at times we hear people say that Johnny went to twelve years of Catholic school but hasn’t darkened the door of a church since graduation. While this is surely regrettable, it is also evidence that what we do in our schools is catechesis and evangelization, not brain-washing. If every Catholic school graduate emerged a devout, practicing Catholic, we might have cause to wonder. Not that we wouldn’t want that to be the case – we do – but grace is offered and can be refused. As St. John Paul was fond of saying, the faith is proposed, not imposed.

Second, we have something to learn from the parable of the sower, wherein we hear of the various types of soil in which the seed of the Word of God is sown. While we teachers are used to assigning a grade of 65 or 70 as passing, what does Jesus say about a passing grade for a
sower of the seed, that is, a Catholic educator? The Master Teacher says a teacher who succeeds 25% of the time is indeed a success. Why? Because, as St. Thomas Aquinas taught, “grace builds on nature.” We can only do so much with what we are presented. Or, as Cardinal Dolan of New York puts in one of his homely and foody images, “You can only make gnocchi with the dough you’re given.” Which leads to my last point.

Children are coming to us today all too often from homes where the parents don’t know how to parent because they were never properly parented. Therefore, teachers today – more than ever before – truly stand in loco parentis (in the place of parents). We need to, can, and must catechize and evangelize two generations at once – and not infrequently three. That ought not to be viewed as a burden but as an exhilarating opportunity.

St. Edith Stein (whose liturgical memorial we celebrated last week) was a consummate educator, a fact not often adverted to. The Carmelite martyr of Auschwitz maintained that it is the teacher’s task to help students “develop their gifts and talents and find their own place in the community of the classroom where they can contribute to this community.” She goes on: “Teachers who practice their vocation in the above manner pave the way for the recovery of family and nation.” But then, very realistically, she adds: “Should it be too late for that, then in any case, [the teacher] works for the Communion of Saints.”

When all is said and done, that’s what it’s really all about – working for the Communion of Saints. That is, saving ourselves through our noble vocation as teachers and helping to save as many of our students and their families as we can. In one of the more revealing dialogues in the award-winning film, A Man for All Seasons, St. Thomas More engages the weasel Richard Rich in a conversation about his future. Rich says that he has thought about becoming a teacher but has dismissed it in the end. “Why?” asks More. “Who would know?” responds the egoistic Rich. More, who had a way of getting to the heart of the matter, replies: “You would know; your students would know; God would know. Not a bad audience!” Indeed, not a bad audience.

Pope Benedict, in speaking to a group of American bishops on 5 May 2012 on the Catholic schools of our nation, concluded thus: “I wish to express once more my gratitude, and that of the whole Church, for the generous commitment, often accompanied by personal sacrifice, shown by so many teachers and administrators who work in the vast network of Catholic schools in your country.” It is my privilege to echo those sentiments of the Holy Father today.

I pray that you take to heart the divine challenge given to Ezekiel and see in this new academic year the exciting challenge to bring to life dry bones which will rise up to form an army of Christian soldiers who will be a force for truth and goodness and renewal in the Church and in society-at-large. We have the assurance of God Himself that this can happen: “I have promised, and I will do it, says the Lord.”

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I always say that a teacher, a parent or a priest must develop the mentality of the long-distance runner. What do I mean? It is rare to see immediate results for our efforts. Sometimes the affirmation comes years later; sometimes, not at all. And so, I want to leave you with a meditation penned by the great John Henry Cardinal Newman – a pre-eminent promoter of Catholic education in nineteenth-century England and an inspiration for our schools to this day. His reflection is not valuable solely for us teachers, but something worthwhile to share with our students as well. Blessed John Henry writes:

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments.

Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

Yes, the Almighty knows what He is about, and He has given you the call to teach His little ones about Him. What a dignity! What a grace! What a responsibility! With St. Paul, I pray: “May the God who has begun this good work in you bring it to completion.”
If Music Be the Food of Love, Let’s Teach It!

In the opening words of Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night, Duke Orsino declares that music is “the food of love.” Although these beautiful words are said by a somewhat shallow and flippant character, they nonetheless signify a great truth.

In another altogether more serious comedy, The Merchant of Venice, Lorenzo makes the case for the importance of music in one of the most wonderful speeches that Shakespeare ever placed on the lips of any of his characters:

The man that hath no music in himself, Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; The motions of his spirit are dull as night, And his affections dark as Erebus. Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.

In writing these lines, Shakespeare was making a scarcely concealed reference to those powerful Puritans in English culture who were seeking to abolish the use of music in the liturgy. As Shakespeare shows us, such people have spirits as dull as night and as dark as hell.

How different are such Puritans to the great St. Augustine, who noted that praying in song is like praying twice. In other words, since prayer is beautiful and is the offering up of the mind and soul to God, it is appropriate that prayer and praise should be united to the beauty of the sung voice. It is for this reason that Dr. Timothy McDonnell, director of the Institute of Sacred Music at the Catholic University of America [1] in Washington, D.C., is a great advocate for Gregorian chant, the traditional form of sung prayer used in the liturgy.

Although McDonnell, who composes sacred music as well as teaching it, is an admirer of Renaissance polyphony “with its elaborate texturized harmonies,” he stresses the primacy of chant, acknowledging the great benefits to the Church’s liturgy arising from the privileged place of chant in the liturgical reforms initiated by St. Pius X in his motu proprio, Tra Le Sollecitudini [2] (1903), which were buttressed by Pius XII in the encyclical Mediator Dei [3] (1947) and reaffirmed by the documents of Vatican II.

“The tradition of sung prayer dates back to the first millennium,” McDonnell says, “with Gregorian chant becoming the proper music of the mature Roman rite.”

“The chant is traditionally sung a capella in plain, monophonic tones,” he told Catholic News Service [4], “making the text the focal point of the music. However, there are exceptions to that unofficial chant rule, and some choirs add harmonies and occasionally insert musical accompaniment.”

Although chant is still not the principal form of music in most U.S. Catholic parishes, in contravention of the explicit teaching of Church documents, it has steadily been regaining popularity in recent decades. In order to nurture and nourish this healthy return to tradition and to the authentic expression of music in the liturgy, McDonnell’s work at Catholic University is not only important but should be emulated by Catholic educators throughout the country.

“Gregorian chant can be incredibly advanced, complicated, involved and with a high level of artistic value,” McDonnell says. “At the same time, so much of its beauty resides in its simplicity and the fact...
that much of it can also be accessible to the congregation and by children.

“Anybody can learn to sing some amount of Gregorian chant,” he continues, “and the Church over the years has categorized the chants according to their accessibility. So, there are many chants that are expected to be sung as part of the liturgy by the faithful and those chants really are every bit as much Gregorian chant as the more florid and elaborate ones.”

In other words, Gregorian chant is accessible and is easy to teach. Although it should be taught at the more advanced level, alongside sacred polyphony, at good Catholic colleges and universities, such as the Institute of Sacred Music, which McDonnell directs, it could and should be taught at the simpler level at grade school and at the intermediate level at high school.

In this way, Catholic schools can work in harmony with good Catholic parishes to feed the liturgical life of the Church with the rich nourishment of its musical heritage. To return to the words of Shakespeare, good sacred music can be the food of love, helping us celebrate and worship the great Food of Love that is given to us in the Eucharist.

Joseph Pearce

Education as an Apostolate

Much of the Church’s most important work is done through the laity’s various apostolates. One thinks immediately of apostolates responding to critical situations to save lives and souls, such as evangelization, pro-life efforts, feeding the poor, and aiding the sick. “What you do for the least of your brothers,” you do for Christ and for His Church.

But does education come to mind as one of these important apostolates? Perhaps it should. Perhaps Catholic education is the most important apostolate of all. In education, we cultivate minds and hearts that are still mostly pure and innocent, to strengthen and preserve them to counter the seductions of the “flesh, the world, and the devil.”

The tragedy is that too many do succumb to the enemies of the Faith, and we need apostolates to provide spiritual rescue. Education, however, is preventative. As important as it is to rescue those in danger, the greater work of charity and the greater measure of success of lay apostolates is to preserve young people in truth and virtue, so that they avoid the dangers to begin with. That is the power of education.

But there are additional reasons that education is a most important apostolate.

Pope St. John Paul II once pointed out that “culture” is what happens whenever human beings interact with each other. The kind of culture that emerges depends upon the kind of people we are, and how we interact. In order to bring about changes in American culture, we need to establish an actual, functioning small-scale culture that can influence the wider society in which it exists. Ideally, the local parish would be the center of this micro-culture. Yet more and more parishes are closing their schools, even though such schools should be the center of a culture of life for the faithful.

Education also forms minds and hearts with the “why” that underlies the other apostolates. Education, if it is done well, motivates young people to serve others and equips them to engage with a skeptical society. If other apostolates rescue those in need, education prepares the rescuers. Education underlies the success of other apostolates.

In education, we nurture the truth in the child who is growing in the faith. We form young people in virtue, not only to embrace it and thus strive to live virtuously, but also to achieve the character necessary to work in the other apostolates.

It is not simply about reading, writing, and arithmetic. A Catholic education should leave a person with no doubt about the nature of family, the nature of man and woman, and the nature of right and wrong. There should be no doubt that as Christians we strive toward virtue, in particular toward the divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

The apostolate of Catholic education’s mission of forming the intellects of young Catholics is the apostolate on which so many others will depend—and therefore perhaps the most important apostolate of all.

Aileen S. Coccia

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/01/education-as-an-apostolate/
Stratford Caldecott’s *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* [1] (2012) is like no book in the genre of classical education that I have read to date. It is personal, reflective, profound, spiritual, psychological, learned, practical.

I have hopes that it will fill a great need in my work with Catholic schools seeking to recover and develop our lost traditions, but it might be too rich and varied for most educators. Still, I recommend it to anyone who is serious about Christian education at any level and has time to think with a man of great heart who has read widely and reflected deeply.

Caldecott faces the problem that all contemporary treatments of the Trivium must address: The Trivium cannot be for us what it was in classical times, when mastering the language and literature of ancient Greece and Rome was the whole of pre-collegiate education.

“The lessons drilled on in the morning were regularly recited in the afternoon, and all the work of the week was reviewed in recitation on Fridays and Saturdays. A 16th century schoolmaster estimated that one hour of instruction would require at least six hours of exercise to apply the principles to writing and speaking.” Our segregated curriculum in which the traditionally advanced subjects of mathematics and science claim a large portion of school time does not allow for the focus of yesteryear. And, as Christopher Dawson has pointed out, educators in a democratic age can never leave aside the concern for vocational training.

In this context, Caldecott’s reflections can serve Christian educators well.

But what kind of education would enable a child to progress in the rational understanding of the world without losing his poetic and artistic appreciation of it? This is what I am searching for in the present book.

Caldecott gives us glimpses at how to achieve this goal, while helping us to enlarge our own hearts and imaginations. He precedes his treatment of the Trivium with a chapter on the relationship between teacher and student, which he considers to be the heart of the school. He generally, though not uncritically, approves of the Romantic conviction that the natural impulses of the child towards learning need to be the beginning of education and that the best teachers pay great attention to them. The teacher develops the child as a person by fostering his powers of attention, empathy and imagination as he initiates him into a larger cultural tradition, “…to grow as a person we must learn self-transcendence.”

The chapter on grammar exemplifies the richness and challenge of Caldecott’s whole work. Like others, he wants to free it “from the narrow confines of an association with sentence construction,” but he goes far beyond Dorothy Sayers in presenting the developmental importance for mankind and each child of naming, listening, remembering, imagining, creating. Rooting his ideas theologically in Genesis, he draws lessons from Heidegger and Pope Benedict XVI, Chesterton and Tolkien, Pieper, and Guardini, and many others. He makes important philosophical and psychological claims about the human person: “By speaking of Memory or Remembering we are really speaking of the foundations of attention, of the integration of the personality, and of the road to
contemplation.” He arrives at the practical conclusion that “the restoration of Grammar… must include not only the revival of memory and the discipline of learning by heart (enlarging the heart in the process) but the cultivation of imagination and a poetic or musical vision of the interconnectedness of all things.” Reliance on computerized memory banks is dangerous; crafts, drama and dance, poetry, and storytelling are foundations for independent and critical thought. The chapters on dialectic (logic) and rhetoric offer similar depths and similar difficulties.

Caldecott extends his consideration beyond the Trivium to the importance of philosophy, the fine arts, and history; he dreams of an elementary curriculum devoted to storytelling, music, exploration, painting and drawing, dance, drama, and sport. Finally, he shows how an education centered around “Beauty in the Word” forms the moral imagination and educates the heart. “This book has touched on many themes—no doubt too many, though the case for inclusion of each was overwhelming.” The casual reader will probably share Caldecott’s conflict. The serious reader will look forward to spending some time reflecting with him on the many strands of traditional and contemporary educational thought contained in the work. I will look forward to forming a more complete judgment as I work through it with Catholic educators around the country.

Andrew Seeley

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https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/01/rethinking-foundations-education/
Why Do We Teach Essay-Writing? Do We?

In teaching students the art of writing an essay, we have gone from the thesis to the thoughtless, from a rigorously argued, tightly reasoned, carefully worded work of rhetoric to a loose and lazy stream of consciousness that flows nowhere.

The short thesis, which is not really an essay, but is generally considered as the classic essay form, goes like this: Five paragraphs. State the thesis in the first paragraph. Give three supporting paragraphs. Then, in the final paragraph, repeat the thesis statement, worded slightly differently, giving the impression to the reader that you have demonstrated it.

Or to put it more plainly:

First paragraph: This is what I’m going to say.
Second paragraph: Now I’m saying it.
Third paragraph: I’m saying it again.
Fourth paragraph: I’m saying it again.
Fifth paragraph: This is what I just said.

It is a good exercise in clear thinking, making an argument, giving evidence to support it, and putting a modicum of reason to work. Every student should learn the form, practice it and master it. They should be able to do this by the time they are high school freshmen. Then they should learn how to write an essay. Because the short thesis is not an essay. It is a form of torture. Not for the person who has to write it but for the person who has to read it. Reading the short thesis is similar to being beaten over the head repeatedly with a stick, the only difference being that being beaten over the head with a stick is not as boring as reading a short thesis.

A generation or two ago, our writing teachers recognized the boringness of the short thesis, and so they abandoned it all together. But they have also neglected to teach the art of the essay. Instead, they now teach writing by telling the student something like this: “Here is a blank piece of paper (or, I suppose, a blank screen). Put words on it. Write what you feel. Never mind form or function. Only mind what comes into your mind. Assertions are as good as facts. Associations are even better. Conclusions are close-minded. Punctuation is optional.”

The problem with the new approach is that it also inflicts pain on the reader. It is not the sharp pain of a pointed thesis, but the dull pain of pointlessness. It is also unreadable.

So how can we reel the essay back in?

We have to start by starting over and bringing back the short thesis. We still need to take students through that exercise of making a point and being persuasive about it, but then we have to teach them how to write an essay, an essay that a reader will not only find convincing, that will keep their attention, and be a delight to read.

And that is where we bring in the big gun.

G.K. Chesterton.

Chesterton was one of the most gifted essayists of all time. He wrote over 5,000 essays, and virtually every one of them grabbed readers and wouldn’t let them go. They still have that effect.

Why are his essays so good? Because he is a mystery writer. He writes an essay the same way he writes a mystery story. A good mystery gets your attention immediately and holds it. It gives you lots of interesting
information, all of which keeps you wondering. Then it shocks you with an ending that you do not expect, even though it was sitting there staring at you. It leaves the pleasant and refreshing sensation that comes with the sudden transition from ignorance to knowledge.

The ideal essay should be written using the same three elements of the mystery story: the corpse, the clues, the killer. Or to put it another way: the hook, the string, the catch. Or: the question, the partial answers, the complete answer.

The first sentence of an essay is the all-important hook. It needs to be spectacular. Here is the opening line of one of Chesterton’s most famous essays:

“Lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling.”

It instantly intrigues you with a vivid and unusual image. But notice how it starts you off in one direction, and suddenly startles you with an unexpected twist—in just the first sentence. You must read on. Where is he taking you? You want to find out. You want to go there.

The strength of the essay, which is what distinguishes it from the short thesis, is also its weakness—and its danger. It is the wonderful meandering. It is what happens between the beginning and the end. It is not, and cannot be a straight path. It is what makes an essay interesting, where we find creativity and beauty and all the things that fascinate us, but also where we can get lost, in some cases, irrevocably.

Just as in a detective story there are lots of clues that appear to lead to a dead end and we begin to lose hope that the mystery will be solved, the essay can take us down a lot of scenic side roads that don’t appear to be going anywhere. But done right and done well, these make the conclusion all be more jolting and satisfying.

