Advanced Notice:

The 5th Annual Workshop on
“The Role of the Priest in Today’s Catholic School”
will be held at Seton Hall University from July 16-19, 2019.

Stay tuned for further details.
A Word From Our Editor

Homily preached by the Reverend Peter M. J. Stravinskas, Ph.D., S.T.D., on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Class of 1968 from St. Joseph High School in Toms River, New Jersey, on 22 September 2018, the vigil of the Twentieth-fifth Sunday of the Year (B).

In biblical studies, St. John the Baptist is often referred to as an “intertestamental” figure, by which is meant that he straddles the Old and New Testaments: he closes out the Old and ushers in the New. In some way, I think the same can be said about our class: We began our Catholic education in ways that differed only slightly from our parents and even grandparents. By the time we got to high school, it appeared that an entirely new ball game was in play. Indeed, our graduation year of 1968 has been called the annus horribilis. In society, we were confronted with riots and assassinations; in the Church, we beheld the mass exodus of clergy and Religious, as well as a full-blown rebellion against a Pope’s encyclical. The stability of our grammar school years gave way to confused and confusing religion classes, disrespect and challenging of teachers (whether justified or not), and three Sister-Principals in four years. The changes were so frequent, so unexpected, and so disruptive that it is a minor miracle that the suction didn’t take all of us down that vortex.

Anniversaries are important milestones, but they can devolve into little more than empty exercises of recalling silly or shallow events. At their best, anniversaries are opportunities for gratitude, regret, and renewal. I would suggest that the response of today’s psalm could be a good guide for our reflections: “The Lord upholds my life.”

Gratitude. Those of us who made it to third year Latin will recall Cicero’s insight: “Gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues, but the parent of all others.” For what ought we to be grateful? Most of us had the inestimable gift of thirteen years of a Catholic education. The foundations given us in elementary school were solid. We knew the Faith (who among us could not still answer questions like, “Who is God?” “Why did God make me?” “What is a sacrament?”). We lived the Faith – and had excellent models in our teachers. Even when things got shaky in the late sixties, the sure foundations kept many of us from going over the cliff and brought back not a few of those who had gone over the cliff.

We had a superb secular education, which positioned us for success in any field we chose. This grandson of four immigrants ended up with two doctorates. We learned how to read and write. We learned grammar and spelling (I was quite impressed that in the hundreds of emails we have exchanged in recent weeks, I found only one grammatical error and not a single spelling error!). We learned history and math and languages, to be sure, but most importantly, we learned how to think and to think critically.

And we got all this for a pittance. Do you remember that our freshman tuition was $150, which then “escalated” to $300 by senior year? That was possible because of the immense sacrifices made by clergy, Religious and laity, who loved God enough to love even, oftentimes, hard-to-love teenagers.

The Lord upholds my life.
Regret. Only the most arrogant or obtuse would say that they have no regrets. Some of the things we regret – or should regret – were merely the usual failings of the immature. Others, however, were mistakes – sometimes major and life-changing – that were foisted on us by a culture or anti-culture that lured us into a web of what St. James today speaks of as “disorder and every foul practice.” We were told that if we jettisoned laws, rules and regulations, we would come to know true freedom. Most particularly, we were encouraged to rid ourselves of the sexual hang-ups of previous generations.

Many political commentators observe that Ronald Reagan won the election of 1980 with a simple question: “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” The electorate probably voted against Carter more than they voted for Reagan. Similarly, I believe we can and should ask: “Are we, Class of ‘68, – or anybody else, for that matter – any better off as a result of casting off the seeming yoke of repression?” The carnage resulting from experimentation with and addiction to drugs, sex and alcohol suggests otherwise. Fifty years into it all, we find the only beneficiaries of the revolution are psychiatrists, whose couches and pockets have been filled by the victims of the disastrous rebellion. Surely, the unprecedented suicide rate, especially among the young, should give any reasonable person pause.

And then, there are the personal regrets: estrangement from the Church; failed relationships and marriages; children and grandchildren never given the benefit of a Catholic education and thus unevangelized, uncatechized, and wandering aimlessly through life, identifying, perhaps, as “spiritual but not religious.”

I suspect that not a few of us fed into that stream of thought known as Existentialism, about which Father Murphy warned us in freshman year. Its American theme song was taken from a French number and adapted by Paul Anka for Frank Sinatra, yes, in 1968, “My Way.” Old Blue Eyes could have dedicated it to our generation – his rendition certainly inspired many of our contemporaries. As he notes that “the end is near,” “fac[ing] the final curtain,” he woefully admits: “Regrets, I’ve had a few,” although he protests that he “planned each charted course, each careful step along the highway,” one would ask why the “regrets”? The answer should be clear: “I did it my way!” In a hubris that would make any Greek tragic figure blush or find Sartre or Camus gloat, he declares that his are “not the words of one who kneels” – although he does acknowledge that this posture made him “[take] the blows.” The French philosopher Jacques Maritain put it chillingly: Modern man, “having sought his center in himself, is nothing more, according to the phrase of Hermann Hesse, than a wolf howling in despair toward eternity.”

In spite of these regrets, The Lord upholds my life.

Renewal. Regrets are not all bad. In fact, regrets can be a sign of growth and maturity. The Gospels offer us examples of two Apostles who sinned grievously against their loving Master: Judas and Peter. Both men betrayed Christ. Both realized the gravity of their offense. Judas’ acknowledgment of his sin led him to despair; Peter’s led him to repentance and renewal. On Holy Thursday night, in the very moment of Peter’s threefold denials of Our Lord, St. Luke tells us that Peter beheld the converting glance of Jesus, moving him to tears of repentance. That scene is etched on the Holy Year door of St. Peter’s Basilica, through which penitents have
passed for centuries. Our God delights in the return of sinners, so much so that the Risen Lord rehabilitates Peter by enabling him to reverse his triple denial with a triple affirmation of love: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you!” (Jn 21:17).

“The end is near,” to be sure, surely nearer than it was in 1968. At our age, we should be able to realize that doing things “my way” hasn’t been a formula for success, happiness or genuine fulfillment. Any good psychologist will say that every human being must choose some person or value outside himself to serve. Choosing oneself is choosing the cruelest, most demanding master. Choosing to serve Christ is submitting to the gentlest Master of all, who urges us: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:29). Admitting false moves and bad roads taken; sincere sorrow for such sins; a good confession; and a firm purpose of amendment can return us to the joy and innocence we all knew when our Catholic education began at the age of four or five, re-capturing that spiritual childhood extolled by Jesus in today’s Gospel, a spiritual childhood which may have been derailed by an era of confusion within the Church and in society-at-large.

Ten years after our high school graduation, God surprised the Church and the world with the accession to the Chair of Peter of St. John Paul II. Perhaps if he had been Pope when we were coming of age, we may have been spared some of the wrong turns. On the day of Pope Benedict XVI’s inauguration of his Petrine ministry in 2005, he rhapsodized thus:

“At this point, my mind goes back to 22 October 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.”

The Lord upholds my life.

In sophomore year, Sr. Stella Grace introduced us to Francis Thompson’s “Hound of Heaven,” and made us memorize it – for which I am eternally grateful as I have had recourse to its
beautiful lines on more occasions than I can mention. God, the relentless Lover, is faithful, even when we are unfaithful:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

Do you recall how Thompson narrates his wanderings and meanderings “from those strong Feet that followed”? A hundred lines later, seeing with all the clarity of hindsight, he ends with a magnificent flourish spoken by none other than the Hound of Heaven Himself:

How little worthy of any love thou art!
Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!

Arguably, the greatest intellect of the nineteenth century and surely the most important convert to the Catholic Faith in England of that era was Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman. He often noted that the older he got, the more convinced was he of the omnipresence of Divine Providence. That conviction led him to pen this consoling meditation, which I would commend to your daily prayer and reflection:

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 Lord upholds my life.
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Michigan School Battles Anti-Catholic Law

The Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic school filed a lawsuit last month against the state of Michigan, urging the court to find a nearly half-century ban against using state aid for private education unconstitutional, as it clearly targets Catholic schools, reports Detroit News.

Currently, the school is forced by the government to comply with myriad public health measures such as immunization compliance, criminal background checks, and fire drills but is forbidden from receiving state aid to help it comply. The school is arguing in state court that the rule, which was passed by voters as an amendment to the state constitution, violates the U.S. Constitution because it “forces a religious school to choose between remaining a religious school or become entitled to a public benefit.”

The policy came into effect after the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan filed a lawsuit to prevent private schools from receiving government funds. The group pointed to the state’s Blaine Amendment which was passed when anti-Catholic sentiment was high.

“The Blaine Amendment is unconstitutional discrimination of religion,” said John Bursch, one of the lawyers who filed the lawsuit.

High Schoolers Ask Bishop Barron to Judge Evangelization Contest

Students at Bishop Sullivan Catholic High School in Virginia are required to complete a “senior evangelization project” for their final year’s theology class. This year they were asked to create their own film about Catholicism, inspired by Bishop Robert Barron’s own work, according to Angelus News.

The students and their theology teacher reached out to the Los Angeles auxiliary bishop in a video letter on Twitter, asking him to judge the final five nominees and choose the winner of what the school is calling the “Bishop Barron Video Award.”

“How could I say no?” Bishop Barron said, adding that the request left him “very touched and moved.”

“My own thinking has kind of impacted these kids, and my own approach to evangelization has influenced them, so I was very moved by it and was very grateful to their teacher,” he said.

The seniors produced 34 videos, which will be narrowed down to the final five films to be judged by Bishop Barron. The students’ films range in subjects from the return of the Tridentine Mass to a feature on the Sisters of Life.

“I suppose I am looking for a combination of content and style,” he said. “I’d also like it to be substantive, because that has been a big part of my work – I don’t want evangelization to just be superficial and flashy.”

Blasphemy at a Jesuit College, or Just a Free Speech Controversy?

First Things magazine published a piece recently showing that recent stories by secular media on the College of the Holy
Cross professor who suggested that Jesus can be seen as a “drag king” with “queer desires” are missing the point, by framing it as a “free speech controversy.”

Sadly, that’s only beginning of the blasphemies Professor Tat-siong Benny Liew passes along, and the piece fleshes that out. Mind you, it’s disturbing reading.

But, as *First Things* points out, this goes far beyond a free speech issue. This issue cuts to the heart of Catholic identity at Catholic colleges.

Matt Archbold

STEM on Steroids, aka Liberal Arts Education

What has a liberal arts education to do with STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math)? Everything that matters. STEM training built upon a solid liberal arts foundation is like STEM on healthy steroids. A liberal arts foundation is an indispensable prerequisite for the most praise-worthy exercise of the STEM disciplines.

Progressive education proponents and business leaders tout STEM as the ultimate answer to America’s waning prominence on the economic world stage. From a perspective of economic global competition there may be some truth to this, at least in the short-term. Linking education solely to jobs is the main goal of STEM and its proponents. While this is not the central focus of a liberal arts education, it may prove instructive to consider their perspective for a moment because, even under this utilitarian lens, STEM falls short.

A warning from the recent World Economic Forum predicts robots could replace 800 million jobs by 2030. In addition, Chinese billionaire Jack Ma cautions, “if we don’t change the way we teach, 30 years from now will be big trouble.” So, more STEM? No. Ma urges the importance of teaching what is uniquely human. Computers, Ma insists, are smarter than humans and we can’t keep up with them. Therefore, education must focus on “values, believing, independent thinking, teamwork, care for others.” How? Ma says by teaching sports, music, and art.

A friend of mine working in the medical ethics field reviews multi-million-dollar scientific studies. Educated in the liberal arts, frequently he is astounded at the sloppy exercise of the scientific method. The ivy-league-educated research doctors often miss fundamentals like isolating variables. Why? My friend’s hypothesis, “they can’t think for themselves.”

Science

In many schools, science means teaching the scientific method. While the scientific method is an indispensable component of any education, the way in which it is taught makes the difference between life and death, literally. If a student is taught to “follow the method” without perceiving how the subject fits into the fabric of the cosmos, or without considering the moral implications, all is lost.

A friend of mine working in the medical ethics field reviews multi-million-dollar scientific studies. Educated in the liberal arts, frequently he is astounded at the sloppy exercise of the scientific method. The ivy-league-educated research doctors often miss fundamentals like isolating variables. Why? My friend’s hypothesis, “they can’t think for themselves.”

Technology

What makes labor-saving devices good? When is it better to use a machine instead of doing the work manually? Is technology bad? Hardly. Computers, cars, air conditioning, all these innovations possess the capacity to significantly improve the quality of life. And yet, is this true absolutely, in every circumstance?
Recently we lost power in a wind storm. We encountered unexpected joys as we huddled around the wood stove: spontaneous conversations, card games, and read alouds by candlelight. It made me think about what family and community life was like before the (extremely handy!) invention of central heating.

According to Mark Twain’s telling of the life of Joan of Arc, several villagers gathered regularly in the dead of winter around her family’s hearth to share its warmth, along with a simple meal, and fellowship. What stands out about one frigid night is the rapping on the door of a wandering vagrant. Although Joan’s father objects, the stranger is admitted entrance. Ignoring protests Joan feeds the famished fellow. Finally, warm and satisfied, the guest returns the kindness by intoning the Song of Roland to the sheer delight of all.

While few would readily forego central heating (including me), it’s good to ask whether the cultivation of family and community bonds have been well-served by this invention. And if, per chance, we’ve lost something essential to the richness of the human experience along with the necessity of gathering around a common hearth, how might we go about intentionally cultivating that richness, while preserving our thermostats? We need technology visionaries who see the whole picture.

*Engineering*

Engineers thrive at solving problems with the intention of “making life better.” The iron plowshare, bridges, x-ray machines, spacecraft: all these and many more we enjoy thanks to innovative engineering.

Right now, electrical engineers are working to perfect Charles, the mind-reading robot, by programming Charles to “read” human social cues with the intention of promoting more human engagement with robots. What could illustrate more poignantly the absurdity of isolating empiricism at the expense of common sense? To reduce the complexities of thoughts, emotions, and facial expressions to empirical data does violence to the wonder that is the human person.

The targeted advantages are that, “Elders will have more company, and autistic children will have endlessly patient teachers.” What!? Has divorcing formal and final cause from reality ever been more preposterous? Can substituting a virtual relationship with a robot for a real relationship of another person enrich anyone’s existence? It’s striking to note these engineers are striving beyond the realm of “labor saving” devices; they have ventured into the foray of attempting to imitate virtue. (Just a suggestion: spending time with an elderly neighbor might prove more mutually beneficial in the long run.)

This is a by-product of progressive education. Dumping data into children’s brains for several hours a day is treating them like machines. Why should we be surprised that their goal has become making machines in their own image?

*Mathematics*

STEM saves the best for last. Math is beautiful. And beauty, Thomas Aquinas tells us, is that which gives pleasure when seen: that which possesses integrity, proportion and clarity. Whether the visual arts, music, or literature, the understanding of number and increment in math corresponds to the inherent order of the cosmos in infinitely creative ways.
The STEM approach to math is not pretty. The Common Core Standard aims at, “Mathematically proficient students [who] can apply the mathematics they know to solve problems arising in everyday life, society, and the workplace.” Helpful? Sure. But this goal strives for nothing a computer couldn’t do more efficiently. An understanding of the meaning inherent in proportion, interval, harmony, ratio, and the qualitative properties of number is lost in the STEM model, which focuses solely on quantity. Alternatively, the liberal arts approach to Math leads not just to “right answers” but to wisdom.

One of the strengths STEM offers is the encouragement for the various disciplines to work together. However, even if perfectly integrated, STEM lacks a true foundation. The liberal arts offer formal and final causes, beauty, truth, goodness, and a criterion for evaluating whether the advances in these fields actually serve the good of the human person. How is this standard possible when there is no shared vision of reality and recognized raison d’être for man’s existence and his place in the cosmos?

Without a liberal arts foundation, STEM moves the human person closer to a merely mechanized existence. With it, STEM is poised to truly enrich the human experience in the world.

Karen Landry

https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/04/stem-on-steroids-aka-liberal-arts-education/
Three School Boys Awarded for Saving a Suicidal Man’s Life

If it weren’t for their bravery, police say, the man would not be alive today.

Three English school boys just received awards for acts of bravery and service they performed while walking home from school last fall.

Devonte Cafferkey-Wilson, 13, Sami Farah 14, and Shaun Young, 12, who attend a high school called St. Mary’s in Hertfordshire in the southeast part of England, spotted a man sitting on the edge of an overpass with a rope around his neck about to jump.

The boys immediately took action, two of them holding the 21-year-old suicidal man down while the other one called for help. Two passers-by stopped to assist them and as a team, the group managed to keep the troubled man, who was trying to struggle away, from jumping until first responders arrived to take over.

Shaun’s mother, Carol, who was impressed with the boys’ feat, told the press that she felt “they were meant to be there to help him.”

After being commended by the local police, who said the man would certainly have died if the boys hadn’t taken such quick action, all three boys were awarded Royal Humane Society Certificates of Commendation.

The Secretary of the Royal Humane Society, Andrew Chapman, announced the awards at the Society’s London headquarters, saying, “There is no doubt that without the quick thinking and action of the three boys the man would have jumped and would have died.

“They were the right people in the right place at the right time and showed tremendous presence of mind in acting as they did particularly bearing in mind their ages.”

Heroism and helping others is something all of us capable of, no matter our age or abilities. These three boys have set an example for everyone who knows them and reads about their deeds.

Zoe Romanowsky

Despite Challenges, Assumption High School Perseveres

People who have heard of the Augustinians of the Assumption, more commonly known as the Assumptionists, probably know of Assumption College, located in Worcester, MA.

But that’s not the only Assumptionist school. In fact, the congregation has educational institutions all over the world.

The Rev. Jacob Barasa, A.A., director of the new Assumption High School in Nairobi, Kenya, said through email they decided to open the school to help “curb the lack of secondary schools” in the area and to provide a solid education.

“The majority of these students cannot afford to pay tuition. However, we encourage them to attend school regardless of financial ability,” he wrote on the GoFundme page.

None of these challenges though, has stopped the 32 students-23 second years and nine first years-from coming to school.

“Their first years are currently eating their meals standing up. There is no dining hall. A new one would cost about $10,000 US to build.

But in undertaking this work, they’ve been faced with some challenges. There’s money. And there are others: a lack of security, no busing, no water on the compound, no dining hall.

It’s also there to serve the poor.

“These poor boys and girls, without shoes and good clothing, walk from neighboring slums, including Kibera. They seek not only education but access to medication and nutrition,” he wrote on a GoFundme page about the high school.

None of these challenges though, has stopped the 32 students-23 second years and nine first years-from coming to school.

“But in undertaking this work, they’ve been faced with some challenges. There’s money. And there are others: a lack of security, no busing, no water on the compound, no dining hall.

“It’s also there to serve the poor.

“These poor boys and girls, without shoes and good clothing, walk from neighboring slums, including Kibera. They seek not only education but access to medication and nutrition,” he wrote on a GoFundme page about the high school.

If you are interested in donating to the Assumptionist High School, you can visit the GoFundMe page, which can be found here: https://www.gofundme.com/help-rescued-kenyan-students

Jon Bishop

St. Joseph Academy Grad Vying to be Next ‘American Idol’

Jonny “Brenns” Brenninkmeyer grew up watching “American Idol” on his living room TV.

“Even when I was like 12, I’d still follow it with my older sister, who’s also into music,” said Brenninkmeyer. “If there was someone on who wasn’t very good, I’d think, ‘I could probably do better.’”

Last fall, the 18-year-old St. Augustine native took the first step toward doing just that. Brenninkmeyer — a 2017 St. Joseph Academy graduate who now attends the College of the Holy Cross in Boston — auditioned for the singing competition in New York City.

Not sure how he would fare, he kept it a secret from his family, jumping on a Greyhound bus to Manhattan. But Brenninkmeyer was called back for another round, and then another, before being chosen to try out for the celebrity judges — who in this year’s newly revived version of the popular TV show are Katy Perry, Lionel Ritchie and Luke Bryan.

The episode featuring his audition will air at 8 p.m. tonight on ABC.

The singer-songwriter with the silk-smooth voice was chosen from 30,000 contenders to make the first cut. The last time a local put the Ancient City on the map on American Idol was 2015, when St. Augustine High School alumna Jamalia Wells also made it to the celebrity round. Wells did not move past the show’s famed Hollywood Week.

For his audition, Brenninkmeyer chose an original song, “Blue Jeans,” accompanying himself on guitar. He didn’t tell the judges he was sick and had only part of his full voice.

“They were really supportive,” he said of the judges. “But they said they wanted more power and range. And I was like, ‘Let me go through and I’ll show it.’”

His reaction to the panel’s thumbs-up: “I didn’t get too crazy. I was more like a chill, surfer dude.”

Brenninkmeyer, the son of Leo and Lisa, got an early start in music, picking up both guitar and piano easily. He describes his singing style as “blue-eyed soul,” mixed with jazz, pop and folk, and counts Frank Sinatra, Leon Bridges and Vance Joy among his inspirations.

Brenninkmeyer was the president of the music ministry at St. Joseph Academy and sang lead vocals in the choir. As a freshman at Holy Cross, he is part of the acapella group known as the “Sons of Pitches.”

In an April 2017 Record story, Carolyn Brown, Brenninkmeyer’s voice coach said: “There is a certain gift with talent that can touch you and I thought, ‘Wow, out of a lot of people I’ve heard, he has it.’”

In 2017, he was one of four singers chosen to compete in The Voice on Snapchat, a social media extension of the TV show, based on a video submission. Though he did not move forward, the experience did encourage him to keep going.

“I’ve gotten a lot more serious about music over the last six months or so,” Brenninkmeyer said.

Winning American Idol — or even making the finals — would be a kind of affirmation of that choice, he said.
Under the terms of American Idol, Brenninkmeyer was not allowed to reveal how far he progresses in the competition, but local residents who want to support him can follow his journey on his Facebook page at www.facebook.com/jonnybrennsmusic.

Colleen Jones

Not a Queen’s Coronation, But a Mom’s:
One of the Church’s Most Special Traditions

If May crowning isn't part of your family and parish celebration of May, you can (and should!) change that.

If you grew up in a Catholic community in the 1950s, a May crowning is nothing new to you.

On the first Sunday in May, you put on your loveliest dress or your starchiest shirt, picked a flower from your garden, and joined a procession of schoolchildren singing “Immaculate Mary” and “O Sanctissima.” The sweetest girl in the eighth grade (or perhaps the prettiest girl in the second grade) carried a crown to be placed on the head of a Marian statue, likely set up in an outdoor replica of the Lourdes Grotto. The weather was always beautiful and the cookies and punch afterwards may or may not have been the highlight for most of the children.

But like many Catholic traditions, this one has gone by the wayside in most communities. And while it’s only a nice tradition, there’s something powerful in those communal memories, especially the ones that form our souls.

When you grew up around Eucharistic processions, it’s hard not to take a knee before the Blessed Sacrament. And many who may rarely make it to church might find themselves smiling fondly at the thought of crowning Mary their Queen.

This devotion isn’t just about assenting to the mystery of Mary’s Queenship, the idea that as the mother of the King of Heaven she is the Queen of Heaven. Certainly, the crown offers that symbolism, and it’s nothing to be shrugged at. But we’re not crowning her with gold and diamonds, we’re crowning her with flowers. It’s not a queen’s coronation, but a mom’s.

What makes this celebration so special isn’t the flower crown ordered specially from the florist to fit her concrete head, it’s the flowers lovingly placed before her (some carefully grown or purchased, others picked last minute from a bush in the front yard).

It’s the little children picking just the right flower from their garden, or perhaps begging their mother to take them for a florist so they can find the perfect thing for Mary—this is what’s most beautiful. This old Catholic tradition teaches little ones to look for something beautiful to offer to their Mother in Heaven. It teaches them to love her in a tangible way.

My sister has a gaggle of little kids and an outdoor statue of Mary. On any given spring day, you can find wilted nosegays of weeds or wildflowers, picked by a child who knows Mary is her Mother and wants to give her Mother something beautiful. Some days the flowers are accompanied by stomp rocket missiles, baby dolls, or other childish offerings, but the heart of it remains the same: they stop by to see Mary and tell her they love her.

This year, they made a special visit on Good Friday, because they knew Mary was sad. She had watched her Son die, and they wanted to keep her company. They know it’s just a statue. But it’s a tangible way for them to love the Blessed Mother. And when we participate, it’s a way for us to become like children again—her children.

So this year, I want to invite you to have your own May crowning. If you’ve got toddlers, teach them which flowers they can
pick for Mary and start the practice of taking her flowers and saying a Hail Mary. With older kids, you can invite a few families over, make flower crowns, and sing a few songs. If you don’t have children, make a habit of stopping by the store each week in May to buy a little bouquet for a Marian image in your home or a statue at your church.

If you work at a school, make a whole production of it, with a crown from a florist and all the students encouraged to bring flowers from home. Parishes could hand out flowers on Mother’s Day and invite parishioners to join in a procession to a Marian statue after Mass. Even switching your phone’s wallpaper to an image of Mary for the month is a small way of joining in with generations past in loving our Mom a little bit extra during the month set aside for her.

Because these little devotions don’t just form our children’s hearts to be Marian, they form our hearts to be childlike. Jesus told us to become like little children (Mt 18:13) and then gave us his mother so that we could practice. As May begins this week, let’s look at her the way little ones look at their moms: like she’s the most beautiful, wonderful, kind, loving mother in the world. Because she is.

Meg Hunter-Kilmer

https://aleteia.org/2018/04/30/not-a-queens-coronation-but-a-moms-one-of-the-churchs-most-special-traditions/#.Wuhhx6H4ZMg.email
Why Reading Comprehension Tests are Inherently Flawed

Teaching "reading comprehension" is pointless if kids don't have the education they need to comprehend what they're reading.

I will never forget when my oldest daughter was studying for her very first state-mandated standardized test. She was practicing reading comprehension questions – the kind where she was given a short paragraph to read and then questions to answer, questions that would supposedly test her ability to comprehend what she was reading.

She was doing fine until she got to her third question. I was in the kitchen making dinner when she asked for help, so I took a break and came around to the kitchen table.

The paragraph was about the invention and popularity of the game of jacks, and the question asked something like “where were jacks typically played.” The choices were on par with her comprehension level at the time, making the right answer fairly obvious. So I began to ask her leading questions like, “do you think kids would have played jacks in a swimming pool?” figuring she just needed a little push to eliminate the wrong answers.

So I was surprised when she said, “I don’t know.”

“Well, think about it. Is jacks a game you could play in the water?” I asked.

“I don’t know!!!” she repeated, getting frustrated.

“Sienna, just think about it. Think about whether it would even be possible to play jacks in water,” I repeated.

She threw her head down into her arms and wailed, “I don’t knooooowwwww!”

“It’s not that hard, kiddo,” I said gently. “Could you scatter the jacks on top of the pool?”

“But jacks are things you do,” she wailed. “You can’t put them anywhere!”

This was moment when I realized how utterly ineffective reading comprehension tests are. Kids might be able to read and comprehend fine, but if they don’t have a grasp of basic facts the tests are predicated on, it will appear that they lack comprehension skills.

As The Atlantic pointed out recently, American schools’ gradual shift away from teaching information and toward teaching skills predicated upon the mastery of standardized testing is paradoxically leaving kids less equipped to pass those tests, in addition to short-changing their education as a whole.

Cognitive scientists have known for decades that simply mastering comprehension skills doesn’t ensure a young student will be able to apply them to whatever texts they’re confronted with on standardized tests and in their studies later in life.

One of those cognitive scientists spoke on the Tuesday panel: Daniel Willingham, a psychology professor at the University of Virginia who writes about the science behind reading comprehension. Willingham explained that whether or not readers understand a text depends far more on how
much background knowledge and vocabulary they have relating to the topic than on how much they’ve practiced comprehension skills. That’s because writers leave out a lot of information that they assume readers will know … But if readers can’t supply the missing information, they have a hard time making sense of the text. If students arrive at high school without knowing who won the Civil War they’ll have a hard time understanding a textbook passage about Reconstruction.

Reading comprehension tests are supposedly formatted in such a way that the reader needs no other information than what is contained in the paragraph to answer the question, but that’s not how it works out in reality. So while the paragraph Sienna read explained how to play jacks, she couldn’t understand any of it because in her mind, jacks were jumping jacks. She had never seen a jack, and the paragraph didn’t explain what they were — it assumed the reader knew.

But if the reader doesn’t know, he or she will try and supply information makes the most sense and fit the rest of the questions around it. Sienna was trying to figure out where people would be most likely to do jumping jacks, and while “in the pool” wasn’t the best choice, it was a lot better than one of the other options — on the kitchen table.

Just imagine how many kids are bombing reading comprehension tests through no failure of comprehension, but through a simple (and easily fixable) lack of information. And instead of being given what they need to succeed next time, they’re repeatedly given disconnected sets of “readings” that do nothing to further the actual knowledge they need to comprehend.

We owe our kids better than this. It’s time to stop pretending that reading comprehension can be taught or tested in isolation from actual education. It’s time to stop laser-focusing on math and reading skills necessary for standardized tests and time to start remembering the whole wide world of education our kids will need to succeed in life. And above all, it’s time free students and teachers from the shackles of pointless, counterproductive, and ultimately damaging methods of standardized testing. Let the teachers teach, and let the students learn!

Calah Alexander

The Remarkable Story of a 33-Year-Old Irish Nun Killed in an Earthquake

A documentary about Sr. Clare Crockett's inspirational life is now available, with a trailer on the internet.

Just a little over two years ago, on April 16, 2016, Sr. Clare Crockett died after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Ecuador, killing 480 people. The nun, who belonged to the Order of the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother, was playing guitar and singing in the main building of the Holy Family School, along with Sr Thérèse Ryan, who was injured in the disaster, and five young aspirants to the order. The earthquake left the four-story building in Playa Prieta in ruins, claiming the lives of Sr. Clare and the five postulants.

The death of the gregarious Sr. Clare deeply affected those who knew her. Her Order stated: “We discovered that her loss afflicted us, while her memory filled us with joy.” It became obvious that the 33-year-old had left a lasting impression on everyone she met; the Irish “livewire” was infectious with her energy, joy, and love of Jesus. Soon the Servant Sisters were inundated with messages revealing how Sr. Clare had helped them: “Strangers who spoke to us of conversions, vocations discovered or recovered, and special grace.”

As a result the Order decided to gather testimonies and stories relating to the life of Sr. Clare and make a documentary. In the trailer we get to see a young Clare with a passion for acting and to become famous. Then as she grew older she shared with great enthusiasm how “Jesus Christ stole my heart.” Her sister, Shauna Gill, told BBC Radio Foyle: “Clare was just your normal average teenager … It was a surprise, a big shock to everybody, when Clare said she was going away to be a nun.”

Yet, it’s no surprise that everybody loved her. In the little we see of her in the trailer, she resonates joy and such excitement for Christ, with a desire to share this love with everybody she meets. While people gravitated towards her, one participant in the documentary simply states: “She didn’t want them to come to her but to the Lord.”

The documentary shows how she was “one of the most unbelievable nuns” and her love for Christ encouraged others, with one young lady saying: “I owe a lot to her for the salvation of my soul.”

And now, on the two-year anniversary of her death, after a lot of work and dedication, the film is ready. Yet, in keeping with the true apostolic spirit of the Sister, the documentary, All or Nothing: Sr. Clare Crockett, will be distributed in “a form that is cost-free and apostolic.” While a few select screenings have already been organized, in order to arrange the viewing of the film in your parish, school, or even movie theater you just need to make a request on the Sr. Clare webpage.

Cerith Gardiner

https://aleteia.org/2018/05/01/the-remarkable-story-of-a-33-year-old-irish-nun-killed-in-an-earthquake/#.WuhgSze_P-k.email
Why Johnny Stopped Going to Church: Part 2

Nostalgia is a beautiful thing. Each August 7, I take my wife out for dinner. I never miss the date, because 17 years ago this was when we joined in marriage. Part of the strength we gain for the present is nourished by the strength we draw from our past.

Nostalgia can, of course, be deadly too. When memories are utterly indifferent to the present, nostalgia blinds us to the needs of the future. Something like this happens for many of us when we think of Catholic schools. Parents or grandparents who were educated in the past often fail to appreciate that what goes on behind classroom doors today at times bears little resemblance to their own experience.

To make vivid this contrast, I sometimes use a chart which communicates the decline in the sheer number of Catholic schools relative to the Catholic population in America.

In 1965, at the peak of the parochial system, Catholic schools educated about 5.5 million students. Today the number has slid well below 2 million. About 96 schools closed last year (20 opened). Fifty thousand desks go empty each year. Over the past decade Catholic schools lost 20% of their population. By the numbers it looks like a slide to oblivion. If trends continue, by the time a new teacher retires they’ll be about as many Catholic schools around town as there are Buddhist Montessori daycares. They might exist somewhere; but you and I won’t find them.

One of the reasons for the decline is intellectual. In my previous article, I suggested that dominant secular theories of learning and catechesis presume that Christian doctrine has no foundation in reason. But of course to halt our analysis here would be to oversimplify. It is not only intellectual causes that undermine faith. Often, Johnny stops going to Church for cultural reasons, which an individual school has little or no power to control – at least in the short term.

A few months ago, I was speaking to a group of teachers and wanted to convey a sense of what the Catholic school, even an enthusiastically faithful Catholic school, is up against. I wondered: to what other metrics of “decline” within Catholic culture could we point? Everyone knows about the rise of abortion since the 1970s. Drug use is up. Fornication is out of control. These are toxic, no doubt, but arguably they are a step removed from the internal workings of Catholic life and culture.

I didn’t want to name metrics that could be disputed among Catholics (the way, for instance, the Church’s teaching on artificial contraception is often “disputed” even by church-going Catholics). I also didn’t want to focus attention on “the world.” The point I wished to make was that we have our own house to bring into order. In the end, I settled upon these three metrics or marks of a healthy Catholic culture that I thought any person of good will could accept: 1. The presence of religious sisters; 2. Catholics getting married; 3. Catholics attending weekly Mass. After some digging, here are the numbers that I was able to correlate alongside the loss of Catholic schools and the increase of the Catholic population since Vatican II.

Once I plugged in the figures, I was astounded. The post-Vatican Two problem of Catholic cultural decline clearly didn’t only hit the schools. The loss of other core
Catholic indicators has been following a roughly proportional rate of decline.

The “red” line quantifies the fate of the religious sisters. Perhaps this shouldn’t be a surprise. Sisters staffed many of our Catholic schools. As they took off their habits or entered secular professions, it follows that schools might close, as in fact they did, according to a corresponding pattern. What was more surprising, at least to me, was how the “brown” and “green” lines followed a similar trajectory.

So which is it? Did Johnny stop going to church because he received bad ideas? Or did he accept bad ideas because his Catholic school closed and his older siblings didn’t bother marrying and his parents stopped going to church? Perhaps this is a chicken and egg question, but it is worth pondering.

A few years ago, a prominent political philosopher, Mary Eberstadt, published a study that challenged a feature of what had been the standard account of secularization. The standard story goes something like this. As science and prosperity advance, religious faith retreats – and in its wake, the decline of the family. What Eberstadt’s book, How the West Really Lost God: A New Theory of Secularization, argues is for a reverse of the causal explanation. Standard accounts propose that cohesive family structures tend to whither after belief in God has waned. In contrast, her research pointed out that the empirical evidence at least equally supports an opposing order of causality: namely, that it is the loss of the family that tends to encourage religious skepticism. This line is similar to the argument made a few years ago by another prominent academic, Paul Vitz, a psychologist at New York University. In his Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism, through a series of case studies of famous atheists, Vitz argued that it is often an atheist’s disappointment in his own father that unconsciously justifies his own rejection of God. Both books suggest a similar conclusion. It may be true that a vote against God equals weak families. But “weak families” appears just as likely to produce belief in “no God.”

The precise order of causality is somewhat of a moot point. The takeaway for those of us in the business of teaching – bishops, pastors, teachers, parents – seems clear enough: Catholicism only survives if it is presented consistently as a total way of life and thought. Where structures fail, faith flounders; where faith fails, structures flounder.

Catholic culture in North America in the 20th century was supported by three legs: the parish, the family, and the Catholic school. As one falters, so do the others. If Johnny is to come back to the Church, if our schools are to survive into the next generation, we cannot continue as though it were business as usual. Our children deserve better. Our faith demands more. The Church stands as one of the last defenders of reason. Catholic teachers of the future will need to be better equipped to confront the deep sources of nihilism in our culture; even more, Catholic parents, alongside schools and parishes, will need to form their children in an alternative culture. Only then, I think, is Johnny likely to stay in church.

Ryan N.S. Topping

American Children and the Culture of Disrespect

Let’s face it. Almost every child has likely had some type of meltdown in public, causing great embarrassment to both the child’s parent and to other witnesses in the vicinity. But while such disrespectful behavior is embarrassing at age two, it’s downright horrifying the older a child gets. Dr. Leonard Sax recently experienced one of these horrifying displays of disrespect in his medical practice. He describes the scenario in a recent edition of The Wall Street Journal:

“Kyle was absorbed in a videogame on his cellphone, so I asked his mom, ‘How long has Kyle had a stomach ache?’ Mom said, ‘I’m thinking it’s been about two days.’ Then Kyle replied, ‘Shut up, mom. You don’t know what you’re talking about.’ And he gave a snorty laugh, without looking up from his videogame. Kyle is 10 years old.”

Unfortunately, such behavior is no longer an anomaly, as Dr. Sax goes on to explain:

“I have been a physician for 29 years. This sort of language and behavior from a 10-year-old was very rare in the 1980s and 1990s. It would have been unusual a decade ago. It is common today. America’s children are immersed in a culture of disrespect: for parents, teachers, and one another. They learn it from television, even on the Disney Channel, where parents are portrayed as clueless, out-of-touch or absent. They learn it from celebrities or the Internet. They learn it from social media. They teach it to one another. They wear T-shirts emblazoned with slogans like ‘I’m not shy. I just don’t like you.’”

But while disrespectful children have become the norm, Dr. Sax has found that respectful, obedient children still exist out there, largely because there are still a few parents who practice authoritative parenting. And according to Dr. Sax, it’s not too late for parents to change course and start instilling respect in their children. His recommendations for doing so are summarized in the following three points:

1. Put the family before the child.

Prioritize the family. The family meal at home is more important than piling on after-school extracurricular activities. Instead of boosting self-esteem, teach humility.

2. Remove distractions.

No screens when you are with your child. Put your cellphone away. No electronic devices at the dinner table. Teach the art of face-to-face conversation.

3. Draw a line in the sand, and don’t look back.

If you’re going to make a change, don’t be subtle. New Year’s Day is as good a time as any to sit down with your children and explain that there are going to be some changes in this household: changes in how we talk, in how we behave, in how we treat one another.

Americans have tried the kinder, gentler, let-me-be-your-friend approach to parenting for the last several decades. If the behavior problems in schools and the heightened level of sensitivity on college campuses are any indication, this parenting approach hasn’t produced the positive outcomes we were hoping for. Is it time for today’s parents to reverse course and begin teaching their children to respect others first instead of their own little selves?
Annie Holmquist

How Do Kids Become Hard Workers?

“How do you get your kids to be hard workers?” This is a question that confronts parents and educators alike. In most instances, kids who work hard on things outside of school generally are hard workers in school, too. However, from the growing awareness that millennials lack the work ethic of previous generations to the mounting anxiety over the current iGeneration’s apparent inability to focus let alone work, the cultivating of a work ethic in young people is a hot topic.

So how is it to be done? Here are a few opinions from some best-selling books.