Consider Chesterton’s essay, “The Twelve Men [1].” It’s about jury duty. After describing all the things going on in a courtroom, Chesterton, as a member of the jury, contemplates how the judge and lawyers, impressive in their trained capacity, seem to have overlooked the reality that a human being is on trial. Then he concludes:

Our civilisation has decided, and very justly decided, that determining the guilt or innocence of men is a thing too important to be trusted to trained men. If it wishes for light upon that awful matter, it asks men who know no more law than I know, but who can feel the things that I felt in the jury box. When it wants a library catalogued, or the solar system discovered, or any trifle of that kind it uses up its specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing round. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity.

Didn’t see that coming.

The only thing more important than the first sentence of an essay is the last sentence. The same thing can be said, I think, of the cosmos.

Dale Ahlquist

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/01/teach-essay-writing/
Virtue Versus Virtuosity

What is the primary purpose of education? Is it to enable our children to be successful in a worldly sense? Is it primarily meant to pave the pathway to a remunerative career? Or is it to enable our children to be successful in that other-worldly sense, in which they are shown how to become holy? Is it primarily meant to pave the pathway to heaven?

As Christian parents, we will presumably agree that the primary purpose of education is to teach our children what it takes to be holy, but I’m sure that most of us hope that our children will also be able to look after themselves financially at some point and that this goal, though secondary, should also form a part of their education. It is, therefore, not either/or but both/and, as long as we put things in the right order.

If, however, the primary purpose of education is the attainment of heavenly health, as distinct from worldly wealth, we need to teach our children the difference between being good and being the best. The paradox is that being good is better than being the best, and that being the best is not always the best thing to be.

Perhaps a practical example might help, and indeed a personal example.

Our daughter is learning to play the piano. She is learning to do so because it is good for her to learn to play a musical instrument. She is improving in her musical ability, to be sure, but she would be even better were she to practice more. As parents, however, we are much more concerned with her growth in virtue than in her virtuosity. She needs time to do her other studies, time to help with the education of her special-needs brother, time to read, time to play, time to pray, time to be with friends, time to be with us.

All of this encroaches upon the time she has to practice the piano. In learning to be the proverbial Jack- or Jill-of-all-trades, she is destined to be master or mistress of none. And this is the way it should be. If the specialization in one area leads to the neglect of other equally important areas, it is detrimental to a child’s growth in knowledge and the experience of many things necessary to a growth in virtue.

At the heart of this understanding of education is another paradox as seemingly perplexing as the paradox that the best is not always best. This other paradox was coined by G.K. Chesterton. It is that anything worth doing is worth doing badly [1]. Such a paradox is so counterintuitive that we are tempted to move from perplexity to apoplexy, insisting that it is nothing but arrant nonsense. Obviously, anything that is worth doing is worth doing well. How can anyone suggest that it should be done badly? What on earth was the usually sagacious Chesterton thinking when he uttered such nonsense masquerading as paradox?

If we are to answer these questions, we need to take a step back so that we can see what Chesterton was actually saying. In saying that a thing worth doing is worth doing badly, he is not saying that it is not worth doing well. It’s not an either/or scenario. It’s a both/and scenario. A thing worth doing is worth doing badly and it is worth doing well. Indeed, it is worth doing badly because it is worth doing well. And here is the heart of the paradox: It is impossible to do a thing well until you have done it badly. Unless you are prepared to do
it badly, you will never do it well. As the saying goes, practice makes perfect.

And what is true of playing the piano is true of even more important things, such as growing in virtue. We need to practice the faith, however badly, because doing it badly is worth doing. It is infinitely better than not doing it at all—however badly we do it. Of course, we should try to do it better; indeed, we should always be trying to do it better. And yet in doing things better we should not be trying to be the best because we can never be the best. God is Best. We can only get better by becoming more like the Best, knowing that we can never be the Best. This is the way of virtue which transcends relative trivialities such as virtuosity.

Joseph Pearce

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/01/virtue-versus-virtuosity/
The 21st century, often characterized by excessive noise and distractions, can benefit from a renewal of contemplation. One might encounter terms such as reflection, meditation, or deliberation in contemporary education, but these terms are the “poor cousins” when compared to contemplation.

St. Thomas Aquinas succinctly defines contemplation as “the simple act of gazing on the truth” [1], and contemplation surpasses considering or ruminating upon a topic, because one is drawn to know and accept the truth of the matter.

“The simple act of gazing” is a conundrum for the contemporary secular world that struggles to understand or accept contemplation, because it cannot be achieved in the same manner that other knowledge is gained. Contemplation is neither earned by hard work, nor by an accumulation of hours, nor is it ranked on a numerical scale. Gazing requires a sustained period of time with a reduced number of visual and auditory distractions; nevertheless, reducing distractions, a simple and obvious solution, may prove difficult to enact in an age of pop-up advertisements and background music in stores and restaurants.

Fickle contemporary society bombards us with a sense of busyness, noise, and immediacy, yet many of us admit to experiencing an increase of stress, anxiety, or technological overload. Even in the midst of the din of the secular world, there springs forth a desire for a type of quiet reflection, as indicated by the popular interest in Zen or mindfulness.

Another “distraction” from gazing is not the direct incursion of technology or commerce, but may be manifested in the subtle and gradual awareness of our withdrawal from the natural world and landscape. The deprivation of sensory experiences in nature, especially in children and young adults, has been explored by Richard Louv in The Last Child in the Woods [2] and Stephen Moss in Natural Childhood [3], a report commissioned by the National Trust (UK), as well as anecdotal observations by educators, whether in elementary school or in higher education.

Primary nature experiences are paramount to our spiritual flourishing, especially as The Catechism of the Catholic Church expresses that a person learns to “read,” to gaze upon “the material cosmos” for “traces of its Creator” (#1147). A person who lacks the ability to contemplate upon the “light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit” may grapple with identifying and interpreting symbolic words and images of the sacramental and liturgical life which are based on the natural world. The loss of natural experiences affects the depths of man’s spirit by disrupting the contemplative gaze, that is, man’s ability to search for the truth.

In the secular world, this deprivation has spurred a desire for a spiritual or transcendent relation with nature and has initiated a renewal of nature writing, notably by English authors Robert Macfarlane, Alexandra Harris, and the launch of Little Toller Press [4], which seeks “inventive ways to reconnect us with the natural world.” The new nature writers beckon for a strong relationship to the natural world, and many passages evoke the comparison of the exterior natural landscapes with the interior landscape and articulate a desire to venture...
into the wild places, the hinterlands, to gaze, to listen, to contemplate.

Contemplation requires an interior decision to search for the truth that precipitates the reduction of noise and activity. In fostering contemplation in the digital age, one approach could consist in neither retreating from the world, nor cutting off the electricity, but by articulating the challenges and offering an alternative mode of life and creativity.

Reverend Conrad Pepler, OP, an English friar, offered an analysis of the complex struggle with modernity in the mid-20th century in Riches Despised: A Study of the Roots of Religion [5]. In a frank tone that is slightly tempered with a vague sense of hope, Pepler asserts that we “argue here… that the Christian religion cannot exist normally and as an integral part of society in the artificiality of modern civilization…. But we can see that every Christian must strain his eyes through the fog of the modern imagination to see ‘the holy city, new Jerusalem.’” The contemplative gaze is precisely that which can help us see through the fog of modernity to the divine truths.

Contemplation can assist by prioritizing and determining the object of the focus by enlarging the soul with a wider and deeper vision, and so is integral to Catholic education since it primes the interior senses and intellect to be receptive to the glimmers of truths which light the path to the Truth.

Sister Thomas More Stepnowski, O.P.

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/01/contemplation-heart-catholic-education/
Einstein on the Humanities

Those architects of modern education obsessed with abandoning the humanities in favor of the so-called STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and math) should pause to consider the words of Albert Einstein, arguably the greatest scientist of the 20th century.

Writing in the New York Times on Oct. 5, 1952, Einstein warned of the dangers of teaching the scientific “stem” while abandoning the human roots of education. “It is not enough to teach a man a specialty,” he wrote. “Through it he may become a kind of useful machine, but not a harmoniously developed personality.”

It was “essential,” Einstein continued, that the student “acquire an understanding of and a lively feeling for values.” Specifically, he must acquire “a vivid sense of the beautiful and the morally good.” In the absence of such a well-balanced education, a student, possessing nothing but his limited specialized knowledge “more closely resembles a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person.”

Einstein believed in an education built on the humanities, whereby the student could “learn to understand the motives of human beings, their illusions, and their sufferings.” It was only through this education in the humanities that the student could gain “a proper relationship to individual fellow men and to their community.” In more specifically Catholic parlance or terminology, we might rephrase Einstein’s argument by saying that an education in the humanities is necessary for the fostering of a healthy respect for the dignity of the human person and for a true appreciation of what constitutes the common good.

“These precious things are conveyed to the younger generation through personal contact with those who teach,” Einstein wrote, “not—or at least not in the main—through textbooks.” It was this “that primarily constitutes and preserves culture.”

In his book, Ideas and Opinions [1] (1954), Einstein insisted upon the limits of the scientific method which could “teach us nothing else beyond how facts are related to, and conditioned by, each other.” Although “the aspiration toward such objective knowledge belongs to the highest of which man is capable,” it was not in itself sufficient or of primary importance, because “knowledge of what ‘is’ does not open the door directly to ‘what should be.’” In other words, science can teach us nothing about ethics.

In “A Message to Intellectuals [2],” published on Aug. 29, 1948, and included in Ideas and Opinions, Einstein went even further in expressing his concerns, condemning the naiveté of those who place their faith in science and technology to the neglect and detriment of humanity: Penetrating research and keen scientific work have often had tragic implications for mankind, producing, on the one hand, inventions which liberate man from exhausting physical labor, making his life easier and richer; but on the other hand, introducing a grave restlessness into his life, making him a slave to his technological environment, and—most catastrophic of all—creating the means for his own mass destruction.

Today, almost 70 years after these words were written, they resonate as strongly as ever, perhaps even more strongly than ever in the age of the iPhone and other addictive
devices. It is clear today, as it was clear to Einstein then, that an education obsessed with science, technology, engineering, and math, to the exclusion or neglect of the humanities, stems the growth and development of the human person, on the one hand, and unleashes technology without ethical constraints, on the other. Only a fool would advocate such an education. Einstein was no fool. Apart from being the century’s greatest scientist, he was also an advocate of a good and healthy liberal arts education.

Joseph Pearce

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/01/einstein-on-the-humanities/
The Uncommon Core of a Saint Mary’s Education

In this Common Core era, Saint Mary’s Catholic High School stands out. To discover what makes the school so unique, one only needs to look at our mission statement: “The mission of Saint Mary’s Catholic High School is to provide a Liberal Arts education that forms virtuous young men and women who know the Truth and love the Good.”

Like every other college preparatory high school, we make sure our students are ready for whichever university they choose to attend, but our primary concern is not “career and college readiness” or the “challenges of a 21st century world.” On the contrary, our first concern is man’s last end. Everything we do at Saint Mary’s—our courses, our campus ministry, our athletic competitions, everything—is oriented to this end. This is because we understand a fundamental truth that is too easily and too often forgotten: Man was not created for career and college; he was created for happiness.

The happiness for which we have all been made is not the fleeting, superficial happiness of pleasure or wealth or power or fame. This happiness is the eternal happiness that comes only from fulfilling one’s true purpose, of becoming, as Pope St. John Paul II would say, “who we are.” This is why our mission statement speaks of virtue and the liberal arts, but not of career and college readiness. Virtue and the liberal arts are at the heart of our mission, and together they constitute the “uncommon core” of a Saint Mary’s education. Understanding these terms is essential to understanding the formation Saint Mary’s offers its students.

Virtue is often defined as “a habitual disposition to do good,” but it can also be understood to mean “excellence.” In the intellectual realm, the good to which we are disposed is truth. Aristotle tells us in his Metaphysics that all men by nature desire to know the truth. This—seeking and finding truth—is what intellects are for. Good intellects—that is, well-formed minds—do this excellently and habitually, with ease and with pleasure. In the moral sphere, the good to which our wills are drawn is goodness itself. Well-formed hearts love the good and habitually choose what is good for themselves and for others.

In order to habitually and excellently know truth and love the good, people must be free to fully exercise their intellectual and moral faculties. Those arts which enable men to do so are called the liberal arts. Today, when people refer to a “liberal arts education,” they usually mean “not-STEM” (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). However, that is a very superficial understanding of the term.

Traditionally, there were seven liberal arts: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. These arts were divided between the trivium and the quadrivium. The trivium (Latin for “three ways”) consists of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, the so-called “language arts.” These arts are not subjects, per se, but are rather the prerequisite tools of language that must be mastered before specialized study can begin. In order to make sense of the world, one must be able to talk intelligently about it.

The first of the liberal arts, grammar, is concerned with how to communicate—how to make sense when using words to describe
reality. The second, logic, deals with the arrangement of grammatically correct statements into arguments that are true. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. It teaches how to arrange and present grammatically correct statements and logical arguments in the way most likely to convince an audience to agree with the speaker or do what he wishes.

At Saint Mary’s, students explicitly study the trivium as freshmen in their “Grammar & Composition” class and as sophomores in “Speech & Rhetoric” class. But because language is the foundation of learning, they employ these liberal arts in all their classes, most especially in their “Seat of Wisdom” seminar classes, which integrate the study of history and literature while making extensive use of Socratic discussions.

In contrast to the trivium—which deals primarily with language and the communication of ideas—the quadrivium (i.e. “four ways”) equips students to quantify and measure the material world. The quadrivium is concerned with number (arithmetic), volume (geometry), extension in time (music), and extension in space (astronomy). These arts help students recognize patterns that occur in nature and in art and prepare students for all areas of study that make use of pattern recognition such as medicine, law, finance, all the sciences, and even sports. Most importantly, the quadrivium shows students clearly that truth exists and that it can be known with certainty.

Collectively, these seven arts form the basis upon which all other study is made possible. Through the study of the liberal arts, students learn how to think and how to communicate, how to recognize patterns and how to make connections between subjects.

These habits are essential to being a well-formed human being, who not only knows facts and can perform certain functions, but who understands facts and sees their significance in relation to other truths. In other words, these habits help men become wise, not just smart. Animals can be trained, but only humans can be educated. The liberal arts help men and women as men and women become the best versions of themselves they can be.

Of course, a liberal arts education alone is insufficient for bringing man to his final, beatific end. As Pope Leo XIII writes in Divini Illius Magistri [2] (1929), “every method of education founded, wholly or in part, on the denial or forgetfulness of original sin and of grace, and relying on the sole powers of human nature, is unsound.” To achieve ultimate happiness, one needs God’s grace, which comes to us through the Church and her sacraments. Thankfully, Saint Mary’s is imbued with the sacramental life, and students can receive that grace every day.

Saint Mary’s is uniquely capable of educating the whole child. By providing an education that forms the hearts, minds, and souls of the young in virtue, Saint Mary’s prepares young men and women to be receptive to God’s grace and to recognize Him at work in all things that are good, true, and beautiful.

Robert Drapeau

The old image of the snake eating its own tail has descended into reality. Starting with a media mogul, rifling through Capitol Hill, and landing on the doorstep of The Today Show with NBC’s firing Matt Lauer, this fall’s outrage has landed relativism and sexual mores on the front burner of the news cycle. Alabama elections, the NFL network, and rap producers are keeping the burner lit well into the winter.

Shock! Outrage! Men! My friends who work in Hollywood are almost at a loss of words for the pretend outrage that was expressed over the harassment that occurred in Tinsel Town. [Author’s note: Not all in “the industry,” as we call it here, are depraved. There are many excellent Catholic folks making their mark, too.] Everyone knows it happens and has been happening for decades. Now, these same people who have promoted sexual promiscuity and moral aberrations in movie after movie after movie clamor to tweet their outrage. The sane people are genuinely outraged at the others’ pretend outrage.

Then there are the pols and their loose morals—or is it their enemies who are casting false aspersions and just want to topple them? It is happening on both sides of the aisle, so it appears there is plenty of blame to go around. This sector of slime even has the major news media slapping themselves on the wrist for not holding former President Clinton to a higher standard—maybe a standard of common decency?

The NFL has battled this for some years now. Then there are all the other abuses that keep coming into the light of day.

Why should we be surprised? Should we not share the outrage of my friends in Hollywood, that is the righteous outrage at the fake outrage? We should! We must! This should find its way into our conversations, in our letters to editors, in our forming our children in morality and decency, and in our Catholic schools.

For over 50 years, we have battled such relativistic thinking in the education system at large. Our Catholic schools, sadly, were not immune to it. Some decades ago in my Catholic high school, all the rage in religion courses was “situation ethics.” Morality was largely determined by our feelings, and thus our consciences were being formed subjectively, in the vein of relativism. It was just one symptom of a deeper cultural problem.

We saw it too with the demise of the Immaculate Heart nuns in Los Angeles who saw their order decimated [1] in less than five years due to the experimental psychology of Carl Rogers rocking the foundation of their self-gift to serve Christ and His Church. We have seen columns in this Journal shining a light on some of these battles happening today, but we have also seen good news of it being countered.

The snake of modernism is eating its own tail. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI warned us of the dictatorship of relativism, and the dictator is starting to destroy its innermost circle of trusted cohorts. C.S. Lewis’ prognostication was that modern educational theories on the subjectivity of knowledge and moral relativism would give us people lacking in character. We have that in spades! All the accusations that assail us in the news cycle are simply the logical, natural consequences of several generations of the
destruction of traditional morality, genuine decency, and simple common sense. The modernist culture has worked so hard to mock and tear down traditional values, and they succeeded. And now they are aghast? Poppycock! They are simply reaping what they have sown for generations now. What right have they to complain? Well, truth be told, they have every right, because we all have a calling to convert at every moment, should we open our ears to hear. Think of Mary Magdalen and her simple and devout cry to our Lord, “Rabonni (Teacher).”

As bad as things have been, we still have God’s law written on our hearts. Sooner or later false ideas must come back to haunt us. Evil will sting us, eventually. The snake must, finally, eat its own tail when it runs out of other things to devour. And then we wake up! The outrage we are hearing, even from those who propagate so much of the gutter culture, is because what is happening is just wrong. By every measure, sexual harassment and lewd behavior is wrong and should not be tolerated. Might the outrage we are hearing about be a glimmer of hope?

Hence, we arrive at the Catholic Education Moment. Allow me to offer that, at least to us in Catholic education, it is a huge opportunity. If the world is ready for direction, answers, and the freedom that comes with God’s law, then we have the answer.

Our schools, in hearkening back to our intellectual and moral tradition can offer a deeply desirable and satisfying refuge from the insanity. If we boldly proclaim our stance, our mission, our heritage, we will attract the increasingly scared parents who may not be sure exactly what is wrong, but they know the solution must be different than marching along the same path we are on. Progress is not progress if we are heading in the wrong direction, and that is precisely where progressives get it wrong!

So, let the snake eat its tail. For the rest, come join us at the feast of the bridegroom!

Michael van Hecke

A proposal to end the ability of Catholic schools in Ireland to give preference to Catholic children is causing fears over the increasing secularization of society in the majority-Catholic country.

Unlike in the United States, the government funds religious schools in Ireland, and about 96 percent of elementary schools in the country are under the patronage of a religious group, and approximately 90 percent of these schools are run by the Catholic Church.

In some areas of the country - mostly in and around the capital Dublin - there are more students seeking places in certain Catholic schools than are available. These ‘oversubscribed’ schools can choose students belonging to the school’s denomination over students who live closer to the campus.

Last year, Ireland’s Minister for Education Richard Bruton announced plans to prohibit Catholic primary schools - but not schools from minority denominations such as the (Anglican) Church of Ireland - from giving priority to students based upon their religion.

According to a statement from the Ministry for Education, Bruton argues it is “unfair that preference is given by publicly-funded religious schools to children of their own religion who might live some distance away, ahead of children of a different religion or of no religion who live close to the school.”

Although the government is presenting this as guaranteeing a child’s right to an education, others see it as a sign of a growing secularization of Irish society.

“The core problem in all of this is that people believe that if you take religion out of schools, schools are then neutral. But they’re not neutral, because there is always a belief system involved in the schools,” said Patrick Treacy, a lawyer belonging to Faith in Our Schools, an interdenominational group supporting the freedom of religious schools.

“I draw a distinction between the term secular and secularist. I believe in every constitutional democracy, it must be secular: That is, that competing versions of the good and the role of religion must co-exist and mutually support and respect each other. That’s the secular perspective. The secularist perspective is that there is no place for religion in public life: No place for religion in schools, no place for religion in public debate,” Treacy told Crux.

The Republic of Ireland was once known as the most Catholic country in Western Europe, but more and more people are describing themselves as having no religion.

Currently, just over 78 percent of the population describes itself as Catholic, a sharp decline from the 84 percent who said they were Catholic in 2011. Of that number, less than 30 percent attend Mass every week; it was over 87 percent just 20 years ago.

Revelations about clerical sexual abuse has led to much of this decline, and to a less deferential position towards the Church from the government.

In 2011, the Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny said the “historic relationship between church and state in Ireland could not be the same again. The rape and torture of children were downplayed or ‘managed’ to uphold instead the primacy of the
The most striking example of the loss of Church influence was in 2015, when Ireland held a referendum on same-sex marriage in which 62 percent of the voters backed changing the constitution to allow the practice.

(The government is now preparing another referendum to strike down the constitution’s protections for the unborn, allowing legalized abortion in the country.)

Treacy told Crux the same lobby groups which pushed for same-sex marriage are now supporting changing the law on how Catholic schools can select their pupils.

“There is a very definite overlap - not just in personnel but in modus operandi - of advocates for marriage equality, as it’s so-called, and for education equality,” he said.

“The problem is, everyone is in favor of equality, and equality is a fundamental Christian principle, but what the secularists are arguing is a principle of absolute equality. What I mean is, equality must be balanced with freedom and with responsibility,” Treacy continued.

Behind the scenes, the Catholic school establishment in Ireland has been vigorously opposing the proposal.

Using Ireland’s Freedom of Information Act, The Irish Times accessed the submission to the government from several affected Catholic institutions.

Charles Collins

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CATAPULT LEARNING AWARDED CONTRACT FOR TITLE IV PROGRAM TO SERVE PRIVATE NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF GALVESTON-HOUSTON

Title IV Program Joins the Company’s Title I and II Program Partnerships with HISD

October 23, 2017, Camden, NJ – Catapult Learning, Inc. today announced that the company has been awarded a contract by the Houston Independent School District to provide Title IV, Part A services to private, nonpublic schools within the district. Catapult is the sole recipient of this one-year contract (RFP is option to renew through 2022), which will enable the company to provide services to as many as 52 private nonpublic schools within the Houston Independent School District. The Title IV, Part A program, also known as the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant, will service schools in three focus areas: well-rounded educational opportunities; activities to support safe and healthy students’ activity; and effective use of technology.

The Title IV program services will support students, families, teachers, and school leaders. The family-specific programming focuses on family engagement and personal well-being as critical to student success. STEM-focused programs—targeting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)—will support both students and teachers, providing STEM literature and hands-on activities for students and professional development workshops for teachers.

“The Title IV, Part A grant provides great flexibility to support eligible students at our participating schools,” said Pamela Evans, Manager, External Funding - Titles I, II & IV, for Houston Independent School District. “This new grant expands our working relationship with Catapult Learning that is centered around ongoing collaboration between Houston ISD, Catapult Learning, and our private nonprofit schools.”

Catapult Learning has provided education services to the Houston Independent School District (HISD), the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston (ADGH), and the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston for nearly ten years. The company partners with HISD, providing Title I and Title II services to more than 2,000 students and professional development to over 1,000 teachers and school leaders annually.

“This is an exciting opportunity for us to grow and strengthen our partnerships with Houston ISD, ADGH, and the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston,” said Meridith Banks, Catapult Learning’s Regional Director. “This new Title IV program allows us to provide additional
Catapult Learning provides Title I and Title II services in both public and nonpublic schools throughout the country. Several of its longest-standing partnerships are with the largest dioceses and archdioceses in the country, including New York, Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, in addition to Galveston-Houston. The company is a proud partner to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) and is participating in this week’s NCEA Catholic Leadership Summit in Tempe, Arizona.

About Catapult Learning
Catapult Learning, Inc. has dedicated over four decades to providing education solutions that generate demonstrable academic achievement and better life outcomes for students, regardless of their learning barriers or other challenges they may face. The company’s team of 5,600 educators works to achieve sustained academic gains and build teacher and leadership capacity through evidence-based programs that include intervention services, special education and alternative education programs, and professional development solutions. Founded in 1976 and headquartered in Camden, New Jersey, Catapult Learning partners with over 500 school districts, including 18 of the 20 largest school districts in the United States. Catapult Learning has Education Service Agency Accreditation by AdvancED, a global leader in providing improvement and accreditation services worldwide. www.catapultlearning.com
Latin Makes a Comeback

The Church may have mothballed much of its Latin, but in the secular world it’s become the third most studied language.

Why Latin?

That exposure is growing in the secular world as well. The American Classical League/National Junior Classical League (ACL/NJCL) gave the first National Latin Exam to 7,000 students in 1978. In 2016, 154,000 sat for it, and the numbers keep climbing, with the largest growth coming from home-schooling families.

Designed to encourage the study of Latin and give students a sense of accomplishment, the Exam presents 40 questions at seven different levels of study from first-year students to those studying at the highest levels. Questions include not just grammar and vocabulary, but also mythology, English derivatives, and classical life, history and geography. The NLE awards gold and silver medals for excellence, and has given out $1 million in student loans over the years. Some students are drawn to Latin to get an edge on the SATs, since there’s evidence it helps improve scores, but most are drawn to culture and the way Latin aids in understanding the very roots of language. Sixty percent of English, as well as huge portions of many other languages, is derived from Latin, so understanding Latin provides a solid foundation for future language study. Linda Montross, Co-Chair, ACL/NJCL National Latin Exam, adds that “students who study Latin are better writers, speakers, thinkers.”

At Thomas More College, students must take Latin or Greek for the first two years.

The college’s chief Latinist, Fred Frasier, says it does more than just help with English composition. “As the students undergo the liberal arts curriculum, they encounter texts that move them deeply, but which are translated from Latin into English, or they develop an appreciation for Latin as a sacred language in the Roman Catholic Liturgy. In both of these cases, they realize that by knowing Latin they can deepen their sense of a text or of the liturgy. I regularly witness Latin strengthening the spiritual life of the students at Mass and in their private devotions. During Mass, especially a sung Mass, students participate more fully when they understand the Latin responses that they are making.”

Since Latin is a “dead” (that is, unchanging and largely unspoken) language, the focus is on reading rather than speaking. As Kristie Joyce points out, that means teachers “focus more on myth and stories. In my experience, students would much rather read ancient myths and stories and make connections to our world today, than learn how to introduce themselves and go to a café as they do in the ‘living’ language classes.”

Charlotte, a high school freshman and first year gold medalist, chose to study Latin “because of how beneficial it will be when trying to decipher seemingly gibberish words on standardized tests. Also, as a history nerd I like preserving old things, so it feels nice to contribute to keeping such an ancient language alive. I enjoy Latin for the interesting culture that comes with it, and the passages and letters written over a thousand years ago that I can now translate and understand. It opens a window into history.”
Thomas L. McDonald

https://aleteia.org/2016/05/18/latin-makes-a-comeback/2/#.Wl_suFkKIwg.email
Let’s Educate for Happiness, not Just Success

We need to teach our children that a good life means much more than having a great job.

The Common Core standards, which most states have implemented, aim to prepare a student, starting with kindergarten, for the career he or she will eventually have — whether that starts after high school, or after higher education.

These standards are by no means unique to the Common Core. The vast majority of schools, public or private, secular or Catholic, have similar goals. Education today is for the sake of eventually landing the best possible career.

I want my kids to have great careers, too, but not because having a stable job means anything in itself. No, I just want my kids to be happy. My grandmother used to say, “Money can’t make you happy, but not having money can sure make you miserable!” I’d like to guard them from that particular kind of unhappiness, if I can. A good career isn’t a bad goal at all and schools and parents are right to want to give their students all the practical advantages they can.

Unfortunately, all the success in the world is no guarantee of happiness, so what if we could do better? What if we could educate our children towards becoming happy, not just towards a great career that, we hope, will contribute to their happiness?

Educator Karen Landry, writing for the Cardinal Newman Society, says education can do just that, and it’s called the liberal arts. To a Christian, she explains, “True happiness is found in God. Made in His image and likeness, our souls are meant to reflect His divine order. The soul, oriented to God, in love with God, and subject to His will, is happy.” She goes on, “A liberal arts education is a means of teaching the student to be happy by learning to love what is good, true, and beautiful. God is the Origin of all goodness, truth, and beauty — and that means loving Him and ordering one’s life accordingly.”

You can see why most schools aren’t able (even if they were willing) to teach to this understanding of happiness. And certainly, I’m glad students are being taught practical, concrete skills which will help support them in their adult lives. But we, as parents, need to keep in mind that the schools aren’t offering an education in happiness; they’re offering an education in career success, and crossing their fingers, hoping that success will offer the student a happy life. We don’t have to just cross our fingers and hope. Parents, writes St. John Paul II, are the “first and foremost educators of their children,” even when they’ve delegated that task to other teachers. That makes it our job to teach our children that living a good life means much more than just working a good job.

How do we do that? It’s daunting, especially when our kids’ energy is taken up with their ordinary school day already. Luckily, the liberal arts, being ordered toward human flourishing, have a way of fitting in anywhere that goodness, truth, and beauty, are found.

Landry writes, “At the heart of a liberal arts education lies the student’s engagement … with personal experience of truth, goodness, and beauty in countless ways: music, poetry, dance, drama, and sports, to name a few. On a daily basis, these encounters shape their
affections, order their souls, and encourage self-reflection.”

It’s the experience of these fundamental three aspects of the world which is the real education. Even if you can’t send your kids to a liberal arts oriented school, nothing can stop them from accessing truth, beauty, and goodness. As much as you can, expose your children to beauty. Encounter truth with them, experience goodness, and talk about all of it; never stop having that all-important conversation about the central place that these three things ought to occupy in our lives. Teach them who they are, and who God made them to be, and model those values in your own life.

This is at the heart of what the liberal arts emphasizes, and it can be a constant reminder to you and your children of life’s real priorities — to find happiness in God, and develop an understanding of who you are and who you’re made to be.

Anna O’Neil

https://aleteia.org/2018/01/10/lets-educate-for-happiness-not-just-success/#.W1eDtE58VJA.email
Traveling Crucifixes Help Young People Pray About Vocations

Lisa Tuszkiewicz’s fifth-grade students at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic School in Medina, Minnesota, have a long road of discernment before they enter their vocations as adults.

But praying with a special traveling crucifix with their classmates for a week in October has been an important stop on their journey to discover God’s plan for their lives, their teacher said.

The class’ prayer with the nine-inch wooden crucifix, which was provided by local Serra Clubs, tied into “talking about how it’s very challenging in today’s world to be calm, still and quiet and listen to how the Lord is trying to guide us into fully having an appreciation and understanding for the passions that we have in life and how those passions and interests lead us to our eventual vocation,” Tuszkiewicz said.

Other Catholic-school students around the country are also learning about vocations and considering their own, as well as praying for vocations, with the crucifixes.

The Serra Clubs’ effort to connect Jesus’ ministry and his passion to vocations through dedicated traveling crucifixes both helps children understand vocations and gives parents and teachers a means to encourage conversation and prayer with them as they consider their futures, Serra leaders say. Whether those prayers and conversations start in classrooms or at home, U.S. Serra Clubs hope to reach Catholic schoolchildren nationwide.

The USA Council of Serra International is a nonprofit organization consisting of lay Catholics in local clubs who foster and promote priestly and religious vocations and strive to respond to God’s call to holiness in Christ.

Serra has long helped young people consider vocations, according to Serra USA’s episcopal adviser Auxiliary Bishop Andrew Cozzens of the St. Paul and Minneapolis Archdiocese. “These new resources for our Catholic schools help our young people ponder and discover the mystery of their personal vocation: the central truth that God has a plan for every human life. This is an essential aspect of our faith which we must learn to present to our young people, especially in our Catholic schools.”

For more than 40 years, Serra Clubs throughout the country have provided parishes with chalices and crucifixes to encourage prayer for vocations.

The USA Council is now emphasizing crucifixes in Catholic schools to involve more children directly in prayer and consideration of their vocations, said Judy Cozzens, USA Council president-elect and the mother of Bishop Cozzens.

Clubs in more than 10 locations have purchased the crucifixes for schools and more plan to offer them. Prayers, lesson plans and other resources are available at SerraSpark.org.

At home or in class, the crucifixes offer a focal point for daily prayer, said John Halloran, Serra USA Council vocations vice president and Lake Charles, Louisiana, Serra Club president.

The aim is to help grade-school students consider a priestly or religious vocation before they’ve decided on a career path,
Halloran said. “We’re trying to plant a seed a lot earlier for them to consider.”

For schools that rotate the crucifixes between classrooms, the traveling crucifix is closer to students than the one on their classroom wall, Judy Cozzens said, adding, “They can hold it and think: ‘Jesus died for me. I can give my life for him.’”

When students take the crucifixes home, the family has added motivation to pray together, said Father Brian Schieber, pastor of St. Michael the Archangel parish in Leawood, Kansas. The parish’s school has been using crucifixes to promote vocations for two years.

Frequently, vocations begin with prayer, he said. “If we’re not praying, how are we going to know what God wants us to do? So we’re trying to find ways to say, ‘Hey, this is your homework this week: to go home and pray with your family.’”