A few years ago, a book called *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* by Amy Chua caused a bit of stir. Chua, a Yale Law School professor, contrasts the “Chinese parenting” style with the typical parenting style of white Americans. “Western parents try to respect their children’s individuality,” Chua explains, “encouraging them to pursue their true passions and providing a nurturing environment.” The Tiger Mother, in contrast, made her two daughters take Mandarin lessons, do math speed drills, and practice their instruments two to three hours a day (no breaks on vacation and double sessions on weekends), all the while expecting straight A’s at school. And no surprise, the Tiger Mom got results. In addition to high academic achievement, her daughters won acclaim as young musicians. One of her daughters earned a statewide prodigy award for violin, and the other one performed at Carnegie Hall at age fourteen.

The Tiger Mom’s prescription for hard-working children is not for the faint of heart. Chua says that through it all, her daughters probably hated their mother, and there were many battles along the way. But by the end of high school, both daughters realized that they were glad that their mom raised them the way she did. Chua’s point is that a “boot camp” type of upbringing for children is not a bad thing. It didn’t crush her daughters. It made them strong and accomplished. Her daughters had to go through some suffering, but it forged them and made them confident. The Tiger Mom’s message is that most kids have to be pushed and pushed hard in order to accomplish a lot. And in the end, they won’t hate you; they’ll even appreciate what you did for them.

[Joseph Pearce notes: There is a good counter-argument to Chua’s “Tiger Mother” approach to parenting which I have endeavored to articulate in an article in this very Journal, entitled “Virtue versus Virtuosity.” It can be read here: https://journal.newmansociety.org/2018/01/virtue-versus-virtuosity/]

Ben Sasse, the senator from Nebraska, has a book titled *The Vanishing American Adult*. Sasse is somewhat controversial among conservatives, but in this book he has some interesting things to say. He warns that the prevailing culture tide flows against learning how to work hard, and the situation is much worse than most people want to acknowledge:

“If you live today,” Flannery O’Connor sagely observed, “you breathe in nihilism.” It is the sea in which we swim. And she was writing a half a century ago—today, we practically choke on the pathologies of our culture. Therefore at our house we have come to conclude that building and strengthening character will require extreme measures and the intentional pursuit of gritty work experiences.
The Nebraska Senator does acknowledge that part of our struggle against culture is simply the convenience of life today and the structure of suburban living. Very few people are able to raise their children in an agrarian setting, where kids would need to work on the family farm as a necessity. Moreover, modern amenities and technology combined with labor laws and safety concerns have severely limited what children can legally do for work.

Many parents want to help their kids learn a work ethic but discover it’s simply very hard to find them work. There is much less work around the house than [at] any point in history… At our house, we have come to the realization that we must set aside time to plan work—and thus victories—for them. It is work to plan work, and we’ve had to resolve to do it, even when it feels artificial, and even when kids think it is borderline mean of us.

Sasse puts a high priority on having kids do work, any kind of work, at an early age, because if they are not being productive in some way, they are just being consumers. Kids that are productive can take ownership in their production and these kids have an immeasurable advantage in life.

Dr. Leonard Sax, a physician and psychologist, echoes a similar thought. However, for Sax, having children do chores is important for teaching humility.

By exempting your child from all chores, as many affluent American families now do, you are sending the message, “Your time is too valuable to be spent on menial tasks,” which easily morphs into the unintended message, “You are too important to do menial tasks.” And that unintended message puffs up the bloated self-esteem that now characterizes many American kids. (The Collapse of Parenting)

Sax recommends: “Require your kids to make their beds. Wash the dishes. Mow the lawn. Feed the pets. Set the table. Clean the bathrooms.” When adults do all the menial tasks around the house, it breeds a sense of entitlement in kids that is difficult to correct.

Some people might be quick to object, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” That can be true, but it depends on what you mean by “play.” There’s a difference between passive amusements and active leisure. “All amusements and no leisure makes Jack have a dull head,” but that’s a story for another day.

Mo Woltering

Should Catholic Schools Observe Fish Friday All Year?

I report here a conversation a trustworthy friend recently related. He could not recall, precisely, where the conversation took place. But he promises that it did take place and assures me his memory is accurate. I, for one, was edified by his story; I relay it here, trusting it will edify others.

Characters: Bob Beefy and Solomon Salmon, two colleagues, one a Catholic teacher, the other a new principal.

Setting: Over lunch, three weeks before the end of year BBQ.

BB: Really, Solomon, you cannot be serious. Are you proposing that we cancel this year’s BBQ? The staff members look forward to this all winter.

SS: (Laughing) Not at all, not at all…I love BBQs – the redder the beef the better…

BB: Then why, at least as I heard, are you trying to get rid of the party? I’ve taught here 20 years. We’ve always hosted a BBQ first week after exams.

SS: Listen, Bob, I don’t know what you heard. But I tell you plainly, I’m not against the BBQ. It’s the meat…

BB: Meat! Oh yes. I see. I did not peg you for one of those environmental types, Solomon. But I agree. I’ve thought of that too. This is one of Pope Francis’s themes isn’t it? All the extra water it takes to produce beef. I suppose a lot of younger teachers are pretty sensitive to the environment.

SS: The environment?

BB: Yes, last week, somebody was talking about how we should be bringing in some kind of imported tofu for our staff meals. Very authentic, as I understand. Comes straight from Singapore, or somewhere –

SS: Marvelous stuff they said. And good for the environment too.

BB: Oh, Friday is the problem!

SS: Yes, Friday.

BB: Ah, I understand. You young ones. Solomon, look here: what do you see? (gestures toward the garden out the open window)

SS: Lovely daisies, Bob.

BB: Daisies, that is right. Lent is over, my friend. The Easter bunny has come…

SS: Thank you for the reassurance. (Turns aside, sneezes)

BB: God bless you.

SS: Oh, thank you.

BB: Vatican II did happen, you know. This seems rather reactionary. Next thing we know, you’ll propose we start inflicting Latin on the poor kids again…

SS: Pace, pace… one charge at a time my friend! I’m aware we don’t have to abstain
from meat, strictly speaking. I’m not saying it’s a sin to eat meat, Bob. I just think observing the discipline together speaks well to our efforts to keep the school Catholic. You know we’ve set that as one of our institutional priorities.

BB: I’m all for being Catholic. But this seems oppressive. Why would you want us all to conform to a rule that is obsolete? You probably don’t remember being threatened as a child. I do. When my friends ate hotdogs at birthday parties, I wasn’t allowed. The reason the Church – thank God – got rid of the Friday Fast is because pastors saw that rituals don’t count for modern people. We’re supposed to find a fast that is personally meaningful, and besides, a lot of people like fish, so what would be the point of fasting for them.

SS: OK, Bob. I’m sorry you felt threatened…. On meaningful disciplines: you have a point. I don’t like meaningless ritual either. Jesus does say, it’s not what goes inside the body that counts…. (sneezes again).

BB: God bless you.

SS: Thank you, allergies.

BB: No problem. Anyway, let’s not be Pharisees.

SS: Hang on. I agree that the “inside” is more important. That doesn’t mean the “outside” doesn’t count. In fact, for most of us, most of the time, it’s only when we act through the body that we ever make progress in the soul.

BB: I don’t follow.

SS: Bob, if we were angels, we could be “spiritual” with our heads only. But we’re not angels. Man cannot live by thoughts alone – we need signs and symbols and gestures. And it’s the symbolism of Fish Friday as much as anything else that I want to encourage in our staff. You have grandchildren, right?

BB: Sure do. They’re 12, 8 and 2.

SS: Wonderful. Do you ever pray with them?

BB: Of course….

SS: Before meals?

BB: Always.

SS: And how do you do that?

BB: What do you mean?

SS: What do you do together when you are at the table? Do the kids pray silently to themselves, and then fork into the spaghetti and meatballs?

BB: Of course not. No one touches their plate till grandma sits down. Then we hold hands, bow our heads, and I say a grace.

SS: Precisely, you see?

BB: See what?

SS: You hold hands.

BB: Every time. Listen, Solomon, lunch is nearly over. Are we going to get the BBQ or not?

SS: OK, I’m almost through. You hold hands because you know that your posture, that is, your body, matters. You know this instinctively, Bob, and so you are teaching your grandchildren well. To feel prayerful,
we have to act prayerfully. The inside matters, but the outside gets us there.

BB: Fair enough. We all need disciplines. I don’t see what this has to do with meat.

SS: Well, what I’m trying to get at is this: For 2,000 years Catholics have kept up the custom of abstaining from meat on Fridays. It is one of the few unbroken customs in the Church which we retained from the Jews. To break the custom in the Church is a little like stopping holding hands in your family. Sure, you may be able to pray alone – but holding hands while praying is one of the marks that identifies membership in your family. Fasting from meat is a mark that helps Catholics know they belong to the Church’s family. It’s kind of like wearing our school’s colors.

BB: OK, I can see that. What about Vatican II? You and I both know that the old fasting rules were trashed….

SS: Well, that’s not quite true. After Vatican Two, you are correct, the custom was not made obligatory year-round. Here. Look at my phone (pulls up the Code of Canon Law):

Canon 1251 Abstinence from eating meat or another food according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops is to be observed on Fridays throughout the year unless they are solemnities….

then (scrolling down), this one:

Can. 1253 It is for the conference of bishops to determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence and to substitute in whole or in part for fast and abstinence other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety.

That doesn’t look to me like the custom was trashed. It’s only that, outside of Lent, a substitution to meat on Fridays may be granted.

BB: You know, I’ve never read that before.

SS: Abstinence from meat is still the default discipline, unless a country’s bishops allow for a substitute.

BB: Hmm… Ok. But why should our school observe the fast?

SS: Well, why should your grandkids hold hands around your table? It’s one of those “signs.”

BB: It’s true, we’ve been holding hands for 40 years.

SS: Forty years is a long time. It makes good sense that you’d want to defend that tradition. Two thousand years is longer. I guess that’s partially why this seems a custom worth renewing for us at the school.

BB: Alright. I’m not sure if I agree. But I see what you’re getting at.

SS: Oh yes, did you realize that the Bishops of Britain have already reinstated the common discipline? I wouldn’t be surprised if more dioceses started doing the same.

BB: Well, Solomon. You’ve given me something to chew on. If you bring it up at our next faculty meeting, I won’t like it, but I promise not to growl . . .

The bell rings. All exit.
Ryan N.S. Topping

https://newmansociety.org/should-catholic-schools-observe-fish-friday-all-year/
The Liberal Arts vs. Progressive Education

Search the web and you will find any number of lofty “purposes of education”: Education enables us to develop to the fullest. Education cultivates the human mind with values and principles. Education teaches us to think and analyze the world. And many more.…

But even those vapid platitudes greatly exceed the reality of modern American education. Today’s public schools do no such things. Public schools are in fact the natural offspring of the Progressive Education movement. John Dewey, the movement’s author and founder, did not envision high purposes. Quite the contrary. He constructed a theory of education that saw children—the product of public schools—as cogs in the machine. Not people made in the image of God, but future workers in the social-democratic order. He emphasized equality rather than liberty. Students need to fit the educational pattern, not the other way around. Materialism was at the heart of his philosophy. People, including school students, are simply matter, and matter can be shaped, fashioned, and manipulated into any form necessary. It was a scientific process for Dewey. Properly quantify the educational process, and you can produce an infinite supply of uniform workers.

We lament the absence of honor and courage in our society, the shocking selfishness that we witness daily. But if we are honest, we must admit that this condition is not an accident. Progressive Education produces what C.S. Lewis called “men without chests” by design. If we want a different kind of culture, we need a different kind of education.

One of the hallmarks of Progressive Education is its institutionalization of learning. Students become less and less human. They are herded rather than nurtured. Classical Christian Education (CCE) recognizes the unique, God-given gifts and attributes of every child. Proverbs 22 says “Train up a child in the way he should go…” Note that Solomon says the way “he” should go… a way unique to him. Not squeezed into some generalized institutional pattern.

Progressive Education is also vocational. That is, the goal is to produce an ample supply of workers for diverse menial tasks across the economy. Classical education is much more than vocational. Think about what “liberal” means, as in the Liberal Arts—from the Latin for “free.” It is the education that a free man or woman needs in order to live responsibly and make wise decisions. It is more than the ability to get a job, it is the foundation for a good and virtuous life.

Obviously, the Progressive vision for public education is secular. God has no place in public education. Instead it is somehow supposed to be “neutral” to matters of transcendent value. CCE is based on the tripartite foundation of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Each of those in turn is rooted in the eternal, the transcendent. Classical education takes us out of ourselves and into the realm of the divine.

Dewey’s educational philosophy was furthermore highly socialistic. Dewey was a proud member of the American Socialist Party and believed that government-funded education could move the country in a Socialist direction. His educational philosophy served the greater ends of
Socialism in his view. CCE serves much different ends. Ultimately, CCE is a Kingdom-serving enterprise. Education is never an end in itself. Always ask yourself, education for what?

Finally, Progressive Education is about training up boys and girls who know how to follow. Dewey’s statist philosophy required a passive citizenry, and his educational model sought to keep students focused on themselves and their most narrow interests rather than broader social concerns. The classical education model is more concerned about helping students become capable decision-makers in their community and in their families. Leaders who help bring about positive change in their culture. Risk-takers who are not afraid of inevitable uncertainty and the unknown. And creators who can discover new solutions and articulate beauty in new ways.

When you really start to consider the alternatives, the choice between Progressivism and Classical Christian Education is not a hard one. The task before us is simply to increase the opportunities for families to enjoy the fruits of the Liberal Arts.

Robert D. Stacey

https://newmansociety.org/the-liberal-arts-vs-progressive-education/
It Works! A Principal’s Principles

As my school is gearing up to celebrate our 25th anniversary, it is a natural time to start reflecting, to give thanks, and to consider what we did right that brought us to this point. This is an especially poignant reflection in an educational environment where schools are either closing or else adding younger and younger grade levels, or importing foreign students in order to keep enrollment numbers steady. I say this because, today, in this challenging Catholic school market, our school is thriving more and more. We have been full for the last five years and count a waiting list of 25 percent. What did we do? What do we do? Do we have anything to share?

In my reflections, five areas stand out as essential to forming the culture of the school. It is this culture which is the foundation of the school’s attraction to families. It is this culture which results in the joy that is predominant among students, faculty, administration, and families. Joy. Joy comes from God, and it is to Him that we are dedicated, fully, as a school. It is because of serving Him that the board of our school committed to these basic principles years ago when they hired me as a principal, and it is these which have guided me in my administration of the school community.

1. Hire for mission. This meant hiring teachers and administration staff who believed in the ministry of education and who have the personality and intellectual/cultural formation to help form the children. That is not found in an education degree; it is found in the right kind of person who is committed to truth, beauty, and goodness, and who has a knack for the art of teaching. A deep-held principle of the hiring process is that in hiring for mission, the principal is also forming a faculty of friends. This friendship is based in the highest things, first in love of God, then love of the children and their families, and love of truth, beauty, and goodness. To encourage this spirit, we have many faculty gatherings, seminars, and discussions.

2. Pay whom you hire. The board committed, early on, to a very regular and healthy increase of salaries based on the principle that if it is the right thing to do, God will provide. He did, in spades. Part of the financial responsibility of the school is to pay a just wage, but this has also been balanced with a reasonable teaching load. The just wage allows families to live on the teacher salary, buy a home, and raise a family. They may not get rich, but they should not be poor. A reasonable load allows room for ongoing fresh learning and the faculty time for leisure and, most importantly, time with their families.

3. Grant full leadership authority to the principal. Transitioning from a founding board that usually performs many operational duties of a school can be difficult, but humility and trust win the day at St. Augustine Academy. This school’s board handed over operations and did not meddle. That allowed the whole community to understand the unity of leadership and, thereby, avoided the typical divisions that occur in many schools. It is not usually money that disrupts or destroys schools, it is people holding on to their own self-interested pieces of power. There is also a huge element of success that owes to the school and principal not being bound to the datacrats and burdens of many public-school-like bureaucratic elements that have come to burden even our private schools. This is choking our principals, teachers and
curricula. Hire a principal for mission and let him govern.

4. Limit the size. Every time it comes up for discussion, the board resoundingly reaffirms the school’s commitment to a limited class size, and school size. This is based on the ever-increasing importance of relationship as an essential element of a highly effective school – especially a Catholic school. As with every decision, there are consequences to each path. The smaller school limits some benefits that come with a larger school, e.g., sports programs. However, the trade off for individualized student attention and formation, St. Augustine Academy felt, was totally worth it. The more distant the world becomes with the ever-increasing technological allure, the more essential real relationship becomes in an education based in Christian anthropology. Children need teachers, mentors, alter-Christi’s—not another device that can keep larger classes seemingly engaged.

5. Serve the Catholic family. The final piece of this puzzle was to have a school deeply committed to sound principles rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition, and offer that to Catholic families. The rub to this position is that many families have a wide variety of personalities and intellects within a single family. St. Augustine Academy committed itself, early on, to serve them all. The school would have great teachers and the greatest ideas, so that serves all the highest intellects well. At the same time, the school’s great teachers are loving, mission-driven Catholics who pour out their hearts to improve every mind and heart in their care. Not overloading teacher schedules gives them enough breathing room that they have the energy and desire to go above and beyond what duty demands, and that usually means for the students. Supporting Catholic families, especially ones which are generous to the gift of life, means the school needs to have an affordable tuition scheme (ours is currently the lowest tuition in the Archdiocese).

This has been a recipe for beautiful success. Now many of these topics may be headlines we hear in passing, or those being touted by the latest “marketing campaign,” but with our school it really is true, and it goes deep to the core of every aspect of what we do. As Archbishop J. Michael Miller points out in his work, The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools, “Catholicism must permeate… the entire curriculum.” Permeate . . . the entire curriculum. This can only be done when it also permeates a school’s mission, faculty, and culture. These are the principles that this principal follows.

Michael van Hecke

https://newmansociety.org/it-works-a-principals-principles/
Meet Jimmy Kimmel’s Nun

It was once understood that a gentleman never holds up a woman’s looks for ridicule. Even now, when the idea of a gentleman has itself become an anachronism, the #MeToo moment might have been thought to re-enforce the old prohibition. Turns out there’s an exception for nuns.

Last Tuesday, the host of ABC’s “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” took advantage of this exception during a segment poking fun at the A-listers showing up for this year’s Met Gala in everything from mock papal headgear to cross-bedazzled evening gowns. The gala’s theme was “Fashion and the Catholic Imagination.” Mr. Kimmel said his boyhood had given him a much different impression of the Catholic sense of fashion. For the laugh line, up popped a photo of a middle-aged nun—he called her “Sister Mary Frances O’Brien”—“wearing the latest from JCPenney.”

In reality, Sister Mary Frances O’Brien doesn’t exist. The nun in the photo is Sr. Patricia Pompa. I know because Sr. Pat is principal of Villa Walsh Academy, the Morristown, N.J., high school my daughters attended.

At a time when Christians elsewhere are being beheaded or having their churches torn down, a nun joke doesn’t register high on the outrage meter. But for those who know the real-life woman behind the joke, it stinks of injustice.

It’s true, as Mr. Kimmel’s reference to JCPenney was meant to convey, Sr. Pat’s habit would win no awards for fashion. Then again, it is precisely in this sense she wears it. In its way it is a declaration of higher loyalties and imperatives.

Sr. Pat’s entire life has been about self-sacrifice on behalf of one of these imperatives: the education of girls, which she oversees in a school located a few feet from the convent where she and the sisters live. So when they admit a girl to their school, they see themselves as welcoming her into their home. The Lord says, “I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” At Villa Walsh, Sr. Pat knows every one of her 250 lambs by name.

The Religious Teachers Filippini were founded to educate the daughters of the poor, but the school’s location means a fair number of Villa students come from families of means (“I see the cars you drive,” Sr. Pat sometimes reminds parents during fundraisers). Affluence is no immunity from the trials and tragedies of life: the girl whose parents are in the thick of an ugly divorce, the senior who becomes pregnant, the student with a drug problem, the 14-year-old who just lost her mom to cancer.

In many cases, Sr. Pat is powerless to alter outcomes. But she can love. And love is as much a part of the Villa formula as the high bar it sets for academic excellence. The sisters can’t guarantee their young charges a life free from hurt and unfairness. But they promise them this: No Villa girl will ever hurt alone.

In the popular culture, nuns are synonymous with discipline. There’s something to that, though it’s worth remembering the Latin root for “to discipline” is not “to punish” but “to teach.” As part of preparing their girls for the world, the Filippini sisters endeavor to show them, by example, that when St. Paul wrote that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and
endures all things, it was more than pretty words.

Sometimes love means being the one to deliver bad news; sometimes it’s telling a student to knock off the nonsense and start living up to her God-given potential; sometimes it’s just offering a shoulder to cry on for a girl feeling terribly lost and abandoned. Across our world there are thousands of women who, just like Sr. Pat, bring this love to bear daily in ministries from health care and education to helping victims of sexual trafficking. They are living out their promise to God to put the needs of others before their own.

Like many moms and dads, my wife and I have our anxious moments when we contemplate the future our daughters will inherit. Again like others, we pray for guidance. Then we send our daughters to Sr. Pat. They arrive as unsure and unformed girls—but leave as capable, confident and well-educated women.

And her thanks? To be used as a punchline on late-night TV.

Sr. Pat is not the type to give something like this a second thought. She also knows enough to know Mr. Kimmel intended no malice. Still, she deserves better.

A pity Mr. Kimmel and his audience will settle for a cheap laugh line like “Sr. Mary Frances O’Brien.” Because if they could bring themselves to look just beyond the caricatures to the real-life Sr. Pats and the institutions they run, they would be astonished by the strength, selflessness and accomplishment they would find.

William McGurn

https://www.wsj.com/articles/meet-jimmy-kimmels-nun-1526338218?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=1
Archdiocese of Baltimore Plans to Build
First New Catholic School in City in More Than 50 Years

After years of shuttering schools amid declining enrollment and budget constraints, the Archdiocese of Baltimore is planning to build its first new Catholic school in the city in more than 50 years.

So far, the archdiocese has raised about $13 million of its roughly $18.5 million goal for the creation of the co-ed school, which will serve students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The school will be built on the site of the former public Lexington Terrace Elementary School, which was torn down in 1997 as part of a broader neighborhood redevelopment project.

Sean Caine, a spokesman for the archdiocese, said it hopes to open the school by the fall of 2020 and eventually enroll 500 students there.

“We’ve shrunk our educational footprint in the city; however, we recognize that there is a lack of presence of Catholic education in some areas,” Caine said. “We’ve heard people articulate a need for it and say there’s a pressing need for the stabilizing presence of a Catholic school in West Baltimore.”

Archbishop William E. Lori first publicly discussed the plans last week during a meeting with some of the city’s business leaders at the Center Club.

“It was a way to transition from a quiet phase of the fundraising to a more public one,” Caine said.

In recent years, shrinking enrollment and costly infrastructure upgrades forced the archdiocese to dramatically scale back its portfolio of schools in the city. In 2016, it announced it would close three schools and merge two others. Six years earlier, the archdiocese closed 13 schools, including the beloved Cardinal Gibbons High School in the Morrell Park neighborhood.

But the decision to close schools, officials say, left a void in an area that’s been plagued by high crime and poverty. Those issues were put into stark relief after the 2015 riots following the death of Freddie Gray from injuries suffered in police custody.

The choice to open a new school near a part of the city that witnessed the brunt of the unrest “certainly is symbolic of the church’s renewed commitment to the city and an area of our city that needs investment,” Caine said.

“If there is a way out of poverty and hopelessness and joblessness, education has to be a major part of that conversation,” he said. “And the church wants to be all in when it comes to helping transform lives and communities in West Baltimore.”

Michael Seipp, executive director of the Southwest Partnership, said he welcomes any effort to bring better educational opportunities to his surrounding neighborhoods.

“It’s been a long time since we’ve had a Catholic school open in this area,” he said. “It’s an important step for the archdiocese to bring alternative educational opportunities to neighborhoods, and as someone raised Roman Catholic, I think this is a wonderful thing.”
Still, Seipp said, he’s sure many people who live in the neighborhood will have questions for the archdiocese in the coming months: Where will students be recruited from? Will there be scholarships? What will the effect on traffic be?

In recent years, Caine said, enrollment in the system has stabilized. Part of that can be attributed to a voucher program Gov. Larry Hogan launched in 2016, called Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today.

Known as BOOST, it was designed to provide thousands of Maryland students from poor families with taxpayer-funded vouchers they can use to attend private or religious schools. According to Oct. 30 state data, more than 900 Baltimore students – more than in any other county – were awarded one of these vouchers this school year.

“Without a doubt, it has put Catholic education on the map again in Baltimore City,” Caine said of the BOOST program. “It has breathed new life into Catholic schools.”

About 17,000 students are enrolled in the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s 45 schools, 10 of which are located in the city.

City Councilman John T. Bullock, a lifelong Catholic whose district covers West and Southwest Baltimore, said he’s glad to see the empty lot – at the corner of Martin Luther King Boulevard and Lexington Street – put to good use.

“There’s been a lot of consternation around the closing of schools,” he said. “To have this kind of investment will be a great shot in the arm for the neighborhood.”

The archdiocese plans to name the school after the late Cardinal William H. Keeler. In January, a state board approved a motion to transfer the roughly 1.5 acre Lexington Terrace Elementary School property to the city, and then to the archdiocese “for the construction of a new private school.”

The location is also close to the University of Maryland BioPark, highlighting the school’s planned emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Caine said the archdiocese has submitted an application for a contract to purchase the property and is regularly meeting with the city to finalize details for the sale.

For now, it is focused on fundraising.

“Once the money is in hand,” Caine said, “we will set a date for a groundbreaking.”

Talia Richman

Major Growth for Group Highlighting Faith-Science Harmony

In his 1988 letter to the Director of the Vatican Observatory, Pope John Paul II called scientists who are members of the Church to “serve as a key resource” by providing a “much needed ministry” to those who find faith and science at odds.

Now, a group of scientists is rising to the late pope’s challenge through what is known as the Society of Catholic Scientists.

Dr. Stephan Barr of the University of Delaware, founder and president of the society, explained that the group was created in 2016.

“Its main purpose was to promote spiritual and intellectual fellowship among faithful Catholics who work in the natural sciences, and also display the harmony between faith and science in an era when many doubt it,” Barr told CNA.

Two years after its founding, the Society of Catholic Scientists has grown from a small group to an organization with more than 700 members, which include Catholic individuals who either have a doctorate in a natural science or who are in school for a science degree as a graduate or undergraduate student.

While primarily focused in North America, the organization has members in 35 countries and all seven continents.

The Society’s motto, taken from the writings of St. Bonaventure, is “knowledge with devotion, research with wonder.” The organization strives to foster fellowship among Catholic scientists, give witness to the harmony between faith and science, host forums for scientific and theological discussions, and be a resource for the laity, Barr said.

“For too long, a false impression has been allowed to grow that the world of science is a religious wasteland where faith cannot grow,” he said.

“Even religious scientists can have this impression and feel isolated, because they are unaware that many of their colleagues share their faith – this is especially true of younger researchers and students, so providing mentoring and role models is another goal of SCS.”

In June, the Society of Catholic Scientists is hosting its second annual conference that will focus on the theme of “Physicalism and the Human Mind.” It will explore the idea held by some within the scientific field that only the physical world really exists.

The society’s first conference was held in April 2017 in Chicago with the theme “Origins,” and was attended by over 80 members of the organization, as well as dozens of other scholars. This year, the 2018 conference is expecting 135 scholars to attend, including 110 Catholic scientists and students.

The upcoming conference will be held at The Catholic University of America from June 8-10 and will feature 11 speakers from various fields, including neuroscience, quantum physics, mathematics, and philosophy. While most of the speakers are Catholic, some are not, including the distinguished Prof. Peter Koellner of Harvard.

Continuing a tradition established last year, one scientist will be singled out and honored.
with the St. Albert Award, named after the patron of scientists. This year’s award will be presented to Juan Martin Maldacena of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton for his distinguished work linking gravity and quantum field theory.

Noting that the Society of Catholic Scientists has grown tremendously in its first two years, Barr said he believes the organization “continues to grow rapidly” because scientists are feeling isolated in their fields and are looking for an outlet to discuss the connection between their faith and science.

The society has been recognized by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and has Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia as its episcopal moderator.

Catholic News Agency

https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/major-growth-for-group-highlighting-faith-science-harmony-56543#.Ww1p55ADZZw.email
As a sign of solidarity with religious minorities who have been victims of Islamic State-led genocide, Archbishop Leonard P. Blair of Hartford celebrated a special Mass for persecuted Middle Eastern Christians April 15 at St. Mary’s Church in New Haven, the birthplace of the Knights of Columbus.

Bishop Bawai Soro of the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of Mar Addai of Toronto, a native of Iraq, delivered the homily and also proclaimed the Gospel in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus.

During the Mass, sponsored by the Archdiocese of Hartford and the Knights of Columbus, the two bishops encouraged the large congregation to pray for Christians throughout the world who are under constant threat of losing their homelands and their very lives if they do not renounce Christ.

“These persecuted Christians of Iraq and Syria have not stopped giving thanks to God for your love and solidarity,” Bishop Soro said in his homily.

“We thank you for helping us carry our cross” of being persecuted and displaced “simply because we believe in Christ,” added the bishop, who for many years has ministered to the Iraqi Christian community in North America.

Archbishop Blair recognized students from nine Catholic high schools who have been part of an archdiocesewide effort to learn about the genocide in Iraq and Syria. Students in each school have prayed for a “sister town” in the region; held assemblies about the persecution and rebuilding efforts in the ancient cities; and collected donations by distributing olive wood “solidarity crosses,” which were made in the Middle East and supplied by the Knights of Columbus.

During the offertory, students presented the archbishop with proceeds from the cross distribution, which will be sent to the “sister towns” to help in rebuilding efforts.

“We are hopeful that this program will be the first of many across the U.S. and Canada,” said Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson. “We are very grateful to the Archdiocese of Hartford, and we have been truly inspired by these high school students who have taken time and energy to learn about this important issue and raise money to help.”

The K of C Supreme Council estimates that about $70 will feed a displaced family for a month in Iraq; and about $2,000 will help reconstruct a family’s home.

Since 2014, the Knights of Columbus Christian Refugee Relief Fund has committed nearly $19 million to aid persecuted Christians in Iraq, Syria and the surrounding region with food, shelter, education, medicine and rebuilding. A current project underway is the resettlement of the Iraqi town of Karamles.

As part of the high school campaign, Archbishop Blair delivered a webcast in which he explained the genocide of Christians and other religious minorities perpetrated by ISIS militants in Iraq and Syria.
“They were given the choice of renouncing their faith, fleeing or being killed,” Blair stated. “The fact that the overwhelming majority kept their faith, even though it meant that they had to leave what were often comfortable middle-class lives, is a great witness to the power of their faith.”

Mary Chalupsky


He added that Christians in Iraq and Syria are members of some of the oldest Christian communities in the world, but the number of Christians in Iraq has fallen from 1.5 million before 2003 to only 200,000 today. In Syria, the number has declined by 70 percent.
At first glance one might surmise that the title of this article alludes to the characters in John Steinbeck’s classic. Truthfully, while reading *Of Mice and Men* I grew to like the characters and found myself empathizing with some of their hardships. A good author is able to pull his readers into the world of his characters. While C.S. Lewis’s metaphor “men without chests” could be ascribed to the characters in *Of Mice and Men*, a more critical concern at hand is the impression the novel has made on young readers for more than a half-century. What has been their take-away? How has this short, yet harrowing, novella affected the hearts and minds of readers and our overall culture? Why does it continue to be one of the most popular required reading selections in middle schools and high schools across America?

In case you are not familiar with *Of Mice and Men* the story concludes with an act that has been described as “mercy killing.” One of the main characters, Lennie, a mentally disabled man who is like a big, clumsy, guileless teddy bear unaware of his own physical strength, accidentally breaks the neck of a young woman – who happens to be his boss’s daughter-in-law – on the ranch where he is living and working. George, Lennie’s closest friend and caretaker, finds the body and after some deliberation with his friend Candy, decides to shoot Lennie in the back of the head since the deceased woman’s husband and other men were coming to kill him. What’s also implied is that George wished to spare him from what he feared would be either a brutal death or a life of imprisonment and suffering.

I do not wish to presume Mr. Steinbeck’s intentions when he penned *Of Mice and Men*. The purpose of this article is not to focus on the author or characters in his novel per se, but on the culture we have created, which has ensued, in large part, from what we put into our minds.

St. John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life) warns of an emerging culture “actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency.” He alerts us further to “a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable ‘culture of death.’” In Pope Francis’s recent apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et exsultate* (Rejoice and be glad) he expresses grave concern for “the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia” and “the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development.”

Presently, 68 percent of Americans believe in physician-assisted suicide (up 10 percentage points from last year), now legal in seven states. The Down Syndrome abortion rate has increased to over 90 percent in Iceland, Denmark, and Australia, prompting Special Olympian Frank Stephens to speak out in defense of his life. Interesting that the character Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* was mentally and physically challenged.

Recently little Alfie Evans lost the battle for his life since the British High Court ruled he should be taken off life support. Despite the fact that he was granted Italian citizenship and offered treatment at Vatican-owned Bambino Gesu Pediatric Hospital, the judge ruled, “this would not be in his best interest.”
Perhaps some responsibility for our culture of death lies not only in our selection of literature but also in how less-than-ideal literature (or what many consider to be less-than-ideal) is taught. A book that appears to oppose meritorious ideals can also be used to champion them. There is a flip side to every story. For example, a teacher could pose the following questions to her students:

What would be your ideal ending to *Of Mice and Men*?

Do you think George did the right thing? Why or why not?

What if the authorities saw that Lennie had a mental illness and they understood he was not entirely at fault?

What if George was able to defend Lennie and got him the help he needed?

When you take someone’s fate into your own hands you are haunted by the “what ifs” for the rest of your life. It’s doubtful that the modern day teacher would be so inclined to seize such an ideal opportunity to open up a discussion on morality. Her potential loss of a job in this politically correct climate in our schools precludes her from doing so. Nevertheless, questions should be presented to encourage students to think outside the box of secular relativism and venture into the infinite beyond.

We have grown accustomed to seeking entertainment at all costs – even the cost to our own souls and those of our children. We choose novels because they are short and easy to read, or entertaining, even though the once-esteemable moral standards of our society are at stake. We forsake what little opportunity we have to instill virtue in our young – virtues such as fortitude, temperance, prudence and justice, in addition to all of the minor virtues. In a classic passage from *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis elaborates on this point:

And all the time – such is the trag-comedy of our situation – we continue to clamor for those very qualities we are rendering impossible… In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.

By “chests” Lewis is referring to that space between the mind and the gut, or in his words, “the liaison… between the cerebral man and the visceral man.” Without “chests” we are rendered incapable of grasping objective realities. If we persistently endorse literature infused with values that are ambiguous at best and malevolent at worst, we mustn’t be surprised by individuals in our midst bereft of virtue and enterprise. After all, you can’t extract water from a stone. Virtue is derived from sources that are virtuous—those that promote truth, beauty, goodness and love. “By starving the sensibility of our pupils,” Lewis says, “we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes.”

Virtue doesn’t magically manifest itself on humans as they grow; virtuous qualities are cultivated over time through witness and example. When we spurn opportunities to teach objective truths – such as all life should be respected and preserved regardless of a person’s efficiency or condition – *Of Mice and Men* will leave a young reader dangling in the air, bewildered, and utterly confused about what should be the most fundamental aspect of life: that all human life is sacred and never worthy of extermination. Moreover, the direct killing
of an innocent person is always intrinsically wrong, even if one perceives that doing so would bring about a greater good. Not only has this moral absolute always been the Catholic Church’s position, other Christians, Jews and pagans have also affirmed it. As Socrates famously professed, “It is better to suffer wrong than to do it.”

That much of today’s scholastic literature fits in nicely with “progressive” ideology is no coincidence. C.S. Lewis was not concerned with the intention of the authors he was critiquing “but with the effect their book will certainly have on the schoolboy’s mind.” Perhaps 1944—the year Abolition of Man was published—marked the beginning of a dangerous trend he was able to foresee; a trend that would gradually chip away at the moral conviction in our souls, thereby opening the door to moral relativism. A trend that would shake our propensity for virtue and lure us toward vice. And a trend that would produce “men [and women] without chests.”

“I doubt whether we are sufficiently attentive to the importance of elementary text books,” surmised Lewis in the opening of The Abolition of Man. Although I agree with him I believe that his presupposition would not apply to everyone in this day and age. It seems there are a multitude of characters in education that know exactly what they are doing. “They see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda – they have learned from tradition that youth is sentimental – and they conclude that the best thing they can do is fortify the minds of young people against emotions,” notes Lewis in his prophetic work. He was particularly concerned with value judgments of subjects being ascribed to mere feelings about those subjects, for example, that a waterfall itself is not sublime; sublime represents the emotional state of the person speaking. In other words, how I feel supersedes objective truths. It’s as if he foresaw the “Me” generation unfolding before his eyes.

In this age of technology when scrolling on screens has nearly replaced turning the pages of a book, we have but a small window of opportunity to teach literature. Shouldn’t we make the most of this time and be more discerning with our choices? Of all the literary masterpieces that exist why do we insist on keeping such a dark, depressing, slang-filled, absurd story that glorifies euthanasia and blasphemes God on every other page in our school curricula? If you were going to be trapped on a desert island for many years and could bring only five books with you would Of Mice and Men make the cut? I have a hunch that the majority would answer no to that hypothetical question. Why would anyone want to read and reread a story that ends with despair? Even worse, why do we continue to inflict this torment on young minds?

Many of us submit to the idea that kids need to be prepared for the real world. Well, is it possible our notion of reality derives from a demoralized worldview? Shouldn’t the real world strive for the ideal no matter how impossible it may seem? For what it’s worth, my ideal ending to Of Mice and Men is this:

Candy takes Lennie into the woods to hide while George makes a plea for his life. Lennie hears his beloved friend defending him from afar. The police show up and take Lennie in. He’s treated fairly in prison and given a shorter sentence due to his compromised mental and physical faculties. He then moves to a medical facility that cares for him and teaches him self-control. Lennie progresses and, in turn, teaches
others who struggle with the same challenges. And on Saturdays, he happily tends to the rabbits on George’s farm.

Some may believe such an ending is an improbable fantasy. Perhaps, rather, improbable fantasies have conditioned us to surrender to the notion that the highest ideal is unattainable. Miracles can happen but only if they are given a chance. One must resist the temptation to act and allow God to move first—a deference that requires faith. Do we want our children to believe in miracles?

There was a time when American schools prioritized instilling values in students that promoted life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We taught them that God is the author and creator of all life, and therefore, the sovereign Master of life. And we believed in the interminable strength of human beings, even in the most desperate situations, such as those described by Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl in Man’s Search For Meaning, whose memoir was once a curriculum standard in many American schools.

Like the character George, Judge Hayden and the UK High Court are moved by misguided compassion. Compassion means to suffer with, yet they believe they are taking the moral high ground by sparing someone from what they perceive will be lack of quality of life. Yet, who are they to determine the essence of quality? Who are they to say who deserves to live and who deserves to die? Who are they to say that the person’s life will have no meaning or serve no purpose and must be terminated? Like St. John Paul II prophesied, our society has become “excessively concerned with efficiency.” Frank Stephens says he has “a great life.” Perhaps the British courts need to hear his testimony.

Let’s be frank. The intent of the evil one is to create spiritually vacant, soulless individuals devoid of consciences. Figuratively speaking, if the organ that comprises the soul and conscience is removed so are the faculties needed to love authentically. We know that love involves more than what we are feeling, since our feelings can’t always be trusted. God is love, and so if we remove Godly principles and ideals we remove the one indispensable source necessary to properly nurture our souls.

“The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing,” said Edmund Burke. It seems many “good men” have become morally and spiritually apathetic. Otherwise, they are too busy to notice. I have to admit that at times I haven’t always strived for the ideal; and when my children were young, I didn’t always pay attention to what they were reading in school. I assumed that the literature selected was for the betterment of their education. Perhaps in many ways it was. But I neglected, for a time, to consider something much more important, that is, if the lessons they were learning were helping them become virtuous human beings. As parents and educators it’s never too late to start noticing.