In offering crucifixes, Serra isn’t equating a vocation with crucifixion, but wants to help students understand ministry and what their role can be, Halloran said. “We need Catholics to do as Jesus did,” he said, “to minister to the flock and try to make the connection between Jesus’ total life of ministry and his ultimate sacrifice — because by being a priest or a religious, the sacrifice is no marriage, no kids.”

During St. Michael the Archangel School’s Friday school Mass, Father Schieber gives three students crucifixes to take home for the week. Students in the parish’s religious-education program also can take home a crucifix.

“There’s a value to that, too, just having that weekly reminder, that this is important — we have to pray about what God wants us to do,” the priest explained.

The crucifix gives parents a more natural way to talk about vocations, added Father Schieber, whose own father encouraged him to become a priest. “Just raising the question can bear a lot of fruit.”

Nicole Callahan’s kindergarten class probably won’t comprehend all of the vocational discussion as a crucifix travels around Our Mother of Sorrows School in Tucson, Arizona, this year, but the subject likely will come up at home with her 9- and 11-year-old daughters, who attend the school, she said.

Callahan said conversation and communication about prayer and vocations at home are important. “It’s a great starting point to get prayer back in the home or discussion and an awareness of” vocations going in families.

Callahan, who also has a 4-year-old son, said she hopes her daughters will lead some of the discussion about vocations and service.

This school year, 11 Serra Clubs in the St. Paul and Minneapolis Archdiocese provided crucifixes for use in classrooms of more than 30 archdiocesan schools and eventually plan to provide them for all 79 grade schools and nine high schools, Judy Cozzens said.

So far, Minnesota teachers are enthused about the program, which gives them a tool for lessons on vocations, she said.

Dean Ellingson, who teaches sixth grade at Holy Name of Jesus School, had one of the crucifixes in his classroom before Christmas.
A Catholic-school environment where service is encouraged is good for teaching students about vocations and using their gifts, he said. The crucifix, along with his class’ Nativity scene, fostered discussion about Jesus’ life, including when Christ was a boy in the Temple coming to terms with his vocation, Ellingson said. “It’s a good time for them to begin to question and start to figure out, ‘What is my calling and my vocation, and how am I going to fulfill that?’”

His student Victoria Zamorano, 11, said the story makes her think, “I can be just the age I am to learn more about God and myself and how to make decisions. Every decision I make is a reflection of what God taught me; that’s what I hope I’m doing.”

Sixth-grader Louis Wehmann, 11, prayed with the crucifix in Ellingson’s class last fall. “It kind of connects everybody in the school, and you can talk about what your experiences were,” he said.

Halloran’s club, which previously has provided chalices in parishes, hopes to launch a crucifix program this fall, he said. The club has purchased crucifixes and binders with prayers for students in seven schools and, pending bishop approval, to take home, he said.

He is hopeful the seeds planted now through these programs will grow into vocations.

“We won’t know the fruits of this for years to come,” he said. We will “see if it does increase the number of young men and young women saying Yes to vocations.”

Susan Klemond

‘Abuse’: Boston Globe Slams Academy-Award Nominated Gay Film That Normalizes Man-Boy Sex

Despite the fact that Hollywood is still swirling in a vortex of sexual harassment allegations, “Call Me by Your Name,” a movie about an older man’s homosexual "romance" with a 17-year-old boy, has picked up four Academy Award nominations.

The film is nominated for Best Picture, Best Actor for Timothée Chalamet, Best Adapted Screenplay, and Best Original Song.

But by nominating the film, voting members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) have just put their tacit personal seals of approval on what the Boston Globe is calling "sexual predation and abuse."

"Call Me by Your Name,' the new film by Luca Guadagnino, is a deftly directed, beautifully photographed, wonderfully acted master class in sexual predation and abuse," wrote Cheyenne Montgomery in a January 25 column titled ‘Call Me by Your Name’ is a dishonest, dangerous film.

"Although many reviewers touch on the problematic 'age gap' between them, for the most part, they minimize those concerns and lavish praise on the movie. (‘An erotic triumph,’ says one; ‘a romantic marvel,’ says another)," Montgomery continues.

"But even the brief 'age gap' caveats miss the point. 'Call Me by Your Name' isn’t about an older man and a younger man. It falsely romanticizes an exploitative relationship between a grown man and a teenager. These manipulative relationships cause lasting damage, as I know from my own experience,’ she adds.

Montgomery went on to relate how when she was a teen she was sexually manipulated and abused by an adult who at first posed as her protector.

"In real life and in the movie, these shouldn’t be thought of as sexy coming-of-age romances, deliciously painful trysts from which both partners emerge better for having known each other. When an adult grooms a teenager, and engages her or him in a sexual relationship, it’s neither romantic nor consensual. It left me shattered. For years I lived with intense shame, believing I was a bad person," she wrote.

"This film has the potential to cause real harm by normalizing this kind of sexual predation. It could be particularly damaging for LGBT youth, who are already at a high risk for depression and suicide."

"So no, 'Call Me by Your Name' isn’t a radical, brilliant piece of art. We need to call it by its name. That name is abuse," she concluded.

Since the movie debuted in November, it has been touted as an Oscar favorite by countless critics.

“Call Me By Your Name Just Officially Became This Year's Oscars Frontrunner,” trumpeted a W Magazine headline. Rolling Stone declared it “the most romantic movie of the year” and “an instant classic.” The New Yorker called it an “erotic triumph, emotionally acute and overwhelmingly sensual,” and it was hailed by Entertainment Weekly as “gorgeous and intoxicating.”

Catholic writer Daniel Mattson, author of Why I don’t Call Myself Gay, also called the film "dangerous."
“I know many men to whom this sort of thing happened. This is indeed a dangerous film,” he tweeted.

Ex-gay porn actor Joseph Scambio said that the story of a broken young man looking for affirmation from other men can be told of practically all gay men, though many would not admit it.

“Sciambra, now a faithful Catholic, said when as a boy he finally had the courage to walk into a gay bar what he found were an enormous number of older men eager to show him the ropes, which they did, and pass him around. Already wounded by his own relationship with his father, Scambio eagerly sought refuge there. He says the same story can be told of practically all gay men, though they won’t admit it to you or me,” wrote Austin Ruse last summer in Crisis Magazine.

After scoring win after win in courts across the nation, culminating in the United States Supreme Court’s landmark same-sex marriage Obergefell decision in 2015, the progressive left has moved on to its remaining frontiers: transgenderism and adult/child sexual relationships.

Pro-family critics have long warned of a slippery slope, noting how the normalization of homosexuality will lead to the normalization of first pederasty, followed by pedophilia.

Daniel Mattson

‘Calm and Cool’ Eighth-Grader Aids Ailing Bus Driver, Students

David Rae remained calm for his bus driver and schoolmates in an alarming situation.

Thinking back to what he learned at an assembly at the beginning of the school year, the 14-year-old eighth-grader at St. Patrick’s School in Yorktown Heights stepped forward to assist his bus driver who was suffering abdominal pains. He also kept the other students in the loop until another bus and driver arrived 15 minutes later to transport them home.

“I wasn’t too nervous because we had an assembly in the gym to discuss what to do if something like this happened. We have that each year at the start of the year. I remembered that and tried to do it,” David told CNY in an interview last week.

On Nov. 28, David and schoolmates had just departed school for home on the bus when driver Anthony Andriani started feeling abdominal pains and pulled the bus off the road. Andriani summoned David to the front of the bus and requested that he contact the bus company on the radio.

David, the only eighth-grader on the bus, gave his name and reported what happened to the driver along with the bus number and bus location so that the company could send another bus and driver.

With the driver’s resting his head on the steering wheel and still feeling abdominal pains, David went to the middle of the bus to tell his schoolmates what was happening.

“I knew if we all stayed calm and cool, everything would be all right,” said David, who is planning to attend Montfort Academy in Mount Vernon next fall.

Darlene Del Vecchio, the principal of St. Patrick’s School, received a phone call that day from a representative of the bus company.

“The bus company called us to see what the student’s name was. We looked up the kids on the bus route and knew he was the one,” Ms. Del Vecchio said.

“He’s fantastic, extremely intelligent, responsible, very spiritual and a leader. He’s calm and mature.”

Elizabeth Cahill, manager of the bus company in Yorktown Heights, mailed a letter to Ms. Del Vecchio and the school staff.

“After being an EMT for N.Y.C. for many years, I was struck by the maturity of this young man and how well he handled a very serious situation, as well as a seasoned EMT,” Ms. Cahill wrote. She added Andriani was well enough to return to work the next day.

David said this is the first school year Andriani has been his driver. He added he’s had opportunities to chat with Andriani because he was the first stop in the morning and last stop going home.

“He thanked me and said you did really, really well,” said David recalling his conversation with Andriani the next day.

“We’ve been pretty good friends. Since that day, we’ve had more conversations. We have a really good bond with each other.”

Dan Pietrafesa
One of India’s leading bishops has called on education in the country to help bring about “a moral revolution with a renewed ethic of justice, responsibility and community.”

Cardinal Oswald Gracias, the Archbishop of Bombay, said, “Education should help people realize that national unity and integrity of the nation should be placed high above any divisive forces and sectarian interests.”

The cardinal’s words came after a series of incidents when Hindu nationalists tried to force their way into Catholic educational institutions in order to perform Hindu rituals.

Recently, members of Hindu nationalist societies affiliated with the ruling BJP party tried to force their way into two Catholic schools in the central state of Madhya Pradesh in order to conduct Hindu religious rituals.

Although the nationalists were prevented from entering the grounds by the police, the disturbances are a symptom of the growing unease religious minorities are feeling under the rule of the Hindu nationalist party.

Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas, the new General Secretary of the Indian Bishops’ Conference, said Catholic educational institutions were being increasingly targeted by Hindu nationalist student groups.

Gracias did not specifically mention the incidents in Madhya Pradesh, but he did name some existing challenges to national integration: “They include brutality, violence, casteism, communalism, regionalism, fanaticism, religious intolerance, social and economic disparity and the vested interests of some people,” he said.

“People everywhere are asking the question whether peace can ever be achieved in our planet,” Gracias said. “There is so much conflict and violence taking place in different parts of the world today, that it appears as though disputes, confrontations, riots, terrorism, attacks and war has become part of our human existence.”

The cardinal said society needs a “moral revolution” with a renewed ethic of justice, responsibility and community.

“The universal moral law written on the human heart is precisely that kind of grammar which the world needs. And the
basis of this grammar is the formation of our societal conscience which instructs us that all human beings are brothers and sisters, coming from the same stock and having equal dignity,” he said.

Gracias said what the world needs most today is a spirit of reconciliation, and this can only come about when we learn to treat each other as brothers and sisters and recognize our shared vocation as children of God.

“The pursuit of reconciliation, peace and human development can become more effective if we invite and involve people of all religions to collaborate with one another and work together in dialogue with one another to build bridges of understanding and promote respect for human life everywhere,” the cardinal continued. “This process of education for reconciliation, which is so essential to heal wounds of division and bring about peace, should be made part of every value education program.”

Gracias noted the unique “multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic” heritage of India.

The country is the birthplace of several religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism. There is also a large - over 14 percent - Muslim population, and although the number of Christians is small, they trace their roots back 2,000 years to St. Thomas, the apostle.

India also has several ethnic minorities, and 22 official languages, although hundreds of other are spoken in the country. The country is also divided by caste, the rigid class system which governs much of social life.

The cardinal said education has an important role to play in building the bonds of the country.

“Education must not only enlighten the minds and develop critical thinking but also touch the hearts of people. It must enable people to attain maturity on the personal, social, emotional, spiritual and moral aspects of their lives,” he said.

Gracias quoted the All India Catholic Education Policy, published in 2007, which affirmed that education to peace does not mean merely holding some peace-seminars: “It means earnestly working on the various forms of prejudice-reduction: Prejudices against persons of other castes, tribes, languages, political affiliations, ideologies and theological points of view, regions and religions…Education for peace includes teaching youth to deal respectfully with people of other convictions, cultures and civilizations.”

The cardinal said the policy affirms the need of Catholic institutions to contribute to the betterment of India and its people by sharing in nation-building.

“It advocates the essential social and societal transformation as a major goal and mission of our education and urges the formation of communities of solidarity, and of justice and equality, at the service of all people, especially the poor and the marginalized,” he said, adding that the Church has always shown its commitment to the building of a new society based on justice, peace, love and harmony: “A civilization of love.”

Gracias said teachers and students of every religion in Catholic schools must be encouraged to join the quest for peace “by examining our own readiness to forgive others and to be reconciled, and by making gestures of forgiveness and reconciliation.” “Without peace between religions, peace in the world is not possible,” the cardinal said.
“Today, there is an urgent need, through our educational system, to foster the universal human virtues of reconciliation and mercy in order to dialogue with various cultures and religions and work together with them to bring peace in the world,” he said.

Gracias was part of a group of Catholic bishops that made a courtesy visit to Ram Nath Kovind, India’s new president, on August 24. The bishops spoke to the president about the work the Church does in the field of education in the country.

During the meeting, the president said he appreciated the work the Church does for the poor and the downtrodden and reminded them that while the whole world speaks of development, “spirituality in this development was also important.”

Nirmala Carvalho

How Can Catholic Schools Make Use of Social Networks?

8 Tips for Educational Institutions

To Infinity and Beyond (Hasta el infinito y más allá): this is the name of a recently updated publication Catholic Schools of Spain created as a communications manual for educational institutions. The goal of the guide is to make it clear, as they say in the introduction, that “everything and everyone is on the net, and educational institutions must not be an exception.”

Consequently, with the goal of helping schools have an appropriate and active presence online, the guide proposes methods and provides information and steps to follow so that schools can use the internet to their best advantage, following sound didactic principles. The authors summarize their advice in eight tips for Catholic schools to use social networks properly:

1. Start with an initial study to see what people say about the school on the internet.

First of all, you should analyze the current status of the institution’s online presence. This involves searching for what people say, what information is available, and where, and actively listening to what the students, parents, professors, and the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) members who are most present on digital media say about the school.

2. Prepare a communication strategy.

Based on the diagnosis obtained from active listening, determine how the school wants to be perceived, and how that differs from the current situation. This is the starting point for then establishing objectives, in accordance with the institution’s communication plan, and creating a strategy to achieve those goals. The school’s directors and staff should feel comfortable with the communication policy. “You have to be calm, respect your habitual pace and schedules, and communicate logically, without rushing and without interruptions. You should have a simple but efficient strategy that brings you closer to your public and that gives them information that is sufficient, relevant, and interesting; neither too much, nor too aggressive,” the manual explains.

3. Name someone to be in charge of social networks.

This person will be in charge of building and managing an online community created around the institution. This person, also called a “community manager,” should be strongly committed to the institution; in very good communication with the board of directors; very patient, balanced, and calm; and should know the school very well. If there is a team working in this area and not just one individual, it is important that their work be very well coordinated.

4. Decide on content and draw up a calendar of publications.

Select your content based on the internal activities of the school that could be of interest, as well as external content that is relevant but also sufficiently different from your original content.

5. Build or renovate the website.

The website should be managed by professionals, and it should be consistent with the institution’s goals; the website is a
way to present the institution to users who probably aren’t familiar with it yet. The name of the website should be the same or very similar to the institution’s name, so that web users who search for it can identify it quickly. The name you use can favor the positioning of the site in search engines and should also be optimized for social networks. The website should contain all the basic information so that people can learn about the school and locate it easily.

6. Consult the key principles for presence on social networks.

According to the manual, these are the key principles:
– Choose the name well.
– Keep the school’s profiles open to the public.
– Select the profile picture and cover photo carefully.
– Post quality original content.
– Include photographs in your publications.
– Keep a positive and familiar tone in your messages.
– Plan and schedule your publications.
– Encourage debate and the sharing of content.
– Be patient, because the results will grow slowly.
– Create synergy among all the institution’s accounts so as to obtain followers and visits to all your content.

7. Begin with Facebook and Twitter.

These two networks are recommended as the principle places to start having an online presence beyond your own website. Facebook is the quickest tool for interacting with users. Twitter is a channel for sharing information and a “great tool for directing traffic to your website.” There are specific techniques to follow on each network to achieve your institution’s goals, explained in the manual; many guides are also available online.

8. Increase your presence on other networks according to your institution’s specific objectives.

Besides Facebook and Twitter, the manual explains the best way to use other social networks on which it recommends that institutions have a certain presence. YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Flickr, Pinterest and Linkedin are the most important. The manual also recommends using online tools within the organization, such as Slideshare, Issuu, and Spotify.

The authors remind readers that sometimes going to infinity and beyond has its risks. Consequently, institutions must “accept that there will be a segment of the public that will disagree with you; as in real life, you can’t please everyone.” For this reason, the manual specifies how to avoid a crisis of communication on the internet that could make the institution lose prestige.