Of Mice and Men is but one sample among many educational tools seemingly being used to promote a nefarious agenda. Although literature is not the only societal influence that exists, we should not underestimate its power to erode the moral fiber of our culture. Tragically, it seems we have, as C.S. Lewis so accurately predicted. Let us rise up and assess what our choices have wrought. What are we doing to our children, our young adults, and our overall society? Have our selections in literature enhanced our mental, spiritual and
emotional wellbeing? Have they promoted our Judeo-Christian values and ideals? It’s time to ensure that they do, and to make reparation for the damage we’ve incurred. It’s time we the inattentive start paying attention.

Anna Githens

Gaza Students Defy Daily Challenges to Do Well in Catholic-Run School

Messelem Abu Mutlak, a 15-year-old student at the Rosary Sisters School in Gaza, fantasizes about being a champion goalkeeper and when he is not studying, he dedicates himself to improve his soccer skills.

Abu Mutlak’s real dream though, is to study computer science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston.

However, the reality of his life as a young man living in Gaza is that no matter how much effort he puts into his studies and getting good grades, he has about as much chance of going to MIT as he does of becoming a star goalkeeper.

“I have maybe a one percent chance of going there,” Abu Mutlak told Catholic News Service in a telephone interview after completing the last of his final exams for the year. “I really want to get there. I want to study. I know MIT is the best college teaching computer programming.”

His friend Mahmoud Abu Smara, 15, also wants to study computer science in the United States, although he is not set on any one college yet.

“I think I did well on my exams,” Abu Smara said. “My parents want me to study in the USA to better myself. And I want to do something in my future so that I can help the world and my people. But it is hard to study here in Gaza. I am not able to focus all the time.”

To keep focused so as not to fall into despair, Abu Smara started training two years ago for triathlon competitions, which are held once a year in Gaza. This year, he finished in the top 10, he said.

Much of his motivation and focus on positive goals despite rampant difficulties and dangers of living in Gaza has come from the education he has received at the Rosary Sisters School.

“They teach me about life and how to have a positive outlook, not just book learning,” he explained. “They help me to think things through and realize that not everything that happens to you in life is negative. They help us to think positive and be happy in your life.”

On March 30, Palestinians began the Great March of Return, a six-week campaign that included protests demanding to be allowed to return to their homeland in what is now Israel. More than 110 people were killed and thousands injured in the ensuing demonstrations, mainly along the Gaza border as Israeli forces responded with gunfire and tear gas.

Israel maintains that the ruling Hamas party has used the demonstrators for its own political purposes with its members trying to breach the border fence into Israel.

Gaza has been under an Israeli and Egyptian blockade for more than a decade since Hamas was voted into government. Both countries control the exit routes of the besieged 139-square-mile strip of land sandwiched between them, where about 1,000 Christians live amongst a majority Muslim population of 1.8 million.

Tensions remained high in Gaza and three demonstrators were reported killed and hundreds injured along the border on the last Friday of Ramadan June 8 as Israeli soldiers fired tear gas and live rounds at protestors who threw grenades, other improvised...
explosives and rocks at the soldiers, and burned tires.

Though it can be “devastating” to hear about the situation along the border, the Rosary School students interviewed - all Muslims, as are the majority of the students at the school - said it was clear to them they can help the Palestinian cause by getting an education and contributing to society in the future.

“You can’t really focus … when I know some people are getting killed on the border but I don’t go to demonstrations. I don’t want to go and my parents don’t want me to go. I can give more to my society alive than dead, though I can’t be sure of what my future will be. If the border is not open, where can I go?” said Jaafar Abu Cumboz, 15, who wants to be a surgeon.

Of course, it is difficult to maintain hope in Gaza, acknowledged Yassen Alakhras, 16, but he knows he is a good student. He wants to study medicine, probably in Gaza, he said.

“People ask me how I can remain positive, but I will live my life,” Alakhras said.

School principal Sister Nabila Saleh, originally from Egypt, said that in addition to providing a strong academic curriculum, the school dedicates itself to imparting on students their own importance and value as members of society.

It has not been easy on the students studying for their final exams, she said. Along with the political tensions young people have had to contend with a troubling aspect of daily life: only four hours of electricity a day. The students study for final exams by using rechargeable battery-powered lights. Still, that is better than a few years ago when they could study only by candlelight.

“In our school, we try to give our students capacity building for their lives, not just for their studies,” Saleh said. “We try to help them learn how to work in their difficult situation. We teach them English, French. We give them music class. We teach them that they are important. We try to keep them away from the violence.”

For the young people, it has made all the difference.

“Two years ago, I was just playing games, I didn’t study. I stayed at home all the time playing games,” Abu Mutlak said. “But now I want to go out and give what I can of myself. Especially in the last year I have completely changed my personality and hope to better myself and have a better life.”

Judith Sudilovsky

Self Esteem or Self-Discipline in Schools

Do you want your child at a school that merely works to ensure your child feels better about themselves or one that urges them to actually better themselves? The answer could decide where you send your child to school.

The self-esteem movement, which has been the celebrated central mission of many schools throughout our country, both public and private; secular and religious, has its roots in Ayn Rand’s Obectivism, an atheistic philosophy which eschews sacrifice and kindness. The father of the self-esteem movement, Nathaniel Branden, was a Rand acolyte who originally published many chapters of his foundational work “The Psychology of Self-Esteem” in Rand’s newsletter.

That movement has since evolved into decades of classroom-based social engineering which scorn concepts of sin, standards, shame, and self-discipline. What has that brought us? The No Child Left Un-Whined curriculum has bequeathed unto us generations of social activists shrieking about transforming the world with little interest in changing themselves.

As a father of five, I couldn’t conceive of a more malevolent lesson than teaching children that any criticism of themselves is a sign of a sick society which is desperately in need of the healing that only Generation Them can bring.

Taking stock of the past fifty years, we can ascertain that the self-esteem movement in schools hasn’t improved academic performance or reduced anti-social behavior. Grade promotion has become the equivalent of the academic participation trophy. And how many young people have been assured that every time they’ve gotten in trouble at school it’s the teacher’s fault or that they’re just not understood? Let’s be honest, when schools teach that nothing is ever wrong, further lessons are impossible.

But thankfully, there are alternatives for parents hoping for better. The Wall Street Journal ran an editorial recently titled “The Catholic School Difference” that elaborated on a study conducted for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute by University of California-Santa Barbara associate professor Michael Gottfried and doctoral student Jacob Kirksey about how Catholic schools, as opposed to other schools, have been particularly effective in nurturing self-discipline among students.

The authors compared children in Catholic schools with those in other schools and discovered that “Catholic school children argued, fought, got angry, acted impulsively, and disturbed ongoing activities less frequently,” than others.

In fact, students in Catholic schools “were more likely to control their temper, respect others’ property, accept their fellow students’ ideas, and handle peer pressure.”

The Journal concludes that “the correlation is strong between the focus that Catholic schools put on self-discipline and better student behavior.”

First: “Schools that value and focus on self discipline will likely do a better job of fostering it in children.” If other schools “took self discipline as seriously as Catholic schools do, they wouldn’t have to spend as much time, energy and political capital on penalizing students” for bad behavior.
Second: “Assuming that these results reflect a ‘Catholic Schools Effect,’ other schools might consider both explicit and implicit methods to replicate it.” The report notes that some “no excuses” charter schools are already doing this, through the curriculum or the way students interact with adults and teachers who model self-discipline themselves.

Third: “Don’t underestimate the power of religion to positively influence a child’s behavior.” Religion isn’t the only way to foster self-discipline, the authors emphasize, but it’s effective compared to most of the alternatives in channeling youthful energy into productive self-control.

So the question must be asked – What is it about Catholic schools that’s more effective in teaching self-discipline? I would suggest that for starters, good Catholic schools are more focused on self-discipline rather than self-esteem.

Just an observation, those who have been praised their entire lives will be hard pressed to kneel in praise of another. But there’s also this – Catholic schools, at least some of them, still teach about sin. Insert gasp here. When children learn that they were conceived with original sin, they are also taught gratitude to Jesus who died on the cross to save them. They learn that people are their neighbors to be loved, not merely obstacles to be manipulated towards the creation of a utopia. They are taught the proper balance of rights and responsibility, freedom and duty. They are taught to seek the human experience of love, sin, grace, and redemption.

A Catholic school which teaches young people that they are born with original sin and must look to God’s grace for salvation will likely get very different results than a secular institution which tells children that every whim, urge, and feeling they’ve ever had is owed validation by the world.

The former helps to form servants who have mastered themselves, the latter creates tyrants who seeks to master servants.

The public school system, and sadly many nominally Catholic schools, teach children that the only sin is reminding others that they are sinners.

I can’t help but ponder, if a school’s Catholicism is helpful to teach children self-discipline then how much better is a school that takes its Catholic identity seriously? Yet oddly, (or maybe not so oddly) it is those very schools that seem most under attack from secular progressives.

The authors of the study say it is a “tragedy for the nation” that so many Catholic schools continue to close when they are most needed. I would argue that a far greater tragedy is that so many Catholic schools seem so intent on mirroring their failing secular counterparts.

Matthew Archbold

The Call of Beauty

When John Ruskin, the greatest of all Victorian writers on Catholic art and architecture and a passionate promoter of good craftsmanship and the rights of the artisan, went as a young man with his father on the grand tour of Europe, he settled for a while in Turin. One Sunday he attended a service of the Waldensians, those spiritual progenitors of his own Puritan tribe.

“The assembled congregation,” he said, “numbered in all some three or four and twenty, of whom fifteen or sixteen were grey-haired women. Their solitary and clerkless preacher, a somewhat stunted figure in a plain black coat, with a cracked voice, after leading them through the languid forms of prayer which are all that in truth are possible to people whose present life is dull and its terrestrial future unchangeable, put his utmost zeal into a consolatory discourse on the wickedness of the wide world, more especially that of the plain of Piedmont and city of Turin.”

He departed neither troubled nor consoled, but said that from that point on, the old “evangelical” strain in him, that is the Puritan, was gone for good. Very different was his examination of the first old missal that came into his possession. “For truly,” said Ruskin, “a well-illuminated missal is a fairy cathedral full of painted windows, bound together to carry in one’s pocket, with the music and the blessing of all its prayers besides. And then followed, of course, the discovery that all beautiful prayers were Catholic, – all wise interpretation of the Bible Catholic; – and every manner of Protestant written services whatsoever either insolently altered corruptions, or washed-out and ground-down rags and debris of the great Catholic collects, litanies, and songs of praise.”

For a variety of cultural and political reasons, Ruskin did not become a Catholic, seeming to think that he could no more do so than become something other than Scots-English. Yet what would Ruskin say if he visited our American churches now?

It won’t do to say that what’s really important is the message of the gospel. Everybody knows that. The Waldensian heretic knew that. If you are going to a wedding, what’s really important is the committed love of the bride and groom. But we are not disembodied spirits, floating about in mental space. Anima forma corporis: the soul is the body’s form, says Saint Thomas, and we may stress each noun in turn. The soul – not something else, is the form or animating structural principle of the body. The soul is the form of the body, and not some flitting ghost in the machine. The soul is the form of the body – not of a computer program or a tangle of steel and wires. The human soul is the sort of creature God made to animate the human body. They belong together. Therefore we believe in the resurrection in the flesh, not in the fleeting of some soul or other off to sparkle-land.

Therefore what we do in the body and through the body redounds to the good or the harm of the soul. Plato knew this, and that is why he believed that the base of all education was music: harmony. It follows that if we fill our churches with slovenly or silly music, we will be hard put not to become spiritually slovenly and silly ourselves. If we whitewash all of our old stories of saints, and let the young feast on bare walls with water-stains, dust, and mold, we should not be surprised to find that even the gospel stories are not “real” to them, have no body, no imaginative form; a theoretical Jesus, not the real man who
might arrest you with his gaze, convict you with his glare, or console you with one glance of mercy.

I have attended vespers with a conservative Lutheran congregation, who had invited me to speak to their assembled pastors and their families all day long, and been struck by the beauty and the Catholicity of the chants and the prayers, and I noted with gratitude and delight that even the small children knew what to sing and how. And I wonder, “What do we think we are doing?” What has happened to the beauty of our prayers, hymns, chants, processions, windows, painted walls and ceilings, vestments, and vessels?

In the 1970s, American Catholic churches engaged in a race of iconoclasm, a race to see who could reach the bottom of blankness first, getting a certain number of points, I guess, for each prayer forgotten or painting obliterated or communion rail reduced to debris. It would be comforting to say that silence took their place. Often a silence of the wrong kind did: the silence of a parking lot where a church used to be. But man’s mind, like nature, abhors a vacuum, so instead of art we have minimalist mockeries or childish banners, instead of hymns we have political jingles or off (way off) Broadway show tunes for Miss Performance, and instead of prayers we have committee-drafted memoranda: “Parish to God, send vocations.” I know, I know, it isn’t all that bad. Some of it is worse, and in some places there’s a real attempt to recover what we have lost or thrown away.

But it would be a fine and comforting thing to know that whenever you enter a Catholic church, you will be entering a place where people care about beauty, because they understand that God who made the astoundingly beautiful world around us is properly worshiped in beauty, whether the austere beauty of a Carthusian monastery, or the florid beauty of a Baroque cathedral; but beauty in any case. They say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I should rather say that ugliness is in the eye of the beholder – like a pointed stick. Beauty is a real thing. God made it.

We should learn from that.

Anthony Esolen

**Aristotle’s Commonsense Philosophy**

The poet Dante called him “master of those who know.” The scholastics named him simply “the philosopher.” Founder of biology, zoology, logic, political science, rhetoric, literary criticism, psychology, ethics, physics, economics, and more besides, contemporary scholars in numerous fields still consult him before launching out on their own enquiry. Aristotle never disappoints. For the modern educator, his insights remain fundamental.

Aristotle, along with Plato, stands at the head of one of the three broad traditions of educational philosophy that today compete. (The second, the Romantic tradition, stems from Rousseau, the third, the Utilitarian, from J.S. Mill.) Already a century before Aristotle, the Greeks had invented a sequence of studies meant to perfect the nature of man as man. This education they called “liberal” because it was ordered to perfecting our freedom. Freedom is always for some good, and the good most valued by the Greeks, and to which Aristotle’s writings give witness, is the good of the intellect. Aristotle has been called the philosopher of common sense. The reason for this is that he begins with evident truths. He does not demand faith. Nor does he wrap his ideas in jargon. Rather, like St. Thomas Aquinas, he appeals to our common experience and the wisdom of tradition. Only then does the work of rational inquiry begin.

Modern educators, following the steps of modern philosophers, see their task in revolutionary terms. New schools and sub-schools of “theory” pour out of our educational laboratories only to be served up for our children as though they were field mice awaiting scientific experimentation. But children are not mice. And the newest recipe in the cupboard should be the last to be served to the baby. Experiment and innovation have a place in education. But that is in the matter chiefly of application, not of principle. For the fundamental principles of human nature and thus of sound pedagogy remain constant. At least that is Aristotle’s conviction.

Aristotle’s thought is so rich and his observations so penetrating that the chief obstacle a budding teacher meets in confronting the master is rather like the one a youthful climber faces when standing before the face of a mountain: the edifice is grand, the promised view breathless, but the path up is obscure. What I’ll offer are a few footholds to begin the ascent. I present below a variety of short quotations drawn from his *Nicomachean Ethics* and allied works followed by a gloss and, where helpful, a note of contrast to some modern doctrine.

Man is ordered to truth. “All human beings by nature desire to know” (opening line of the *Metaphysics*). Let’s begin at the beginning. All desire knowledge. As the eye is suited for sight and the ear for sound, so also is the intellect ordered to truth. Knowledge is good for man; it is a condition for our happiness. Without it we wither and fade. As John Paul II once said, “The greatest need today is to help young people see the possibility of knowing truth.” This contrasts with the postmodern celebration of the irrational. To dogmatically accept we have no access to universals is to swallow a pill of despair. Even those teachers infected by Marx or Nietzsche or Derrida cannot deny that young people, reflexively, reach out for knowledge hoping that it may be found. Aristotle’s philosophy is a philosophy of
hope. We don’t “make” truth; we discover it. This is opposed to constructivism.

Teaching presumes the mind’s native power to grasp truth. “But all teaching is from what is already known” (NE 1139b26). But can we know truth? Teaching, according to Aristotle, is less pouring water into an empty vessel than it is irrigating a fertile field. A tree will never sing and a dog will never learn the alphabet, because it has no potency for language. Human beings have such potencies, and for much more besides. The teacher, therefore, never encounters an absolutely blank slate. Knowledge begins in sense experience. The art of teaching assumes a pupil’s native grasp of things. That apprehension may be imperfect or flawed, but learning occurs long before a child enters the classroom.

The teacher’s task is, then, to assist with nature, to find where the student has already climbed, and lend a hand so that he may see yet farther. Aristotle’s logical and ethical works offer innumerable insights on the degrees of knowing, the conditions of knowing, and the fruits of knowledge. In brief, though, here are the three modes of teaching: by induction (drawing from particular instances universal principles), by deduction (deriving particular conclusions from universal principles), or by dialectic (through the logical examination of the consequences of premises) – and always by the teacher’s own example. This is opposed to relativism.

We can distinguish between liberal and servile learning. “There are also some liberal arts quite proper for a freeman to acquire” (Politics 1337b15). Plato and Aristotle distinguished between an education that is liberal and one that is servile. “Liberal” in this sense has nothing to do with political parties. It designates, rather, whether a given discipline is properly pursued as an end or a means. Liberal subjects are those which are studied for their own sake, or better, for the sake of liberating a man from ignorance about his proper end.

Which disciplines should qualify? Opinions varied somewhat in the ancient world. By the time of St. Augustine, in the fourth century A.D., the list of “liberal” subjects was settled: grammar, logic, rhetoric (the trivium); music, astronomy, geometry, arithmetic (the quadrivium). The reason these arts liberate is as follows. First, they train the mind in both qualitative and quantitative reasoning; where the one gives us access to being through words, the other gives us access to being through numbers. Second: these seven disciplines make ready the soil of the mind for philosophical reasoning – reasoning about being as being, ultimately, God. Absent philosophy, theology becomes arbitrary; absent the liberal arts, philosophy becomes nearly impossible. Absent a liberal education, education itself becomes drudgery.

In contrast to liberal disciplines are servile disciplines. Servile disciplines are not bad. Indeed, they are recognized by all as highly useful. What they are not, however, are ends in themselves. Servile disciplines are only useful as means. For example: plumbing, medicine, and engineering, help us attain the important goods of fresh water, reasonable health, and solid bridges. These are all genuine goods yet none of them are pursued for their own sakes. We want sanitation, health and movement for the sake of freedom; but freedom for what? Servile arts cannot tell. While it is crucial that our education should equip a child to get a job, even more important is it that we equip a child to have a reason to live. This is opposed to pragmatism.
And in conclusion: God is the first principle of and last end of knowledge. “Daddy, where do people come from?” Such uncomfortable questions children unfailingly ask. Aristotle thought grown-ups need to ask them too. The philosopher even thought reason can supply an answer: God. Aristotle gives his demonstrations for God’s existence in the Physics, Metaphysics, and On the Parts of Animals, or you can look at St. Thomas’ Summa Theologica, I.2 for a smart adaptation. To remove God from the classroom is to remove the first principle from rationality. Though Christians and Jews know that the fruits of revelation, too, have something to contribute to our public schools, to deny God is simply to jeopardize the very foundation of public reason. This is opposed to the Supreme Court.

Ryan N.S. Topping

New Mexico’s Supreme Court is reconsidering a 2015 ruling which ended the state funding of textbooks for private schools. Is this good news?

As a publisher of textbooks produced specifically for Catholic schools, I am conflicted in answering the question. On the one hand, state money provides a large well of cash for schools to much more easily make a decision to upgrade textbooks. After all, most of our schools are woefully budget challenged. Money to alleviate the strain is a welcome relief to those schools, I am sure. On the other hand, two problems peek out of the public funds trough. One is the looming “strings attached.” We wait for the string to be pulled, and wonder what it means for a school to keep following the money on the string – what do they have to compromise? The second problem is becoming dependent on the funding source to the point of having it dictate a school’s buying decisions, even if not necessary.

The positive side seems obvious. Catholic parents pay tuition, but also pay their fair share for public education. It is only right that some of those funds come back to benefit the educational process of their own children. It is also for the good of the state and society that Catholic schools exist, for they educate well, they form a more acute conscience-guided citizen, and they save the states billions of dollars in education spending. Archbishop Chaput offers this statistic: “Catholic and other non-public schools currently save Pennsylvania taxpayers more than $4 billion every year.”

Imagine what would happen if all those schools were to close. Tens of thousands of students, $4 billion dollars worth, would show up on the doorstep of the public schools and the state would have to educate them, with not a dime of additional resources from the public, because they already receive taxes from everyone. It would break the system! And so, it seems like sound business sense for the state education funds to keep that small trickle of good will dollars going into the private schools. Curricular aid is a perfect place to do so. Textbook assistance can provide a small but important benefit, based on a per child formula, which ensures the benefit really follows the child.

The Church has repeatedly called for governments, in justice, to aid Catholic schools in some of the expense of educating children. She realizes the state has no obligation to fund religious education, as such, but she claims there is the whole other element of education, the so-called secular subjects, which the state has a vested interest in. Again, to paraphrase Archbishop Chaput, the value to our society that a good education provides, no matter who is giving it, is priceless. For this reason, it seems that states should follow New Mexico’s response to the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2017 case, *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer*, in which it sided with a Lutheran school being able to access state funds that were made available to upgrade the safety of its playground. New Mexico saw that a basic human need was being met, even if it was on the grounds of a church.

There are other ways to look at this whole issue, however, such as from a perspective of fundamental anthropology, or liberty. Government funding has become increasingly tied to a secular, anti-religious ideological agenda. One must be very wary of moving in the direction of government funding. A common argument of advocates...
on all sides of the aisle is that the secular subjects are just that, secular, and not subject to ideology, so it is fine for the state to fund those books. We have our history textbooks funded by a few states due to this very reasoning.

In a recent *Catholic News Agency* article on the New Mexico case, Eric Baxter of the Becket Law Group stated in a perfectly well-meaning way, “A science textbook is a science textbook no matter whose shelf it’s on.” The problem is that this is not true! A science textbook is not just a science textbook. Nor is a history book just a history book. To assert, or even accept the notion that publishers like Pearson, Glencoe or Prentice Hall do not have an agenda is either a lie or terribly naïve. They do have an agenda, even an ideology, and they push it.

The standard mainstream science textbook is written from a mechanistic world view. This is flawed science because the world is not mechanistic. One can be a pure and excellent scientist and still acknowledge God, creation, and the beauty of His stamp on the world. In fact, many of the greatest scientists in history were deeply religious – many of them monks and priests. They became so interested in science, and so advanced in discovery because they wanted to understand God’s creation even better, and reveal the gifts He had locked in the intricacies of His world.

Similarly, an honest historian cannot tell history without a significant part of the story being wound up with the Church, and religious motivations for discovery, improvements of economy and government, and yes, some not-so-rosy things, too. But to write the Church’s involvement largely out of history is profoundly poor scholarship. Yet that is what they do. The Church is written out, and Ellen DeGeneres is written in, along with Harvey Milk, Jose Sarria and Gavin Newsom. These are prominent characters in the new lower elementary social studies books in California. These characters are important to history because of their stand for “gay rights”. Of all the stories to share with our children about the great arc of history, are these the ones my seven or eight year old really need to be learning? And yet, this is what we get when we follow the state textbook.

What have we done? We have traded our liberty to teach truth and form our children in right teaching, for free textbooks. Beware of states bearing gifts.

If, as in the case of a few states, your state will fund textbooks such as the Catholic Textbook Project’s history series, by all means, use those funds. That is a right and proper use of the citizens’ taxes. Just be ready to also pay for good, true and beautiful materials by yourself if the state stops funding such products. After all, most Catholic schools in the country do not benefit from state funding of textbooks anyway, and they still find ways to pay for it. It is a nice perk if you have it but please do not let it prevent you from having a textbook that is in line with the core principles of our mission of Catholic education. Sometimes liberty comes at a cost!

Michael van Hecke

Are the Project Veritas/NJEA Videos an Anomaly or the Canary in the Coal Mine?

Last week at the Statehouse in Trenton, New Jersey legislators moved far beyond the usual debates about our education system.

Instead of quotidian discussions on issues like the flaws in our school funding formula or high school graduation requirements or student assessments, the Senate Education and Labor Committees held a special joint hearing on the unimaginable: the safety of New Jersey’s public school children and the behavior of teacher union leaders.

Anchoring these hearing were two videos by Project Veritas, released in May, showing New Jersey union presidents discussing ways they protect teachers accused of sexual abuse toward students.

In one video, Kathleen Valencia, president of the Union City Education Association is caught on tape advising a teacher to not report that he hurt a student and referring to a Union City teacher who had sex with a child but was not charged criminally.

In the other, Hamilton Township Education Association President David R. Perry tells someone posing as a teacher who confesses to beating a student, “I need to know the truth, so that we can bend the truth. If nobody brings it up from (the) school, I don’t say boo.” Later in the video Perry says, “I’m here to defend even the worst people.”

These comments sent shock waves throughout the state and last week’s hearing was the beginning of the process to address this issue.

Prior to the hearing, NJEA stated that they “welcome the opportunity to discuss these important issues further with legislators in order to ensure that all public education advocates are working together to ensure the safety and well-being of New Jersey’s students.” During the hearing, NJEA Executive Director Ed Richardson agreed his union had “a moral obligation to protect students,” but also suggested that the union officials in the videos were “set up,” and did not provide any guarantees or reassurances that this kind of behavior was an anomaly.

However, Senate President Steve Sweeney remarked that if union leaders have “devised a way to get around reporting properly incidents in schools where kids have been physically assaulted, it’s a real problem.” He added, “I think it’s enough of an issue when you have local leadership bragging about how they get around things, and how they can fix things, that it needs to be reviewed to make sure it stops.”

This got me wondering: Do these videos represent a successful sting operation that showcase two bad apples? Or do they reveal a pattern of illegal and unethical behavior?

My hope is that this issue ends now and we will not find any more examples of this kind of behavior.

But there are signs that this could be just the beginning.

Note the following from the NJEA website, posted this January, titled “Protecting Yourself During Child Abuse Investigations.” Here, an NJEA attorney states, “NJEA [has] provid[ed] attorneys to represent hundreds of certified and support staff school employees each year in… child abuse and neglect investigation…NJEA’s
cadre of lawyers are among the most experienced in the state in dealing with such allegations… Your NJEA dues help you preserve your career.”

For the sake of the safety of our kids, my hope is that Valencia and Perry were indeed anomalies, but until NJEA substantively addresses the issue, one must wonder if union leadership has a pattern of defending all teachers, even the very worst teachers, at all costs, including those who molest children. Most importantly, are there any teachers in New Jersey classrooms who should not be around our children?

Unfortunately, the lack of clarity by NJEA leaders did not help put this issue to rest.

At the hearing, Senator Teresa Ruiz, chair of the Senate Education Committee, responded to the videos and summarized this concern: “We have to change the culture of individuals who think their main priority is to protect the worst.”

With a nod to recent history (thinking of Harvey Weinstein et.al. here), if a culture of protecting the worst does exist, the truth will out.

Laura Waters

Moments after the June 2 Mass of Ordination in St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral, Trenton, had concluded, Christian Brother Frank Byrne, president of Christian Brothers Academy, Lincroft, and Christian Brother Ralph Montedoro happily reflected on the blessing of having three CBA graduates receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders from Bishop David M. O’Connell, C.M.

“It’s great for the school to know that three of our [former] students were ordained today,” said Brother Frank, noting that he knew Father Nicholas Dolan when he was a student at CBA, but Father Christopher Dayton and Father Michael De Saye had already graduated by the time he arrived to the school nine years ago.

“It’s special for our school,” Brother Frank said. “It speaks well of Catholic education in general that the school helped plant the seed in the young men along with their families to nurture and grow into ordination today.”

Brother Ralph, the school’s executive vice president, said it was a privilege to be present for the ordination and that he was honored knowing that the CBA community had played a part in the men’s priestly journeys.

“They were typical CBA young boys who we helped to nurture,” he said.

“Who would have known they would have gone on to pursue the seminary? [God] touched their lives and called them, and they said ‘yes’ to the call,” he said.

Father DeSaye also remarked on how his CBA education helped inspire his vocation, saying, “They laid a good foundation in Catholic morals and Catholic culture, which I think is fundamental to anyone who is going to discern a priestly vocation.”

A wide smile came crossed Brother Frank’s face as he reflected on the number of graduates from the all-male school who went on to become priests.

With the ordinations of Father Dayton, Father DeSaye and Father Dolan, “we now have nine,” said Brother Frank, who then proceeded to name other priest alumni, especially those who are currently serving in the Trenton Diocese – Father Robert Holtz, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Riverton; Father Joseph Farrell, pastor of Assumption Parish, New Egypt and St. Andrew Parish, Jobstown; Father Jarlath Quinn, parochial vicar of St. James Parish, Pennington, St. George Parish, Titusville, and St. Alphonsus Parish, Hopewell; and Father Kenneth Ekdahl, pastor of Jesus the Lord Parish, Keyport.

“We keep praying for vocations to continue to the priesthood and religious life,” including vocations to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the community which staffs CBA,” he said.

Mary Stadnyk

http://www.trentonmonitor.com/main.asp?SectionID=4&SubSectionID=234&ArticleID=18390
The Internet: Blessing or Curse?

Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles Robert Barron recently gave a pair of quite interesting talks at Google and Facebook. Now approaching 30 million views, Bishop Barron’s *Word on Fire* is the most influential Catholic evangelization ministry online. Bishop Barron is the ideal teacher, and this for two reasons: mastery of his subject and a genuine love (in the Augustinian sense) of his listeners. These qualities allow him to communicate complex ideas in comprehensible ways and, like his hero Aquinas, to dispassionately consider objections on their own merit without demonizing anyone. In a mass-media world awash with anti-intellectual polemics, Bishop Barron is manifestly reasonable and pastoral.

All of this being said, I was surprised by Bishop Barron’s unqualified affirmation of the Internet as a great good for us all. I understand it would not do for an honored guest to note the pernicious features of his host’s profession, but while allowing for noble endeavors such as *Word on Fire* and *Crisis* and other good things, the Internet also makes possible virtually unrestricted mass communication of the basest inclinations of our sinful nature. It is debatable that the Internet is an unqualified good. It is more often the case that the Internet promulgates the worst that has been thought and said, not the best.

Besides obvious moral risks, are there cognitive risks to those growing up in a personalized, voice-activated, high-speed, ever-changing, always “tweeting,” incessantly “following,” electronic environment, such as the development of a new tool. When a technology performs tasks previously performed by the brain, our brains gradually change accordingly as the need for certain neural functions becomes obsolete. We might consider the impact of calculators on American students’ ability (or willingness) to learn mathematics. Why bother using our brains when a device will do things for us?

Is there something about the technology itself that, over time, impacts the way we think? In a very interesting article in *The Atlantic* in 2008, Nicholas Carr wondered if Google is making us dumber. He noticed that for some time he was feeling something “remapping the neural circuitry” of his brain. Carr believes it’s the Internet. He observed a change in the way he thinks, most in evidence when he tried to read a book. Citing 1960s media theorist Marshall McLuhan, Carr asserts of media:

They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought. And what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.

McLuhan also observed that technology is often the mechanism used to advance utopian ideals under the guise of enhancing physical or neural functions. This was the promise made by the inventors of the Internet. But McLuhan notes that mechanization ends by supplanting human functions rather than enhancing them. Bookless curricula and inquiry-based
learning are now the watchwords of mechanized schooling that increasingly diminishes the need for actual teaching or learning.

Carr cites a study of search habits undertaken by scholars from University College London. Over a five-year period they documented the search behaviors of people using two popular research sites. The study concluded that a new kind of reading is emerging which they characterized as a “skimming activity.” Visitors to the sites would “power browse” in order to “avoid reading in the traditional sense.” If the Internet is changing our reading habits, it is also indirectly changing our thinking habits because reading well precedes thinking well.

Though a consensus about long-term effects of Internet use is still forming, a phenomenon called “the Google effect” is widely acknowledged. In general terms, “the Google effect” means people are understanding the Internet as an extension of their intellects, alleviating them of the responsibility to really know anything.

If this seems overstated, consider the following data collected by journalist William Poundstone: According to a 2010 poll, a quarter of Americans don’t know from which country we fought to gain independence.

In 2011, Newsweek gave the U.S. citizenship test to 1,000 Americans. 40 percent had no idea which nations we fought in WWII.

Another study found that only half of Americans could recognize Thomas Jefferson from a picture, despite the fact his countenance has been on our nickel since 1938.

Results are even more dismal for millennials, the most schooled generation in American history. In 2015, the Educational Testing Service “compared the verbal, mathematical, and digital-media skills and knowledge of US millennials to those of their peers in 22 other nations. The US scores were among the lowest in all categories.” Is it coincidental millennials are also the most technologized generation to date?

We are only now beginning to see the troubling effects of supplanting books and maps with screens and apps. Ignorance of geography among the American populace can have deleterious implications because it can shape public opinion and, potentially, foreign policy. Poundstone reports, “In 2014, as Russian troops entered the Ukraine and America debated how (or if) to react, three political scientists took a survey to see if Americans knew where Ukraine was. Asking people to find it on a map, only one in six could.” This circumstance drove political perception. “The researchers found that, the farther a person’s guess was from the actual location of Ukraine the more likely it was that the person supported a US military intervention in Ukraine.”

Another regrettable feature of the Internet is the ability it provides users to fortify themselves against irksome intrusions from those with different opinions and tastes. Internet technology has made it possible to customize our own individualized world. This situation retards the development of reason and inflates egos. It is totally opposed, for instance, to the scholasticism of Aquinas. The medieval university would horrify most American college students and professors because it was ordered around discussion of disputed questions. Nothing was off the table. Consider the massive temper tantrum thrown by college students
after the last presidential election. Those students had been duped by social media echo chambers into believing they are entitled to a world of their own making, as though they could simply command, “Alexa, elect Hilary Clinton,” and it would be done. The minds of millennials, conditioned by years of technologically personalized experience, are easy targets for demagogues posing as teachers who view students’ incapacity for independent thinking as their long-awaited fait accompli.

The Internet makes everything easy, which is one of its greatest attractions. We want things easy. But things easily attainable are often cheapened and neglected. This is why in Shakespeare’s The Tempest, Prospero assigns Ferdinand to a period of hard labor before allowing him to marry his daughter Miranda, who has quickly fallen in love with Ferdinand. “But this swift business / I must uneasy make, lest too light winning / Make the prize light” (I.i.449-452). The Internet makes knowledge swift business won lightly. It removes incentive to learn and know anything by making everything perpetually available. Students are less likely to remember information they believe will be available to them on the Internet. Such an ethos gives to the Internet an unmerited epistemological advantage because it discourages knowledge gained in any other way, such as through literature or contemplation.

It seems apt that the Internet used to be called the World Wide Web. Webs can be quite beautiful when sunlight and dew play upon them. But they are death traps that slowly kill off any living thing that touches them. What happens when kids have electronic devices placed in their hands at the age of two, who before Kindergarten learn, like little princesses and princes, to command an always acquiescent servant called Alexa or Siri, who have flickering screens in front of their faces every time mom or dad straps them into the car seat, who never have to figure out their own way around town when they start driving because an app was invented to spare them that responsibility? What happens is what we see in a Liberty Mutual ad on TV where an infantilized teenage boy needs his mom to call the insurance company because he couldn’t figure out how to change a tire. If ads reflect the culture, then it is clear Google is not making us smarter.

There are also growing concerns about the spike in clinical depression among teens, which happens to coincide with the rise of social media. Baby boomers would like us to believe this is because teens are more open with their parents. As a former middle school teacher I can tell you that’s naïve. Again consensus is unsettled on this issue, but it is not unreasonable to examine possible connections between the rise of anxiety and depression among adolescents and the empire of social media that subjugates them.

The above is not intended to diminish the good work of Bishop Barron. Other notable Catholic leaders, such as Archbishop Fulton Sheen and Mother Angelica, have used modern media to evangelize with great effect. The Internet is here to stay. Genies are notoriously resistant to being forced back into their lamps. Bishop Barron should be commended for sharing his great gift for teaching with the world. The saints in heaven rejoice over one reclaimed soul. Visiting Word on Fire or reading an essay on Crisis each day will not result in a diminished capacity for thought or contemplation. As with so many things, maybe it’s a question of moderation. It is not good that, even in their own homes, millennials and those growing up behind
them have been abandoned to a world given to immoderate reliance upon mass media. It is a world characterized by Eliot’s phrase: “distracted from distraction by distraction.” We are creating generations of Pinocchios who are incapable of focusing their minds on any one thing, such as a book or a prayer. A cautionary analogue for all of this can be found in the Davy lamp. In 1812 a terrible mine explosion killed nearly a hundred men and boys. Sir Humphrey Davy invented new technology that he claimed would provide adequate illumination in the flammable environment of the mines while reducing the risk of explosions. The Davy lamp lived up to its promise. The number of explosions decreased. However, the new technology led to an unforeseen result. With the risk of costly explosions decreased, avaricious mine owners greatly expanded their enterprises. Mines began proliferating which meant more and more men and boys were lowering themselves into the dangerous bowels of the earth to feed the nation’s growing demand for “black gold.” The expansion of the mines made possible by the new technology resulted in fewer explosions, but more deaths from other mine-related illnesses and accidents.

Whatever blessings the tech industry may afford must be weighed prudently against the manifold curses to which it makes us vulnerable.

Tom Jay

Loss of Memory and the Persistence of Beauty

How to keep—is there any any, is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch or catch or key to keep Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, ... from vanishing away?
—“The Leaden Echo,” Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

May, budding with dreams and hopes, also captures memories, as we recount the entwined joys and sorrows of the past academic year, with families and friends. How often we begin conversations with “Do you remember....,” and within moments a favorite storyteller is cajoled to regale the listeners, adding expressions, tones and gestures that heighten the amusement. Yet, even simultaneously with these retellings, we are confounded with lapses of memory, of forgetfulness, of events or words we wished we could erase.

Francis O’Gorman, the Saintsbury Professor of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, in his book Forgetfulness considers not only the reliability of our individual memories but also “collective memories,” the memories that are transmitted in families, schools, countries, specifically tackling, “how a human being in the liberal West relates to communal rather than private yesterdays. . .” (4). O’Gorman’s consideration spurs us to consider how Catholicism transmits collective memories, or more precisely, the fullness of memory, in her institutions.

O’Gorman makes two assumptions in his argument: first, that there is a relationship between human attributes or dispositions, such as “pleasure, wisdom, identity, and security,” and “the best and most interesting of the past”; second, that the contemporary West has “largely failed to remember this” (5). He questions a trend that is sadly familiar to educators and parents, one in which “the literature, music, and art of the past have become accessible to the young almost entirely as subjects for school or university tests and of little more advanced use, delight, profitable confusion, or sense beyond that” (6). This trend continues to exist cloaked under various guises, but recognizable in the attempt to segregate the humanities, “the best and most interesting of the past,” from our humanity. The segregation leads not to complete forgetfulness, since the arts are still performed in theatres and maintained in museums, but to a fossilization of the arts in which the communion with pleasure, wisdom, and delight regarding the “best and most interesting of the past” is broken or thwarted at best. Fossilized arts may become objects of curiosity that are detached from their purpose: consider the way in which many altarpieces are detached from the celebration of Mass and relegated to museum pieces or how medieval and Renaissance literature is read through lenses that filter out Christian faith. There is little movement in the contemporary and secular West that would indicate that this rift can be breached or that the fossilized arts can be revived. Hence, the anguished cry of the speaker in Hopkins’ poem who is confounded with remembering and with transmitting the memories: “How to keep back beauty… from vanishing away?”

The splendor of Catholicism’s liturgical and sacramental life surpasses mere collective memory because “the best and most interesting” art, literature, architecture and music of the past are wedded to worship which makes the past present in a way ever
ancient and ever new. The liturgy not only recalls the Old Testament scriptures and traditions, but makes Christ present in the earthly liturgy as we are drawn into participation in the heavenly liturgy. In the liturgy, the fruitfulness and wonder keep memory alive.

In the “The Golden Echo,” Hopkins’ response to “The Leaden Echo,” beauty is neither to be hoarded nor allowed to fossilize, but with prodigal abandon the speaker acclaims, “Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty’s self and beauty’s giver.” This return to God, this breaking of the jar of costly ointment, this casting the net on the other side of the boat, does not make sense to the secular West which has “largely failed to remember.” As the agnostic poet Matthew Arnold aptly identified in “Dover Beach,” the Sea of Faith is no longer full and brimming for the secular West, which cannot assuage man’s desire for memories. When the sacramental and liturgical life is divorced from the humanities, the rift widens and “the best and most interesting of the past” dwindles and fades into forgetfulness. As Hopkins concludes “The Golden Echo,” he directs us how to keep the memory alive, with desire, with wonder, in looking ever forward, through our experience of the liturgy where our thirst is quenched and our hunger satiated by participation in the Sacred Banquet: “Do but tell us where kept, where.—/Yonder.—What high as that! We follow, now we follow.—Yonder, yes yonder, yonder./Yonder.”

Sister Thomas More Stepnowski, O.P.

From Acorn to Oak Tree: Becoming a Catholic Liberal Arts School

My experience of teaching in a traditional parochial school, which has begun a deliberate, reflective shift in the liberal arts direction, is akin to my experience of taking over the family farm with my wife several years ago. Before we moved to the country from our tiny, two-room city apartment, I found myself constantly dreaming up a delight of possibilities! I imagined gazing out the window as the sun crested over the tree line, to spy the hens emerging from their coop, ranging and flitting about. Just beyond them, one of the newly freshened does would venture from the safety of the barn and begin nibbling at the dewy pasture grass, while her leggy, newborn kids scampered after her. And I’d sit at the kitchen table and drink coffee and read the Psalms, waiting for the children to stir. Talk about bucolic!

Then we actually moved on to the farm and took charge of its cultivation. And I soon discovered how sweaty and smelly and sensual farm life is; and how quickly callous and coarse my hands became; and that I spent far more time working with animal droppings than the animals themselves. No wonder the stoic couple in American Gothic have such long faces!

In brief: only the sweat of the brow can transform a bramble into a vineyard; and most schools are caught in the bramble. The modern secular approach to education has become little more than a mechanized, politicized, bastardized industrial behemoth—churning out thorny, skeptical, cookie-cutter automatons; mostly predictable and compliant, and mostly ready to work, but by no means more authentically human for having spent twelve, or sixteen, or twenty years in school. The vast majority of schools have long-established and entrenched cultures, for better or worse. As such, the implementation of a liberal arts program rarely allows for the starting from scratch, lest we end up harvesting the wheat with the weeds (cf. Mt 13:30). Resurrection School in Lansing, Mich., is no different.

What I’ve discovered after my first full year there – teaching Religion and History in the middle school – is that a liberal arts approach to education requires far more than even the best combination of its ancillary components: more than just good seeds. Beyond textbook series, daily schedules, parent buy-in, dynamic curricula, and beautiful art and architecture, what seems of singular importance is a proper understanding of what man is, and what man is for; that he is created to experience the wholeness and wonder of reality as it is – even if only imperfectly so; that he is made to survey the stars – not simply to map them (however pleasurable that might be) or to guide a ship (however necessary that might be) – but to be drawn by them in wonder toward the fullness of reality.

Practically, the transformation began with the end in mind. And the highest end, the end for which we are created, is union with God. So worship – using Thomas’ terminology of causation – was both first in the order of intention and in the order of execution (ST I-II, Q.25). Before I arrived, the pastor, principal, and school commission decided that the students should increase Mass attendance to three times a week, and our activity in the classroom has been increasingly directed toward disposing the students to corporate and private prayer: silence, stillness, attentiveness, investigation.
The transformation has involved a fair bit of what Augustine argues is the first stage of learning: unlearning. Unlearning on the part of students, teachers, staff, priests, and parents. It’s always a bit of a shock to the students (and their parents) to learn that education will never become valuable until it is valued as something good in itself; it will never be meaningful if it’s pursued merely as a means to utilitarian ends; it will always be a work of necessary drudgery if approached only for the sake of its being a prerequisite for gainful employment. A true liberal arts approach is opposed to such servile ends; it is freeing; it liberates.

My own classroom is moving slowly from bramble to vineyard. It’s neat and simple and ordered (I’ve even put in a request to replace my whiteboards with chalkboards… we’ll see how that goes over). The desks are usually arranged in a U-shape, which encourages both conversation and chaos. I’d prefer tidy rows, facing the board: but twelve-year-olds can only take so much of the Socrates in me. Even so, they know who Socrates is.

My students are maddening, and delightful, and typical. The young men don’t spend their days wandering around the campus with copies of the *Odyssey* stashed in their back pockets. But they’re learning that the journey home from war can take a man many places and two decades—especially if you’ve angered Poseidon (yes, they also know who Poseidon is). The young ladies—while sometimes readier than the boys to appreciate and sing beautiful music—are frequently found performing lines from pop divas, though they’ve heard and are beginning to enjoy Palestrina.

But, as we continue to grow into the liberal arts model, or what our principal calls simply “authentic Catholic education,” we surround the students and ourselves with the very best of what has been thought and said. And though a bold statement, it bears saying: once a school does that, and sees the educational process not as a system of information-transfer but rather as an opportunity to teach students how to be learners, it places the subject matter being taught into its proper context. All subject matter, says Dorothy Sayers in *The Lost Tools of Learning*, is to be regarded as “mere grist for the mental mill to work upon.” This shift in thinking, maybe the most difficult water to navigate, will require a long and lovely courtship of the heart, as well as an absolute commitment to first principles.

In the end, what we’re attempting to do in our little parochial school is train minds to think in a certain way and hearts to love in a certain way. For the purpose of education is to form young people into the kind of people God wants them to be, so that they can have the kind of relationship with God that God wants them to have. It’s as simple and beautifully complicated as that.

With each passing year, I pray that our “school” feels more like a schola: a group of teachers and students set upon the harmonious use of leisure time, cultivating the sandy soil of intellect and will, and given to those intellectual, spiritual, and social endeavors that will lift us all beyond ourselves. Guided in all things by the Spirit, we’re at once forming saints for silence and soldiers for spiritual warfare; we’re cultivating imaginations while grounding our students in Memory; and we’re pruning these precious little ones for their earthly pilgrimage, even as we help them hew out a heavenly home.
Brian Fink

Failing In Formation

The enrollment drop in American Catholic schools—from 5.2 million students in the 1960s to 2.5 million in 1990 to today’s 1.8 million—is a plunge of Syrian magnitude. In the last ten years, 1,336 Catholic schools have been either closed or consolidated. Meanwhile, bishops have been scrambling to ensure that their patient will survive—hoping for a recovery. In 2015, the archbishop of Cincinnati, wanting his schools to be more fully Catholic, called up Matthew Kelly and his team at Dynamic Catholic and asked them to develop a program to help. He shouldn’t have done that.

Most Catholic-school teachers are not academic philosophers. Yet the questions they ask are obviously philosophical. What makes a school “Catholic”? What if the faculty aren’t Catholic? What is the place of the sacraments in a “learning environment”? Why should a school application ask for “Mother” and “Father” instead of “Parent 1” and “Parent 2”? How do I increase “Catholic identity” in my math or science classroom?

Bear in mind that these questions arise in a building that is filled with kids and teenagers. So other sorts of questions arise as well. In my first year of teaching, my department chair’s twenty-seven-year-old daughter was killed by her (the daughter’s) husband in an act of domestic violence. How do you talk to kids about that? I’ve taught two students conceived via IVF. How do I even begin to tell them what the Church teaches? A colleague once had a girl suffer a miscarriage in the middle of class, right there on the floor. Imagine the questions the kids had the next day.

I cannot speak for all of my colleagues, but my conclusion after only a few years of teaching is that our questions are not taken very seriously. The program from Dynamic Catholic proves it. Teach, Lead, Serve: The Ministry of Teaching is a resource conceived, developed, printed, and shipped by its founder, Matthew Kelly. The full “Program Pack” comes with the book and three DVDs, a spoken version on which the contributors read their respective chapters. Think audiobook with pictures. Kelly, if you’ve never heard of him, is a particularly postmodern sort of man: an entrepreneur selling “passion” and “purpose,” whose raison d’être is “to help people and organizations become the-best-version-of-themselves.” (The hyphenated phrase he has trademarked.) Mr. Kelly made his big splash in the Catholic world back in 2010 with the publication of Rediscover Catholicism—a book that argues, more or less, that Catholicism will help people become the B.V.O.T. The imprimatur for Rediscover was given by the archdiocese of Cincinnati, the same diocese that commissioned Teach, Lead, Serve.

TLS is being used in all fifty states. At least fourteen dioceses (including the dioceses of New Ulm, Minnesota; Lake Charles, Louisiana; Richmond, Virginia; Saginaw, Michigan; Grand Rapids, Michigan; South Bend, Indiana; and Norwich, Connecticut) have distributed the book to all of their diocesan schools. The archdiocese of Denver actually gathered 1,150 diocesan teachers together on September 30, 2016, for a retreat based on the book. Dynamic Catholic notes that resources for Catholic teachers are far too few and promises that Teach, Lead, Serve—a “world-class resource”—meets this need. As far as I know, it is the first and only book to be written specifically for Catholic-school teachers.
And it is a comically bad book. Designed to "train Catholic school teachers as ministers, deepen their understanding of Catholic Church teaching, and inspire them in their calling to Catholic education," TLS is 7¼ inches tall, 5½ inches wide, and nine-sixteenths of an inch deep. It is “printed in the United States of America.” The binding is an unusually rubbery cardboard. Of the 207 official pages, only eighty-nine contain actual writing. Seventeen pages are entirely blank; dozens more are set aside for “Notes.” In Part 1, Matthew Kelly—not himself a teacher—reflects on the “Ministry of Teaching.” In Part 2, Ryan Mahle—a high school theology teacher from Ohio—talks about morality, sex, and abortion. Part 3 is a hodgepodge of previously published essays on everything from “When Pazziing Notes is a Good Thing” to “The Prayer Process.”

The advice is banal, the language clunky: “The people you surround yourself with, and how you let their positivity or negativity influence you, impacts the kind of teacher you are.”

At times it is saccharine: “There is no national monument for teachers. I have never seen a statue of a teacher. But we all build monuments for teachers in our hearts.”

It can be pedantic: “Education is a wildfire. And a single educator is but a flickering of this timeless flare, hoping to shed some light where there is darkness.”

Or condescending: “Let me throw a little theology at you.”

Some of it reads like motivational business-speak: “We respect forever the leaders in our lives who were tough but fair.”

And every so often it calls on a weird source to make a point: “As Friedrich Nietzsche observed, ‘He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.’”

You get the idea. Matthew Kelly manages to evade the hard questions mostly by ignoring them. How should I include “Jesus in [my] lesson plans?” Keep “an empty chair” for him, to “remind students that Jesus is always at their side.” What is evil and how should I respond to it? Make “holy moments!” How do I deal with the exhaustion, fatigue, frustration, and pain of teaching? “There is no limit to the number of holy moments you can create.” The prose is as limp as the cloying optimism it promotes. It often circles back to his usual refrain: Be the “best-version-of-yourself.” That was more or less what Eve was told in the garden.

If Kelly is evasive, his primary coauthor, Ryan Mahle, is misleading. Mahle was tasked with writing a major section about “Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.” But he offers no theology and no philosophy of education; no Colossians 1:17 or 1 Corinthians 14:6. No Newman. Instead, he writes exclusively about sexuality and reproduction—in a way that would make traditionalists wonder why they even bother.

The entirety of “Truth, Goodness, and Beauty” follows an objection-and-response format, a form used to great effect by Aquinas. But Mahle uses objections that range from the silly to the histrionic. “Catholic morality just makes people feel guilty”; “Women have a right to their bodies and the right to choose what to do with their bodies”; “The moral commands of the Church may be true for you, but they’re not true for me. So don’t judge me!” These objections, in fact, come not from teachers but from students. The responses are not
much better. At one point, Mahle describes original sin.

“Does God make imperfect things?” Well, He made me, so I think the answer is a resounding “Yes!” In fact, in large part, this is what we mean by original sin—that simply by virtue of our natural birth we are already not perfect (or complete) and are therefore in need of God’s grace.

If you remember your Aquinas seminar, you’ll recognize that Mr. Mahle isn’t describing original sin at all; he’s describing an equivocal cause. Aquinas’s preferred example of it was the sun. The sun creates the light and heat that emanate from it. The light and heat resemble the sun from which they come, but they constitute something less than their origin. Aquinas, now: “So, too, God gave all things their perfections and thereby is both like and unlike all of them.” This is not original sin at all. To say that God is an equivocal cause of humans is not to say that humans have fallen from grace. Sin is not our created state, but rather the result of a choice of a creature given a will of its own.

Some errors are easier to spot. Remember those student objections? Turns out that Mr. Mahle’s responses were first used in his Cincinnati classroom before being printed in TLS. This poses a whole new set of problems. For example, Mahle thinks this response – “Medically speaking, anal sex is unquestionably harmful – ask any pathologist” – is a reasonable way to explain church teaching regarding homosexuality to teenagers. Sure.

The primary problem facing Catholic schools today is an intellectual problem: It is the severance of the intellectual from the spiritual, and of the intellectual disciplines from one another; the severance of head from heart, blowing reality into shards. Plunging enrollment is a symptom; poor faculty formation is the cause. Readers of this journal know well the deep intellectual incoherence that plagues the modern university. Will people educated in such a system be at all able to sustain Catholic education? Can graduates of American universities be expected to teach faith and reason when their formation in the former is superficial and their formation in the latter is almost certainly flawed? There is now a general consensus that Catholic laity are not properly formed by Catholic universities or by their respective parishes. Yet no one has pointed out the obvious corollary: If the laity aren’t properly formed, those institutions which rely on the laity will not properly function. And Catholic schools are the most obvious example.

Steve is a colleague of mine, a veteran of the math department and a faithful Catholic. He was organizing an ethics debate for statistics class. He knew my students were studying Aquinas’s definition of the soul and came to ask me how I could claim that a baby had a soul from conception when there was still the possibility of monozygotic twinning. Unable to give a compelling argument in the three minutes I had before class started, I gave him my copy of Robert George and Christopher Tollefsen’s Embryo. They cover the old soul-splitting twin problem in chapter 6. Steve read the whole book that day.

As it turned out, Steve was actually asking because his oldest son was trying to acquire a child through IVF, and Steve had never been given any reasons for the Church’s prohibition of such things. Given that his son was no longer Catholic, Steve couldn’t rely on assertion (“The Church says no”); he needed arguments.
John Haldane has summarized the virtues of the philosopher as follows: “One . . . needs to have good sense and good judgment, an eye for the weeds, and an ability to distinguish between the significant and the trivial.” In endorsing and circulating Matthew Kelly’s works, Catholic leaders have abandoned those virtues. While Kelly churns out books at an amphetamine rate (twenty-seven in the past twenty-three years), his real career is motivational speaking—a superficial enterprise packed with glib slogans (“We gotta go home with a game-changer”)—while selling books with titles such as “The Dream Manager” and “The Rhythm of Life.” It occasionally gets worse. A recent Dynamic Catholic event in Virginia Beach included torch-and-knife-juggling—to prove that Catholicism is cool. Kelly’s consulting company is called “Floyd Consulting,” with “Floyd” being an acronym for “Finally Living Out Your Dreams.” Why Cincinnati Archbishop Dennis Schnurr called on him is a mystery to me.

There are better alternatives. *Understanding the Scriptures* is a high school textbook written by Scott Hahn at the behest of Archbishop Chaput of Philadelphia. It offers a complete walk through the Bible. Hahn occasionally shows his scholarly side (a section on “Understanding Time as a Part of Creation” is my favorite), yet throughout the book’s 541 pages, you don’t feel schooled so much as led—led about with no condescension or dumbing down. Catholic teachers need more books like this one.

There are 152,289 of us nationally, 97 percent laity, teachers educated after Land O’ Lakes and the ’60s. We’re educated in “education” and theory, with Sunday’s homily our only regular religious instruction. We come from all over and end up here— at your child’s Catholic school. Only a handful have been formed by FOCUS, Catholic Studies, or a Newman Guide university. In spite of all that, the Augustinian insight holds true: We are looking for something.

Like my colleagues, I fuss and grumble my way through *Teach, Lead, Serve*; unlike my colleagues, I knew things didn’t have to be this way. Understanding the Scriptures didn’t come out of nowhere. It was written because a bishop saw what students needed, and he asked a qualified theologian to supply that need. Archbishop Schnurr saw that teachers needed something. Yet he didn’t look to a qualified theologian. There are dozens of sensible, theologically literate, and philosophically serious Catholics spreading the gospel and serving the Church. And yet there has been no serious attempt by a faithful Catholic intellectual (lay or religious) to evangelize Catholic-school teachers specifically the way Bishop Robert Barron has evangelized the Catholic laity more generally.

If we’re to educate the next generation in the faith, that’s exactly what we need. Less Rediscover Catholicism. More Catholicism.

*Original Editor’s note: An earlier version of this essay did not cite Archbishops Schnurr and Chaput by name.*

John Thomas Goerke

Teaching Prudence — and Not Teaching It

I recently wrote about the classical notion of prudence as the form of the other virtues. Prudence is the virtue that allows us to apply the general principles of morality to concrete, particular situations. On this view, for an act to be virtuous, it must result from a wise, prudent judgment.

So how do you teach prudence? Do you teach students a host of rules and reasons for the rules? Since prudence is the virtue by which we apply the rules to specific instances, teaching students the rules alone would be like teaching them the rules of basketball without putting them on the court to play the game. Not only are they likely to remain confused (try explaining “offsides” in soccer to someone watching their first game), they are also likely not to care.

I’ve had people try to explain cricket to me, but since I never watch it, I would be the first to admit I don’t really pay much attention or try to commit it to memory.

It’s not that students shouldn’t know and understand the rules; it’s just that rules alone will not produce prudent judgments or people who care about being moral.

Can prudence be taught? Yes, but if so, it can’t be taught in a classroom by a professor. Yes, I am a professor, and yes I teach moral theology. So what do I think I’m doing? Well, I remind my students all the time of something they already know – something I wish the people who put them into a single “ethics” class with a view of making them “moral” would understand. “Moral theology classes do not make you a better person,” I tell them. Indeed, many “ethics” classes, especially when done as “survey” courses, often result in reinforcing in students their predispositions toward moral skepticism and can actually make them worse. “Ethics” classes often simply provide students with a host of intellectual evasions to allow them to do what their parental or religious upbringing told them they shouldn’t.

When classes in moral philosophy or theology are at their best – and this is rarely the case – then the best they can probably hope for is to make students more thoughtful, to allow them the occasion to say, “Hmm, maybe I should consider living like that.” But making moral choices requires prudence, and we don’t teach that.

This is because prudence requires experience, often experience in a particular area, and I can’t teach my students to be prudent lawyers, doctors, and politicians because I do not have the relevant experience in any of those areas.

College professors are not generally known for their prudence (to put it mildly), although this is not entirely fair. In my experience, professors tend to be prudent in the areas they know, such as research, teaching, and curriculum, but not very prudent in areas they don’t, like hiring or budgets. Hence, professors can usually only teach prudence to those who themselves want to become professors.

As Thomas Aquinas points out, “the prudence whereby a man rules himself differs from the prudence whereby a man governs a multitude,” and differs too depending upon the kind of multitude and what they are gathered together for. Hence there is, says Thomas, “military prudence” which governs an army gathered together to fight, which is distinct from “domestic
prudence,” whereby a home or family is governed.

The skills needed to lead an army are not necessarily those needed to run a family, a business, or a college. Ruling a city or kingdom requires “regnative prudence,” says Thomas; the citizens need “political prudence.” And so forth.

We might add “juridical prudence,” “commercial prudence,” and “ecclesiastical prudence” to Thomas’s list, but the point is, all are sadly lacking. And yet students who want to do something other than teaching and research need to go out into the world and find wise and virtuous mentors in the area they want to work in.

There are, however, skills and abilities we might try to inculcate in our students to help them gain prudence after graduation. Thomas Aquinas mentions

- **Intelligentia:** the understanding of first principles;
- **Ratio:** practical reasoning, including the ability to research and compare alternatives, and to take principles or lessons learned in one area and apply them in another;
- **Memoria:** a good memory for relevant details and an ability to learn from experience;
- **Docilitas:** an open-mindedness that recognizes variety and is able to seek out and make use of the experience and authority of others;
- **Providentia:** the capacity to estimate whether particular actions will actually achieve the desired goals;
- **Circumspectio:** the ability to consider relevant circumstances
- **Cautio:** the ability to estimate risk; and
- **Sollertia:** the ability to evaluate a situation quickly and “think on one’s feet.”

Thomas calls these the “quasi-integral” parts of prudence.

There is another interesting distinction Thomas makes between *synesis*, which concerns judgments in ordinary affairs, and *gnomē*, which is what is needed in matters of exception to the law.

How much better bureaucracy would be if people understood that the skill which makes them effective in normal circumstances is definitely not the one needed in exceptional cases! The first is something we can outsource to a robot. The second is something no robot will ever be able to do.

Are we teaching these skills, preparing students to be prudent? I have yet to see a course designed to teach or instill prudence.

If we don’t teach prudence, our fate will be endless squabbles between thoughtless legalists on one side versus lax loop-hole-creators on the other or an ill-fated combination of thoughtless rule-following bureaucrats across from increasingly skilled loop-hole finders in the world of modern bureaucracy and its sophisticated discontents.

Lacking prudence, we become a culture of crass, constantly complaining casuists who increasingly deal with others according to the rigid bureaucratic protocols for “cases” rather than understanding the particular problems of others in a communal spirit of fraternity.
Randall Smith

St. Augustine on “Why We Read”

Henry David Thoreau once remarked: “[r]ead the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all.” This is sound advice for anyone. There was a time when American high schools and universities provided significant exposure to the “best books.” In the latter half of the 20th century, educators referred to them as the “great books.” Yet more recently, this body of texts – classic works of literature, philosophy, history, and culture – have been denounced and displaced at every educational level.

It’s unusual now for a student to read even excerpts from the great texts. The result is pitiable: we have generations of young adults with virtually no exposure to “the best that has been thought and said in the world.” (Matthew Arnold)

Teaching the great texts has diminished at an astonishing rate for numerous reasons, but two in particular stand out. For many professional educators, reading is increasingly oriented toward the marketplace and getting a job. Furthermore, humanistic learning has been dismantled by postmodern critiques, which maintain that texts are unstable, non-signifying, and without reference to truth.

At universities, the great texts are often deconstructed along lines of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. After several decades of such ideological demolition, students and parents have reasonably concluded that the humanities are badly politicized and irrelevant, and en masse have migrated to more sensible, practical majors.

But why should we study the great texts? St. Augustine of Hippo provides a coherent rationale. The often touted reasons these days for reading great texts – being “well rounded,” or articulate, or culturally “sensitive” – Augustine regards as either irrelevant or a deception. For Augustine, we read great texts for one purpose: to become wise. Reading for any reason other than the sapiential motive is trivial. The *Confessions* offers his clearest articulation of this view; he argues there that wisdom should lead to personal transformation – a matter of life and death.

*Confessions* is a book about books. Augustine measures his spiritual growth and conversion by what he has read as well as by what he has done: reading is the lens through which he interprets his journey toward conversion. He recounts his early literary education, reading Homer, Virgil, Terence, Cicero, Aristotle, Plotinus, Porphyry, and the sayings of Mani (founder of the Manichean Gnostic sect to which he was so long attached).

He learned to weep for Dido in the *Aeneid*, and gravitated from literature to philosophy – especially Neo-Platonic thought. Augustine learned the slow ascent from particulars (the domain of literature) to the abstract (the domain of philosophy) so characteristic of the great texts.

The most dramatic episode in *Confessions* captures beautifully why we read and where reading can take us. Influenced by St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, Augustine was intensely drawn to Christianity. As he prayed and studied, Augustine approached full conversion to Christianity, but found himself tormented by his sins, especially lust, a subject upon which he is astonishingly candid. Many who have never read *Confessions* nonetheless
know his plea that God make him chaste, “but not just yet.”

At a crucial moment prior to his conversion, Augustine recounts an experience the context of which is grounded in reading and texts:

As I was . . . weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice form the nearby house chanting . . . saying and repeating over and over again “Pick up and read, pick up and read.”

Augustine interpreted this voice as a “divine command” to open the book at hand, Paul’s letter to the Romans: “put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh.” (13:13-14) Augustine comments, with astounding economy of expression, “I neither wished nor needed to read further.” The text had led him to integration, peace, and conversion.

In his exasperation while approaching conversion, Augustine had posed a fundamental question: “where should we look for the books we need? Where and when can we obtain them? From whom can we borrow them?”

Human beings don’t read simply for information, rhetorical skill, know-how – our real reasons are deeper. Near the end of Confessions, Augustine exclaims, “Let me confess to you [Lord] what I find in your book.” This prayer is an interpretive key to Augustine’s autobiography. Reading great texts over many years cultivated in Augustine the habit of wisdom, which equipped him to read the one book – the Word of God – which, read well, is the transformation and salvation of the soul.

The eminent modern literary theorist René Girard, reflecting upon reading and conversion, also confessed: “Great literature literally led me to Christianity. This itinerary is not original. It still happens every day and has been happening since the beginning of Christianity. It happened to Augustine, of course. It happened to many great saints such as St. Francis of Assisi and St. Theresa of Avila who, like Don Quixote, were fascinated by novels of chivalry.” With Girard and Augustine, I suggest we read the great texts because they take us on a journey toward truth.

When read seriously, the great books lead us to inquire, to doubt, to imagine, and to desire, but most importantly, to seek wisdom. It is not merely an exercise for practical purposes or for its own sake. Reading great texts teaches us humility, self-knowledge, docility, attentiveness.

Such reading may lead us to “pick up and read.” If we are particularly graced, we might even learn to say with Augustine at some point in our lives, “Let me confess to you [Lord] what I find in your book.” If such is the outcome, I can think of no better rationale for reading and teaching the great books.

Aaron Urbanczyk

https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2018/07/12/st-augustine-on-why-we-read/
The Significance of a Song

Let me tell you a little story that captures a large truth about education. It recounts a brief experience that happened to me, the headmaster of a boys’ boarding school. Like most things that happen to me at school, this happened in my office—or at least, I heard it in my office—and it was one of those moments of sudden clarity that make the often-exhausting work of education, especially on an administrative level, a renewed joy.

As you may imagine, the headmaster’s office at a boys’ school is not a place that typically rings with levity. The four walls of my office groan under the atmosphere of budgets and bills. I often muse to myself that had I received a degree in business, I might have been able to teach the Liberal Arts. But even so, a Liberal Arts school has a business side to it and, somehow, I have fallen on that side. And so it is. My old desk, scarred with the labors of previous headmasters, often feels like a battlefield. The stolid chairs standing before it have upheld students, parents, and teachers through the rigors of policy and performance. But every so often, something different, something lighter, obtrudes into this den of customary heaviness and solemnity that makes it all very much worth it.

It was early in the morning, and I was in my office. Around the corner from the open door, a long hall runs, where I overheard two boys busy with brooms upon their morning chores. But they were not just sweeping. They were also singing. They were also singing together. Without shame or self-consciousness in that echoing hall. Singing as most boys struggling in a cynical culture would never do. While I hear boys singing quite regularly, since learning folk music is a part of the curriculum, this was a little different.

While one of the boys was holding the tune very well, being a strong singer, the other kept falling off key. The off-key lad was not aware of his tone-deaf yet hearty contribution, but it was clear that the other boy was. I heard that he kept pausing and re-adjusting his tone to match his partner’s in a subtle effort to regain concordance – which worked quite well, until the other fell flat again. And so they merrily went. As they swept and sang together, the one boy cheerily helped the song and his fellow singer along, giving brotherly support in a remarkable and beautiful manner, unaware how much encouragement they provided to me, an invisible listener down the hall.

The song these students shared is significant – it is a sign of happiness and helpfulness, and the sound of a spirit that is fast losing place in a world of constant noise. It is a sign and the sound of true education, where the soul finds its place in the work of the world. What these boys were doing so naturally and unassumingly was a result of something they had really and perhaps unknowingly learned in classroom, dormitory, and chapel: a boyish form of St. Benedict’s ora et labora, a little living-out of St. Thérèse’s little way, a happy participation in something good, true, and beautiful. So much can be said for a song in the context of authentic living and authentic learning. It gives voice to what is too often a hidden reality and realization.

The music and the charity I overheard that morning must find their way beyond the walls of Catholic schools that foster them and into the world that has forgotten them. Those singing, sweeping boys of my story
are freshmen in high school. It is wonderful to imagine how much they will learn and grow over the years. How encouraging it is to think, to hope, that they will bring the song of their education along for the work of their lives. Teachers, give your students, in whatever way you can, the gift of cheerful song and sacrifice, so that it can serve as a bright expression of the education in the Faith you provide – and also that it might provide for you all within your school those small moments of encouragement which are of great significance.

Sean Fitzpatrick

Graduation Speeches: Positive Results of a True Assessment (Part 2)

In my previous article, “Graduation Speeches (Part 1)”, I proposed that valedictorian, salutatorian or student speeches given at graduations should be a primary point of judgment, or “assessment” to use the modern term, on whether a school is fulfilling its mission.

To help highlight what is possible, and what schools really can do in the modern world, I give you more of their words, directly. Here are a few more protracted examples of some excerpts from two different schools that are purposeful in their mission – one an inner-city high school that shifted its mission six years ago and is now reaping the rewards, the other a newer school founded on the mission expressed in The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools by Archbishop J. Michael Miller.

From Saint Mary’s, this valedictorian was part of the first four years of the re-shaped focus on mission. She was clearly formed by the school’s newfound inheritance of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

For the past four years, Saint Mary’s has proposed a path to Truth, a way to profoundly live, and now it is up to each of us to pursue that end of happiness. As Christians, we realize that the true fruits of our labor come not in this world, but in the next, so we can be joyful in this earthly life even through the hardships and in the pit of all suffering.

So as we go out into the world, remember that there is a deeper and exponentially richer life behind the thick curtain of fake culture. This fake culture lacks foundation, and so moves on into despair, feeding into its own facade that it perpetuates. This sort of society creates a mere shell of a person, made to progress, not to live. The people of this society are caught up in the superficial, floating in the realm of his or her own made-up reality that plays on in a monotonous loop winding down to nothingness and eventual oblivion.

While most people seem to think the biggest problem in our culture is outer turmoil, there is a much larger crisis at hand: the crisis of inner turmoil. The world has seen great impending fears and struggles before (the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 or the advent of WWII, etc.), but the real issue at hand is a society with an aversion to truth.

We are living in the midst of a culture that has completely forgotten the importance of asking the big questions: “What constitutes a human person?” “What is the end of a human person?” “What is beauty?”

I can guarantee you that the vast majority of people our age, when asked “how they were going to make a difference or change the world”, speak of political reform without ever picking up a copy of our favorite treatise by John Locke.... They speak vaguely about “equality” without ever considering the nature of the human person and what it really means to be “equal.” Everybody wants to be the one to “change the world,” to leave a mark behind saying “I did this,” but how are we even supposed to know how to make a difference if we don’t know what differences need to be made?

This isn’t a make-believe reality. If you are under the impression that Jesus is some sort of sentimental or fairy-tale-like idea made only to induce a synthetic sensation for people to feel better or worse about the life they lead and the choices they make, you
have tragically and thoroughly missed the point.

We have all been blessed to have a school which loves us and desires for us to turn the tide of civilization by forming individuals in the Truth. We are all greatly fortunate to have teachers and parents who want us to be different, to make a difference, and to know that the path to happiness and true life only starts with a proper formation of our minds to know Truth and to love the Lord.

Now is the time to take the blessings we have been given and turn them into something fruitful.

We can all skate through life, perhaps even with some worldly success, and we might think we are happy enough, but a life lived in Christ is a promise of eternity, the summit of all happiness, and perfect love. We were entrusted with the world and in Christ we can change it for the better in whatever wonderful ways, big or small, He has planned for us. [1]

At my own school, the valedictorian understands the purpose of what he was educated for – the mission of all Catholic education:

We have received an incredible formation here. We have received our friendships. But what is it all for? What will we do with them? There are many different paths we can take, but they must all have the same mission, the same end. We must do what our teachers have done for us. We must aid the Church in her great duty of spreading the Good News to all we meet by being examples to everyone of the joy that can be attained through Christ and His Church.

Then, his classmate, who gave the class-speaker address, pulled from contemporary thinkers but showed that such ideas have their roots in the canon of great thinkers and writers of Western Civilization. He cites Steve Jobs and Ronald Reagan, then links their ideas to the ancient Greeks and Old English literature. He draws out the ideas!

Studying stories (such as The Odyssey or Beowulf) that grapple with the fundamental questions in life help plant seeds of thought within the student’s mind, which may eventually grow into further realization and understanding. Meanwhile, the study of logic and mathematics helps form a clear, rational mind receptive to truth. Once truth is discovered, the skills taught in rhetoric, grammar, oration, and writing allow for that same truth to be eloquently expressed. This is the method behind a Classical Education, and the reason this style of education has been endorsed by presidents and tech geniuses alike.

He goes on to show his humility in the presence of real wisdom:

The way I’ve been talking about a classical education may make it sound like just by studying this book and that poem one can magically form a perfect, wise, intelligent person on par with King Solomon himself. All it takes is a quick glance at my class to see that’s not the case. It would take a much longer time than four years, studying many, many more works than we have, to gain any significant amount of wisdom. We have learned and studied much, but ultimately it is only a grain of sand on the shore.

Then, in a beautiful exposé of the real reason for all we do, he reminds his classmates that “the education we receive is so powerful, effective, and lasting because it is centered in human relationships, like Christ and His disciples.”
To close, he again toggles from the Gettysburg Address to Steven Hawking and Martin Luther King to conclude that we must walk forward in humility, knowing we have only begun to scratch the surface in learning:

*It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that because we have graduated with a Classical Education and have laid a strong foundation, we are all set and know everything. But it must be remembered, as Stephen Hawking once said, that “the greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, but the illusion of knowledge.” Although we as students read and study and delve into the deeper questions of life, we have not lived life yet. School has prepared us for it as best it could, but we must realize we are inexperienced and we must act with humility as we continue to learn.*

As one grandparent said to me, eyes moist in both hope and loss after this last speech, “Every child, every single young person in this country should have the opportunity these young people have. What a tragedy! All the potential, all the light, all the wisdom and love that these kids get is held back from most children. What a tragedy—it is their inheritance, why are they not allowed to see it, hear it, read it, imbibe it? I have great hope in these young people. They truly will be the light of the world.”

Michael van Hecke


Many Millennials Embrace the Church

A few years ago, my nephew was playing a video game which had Gregorian chant playing as its soundtrack. I asked him about the music, and he said he didn’t know what it was, but it was “really cool.” I couldn’t help but notice the irony. For years, we’ve been told by a certain aging demographic that we must get rid of everything in the Church like rosaries and old-tyme music because it isn’t cool. Because, as you know, “cool” outweighs appropriate or meaningful.

Most Americans and even many Catholics, in our schools and our parishes, have swallowed that lie. But young people, when given the opportunity and a proper formation, are attracted from deep within their souls to Truth, Goodness and Beauty. It’s high time we acknowledge it.

I bring this up, because a funny thing happened at the annual assembly of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, which claims to be “the largest, most inclusive association of priests in the United States.” Its mission is to “promote the vision and values of Vatican II.” To give you a sense of the priorities of the organization, they passed resolutions on border separation of families, LGBT ministry, gun control, ordaining married men, and—last but not least—“the Importance of Dialogue in the Life of the Church.”

Franciscan Sr. Katarina Schuth, professor emerita at The St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity in St. Paul, Minn., monologued about the challenges in reaching millennial Catholics and said they tend to “consider personal, subjective experience to be the basis for authentic religious truth.” Hmmmm. I wonder where they learned that? If you know the state of much of Catholic education today – and the fact that most Catholics go to public schools – you won’t have to “hmmmm” long to figure that one out.

Certain baby boomers have worked very hard to place feelings over Church teaching for years, and sadly they’ve succeeded in large part. Mass for many Catholics has become a communal event where we celebrate togetherness or something. Yet something funny has happened along the way, according to Schuth. Many of today’s young Catholics seem unimpressed with the “cool” experimentation of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations – what Schuth calls the “older Catholics.” Instead, young people are looking to the older, older Catholics for substance.

National Catholic Reporter:

“The Second Vatican Council is as distant [to millennials] as the Council of Trent,” she said, and millennials offer “new interpretations” of devotional practices like praying the rosary or practicing Eucharistic adoration. Millennials, she explained in her presentation, “do not and cannot look at the Church, the Mass, the hierarchy, the sacraments, devotions and other aspects of Catholicism with the same cultural mindset of older Catholics.

“Thus, what older generations may consider ‘retro’ Catholic practices such as the rosary, Eucharistic adoration, Gregorian chant or religious habits, [these] may be attractive to young Catholics, Schuth said.”

In short, the traditional faith is rising again among some in the younger generation. Not because of their elders. But despite them. I actually think that the Catholic faith has been maligned so much that it seems cool to
some millennials seeking a counterculture. I’ll tell you a quick story. I was kind of meh in my faith when I entered college. While there, I had a Jesuit priest explain to the class why the pro-life position made no sense. It inspired me to counter him, so I began reading what the Church taught on the issue. I read everything including the Church fathers, and then I was hooked. That’s how I became a serious Catholic. To counter the apparent nonsense that I’d been taught. It is nearly axiomatic that wherever the faith is attacked, the faith grows. It’s counter-intuitive, I’ll grant you, but I’ve got 2,000 years of history to show you. Look at the state of Catholic education. Nowhere is Christianity more maligned than in the hallowed halls of higher education. And yet, what do we see rising up in response?

The March for Life has only grown. Millennials, who are consistently polled to be among the most liberal on all issues, are increasingly saying that life may not be as disposable as they’ve been taught. That’s a thought that the left cannot tolerate. That is the crack in the cement that a flower can spring up through. Similarly, despite the wild goings-on at most colleges, we are also seeing a rebirth in Catholic education with many faithful Catholic colleges experiencing boosts in enrollment.

It seems the more extreme those on the left become, there is a response. Terribly, the only response the left seems to understand is to push back even harder. Michael Sean Winters of the National Catholic Reporter wrote a piece this week excoriating so-called pro-lifers who support President Donald Trump. He concludes with this frightening graph:

“Normally, when I get into a debate with a conservative friend and we are at an impasse, with no hope for resolution, I try to ease the tension with levity, and say, “Well, when the revolution comes, I will put in a good word for you and your family.” To my friends in the Republican political and legal establishment who have not stood up to Trump: When the revolution comes, you are on your own, and I will be clamoring not for mercy but for a seat next to the guillotine, where I can do my knitting.”

It was only a matter of time before the truth came out. While some erstwhile revolutionaries reach for implements of torture, I believe that increasingly the faithful in this country will reach for rosaries. If one is looking for the fate of America, look to our Catholic homes, parishes, schools and colleges. If they are thriving and faithful, this country has a prayer. If not, prepare for the guillotine.