For example, the school’s social media administrators must be constantly attentive to what is being said about the school and reactions to the content being published, so as to detect possible crises early on and react in a timely fashion. When problems emerge, they must be handled with calm and with emotional distance, and any reaction should be in line with the school’s standards and identity. It’s also important to remember that as quickly as a problem can arise on the internet, it can also disappear, as the internet community’s attention is often fickle and easily distracted. The institution must show concern and listen to criticisms, but the situation must be kept in perspective. In addition to these general principles, the manual provides more in-depth, step-by-step
methods for dealing with internet crisis situations.

These ideas from the manual show that social networks can become allies of Catholic schools. After its section of advice, it includes some testimonies. To quote just one of them: “There are still many doubts and fears, many questions, and the occasional bad experience we can learn from, but school by school, we are getting on the internet. It unites us, it nourishes us, we share, and we are able to shape a message; a message which needs to be heard on social networks. A message based on our identity, a message that educates, that spreads the word about our project, that evangelizes, reaching all corners of the world,” says Mar Martin, director of pedagogy for the team of directors of the Company of Mary in Spain.

Mirian Diez Bosch

The word “catechesis” comes from the Greek word “to teach.” It means what is taught, what is held. We do not teach “teaching.” We teach something. Nor does “learning” consist in repeating the professor’s opinions. It deals with knowing what is true for both the teacher and the taught. We are not interested in what a professor maintains, but in whether what he teaches is true or not. Both teacher and student are to affirm the same truth because persuasive reasons exist to do so. Someone who denies that anything is or can be true cannot be a “teacher.” No attention needs to be paid to him or to his theories. If what he says and what I say are contradictory but both equally “true” simply because we affirm them, then it makes no difference what is taught. We have thereby chosen to live in a lonely world in which nobody can talk to anybody about anything.

Where to begin? I am aware that I exist when I know something besides myself. My mind enables me to know what is not myself. I become aware that it is I who knows something. Things besides myself exist. I find myself eager to know and identify what they are. I learn the names they are given in my language. I did not cause anything, including myself, to exist or to exist as it is.

Different kinds of things exist – living and non-living, vegetative and sensitive things. I myself have all the levels of being in my very existence. I weigh, grow, feel, and think. I am the one being in the universe with a hand connected to a mind. Thus, I can understand things, suit them to my purposes, and fashion them into useful aids. My thoughts reach the world through my hand.

I encounter others of my kind. I cannot “know” them unless they allow me to know them. We find that, however much we are alike, things go better when we all do not do the same thing. Our relationship to others of our kind turns out to be the most demanding, exciting, and sometimes dangerous thing about us.

We find some intelligence in nature that identifies and separates this thing from that thing. We try to know things by distinguishing one thing from another, by what they do. A thing is true when our minds conform to what is out there. We call this affirming activity “knowing the truth.”

Yet we live in a broken and imperfect world. Some fundamental disorder keeps recurring within us and amongst us. We try to perfect things by ourselves, but we seem to require help from outside of our reach. We praise and blame one another for ruling or not ruling ourselves.

We notice that we die, each of us. One generation replaces another. Begetting is the counterpart of dying. We anxiously seek to be happy, but we find whatever goodness we encounter to be passing and fragile. We remain unsettled.

Though this world witnesses our beginnings, we are not in fact created for this world alone. We find existence in this world to be a span of time during which we must decide what we choose to be forever. No human life is complete in this world until it is finally judged. However much time we are given in this land of the living before we die, it is enough, short or long, in which to decide, by our actions and thoughts, what we will be.
We are created to live an eternal life. We are created to rise again. Indeed, we are created to participate in the inner Trinitarian life of the Godhead, itself the source of all being, including our own.

God cannot grant us His eternal life, unless we choose to accept it. This invitation lies at the core of our being. This choosing freely to accept or reject this transcendent life constitutes the central drama of the human life of each existing person. The world exists to make this offer of eternal life possible to a finite, free person.

The life (and death and Resurrection) of Christ is the channel through which eternal life flows to us. Christ is true God and true man. The fact that He existed in this world changed the world’s direction and clarified its purpose.

Revelation is directed to our reason when our reason recognizes that it cannot fully explain itself. But it can recognize that what is offered to us in revelation is what we would want if we could choose it.

The import of this brief catechesis is that we are free to choose our eternity – or to reject it. Creation in its glory exists in order to find out which alternative we choose as manifested by the way we live our lives in the time before we die.

James V. Schall, S.J.

https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2018/02/13/a-short-catechesis/
How This Classical Catholic School Welcomes Children with Down Syndrome

Students with Down syndrome study Latin and logic alongside their classmates at Immaculata Classical Academy, a Catholic school in Louisville, Ky., that integrates students with special needs into each of their pre-K through 12 classrooms.

The school emphasizes “education of the heart,” along with an educational philosophy tailored to the abilities of each student. About 15 percent of students at Immaculata have special needs.

“When you look at these students with Down syndrome in a classical setting, it is truly what a classical education is all about – what it truly means to be human,” the school’s founder, Michael Michalak, told CNA.

“You can't learn compassion in a book,” Michalak explained. He said the students at Immaculata are gaining “the ability to give of yourself to help others” through mutual mentoring constantly taking place in the classrooms.

Michalek founded the academy along with his wife, Penny, in 2010. The couple saw a need for a Catholic school in which students like their daughter, Elena, who has Down syndrome, would not be segregated from their siblings. They wanted to keep their children together without compromising educational quality or spiritual formation.

"A classical education is, I think, the best education for a child with special needs because it is an education in everything that is beautiful, true, and good. It is perfect for these children,” Penny told CNA.

The school’s course schedule is configured so that students can move up or down grade levels by subject at each class hour, according to individual needs. “A second-grader might go to third grade math class and a child with Down syndrome in second grade might go over to first grade or might stay in 2nd grade,” Michael Michalak explained. “Nobody is looking around and saying, ‘Oh, they are going to special classroom.’ They are just going where they need to be.”

"In the midst of all of this we are not leaving students behind,” Penny added. “We keep our high academic standards while integrating students with special needs.”

Since its founding, the independent Catholic school has grown to a student body of 160. Other Catholic schools across the country have begun looking to Immaculata as a model, the Michalaks say.

"Whenever anyone visits our school, they always say, ‘Oh my goodness the joy of this place!’” Penny told CNA.

The couple attributes the school’s sense of joy to the Holy Spirit and “the joy of belonging.” “Inclusion is more of a buzzword these days, but it is true that we all want to belong and we all want to be loved,” said Michael Michalek.

"Prayer is the air that we breathe. We start the day with prayer. Every class starts with a prayer and ends in a prayer,” said Penny, who entrusted the school to our Our Lady at the school’s founding with St. Maximilian Kolbe as its patron.

"Our whole philosophy is to teach every child as if we were teaching the Christ child, so that is how we handle each and every student," Penny continued.
A developing religious community, the Sisters of the Fiat, also teach at Immaculata. The sisters take an additional vow to serve those with special needs, along with the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The school’s founders say they are aware of their unique witness and role in a world where many children with Down syndrome are aborted. The estimated termination rate for children prenatally diagnosed with Down syndrome in the United States is 67 percent; 77 percent in France; and Denmark, 98 percent, according to CBS News.

At the annual March for Life in Washington, DC, students from Immaculata Classical Academy hold signs that read, “Abortion is not the cure for Down syndrome.” The students are united in mission as “a pro-life school” and pray together for an end to abortion for their brothers and sisters with Down syndrome around the world, Michalak said.

The Michalaks have also adopted three children with Down syndrome.

Michael sees the founding of a school like Immaculata as the natural Catholic response at a moment in history when children with Down syndrome are especially at risk.

"Look at what the Catholic Church has done throughout history: We see orphans; we build orphanages. We see sick people; we build hospitals. It is in this particular time and place that we saw the need to take the lead on this and to start a school that incorporates the whole family.”

Courtney Grogan

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, a charter citizen of the Republic, was born in 1774, on the eve of the American Revolution in New York City. The daughter of a distinguished physician, she matured and adapted easily to the affluence and opportunity that surrounded her.

A voyage to Italy in 1805 led her to the Catholic Church. That same year, Alexis de Tocqueville was born. He too was a child of fortune, but in the tortured aftermath of the French Revolution, in Paris, to a Catholic family of the old Norman aristocracy. His father and mother, who were in the service of Louis XVI, barely escaped the guillotine.

Both Seton and Tocqueville received the best education with private tutors. Both traveled abroad and experienced something that would forever change their lives. Both grew out of a generous kind of aristocratic stock which did not obstruct the view that a well-formed middle class had tremendous potential to govern well the affairs of the state.

During his travels to America in 1831-32, Tocqueville gradually began to view private political, religious, and education organizations in America less as a hindrance to the progress of the common good and more as a vital part of participation in a healthy state. He came to see the warp and weft of these organizations as the fabric that ultimately served to protect the community against tyranny and individualism. Seton was a convert and Tocqueville was a casual Catholic, but both held tenaciously that the free expression of religion is a human right.

Tocqueville visited Maryland in 1832, more than 20 years after Seton had established St. Joseph’s Academy in Emmitsburg, Md. He met with Charles Carroll in Baltimore in October of that year, who, at 94 years old, was the last living signatory of the Declaration of Independence. After his meeting with Carroll, Tocqueville observed that, “This race of men is disappearing today, after having furnished America her greatest men. With them is being lost the tradition of the better born.”

Carroll’s brother, John, who was appointed the United States’ first bishop in the year of the French Revolution (1789), would play an indispensable role 20 years later by providing necessary support for Elizabeth Seton’s founding of the Sisters of Charity and the first free Catholic school in America.

Tocqueville’s central question upon his visit to America was: How could liberty, order and human dignity be preserved, and despotism, chaos, and degradation be averted? Seton had anticipated his question two decades earlier as she marshalled her resources to form a generation of native-born Roman Catholics like herself, whose integrity, faith, and perseverance would preserve and sustain the new Republic.

She described her role simply: “[To] provide for the happiness of all, to give the example of cheerfulness, peace, resignation, and consider individuals more as proceeding from the same Origin and tending to the same end than in the different shades of merit or demerit.” Despite innumerable obstacles, she managed to maintain this expansive vision, and she designed a dual system of tuition-paying families who would by their means also support impoverished students and orphans. She emphasized intellectual and practical skills with programs of individualized instruction. She...
welcomed students from all backgrounds, without discrimination. She referred to herself as being “a citizen of the world,” and Protestant, Dutch, Quaker, African American, affluent, impoverished, and orphan children were welcomed by the saint. She wrote that her goal was to prepare her students “for the world in which you are destined to live,” both as citizens of this world and the next.

Tocqueville defended human rights and abolitionist views in Parliament (although he supported the colonization of Algeria), and he wrote insightfully on the plight and disparity among white, Native, and African Americans in Chapter XVIII of Democracy in America [1].

Upon visiting Baltimore in 1832, Tocqueville’s companion remarked that “[t]here was, notably, one very interesting thing to be examined, to wit, the slavery which still exists there legally.” In the remote woods of Emmitsburg, Seton and her sisters were imparting, through teaching and example, the preservation of all human dignity, systematically averting “the despotism, chaos and degradation of the age.” Looking back in 1852, Archbishop Francis Kenrick of Baltimore said to his brother bishops, “Elizabeth Seton did more for the Church in America than all of us bishops together.”

Sister Mary Sarah Galbraith

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/02/the-statesman-and-the-saint/
Why Mother Goose Matters

Education is like a journey and, as with any journey, there must be some initial idea or inkling of the destination before there can be any reasonable means to arrive there. The end of education is, of course, the truth, and there exist few truthful awakenings like Mother Goose’s nursery rhymes. As a wondrous introduction to the paths of wisdom, educators in the playroom and the classroom know well why Mother Goose matters.

Mother Goose nursery rhymes introduce children to the world that God made good. They are musical and imitative vignettes of reality, constantly shifting their gaze, page by page, from one subject to another. There is no attempt to present any concept of a whole because there is no need for an integration of things at this tender age. The child is happy to explore a vast multitude of goods without worrying about what they all amount to or tend towards. Mother Goose simply plays with the parts, diving one at a time into the many worlds that make up the world.

What focus there is, is on the household, the countryside, and everyday life—the sorts of things that happen when people wake up, eat meals, do chores, play games, and go to bed. Mother Goose is not so concerned with the deeper mysteries since the surface of things is wonderful enough to any child who is seeing it for the first time. Mother Goose rhymes portray plain, honest, and playful quips in plain, honest, and playful fashion, with a profundity and simplicity that most have forgotten through custom.

Besides the large truths about life peering and beaming from these little poems, they are first and foremost delightful. These delights are an introduction—nothing more; but introductions are often the most important part of any endeavor, especially education. The genius of these rhymes as introductions to the way things are is that they are rhymes. They settle themselves comfortably into the hearts and minds and mouths of children, becoming part of their language and a ready measure for experience.

For children, these rhymes are not simply satisfying. They are soul stirring. To them, dogs are as exciting as dragons and puddles as infinite as oceans. Mother Goose parades a whole host of such ordinary wonders before her little blossoms, and in this they are given a taste of reality—and a taste for it, as well, which is precisely why she is educational. These little introductions celebrate the wide world. Mother Goose well knows that the good things grown dull for so many are more than sufficient to please the innocent.

The benefit of Mother Goose, however, is not that she provides children with patterns or preparations on how to be moral, or well behaved, or good readers, or any other practical thing. Her wise prattlings are good for their own sake, giving children the all-important experience of resting in an end, even if it is a simple or a silly end. Any utilitarian good that proceeds as a result of their having these rhymes written in their heart is purely accidental.

The most significant obstacle to providing today’s children with the education of Mother Goose is that Mother Goose has not educated many of today’s teachers and parents. No teacher or parent can give a child what they themselves do not have. The solution to this difficulty is simply that teachers and parents who have no
experience of Mother Goose should read Mother Goose. Poetic knowledge is good for grown-ups too.

Mother Goose serves as a principal awakener to the everyday wonders of the world for young children. Without Mother Goose, children run the risk of being forever babes in the woods, deprived of the touchstones that help to form the habit of knowledge. Without these indispensable nursery rhymes, a child may never acquire appropriate appetite or aptitude for works that plumb the depths of reality.

Without the poetry of the nursery, every other poetic mode and philosophic instinct can be left undeveloped, resulting in education itself becoming a crippled thing. Mother Goose prepares the way for other educational journeys. In the end, Mother Goose matters because she is a beginning.

Sean Fitzpatrick

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/02/mother-goose-matters/
Why Young Readers Need Real Books

A young lady I know won a Kindle in an academic contest. She is a voracious reader. In eighth grade, she enjoys Austen, Chesterton, Lewis, and Wodehouse, among many others. A trail of books seems to follow her everywhere she goes.

Her parents, wary of potential negative effects of screens on growing minds, would have preferred that their daughter not own a Kindle, at least not for a few more years. Since it was a prize well earned, however, they acquiesced.

The young lady continued to read paper books, but the Kindle came in handy for outings (no more scrambling to find enough books to bring along) and reading in bed (no book lamp needed). Not wanting to spend money, she searched for books in the public domain, and was delighted to discover that the Kindle gave her access to some old books by her favorite authors—books that local libraries no longer carried on their shelves.

She also said the device was improving her vocabulary, because when she encountered new words, she could simply click on them for the definition.

All in all, it seemed like a wholesome approach to integrating technology, and so her parents were surprised when, several months later, their daughter announced that she wanted to sell her Kindle.

“For the first time in my life,” she explained, “I’ve noticed that I’ve had to read lines two or three times in order to understand them, because I’m distracted. There are so many choices, so many things to fiddle with, that I lose track of the story. It’s becoming a habit that is carrying over into my real books, too.”

Nineteenth-century British educator Charlotte Mason described the ability to focus (in a healthy brain) as a habit of the mind—one that can be gained or lost according to how the mind is trained. For this eighth grader, reading on a Kindle was undoing her habit of concentration. Her mind was losing the ability to be fully present to her books, and she did not like how it felt.

Will this dilemma befall every child who uses a Kindle? I don’t know. Certainly, the Kindle has advantages over other types of even more fragmented and distracting technological devices. “It’s just a Kindle,” one might say—and yes, I agree that there are far worse threats to a child’s mind. Yet, if “just a Kindle” can have a detrimental effect on a bright young reader, it’s worth measuring its drawbacks before deciding whether the device should replace real books in a child’s life.

Books and Memories

A few months ago, I suddenly had a memory of a character from a book I had read many times when I was a girl, though I had forgotten all about it as an adult. As I tried to remember more about it, bits and pieces of the story came back to me. I was overcome with the desire to read the book again, to find it as I might want to find an old friend I hadn’t seen in decades.

I ordered a used copy, and within a week held it in my hands once again. The details came rushing back as I looked at the cover
and flipped through the pages, remembering how I would read the book in my bedroom in the house where I grew up. It truly felt like I was reunited with an old, dear friend—reunited with the book, and reunited with my childhood, too.

I wonder: If I had first read this book on a screen, would I have felt the same physical connection to my youth as I held it in my hands decades later?