Matt Archbold

The Tech Industry’s War on Kids

How psychology is being used as a weapon against children

“We called the police because she wrecked her room and hit her mom… all because we took her phone,” Kelly’s father explained. He said that when the police arrived that evening, Kelly was distraught and told an officer that she wanted to kill herself. So an ambulance was called, and the 15-year-old was strapped to a gurney, taken to a psychiatric hospital, and monitored for safety before being released. Days after being hospitalized, Kelly was brought to my office by her parents who wanted to get help for their troubled girl.

Kelly’s parents spoke first. They said that their daughter’s hospitalization was the culmination of a yearlong downward spiral spurred by her phone obsession. Kelly had been refusing to spend time with her family or focus on school. Instead, she favored living her life on social media. A previously happy girl and strong student, Kelly had grown angry, sullen, and was now bringing home report cards with sinking grades. Kelly’s parents had tried many times in prior months to set limits on their daughter’s phone use, but she had become increasingly defiant and deceitful, even sneaking on her phone at all hours of the night.

When Kelly’s latest report card revealed a number of failing grades, her parents felt compelled to act. They told Kelly early in the afternoon on the day the police were called that she would need to turn in her phone by 9 p.m. But when the time came, Kelly refused, and a pushing match ensued between her and her parents, concluding in the violent tantrum that led the girl to be hospitalized.

I asked Kelly, who was sitting in a corner, to help me understand her perspective on that evening. She didn’t respond and instead glared at her parents. But then, surprising everyone in the room, she cried, “They took my f***ing phone!” Attempting to engage Kelly in conversation, I asked her what she liked about her phone and social media. “They make me happy,” she replied.

The Undoing of Families

As Kelly and her family continued their appointments with me in the coming months, two concerns dominated our meetings. The first was that Kelly’s unhealthy attachment to her phone continued, causing almost constant tension at home. The second concern emerged during my meetings with Kelly’s parents alone. Even though they were loving and involved parents, Kelly’s mom couldn’t help feeling that they’d failed their daughter and must have done something terribly wrong that led to her problems.

My practice as a child and adolescent psychologist is filled with families like Kelly’s. These parents say their kids’ extreme overuse of phones, video games, and social media is the most difficult parenting issue they face – and, in many cases, is tearing the family apart. Preteen and teen girls refuse to get off their phones, even though it’s remarkably clear that the devices are making them miserable. I also see far too many boys whose gaming obsessions lead them to forgo interest in school, extracurricular activities, and anything else productive. Some of these boys, as they reach their later teens, use their large bodies to terrorize parents who attempt
to set gaming limits. A common thread running through many of these cases is parent guilt, as so many are certain they did something to put their kids on a destructive path.

What none of these parents understand is that their children’s and teens’ destructive obsession with technology is the predictable consequence of a virtually unrecognized merger between the tech industry and psychology. This alliance pairs the consumer tech industry’s immense wealth with the most sophisticated psychological research, making it possible to develop social media, video games, and phones with drug-like power to seduce young users.

These parents have no idea that lurking behind their kids’ screens and phones are a multitude of psychologists, neuroscientists, and social science experts who use their knowledge of psychological vulnerabilities to devise products that capture kids’ attention for the sake of industry profit. What these parents and most of the world have yet to grasp is that psychology – a discipline that we associate with healing – is now being used as a weapon against children.

“Machines Designed to Change Humans”

Nestled in an unremarkable building on the Stanford University campus in Palo Alto, California, is the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab, founded in 1998. The lab’s creator, Dr. B.J. Fogg, is a psychologist and the father of persuasive technology, a discipline in which digital machines and apps – including smartphones, social media, and video games – are configured to alter human thoughts and behaviors. As the lab’s website boldly proclaims: “Machines designed to change humans.”

Fogg speaks openly of the ability to use smartphones and other digital devices to change our ideas and actions: “We can now create machines that can change what people think and what people do, and the machines can do that autonomously.” Called “the millionaire maker,” Fogg has groomed former students who have used his methods to develop technologies that now consume kids’ lives. As he recently touted on his personal website, “My students often do groundbreaking projects, and they continue having impact in the real world after they leave Stanford… For example, Instagram has influenced the behavior of over 800 million people. The co-founder was a student of mine.”

Intriguingly, there are signs that Fogg is feeling the heat from recent scrutiny of the use of digital devices to alter behavior. His boast about Instagram, which was present on his website as late as January of 2018, has been removed. Fogg’s website also has lately undergone a substantial makeover, as he now seems to go out of his way to suggest his work has benevolent aims, commenting, “I teach good people how behavior works so they can create products & services that benefit everyday people around the world.” Likewise, the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab website optimistically claims, “Persuasive technologies can bring about positive changes in many domains, including health, business, safety, and education. We also believe that new advances in technology can help promote world peace in 30 years.”

While Fogg emphasizes persuasive design’s sunny future, he is quite indifferent to the disturbing reality now: that hidden influence techniques are being used by the tech industry to hook and exploit users for profit. His enthusiastic vision also conveniently neglects to include how this generation of
children and teens, with their highly malleable minds, is being manipulated and hurt by forces unseen.

**Weaponizing Persuasion**

If you haven’t heard of persuasive technology, that’s no accident – tech corporations would prefer it to remain in the shadows, as most of us don’t want to be controlled and have a special aversion to kids being manipulated for profit. Persuasive technology (also called persuasive design) works by deliberately creating digital environments that users feel fulfill their basic human drives – to be social or obtain goals – better than real-world alternatives. Kids spend countless hours in social media and video game environments in pursuit of likes, “friends,” game points, and levels – because it’s stimulating, they believe that this makes them happy and successful, and they find it easier than doing the difficult but developmentally important activities of childhood.

While persuasion techniques work well on adults, they are particularly effective at influencing the still-maturing child and teen brain. “Video games, better than anything else in our culture, deliver rewards to people, especially teenage boys,” says Fogg. “Teenage boys are wired to seek competency. To master our world and get better at stuff. Video games, in dishing out rewards, can convey to people that their competency is growing, you can get better at something second by second.” And it’s persuasive design that’s helped convince this generation of boys they are gaining “competency” by spending countless hours on game sites, when the sad reality is they are locked away in their rooms gaming, ignoring school, and not developing the real-world competencies that colleges and employers demand.

Likewise, social media companies use persuasive design to prey on the age-appropriate desire for preteen and teen kids, especially girls, to be socially successful. This drive is built into our DNA, since real-world relational skills have fostered human evolution. *The Huffington Post* article, “What Really Happens On a Teen Girl’s iPhone” describes the life of 14-year-old Casey from Millburn, New Jersey. With 580 friends on Instagram and 1,110 on Facebook, she’s preoccupied with the number of “likes” her Facebook profile picture receives compared with her peers. As she says, “If you don’t get 100 ‘likes,’ you make other people share it so you get 100…. Or else you just get upset. Everyone wants to get the most ‘likes.’ It’s like a popularity contest.”

Article author Bianca Bosker says that there are costs to Casey’s phone obsession, noting that the “girl’s phone, be it Facebook, Instagram or iMessage, is constantly pulling her away from her homework, sleep, or conversations with her family.” Casey says she wishes she could put her phone down. But she can’t. “I’ll wake up in the morning and go on Facebook just… because,” she says. “It’s not like I want to or I don’t. I just go on it. I’m, like, forced to. I don’t know why. I need to. Facebook takes up my whole life.”

**Important Questions Are Simply Not Asked**

B.J. Fogg may not be a household name, but *Fortune Magazine* calls him a “New Guru You Should Know,” and his research is driving a worldwide legion of user experience (UX) designers who utilize and expand upon his models of persuasive design. As *Forbes Magazine* writer Anthony Wing Kosner notes, “No one has perhaps been as influential on the current generation
of user experience (UX) designers as Stanford researcher B.J. Fogg.”

UX designers come from many disciplines, including psychology as well as brain and computer sciences. However, the core of some UX research is about using psychology to take advantage of our human vulnerabilities. That’s particularly pernicious when the targets are children. As Fogg is quoted in Kosner’s Forbes article, “Facebook, Twitter, Google, you name it, these companies have been using computers to influence our behavior.” However, the driving force behind behavior change isn’t computers. “The missing link isn’t the technology, it’s psychology,” says Fogg.

UX researchers not only often follow Fogg’s design model, but some may also share his apparent tendency to overlook the broader implications of persuasive design. They focus on the task at hand, building digital machines and apps that better demand users’ attention, compel users to return again and again, and grow businesses’ bottom line. Less considered can be how the world’s children are affected by thousands of UX designers working simultaneously to pull them onto a multitude of digital devices and products at the expense of real life.

According to B.J. Fogg, the “Fogg Behavior Model” is a well-tested method to change behavior and, in its simplified form, involves three primary factors: motivation, ability, and triggers. Describing how his formula is effective at getting people to use a social network, the psychologist says in an academic paper that a key motivator is users’ desire for “social acceptance,” although he says an even more powerful motivator is the desire “to avoid being socially rejected.” Regarding ability, Fogg suggests that digital products should be made so that users don’t have to “think hard.” Hence, social networks are designed for ease of use. Finally, Fogg says that potential users need to be triggered to use a site. This is accomplished by a myriad of digital tricks, including the sending of incessant notifications urging users to view friends’ pictures, telling them they are missing out while not on the social network, or suggesting that they check – yet again – to see if anyone liked their post or photo.

Fogg’s formula is the blueprint for building multibillion dollar social media and gaming companies. However, moral questions about the impact of turning persuasive techniques on children and teens are not being asked. For example, should the fear of social rejection be used to compel kids to compulsively use social media? Is it okay to lure kids away from school tasks that demand a strong mental effort so they can spend their lives on social networks or playing video games that don’t make them think much at all? And is it okay to incessantly trigger kids to use revenue-producing digital products at the expense of engaging with family and other important real-life activities?

**Brain Hacking**

Persuasive technologies work because of their apparent triggering of the release of dopamine, a powerful neurotransmitter involved in reward, attention, and addiction. In the Venice region of Los Angeles, now dubbed “Silicon Beach,” the startup Dopamine Labs boasts about its use of persuasive techniques to increase profits: “Connect your app to our Persuasive AI [Artificial Intelligence] and lift your engagement and revenue up to 30% by giving your users our perfect bursts of dopamine,” and “A burst of Dopamine doesn’t just feel good: it’s proven to re-wire user behavior and habits.”
Ramsay Brown, the founder of Dopamine Labs, says in a *KQED Science* article, “We have now developed a rigorous technology of the human mind, and that is both exciting and terrifying. We have the ability to twiddle some knobs in a machine learning dashboard we build, and around the world hundreds of thousands of people are going to quietly change their behavior in ways that, unbeknownst to them, feel second-nature but are really by design.” Programmers call this “brain hacking,” as it compels users to spend more time on sites even though they mistakenly believe it’s strictly due to their own conscious choices.

Social networks and video games use the trusted brain-manipulation technique of variable reward (think slot machine). Users never know when they will get the next “like” or game reward, and it’s delivered at the perfect time to foster maximal stimulation and keep them on the site. Banks of computers employ AI to “learn” which of a countless number of persuasive design elements will keep users hooked. A persuasion profile of a particular user’s unique vulnerabilities is developed in real time and exploited to keep users on the site and make them return again and again for longer periods of time. This drives up profits for consumer internet companies whose revenue is based on how much their products are used.

Clandestine techniques that manipulate users to fulfill a profit motive are regarded by programmers as “dark design.” Why would firms resort to such tactics? As former tech executive Bill Davidow says in his *Atlantic* article “Exploiting the Neuroscience of Internet Addiction,” “The leaders of Internet companies face an interesting, if also morally questionable, imperative: either they hijack neuroscience to gain market share and make large profits, or they let competitors do that and run away with the market.”

There are few industries as cutthroat and unregulated as Silicon Valley. Social media and video game companies believe they are compelled to use persuasive technology in the arms race for attention, profits, and survival. Children’s well-being is not part of the decision calculus.

*A Peek Behind the Curtain*

While social media and video game companies have been surprisingly successful at hiding their use of persuasive design from the public, one breakthrough occurred in 2017 when Facebook documents were leaked to *The Australian*. The internal report crafted by Facebook executives showed the social network boasting to advertisers that by monitoring posts, interactions, and photos in real time, the network is able to track when teens feel “insecure,” “worthless,” “stressed,” “useless” and a “failure.” Why would the social network do this? The report also bragged about Facebook’s ability to micro-target ads down to “moments when young people need a confidence boost.”

Persuasive technology’s use of digital media to target children, deploying the weapon of psychological manipulation at just the right moment, is what makes it so powerful. These design techniques provide tech corporations a window into kids’ hearts and minds to measure their particular vulnerabilities, which can then be used to control their behavior as consumers. This isn’t some strange future… this is now. Facebook claimed the leaked report was misrepresented in the press. But when child advocates called on the social network to release it, the company refused to do so,
preferring to keep the techniques it uses to influence kids shrouded in secrecy.

*Digital Pied Pipers*

The official tech industry line is that persuasive technologies are used to make products more engaging and enjoyable. But the revelations of industry insiders can reveal darker motives. Video game developer John Hopson, who has a Ph.D. in behavioral and brain science, wrote the paper “Behavioral Game Design.” He describes the use of design features to alter video game player behavior, sounding much like an experimenter running lab animals through their paces, answering questions such as: “How do we make players maintain a high, consistent rate of activity?” and “How to make players play forever.”

Revealing the hard science behind persuasive technology, Hopson says, “This is not to say that players are the same as rats, but that there are general rules of learning which apply equally to both.” After penning the paper, Hopson was hired by Microsoft, where he helped lead the development of the Xbox Live, Microsoft’s online gaming system. He also assisted in the development of Xbox games popular with kids, including those in the *Halo* series. The parents I work with simply have no idea about the immense amount of financial and psychological firepower aimed at their children to keep them playing video games “forever.”

Another persuasive technology expert is Bill Fulton, a game designer who trained in cognitive and quantitative psychology. He started Microsoft’s Games User-Research group before founding his own consulting agency. Fulton is transparent about the power of persuasive design and the intent of the gaming industry, disclosing in Big Four Accounting Firm PwC’s tech business journal: “If game designers are going to pull a person away from every other voluntary social activity or hobby or pastime, they’re going to have to engage that person at a very deep level in every possible way they can.”

This is a major effect of persuasive design today: building video games and social media products so compelling that they pull users away from the real world to spend their lives in for-profit domains. But to engage in a pursuit at the expense of important real-world activities is a core element of addiction. And there is increasing evidence that persuasive design has now become so potent that it is capable of contributing to video game and internet addictions—diagnoses that are officially recognized in China, South Korea, and Japan, and which are under consideration in the U.S.

Not only does persuasive design appear to drive kids’ addictions to devices, but knowledge of addiction is used to make persuasive design more effective at hijacking the mind. As Dopamine Labs’ Ramsay Brown acknowledges in an episode of CBS’s *60 Minutes*, “Since we’ve figured to some extent how these pieces of the brain that handle addiction are working, people have figured out how to juice them further and how to bake that information into apps.”

*Stealing from Childhood*

The creation of digital products with drug-like effects that are able to “pull a person away” from engaging in real-life activities is the reason why persuasive technology is profoundly destructive. Today, persuasive design is likely distracting adults from driving safely, productive work, and engaging with their own children—all matters which need urgent attention. Still, because the child and adolescent brain is
more easily controlled than the adult mind, the use of persuasive design is having a much more hurtful impact on kids.

Persuasive technologies are reshaping childhood, luring kids away from family and schoolwork to spend more and more of their lives sitting before screens and phones. According to a Kaiser Family Foundation report, younger U.S. children now spend 5 ½ hours each day with entertainment technologies, including video games, social media, and online videos. Even more, the average teen now spends an incredible 8 hours each day playing with screens and phones. Productive uses of technology – where persuasive design is much less a factor – are almost an afterthought, as U.S. kids only spend 16 minutes each day using the computer at home for school.

Quietly, using screens and phones for entertainment has become the dominant activity of childhood. Younger kids spend more time engaging with entertainment screens than they do in school, and teens spend even more time playing with screens and phones than they do sleeping. The result is apparent in restaurants, the car sitting next to you at the stoplight, and even many classrooms: Attesting to the success of persuasive technology, kids are so taken with their phones and other devices that they have turned their backs to the world around them. Hiding in bedrooms on devices, or consumed by their phones in the presence of family, many children are missing out on real-life engagement with family and school – the two cornerstones of childhood that lead them to grow up happy and successful. Even during the few moments kids have away from their devices, they are often preoccupied with one thought: getting back on them.

In addition to the displacement of healthy childhood activities, persuasive technologies are pulling kids into often toxic digital environments. A too frequent experience for many is being cyberbullied, which increases their risk of skipping school and considering suicide. And there is growing recognition of the negative impact of FOMO, or the fear of missing out, as kids spend their social media lives watching a parade of peers who look to be having a great time without them, feeding their feelings of loneliness and being less than.

A Wired Generation Falling Apart

The combined effects of the displacement of vital childhood activities and exposure to unhealthy online environments is wrecking a generation. In her recent Atlantic article, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?,” Dr. Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, describes how long hours spent on smartphones and social media are driving teen girls in the U.S. to experience high rates of depression and suicidal behaviors.

And as the typical age when kids get their first smartphone has fallen to 10, it’s no surprise to see serious psychiatric problems – once the domain of teens – now enveloping young kids. Self-inflicted injuries, such as cutting, that are serious enough to require treatment in an emergency room, have increased dramatically in 10-to 14-year-old girls, up 19% per year since 2009.

While girls are pulled onto smartphones and social media, boys are more likely to be seduced into the world of video gaming, often at the expense of a focus on school. High amounts of gaming are linked to lower grades, so with boys gaming more than girls, it’s no surprise to see this generation of
boys struggling to make it to college: a full 57% of college admissions are granted to young women compared with only 43% to young men. And, as boys transition to manhood, they can’t shake their gaming habits. Economists working with the National Bureau of Economic Research recently demonstrated how many young U.S. men are choosing to play video games rather than join the workforce.

As a child and adolescent psychologist myself, the inevitable conclusion is both embarrassing and heartbreaking. The destructive forces of psychology deployed by the tech industry are making a greater impact on kids than the positive uses of psychology by mental health providers and child advocates. Put plainly, the science of psychology is hurting kids more than helping them.

*The Awakening*

Hope for this wired generation has seemed dim until recently, when a surprising group has come forward to criticize the tech industry’s use of psychological manipulation: tech executives. Tristan Harris, formerly a design ethicist at Google, has led the way by unmasking the industry’s use of persuasive design. Interviewed in *The Economist’s 1843* magazine, he says, “The job of these companies is to hook people, and they do that by hijacking our psychological vulnerabilities.”

Another tech exec raising red flags about his tech industry’s use of mind manipulation is former Facebook president Sean Parker. Interviewed in *Axios*, he discloses: “The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them… was all about: ‘How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?’” He also said that Facebook exploits “vulnerability in human psychology” and remarked, “God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains.”

A theme advanced by these tech execs is that the industry is unfairly using persuasive technology to gain a profit advantage. “Consumer internet businesses are about exploiting psychology,” Chamath Palihapitiya, a former Facebook VP says in a talk ironically given at B.J. Fogg’s Stanford University. “We want to psychologically figure out how to manipulate you as fast as possible and then give you back that dopamine hit.”

Having children of their own can change tech execs’ perspective. Tony Fadell, formerly at Apple, is considered the father of the iPad and also of much of the iPhone. He is also the founder and current CEO of Nest. “A lot of the designers and coders who were in their 20s when we were creating these things didn’t have kids. Now they have kids,” Fadell remarks, while speaking at the Design Museum in London. “And they see what’s going on, and they say, ‘Wait a second.’ And they start to rethink their design decisions.”

Marc Benioff, CEO of the cloud computing company Salesforce, is one of the voices calling for the regulation of social media companies because of their potential to addict children. He says that just as the cigarette industry has been regulated, so too should social media companies. “I think that, for sure, technology has addictive qualities that we have to address, and that product designers are working to make those products more addictive, and we need to rein that back as much as possible,” Benioff told CNBC in January, 2018, while in Davos, Switzerland, site of the
Benioff says that parents should do their part to limit their kids’ devices, yet expressed, “If there’s an unfair advantage or things that are out there that are not understood by parents, then the government’s got to come forward and illuminate that.” Since millions of parents, for example the parents of my patient Kelly, have absolutely no idea that devices are used to hijack their children’s minds and lives, regulation of such practices is the right thing to do.

Another improbable group to speak out on behalf of children is tech investors. Major Apple stockholders – the hedge fund Jana Partners and California State Teachers’ Retirement System, which collectively own $2 billion in the firm’s stock – have recently raised concerns that persuasive design is contributing to kids’ suffering. In an open letter to Apple, the investors, teaming up with leading child technology experts, detailed evidence that kids’ overuse of phones and devices is leading to their increased risk of depression and suicide risk factors. Specifically calling out the destructive impact of persuasive technology, the letter reads: “It is also no secret that social media sites and applications for which the iPhone and iPad are a primary gateway are usually designed to be as addictive and time-consuming as possible.”

Going Lower

How has the consumer tech industry responded to these calls for change? By going even lower. Facebook recently launched Messenger Kids, a social media app that will reach kids as young as five years old. Suggestive that harmful persuasive design is now honing in on very young children is the declaration of Messenger Kids Art Director, Shiu Pei Luu, “We want to help foster communication [on Facebook] and make that the most exciting thing you want to be doing.”

Facebook’s narrow-minded vision of childhood is reflective of how out of touch the social network and other consumer tech companies are with the needs of an increasingly troubled generation. The most “exciting thing” for young children should be spending time with family, playing outside, engaging in creative play, and other vital developmental experiences—not being drawn into the social media vortex on phones or tablets. Moreover, Facebook Messenger Kids is giving an early start to the wired life on social media that we know poses risks of depression and suicide-related behavior for older children.

In response to the release of Facebook’s Messenger Kids, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC) sent Facebook a letter signed by numerous health advocates calling on the company to pull the plug on the app. Facebook has yet to respond to the letter and instead continues to aggressively market Messenger Kids for young children.

The Silence of a Profession

While tech execs and investors are speaking out against the tech industry’s psychological manipulation of children, the American Psychological Association (APA) – which is tasked with protecting children and families from harmful psychological practices – has been essentially silent on the matter. This is not suggestive of malice; instead, the APA leadership – much like parents – is likely unaware of the tech industry’s distorted use of psychology. Nonetheless, there is irony, as psychologists and their powerful tools are guided by ethics, while tech execs and investors are not.
The *Ethics Code* of the APA, U.S. psychology’s chief professional organization, is quite clear: “Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm.” Moreover, APA Ethical Standards require the profession to make efforts to correct the “misuse” of the work of psychologists, which would include the application of B.J. Fogg’s persuasive technologies to influence children against their best interests. The code even provides special protection to kids because their developmental “vulnerabilities impair autonomous decision making.”

Manipulating children for profit without their own or parents’ consent, and driving kids to spend more time on devices that contribute to emotional and academic problems is the embodiment of unethical psychological practice. Silicon Valley corporations and the investment firms that support them are heavily populated by highly privileged white men who use concealed mind-bending techniques to control the lives of defenseless kids. Addressing this inequity is Tristan Harris, who says, “Never before in history have basically 50 mostly men, mostly 20–35, mostly white engineer designer types within 50 miles of where we are right now [Silicon Valley], had control of what a billion people think and do.” Harris was recounting an excerpt of a presentation he made while at Google during an interview with journalist Kara Swisher for *Recode Decode* in February of 2017.

Some may argue that it’s the parents’ responsibility to protect their children from tech industry deception. However, parents have no idea of the powerful forces aligned against them, nor do they know how technologies are developed with drug-like effects to capture kids’ minds. Parents simply can’t protect their children or teens from something that’s concealed and unknown to them.

Others will claim that nothing should be done because the intention behind persuasive design is to build better products, not manipulate kids. In fact, for those working in the user experience and persuasion fields, I’m sure there is no intent to harm children. The negative consequences of persuasive technology have been for the most part accidental, an unfortunate byproduct of an exceptionally competitive design process. However, similar circumstances exist in the cigarette industry, as tobacco companies have as their intention profiting from the sale of their product, not hurting children. Nonetheless, because cigarettes and persuasive design predictably harm children, actions should be taken to protect kids from their effects.

*A Conscience in an Age of Machines*

Since its inception, the field of persuasive technology has operated in a moral vacuum. The resulting tragedy is not surprising. In truth, the harmful potential of using persuasive design has long been recognized. Fogg, himself, says in a 1999 journal article, “Persuasive computers can also be used for destructive purposes; the dark side of changing attitudes and behaviors leads toward manipulation and coercion.” And in a 1998 academic paper, Fogg describes what should happen if things go wrong, saying, if persuasive technologies are “deemed harmful or questionable in some regard, a researcher should then either take social action or advocate that others do so.”

More recently, Fogg has actually acknowledged the ill effects of persuasive design. Interviewed by Ian Leslie in 2016 for *The Economist’s 1843 Magazine*, Fogg says, “I look at some of my former
students and I wonder if they’re really trying to make the world better, or just make money.” And in 2017 when Fogg was interviewed by 032c Magazine, he acknowledged, “You look around the restaurants and pretty much everyone has their phone on the table and they’re just being constantly drawn away from the live face-to-face interaction – I do think that’s a bad thing.” Nonetheless, Fogg hasn’t taken meaningful action to help those hurt by the field he fathered. Nor have those in positions of power, with the recent exception of tech execs coming forward, done anything to limit the manipulative and coercive use of digital machines against children and teens.

So, how can children be protected from the tech industry’s use of persuasive design? I suggest turning to President John F. Kennedy’s prescient guidance: He said that technology “has no conscience of its own. Whether it will become a force for good or ill depends on man.” I believe that the psychology profession, with its understanding of the mind and ethics code as guidance, can step forward to become a conscience guiding how tech corporations interact with children and teens.

The APA should begin by demanding that the tech industry’s behavioral manipulation techniques be brought out of the shadows and exposed to the light of public awareness. Changes should be made in the APA’s Ethics Code to specifically prevent psychologists from manipulating children using digital machines, especially if such influence is known to pose risks to their well-being. Moreover, the APA should follow its Ethical Standards by making strong efforts to correct the misuse of psychological persuasion by the tech industry and by user experience designers outside the field of psychology.

There is more the psychology profession can and should do to protect children and rectify the harm being done to kids. It should join with tech executives who are demanding that persuasive design in kids’ tech products be regulated. The APA also should make its powerful voice heard amongst the growing chorus calling out tech companies that intentionally exploit children’s vulnerabilities. And the APA must make stronger and bolder efforts to educate parents, schools, and fellow child advocates about the harms of kids’ overuse of digital devices.

With each passing day, new and more influential persuasive technologies are being deployed to better take advantage of children’s and teens’ inherent limitations. The psychology profession must insist in this new age that its tools be used to improve rather than hinder children’s health and well-being. By making a strong statement against the exploitive use of persuasive design, the APA and the psychology profession can help provide the conscience needed to guide us in this age of dangerously powerful digital machines.

Richard Freed

https://medium.com/@richardnfreed/the-tech-industrys-psychological-war-on-kids-c452870464ce
To Join Wisdom to Eloquence: Augustine’s On Christian Teaching

It was the year 430 AD. Augustine lay dying. “Please bishop, just one more visitor today,” the voice pleaded as the door gently pushed forward.

“My son, don’t you see my condition?” the tired man replied. “If I had any power over illness I should have healed myself.”

The visitor would not be so easily dissuaded. “I had a dream that I should come to you, and that my health would be restored.” Weary as he was in these final days, the preacher raised his hands in benediction, and the sick man left healed.

Augustine’s last years had been given over not only to the defense of besieged North African Christian towns. He also had just finished a review of his life’s work, especially his books. Only months before the invading Vandals poured through the straights of Gibraltar, 80,000 strong, Augustine had stumbled over a little book he had begun some thirty years earlier, *On Christian Teaching*. Much had intervened between then and now during the years of Augustine’s energetic episcopacy. In these last months of his life, Augustine picked up the unfinished book of his younger self and completed what would become the West’s most enduring sketch of a Christian teacher’s vocation.

Augustine had been a teacher from his earliest days. Prior to his baptism he had climbed from the relative obscurity of a small provincial town to be appointed as one of the Roman empire’s official professors of rhetoric. He had also fathered a child during these years with a woman who was not his wife, fallen in with a Gnostic sect from the east, and often ridiculed Catholics. During his 20s, there was the long and honest struggle with doubt over his professed skepticism. A little later, there was his meeting with Ambrose and a circle of philosophical Christians in Milan, and of course, all through these wanderings his mother’s tear-stained prayers. Augustine’s conversion in 387 marked a turning point for his own soul and the beginning of a long career of writing and of Christian teaching. We have more words from Augustine than any other ancient author, some five million. For his achievement, St. Jerome would even call the African bishop the “second founder of the faith.” Over the next 30 years, Augustine would compose the equivalent of a 300 page tome each year, pages which formed the Church’s thinking on nearly every doctrine, every heresy, every philosophical position, every pastoral work, including the Church’s work in education.

Shortly after Augustine’s ordination as bishop, he began two books that would in time shape the mind of the West. His *Confessions* tell the story of his soul; *On Christian Teaching* tells how to understand the story of Scripture.

Augustine opens his work with a reflection on the role of the teacher within Christian culture. Then as now there lurked a temptation to conceive of human achievement as an essentially solitary project guided, perhaps, by the Holy Spirit, or as the Romantics were later to say, by individual genius. Augustine would have none of it. Augustine is one of the originators of the notion of divine illumination – an epistemological theory describing how truth finds a resonance only after the mind has been acted upon by some external confirming inspiration. At the same time, though, Augustine insists that such inspirations are carried to us, almost without
exception, by the agency of human mediators. Rationality is, we might say, tradition dependent. Reason reaches out for universal truths, but it only draws them into the full light of day with the help of other lifting hands. He invites his readers only to consider the mastery of the alphabet. The potency for language is an innate gift, but its realization requires the words of others. Augustine saw God’s wisdom in such dependency. Our need for human teachers checks our pride. Man can know things of God. But God nearly always uses others to prompt and inspire such knowledge, a knowledge given to us preeminently through Holy Scripture. He uses the case of Cornelius the Roman centurion as an exemplar (cf. Acts 9:3-8). Though Cornelius was given instruction directly by an angel, the new believer “was nevertheless put under the tuition of Peter”.[1]

In the opening prologue, Augustine considers the benefits of human dependency. Had wisdom been accessible merely through a solitary quest, had a lonely ascent to the good been achievable without the aid of friends and mentors, had happiness been within our own grasp in the manner that many 18th century philosophers later dreamed, had the epistemic conditions for deep learning been simplified, had we no need for the Church, friendship, happiness, human nature itself would be impoverished. He continues:

Moreover, there would be no way for love, which ties people together in the bonds of unity, to make souls overflow and as it were intermingle with each other, if human beings learned nothing from other humans.[2]

God is the source of all true insight. But His gifts will always, in some measure, be granted to us through the hand of human teachers, and this is above all for our growth in mutual love.

Another theme Augustine early develops is the relationship between signs and things. “All teaching is of either things or signs,” he declares, and then proposes further, “but things are learnt from signs.”[3] I have spent several years teaching this book to different students. What Augustine means by this opening division between signs and things is not immediately clear. What unfolds for the attentive reader, though, eventually pays rich rewards. One of the 20th century founders of linguistic philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, drew deeply from this text as a source for his own reflections, as have other contemporary philosophers interested in meditating on the nature and limits and wonders of language.

Continuing along the lines above, one of the plain implications that Augustine will draw is that “signs” cement friendships. None of us live within a closed linguistic world. In other words, though we can experience some things privately, there is no way to communicate these sensations or thoughts with others, no good way to share insight, apart from some common bond through the language of words. This is not to deny the efficacy of a nod, a wink, or a hug. Surely these non-verbal signs also communicate, just as miracles can tell us something about God; but without words we would never be able to share an articulate account of the nature of things, nor of God for that matter, the one of whom we need to know most of all. It is this need of ours to know God which turns Augustine’s attention to the study of Scripture.

Augustine completed the first three books of On Christian Teaching when he was still a young Christian and a new bishop. Like the Confessions, the first books already give
some sense of the dazzling power of Augustine’s intellect and his vision for a Christianized theory of culture. Although these pages expound a theory of language, describe the Christian use of music, arithmetic, history, logic, and the other liberal arts, and although they propose a novel structure for ethics, and much more besides, at their heart, these pages are really about learning to read the Bible. It is instructive that Augustine should turn our attention here. All advanced civilizations have their founding texts. The Indian subcontinent had the Upanishads, Asia had the sayings of the Buddha and the Analects of Confucius, and the Greeks and Romans had the Iliad and the Aeneid. The Christians, Augustine now proposed, had Scripture. The Bible, not warrior epics, not philosophical musings, was to serve as the basis for a new Christian culture, a culture Augustine both anticipated and helped to form. One of the lasting achievements of On Christian Teaching has been to show how God’s Word could both admit multiple layers of interpretation while at the same time serving to draw all people into the common worship of the one true God.

Over the years, Augustine would turn his mind to other books. The bishop continued to write other weighty treatises, On the Trinity, The City of God, works against heretics, commentaries on Scripture. Now, thirty years on, he saw the Christian towns whose freedom he had so long fought to preserve, and indeed the empire that had made such freedom possible, begin to crumble. It was perhaps this new situation that impelled Augustine to complete the work he had so long ago begun. Picking up seamlessly from where he had left off decades earlier, somewhere around 425 A.D., he concluded the fourth book of On Christian Teaching, not with a further reflection on Biblical truths, but rather on the qualities of the teacher himself. In these his last sustained meditations on education, Augustine turned now from doctrine to evangelization, from exegesis to the Christian art of communication.

What lessons does he impart? There are too many to enumerate here. In the span of only a few pages Augustine recapitulates the fundamental truths of rhetoric as systematized by the Greeks through the mouthpiece of Cicero, and as illustrated in the Bible and through other Christian teachers. We must teach, please and move. Our rhetorical style may be low, mixed, or “high,” that is, complex. The good teacher must know what constitutes an attractive introduction, how to draw his conclusion to a close, and use illustrations to amplify precepts, etc. We must never bore. We must pray too, and seek humility.

Despite the dazzling array of lessons provided, and the sumptuous summing up of hundreds of years of rhetorical and psychological insights into what moves others to learn, Augustine’s basic counsel is simple: Join wisdom to eloquence. Knowing the good is not good enough, for the good is always diffusive. The contemplation of truth ever calls us out of ourselves in charity towards others. And for that end we Christian teachers must marshal all the skill at our command.

Ryan N.S. Topping


One of the problems besetting modern education is the obsession with the so-called STEM subjects of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Although there is nothing wrong with these per se, they are emphasized to such a degree that other equally or more important subjects are neglected. In consequence, as more and more resources are channeled into the STEM, the real roots of authentic science are being starved.

These real and authentic roots are to be found in the etymological roots of “science” itself. The word derives from the Latin word scientia, which simply means knowledge. Science is, first and foremost, knowledge, pure and simple. It is knowledge pure and simple before it can develop into knowledge which is applied and complex. You cannot have the latter until you have acquired the former. You cannot have technology and engineering until you have acquired science. And science is not restricted to a particular area of knowledge, to the exclusion or neglect of other areas; it is knowledge itself. This is what Blessed John Henry Newman had in mind when, in The Idea of a University (1852), he wrote of the “philosophical habit of mind” formed by “the comprehension of the bearings of one science on another, and the use of each to each, and the location and limitation and adjustment and due appreciation of them all, one with another.”

If, therefore, education can be considered the imparting of knowledge by teachers and the acquisition of knowledge by students, it is important to understand what constitutes true and authentic knowledge (scientia). Theology is a science. Philosophy is a science. History is a science. Even the creative arts, such as literature, painting, and music, are sciences in this wider understanding of the word. Theology is the knowledge of God; philosophy is the knowledge gained through a love of wisdom; history is the knowledge of the past; and the creative arts are the knowledge gained through the imagination’s engagement with the beauty of reality. These are all indispensable forms of authentic knowledge, the neglect of which poisons the roots of science itself, thereby harming the STEM and preventing the fruits of science from developing in a healthy manner.

As for the truncated sense in which the modern world understands what it calls “science”, it was known to the ancients as “natural philosophy”, the love of wisdom to be learned from nature. It was, therefore, a branch of philosophy. It was not science itself but one of the sciences. Furthermore, it was not a stand-alone science but was connected to the other sciences in a whole or holistic unity. It was not the knowledge of nature for its own sake but for the sake of a higher good, i.e. the love of wisdom.

“Nature,” wrote J. R. R. Tolkien, “is a life study, or a study for eternity for those so gifted.” It is, therefore, not merely the study of ultimately dead matter. It is a matter of life and death; of the finite and the infinite; of the temporal and the eternal. For this reason, physical reality should be studied in the light of the metaphysical questions that it prompts. A star is, for instance, larger than a human person in terms of sheer size and yet smaller than the human person, in the sense that the human person can perceive the existence of the star whereas the star cannot perceive the existence of the human person. The star is physically powerful but clueless.
The human person, like a cosmic detective, seeks for clues. This is the reason for seeing what is now called science as “natural philosophy”. If nature is studied in the light of philo-sophia, the love of wisdom, it will bring forth great and wondrous fruits; if it is studied in the absence of such wisdom it will produce scientistic monstrosities which will be the slayers and enslavers of humanity. It is for this reason that a liberal arts education truly liberates the human soul from powers which will otherwise enslave it. It is a matter of freedom or slavery; of life or death.

Joseph Pearce

Petition Started for New Irish Referendum Targeting Catholic Schools

In the wake of Ireland’s May 25 referendum legalizing abortion in the country, the Irish Labour Party has started a petition seeking a referendum to end religious schools in the 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.

“It’s time for a national conversation about how we achieve a modern, secular and equality-based education system for the Ireland of today, and what we hope to achieve for tomorrow,” said the Irish Labour Party Education spokesperson, Senator Aodhán Ó Riordáin.

Changing the education system would require amending the Irish Constitution, which guarantees the right of parents to send children to the school of their choice, including religious schools.

“Ireland is different now compared to when our constitution was written,” said Ó Riordáin. “Religion should not be the overarching principle that underpins our education system, nor should it be the way by which children are segregated at a young age.”

The Labour Party proposal would effectively nationalize religious schools and ban religious instruction on their premises.

“What they envisage for Irish schools (huge State control) would go further than Britain, further than France even. It would go as far (curiously enough) as the US,” David Quinn, the director of the pro-family Iona Institute, said on Twitter.

Both Britain and France allow state funding for religious schools, although government control is stronger than it is in Ireland.

“We have a disproportionate influence of religious bodies over education in Ireland. Over 90 percent of primary schools are under religious control. It’s not reflective of the modern Ireland. And the only way we can deal with this effectively is to have a constitutional referendum to deal with the issue,” Ó Riordáin said on July 17.

Senator Ged Nash said the proposal would still allow the study of religion in a broad sense.

“What we’re talking about is not to have a single emphasis on a particular religion and faith-based education, or religious instruction – that’s the difference,” Nash said. “It is important young people should have an understanding of religious traditions …The same could be said about introducing philosophy in schools.”

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.

The numbers are even more striking when looking at young adults: The latest European Social Survey, released earlier this year, shows only 54 percent of people between the ages of 16-29 identify as Catholic, and less than 25 percent claim to attend Mass weekly.
One of the most Catholic countries in Europe, revelations about clerical sexual abuse have left public confidence in the Church at its lowest level in history.

Irish society is becoming more secular as a result: Three years ago, 62 percent of the voters chose to legalize same-sex marriage in Ireland.

The Irish Labour Party is not a major force in Irish politics, although it has been a recent coalition partner of the current ruling party, Fine Gael. The current Irish President Michael Higgins, a purely ceremonial role, headed the Labour Party until being elected president in 2011.

However, after the 2016 election, it received only 7 seats in the Irish parliament.

Still, Ó Riordáin said he spoke with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar about his proposal, and recounted the prime minister said it was “certainly something … I will consider.”

Varadkar’s government has already 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.

Ireland’s Catholic leaders have acknowledged growing secularism might change the way schools are run in the country, although they see the Church as still having an important place in education.

The Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, has suggested the Church divest itself of some of its schools, while the Archbishop of Armagh, Eamon Martin, said he wasn’t “married” to the idea of preferential access of Catholics to the Church’s schools.

Meanwhile, the Irish government is holding a referendum in October to remove the offense of blasphemy from the constitution.

And on Tuesday, the Irish Minister for Health, Simon Harris, called for a referendum to change the definition of family in the Irish constitution, so that non-parents can be given more rights over children in certain cases.

Coincidentally, Pope Francis will be visiting Dublin Aug. 25-26 when the Irish capital hosts the Vatican-sponsored World Meeting of Families.

Charles Collins

The Misguided Compassion of Social Justice Catholics

There are many reasons for the downfall of our urban public schools, but beyond the undeniable corruption of those sucking the system dry for financial gain, the greatest destruction to our schools, and more importantly to the individual children in those schools, is the misguided and dishonest compassion of Social Justice.

Before going further, a distinction must be made between those who honestly believe in the Social Justice movement and those who use the movement for their own agenda, usually an agenda that leads to more power and profit in their hands and less in the hands of those they pretend to champion.

There is no point in addressing the latter group; they know who they are and they know full well what they are doing. No amount of argument will convince them to change their actions short of spiritual conversion. Neither is this essay aimed at those with scowling faces, voices raised in “righteous indignation,” and fists pumped ready to foment “civil unrest” based on false narratives manipulated by a dishonest media as exemplified in Beyoncé’s 50th Super Bowl half-time show.

No, this essay is aimed at those who believe themselves authentic Catholic Social Justice warriors: the priest lecturing the congregation in his homily, the teacher inculcating in her marginalized students Social Justice values, the voter who believes that one more entitlement program, one more educational paradigm shift, or one last moment of empathy while ignoring the destructive behavior of others, will justly end poverty and crime ushering in a new Eden. Nor can we should not forget those who just wish to assuage their own “guilt” no matter the unintended consequences for those less able to recover from the Social Justice warriors’ so-called benevolent compassion.

As the daughter of an urban public school teacher and as a veteran urban public school teacher myself, I have seen first-hand the destruction caused by the Social Justice ideology in our schools over the past six decades. The following anecdote illustrates but one of many moments in which teachers or administrators, either on their own or forced by the system, do more harm than good to students.

In 2007, I had an exciting opportunity to work for a start-up Catholic high school whose mission was to help college-bound urban students. I had already spent a decade working at my district’s top college prep school, which achieved a 94 percent acceptance rate to 4-year colleges. I had first-rate experience teaching students who often lacked basic skills as freshman, but wanting to learn.

I looked forward to doing the same at a Catholic school where I would also be allowed to relate literature to God and a school where discipline and academics would be held to a higher standard. As good as my previous public school was, it never unlocked the students’ full potential because they were not held accountable to the academic or behavior standards that would allow them to fully blossom. However, just as the first quarter of the first year ended, it was clear that my new Catholic school would perpetuate the same destructive program mislabeled “Social Justice.”

Making Excuses for Bad Behavior

Here is the scenario. The first novel I
assigned was Ernest Gaines’s *A Lesson before Dying*. Each student was given one character to follow. When it was time to write their first high school character analysis essay, I provided graphic organizers and models. Most of these students had never written an essay and they would need lots of assistance.

Only after each step of the writing process was taught, each student had received individual help with their assignment, and most students had completed graphic organizers, I brought 30 brand new laptops into the room for a week. Since this was a college prep high school, all essays had to be typed.

Additionally, the brand new computer lab was open before school, during lunch, and after school. Tutors were available after school if students needed more time or more help. Furthermore, the computer technology teacher allowed students to work on the essay during computer class time that week to help them with formatting and other computer issues. I had written the introductory and concluding paragraphs for them, so the students had almost 10 class hours and plenty of support to type three body paragraphs.

However, Tom and Tony, two cousins who entered ninth grade together, did none of the reading, none of the noting, and none of the planning. While others wrote on their laptops, I frequently found the cousins shopping for tennis shoes or playing solitaire, anything but typing an essay. Throughout the quarter, I repeatedly informed administrators, tutors, and parents these two, along with a few others, were far behind, but there was no change.

The academic dean came to me when the essay was more than three weeks past due, after the last late submission date, and with the quarter about to close. She wanted me to let the cousins submit hand-written essays. I said “No! Absolutely not! I made my expectations clear and I gave them plenty of time and support.” Her reply was, “But this is a matter of Social Justice! They don’t have a computer or the internet at home!”

I reminded her that I had provided the cousins multiple opportunities and that they had access to plenty of generous resources, resources that they had squandered, but she would not be swayed. In her mind, I lacked compassion because I would not allow them to turn in an essay more than three weeks past due and hand-written to boot. I still refused to give in knowing it would set a terrible example for other students.

**Students Deliver When More is Expected**

The students I teach are like people everywhere. If the door is opened to more excuses and work is easy to avoid, most people will take the easiest path. This is especially true when we no longer instill character, morals, or honor in our children. Push students to achieve and they generally rise to the challenge … shockingly, even urban black students … because it is human nature!

Urban students recognize those determined to fight for Social Justice from a mile away, and they know how to manipulate them. Urban students, like most students, grow to respect a teacher who holds them to higher standards, although at first they will struggle and fight and accuse that teacher of being a racist if she is white or evil if she is black. Eventually most realize that the Social Justice teacher is not really concerned about their education, while the latter is.
These two cousins learned that excuses worked at this school and especially with this dean. They did not grow at all. They spent the rest of the year doing nothing or disrupting class. They failed out of the school that first year. No one knows where they ended up, but it was not in a school that provided as many opportunities as ours.

Other students witnessed such moments and learned that they could run to the dean and others who claimed to have compassion for their lives full of “Social Injustice.” The school enabled them to fail. Many did succeed, but fewer succeeded than might have if standards had been respected. It is not compassionate to tell struggling students that they will not be held accountable on one hand while promising them a pathway to college on the other. Neither is it compassionate to spend time making excuses for failing students while utterly ignoring the needs of students with the potential to excel, as this school often did.

A major fault of the Social Justice movement, especially for Catholics, is that it does not seek justice for individuals, but collectives. The cousins, seen as individuals, might have been held accountable. Then they might have been given the tools to succeed in school. As teachers and parents, we know that children must often be pushed to do what they do not want to do in order to grow and that they must be held accountable. Had that happened in this case, the boys might have grown, or not, but the school should have tried.

However, they were seen as victims of Social Injustice, not as Tom and Tony, two individual young men with hopes and dreams and possibilities. That is how it is possible for Social Justice warriors to neglect individuals while at the same time claiming they are uplifting people. Social Justice cares not about lifting individuals, but about lifting groups of “helpless victims.” The expedient sacrifice of a few individuals along the way is acceptable as long as the agenda is preserved.

False Compassion is Everywhere

This false compassion is not limited to urban systems. It is affecting the suburban world too: the trophy-for-everyone, the best team kicked out of competition to give other teams a chance, the end of honors classes, remedial classes, and vocational classes. The top students in suburbia learn that hard work does not pay. Struggling students do not receive the help they desperately need lest they feel left out of “regular” classes. This is not compassion, but self-serving indifference disguised as compassion.

Catholics are not called to be Social Justice warriors. Jesus says, “Get up and walk,” not “You’re a cripple, so we will give you a ‘best bed sitter’ award to increase your self-esteem,” or, “You’re black. I can’t expect you to behave any better.” This is not to say that we should not feel compassion for the crippled man or the poor single mother or the struggling urban student; but we should expect and help the cripple to be independent, to walk if possible, even if it hurts. We should expect and help the poor mother or the struggling student to push themselves to their highest level of achievement, even if they fail sometimes. And we should be willing to tell them when they are failing, not lie to them to make ourselves feel better.

A better example than “Social Justice” for the truly compassionate Catholic is found in a beautiful short film The Butterfly Circus directed by Joshua Weigel. Set in the dark times of the Depression, this “short” is about Will, a man born with no arms and no
legs, found in a sideshow by Mr. Mendez. In the sideshow, Will is taunted by the audience and the sideshow barker who introduces Will as, “…a perversion of nature, a man, if you can even call him that, a man who God himself has turned His back on!” Mr. Mendez tells Will he is “magnificent,” but Will, believing Mendez to be mocking him, spits in his face.

Will later finds out that Mr. Mendez is the ringleader of the famous and respected Butterfly Circus. He finds a way to stow away in the circus’s truck. The somewhat odd troupe of performers welcomes Will, but he is left struggling to find a satisfactory role in a circus that has no sideshow. Mr. Mendez encourages him saying, “The greater the struggle, the more glorious the triumph!”

One day the troupe finds a refreshing river pool and stops for a swim, but Will gets stranded on the rocks on the other side. He calls for help. No one seems to hear. Mr. Mendez walks right past him, saying, “I think you’ll manage” when Will demands his help. In his struggle to get to the others, Will falls into the water, a potentially deadly baptism. Instead of dying, he discovers he can swim. With this discovery, he finds his role in the circus. He becomes a high diver into the classic small pool of water.

Unlike the Social Justice crowd, no one makes excuses for Will, no one rewards him just for being crippled. Rather, they celebrate his triumph, a triumph he would never have experienced if the troupe made excuses for him instead of challenging him. Mr. Mendez, the Christ-like figure, sees Will as “magnificent” just as he is, but also sees the potential for his butterfly-like metamorphosis into something more triumphant, much as our Lord sees us.

The Social Justice movement has been working steadily and stealthily causing destruction in our society for decades, crippling further those already crippled physically or psychologically and those already struggling to find their own triumphs. As Catholics, if we keep our brothers and sisters helpless cripples or turn them into faceless Social Justice projects, we are perpetuating something evil. As Catholics, our job is not to force Social Justice policies into our schools, our churches, or our laws, but to seek justice in our own hearts and beauty in our fellow man, and when possible, to help our fellow man achieve magnificence and triumph on his own, one person at a time.

Dana R. Casey

An Education on the Camino

This summer my wife and I were blessed to be able to go on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela with our son. The Camino, The Way, is a many-centuries-old pilgrimage across Spain to the resting place of the remains of St. James the Apostle: Santiago.

This is my third Camino, and like the others, it has proven to be totally unique and a profoundly moving experience. While my first Camino (we walked the Camino Primativo that year) was a great retreat and an unveiling of a Camino as a metaphor for life, this Camino (the Camino Frances—the most common route) was a metaphor for education.

It began the first day of the Camino, as my wife and I were hiking over the Pyrenees Mountains from St. Jean Pied du Port to Roncesvalles. I had been re-reading The Song of Roland leading up to this first day’s trek and was reflecting on the toughness and heroics of the men of Charlemagne. What men! What courage and strength they possessed! And what vividness of purpose they saw. It was in the midst of these reflections that a trio slowly overtook us on the trail.

Because of the slow pace of plodding up and down mountains, we were within earshot of the two men and one lady for nearly a kilometer (0.6 of a mile for those who are not currently steeped in European measurement scales). These three were all twenty-somethings, each from different countries, friendly young people who just came together for a short time on the walk. The topic of discussion was why Muslim women, or even Christian women, would let themselves be ruled by men. Lots of platitudes to “non-judgementalism” were uttered all in an effort to not offend while they concluded absolutely nothing. Relativism abounded amidst a stream of CNN-worthy soundbites. To be fair, they seemed to have a genuine interest and allowed for the fact that these women themselves probably saw something positive in their dress or behavior constrictions. But they seemed to have no moorings from which to judge a position, much less argue to or for something. They were drifting along in a relativistic cloud, thinking they were expressing “their truth” in pure and respectful freedom.

However, as St. John Paul II reminded us in 1995 (found in the July Magnificat), “freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.” These well-meaning young people have seemingly been robbed of the right to do what they ought, because they have not been taught or shown what they “ought” to do or think. As Heather King poignantly states in her excellent article on Marshall McLuhan (Magnificat, July 2018), what we ought to see, think about, or act in accordance to, is “the Alpha and the Omega… the real Body and the real Blood of Christ.”

That is powerful.

That is purposeful.

That is the kind of conviction that drove Charlemagne and Roland, even with their human failings. They were able to stand for something real, and fight for it and die for it!

That was how my Camino started.

As it continued, and we met many people from all over the globe, it became more and more clear how hungry people are for a Truth they can believe in and live for. We
live in a world starving for intellectual and moral nutrition, and everywhere there is McDonald’s and Cup-o-Noodle. We suffer from malnutrition and yet feed on intellectual fast food.

The Camino is a beautiful opportunity to step aside and step back from the noise, media and speed of the modern world and look, smell, touch and reflect. Whizzing across the countryside in minutes does not allow you to see the small flowers, the four varieties of butterflies on a single bush, or smell of the rock roses baking in the afternoon sunshine.

It is this slower pace, this more natural reality that we need to embrace as we think about what education really is and how it forms our children. We are forming human beings, not computer operators; the latter is simply a skill to be acquired after the person is formed. On the Camino we slowed down, came into proper and intimate contact with God’s creation and ran into our own bodily limits illuminated by shifting pains in legs, feet, shoulders, etc. In King’s article, she references McLuhan’s most famous quote, “the medium is the message.” The medium of the Camino – nature, our own abilities and limits, and the great art and architecture of man’s attempt to worship God – is simple and close to our true reason for being.

This is what education of the young should reflect. Build the imagination, build knowledge, build conviction, build each child as a person destined for eternity. Allow them to come to an understanding of what they “ought.” As Aristotle famously taught, education should teach children to “delight in the things they ought to delight in, and shun what they ought to shun.”

We can pick up our phone when needed, or jump in the car when we have to, but when it comes to forming the hearts, minds and souls of our children, we must be very careful and purposeful about The Way we proceed.

Michael van Hecke

Violence Does Violence to Education

What do famed novelist Charles Dickens, British educator Charlotte Mason, and 19th-century Italian priest and canonized saint John Bosco have in common? For one, they all recognized and taught that physical violence does violence to education. For Dickens, one sees this most clearly in his autobiographical novel *David Copperfield*, where one easily perceives how Copperfield’s youthful education was stunted by the physical tyranny first of his stepfather, Mr. Murdstone, and then by his headmaster, Mr. Creakle. Although Copperfield was naturally gifted as a student, his studies could not flourish under the threat and actual use of force.

In a series of books on education, Ms. Mason likewise derides the use of corporal punishment as a means for securing attention, obedience, and scholarship. She writes in *Towards a Philosophy of Education* that “prizes and places, praise, blame and punishment” are unnecessary to stimulate a child to academic excellence, and actually inhibit the growth of the child’s reason and will. Rather, “love of knowledge is sufficient.”

Finally, the great educator and saint, Fr. John Bosco, created an educational model called the Preventative System, which he contrasted with the Repressive System. In the Repressive System, the law is made known to the student, and when the student then transgresses the law, he is inflicted with quick and often harsh punishment. Thus, punishment is a first resort. In Bosco’s system, outlined in his short pamphlet “An Ounce of Prevention,” the rules are also made known to the student, but then the teachers walk alongside the student and through persuasion and relationship attempt to win the student to right conduct.

Punishment is seen as a last resort, and corporal punishment deemed almost never appropriate.

Perhaps this common lesson from Dickens, Mason, and Bosco is no longer relevant in our times. For admittedly long gone are the days when corporal punishment was used and condoned in public or private schools. If a teacher lays a hand on a student today, he is apt to be sued.

But there is another form of violence in schools that is making daily front-page headlines: school gun violence. Earlier this year, a 16-year-old student was arrested at Como Park High School in St. Paul, Minnesota (about two and a half miles from where I live) after a loaded firearm was found in his waistband. The problem of gun violence in schools is multi-faceted, with emotions running high on all sides of the gun-control debate.

But might I suggest that perhaps one of the causes of increased school gun violence is another type of violence occurring in modern schools: anthropological violence? The reason Dickens, Mason, and Bosco all believed that violence ought not be used by teachers as a means of compelling educational outcomes is because such a means does not respect the personhood of the individual. And because this personhood is endowed by a Creator, the individual is imbued with inherent dignity. Most schools no longer operate from this basic premise but instead act as if children are mere objects into which technical knowledge and information must be pumped. But an education that begins with an errant anthropology is apt to do violence to its pupils. With the loss of knowledge of God comes the loss of the knowledge of man. Or
as G.K. Chesterton put it, “Take away the supernatural and what remains is the unnatural.”

A society can ban all the guns in the world, but until its citizens accept that they and every other person in the universe have immense dignity as a son or daughter of God, gun violence will not end.

Jeffrey Wald

A few weeks ago, at a Catholic homeschooling conference in Florida, or perhaps it was Ohio, I had a conversation with a husband and wife who were promoting a board game they’d designed, which involved role-playing based upon scenarios from Scripture. I remember thinking, at the time, that there were very few educational games designed specifically for Catholics. Such thoughts returned to me this week as I noticed the game of *Trivial Pursuit* amongst the board games at the vacation rental in California at which my family and I are currently staying. Wouldn’t it be good, I mused, were something similar to be designed for the education of young Catholics?

Pondering this idea, my imagination set to work designing such a game. It could be called *Scientia*, the Latin word for “knowledge”, and it would focus on categories of questions attuned to the essential elements of a good Catholic education. I envisaged there being nine distinct categories: Theology, Philosophy, History, Mathematics, Geography, Literature, the Visual Arts, Music, and the Physical Sciences.

The playing pieces would be busts of great men renowned for their contributions to each of these nine sciences: St. Paul (Theology), St. Thomas Aquinas (Philosophy), St. Bede (History), Archimedes (Mathematics), Christopher Columbus (Geography), Shakespeare (Literature), Leonardo da Vinci (Visual Arts), Mozart (Music), Gregor Mendel (Physical Sciences).

The winner of the game would be the first person to “graduate” to the ranks of the *Illustrissimi* (the Illustrious Ones) by answering one question correctly in each of the nine sciences.

I then thought it would be fun to compose the questions for just one of the cards in the pack of several hundred that would be required for the game:

**Theology:** What are the seven deadly sins?

**Philosophy:** The ideas of which philosopher, apart from Plato, are presented prominently in Plato’s dialogues?

**History:** In which famous naval battle in 1571 did a Christian fleet defeat a larger Muslim armada?

**Mathematics:** What formula gives the volume of a sphere?

**Geography:** In which country is the Marian shrine of Fatima?

**Literature:** Who is Dante’s guide through the Inferno?

**Visual Arts:** Whose Pietà graces a side chapel in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome?

**Music:** Whose Sixth Symphony is also known as the Pastoral Symphony?

**Physical Sciences:** Which Catholic priest was the first scientist to propose what became known as the Big Bang theory?

As I took the leisure time to contemplate the rules of such a game, it dawned on me that this would be an excellent way of emphasizing Josef Pieper’s insistence that leisure is the basis of culture. It struck me that the process of learning through the leisure time that a game such
as *Scientia* would afford is incarnating the essence of what a true education should be and should encapsulate. It would bring students together in the sheer leisurely joy of learning while they interacted in friendly competition to “graduate” as true masters of each of the nine sciences.

It also dawned on me that good ideas are ten a penny, and that it would take more pennies than I could afford to develop and market my imaginary Scientia. I considered the words of T.S. Eliot, that a shadow falls between the idea and the reality and between the conception and the creation. As this shadow overshadows my thoughts, I offer these musings in the hope that others might become torchbearers of such imaginative approaches to reuniting leisure to education. Perhaps others might bring to fruition the seeds that my own leisurely musings have planted. In any event, the time spent imagining such things has been time well-taken; and time well-taken is never time wasted. It has been anything but a trivial pursuit.

Joseph Pearce

[https://newmansociety.org/not-such-a-trivial-pursuit/?utm_source=Cardinal+Newman+Society+Members](https://newmansociety.org/not-such-a-trivial-pursuit/?utm_source=Cardinal+Newman+Society+Members)
14 Famous People Whose Lives Were Shaped by their Catholic Education

You may be surprised by some of these names who took their Catholic background to heart. Catholic education is one that stays with you for life. Whether it helps strengthen our moral compass or deepens our faith, it leaves an ingrained sense of belonging to something much bigger than our immediate circles.

For these famous men and women, their years at Catholic school had a positive influence on their home and family lives. While some may have encountered difficulties or fallen away from practicing their faith, having a Catholic education has helped steer them back to their spiritual foundation.

**Danny DeVito**

The funnyman's first role as an actor was playing St. Francis of Assisi at his Catholic prep school. Later, as a teen, he asked his father to send him to a Catholic boarding school to "keep him out of trouble."

**Justin Bieber**

This pop star rose to fame while still studying at a Catholic secondary school. A devout Christian, he has said that God "is the reason I'm here," and refers to his faith in his music.

**Katie Holmes**

This actress was raised Catholic and educated in Catholic schools. After her marriage to Scientologist Tom Cruise ended, she returned to her Catholic faith and her daughter Suri reportedly attends a Catholic school.

**Bill Murray**

The deadpan actor was raised a Catholic and attended a Jesuit school. His sister is a Dominican nun. Murray has lamented the lack of Latin Masses and is a big fan of Pope John XXIII.

**Grace Kelly**

The legendary actress and former Princess of Monaco went to prestigious Catholic schools. Prior to her death, she visited the Vatican twice and made a pilgrimage to Lourdes.

**Pierce Brosnan**

The father of five was raised Catholic and served as an altar boy. He went to a school run by the Christian Brothers, from whom he says he received "a strapping amount of faith."

**Bruce Springsteen**

Calling himself, "the worst altar boy on planet earth," he grew up "surrounded by God" which he says has heavily influenced his music. "The language, the ideas, a lot of it came out of Catholic education."

**Martin Sheen**

One of 10 siblings, he had a Catholic education and returned to the Church after suffering a heart attack in 1977. His faith grew after trips to India and Paris and the actor now regularly attends church at Our Lady of Malibu.

**Benicio del Toro**
The actor and director went to a Catholic school in his native Puerto Rico. Although he had his only child out of wedlock, he brought her to his home territory to be baptized.

*Coco Chanel*

Growing up in abject poverty, the one-of-five siblings was sent to an orphanage after her mother died. Taught by Catholic nuns to sew, she was impressed by their stark white wimples, a color later associated with her iconic brand.

*Jim Caviezel*

The devout Catholic actor went to an all-boys Catholic high school where he excelled in basketball. After an accident in college he turned to acting, beginning a career that would see him taking on the role of Jesus Christ, among other notable religious roles.

*Chris O'Donnell*

The father of five finished his Catholic education at a college in Boston run by Jesuits.

*Mel Gibson*

The controversial actor and director attended an all-boys Catholic school in Australia. He says his work on *The Passion of the Christ* gave him a "wonderful opportunity every day to practice tolerance, something I wasn't too good at."

*Alfred Hitchcock*

The famous director maintained that his Jesuit education instilled in him a sense of "organization, control, and to some degree, analysis." He and his wife were regular church-goers, giving frequently to the Church.

Cerith Gardiner

What Happens When Religious Sisters Get Back in the Classroom

Having nuns as teachers is a luxury today, but here's an inside look at what it's like to be one of the lucky ones.

While religious sisters were commonplace in Catholic schools just a couple of generations ago, they have largely been replaced by lay teachers today. This is a reflection of the dramatic decline in the numbers of women religious in the U.S.: in 1965, there were nearly 180,000 sisters as compared to about a quarter of that number today, or 45,000, at a time when the U.S. population rose from 194 million to 325 million.

Yet while Catholic sisters have been typically departing Catholic schools, there are a few traditional orders involved in teaching that are sending young, competent Catholic teacher-nuns back to Catholic schools, to the delight of pastors, parents and students.

The staff of Marin Catholic High School in the Archdiocese of San Francisco includes four Dominican Sisters of Mary Mother of the Eucharist among its 70 teachers who serve 800 students. The sisters first came to the school in 2011 at the request of Bishop Thomas Daly of Spokane, who previously served as the school’s president. The bishop met Mother Assumpta, superior of the community, while on pilgrimage at Lourdes, France.

The school’s current president, Tim Navone, said, “The meeting was unplanned, so it was by chance, or rather by Providence.”

There was a long waiting list of Catholic schools wanting to have the sisters come and be part of the faculty, he noted, but after Mother met the bishop, “before you blinked the sisters were here.”

The Dominican sisters teach theology, geometry, chemistry and English, but are active in many other campus activities as well. They arrange student Holy Hours, Masses, retreats and programs to bring non-Catholic students into the Church. Navone said, “They’re looking for any way they can to help the souls of our kids.”

The sisters are “beloved” by the students, he continued, and being consecrated, they “are undistracted in their dedication to them.”

Navone has particularly noticed the rapid growth in conversions to the Catholic faith among non-Catholic students. Before the sisters’ arrival, he said, he’d typically lead a single student through the process of receiving the first sacraments, but with the sisters, the initiation program has grown “in spades.”

He continued, “We’re very lucky to have the sisters here. They’ve been a game changer for our school and have become a key component of our success.”

St. James Parish and School in Elizabethtown in the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky, is served by four members of the order typically referred to as the Nashville Dominicans. One is a teacher, another the principal and two serve in an educational capacity on the parish staff.

“It’s always been a prayer or dream of mine to work with the Nashville Dominicans,” said St. James’ pastor, Fr. Martin Linebach. “I tried to make it happen at my previous parish and it didn’t, but God helped me and this time, it did.”
The 2018-19 school year will be the sisters’ third at the parish school, which serves 500 students grades pre-K through 8. Additionally, one sister serves as Director of Religious Education and another the Director of Family Ministries on the parish staff; serving at the school and on the parish staff gives the sisters the opportunity to teach both students and adults. St. James is the only parish or parochial school in the Louisville archdiocese to have the Nashville Dominicans, and “I think a lot of people in the archdiocese have to confess jealousy,” Father joked.

For Fr. Linebach, the most impressive quality about the sisters is their joy, which is based on their Dominican charism. He said, “They are religious women in love with the Lord and the Church, and that is made visible in their love for people … it is a beautiful thing, to live the Catholic faith with such joy.”

The sisters’ joy has been contagious, awakening a positive spirit among the parish community, Father continued, “but they’ve made a bigger impact on me than anyone else.”

Adjustments had to be made to accommodate the sisters, however. The two sisters on the parish staff had to get used to life outside the classroom, and the parish had to adjust to the sisters living life in community. Father explained, “They have to go home every day at 4:30 p.m. so they can pray, eat and have a community life together. They’ve been a powerful witness for us, but we’ve all had to make adjustments to get to where we are today.”

Once a pastor puts in a request to the sisters that they come and staff a school, it can be a long wait, Fr. Linebach admitted. The Nashville Dominicans are “flourishing,” but the demand is high and their numbers compared to the Catholic population are few. But once in place, they can make a tremendous contribution to a parish school and community. Father concluded, “The parish is most grateful for their presence. We’ve enjoyed a healthy, fruitful relationship.”

Jim Graves

Bay Area Project Expands Gregorian Chant Instruction to Children, Teens

An initiative in the Archdiocese of San Francisco to form the Catholic imagination through beauty will next month host a workshop on how to teach “chant camps,” in which children and teens are educated in Gregorian chant.

The Benedict XVI Institute for Sacred Music and Divine Worship, founded by Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone in 2014, is holding a “Teaching Children’s Chant Camp Workshop” in Menlo Park, about 30 miles south of San Francisco, Aug. 9-12.

The institute means to promote the vision of the Second Vatican Council, whose constitution on the liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, said that Gregorian chant is “specially suited to the Roman liturgy” and that “therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services.”

Maggie Gallagher, executive director of the Benedict XVI Institute, told CNA that children are particularly receptive to Gregorian chant.

“Kids, teens, and tweens take to chant like a duck to water. For two reasons: First, music is a language and like all languages it is best learned young,” she said.

“Secondly, kids are fascinated by doing ‘grown-up’ music. People keep offering 8 and 9 year olds ‘children’s’ hymns at the exact moment tweens are looking to put aside the babyish and assume older identities.”

Gallagher’s words echoed those of Pius XI, who wrote in his 1928 bull Divini Cultus that in “their earliest years” young people “are able more easily to learn to sing, and to modify, if not entirely to overcome, any defects in their voices.”

This is the first summer the Benedict XVI Institute has held chant camps for children. The camps’ director, Mary Ann Carr-Wilson, however, “has taught children’s chant camps for the past ten years, helping to pioneer the form,” Gallagher said.

Carr-Wilson directed choirs at St. Anne Catholic Church in San Diego for nine years, has been a soloist with the San Diego Chamber Orchestra and other groups, and holds an M.M. from San Diego State University.

“Learning from Mary Ann is learning from the best. We’re very grateful she’s decided to join the Benedict XVI team,” Gallagher stated.

Rather than teaching solely performance, the camps impart a sense of the meaning of the Mass, and what is participation in the liturgy.

She has said that during the week-long chant camps, children learn how to chant the Mass, in a way that engages them immediately. Older and more experienced singers mentor the younger and weaker ones, and children who thought they couldn’t sing find that they are able.

Most importantly, Gallagher said, is that the children participants deepen their understanding of the Mass.

Gallagher reported to CNA the words of Father Corwin, the chaplain at a recent chant camp, that “These kids get more catechesis at chant camp than some kids receive all year. They learn what the Mass is. They
learn than chant is not performance, it’s prayer.”

Corwin added, “They are intrigued to find out they are singing the same prayers their favorite saints prayed through the ages. They are tasked with mastering the Tradition and then charged with handing it down. They love the responsibility. They love the Mystery. And they love the beauty they offer to glorify God and sanctify the Faithful.”

The Benedict XVI Institute’s promotion of Gregorian chant is in line with the Second Vatican Council, and with popes from St. Pius X to Pope Francis.

In his 1903 motu proprio Tra le sollecitudini promoting active participation in the liturgy, St. Pius X focused on the importance of chant, writing that “Gregorian Chant has always been regarded as the supreme model for sacred music.”

He directed that “special efforts are to be made to restore the use of the Gregorian Chant by the people, so that the faithful may again take a more active part in the ecclesiastical offices.”

Pius XI said, “so that the faithful may more actively participate in divine worship, let Gregorian chant be restored to popular use.”

Pope Pius XII wrote in his 1947 encyclical Mediator Dei that Gregorian chant “makes the celebration of the sacred mysteries not only more dignified and solemn but helps very much to increase the faith and devotion of the congregation.”

In his 2007 apostolic exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis, Benedict XVI wrote that “while respecting various styles and different and highly praiseworthy traditions, I desire, in accordance with the request advanced by the Synod Fathers, that Gregorian chant be suitably esteemed and employed as the chant proper to the Roman liturgy,” adding that “nor should we forget that the faithful can be taught to recite the more common prayers in Latin, and also to sing parts of the liturgy to Gregorian chant.”

The 1967 instruction on music in the liturgy, Musicam Sacram, which was an implementation of Vatican II, stated that “the study and practice of Gregorian chant is to be promoted, because, with its special characteristics, it is a basis of great importance for the development of sacred music.”

And in an address marking the 50th anniversary of Musicam Sacram, Francis praised the instruction and its focus on active, conscious, and full participation in the liturgy.

In his March 4, 2017 address to participants in a sacred music conference, Francis lamented that “At times a certain mediocrity, superficiality and banality have prevailed, to the detriment of the beauty and intensity of liturgical celebrations.”

He urged that musicians and others “make a precious contribution to the renewal, especially in qualitative terms, of sacred music and of liturgical chant.”

Among the participants in the Benedict XVI Institute’s Aug. 9-12 workshop are the Missionaries of Charity, who Gallagher has said “told us they wanted our help to learn both to improve their own prayer life and so they can teach children how to participate in the Mass in this special way.”
Gallagher told CNA that “if you’d like to bring a chant camp or a chant camp workshop to your parish or school or youth choir, contact us Rose Marie Wong at wongr@sfarch.org.”

She added that one or two slots with scholarships for the Aug. 9-12 “How to Teach Children Chant” workshop are available.

Carl Bunderson

What Priests Do

One of Rod Dreher’s longtime commenters recently offered this assessment of Catholic priests:

When I was a little kid, I played with the kids in the prolific Catholic family across the alley until I was around 7. And then for some reason, we did not play together any more. It was not like we had a fight or anything. We just stopped. I was thinking about that one day, for some strange reason, after my father died, and I said to my mother, “You know, it’s odd how when I was little I stopped playing with the X.”

She said, “We stopped it. We did not want them to get you involved with their religion. You know what priests do.”

Yeah, I knew. Brother Davis, in his semi-literate enthusiastic way said it. “They likes little boys!”

In the wake of the revelations of the grotesque betrayals of both the commandments of God and the trust of God’s people by ex-cardinal Theodore McCarrick, you can be sure many people are thinking similar thoughts. Indeed, too many bishops and priests have given people not previously hostile to the Church reason to begin thinking such thoughts. But “too many” is not “all” or even “most.” Far from it. In the righteous anger ignited by McCarrick, many innocent men are being slandered. So how do we respond to those who think that “what priests do” is to sexually abuse “little boys?”

One way of responding is by looking at the statistics. The John Jay report studying allegations of sexual abuse against priests in the United States between 1950 and 2002 concluded that some 4,392 priests were accused of sexual abuse of minors during that period of time, with 2,411 having a single allegation against them. That total represents approximately 4.3 percent of American priests over that time period. Since the report was issued in 2004, additional accusations of abuse have continued to be made, but the great majority have involved priests who were already dead, laicized, or missing. The John Jay report also concluded that the incidence of clerical sexual abuse was the highest in the 1970s, and that it began a steady decline after peaking in 1980. The most recent annual audit by the USCCB, covering the period from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017, recorded 24 allegations of clerical sexual abuse involving children who were minors during that time period. Six of the allegations were deemed substantiated, with three of those involving a single priest. In other words, 0.008 percent of the 37,181 American priests were credibly accused of sexually abusing someone who was 17 or younger in the last reporting year. Under the norms of the Dallas Charter, in place since 2002, priests credibly accused of sexually abusing a minor are to be removed from ministry. The incidence of sexual abuse of minors is far less clear in other professions, but approximately 20 percent of adult females and 5 to 10 percent of adult males indicate that they were subject to childhood sexual abuse, according to the National Center of Victims of Crime. No reasonable observer could look at these numbers and conclude that Catholic priests are characterized as a group by the abuse of the children put in their care, much less that priests in active ministry today are abusing the children in their charge.

But I’d rather respond by recounting what priests have done in my life, which has
taken place in the often turbulent wake of Vatican II. When I was a little boy, my Dad’s father, whom I deeply loved, died suddenly. I was inconsolable. But someone whose words helped me deal with my Grandpa’s death was the priest who presided at his funeral and who treated me with great kindness. Another priest who made an impression on me when I was young was the Slovak-American pastor of our large suburban parish. From my father I learned that our pastor had once been a priest at his childhood parish, a Slovak parish that my Dad loved, one where he swore his eighth-grade teacher, Sister Mary Ramon, acted just like Ingrid Bergman in “The Bells of St. Mary’s.” (My Dad has a candid photo of his eighth-grade classroom buttressing his memory: all the kids are beaming). Those who think that the Catholic Church is an oppressive institution need to wrestle with the fact that the Catholic immigrants who came to America from many different countries in Europe all did the same thing when they came here: they built Catholic churches and Catholic schools everywhere they went, often at enormous financial sacrifice.

From my Mom I learned that our pastor was an excellent confessor, an assessment I came to share, which is one reason I have never been reluctant to go to confession the way too many American Catholics are. From the pastor himself I learned the Faith, both directly from his sermons and indirectly through the religious instruction he saw that even we public school kids were provided. I will never forget the clear lesson on the evil of abortion I received as I prepared for my Confirmation.

The next priests to make an impression on me were the priests associated with my Catholic high school, the one institution that did more to shape me than any other. I was unhappy in my public school junior high, in part because of regular low-level bullying. I experienced none of that at my Catholic high school, where I was accepted for who I was. The contrast between a junior high where teachers and students raced out of the building at the end of the day and a high school where teachers and students often stayed late because they wanted to be there could not have been more stark. The reason for the difference was clear to me: the teachers at my high school, both lay and clerical, regarded teaching as a vocation, not just a job. Indeed, the best teacher I had at any level was the priest who taught me World History as a freshman and AP Modern European History as a junior. Many of my classmates share this opinion, including friends with multiple degrees from prestigious universities.

The many blessings I received from attending that Catholic high school did not end with graduation but continue to this day. That high school history teacher became a friend to my family and me, burying my grandmother, baptizing two of my sister’s children, concelebrating my wedding Mass, and making himself available for spiritual direction and confession when I needed it, including just weeks ago when a Lutheran friend wisely suggested that I talk to a priest after receiving distressing personal news. But what most impressed me about this priest is something that involved me only indirectly. When I was out of the country, the family of Leonard, a dear friend from high school, tried to contact me; they wanted my friend’s mother to be seen again by a priest. The hospital chaplain had already seen her and could not see her again in the time period the family wanted. So they thought of the history teacher Leonard and I both had as freshmen 25 years before and hoped I could put them in touch with him. It turns out they didn’t need me to reach him.
They left a message at the school, and fifteen minutes later my priest friend had returned the call and was on his way to the hospital, to anoint the mother of a student he had taught a quarter century earlier. (Sadly, Leonard died before his mother did. When my friend died, another priest from the school came to the funeral home, unexpectedly and unbeknown, to console us as we mourned Leonard’s early death.)

Through my continued association with my high school alma mater, I also became aware of the inspirational work of a man who had taught one of my theology classes, the late Jim Skerl. I have written many times about Skerl and the ways he followed Christ and the ways he devised for his students to follow Christ by serving others, ways that have now spread to Catholic high schools across the country. Thanks to Jim Skerl, high school students at my alma mater and many other schools now act as pallbearers for those who have no one else to carry their coffin and take meals and companionship on Sunday nights to the homeless living rough on the streets, after first praying before the Blessed Sacrament. I knew my last piece on Skerl did some justice to the man when I learned that the priest who gave him the last rites posted my article on the faculty bulletin board at school, and another priest who had worked with Skerl quoted it in a homily. It is true that Jim Skerl was a layman. It is also true that he was educated entirely in Catholic schools, spent his entire career teaching in Catholic schools, and was both influenced and supported by Catholic priests his whole life.

Thanks to my friendship with Leonard, I am the godfather of the nephew he never got to meet. Jimmy is severely autistic. But he was able to make his First Communion at a church not far from my high school, together with a half dozen or so mentally disabled children. The Mass featured banal guitar music of the type I normally cannot stand, but on this occasion, I did not care, so obvious was the love enveloping the church that day. The same priest who helps the mentally disabled prepare for the sacraments also ministers to the deaf and regularly feeds the homeless at his parish. Those, too, are some of the things Catholic priests do. (In doing all this, the priest is ably assisted by a nun who is his indispensable partner in running the parish.)

As an adult, I have been fortunate enough to go to good parishes led by good priests. In college, I walked to the neighborhood parish, then staffed by religious priests from Italy and featuring wonderful, traditional music, including Latin chants at a time when Latin was never heard in most American parishes. In law school, I also walked to the neighborhood parish, and found a church quite like the one I had attended in college. It was there I first attended the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday, and since then I have seldom missed the opportunity to kneel and sing the Pange Lingua at what is for me the most moving liturgy of the year. Once I returned to Cleveland after law school, I eventually gravitated back to my college parish, which still featured outstanding music but was now led by a diocesan priest, an outstanding homilist who reminded me of John Paul II, whom he often quoted. As with the Polish pontiff, this pastor’s instincts were often to the left of my own, but, also as with the Polish pontiff, I never doubted his sincerity of faith or sanctity of life.