No doubt, a computer might contain a story worth reading. When a father or mother or beloved teacher reads that story aloud to a child, it can forge memories for a lifetime. In our house, we use computers to listen to audio books by authors like Hans Christian Anderson and Thornton W. Burgess, and everyone enjoys it.

Still, it isn’t the same. Listening to the book on the laptop can be nice, but it doesn’t hold a candle to the bond that is built when my husband or I cuddle up with the children and turn the worn pages of our favorite books as we read aloud together.

Isn’t there something precious about the book itself? Isn’t there something in its weight, in its feel, in its illustrations, in its pages, that, when a grown-up child holds it in his hands and reads it to his own children, will awaken a reverence for the story that a computer screen would not?

Raising Readers

With a background in reading education, I am often on the lookout for new tools of the trade. Lately, I have been exploring computer programs designed to teach reading skills. Many have an impressive array of target goals and assessment tools, and catchy graphics to boot.

Beneath the computer-generated rewards for correctly answering prompts, though, something is missing. Stories are contrived to teach phonemic awareness, not to reach young hearts. Sentences are created to impart skills, not to touch souls. There is no author here, no person telling the reader about something that really matters. And so, there is no compelling reason for a child to read, except to win computer games.

Without real books, without authentic stories, without meaningful communication between an author and a child, the world of video-game inspired reading programs feels empty. Empty of meaning, empty of personality, empty of the ability to make memories for life.

The intention of these games is to teach reading skills in a fun way, and that is a commendable goal. Card games and board games like Quiddler, Zingo, and Bananagrams are great ways to help children read and spell. Video games, however, run the risk of damaging a child’s attention span, which, in turn, will damage his ability to read.

“Your child should play this game as often as possible,” one site advises. Regardless of what he is learning, should any child spend every possible minute staring at a screen? An overdose of screen time that endangers the child’s overall ability to focus is a high price to pay for practicing a phonics trick. Used wisely, certain technological tools might benefit some struggling readers, and parents have every right to discern their use according to each child’s particular needs. Yet, in fostering a lifelong love of reading, technology cannot begin to compete with real, whole books.

If we want to raise children who can hold a conversation, they need actual people to
converse with. Likewise, if we want to raise readers, they need, more than anything else, real and worthy books to read. Books that will capture their imaginations and their hearts; books they will feel and see and store away and take out again and hold and remember as part of the story of their lives.

It is never too late to help children find a world of wonder in bound covers, pages that rustle, and words that matter. Real books are endlessly patient. They wait peacefully, and stay just the same, no matter how long it takes to discover them again.

Maura Roan McKeegan

A Catholic education should give students the power to succeed and the freedom to reject the moral relativism and false choices of the times.

I scraped the frost off the window on a recent relentless winter morning and looked out to determine if we were going to attend early Sunday Mass at our parish or “Last Chance Mass” at another nearby church. So, 5:30 p.m. Last Chance Mass it was! After fortifying ourselves with copious amounts of hot chocolate, we eventually headed out to our neighboring parish for Mass. The school principal got up to say a few words about Catholic Schools Week following the lively youth-led liturgy.

She was justifiably very proud of her school and the many programs and classes offered to her students. We heard about the science lab and the medical careers program, along with the academic achievements of her charges. The principal sat down to applause and we bundled ourselves up and headed home. I asked my wife what we didn’t hear about during the principal’s talk. She didn’t hesitate with her answer. “We didn’t hear about the Catholic part of Catholic Schools Week,” she replied.

There was no mention of the complementary roles of faith and reason in education. There was nothing about the long history of Christian scholarship for which the Church is seldom credited. There was no Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. The sacramental studies of the grade school students were never mentioned. Now this doesn’t mean that this parish doesn’t excel at instilling these things into their children. They just didn’t like to talk about it. Not one word.

There is an apocryphal saying attributed to St. Francis which rightfully encourages us to integrate our beliefs and actions: “Preach the Gospel often, and if necessary, use words.” This pithy proclamation is amusing, but misguided. The great English writer G. K. Chesterton said, “Religious liberty might be supposed to mean that everybody is free to discuss religion. In practice, it means that hardly anybody is allowed to mention it.”

The following Sunday morning I walked outside with the dog and, like the groundhog, saw my shadow—so off we went to early Mass at our parish. Now, admittedly, we are consistently spoiled with a solid liturgy, good music, and orthodox preaching. So we weren’t surprised, but were still pleased, to hear what our own principal had to say regarding Catholic Schools Week after inviting everyone to the last day of the grade school open house.

We got the good news about the science lab and the math lab and the academic achievements of his charges just as we heard elsewhere the previous Sunday. We also got The Good News about Catholic education. We heard about the Church’s long history of scholarship and the role of faith and reason across the academic disciplines. He spoke of the students’ service projects, working with those in need. He noted the strong participation of the parish’s young people in the annual March for Life. We heard about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We truly celebrated Catholic Education.

Well over a decade ago we moved into our current home and began visiting the various local parishes which were all about the same distance away. We soon were drawn to and chose our current spiritual home. During our time of discernment, we attended some
school Masses at our parish. Each younger student was paired with an older student in the pews. The older students helped the younger ones during the liturgy by the older ones. Perhaps more importantly, the younger students helped to keep the older ones on their best behavior! One particularly beautiful experience we had was attending an All Saints Day school Mass. The first graders dressed up as their favorite saint and said a few words about them after Mass. It was awesome. We chose well.

We are so often presented with the logical fallacy of the false choice. Technology vs. theology, faith vs. reason, commandments vs. compassion, to name a few. Why not choose both? This is what a classic Catholic education should offer. It empowers a student with the resources to think and act with knowledge and understanding. If knowledge is power, then faith is freedom.

A Catholic education should give a student the power to succeed and the freedom to reject the moral relativism and false choices of the times. There are such things as intrinsic evils. There is a hierarchy of moral choices. A properly educated mind should understand this. Another name for a “seamless garment” is a shroud! A Catholic education is a life-giving gift to the mind and soul. It’s not a dead thing going with the current and wrapped up in the burial cloth of the culture of death.

Timothy Bishop

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/02/keeping-catholic-catholic-schools/
About Proposals to Transfer Catholic Grade Schools
Away from Pastors’ Control, Not So Fast

Pardon my suspicious take on the line that eliminating priests’ responsibilities for Catholic schools in their parishes “will let priests focus on the pastoral and spiritual aspects of schools and parishes” — I can imagine Henry VIII’s henchmen sarcastically making similar comments to monks being expelled from their monasteries – but, admittedly from afar, this proposal has the potential to be a major Church property grab.

Those familiar with the facts Down Under can tell me whether my concerns are well-founded, but, in a nutshell: if Catholic grade schools in Australia are owned by Catholic parishes, then the establishment of self-perpetuating boards, independent from effective ecclesiastical governance, as owners and directors of those schools, is canonically an “alienation” (that is, a transfer of Church property rights) that must meet certain canonical criteria for liceity and even validity even if no money changes hands and even if the pastor is happy to rid himself of the parish school.

You see: Parishes are “juridic persons” (c. 515 § 3), juridically under the direction of pastors (c. 532) who are charged with, among many other things (e.g., cc. 528-530), correctly administering the property of the parish (e.g., c. 1282), which property includes all parish assets (c. 1256) which assets can be “alienated” (sold, leased, mortgaged, even given away) only in accord with canon law (mainly, Book V of the 1983 Code). The canonical consequences of not following the canons on alienation range from an episcopal “Tsk-tsk, don’t do that again”, through a valid-but-illicit act that occasions accusations of negligence in office (c. 1389), to invalid transfers that can result in civil lawsuits against the transfer and personal liability for restitution (cc. 1281, 1296).

Moreover, organizational actions (such as disposing of parish property) that do not follow internal rules (such as canon law) can ‘put a cloud on the title’ civilly, in turn impacting title insurance and civil registration of the deed.

So bottom line, there’s a lot to watch out for here.

Oh, if someone asks, no, Catholic schools, even those established by parishes and dioceses, are not themselves juridic persons absent a decree establishing them as juridic persons (c. 114).

Perhaps the following sources and studies would be helpful.


Dr. Edward Peters

Know Yourself

Pope St. John Paul II began his 1998 encyclical Fides et Ratio ("Faith and Reason") with two words: “Know Yourself.” Knowing yourself is a “minimal norm” for human beings, says the pope. It is a “fundamental question,” which should engage all persons.

Popes and philosophers sometimes say things like this. But how important is it really for regular people living regular lives?

An interesting answer can be found in Walker Percy’s great book, Lost in the Cosmos. In his discussion of “the amnesiac self,” Percy notes that many people seem intrigued by the notion of waking up one day not knowing who they are. Why would this be tempting? Is it because they are so uncomfortable with who they are that they would rather be someone else, almost anyone else? Do you daydream about living an entirely different life as a different person?

So too in the section on “The Self as Nought,” Percy asks why so many people are subject to fads and fashion. Is it because we sense we are a “nought” or “nothing,” and so we buy things like clothes or cars to fill the void and provide the identity we think we lack? After a while, the things we purchase to “change” us become “normal.” We’re left with just ourselves again. So we need to dispose of the old thing and find a new one to create a “new me” different from the “tired-old-me-as-I-am-now.”

Or consider Percy’s “The Promiscuous Self.” Why are people so often tempted by sex with a new person, even an unknown person, even when the relationship with their current mate is rewarding and pleasurable? Surely not all those who cheat are merely seeking something thrilling or dangerous. Is the problem more often that sex with a spouse or long-term girlfriend or boyfriend is like wearing last year’s coat: it has become too much “me,” and now I want to become a “new me,” a “not-me”?

And for that to happen, the old coat, though it is still perfectly good, is now too comfortable for me to feel “new” in. So I cast it aside, though perfectly good, and get a “new me” coat, which, when it becomes associated too thoroughly with “me,” will also have to be cast aside.

If the person you get bored with in a relationship is ultimately yourself, then you may have trouble keeping any relationship going for long. In the end, you’ll be stuck with yourself anyway. Then who will you blame for your dissatisfactions?

Speaking of boredom, why do we get bored? As Percy points out, other animals don’t get bored; they just go to sleep. Do we get bored because other people just aren’t that interesting? Or is there a certain implicit wisdom in the French expression for “I am bored,” je m’ennuie, which literally means, “I bore myself”?

Some people like science and find it fascinating; others don’t. Some can sit through an entire baseball double-header riveted; others are bored out of their minds. Some people actually love watching golf on television. And yet we still might wonder about someone bored by everything.

How does it happen that a human being can be bored by everything in the entire cosmos – not the slightest bit curious about the fact that the whole improbable thing exists at all,
with the most improbable thing of all, namely human beings who get bored?

If you are not fascinated by the fact that you exist and exist as you do, doesn’t this mean that, as the French expressions suggests, you are “boring yourself”? Does your existence bore you? Is that everyone else’s fault? Is the world to blame for boring you?

Have you ever wondered what it would be like not to be bored by things and people and instead find each thing fascinating and interesting? If your first reaction to the suggestion is, “Wow, what a nerd I would be!”, this is understandable, but does it tell you that you would rather be bored than be interested in things because of how you fear you might look to others? How many women do you suppose pretend they read and know less than they do in order not to be thought of as an odd “brainiac” by men? You might ask them.

And finally, what about Percy’s “The Envious Self”? Why are so many people attracted to magazines and television shows about the scandals in the lives of celebrities? Are we to think these people hate celebrities and wouldn’t want to be a celebrity themselves? That seems unlikely.

Why is there so much fascination with assassinations, mass murders, and “true crime” shows? Is it because we want to “get to the bottom of the mystery” and see that “justice is done”? If that were true, “true crime” shows would only show stories of “solved” mysteries, not “unsolved mysteries.” But they don’t.

Why is the good news of our friends or neighbors not always “good news” for us? Does their good news make us feel smaller and less significant? Why? If what Percy suggests is true, then we should expect constant conflict, wars, and struggles. But why, then, do we all say we want peace and good things for others if, deep down, part of us really doesn’t? Are we being honest with ourselves? Do we really understand ourselves?

If we don’t really understand ourselves, and our freedom depends upon knowing ourselves, what does this say about our freedom? Either we just don’t want to do the hard work of being free or we are game to work at it, but don’t know where or how to begin. If peace and justice in society depend upon peace and justice in our souls, where must we begin?

Perhaps we need to begin where St. Augustine in his Confessions found he had to begin: in the deepest recesses of his own soul, in that place where God is and we need to find Him.

Randall Smith

https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2018/03/01/know-yourself/
Beyond Gun Control: Exploring the Underlying Issues of School Shootings

Experts look at prospects of virtue education, forgiveness and responding to red flags.

The national conversation since the February 14 Parkland, Florida, school shooting that left 17 people dead has been dominated by gun control. The general expectation now seems to be for legislators to fix the problem of school shootings with laws that will make it impossible or extremely difficult for people with bad intentions to get guns.

Accompanying this debate, several commentators have raised the issue of mental health. And, late last week, President Donald J. Trump reportedly called a meeting at the White House of companies that produce video games, apparently to explore the question of what role those games might play in leading young people to act violently against others.

And yet, as a nation, America seems to be no closer to finding an answer to why some people carry out mass shootings, especially in schools, and what can be done to prevent them in the future.

If lawmakers are able to find the perfect gun control measure, will that make the problem go away? If government spends more money on mental health care, will that solve it? If entertainment executives can be persuaded to produce video games with no violence, will our society have found the answer?

Or are there other, deeper issues that America is not talking about—and might not even know that they need to?

Aleteia surveyed several experts, including medical and mental healthcare professionals and researchers, to get their take.

Since 2013, there have been 59 deaths in school shootings nationwide, according to the group Everytown for Gun Safety. Though there has been debate over the advocacy group’s inclusion of incidents such as accidental firings and suicides near campus, which seem to make the problem sound worse than it is, excessive anger is “becoming far more prevalent,” in the view of Dr. Richard Fitzgibbons, director of the Institute for Marital Healing outside of Philadelphia and a spokesman for the Catholic Medical Association. A major source of that anger, he said, is school bullying.

“When children are bullied the response is very significant anger,” Fitzgibbons said. Dr. Gregory Bottaro, author of The Mindful Catholic, sees certain similarities among many school shooters in terms of social isolation and the proclivity to violence, indulgence in video games and social media, a “narcissistic disregard for social norms” and “a detachment from what’s normal in society, which requires a kind of empathy for how your actions affect other people.”

Bottaro cautions that these characteristics may be present in a lot of people who don’t end up being school shooters. “But there’s an especially important red flag when you see a drastic change in behavior,” he said. “So you might have someone with these personality characteristics who’s always been that way, and that’s very different from somebody who has been fairly normal maintaining decent relationships … and then all of a sudden becomes very reclusive or turns to either gaming for long hours or
disappears into a room for hours, starts missing school. The changes in behavior are really important to look out for.”

Among school shooters, there “seems to be a common thread of a real distortion in worldview and not having any grounding in a world that makes sense or [seems] safe,” Bottaro said. “It can be a really scary world. We as Catholics see a Father who loves us, who created the world, who holds the world in being and makes it a safe place, and it makes it a place that makes sense. Even if there are bad things that happen, it all fits into the picture. We have a God who conquered death, so even death itself has meaning and has a place to understand it.”

But for someone who doesn’t have that worldview, “this world is just in total chaos,” he said. “The external destruction and chaos is terrifying, and the internal destruction and chaos is terrifying. There’s a lot of brokenness in the family, in the home, with divorce, with parents that don’t how to connect with their kids. Social media is separating people further and further away from real relationship.”

The result sometimes is a “sense of internal chaos and disorder, so there’s nothing to ground a person’s experience,” he posited. “And it kind of becomes this existential hell. … And then you mix that with a desensitization to violence thru the media and video games with certain personality characteristics that are lacking empathy and understanding of social norms and how one’s actions affects others, and that’s where you really get a recipe for disaster.”

Dr. Kathleen Berchelmann, pediatric emergency medicine doctor at Mercy Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, said families often don’t seek psychiatric care until it becomes a crisis.

“How are so many families getting to this point? Well, I think there’s a general lack of parenting support,” said Berchelmann, who is a mother of six children. “More and more, the role of parenting is outsourced to schools and all kinds of support agencies and after-school programs. Even kids who come from middle class families have breakfast, lunch and dinner at school because they have after-school activities going on. They’re doing that because their parents are working two full-time jobs. Even some stay at home parents feel they can benefit from those programs.”

Berchelmann, assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Missouri School of Medicine, commented: “Traditionally, parenting support came from community organizations like churches, or your own family, your own parents. You talked to your own parents, you talked to the parents at church, or talked to the parents you’d meet at school. More and more, people don’t have these communities anymore. They’re not going to church; the parents you meet in your kids’ soccer league have their plates full; you’re not really forming relationships with the parents of your children’s friends, as you did in the past. And of course all family structures have broken down. There are less and less multigenerational family structures that are supportive to family.”

Harold Takooshian, professor of psychology at Fordham University, said there is a growing focus on an concept in psychology called, simply, dangerousness: the “ability to predict if an individual … will do something dangerous or horrible in the future.”

“This youngster in Florida is a good example, where it was just obvious to everybody that he was going to snap,” Takooshian said.
“When it comes to the mass murderer, like Columbine or Sandy Hook or the Aurora theater, it looks like they’re alone or at least part of a tiny group,” said Takooshian. “But actually they’re heavily influenced by what they see other people doing. And that seems to be where we can short-circuit this whole problem, that is, instead of taking only a gun approach—I’m not saying guns are not a problem—but instead to look at early warning signs—and psychologists do have these early warning signs. This fellow in Parkland is an example. He was a fire-setter, he tortured animals. Those things are red flags. It’s true that we live in the US and we don’t want to take the liberty away from people who haven’t actually done anything, who have these warning signs only. But that’s where we are now: we have to try to predict dangerousness, we have to use the available data we have now and get these people back into the normal fold before they spin out of control.”

Others agreed on the need for intervention.

“There needs to be a protocol, where children who are bullied, in which the degree of rage is assessed: ‘Do you have violent impulses against those who hurt you?’ That is almost never explored,” Fitzgibbons said. “A child like this is usually given strong second-generation anti-psychotic medications to calm him down, but the impulses are not explored.”

Fitzgibbons has co-authored two books with psychologist Robert D. Enright, who was recently nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for his work in promoting forgiveness.

“Using forgiveness against those who’ve hurt you diminishes your level of anger and your feelings of striking back at them,” Fitzgibbons said. “Many of the people we work with, even those who have violent impulses, will consider forgiving if we quote [Pope St.] John Paul II to them: basically, without forgiveness you can become a prisoner of your past. Anger locks in your low self-esteem, your obsessional thinking about the memories, about why you were bullied.”

The Pennsylvania psychiatrist said he and Enright are developing a protocol to help children learn how to let go of their impulses for revenge.

“Violent impulses are one thing, violent plans are another,” he said. “If you’re a mental health professional, and someone tells you they have a violent plan, and they name someone, then we have a responsibility to respond. They just crossed the line in terms of being a danger to others. We have to have some better process of getting those kids into a better treatment program, and it must require treatment. They’ve been badly bullied, and there’s no father at home. There are a number of markers. Playing violent video gaming, kids who have been bullied. I think it’s essential that their internet use be monitored.”

At the very least, Fitzgibbons said, a child who has been the victim of a bullying “should never never have access to a weapon.”

They should also not be playing violent video games. Similar to the relationship between watching pornography and acting out sexually. “Don’t buy it for your kids,” he advises parents. “Don’t allow it in your homes … there should be a real major warning” on such products.

On a more global scale, another possible avenue to pursue is the return of virtue education in school, which could combat a growing problem among young people: narcissism.
”This whole issue of narcissism, selfishness is a major cause of excessive anger,” Fitzgibbons contended. “If you don’t get what you want you act out in anger.”

Bottaro added that society has to “develop a culture of illumination. People need to talk about these things. Bringing up concerns should never be shamed or disregarded. When people start to see, you know, ‘My friend is acting kind of weird,’ there should be an openness and an encouragement to explore that further, to talk to a teacher, a professional, a parent. There needs to be a real increase of mental health resources in the school system, whether social workers, counselors. Those people need to be ready with action teams and an action plan to know exactly what to do when a concern is raised for somebody, not in a punitive or inhibiting way but in an exploratory way to really help someone who’s really struggling.”

John Burger

https://aleteia.org/2018/03/06/beyond-gun-control-exploring-the-underlying-issues-of-school-shootings/
Rowan Williams and Richard Dawkins Oppose Expansion of Catholic Schools

They said changing admissions rules for new faith schools would be ‘divisive’

The former head of the Anglican Communion has joined Richard Dawkins in attacking a policy that would allow the Catholic Church to open new schools.

Dr Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, co-signed a letter to the Daily Telegraph saying it was “difficult to bring to mind a more divisive policy, or more deleterious to social cohesion” than removing an admissions cap that prevents new faith schools from selecting more than half of their intake from their own religion.

The cap effectively prevents the Catholic Church from opening new schools because, once they reach the 50 per cent limit, they would have to turn away students because of their Catholic faith – something that would violate canon law.

However, the letter implies that children do not really have any religion, saying that removing the cap would allow schools to “label children at the start of their lives with certain beliefs and then divide them up on that basis.”

Other signatories to the letter include Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK, Rabia Mirza, Director of British Muslims for Secular Democracy, and Conservative MP Sarah Wollaston.

In their 2017 general election manifesto, the Conservative Party pledged to remove the cap, calling it “unfair and ineffective” and acknowledged that it prevented the Catholic Church from opening new schools.

The manifesto reiterated a pledge that Prime Minister Theresa May had made shortly after taking office the previous year.

In December 2016, the Diocese of East Anglia said it was ready to open eight new Catholic schools once the cap was lifted, citing a desperate shortage of school places for Catholic children.

In November 2017, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales launched a petition calling on the government to keep its promise. “By forcing Catholic schools to turn away Catholic school children on the basis of their faith, the very principle of a Catholic parent’s right to choose a Catholic education is under threat,” the petition said.

In January this year, Damian Hinds was appointed Education Secretary, raising hopes that the government would honour its promise. Hinds was educated at a Catholic grammar school and has previously called for the government to lift the cap.

Nick Hallett

Fatherless Shooters … As Liberals Push for Fatherless Families

A fascinating fact has emerged in the aftermath of the Parkland, Florida mass shooting: 26 of the 27 deadliest mass shooters in American history all happened to share one thing in common. What might that be? Your favorite liberal might pipe up with anything and everything from casting a vote for Donald Trump to NRA membership to a seat in the local megachurch. Nope. All but one of the 27 was raised without his biological father.

The list of 27 was compiled by CNN. Suzanne Venker, a marriage-family expert, went through the family backgrounds of the 27 shooters, where she found only one “raised by his biological father since childhood.”

“Indeed, there is a direct correlation between boys who grow up with absent fathers and boys who drop out of school, who drink, who do drugs, who become delinquent and who wind up in prison,” observes Venker, adding: “And who kill their classmates.”

Obviously, this doesn’t mean that boys raised in fatherless families are likely to become mass shooters. (Do I really need to say that?) But it’s yet further affirmation of what we already know: boys need dads. Just as daughters need dads. Children need fathers. They also need mothers. No surprise. We all know this. Liberals once knew it, until they started pushing for fatherless families.

Wait … repeat that, please. Liberals have started pushing for fatherless families? Oh, yes. Of course. Liberals are now fanatically pushing for fatherless families. Actually, they’re also fanatically pushing for motherless families. Think about it: Liberals are on fire for same-sex “marriage” and same-sex parenting, and what is same-sex “marriage” and same-sex parenting than—by very definition—a form of “marriage” and parenting that’s either fatherless or motherless?

Take a depressing gander at any silly liberal website (the Huffington Post on any given day will do, especially the “Queer Voices” section) and you’ll encounter piles of drivel from pompous progressives prattling about how the best parental relationship they’ve invented is two lesbians as moms. They’re asserting this in their newspapers and “studies.” They’re claiming it with a sense of authority inspired by little more than their New York Times and a grande skim latte at Starbucks. This fatuousness flies in the face of what all human beings know in their hearts, and what even liberals conceded until the dawning of Obergefell, namely: the optimal situation for a child is a mom and dad.

Normal people uncorrupted by poisonous ideology inherently understand this. Common sense and rudimentary observation tell us. Studies have long affirmed that kids who grow up with a mother and father are less likely to be poor, to end up in prison, to get addicted to drugs, and are generally healthier and stronger and more successful. The most common denominator among men in prisons is not income or class distinction, not a high school or college diploma, not ethnic or racial background, but whether they grew up with a father.

Well, now we can add yet another dubious correlation, a downright frightening one: The most common denominator among males who commit mass shootings is the presence of a biological father in the home. Wow.
But again, we’ve all known this, including liberals.

In a speech for Father’s Day 2008, Senator Barack Obama was emphatic: “We need fathers.” He explained: “We know the statistics—that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of schools and 20 times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, or run away from home, or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our community are weaker because of it.” Obama added: “Of all the rocks upon which we build our lives … family is the most important. And we are called to recognize and honor how critical every father is to that foundation.” If “we are honest with ourselves,” said Obama, “we’ll admit that … too many fathers” are missing—they are “missing from too many lives and too many homes.”

Yes, if we’re honest with ourselves we’ll admit this. But that’s the problem. The modern secular-progressive project cannot be honest with itself. In seeking to fundamentally transform human nature, it must deny human nature. In seeking to fundamentally transform reality, it must deny reality. These denials, for the liberal/progressive, are applied to marriage, family, sexuality, and on and on. It’s fundamental to the fundamental transformation. And ironically, our President of Fundamental Transformation, one Barack Hussein Obama, spearheaded the insanity, illuminating the new White House in rainbow colors and aggressively looking to renovate everything from school bathrooms to the definition of gender and marriage and family.

In that process, the progressive project must reject the notion that the best model for a child is a home with a mom and dad.

And that’s a recent shift. Go back further from Barack Obama. Go back to Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Go back to Bill Clinton in the 1990s, when he and other Democrats championed the National Fatherhood Initiative. For a while, this was a rare, precious consensus among liberals and conservatives. There are few things that liberals and conservatives have agreed upon, but this was one. Kids need dads.

That law of reality remains unchanged, of course. Call it the natural law. But what has changed is the putrid politics, courtesy of the rotten madness of liberal-progressive ideology. In their militant advancement and forced acceptance of “gay marriage,” liberals are jettisoning this national consensus on fathers, explicitly demanding a category of parenting that excludes fathers.

As for those who disagree with this new paradigm, they are reflexively derided as cruel, thoughtless, backward bigots, with no possible legitimate reason for their unenlightened position. Suggest a mere pause before this grand push forward! by the left and you’re smeared as nothing but a vile hater.

And again, what today’s liberals are advocating is actually far worse than fatherless families, as they are agitating for motherless ones as well. Thanks to the nature-redefining left, there will be a new generation of children deliberately raised without dads and moms and with the sanction and celebration and coercion of the state and culture and the leftist forces of “tolerance” and “diversity.”
And for what? What has prompted this mass shift? It’s so that liberals can accommodate their ideological marriage to same-sex “marriage.” Such is the depths of the secular-progressive descent from common sense to the pit of political depravity. Reject natural law and biblical law, and this is where it ultimately goes. The social-moral consequences of this fundamental transformation will careen in directions we cannot yet begin to fathom.

Paul Kengor

The Educated Teacher: Why Culture is the Key

One of the fruits of Christopher Dawson’s work has been the birth of the Catholic Studies movement at universities across Canada and the U.S.

Crisis? What Crisis? Fulton Sheen still dominated the airwaves. The Second Vatican Council was months from opening. A Catholic president sat in the White House. Notre Dame football had reached legendary status. Religious orders looked healthy and Catholic schools were bursting beyond capacity, enrolling nearly triple the students (about 5.5 million) than they do today. The year was 1961. And yet, crisis is what he called it, prophet that he was.

The Harvard historian Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) is among the 20th century’s most distinguished Catholic converts. As a scholar, he worked tirelessly to trace links between Western culture and Catholicism; he showed, at a time when many wished not to see, the essential connection between cult and culture, between our view of the gods and our capacity for the good life. Culture, in fact, Dawson argued, was nothing other than religion robed in flesh, embodied in habits, transmitted and refracted through custom.

There are many reasons to read Professor Dawson. For the contemporary educator, Dawson’s chief importance derives from the little book he wrote near the end of his career, after his move to America, The Crisis of Western Education. In that work he identified both a problem and a hopeful remedy. Culture, in his view, lay at the heart of both.

Dawson’s opening chapters carry the reader along a swift romp through the main divisions of educational history in the West. From the Greek ideal of liberal education or paideia, to Benedict’s Italian monastic schools, to the rise of the first university in medieval Paris, the fruits of courtly vernacular literature in England and France, to the humanism of Erasmus, the realignments of the Reformation, the Jesuit invention of the Ratio Studiorum, the French revolutionary’s closure of Church schools, the 18th century turn to empirical study, the four phases of the American liberal arts college, and lastly, the absorption of the schools and universities by the modern nation state.

In Part II, Dawson articulates his proposal for reform. In Part III, he shows the urgency of its need. In my years of teaching I have found no better book that offers the aspiring educator a panoramic view of the key moments in the West’s grand experiment in learning. In my years of teaching, I have also found no better book that makes vivid what has been gained and lost. His historical reconstruction is brilliant, but the point of Dawson’s journey is to press his proposal: Culture requires enculturation; unless we wrestle back control of that task from the technocrats, defining characteristics of Western civilization will be lost beyond recovery.

Stark words these. By disposition, Dawson was a gentle man with frail health, a scholar’s scholar, not one given over to exaggeration. His proposal in The Crisis of Western Education proceeds in two steps. First is his analysis of the concept of culture, second is his suggestion for educational renewal. He opens the book with a definition of sorts: “Culture, as its name denotes, is an artificial product.”

The historian continues:
“It is like a city that has been built up laboriously by the work of successive
generations, not a jungle which has grown up spontaneously by the blind pressure of
natural forces. It is the essence of culture that it is communicated and acquired, and
although it is inherited by one generation from another, it is a social not a biological
inheritance, a tradition of learning, an accumulated capital of knowledge and a
community of ‘folkways’ into which the individual has to be initiated.”

The disciplines of sociology and anthropology were young in the 1950s, and Dawson benefitted from the fruits of both. When I introduce this book, for instance, I sometimes take an entire class to unpack this paragraph. Consider: what does it mean to say that culture is “artificial”? Does Dawson think culture is good or that it is bad? You can imagine a conversation going either way. Your initial judgment will depend upon whether you are more influenced by the classical sense or the 19th century Romantic critique of the word.

Culture, in the older sense, is aligned with cultivation, as in a garden that has been crafted to bloom from May to October. In the Romantic reaction, culture contrasts unfavorably with raw nature. The point for Dawson is this: Culture is a social inheritance; culture may be more or less healthy; culture is inseparable from education. Or, to put this in other terms: Schools and classrooms and curricula are really one species of “enculturation,” one process among many by which “culture is handed on by a society and acquired by the individual.” The law, the market, sport, music, literature, dress, and worship transmit the same.

Education, then, is chiefly about human formation. Is that obvious? Only recently have many begun to think so. The gathering momentum over the last 20 years towards private schools and homeschooling has been fueled largely by the recognition that public schools don’t deliver an education that is “neutral.” Indeed, by claiming to be “religiously neutral,” or by withholding judgment on the tattered “lifestyles” of their struggling students, public schools end up perpetuating a form of culture that most parents recognize as toxic. For instance: not to censure slavery is to endorse it; not to censure abortion is to endorse it.

When parents are asked why they send their children to Catholic schools, the top two reasons are “religious education” and a “safe environment.” “Academics” only comes third, and then it is followed in rank by “discipline”—yet another code word for “culture.” Homeschooling parents say the same thing. A recently published study by The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) asked parents why they decided to homeschool their children: 80% cite their “concern about [the] environment of other schools;” 67% say it is to “provide moral instruction,” while 61% say they want to offer better academics (table 8). In other words: Reading and writing count, but culture counts for more.

Culture is the problem, and culture is also the solution. According to Dawson, the form of culture you impress upon the young, the particular “enculturation” your school offers will flow, ultimately, not from budgetary or managerial considerations, nor from the staffing difficulties under which your district has suffered since the last recession. No, culture springs from cult, that is, from worship. The culture you impress will flow from the gods you adore, that which you regard most worthy of human love. Education, in this view, is a battle between the gods. There is no “neutral” territory
upon which an educator can stand. We’ve had 50 years of Christianity that’s light on the beef, heavy on the broth. Since Dawson published his book, both extremes—the “nones” (those who self-identify with no religion) and the “extremely committed,” (typically Evangelicals and conservative Catholics)—have grown. So has the state’s reach into our classrooms. So has the translation of sub-religious, harshly utilitarian, aims into the curriculum. It should not be a surprise that, in the face of sub-religious people, a society that publicly praises few aspirations beyond wealth generation and the expansion of recycling depots, the noble tradition of liberal learning that was for centuries the birthright of Christians has all but collapsed. In place of the liberal arts we now find endemic over-specialization. Where once a scientist was expected also to be a philosopher, now we find English majors who can’t count, and medical doctors who won’t read.

So what is to be done? Sense and sensibility need to unite once more. Dawson suggested that the best way of putting these two back together, the poetic and the scientific, was by immersing ourselves, once more, in the Christian culture that once made the marriage. Man’s eclipse by deadly technology makes the need for such a reunion all the more urgent. Nothing other than a “new system of humanist studies” will suffice.