I came to my current parish through marriage: my wife has been going here since she was four. In addition to introducing me to the parish, she also introduced me to the pastor, an eminently sensible man who had made few changes to his beautiful church.
after Vatican II and a man of great compassion who had been very supportive of my wife when her long widowed mother was dying of pancreatic cancer. My wife’s mother did not want to go to hospice, but she felt some internal pressure to go. At the suggestion of a colleague, my wife had her Mom talk to the pastor, who gave her the courage she needed to reject the early death hospice would have meant and to live one more year, a year my wife and her Mom treasured, despite all the difficulties. The pastor was also there for my wife and her Mom at the end. When we got married, two remarkable priests – my wife’s pastor and my high school history teacher – were there to witness our union before God.

The pastor’s replacement after retirement proved no less remarkable, a younger, dynamic priest whose preaching often focused on the Eucharist and whose example attracted a steady stream of new members to the church. Since this church is almost as close to where I live as my college and law school parishes are, I have had the opportunity to become involved in the parish and saw firsthand how many demands there were on this pastor’s time and how modest his creature comforts were. I have seen the great care taken to keep children safe, with religion students receiving regular instruction in how to protect themselves from sexual abuse and the pastor and other priests taking great care not even to be alone with a child. When public school students attending the Parish School of Religion go to confession, for example, the priests hear their confessions in the open, face to face, where both priest and penitent can be seen, but not heard. This might strike some as excessive, but it does show a strong commitment to protecting children. Finally, through my involvement in this parish, I got to know the seminarian who interned there, and was impressed by his ability to connect with both older parishioners and students and the soundness of his homilies, not to mention his commendable zeal for all Cleveland sports teams. A colleague, who attends the parish to which this seminarian was assigned after ordination, reports that this new priest continues to impress.

None of this is meant to suggest that there is not a profound crisis in the Church. I was a charter subscriber to this publication in 1982 when it was called Catholicism in Crisis, a title I felt was appropriate. The McCarrick scandal highlights important aspects of that crisis: seminarians should not be subjected to predatory homosexuals like McCarrick, there is no place for homosexual activity in the seminary or the rectory, and men who are not committed to celibacy should never be ordained, much less advanced to the episcopacy or the cardinalate, as McCarrick mindlessly was. The abuses brought to light by the McCarrick scandal must end. Nor do I mean to suggest that priests are incapable of committing profound, even grotesque injustices. Sadly, far too many people, including some I know, have experienced such injustices.

What I do mean to suggest is that the wrong response to the McCarrick scandal is to castigate priests as a class, to give up on the Church, or, God forbid, to leave her. My sincere advice is this: if you are a Catholic, stay. If you are not a Catholic, join. You may not find three good parishes within walking distance, as I did, but there are many good parishes out there. When you find one, join, and immerse yourself in its life. I am convinced you will find, as I did, good people sincerely trying to please God. Even in these dark times, there is much good in the Church. She is still producing saints, which is what I believe Jim Skerl will one day be called. And, despite the egregious offenses of far too many clerics, the Catholic
Church remains the only religious body teaching the full truth, including the full truth about human sexuality articulated 50 years ago by Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*.

Tom Piatak

New L.A. STEM School Inspired by JPII

John Paul II taught often that science and religion follow complementary paths toward the same goal: truth.

A new high school in Los Angeles, the St. John Paul II STEM Academy – aims to help students find truth – by teaching faith, and, at the same time, teaching the methods and principles of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

The Burbank school, which plans to begin with 60 freshman in August 2019, is an initiative of the Department of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The archdiocese says the school will offer daily prayer and regular Mass to students, while, at the same time, providing science and technology classes, along with internships and apprenticeships at local businesses.

STEM courses – those in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math – will be single-gender, according to the archdiocese, while the rest of the school’s course offerings will be co-educational. The school will focus on preparing students for careers especially in media arts and trade technologies, according to the archdiocese.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles says the creation of the new school is a sign of a growing Catholic population in the region, and increased interest in Catholic education.

“At the Department of Catholic Schools, we have a vision of growth that is based on the demographic reality of an increasing Catholic population in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles,” Dr. Kevin Baxter, senior director and superintendent of Catholic schools, said in Aug. 7 press release.

St. John Paul II STEM Academy, Baxter added, “it is a great indicator that our vision is one of building and opening and not closure and consolidation.”

The school will open on a campus formerly occupied by Bellarmine-Jefferson High School, a Catholic school that closed in May because of low enrollment and increased operating costs, according to an October 2017 statement from the school. At the time of that statement, the school’s enrollment was 98 students.

“STEM schools” have risen in popularity in recent decades, especially as funding has become available for STEM curricular models through grants from the National Science Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and other organizations. The National Catholic Education Association has promoted the model for Catholic schools, along with the so-called STREAM model, which incorporates religion and arts into the traditional STEM curriculum.

CNA Daily News

The Founder of the First Catholic College

“Master Robert, I should like to be known as a prudent man, but above all let me be one, and you may have the rest, for prudence is such a great and good thing that the word itself savors.”

Thus spoke the great St. Louis IX to one of his chaplains, Robert de Sorbon. To our age, Sorbon (1201-74) is the founder of a college whose name has become so illustrious through the centuries that it now denotes the University of Paris as a whole, La Sorbonne. To St. Louis, he was a trusted advisor and friend renowned as a preudome, a word that defeats easy translation but which summed up the aspirations of the holy king and of his century. The famous line from the Song of Roland, “Roland est preux et Olivier est sage / Roland is brave and Oliver is wise,” aptly captures the truth that the tension between practical wisdom and manly strength is an inescapable feature of human life. In the mind of St. Louis, the preux d’homme, or man of prowess, needed also to be thoughtful, to be a man of prudence. It was on account of precisely this harmony, or perhaps due proportion, of his virtues that he thought so highly of Robert de Sorbon, a spirited man of action who was also a man of far-seeing consideration.

Born to a humble family in the eastern part of France, Sorbon studied the liberal arts in Reims and philosophy and theology in Paris. His clerical career included posts at the cathedrals of Cambrai and Notre-Dame of Paris, but his principal occupation was as a master of the university and a preacher. Known for his moral seriousness, he could be a stern critic, even of the holy king—“A la cort del roy chacun est por soy / At the royal court, it’s every man for himself”—but most especially of his fellow scholars: “These great doctors of Paris, who profess to teach theology, are men full of pride who don’t gain a single soul for the Lord in a year’s time…. The good pastor, the spotless pastor, without reproach, who with simplicity of heart keeps the law of God—behold the theologian whose lessons are profitable.”

Sorbon had a ready wit and loved to use concrete examples in his preaching. In one of his sermons, he railed against the kind of man who desires to marry a wealthy widow, saying that the priest should recite the banns of marriage in this way: “There is a promise of marriage between such-and-such a man and the wealth of Lady Mary, and not between the man and herself.” Then, on the wedding day, the priest should send the lady packing and bring her cattle and furniture to the altar. In a sermon to a group of students, he told a tale of two scholars. One worked night and day and barely stopped to say his Paternosters—he had only four students. The other owned few books but went to Mass every morning—he was rewarded with a room full of eager auditors. When the busy scholar asked the pious one for the secret of his success, he replied: “It is very easy. God studies for me while I am at Mass. When I return I know my lecture by heart.” Sorbon was particularly beloved as an apostle of the sacrament of penance, writing a treatise on the subject and frequently preaching about the importance of our reliance upon God’s mercy.

Although Sorbon was a man of uncommon good sense, he is chiefly remembered for his work as the founder of the first residential college in the University of Paris. At the time of the college’s founding in 1256, the university was disorganized to the point of anarchy. Classes were held in the houses of the masters, while the students lived
wherever they could find a room. Our habit of mind is to associate colleges with ivy-covered walls and cozy dormitories. But that we do is thanks to Robert de Sorbon’s creative inspiration and faith. In his day, the university was a guild or corporation of teachers that exercised only a tenuous authority over its students. The only residential or collegiate living was that enjoyed by members of religious orders. The secular students – destined for lives as parish priests and as administrators in royal and episcopal chanceries – had to find rooms in garrets and make ends meet by carrying water from the Seine River to the town homes uphill. There were communal houses, of course, for students will always find a way to lower their rents. But none was a true academic community until Sorbon founded his college.

In the absence of collegiate regularity, student life at the University of Paris was notoriously riotous. The initial royal charter granted by Philip Augustus in 1200 was necessitated by a bloody town-and-gown disturbance. And several papal interventions followed suit in subsequent decades, as foreign students and Parisian tavern-keepers were often at odds. Young clerical scholars were paid stipends by older canons and left by themselves in the cathedral to sing the offices of matins, lauds, and prime in the wee hours, sometimes with questionable results, as this early-thirteenth century parody of a sixth-century liturgical hymn suggests:

*Iam lucis orto sidere / statim oportet bibere:*

In the face of such hijinks, Robert de Sorbon did not merely preach, he also acted, founding an institution that gave secular clerics the chance to live according to a rule of life whose ideal a later generation captured in the collegiate motto: *vivere socialiter, et collegialiter, et moraliter, et scholariter*, which may be translated as “to live as fellows and colleagues, with good morals and studiously.” Provision was made for poorer students who could not pay the full rent, and soon a chapel was dedicated, so that the residents could cement their fellowship in the common chanting of the divine praises. It was a model of undergraduate living that found imitators throughout Europe in the thirteenth century and afterwards and – consciously or not – still today in America.

In later years, no less a figure than the great Cardinal Richelieu would serve as the head of Sorbon’s college, or, in any event, enjoy its revenue. Today, although its name is known throughout the world, the Sorbonne’s Catholic founding has been forgotten. At its origin, it was a modest foundation, a mustard seed planted by a holy benefactor and his trusted advisor, a man who earned the praise and trust of his king because, to paraphrase Aquinas, his deeds were proportioned according to the spiritual splendor of reason.

Dr. Christopher Blum

If John Henry Newman should be declared a Doctor of the Church, the honor will be in large part due to his work as an educator. As Benedict XVI has pointed out, the “definite service” that he gave to the Church was to apply “his keen intellect and prolific pen to many of the most pressing subjects of the day.” In other words, Newman (1801-1890) is not so much an authority in his own right as he is a witness to the tradition he strove so mightily to inherit and to communicate. This distinction is particularly apt when applied to his writings on education.

The Holy Father has characterized Newman’s educational vision as one in which “intellectual training, moral discipline, and religious commitment would come together.” Newman himself would be the first to acknowledge that this integrated conception owed everything to the great teachers and traditions of schooling that had nourished and inspired him. For apostolic spirit joined to a sense of the duties of a gentleman, what could exceed the Ratio Studiorum of the Jesuits? For speculative rigor, who could surpass St. Thomas Aquinas, his brother friars, and their exemplar among the pagans, Aristotle? For the quenchless thirst for holiness guided and regulated by pastoral good sense, is not the Benedictine and Augustinian heritage a twin peak not to be overshadowed? And what of Newman’s own beloved Fathers of the third and fourth centuries, especially the school of Alexandria? There, too, the philosophical spirit and the desire for union with God were happily married.

If Newman’s principles are those of the tradition, what then makes his own contribution so extraordinary? Surely something must be said of his matchless style. From the sonorous cadence of the great passages of The Idea of a University (think of his account of the theology that is contained in the very idea of God, or of his description of the gentleman), through the almost Romantic sensibility of his Benedictine essays and the first several chapters of the Rise and Progress of Universities, and, finally, to the razor-sharp repartee of the “Tamworth Reading Room” and the exquisite satire of the dialogues in “Elementary Studies”: Newman succeeded in making debates about education not only interesting but enjoyable to read. No small feat that.

The real cause of the enduring significance of Newman’s educational corpus is to be found precisely in his engagement with the disputes of the day and his reflection upon his own duties as an educator. Augustine identified the perfection of the will that must be attained by the seeker of Divine wisdom. Aquinas laid out the essential nature of the teacher’s task in his celebrated disputed question on the subject. Yet neither had the occasions that Newman did to explore and to defend the further ramifications of their insights. They seem to have been able to take for granted certain human goods that were threatened in Newman’s day. Moreover, the adversaries that they were called to face were simply attacking on other fronts.

The central and determining fights of Newman’s age, both within and outside the Church, were over education. This was the case in Germany, where Bismarck’s Kulturkampf attacked the independence of the seminaries. And it was also the case in France, where the hard-won Falloux Law granting Catholics the right to have their own schools again gave rise to a heated dispute as to whether Catholics
should still be reared on the pagan classics. As for Newman, he became a champion of the tradition first against Anglican laxity and then against a certain rigorist fideism within the Catholic Church. And, most notably, he stood in the breach against what Benedict XVI has called the “reductive and utilitarian approach” to education that was prevalent in the increasingly secular nineteenth century, that dull Benthamism which had in it not even a spark of poetry, to say nothing of Christian wisdom.

Against the merely measurable “facts, facts, facts” of the Gradgrinds of the day, Newman set in opposition much deeper ones: “Let the doctrine of the Incarnation be true: is it not at once of the nature of an historical fact, and of a metaphysical?” Here is the proper destination of the “philosophical mind,” which, if worth its salt at all, surely cannot “consent to ignore” such a subject. The truths presented for our consideration in the Scriptures – truths revealed by God – are the starting point for the most exalted, strenuous, and rewarding of mental adventures: sacred theology. Newman’s account of “the old Catholic notion” of theology may not be a definition of the science, but it has rarely, if ever, been equaled: “Faith [is] an intellectual act, its object truth, and its result knowledge.” To dismiss theology from the university was to impose a prejudicial, and tragic, limit to the human intellect.

*The Idea of a University*, the text in which this discussion is found, was written as part of Newman’s “campaign in Ireland” in the 1850s, a true odyssey of service to a Catholic people not at all his own. He accepted the post of rector of the new Catholic university in Dublin as an apostolic call, affirming the bishops’ understanding of the task. “When the Church founds a University,” he wrote, “she is not cherishing talents, genius, or knowledge, for their own sake, but for the sake of her children, with a view to their spiritual welfare and their religious influence and usefulness, with the object of training them to fill their respective posts in life better, and of making them more intelligent, capable, active members of society.” This clear ordering of the task of education to its final end is typical of Newman. Where he differed from the bishops was not in his conception of the end, but of the means. They saw little for the Irish to gain from an Oxford-style education. Newman understood that, if pursued with intelligence and disinterested zeal, an authentic Catholic liberal education promised to make its students more virtuous. His defense of the independence and dignity of the university can only be rightly understood in light of his conception of Catholic liberal education as a means of perfecting man as such: intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

What is needed in our day is not only the reminder of the importance of liberal learning that is found in *The Idea of a University*, but still more urgently Newman’s ideal of a university “seated and living in colleges,” which he explained in a subsequent work, the *Rise and Progress of Universities*. There he elaborated upon a distinction he had earlier made in the preface to *The Idea of a University*, the distinction between a university’s essence and its integrity. Charismatic teachers, eager students, and the fearless pursuit of truth sufficed to bring a university into being, but for its well-being, more was required by way of moral and spiritual formation. These latter tasks were proper to the college, which is “a household” that “involves the same virtuous and paternal discipline which is proper to a family and home.”
The collegiate system that grew up in Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, and other university towns from the middle of the thirteenth century was the source of Newman’s inspiration. And although he did not see the collegiate life at Oxford in his day as perfect – he had been no unthinking conservative, but a reformer during his earlier years as an Oxford tutor – nevertheless he thought the genius of the institution both necessary and fruitful. It was the college that ensured the careful “training for those who are not only ignorant, but have not yet learned how to learn, and who have to be taught, by careful individual trial, how to set about profiting by the lessons of a teacher.” He did not envision vast lecture halls with students attending virtual discussion sections, but instead an educational experience far more personal and indeed familial. And for that reason he thought the college capable of being “the shrine of our best affections, the bosom of our fondest recollections, a spell upon our afterlife,” and “a stay for world-weary mind and soul” – that is to say, a true alma mater.

These and other noble principles are to be found throughout Newman’s educational writings, which indeed offer, as Benedict XVI has suggested, food for thought to educators of all kinds. Were their lessons to be widely pondered and heeded, the renewal that our schools, colleges, and universities so badly need would be well underway.

Dr. Christopher Blum

Many Catholics looking for a bit of summer reading might be tempted to pass over Laura S. Gossin’s offering, *One Man Perched on a Rock: A Biography of Dr. Warren Carroll*, perhaps wondering just who this Carroll character might be or, if aware of Dr. Carroll’s preeminent role as founder of Christendom College and his scholarship on Catholic history, concluding that since they have no connection with the College they will have little interest in its founding or its founder.

They would be mistaken to do so, and for several reasons. (Full disclosure: my four children are all graduates of Christendom College.)

First, this very readable book presents yet again proof for the proposition that while every fall from grace may be boringly similar, every conversion to Christ is refreshingly unique. In Carroll’s case, it is a uniquely American story. He was born and raised in “Yankee” Maine, in a culture still steeped in a morality of natural virtues such as thrift, prudence, and civic duty derived from its Puritan and Calvinist founders, yet stripped of the theology and religiosity thereof. Inheriting from both parents a passion for reading, storytelling, and intellectual pursuit, Carroll was repulsed by what he termed the “fundamental skepticism” – what today we might call the secular humanism – he encountered upon entering graduate school at Columbia. He bounced through the anti-communism of the Cold War and passed through a dalliance with the Objectivism of Ayn Rand and a flirtation with the Puritanism of his Maine forebears, before undergoing a seemingly rapid conversion to Catholicism just a handful of months after marriage to his beloved wife Anne.

Yet, I say his conversion is only “seemingly” rapid. Gossin masterfully traces the various pieces of his life’s story, the twists and turns and intellectual movements which slowly cultivated a heart open and yearning for truth, making it ready to react suddenly and willingly when finally discovering Truth is a Person whose name is Jesus. For example, Carroll’s revulsion to the “fundamental skepticism” he encountered first at Columbia is amply illustrated in the following quote Gossin offers from one of Carroll’s early works of science fiction, a quote which captures in essence the response most if not all faithful Catholics would offer to our current, dominant culture:

“Sophistication is a mask,” said Sherry in a clear voice, “a mask of obscurity in ideas and artificiality in emotion that hides a great hollowness inside – a hollowness where the simple, honest, the warm, and the forthright qualities of every healthy personality should be, but in the sophisticate, are not. Its causes are hypocrisy, fear, immorality, loss of faith, and perverted standards of social prestige. Its effects are aimlessness, the cult of unsentimentality, the ridicule of the pure, and a growing decline in the educational system, which tends to be the main producers of sophisticates.”

This was written in the late 1950s. Thus, it’s not at all surprising – indeed, it seems almost inevitable – that an intellect so acute in diagnosing the illness should, after just a few prayers from Anne, run to the medicine offered by the Divine Physician. Carroll’s story shows Newman’s favorite aphorism that “to be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant” may need to be amended to “to be deep in history is to cease to be basically anything but Catholic.”
Second, as well as telling Carroll’s personal story, *One Man Perched on a Rock* also illuminates one of the more vexing debates rumbling in Catholic circles these days, that surrounding the so-taged Benedict Option. Roughly forty years before Rod Dreher would raise awareness of just how Christians might respond to a culture for which an extreme conception of liberty serves as the lodestar for a descent into decadence, Carroll grappled with the descent just as it was picking up steam. Central to Carroll’s intellectual development in this regard were the minds and personalities involved in the production of the magazine *Triumph*, which sought to bring a Catholic perspective to the intersection of religion and politics in U.S. society. This included such men as Dr. Frederick Wilhelmsen of the University of Dallas; Dr. Bill Marshner, who would later serve as one of the founding faculty members of Christendom College; and L. Brent Bozell Jr., perhaps best known at the time for his association with his brother-in-law William F. Buckley and Buckley’s *National Review*.

Carroll succinctly described the cultural landscape of those years in a forward to an anthology entitled *The Best of Triumph*, published in 2001.

Quotes Gossin:

“*Triumph* magazine was published during the most critical period in American history since the Civil War: from 1966 to 1976. These were the years America passed through a near-revolution (1968-1970) and ceased to be a Christian nation, becoming secular and neo-pagan. (p. 139)”

Surveying the destruction of those years, Carroll opted for the Benedict Option and founded Christendom College. And while the economic revival of the Reagan years, the spiritual revival of the papacy of St. Pope John Paul II, and the fall of the Soviet Union may have masked for a time the further descent of Western Civilization into madness begun in those years of 1966-1976, there can be little doubt that if Carroll was ahead of his time, he was only slightly so.

Which leads to the third reason *One Man Perched on a Rock* should be of general interest to faithful Catholics, to wit: in documenting the founding and growth of Christendom, Gossin presents us a case study, an archetype, of the struggles and pitfalls and, ultimately, the providence of God’s grace in undertaking any true apostolate. Indeed, reading the book brings to mind so many similar stories which should be familiar to us: the seeming improbability of obtaining the necessary resources for the undertaking (think of the story of Mother Angelica and her purchase of the necessary equipment to launch her television network); the inevitable personality conflicts inherent in any human endeavor involving committed, strong intellects (think of the scene from scripture of the falling out between Paul and Barnabas); and the almost fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants approach intrinsic to any venture in which the odds of success are minimal (think of that ragtag fleet of Italian merchantmen and sloops sailing out to meet the Muslim armada at the Battle of Lepanto.) All of these facets of apostolate are artfully presented by Gossin while holding true to one of Dr. Carroll’s last wishes, which was his hope that in the telling of his story, it would, “include no detraction” (p. xi).

Finally, and charmingly, the book presents – particularly in its last pages – a love story. We live in an age which romanticizes to the point of exaltation the eros of “falling in love.” Our ahistorical “youth culture”
idolizes and idealizes “love” as something consisting solely of a rush of hormones. Gossin’s tender portrayal of Carroll’s last years, with many days perched on a chair in his wife Anne’s classroom reading a book while directing her to students with raised hands, touches the soul with the hope to be found in the true love of agape nurtured through a lifetime of matrimonial devotion.

Perhaps the only flaw of One Man Perched on a Rock is that, too often, rather lengthy quotations (often from Carroll’s own works) are offered where a short summary of the thoughts presented would suffice. Particularly in our rapid-fire internet age, some might be tempted to “click” past these quotations, to get on with the story. And if the reader so desires, this probably wouldn’t be that bad a thing. But for those with a bit more patience, these long digressions into the worlds Carroll created in his science fiction, the relationships he nourished in his personal letters, and the scholarship he presented in his historical works all offer a journey into a mind both unique and uniquely Catholic.

For example, Gossin offers the following from one of Carroll’s early, unpublished works of science fiction, written long before he became Catholic, which captures in its essence the sense of joy Carroll felt should be at the center of any life well-lived. His characters are seeking to rebuild a depressed and barren America of the future. As they band together for the task, one character ruminates on the role of laughter in life. The character reasons, thusly,

“…because for all its frequent and bitter perversions, laughter is the divinely bestowed instrument of human joy, and of celebration for human victory…. Like beauty, like any of the few human achievements and capacities which are ends in themselves as well as pathways and guideposts to greater things, joy exists in its moment and in eternity, but only by a fractional reflection, in time. It never grows old, its delight is magical because perpetual and undimmed, its impetus ever renewed fresh and pure and crystal-clear, like the outflow from a mountain spring. (p. 86)”

Such a joyous attitude toward life gives context to the scenes Gossin peppers throughout the book, showing Carroll to be not just an intellectual eclectic but at times maybe just a bit of an eccentric. There is, for example, Carroll’s failed attempt at building a rabbit hutch. Or, his rather self-described “miserable” stint as an apiarist. Or, finally, his love for the game of Twister. One suspects at some point after Carroll’s conversion he came across Belloc’s rhyme, “Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine, there is much laughter and good red wine. At least I’ve always found it so, Benedicamus Domino,” and raised a toast in concurrence.

One of Carroll’s favorite historical characters was a man named Pelayo who, in the 700s tradition tells us, launched the Reconquista to free Spain from the Moors by capturing a small patch of mountainous terrain. He would regale hundreds of students across the years with the tale, always concluding with what for him was a central truth, “One man can make a difference.” In reading One Man Perched on a Rock, said title deriving from this tale of Pelayo, Catholics can be strengthened again in this belief. In this day and age of stifling indifference and overpowering nihilism, that is reason enough for reading the book.
Alan L. Anderson

https://newmansociety.org/one-man-can-make-a-difference/?utm_source=Cardinal+Newman+Society+Members
Christians Lose at Court—and What to Do About It

This June Trinity Western University lost its bid to open a Canadian law school. Increasingly, political and cultural trends in Canada also find their way into the United States, so a Supreme Court ruling against religious freedom in education on one side of the border is worth considering on both sides of the border.

The thrust of the conflict was simple enough. An evangelical Christian university, Trinity Western, nestled a few miles outside of Vancouver, sought to open a law school. To ensure their graduates could practice, the university applied to law societies throughout the country so as to win approval for their degree. Many societies did approve the program, a few did not. The reason for the denials was chiefly Trinity’s “covenant,” or honor code. I recently read the document. It’s short and an elegant statement of how Christians called to study can together live the spirit of the Gospel. As they put it, allegiance to Christ “shapes an educational community in which members pursue truth and excellence with grace and diligence…”

And herein lies the problem. Trinity is a community, a group formed around common goods. Among those goods are “honesty, civility, truthfulness, generosity and integrity” and – yes, believe it – the call to reserve sexual intimacy “for marriage,” between a man and a woman. And this some law societies, and now the Supreme Court of Canada, could not abide.

Imagine it. Amidst the vast sea of secular universities in Canada here is one that actively, publically attempts to offer parents and students a genuinely alternative form of community life to the degrading, all-pervasive, depression-riddled hook-up culture now endemic to most other campuses. Now by a 7-2 vote the court has said no. Apparently, there is not enough room in Canada’s multicultural tapestry of creeds and colors for chastity. “Diversity,” declared the court, would be damaged.

As I have noted elsewhere, from the point of view of Canadian Constitutional jurisprudence the majority ruling is, of course, an embarrassment. Only a few years ago, the court ruled in favor of Trinity on substantively the same issue (in the early 2000s Trinity wanted to open an Education Department). After a judicially prompted re-definition of marriage (2005), and after a judicially imposed re-definition of murder (2015), the recent ruling does not surprise. Given the court’s trend over the past 20 years, Canadians have every reason to expect similar pronouncements for the next 20 years. How can we best prepare ourselves?

Let me first say what we should not do. We should not look for a singular fix. Culture is complex. Multiple causes shape its various manifestations. And yet ambitious, intelligent young Christians, Jews, and others who care about traditional modes of life do well to consider how best they can serve in the long struggle for cultural renewal that lies ahead.

A few days after the ruling, I had a discussion with just such an ambitious young man. He is a teacher in a local Catholic school, already a leader. He is a father and a husband, helps run one study group for men, and another for his students; he is interested in the philosophy of education and wanted to talk about ways he could equip himself for Catholic leadership in education for the future.
After trying to get a sense of his particular gifts, I encouraged him to think about cultural renewal in the following terms. Grace can, of course, work through any channels; yet there are patterns we can discern. Movements in culture, I suggested, are like the movements of a kite. To get “lift,” by which I meant some adjustment in the culture, you need the combined work of two kinds of forces. You need energy from “above” as well as energy from “below.”

This present ruling exemplifies a pernicious use of influence from “above”. In the early phases of the American civil liberties movement, Martin Luther King Jr. worked to great effect from “below.” In recent years in both Canada and the U.S., strident gains in the pro-life movement have been made chiefly from grassroots efforts working from below. In the province of Saskatchewan, Premier Brad Wall’s 2017 use of the “notwithstanding clause”—which effectively overrode a court’s attempt to stamp out Catholic education in the province—was a marvelous display of both types of influence at work; it took a politician of great moral courage to defy the court, but he couldn’t have done it without the thousands of Catholic and non-Catholic moms and dads that he knew were behind him. The point is, if our culture is to be preserved, both kinds of forces need to contribute. We Christians need to become more adept at handling the kite. Speaking now chiefly to Canadian Catholics, one of our crucial failures of the last two generations was to trust the good intentions of our ruling classes. Between 1958 and 1982, for example, we let about 65 percent of our Catholic colleges close or be absorbed by provincial universities. The fall of our institutions was swift. It meant that in the course of a single generation Canada lost much of its capacity to shape leaders who could act “from above”. We trusted, blithely, that a 20-year-old could be educated in a secular university just as well as in a robustly Catholic one. But of course that has turned out not to be true. Simply, if young people are going to keep the faith, we Catholics need to be able to carve out spaces for intense Christian formation. And Trinity’s loss in court shows how difficult it is in Canada for a religious college even to try.

So, to this ambitious young man, I offered this advice: think strategically. We all must consider well where we can best serve, where our immediate obligations and gifts lie, and then prepare ourselves for that service. If you have a bent for administration, get an M.Ed., or better get a minor in philosophy from an authentically Catholic college alongside your education degree and then see where that takes you. And of course leading “from above” is not the only way to fructify culture. More important is abandoning ourselves to God. Visit a seminary. Spend a week at a holy convent. Have a happy marriage that is open to life. Read an encyclical once a month with your friends. Organize a choir devoted to sacred music in your parish. Host a party on your favorite feast day. Whatever our vocations, over the next twenty years together, we need to learn better how to take hold of this kite.

Ryan N.S. Topping

In *The Case for Catholic Education: Why Parents, Teachers, and Politicians Should Reclaim the Principles of Catholic Pedagogy*, Dr. Ryan Topping has provided a fine apology for Catholic education. This short book provides an accessible, provocative, and clear account that will benefit all of the titular audiences as it offers a “set of principles that might guide any genuine renewal of the Catholic culture in our homes and in our institutions” (10).

The book is organized into six chapters and two appendices and focuses on the education of young adults from roughly the ages of 13-21 (19). The first two chapters look at the past and present standing of Catholic education in North America; the next three chapters offer an account of the aim (chapter 3), methods (chapter 4), and content (chapter 5) of an authentically Catholic education; and the final chapter concludes, noting signs of renewal and hope in the educational landscape.

Let me summarize each of the chapters more fully, reflect on the book’s apparatus, and then offer some final remarks. The first chapter, which provides a brief history, largely follows Christopher Dawson’s account of our educational crisis and points to two errors. The first error is intellectual: many Catholic schools have lost confidence in the truth and evaluate success according to a reductive, purely utilitarian standard. Also, and this is the second error, many schools have lost a Catholic culture or rootedness in the stories, smells, images, and the like that shape the moral imagination in immediate and often intuitive ways. Chapter two builds on this critique by using qualitative sociological data to show that, while Catholic schools may still be able to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic well, they are largely failing to pass on the faith and to help students avoid destructive behaviors.

With that background, Topping seeks to provide principles for renewal of Catholic education. Topping is clear throughout the second half of the book that the principles for regeneration are minimal and the enactments of renewal can take many different beautiful, complementary forms. In chapter three, he identifies the ends of a Catholic education: happiness (ultimate aim), culture (remote aim), and virtue (immediate aim). In light of these goals, Topping shows that Catholic education will often have to depart from current secular philosophies of education which, at bottom, reject the desirability and/or achievability of these goals. Topping argues, focusing on the ultimate aim, that at the heart of the matter is an adequate philosophical anthropology or view of the human person. Contemporary progressive education often seeks to lead students to a freedom of expression, whereas Catholic education seeks to give students a freedom for excellence by which to achieve happiness. One wishes that, while maintaining the book’s attempt to be a primer, Topping could have given even a little bit more attention to the other two aims: culture and virtue. He appears to think that Catholics and those who assent to a different educational philosophy will find more common ground in the goals of virtue and culture. This is likely true, but when Topping speaks of virtue, it is not fully clear whether he means skills only (a synonym he uses on page 39) or intellectual and moral virtues. Moreover, I’m not sure that Catholic and secular philosophies of education still agree on the ability of education to cultivate the mind and on the desirability of education shaping the manners of the pupil. At the
very least, what makes up the cultured human being is now less agreed upon than when Newman proposed the end of education be the cultivation of a gentleman.

Chapter four turns to issues of method by which to achieve the aforementioned aims. Topping insists that we must recover the truth that parents, not educators or the state, are the primary educators of their children, and that the child while fundamentally good has a weakened will, darkened intellect, and disordered passions. The reality of concupiscence in students requires that they be formed and guided, rather than just allowed to express themselves. Topping points more particularly to the need for a method in which students learn through imitation and, drawing from the *Baltimore Catechism* and *Ratio Studiorum*, offers illustrative examples of how one might employ this methodology.

This account of method naturally leads to reflections on content in the penultimate chapter. Topping recommends the teaching of the seven classical liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music) as well as the good, and eventually, the great books. Rather than giving an account of exactly how these subjects and books will fit together, the book provides reflection on the developmental ages of students and what sorts of subjects and texts they will be ready to encounter to shape their intellects, imaginations, and spirits at a given stage. The book’s foreword says that Topping has a “bias” toward classical education. The word “bias” may have a negative connotation, but as one sympathetic to classical education myself, I found the account compelling and adaptable. Topping’s rich description of the power of liberal arts education may qualify his earlier assessment that Catholic schools usually teach reading, writing, and arithmetic well, yet he avoids being unnecessarily prescriptive and calls for prudential discernment from parents and teachers as they select content and enact liberal education principles.

To this point the book has articulated an unhappy present and sad history of Catholic education in North America, as well as an ambitious program for renewal that might leave some readers, especially those who are new to these ideas, a bit overwhelmed. Topping does not leave such readers in a state of bewilderment. Instead, he closes by briefing the reader on institutions (not only schools and universities, but also ancillary organizations) where a renewal of Catholic education has begun. A reform is possible; begin! Moreover, the book finishes “painting a picture . . . of two girls” (82), an anecdote that shows the preceding pages aren’t just theoretical; rather, the choices of Catholic educators (parents, teachers, politicians, and clergy) shape the lives of individual children and have the potential to set a student on the road to destruction or to flourishing.

I have characterized this book as a primer and an apology. It is very accessible and offers an appendix of discussion questions and recommendations for further reading, as well as inset quotations and rich images. Like most Angelico Press books, the edition itself is handsome. The prose is lively and, in certain moments, acerbic while remaining largely generous to opponents of good will. The discussion questions maintain this spirit of exchange, often encouraging readers to reflect on their own subjective experiences.

The work has already garnered much praise, excerpted at the book’s beginning, and there is a largely complimentary foreword by Sr. John Mary Fleming, O.P., executive director for Catholic education at the USCCB. I
found the book particularly compelling in its willingness to blend philosophical, qualitative argument with quantitative data, and in doing so, Topping will be able to reach many different audiences. Near the beginning and the end of the book, Topping quotes Pope Benedict XVI’s exhortation that Catholic schools be “a place to encounter the living God.” All told, his treatment of the principles and of the past, present, and future of Catholic education in North America is one that seeks this goal, articulated by Pope Benedict, above all the rest. May this fine little book find its way into the hands of its intended audiences, and may more and more schools and educators see that a reclamation of Catholic pedagogy is needed. Christ, King of the Universe, cannot be squeezed into existing secular curricula and methods as if He were an elective.

Dr. Benjamin V. Beier

https://newmansociety.org/review-the-case-for-catholic-education/?utm_source=Cardinal+Newman+Society+Members
Many years ago, the English writer G. K. Chesterton claimed that the “coming peril” facing civilization was “standardization by a low standard.” Today, almost a century later, Chesterton’s words have something of the mark of prophecy about them. Standards of literacy and numeracy, to say nothing of standards of morality, are not so much declining as plummeting.

The calamitous “dumbing down” of America’s already beleaguered education system is encapsulated and epitomized by the monstrous Common Core. At the risk of seeming a trifle sensationalist, this affront to educational standards is nothing short of being a crime against humanity. Let’s not forget that the humanities are thus called because they teach us about our own humanity. A failure to appreciate the humanities must inevitably lead to the dehumanizing of culture and a disastrous loss of the ability to see ourselves truthfully and objectively.

The problem is that the architects of the Common Core do not believe that it is possible to see ourselves truthfully and objectively. They have a chilling indifference to truthfulness and objectivity in human affairs, rejecting all discussion of truth and objectivity except in terms of that which can be measured empirically by science. With regard to the truth that we can know about ourselves as human beings, and which is expressed in the great works that have graced our civilization through the centuries, they never get beyond Pontius Pilate’s famous question, quid est veritas?, which is asked not in the spirit of philosophy as a question to be answered, but in the ennui of intellectual philandery as merely a rhetorical question that is intrinsically unanswerable. This intellectual philandery spawns numerous illegitimate children, each of which has its day as the dominant fad of educationists, at least until a new intellectual fad replaces it. It is in the nature of fads to fade but in the brief period in which they find themselves in the fashionable limelight they can cause a great deal of damage, a fact that Chesterton addressed with customary adroitness in 1910, over a century ago:

“Obviously it ought to be the oldest things that are taught to the youngest people; the assured and experienced truths that are put first to the baby. But in a school today the baby has to submit to a system that is younger than himself. The flopping infant of four actually has more experience and has weathered the world longer than the dogma to which he is made to submit. Many a school boasts of having the latest ideas in education, when it has not even the first idea; for the first idea is that even innocence, divine as it is, may learn something from experience.

Implicit in Chesterton’s critique of the nature of modern education is a condemnation of the intellectual elitism that fuels the transient fads and fashions of the zeitgeist, the antidote to which is the timeless touchtone of Tradition.”

It should, of course, be obvious that the disenfranchisement of the past inherent in the Common Core’s manic pursuit of novelty is not only an abandonment of the wisdom of the dead but also a disenfranchisement of the unborn. In denigrating and deriding the Great Books of Western Civilization, and the great ideas that informed them, the doyens of the modern academy have broken the continuum by which the wisdom of the ages is transmitted to each new generation. In
refusing any authority beyond the individualism of the self, egocentric Man (*homo superbus*) has disinherited himself from his own priceless inheritance; in imposing his egocentric ethos on the Common Core, he is also disinheriting future generations. He is a contemptuous and therefore contemptible cad who not only kicks down the ladder by which he’s climbed but tries to destroy the ladder so that no-one coming after him can climb it either.

The Common Core is nothing less than the dogmatic imposition of radical relativism, the only philosophy compatible with *homo superbus*, a philosophy which goes hand in glove with the implementation of secular fundamentalism, the political ideology of *homo superbus*. Such a philosophy and its accompanying ideology refuses to tolerate anything but the things it tolerates itself, doing so in the name of “tolerance”, an egregious and outrageous example of the sheer chutzpah of Orwellian double-think!

In short, *homo superbus* has recreated education in his own image, sacrificing all rival dogmas on the altar of self-worship he has erected to himself, on which the tabernacle of any god other than himself has been replaced by the mirror of self-referential subjectivism. There is no place in such self-referential education for religion or for any metaphysical philosophy, nor for the great writers and thinkers who espouse religion or a metaphysical understanding of the cosmos. Homer and Plato and Aristotle are vanquished, vanishing from school curricula. There’s no room for Dante or Chaucer or Shakespeare; or Austen or Dickens or Dostoyevsky. Instead today’s already malnourished high school students will be fed trivia and trash, selected on the basis of its perceived “relevance”. Instead of a good, solid education offering real meat and gravitas, American kids, thanks to the Common Core, are being fed a thin gruel of nutrient-free nonsense. A good education is health-food for the mind and soul, full of nourishing traditions; the Common Core offers only fast food and junk food for the soulless and the mindless.

The *reductio ad absurdum* at the heart of such a system of education was certainly not lost on Chesterton, who perceived it as the very antithesis of the object of a true education: “The whole point of education is that it should give a man abstract and eternal standards by which he can judge material and fugitive standards.” The problem is that the radical relativism of the Common Core presumes that there are no abstract and eternal standards but that, on the contrary, all standards are merely fugitive, here today and gone tomorrow. Education does not serve truth because there is no truth to serve. Chesterton’s *bon mot* will not serve as a motto for the modern academy because the modern academy does not serve anything but itself. Its motto is *non serviam*. In such circumstances, education ceases to be the means to an end because there is no end, in the objective sense of a purpose or meaning to life. Such an education, incarnate in the Common Core, is nothing less than the end of education in that other doom-laden sense of the word. It has put an end to it.