We need to return to the Great books, to be sure. But even more, he called for the study of Christian culture in its artistic, legal, creedal, and mystical dimensions. Young people need to love the achievement of the cathedrals, see the connection between human rights and Genesis 1, appreciate the great debates of Christology, know why the State can never replace the family, and love the saints, and so on.

His advice to today’s students would amount to this: If the program you are in doesn’t deliver such goods, find one that does. Only an imaginative immersion in a total way of life, he argued, would allow for the preservation of a remnant. The work of this remnant would be to keep alive the memory of Christian culture and serve as a leaven for a future rebirth of faith within the West.

Dawson’s proposal has not been without effect. One of the fruits of his work has been the birth of the Catholic Studies movement within universities across the United States and Canada, starting at St. Thomas University in Minneapolis, and now in dozens of campuses. Few saw better the coming “crisis” than did Dawson. Those searching for remedies 50 years on will find in him a sure guide still, prophet that he was.

Ryan N.S. Topping

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/03/educated-teacher-culture-key/
The iconic Chapel of St. Basil at the University of St. Thomas in Houston is known for its beautiful white cubic form capped by a golden dome. That was changed on last Saturday (Feb. 24), when the Chapel was bathed in red light, along with the Colosseum in Rome [1] and prominent cathedrals throughout the Middle East, such as the ancient church of St. Paul in Mosul, Iraq [2].

Red symbolizes the blood of murdered Christians today and signifies the solidarity between the Catholic community on the Houston campus with those around the world, while literally highlighting an ugly truth that is often unreported in mainstream media.

Several reports—by agencies independent of each other—have recorded a staggering genocide (Human Rights Watch [3], Amnesty International [4], Open Doors International [5], and Aid to the Church in Need [6]). Every year, over the past two decades, around 100,000 Christians have been slaughtered for their faith—that’s about two million people—and this does not include those millions who have been wounded, abused, raped, and/or robbed of their property.

Often churches are desecrated and appropriated in the attempt to erase Christianity from local history. It’s easy for Americans and Europeans to be oblivious to these realities since we enjoy religious liberty. Out of sight, out of mind. That’s why there is a concerted effort by nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations to alert the public. Images can communicate, at times, more effectively than words.

Sculpting light has always been part of Christian artistic practice. Early Christian basilicas are known for their reflective gold mosaics and medieval cathedrals are known for their luminous stained-glass windows. Modern technology continues the tradition. In 1888, America made history when a church in Roselle, N.J., installed Thomas Edison’s new creation—the light bulb—on a huge electrolier (electric chandelier). More recently, since 2002 the Chromaproject, created by Société Spectre Lab, working with professors of art history and clergy, have designed light shows that project colors on the facades of Amiens Cathedral [7]—drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors to the small French town every year.

Casting light on a dark reality is what organizers around the world hope to achieve. The Colosseum in Rome was selected this year by the charity Aid to the Church in Need because it links contemporary persecutions to history. Saint Jerome described how Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, was executed in the year 107 and “condemned to the wild beasts,” and St. John Chrysostom identifies the location as the Roman Colosseum.

Ignatius was not alone. One of the earliest Christian frescos in Rome (above ground, i.e., not in the catacombs), was painted in an apartment converted into a martyr’s shrine (martyrium) in the early fourth century; it depicts an image of a youthful Christ and beside him are the image of three people about to be beheaded. It is hardly coincidental that near this shrine were the passages connecting the vivarium (cages for animals) to the Colosseum. Eventually the shrine was incorporated into the Basilica di San Giovanni e Paolo, where two soldier-saints are also honored as martyrs.
For American audiences, red light is synonymous with the imperative “stop!” and, in this case, conveys “stop the violence.”

By drawing attention to Christian persecution, the University of St. Thomas is making a statement about the role liberal arts institutions play in educating the public. The discipline of art history reminds us that the past has not passed. Each monument is a memorial; as such, they are prescriptions for what the philosopher Santayana identifies as the problem: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

To persecuted Christians around the world, this statement is a concrete reality, partly because religious history has no place in secular education and politics. For Catholics, there is no theology without history. It was Jesus himself who commanded, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Jesus was the first persecuted Christian. His blood, along with all his persecuted disciples, both in the past and today, forms one Holy Communion.

Charles A. Stewart

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/02/monuments-bathed-red/
Teaching Dante in Catholic Schools

Lovers of the Great Books argue interminably about which is the greatest? Among philosophers, the argument might focus on the relative merits of Plato’s and Aristotle’s works—or those of Augustine and Aquinas. Among literature lovers, some will argue that Homer’s epics are the greatest, others, possibly, though perhaps less convincingly, that Virgil deserves the laurel.

And then there are those who will insist that Shakespeare is as good as it gets. And yet, for Catholics, we can hardly leave Dante out of the discussion. From a purely Catholic literary perspective, he must surely stand supreme. He is to Catholic literature what Thomas Aquinas is to Catholic philosophy. If Thomas is rightly called the Angelic Doctor, might Dante not deserve to be called the Angelic Poet?

If this is so, and it is, we can say that Dante’s *Divine Comedy* [1] must be seen as an indispensable part of the curriculum at any self-respecting Catholic school—both at the high school and college level. The problem is that Dante’s magnum opus is often taught poorly, even when it is taught at all. At the root of the problem is the tendency to remain trapped in hell, never venturing forth into purgatory and paradise. This is a consequence of the way that Dante has been taught for decades, indeed, for centuries.

Ever since the Reformation, it has been the tendency to teach the Inferno to the exclusion of the Purgatorio and the Paradiso. The reason is obvious enough. Protestants believed in hell but not in purgatory. As for paradise, the Protestant idea of heaven precluded the hierarchy of the communion of saints which Dante presents in his Comedy. Since Dante’s purgatory and paradise were considered to be heretical, the Protestants were left with nothing but his hell in which to wallow. Disagreeing with Dante about the nature of the Divine Light, Protestants could at least agree with him with regard to the darkness which is the consequence of its absence.

The tendency to teach the Inferno to the exclusion of the Purgatorio and the Paradiso, already established as common practice by Protestants, was continued by the children of the superciliously self-named Enlightenment. Whereas these skeptic-souled secularists might not believe in hell any more than they believed in purgatory or heaven, they could at least see that evil existed, even if they no longer called it sin, and they could perceive its harmful consequences. As such, the Inferno still resonated psychologically, even if its theology was now ignored.

It might be argued that none of the foregoing is of much concern to Catholics in general, or to Catholic educators in particular. If Protestants and secularists want to wallow in Dante’s hell because they have excluded themselves from purgatory and heaven, that’s their problem. Of what concern is it to us? The problem is that Catholic schools are also often stuck in hell, having excluded themselves from purgatory and heaven. In all too many schools, we find that only Dante’s Inferno is on the curriculum.

Why is this?

In part, it’s because we have bought the Protestant and secularist lie that the Inferno is far superior to the other two books of the Commedia. This is quite simply not the case. It was not the view of the Poet
who composed it, nor of those who understand the Poem best. Take, for instance, the judgment of Maurice Baring, one of the most cultured and well-read men of the last century:

“Scaling the circles of the Paradiso, we are conscious the whole time of an ascent not only in the quality of the substance but in that of the form. It is a long perpetual crescendo, increasing in beauty until the final consummation in the very last line. Somebody once defined an artist … as a man who knows how to finish things. If this definition is true – and I think it is – then Dante was the greatest artist who ever lived. His final canto is the best, and it depends on and completes the beginning.” [2]

Having seen through the lie, or at least the misconception born of ignorance, that the Inferno is superior to the other two books of the Commedia, why, one wonders, do some Catholic schools still not teach the Purgatorio and the Paradiso? An all too common reason is that the teachers are only teaching what they were taught. Since those who teach were only taught the Inferno, they only know the Inferno. It is, therefore, easier to stay in one’s own comfort zone (in this case, ironically, hell!) rather than venture forth into unknown and uncharted territory. Quite literally, as well as quite literally, the path of least resistance for many Catholic teachers leads to hell—and, what is worse, having led there it stays there.

A final reason for sometimes only teaching the Inferno is that there’s simply not enough time to teach the whole Commedia. Sadly, this is usually true. And yet, if this is so, why not teach the Purgatorio or the Paradiso and not the Inferno? Better still, and this is the way that I normally teach the Poem, why not select certain cantos from each of the three books, thereby at least giving the students a sense of the majesty and integrity of the whole work?

Regardless of the degree to which the world is only at home in hell, it is imperative that good Catholic schools assent to the ascent which leads from hell, via Mount Purgatory, into the celestial spheres of Paradise. Where else should Catholics seek to be than in the presence of God and his saints? Why accept any less, still less the ultimate “less” which is God’s infernal absence?

Joseph Pearce

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/02/teaching-dante-catholic-schools/
Further Thoughts on Teaching Dante

In yesterday’s article [1], I wrote of the importance of teaching Dante’s Divine Comedy [2] in Catholic schools—both at high school and college level, and of the importance of teaching it well. I argued that it was a grievous error to teach only the Inferno to the exclusion of the other two books—and that it would be better to teach either of the other two books in preference to the Inferno if time permitted the teaching of one book only.

Furthermore, I suggested that selections from all three books would give a better idea and greater understanding of the majesty, scope, and integrity of the whole work than a concentration on one of the books to the exclusion of the other two.

The next pressing question is the edition which should be used as the set text.

It is another all too common mistake to believe that we are doing students a favour if we assign the cheapest edition of the work we’re studying. This is often not the case and is especially not the case where Dante is concerned. I would strongly recommend two editions of The Divine Comedy, either of which will serve well as an assigned text.

The first is the Dorothy Sayers translation (Penguin Classics) [3], and the other is the more recent translation by Anthony Esolen (Modern Library Classics): Inferno [4], Purgatory [5], Paradise [6]. A singular strength of the Sayers’ translation is its adherence to Dante’s original terza rima, the rhyme scheme that Dante invented for the poem. This verse stanza form, consisting of interlocking three-line stanzas connected in a single canto-length chain, is formally robust and conveys a cohesive strength to the very fabric of the work.

Something is lost when the terza rima is abandoned by translators—something integral to the poem. The problem is that it’s much easier to find words that rhyme in Italian than it is in English, making terza rima difficult to render from the one language to the other. In her determination to adhere to Dante’s formal rhyme scheme, Sayers sometimes compromises the quality of the verse.

It is for this reason, presumably, that Anthony Esolen, following the lead of most other translators of the Commedia, chooses to forgo the terza rima in order to be more faithful to the qualitative rendering of the verse. Should his translation be selected instead of Sayers’, I would simply suggest that one sample of the Sayers’ translation be shown to the class as a means of illustrating the formal structure of the poem.

Another reason for my recommendation of these two particular editions is the quality of the explanatory notes. It is simply not possible for a modern reader to comprehend Dante’s work without frequent reference to the accompanying notes. The quality of such notes is, therefore, crucial. Especially important is the manner in which the notes conform with Dante’s Thomistic understanding of the cosmos and man’s place within it. Sayers is especially good at making this Thomistic connection. As for Esolen’s notes to his own translation, readers of this journal will be all too aware of his eloquence and the lucidity with which he writes.

Any diligent teacher who would like to do some further background reading, prior to
teaching the Commedia, could do far worse than to consult *The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers’ Encounter with Dante* [7] by Barbara Reynolds (Kent State University Press, 1989). Reynolds was Sayers’ close friend. She finished Sayers’ translation of the Paradiso after Sayers had died in the midst of translating it. She is, therefore, uniquely placed to guide us into a deeper encounter with this greatest of poets.

Joseph Pearce

Are the Liberal Arts for the Use of Technological Advancements?

Anyone who has a degree in the classical liberal arts is accustomed to people—including the proverbial uncle at Thanksgiving—asking what use his or her degree will be in finding a job after graduation.

What do Homer and Aristotle have to do with real work that brings in real money? Just seven years ago, Microsoft cofounder Bill Gates shared the opinion[1] of the proverbial uncle: Graduates with a liberal arts degree would be insufficiently prepared for the modern economy. Now, however, Microsoft officials have reportedly said that liberal arts majors[2] will be essential to the future of technology—especially in developing artificial intelligence (AI).

Why has Microsoft seemingly switched gears regarding liberal arts majors? As Microsoft President Brad Smith and Executive Vice President of AI and Research Harry Shum explain, “As computers behave more like humans, the social sciences and humanities will become even more important. Languages, art, history, economics, ethics, philosophy, psychology, and human development courses can teach critical, philosophical, and ethics-based skills that will be instrumental in the development and management of AI solutions.”

Because AI is not only related to technological fields, but also ethical ones, liberal arts majors will be useful in working on this technology because of their backgrounds in philosophy and the humanities. The ethics of Aristotle truly become relevant; the interactions of Achilles and Agamemnon become important for understanding human behavior. The relevancy of the liberal arts is most certainly true, as AI technology involves many ethical questions that cannot be ignored or overlooked. Yet one wonders if Smith and Shum have considered what a liberal arts degree is at its heart. In other words, is a liberal arts degree really for the purpose of assisting technology?

In Leisure: the Basis of Culture, Josef Pieper[3] discusses the importance of the liberal arts in ancient Greek culture. The liberal arts were the “free” arts, which meant that those without servile work could pursue them. They were not learned with any particular purpose; rather, the liberal arts were pursued simply for their own sake. In other words, whereas the art of brickmaking is learned for making bricks for buildings, the liberal arts, such as philosophy, are studied simply because of their intrinsic goodness.

It is good to know philosophical principles; it is good to know Euclidean geometry proofs, even if they have no use for anything practical (some might argue to the contrary, however). In Aristotle’s Metaphysics[4], he writes that men began to pursue the liberal arts when they had time for leisure. After they had learned the arts necessary for survival, they had time to rest and wonder at the world surrounding them. Wonder is born in leisure, which is used for the purpose of contemplating the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Contrast this perspective with modern American culture. Everything that is done in our society is for some particular use. We are proud of our extreme efficiency, to the point that traveling to Europe can become irritating for the American, who is accustomed to everything being done in an
instant and on demand. We are frequently eating on the road, while we continue to work, and we will even sometimes skip meals to continue working. Education is for the purpose of learning a skill to make as much money as possible (as the proverbial uncle will affirm). Even though many trade skills are in high demand right now, and while there is certainly nothing wrong with learning them, this (in the American mind) is the sole purpose of education. Any other kind of education is inefficient and a waste of time.

Nevertheless, in Leisure, Pieper offers a distinction between education and training. Training, he explains, is for the purpose of learning a useful skill, such as plumbing, carpentry, or accounting. These skills are indeed useful, but they cannot comprise the entirety of a person’s learning. Education, on the other hand, is for the whole person and allows him to ask the deepest questions about human existence, which are often overlooked or ignored when we are consumed with doing “useful” things. Education allows a person the space to wonder and to contemplate, to consider the goodness of the world and of existence. Such an education is the opposite of being merely useful, in the strictly utilitarian sense of the word. The liberal arts consist in this true education because they are not mere training. Pursuing the liberal arts allows the students to think about the deepest questions and to ponder the goodness of the world.

How does this discussion relate to Microsoft’s eagerness for liberal arts majors to help with AI? It is possible that Microsoft misunderstands the reason behind pursuing a degree in the liberal arts. Someone pursuing a liberal arts major is seeking to develop his or her whole person. He or she may eventually decide to help with the AI movement, but this is not the primary reason for his or her education. While liberal arts majors might prove helpful to the movement, and indeed should help if they feel inclined or called, we must be careful not to place this degree in our category of “useful,” for that is not the raison d’être of the liberal arts. People with an education in the liberal arts indeed can become useful once they have pursued their degree, but they earned this degree simply for the sake of studying the good, the true, and the beautiful. The motives were likely not utilitarian, even if one can recognize that liberal arts majors can be important for society.

Nevertheless, as Smith and Shum write, “If AI is to reach its potential in serving humans, then every engineer will need to learn more about the liberal arts and every liberal arts major will need to learn more about engineering.” There is certainly some truth to that. Interaction between these two fields is certainly important, and many liberal arts majors are eager to learn about anything they come across. And yet we must continue to respect the liberal arts for what they are, namely, the pursuit of something good simply for its own sake, which only secondarily becomes something useful for society. Or, perhaps we should consider the goodness of the liberal arts as Blessed John Henry Newman describes in The Idea of a University [5].

Though the useful is not always good, the good is always useful…. If then the intellect is so excellent a portion of us, and its cultivation so excellent… it must be useful to the possessor and to all around him; not useful in any low, mechanical mercantile sense, but as diffusing good, or as a blessing, or a gift or power or a treasure, first to the owner then through him to the world (Discourse VII.V).
In other words, the liberal arts education is useful to the world in that it is a blessing because of the goodness that it shares; we must never confuse this goodness with usefulness in the purely utilitarian sense, for then we risk losing the sheer goodness and beauty of such an education.

Veronica Arntz

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/03/liberal-arts-use-technological-advancements/