The tragedy of the Common Core is that it has left us perilously ignorant of who we are, where we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. We are lost and blissfully unaware that we are heading for the abyss. Such is the price we are doomed to pay for our blind faith in nothing in particular.
In a world saturated with electronic sounds and images, is it really a big surprise that learning struggles are on the rise? Granted, there are genuine physiological maladies which result in learning disabilities, but there are multitudes of children (and adults) who suffer learning issues which are not related to diagnosable disabilities. Even many good and bright children struggle in areas where they should shine more naturally. The force of technology is so strong that it is hard to find popular adherence to wisdom which counters the technological tidal wave in life and education. And yet, at a recent address at Catholic University of America, tech entrepreneur Michael Ortner made a compelling case for an education rooted in the classics, logic and Latin as a prime and superior preparation for careers in the tech field. There is also an increasing number of articles echoing what one now-famous New York Times article revealed: the technological “royalty” (i.e., the Silicon Valley clique) are choosing an anti-technology education for their own children.[1]

While such articles sit well with those of us who promote education rooted in human nature and Christian anthropology, as a headmaster I still have to face the problem of practical solutions to our cultural nemesis—runaway technology. As teachers and parents immersed in a digital world, regardless of our personal efforts, we still see the effects of tech-saturation on our children. With large screen televisions in our restaurants, clothing stores and at the checkout counter, and the ever-present new styles of computers, iTouch, smart phones and iPads, do we even have a fighting chance anymore? Do we have a chance of facing the many challenges we find in the classroom, such as, most poignantly, sustained attention and real hands-on experience with something as simple as holding a pencil or crayon?

I maintain we do have a fighting chance, but it will take time and determination—and sound principles. As parents and teachers, we need to wrest control back from the main stream of culture and create a different environment in our homes and Catholic school classrooms.

Like the Waldorf school in the article referenced above, we must be purposeful and committed to educational ideals and practices that help children grow in their human nature in a simple, natural and beautiful way: “While other schools in the region brag about their wired classrooms, the Waldorf school embraces a simple, retro look—blackboards with colorful chalk, bookshelves with encyclopedias, wooden desks filled with workbooks and No. 2 pencils.”[2] Emory Professor, Mark Bauerlein, in an article published earlier this year, challenges everyone to go back to real handwriting. He contends that it will improve many things, especially the quality of writing and thinking: “The pen moves more slowly, but that isn’t a drawback. Like other “slow” movements (slow food, slow reading, slow art), slow writing aims for a fuller and tighter relation to the object, a nearness of mind to the language it utters. The plodding process of “drawing” letters instead of tapping keys and telling a computer to draw them gives words greater intimacy and presence. The handwritten word is closer, and that makes a writer more deliberate with words.”[3] I would go as far as to say that the attention given to picking up a pencil and handwriting, as well as sketching, will slow down a child’s mind to
a human pace and, simultaneously, increase their powers of observation and perception. This will give the student back their human control, re-establishing them as masters of themselves rather than soft slaves to the “search” button.

Parents, too, must create a sound counter-culture. One important way of doing so is reading aloud to our children. In this simple act we build imagination, relationship and a base of common knowledge – provided we read wonderful, classic books of stories and poetry. One of our local priests who does extensive counseling with families is a product of Boston Latin School, Harvard and the US Marine Corps. He knows something about building and maintaining a culture! He often reminds us parents that we are in charge of our homes; it is our duty and our responsibility to build the culture of our own home. We cannot do much about Macy’s video screens or “control” over what happens to the car radio when our teen has our car out on an errand. But, in our home and even in our car, when we are there, we can and must insist on providing the culture we have determined is right for our children if they are to live a well-balanced life, a life ultimately ordered to virtue so they will be free from slavery to the undulations of pop culture.

If schools, teachers and parents all insist on this, a culture ordered to the True, the Good and the Beautiful will start to take hold. If it takes hold, our children will have a chance at authentic freedom – that true freedom which comes from our being free from our unrestrained passions and free to love Him for whom we are made. Ultimately it all comes down to the words of St. Augustine, “Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they rest in Thee.”

Try having your child write those words of St. Augustine, in pencil, then have them color the words, with pencils. Once they have done so, you will have a wonderful homemade saying to live by worthy of a place of honor on your refrigerator.

Michael van Hecke


[2] ibid


Considering how much unhappiness there is in the world today, there might be a temptation to dismiss this poem and its ilk as an optimistic delusion. There is a sad tendency to view the world as a wasteland rather than a wonderland. This is, perhaps, one of the deepest errors of our time, the error of cynicism. What the world needs, what people need, what Catholics need, is a psychological and spiritual renewal: a renewal of politics, culture, parenthood, education… and poetry.

There is an old proverb that says if a person does not learn poetry as a child, they will not know how to pray as an adult. A more arresting thing could hardly be said, especially in an age where poetry is dead, either shrugged off with indifference or dismissed as unimportant.

Without doubt, the Church and the world need scientists and soldiers in the cultural and spiritual war zones to defend the Faith. But, in as much as civilization needs such professionals, so too does it need poets – and that for a very simple reason. Scientists without poetry can be slaves to systems. Soldiers without poetry can be barbarians devoid of chivalry. A people without poetry cannot be effective missionaries, because the charm of the Faith shines with poetry. Without poetry, without some knowledge or expression of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, there is less hope of attaining the glorious end of martyrdom – whether through war, marriage, work, or any given Tuesday.

Poetry offers that knowledge and expression, and thus offers children a window to view and begin to understand a world so full of “a number of things.” Poems should be lifelong teachers and they should begin their lessons in the hearts of the young. Once there, they can give satisfying expression to those mysteries of childhood that are beyond a child’s ability to express. And in so doing, poetry can begin to introduce children not only to the outward world and inward emotions, but also to give all things their proper place and relation.

Perhaps the most significant obstacle to providing today’s children with the experience of poetry is that many of today’s parents and teachers have not had the experience of poetry themselves. (It is never too late to have the experience!) Poetry – that art which meditates on beauty, rest, perfection, and the grandeur of God’s presence in nature – is good for grown-ups too. No matter how old you are, or how busy you are, it is always important to be reminded of the beauty and mystery that transcends all our distractions. And this is especially so if you are a teacher.

If you never thought about the importance of poetry in education, do not, by any means, let this article convince you. Take the time to discover great poetry. Read Shelley, Keats, and Byron. Read Wordsworth and Poe. Read the Psalms. Read Homer, Virgil, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge, and Hopkins. Write your own book inscriptions and Christmas cards to your loved ones in verse. Allow yourself the opportunity to encounter and engage the kiss of beauty.

Immerse yourself. Engage the material. And, above all else, enjoy it. Take the time.
No parent or teacher can give their child or student what they do not have. No pupil will take to heart what is brushed off as being unimportant by their parents or teachers. If parents and teachers want their children to pray, they must pray first. If parents and teachers want their children to be good, they must be good themselves. If parents and teachers do not read and savor the poetic works, neither will their children.

The first step to giving your children the gift of poetry is to love it yourself. Following are 10 excellent poems to begin with, to learn by heart and to teach the children you know to learn by heart. The rhythms of poetry reflect the rhythms of creation, of life, and the human heart. They put profundities in the mouths of babes, fortifying them for those times when, as adults, they will cry out from the depths. The power of beauty must not be lost. Like the coming of spring, the world will be saved by beauty, and a line of poetry may make all the difference in a person’s salvation. There is nothing like a poem held in the heart, like a fire in a hearth, to give the first and final context of earthly experience.

Memorize these 10 poems with your children or your students. They are not long or difficult. Neither does it take long, nor is it difficult to incorporate them at the beginning of a class, on a walk, in the car, or at table. Teach your young minds and hearts these poems and plant the power of poetry in their lives. These are only a beginning, but they are a good start.

1. “Requiem” by Robert Louis Stevenson  
2. “My Heart Leaps Up” by William Wordsworth  
3. “To an Athlete Dying Young” by A.E. Houseman  
4. “Sea Fever” by John Masefield  
5. “Nothing Gold Can Stay” by Robert Frost  
6. “The Destruction of Sennacherib” by Lord Byron  
7. “A Red, Red Rose” by Robert Burns  
8. “Concord Hymn” by Ralph Waldo Emerson  
10. “Psalm 8”

Sean Fitzpatrick

https://newmansociety.org/10-poems-everyone-should-learn-by-heart/?utm_source=Cardinal+Newman+Society+Members
Here Let the Dead Poetry Arise

A couple of weeks ago, the poetry editors of *The Nation*, determined to give the world notice that they were alive and were really important, apologized for a bit of liberal political doggerel they had published and helped cow the poet into apologizing for having written it in the first place. It was a slight thing, the poem, evincing no great mastery of art or language, but because it could be taken the wrong way by people who make a career out of being touchy, it was taken the wrong way. And so the drama duly followed.

Then a former editor of *The Nation* chimed in and wrote an article condemning the apologies and suggesting that the current editors should have the courage to publish poetry regardless of the political views of the poet. I greeted that article with a shrug and a yawn, because it takes no “courage” in our time to publish any poetry at all. Who reads it? It can’t be sung, having long since severed its ties to music. Poetry is less a part of the lives of ordinary people than it has ever been, in any culture, in the history of the world. The pagan Germans, illiterate though they were, had poetry. The Greeks passed along the works of Homer long before they were set down in writing. The Zulus sang polyphonic war songs. Large sections of the Old Testament are made up of poetry.

I am told that when the Canadian poet Robert Service published his first book, the copy boys who were working on the sheets at the printer’s were so enamored of it, they went out into the streets of Toronto, loudly declaiming his poetry to admiring crowds and stalling traffic. We cannot imagine such a thing now.

I fear that Catholic priests and laymen who are in charge of schools, seminaries, and colleges, or who edit the usual hymnals that sit down heavy on the spirit, like fog, or who compose the songs therein, cannot imagine it either. This is a matter that ought to be seen to.

Every work of nature is an ally for the defense and the propagation of the Faith, and so is every second-natural work of man, for man’s art is an echo or an imitation of God’s creative act. If we keep a child cooped in a house, so that he never knows the warm and bright sun, never climbs a tree or splashes about in a pond, we can expect a thin and sallow thing, not a human being growing into the full stature of his kind. Artistically and spiritually, we are like that rickety child, because we have lost the art of the true folk song, we have no poetry, and we have either obliterated the art of our churches or covered their walls with what is slovenly and spiritually cheap.

When I hear the riposte, that there are some very fine hymns being written now, I ask, “Really? Show me the poem.” And no one does. It is as if they knew, though they could not tell why, that the composers they like could no more write a genuine poem than the ordinary person off the street could hitch up his trousers and decide he was going to paint the human body in action, just like that, without the years of careful study, practice, and failure. Show me the poem.

What does all this have to do with Catholic higher education? In a sane world, nothing at all, because in a sane world, you do not go to the university to learn how to tie your shoelaces and comb your hair, nor to be modestly conversant with the long tradition
of poetry written in your native language. But this is not a sane world.

Suppose you were in charge of decorating a great interior space, like that of Penn Station. Would you not want to be familiar with art and architecture, and would you not consult the masters who had gone before you? Would you not want to see what others had done in London, Munich, Vienna, Paris, and Rome? You would never give the job over to any old hack. You would not say, “Hey, here’s a group of enthusiastic young people! Let’s give them a lot of paint and let them go at it.” But when it comes to the art that can bring to life the Scriptures, the person of Jesus, the saints, and the transcendent truths of our faith, and impress them on the minds and the souls of people whose daily work has little enough of the beautiful in it as it is, we act as if good intentions were all that mattered. Have you ever listened to your neighbor’s ten-year-old daughter scraping on the violin? Good intentions are not all that matter.

So I am calling upon every seminary in the country to do something that is pretty obviously needed. Our young priests will get almost no education in arts and letters from their elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. I will brook no disagreement on that score; I have taught college students for more than thirty years, and I know what they know and do not know. Of what use are all the courses on the liturgy, when the seminarian has no solid foundation in arts and letters? It is like pouring water into a bucket full of holes.

The priests should know about poetry, music, and art. They need not have Milton at their fingertips, but if they have not read the greatest poem in English, *Paradise Lost*, and if they cannot say a few sensible things about it, that is a damned shame – and a wasted opportunity, a priceless gift tossed in the dumpster. They need not be able to play “Jesu, Meine Freude” on the organ, but if they have only the vaguest notion of who Bach was and what he did, that is another shame, another priceless gift, buried. They should be filled with the stories of the classical pagan and the Christian authors of the last three thousand years, stories that themselves put a face on the natural law or the exalted morality of the gospels: they should be friends with Prospero, Sancho Panza, Tom Jones, Pip, the Bishop of Digne, and Olaf the Master of Hestviken.

Then maybe they would see how dreadful the accoutrements of Mass have really become, and they would do something about it. For no true ally in the fight before us should be denied.

Anthony Esolen

This Saint Defied the Rich to Establish Free Schools for the Poor.
He’s Now Patron of Catholic Schools

St. Joseph Calasanz, from the 16th century, was shown in a dream that he needed to help homeless and orphaned children.

The man who established Europe’s first free school for children is now the patron saint of Catholic schools. Meet St. Joseph Calasanz.

Joseph Calasanz (also known as Joseph Calasantius) was born in the Kingdom of Aragon (today called Spain). At the age of 14, he was already feeling a strong calling to the religious life. His dad wanted him to get married to carry on the family name, but Joseph had different feelings. He ultimately decided to pursue his calling from God, and was ordained a priest on December 17, 1583. He was soon made the secretary and confessor to the bishop, and tasked with establishing order and discipline among the clergy, which he did.

He became vicar-general of Trempe, Spain, and it was during this period of his life that both his bishop and his father died. It was in the midst of this grieving period that Joseph had a vision. “Go to Rome,” he was told. In his dream, he saw many children surrounded by angels. He gave away his inheritance, renounced his worldly possessions and headed to Rome.

Upon arriving in the Eternal City, he was deeply moved by seeing so many poor, uneducated children. His credentials helped land him a position in the residence of Cardinal Ascanio Colonna with the job of being his theological advisor and the tutor to the cardinal’s nephew.

He quickly learned how many poor, uneducated children were in need of his help. Many were orphans and others were simply homeless. He tried to get them into school but the teachers refused, demanding much more money to teach “vagabonds.” But God was waiting for the right moment.

Joseph asked a priest friend, Father Brendani, if he would help him to solve the problem of these poor, uneducated children. Amazingly, Father Brendani offered him two small rooms at his parish. Two other priests, believing in the mission of Father Joseph, agreed to work with him. In November 1597, only five years after arriving in Rome and having to also learn the language, Father Joseph opened the first free school for poor children.

Other priests began stepping forward to help, and soon they needed to expand. In 1602, they managed to find larger quarters. Pope Clement VIII (1592-1603) and Pope Paul V (1605-21) contributed to their efforts. Soon, Joseph was in charge of a half-dozen teachers and hundreds of students. Then Joseph began to organize his teaching priests into a religious community.

The work of Joseph Calasanz was spreading. By the end of the summer of 1616, they had opened a free school in Frascati, a town outside of Rome. Then on March 6, 1617, Pope Paul V approved a new order which was called (this is long) the Pauline Congregation of the Poor Clerks of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools. The order became known as the Piarists. Joseph Calasanz and his 14 priest followers received their new habits on March 25. They became the very first priests whose primary mission was to teach elementary school kids...
… no matter who they were or what their circumstances.

However, many of the ruling class feared the education of the poor. They predicted it would lead to social unrest and war between the classes. Other priests and religious feared that they would be absorbed by the Piarists. As Joseph’s order grew and more schools opened, some of his own order began to turn against him. They even managed to convince the pope that something was wrong within the order.

Joseph Calasanz, a man who loved his priesthood and fought for the education of poor kids, was arrested and forced to stand trial before the Holy Office, aka The Inquisition. The work of his order was shut down and his members absorbed by the local diocese. Joseph did not lose hope but died on August 25, 1648. Twenty years later, Pope Clement IX completely restored the order and vindicated Joseph Calasanz.

St. Joseph Calasanz was canonized a saint by Pope Clement XIII on July 16, 1767. He is the Patron Saint of Catholic Schools. His feast day is August 25.

St. Joseph Calasanz, please pray for us.

Larry Peterson

The Stages of Christian Education: Part 1

The following article is adapted from a talk originally given as the keynote to a conference on Catholic education in Saskatoon, Canada, on August 10-11.

St. John Bosco once quipped: “Nothing is more characteristic of youth than its tendency to changeableness.”[1] Though our principles be constant, our children are not. In the following two essays I propose to name “sites” where those changes occur. The three figurative places through which they travel from kindergarten to junior high to college, I’ll call the Garden, the Desk, and the Village. These represent the three stages of their education and within which I’d like to describe what goods your child ought to seek. There is, of course, overlap between each stage; but for parents and teachers it can be helpful to have in hand a kind of map of the terrain, as we shepherd our children during these exciting, exhausting, and enchanting years between zero and twenty.

We begin in the “Garden.” The garden represents the place best suited to a child during their first ten years of life, more or less. The two powers awaiting cultivation at this phase are a child’s physical senses and his moral prejudices. The senses is where all knowledge originates, says St. Thomas. By this he did not propose that we can only know material things, such as the weight of rocks or the color of trees; he meant, rather, that learning for us men and women always starts humbly, with our toes in the sandbox. God could’ve filled the world with only angels or apes, but instead he wanted us human beings to rule, creatures both of spirit and of matter. In the course of a child’s education, then, the body comes first. Irrespective of what summits of insight the mind may later climb, each of us takes our first step upon the long ladder of learning with our feet firmly planted upon the ground.

For this reason, the ancients thought early education revolved best around music and gymnastics. You must take care of first things first. Sport was prized because it stiffened muscles and the will even as it helped a child coordinate brain and limb. Then there is music. For the ancients musike included both music and the beautiful recitation of words, that is, poetry. So alongside sport and play and musical formation, in our garden we should also include good books and nursery stories, and songs with silly sounds, as from Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky.”

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

What the mad mathematician meant hardly matters. As parents of young children know, it is the sounds of words that first attract, much more than their sense; volume, pitch, and emotion, speak louder than terms, propositions, and syllogisms. During these years imitation is the chief means of mastery rather than understanding. Anyone who has watched young children play knows how naturally they imitate. In our family, as a supplement to books and plays and songs, our older children watch about two movies per year. We don’t need any more. One sitting of Ben Hur translates into 100 hours of intense and violent chariot racing. Two clips from Mr. Bean, a few summers back, set off two years of contorted facial expressions.

The question is not whether children will imitate, but what images we will set before
them. What stories do we wish them to hear? Those that will help them to imitate what is good. Of course the Bible should provide a regular fare, such as a weekly reading Sunday nights. But so also would we want nursery rhymes, *Aesop’s Fables*, Beatrix Potter, L.M. Montgomery, the *Chronicles of Narnia*, and later, Plutarch’s *Lives*, *The Hobbit* and others like these. Many of us have heard about the “Great Books” movement. The American professor John Senior a generation ago coined a term for the lesser, though in a way more valuable books for youth. These he called the “Good Books.” Like rubies, their lesser brilliance prepares the eye for the brighter light that refracts through the diamonds of the “Great Books.” Plato’s *Republic*, for instance, is arguably the greatest book ever written about education, but how much better will you be prepared for its lessons after you’ve studied the tortured psychology of Toad in *Wind in the Willows* and lived long with all Christopher Robin’s friends in *Winnie the Pooh*.

In the Garden we train our children’s senses through sport and literature. I mentioned also “prejudices.” I choose that word deliberately. Prejudices can be harmful. Prejudices can be misleading. What prejudices cannot be is wished away. They have their own sacred use. A good educator must find out what that is. A prejudice is, literally, a judgment made prior to a direct encounter with a “thing;” and children, if they are to survive into adulthood, must have heads filled with such judgments. Those who cannot learn from others will be doomed to learn everything by themselves: your finger wedged in your front door; your hands carrying back to the table bits of grandma’s smashed china; your bicycle stretched across a Ford F-150’s grill; these and a hundred other evils lie in wait for the child who has not learned to be prejudiced. The need for sound prejudices extends far past the Garden. The mother who says to her daughter about “Religion” or “dating” that she wishes her simply to make her own choices, is rather like a captain who would send his regiment into battle without weapons or map.

This second aspect of early education, like the first, holds for its object the supplying of surrogate experiences of good and evil. Instruction can help, but literature insinuates better; a good story, like *Treasure Island*, can implant a loathing for pirates, even if you grow up on the prairies; a good story, like *Farmer Boy*, can implant a love for hard work, even if you grow up in a city. More important than books to your own children, though, will be your own example, and the example of their other teachers. At this stage, imitation comes naturally and of necessity. For their image of the good, for what to fear, for what to love, and for what to hate, they will snoop around in picture books, and feel the motions of song, but it is at the canvass of your life that they will stare.

Wait a moment; should all these passions be cultivated? How about the last in that list, hatred? Does this passion deserve cultivation in our Garden? Hatred I define here as anger directed toward an ignoble object. Scripture does not say, “never be angry,” but rather “let not the sun go down” upon your anger. A child must respectfully fear being hit by a bus, but he must determinedly hate falling into sin. Habituating well this passion means acknowledging that not all is well inside and that for every yes there must also be a no. In other words, virtuous, godly anger requires renunciation. In a psychologized culture this may sound harsh. But the consequences are worse. Just a few days ago
a couple told me and my wife about an encounter on a city bus. A mother was riding with her child of, I think, 4 years old. The bus was full, but with enough room for the youngster to scamper up and down the aisle visiting the other passengers along the way. Except, as this child roamed from rider to rider, he swung his foot against each person’s shins. The game continued for some time before one of the victims turned to the mother in exasperation to ask whether she did not see what her little sinner was doing and whether she might not put an end to the impromptu soccer practice. To which question this mother answered that she wanted to raise her child in a “stress-free” environment. The bus rumbled along, I imagine, in an awkward silence. A shuffle, and then a teenager pulled on the high little string beckoning the chauffeur to let him off. That teenager had a wad of gum in his mouth. As the teen stood up from his seat he offloaded the wad onto his thumb, then swiftly planted the sweet rubber into the child’s forehead, looking drolly over his shoulder at the indignant mother, he announced that “my mother also raised me in a stress-free environment!” That’s a good teacher in the making!

To sum up: reasonable bedtimes, an orderly prayer-life, common meals, consistent discipline all insinuate the life of grace to our children. These early lessons may be rejected later on, but at least we will have given them something substantial to deny. Alas, so few young rebels these days bear such a privilege. Though the child’s work in the garden may look like mere play, we must tend to it well, to body and to soul, through precept and example, showing them what to hate and what to love; for before long that child will disappear and in his seat will be found the youth. We turn, in our next essay, to the “Desk and to the Village.”

Ryan N.S. Topping


The Stages of Christian Education: Part 2

The following is the second part of an article adapted from a talk originally given as the keynote to a conference on Catholic education in Saskatoon, Canada, on August 10-11. The first part of the article is posted here.

Sometime between a child’s 8th or 10th year, most parents will begin to share their work with others. This is the season when catechism classes begin, when soccer means more than kicking a ball against the fence, when kindergarten turns decidedly into elementary then Junior High, and homeschooling requires more than just keeping your kid at home. With our own children, I often feel that this transition creeps up on me. One day a child is not riding his bike, the next day, he is trying to pass me on mine; one day he is drawing in the pew at Mass, the next day, he wants to know proofs for God; one day he thinks I’m clever, the next day that I’m definitely not. In our first essay we took up the development of the child in the Garden, and saw that the chief aim should be to help the child, through music and sport, imitate the good; here we see what truth and beauty are to be found in the Desk and then the Village.

As the child skips towards his teen years, no longer is he or she fully immersed in his or her senses, although these continue to develop. Now intellect awakes. From chanting nonsense, and memorizing license plates, to asking questions and dissecting your answers, the intellect emerges, as from a gentle slumber, into frenetic action. Youth tests all. Instead of an endless passion for naming “cat,” “horse,” “girl,” this young teen strains to see beyond the appearances of things, to grasp their “form.” He moves on from names to definitions and arguments. What are the differences between a boy and a girl, precisely? Could a donkey ever breed with a bird? Can you prove the soul? And why can’t I drink alcohol yet?

It is reported that parents often feel this time as a trial. The sweet child of 10 has at 14 turned sour, and as with a good wine, we do have to trust that the walking barrels of vintage presently occupying the rooms in our house just might get better with age. As parents we need patience. But youth needs more than time. Besides, prayer, constancy, forgiveness, encouragement, example, they need also the right “disciplines.” Up until nearly yesterday, Christians were confident that these were encompassed by the seven liberal arts.

For hundreds of years, really until the 1960s, education in Europe and North America was informed by the classical liberal arts tradition. Liberal arts have nothing directly to do with politics, though democracy arguably can’t survive without them. They are called liberal inasmuch as they are the arts of freedom, liberal because they liberate from ignorance, lifting a boy or girl out from under slavery of opinions, to see and defend truth for themselves.

These arts divide between the trivium and the quadrivium. The first three arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric) trade in words, whereas the second group of arts (music, geometry, arithmetic, and astronomy) trades in numbers. Where the trivium teaches us to grasp being under the aspect of quality, the quadrivium views things under the aspect of quantities: qualities and quantities, words and numbers. At the time of the birth of the universities, Hugh of St. Victor, a master teacher, called these arts the “three-fold” and the “four-fold” roads to philosophy; though they yield knowledge, in medieval
and Renaissance and earlier 20th century curricula, they were used as the preparatory paths along which the mind would get its “legs” so to speak, so that having learned to walk, the youth would later be fit to run more swiftly along the higher paths of disciplines like philosophy, law, medicine, or theology. Here is the point: while the arts lead the mind to know, their more important function is to teach students how to learn.

We retain a memory of the tradition. But that memory has long been fading. The Greeks first articulated it, medieval Christians perfected it, and since the French and Industrial Revolutions—when nation-states needed mass-produced skills to manage mass-produced armies and factories and public schools were invented—we’ve been floating along downstream more or less upon the tradition’s scattered debris. We sense a child ought to know something about reading, writing, and arithmetic. But modern schools don’t usually know why these things are good, beyond that they are useful for making a child, in the words of the Common Core curriculum, “college and career ready.”

Ready for what, and why? Maybe for citizenship, maybe for environmentalism, maybe for celebrating diversity? Questions about ends are questions about which the modern school, on the whole, refuses to answer. It’s not the principal’s fault. Most public schools can’t commit to more than vague and mushy ends because our society is not allowed to commit to more than vague and mushy ends. Try to say more, and the courts will lock you out, as the Canadian Supreme Court did to Trinity Western University, this summer. To say more about “the good” than that you need to tolerate everyone else’s view would be, so many now say, oppressive—a social condition which Pope Benedict XVI described as the Dictatorship of Relativism.

This lack of a coherent account of the proximate and final goals of learning produces the chaotic results of secular public junior and high school curricula. Literature and arithmetic are still present, sort of, mostly, but so may be cooking, and courses on random cultures, and computer programming, and sex and hygiene, and band, and by-the-way-didn’t-you-know-bullying-is-bad. These things may not be bad, but the student has no way of knowing why he should be forced to think this random configuration of subjects is good. At its best, a modern curriculum prepares a child to get a job; at its least, a liberal arts curriculum prepares a child to live a good life. From the desk, we venture into the village.

In our post-Christian and post-truth culture, the village is looking more and more like a jungle. The great strength that many conservative and tradition-loving families regularly enjoy is the sense of the fullness of family life. Those families that scorn crass popular culture, that rarely plug into TV, the internet, or video games, that share meals, that read books, that play, work, and pray together—such families often know such a fullness of their common life that it may become difficult to see what the outside world has to offer to their already very rich hours.

To such families, I say, embrace your bubble. One thousand lions lurk at your door, terrible in their hunger, fierce in their rage against you, yes you who stand against their dominance over the village that these lions would transform into a jungle. Their “tolerance” comes without truth, their “justice” without mercy, their love without honor, their spending without wealth, their future without children, their hope without
heaven; and could they but break the defense of your doors, in their hunger for aimless freedom they would tear apart your little lambs. I say, parents, lock your doors at night.

Even though we lock our doors at night, this is not to keep us inside all day. We also need the village because, even here, there are beautiful ideas and beautiful works and beautiful persons which the family alone cannot supply. For the remainder, I’d like to walk with you through some of this village’s attractions, and what good these bring to our education. In swift order I want to consider what other benefits the village offers, in the store, the pub, the hall, and the church.

In this village we find a market. Man cannot live by bread alone; but as Our Lord well knew, he will perish without it. Our word “economics” comes from the Greek “oikonomikos,” which literally means “household management.” The “market” comes into being whenever two households trade. One day your son or daughter will enter into his or her own alliances. Their formation should therefore prepare them for that day when they marry and need jobs. Mostly, we assume other institutions, such as technological colleges and universities, will prepare them for success at work. Whichever route your children follow, without good character, they will fail, even here.

But life is for more than wealth, and from the market we stroll next to the pub. How can the family help prepare a child to flourish here? The pub is a gathering place for friends, of which Aristotle distinguished three kinds. The highest friendship is based upon virtue. With these sorts of friends your son or daughter will act as “iron shapes iron.” Friendships based upon the common love of the good, the true and the beautiful are as rare as fine stones. The best way to prepare for such friendship is by helping your children become the sort of boy or girl that a virtuous person would like to be with. Good manners, pleasant speech, the cultivation of an inner life where silence does not frighten, and where sacrifice is not foreign, will help make it more likely that your David will meet his Jonathan. Of course, not everyone we meet in the pub of our village can be our best friends, and we must learn also to settle for lower forms of friendship too, of pleasure and utility.

The “hall” represents those civil associations regulated by law. Acreages have their charm, and the hermit his place, but let us Christians never be lulled into thinking we have done our duty if we rest content to leave the work of government in the hands of bad people. We dare not. The human family begins in a Garden, but it ends in a city, the New Jerusalem.

Lastly, the church. If the family is the foundation of civil society, the Church is its ultimate end. Even in this life, though, the Church brings to our Garden, our Desk, and our Village the sacraments, a vocation, and through her art, music, architecture, sculpture, philosophy and charity, a supernatural nobility.

If nothing is more characteristic of youth than changeability, nothing is more stable than the transcendental purposes of learning – the good, the true, and the beautiful. Each has its place in our curriculum from zero to twenty: the Garden, where children learn best to imitate the good; the Desk, where truth is uncovered and defended; the Village, where a virtuous soul can delight in all things and all persons beautiful. Let us ask the Lord to help us lead our children well, through sport and music, through the liberal arts, and through the wonders of wealth, friendship, civility, and grace.
Ryan N.S. Topping

Are Your Kids a Wreck After School? There’s a Name for That

"After-school restraint collapse" is a real phenomenon – here’s how you can help your kids manage it.

When my kids get home from school, they all do very different things. My 12-year-old starts talking at light-speed about everything that happened to her that day while rummaging through the pantry. My 9-year-old gets a snack and then either starts her homework or starts complaining about something being unfair. My 8-year-old goes straight to his room, shuts the door, and plays with his Pokémon figures for a solid half-hour. And my 5-year-old has a complete meltdown on the kitchen floor.

It’s the same thing, every day, like clockwork. Four kids in four different emotional states trying to unwind from a long day of schoolwork, schedules, and learning, all while I’m trying to get homework rolling and dinner prepared. Inevitably, someone starts crying (someone other than the already-crying 5-year-old, that is) and on really bad days, that someone is me.

Turns out this is an extremely common experience for school-aged kids—so common that it has its own name, according to Motherly: after-school restraint collapse:

“Children experience this in various ways. Some children have a complete meltdown that involves temper tantrums [or] refusal of parent directions while others just withdraw or are quiet for awhile after school,” says Stacy Haynes, CEO and counseling psychologist at Little Hands Family Services…

How you can help ease the after-school transition

At the end of the school day, most of us parents are eager to ask all about the day. But that may be the last thing a child needs for a while, says Haynes. “Give children time to get a snack [and] relax their minds,” she explains. “Offer your child a physical activity directly after school, sports, yoga or walking are great releases that help to balance the mind and body.” Homework can also wait and will probably be done better as a result of a brain break.

Like me, my 12-year-old processes things by talking them over (sometimes incessantly), so she’s already found her way to unwind. I’ve never actually tried letting her talk until she’s done, but instead tend to cut her off almost immediately in order to redirect her. Although it’ll be a struggle for me is to listen patiently instead of trying to redirect her to homework, if letting her talk is the best way to give her brain a break so she can refocus on homework, it’s a struggle worth having.

My 8-year-old has always processed things by playing alone, since he was a toddler. I’ve long recognized this fact and rarely interfere with his after-school ritual. But my 9-year-old and 5-year-old have been a mystery to me. Why the complaining? Why the tears and tantrums?

I get it now. After all, I need some time to unwind after a long work day as well – sometimes I do this by reading, sometimes by working out, but what I never do is go immediately from a long day of work to even more work. My brain is usually fried and I know that if I try and work like that,
it’ll take me twice as long to accomplish half as much. If I come back to it after a solid break, however, I’m almost always refreshed enough to get those last few things done before bed. It makes sense that my kids feel the exact same way.

The trick will be to figure out what kind of break helps them unwind. I know it won’t be solitary play – they’re not exactly solitary-play children. And it won’t be endless talking … in fact, my 9-year-old often works herself up into even more of a tizzy by talking about things.

But like me, they both relish activity. I’m betting that giving them a snack and a half-hour to swim or play outside will be exactly what we need to mix the meltdowns and get them in the right frame of mind to tackle homework before bed. Bonus – if I play with them, I might get the same benefit.

Calah Alexander

https://aleteia.org/2018/08/31/are-your-kids-a-wreck-after-school-theres-a-name-for-that/?utm_campaign=NL_en&utm_source=daily_newsletter&utm_medium=mail&utm_content=NL_en
The Reason Why Public School Enrollment is Crashing

In the latest grim sign for the Empire State’s future, the Empire Center’s E.J. McMahon reports that public-school enrollment is headed down to 1950s levels.

Of course, current trends might not continue, but McMahon notes that the state school population is already on a clear decline, with this fall’s enrollment set to be the lowest in nearly 30 years. And the 2.6 million figure includes pre-K toddlers as well as public charter-school students – two whole categories that didn’t even exist before.


Westchester, Rockland and parts of the city are the only New York areas to see K-12 growth over the last decade or so. Statewide, it’s down 10 percent since 2000.

You probably haven’t noticed this in your tax bill, because per-student spending keeps rising. From 2007-08 to 2014-15, it’s up 24 percent, more than double the national average.

And even with New York spending far, far above the US average on its schools, its students continue to draw average scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exams – the gold standard tests for measuring achievement.

Of course, that particular bang-for-the-buck calculation is only part of the reason why the state can’t hold on to young parents. But high taxes and poor government translate to rotten job prospects across much of New York, leaving too many young people little choice but to move away.

Still, the bottom line remains the same: If the politicians can’t start giving more New Yorkers reason to hope for their future here, the future will increasingly happen somewhere else.

Post Editorial Board

Why Men Matter

I spent the 1960s studying to be a priest, so I was exempt from the military draft. I never served in Vietnam.

I can't and don't claim to know what combat is like. But I have friends who did serve, and no one in my generation could really avoid the war because it dominated our country's life for more than a decade. The Vietnam War intersected with a sexual revolution and a wave of social turmoil here at home that, in some ways, remain with us today. And yet, along with the war's bitterness and suffering, there were moments that are frozen in time because they had an impossible beauty. They can move the heart even now. I want to focus on one of them.

In your conference booklets, you'll find a photograph with the title "Reaching Out." I want you to study it. October 1966 saw a series of heavy firefights between American Marines and North Vietnamese regulars in the jungles and hills just south of the DMZ. This photo was snapped on Hill 484, moments after a hand-to-hand battle for the hill had ended. The man with the head wound is a gunnery sergeant, or "gunny," the senior enlisted man in a Marine company.

Two things are obvious. The Marines around the gunny are trying to get him to a medic. And the gunny is doing the opposite – ignoring his own pain to help a wounded young Marine bleeding in the dirt. What's not obvious is something outside the frame. The same Marines had just dragged the sergeant away from the body of their dead company commander, who had called down friendly artillery fire on his own position to keep his men from being overrun. The beauty in this photograph – what the poet William Butler Yeats called "a terrible beauty" – is the love among men in the shadow of death; men in the extremes of pressure and suffering. Not a romantic love. And certainly not an erotic love. But the loyalty-love of men made brothers by the tasks and burdens they share.

Men don't often talk about this love, but it's real. It's the love that enables a man to sacrifice his own life in service to someone or something more important than himself. It's the love that takes the male of our species and remakes him into a man. And that leads us to our theme this afternoon: why men matter.

It's an odd question to ask, isn't it. Why do men matter? In a healthy time and culture, we wouldn't need to ask, because the answer is obvious. The role of good men is to provide, to protect, to build, to lead, and to teach, both by our words and by the example of our lives. None of these things is exclusive to men, of course. Women can do all of these things in their own way, with their own particular genius. But men have the special responsibility to create a secure and just society where new life can grow and thrive to ensure the human future.

The trouble is, we don't live in a healthy time and culture. We live in an on-going civil war in this country over the meaning of sex, gender, family, marriage, human nature and whether our lives have any higher purpose at all. And that makes the sound of any sane voice all the more precious.

Abigail Shrier is a writer based in Los Angeles. Last month, for the issue of July 21-22, she wrote a remarkable piece in
The Wall Street Journal with the title "Masculine Dads Raise Confident Daughters." If you want some homework from our time together today, find it. Read it. And take it to heart. It's a better debunking of today's attacks on masculinity than a man could ever write. To borrow from just a couple of passages, Shrier notes that:

"My father never hid that he had high expectations of me . . . He admired smarts less than grit, found surface beauty less enchanting than charm. The woman he admired most was our mother, not for her intelligence or accomplishments, though she had plenty of both, but because of a strength that took his breath away and on which he often relied . . .

"My father's own unapologetic masculinity made us feel secure . . . [He] never let me get away with self-pity. Never allowed me to win an argument with tears. He regarded unbridled emotion in place of reason as vaguely pathetic . . . And when young men didn't like me or were poised to treat me badly, it was my father's regard that I found myself consulting and relying upon. When a man tries to mistreat a woman . . . he is unlikely to get very far with [someone] whose father has made her feel that she's worth a whole lot . . . [So] Dads, whatever you're doing for your daughters, double it."

The point of Ms. Shrier's article is the shocking claim – shocking to some people, anyway – that men and women are different. They need each other's distinct and particular gifts to flourish. In other words, an agenda of demeaning men, effeminizing boys, and trashing chivalrous behavior, which seems to be the goal of at least some of today's "progressive" politics, does nothing to advance women. It does exactly the opposite. It cripples them.

Shrier isn't alone in her thinking. Plenty of data exist showing that strong, involved, masculine fathers produce confident, successful, feminine daughters. And likewise, fathers play a crucial role in forming boys and young men in habits of mature self-discipline and excellence. Masculinity is learned; and the right kind of masculinity is learned from fathers with deep moral character and other adult men of virtue. The presence of a loving father radically improves the environment of a family. It results in lower rates of poverty, less crime, better psychological health, and higher rates of education and career achievement for children of both sexes. None of these realities is a surprise or a news flash. All of them are simple matters of social science fact. Another simple fact is that the absence of a father hits the lower social classes especially hard. It makes the cycle of poverty and crime even more difficult for single mothers and their children to escape.

The irony is that, despite all these facts, the leadership elites in many of today's Western countries have never seemed more skeptical of natural gender roles and never been more hostile to what they describe as "toxic" masculinity. Examples are legion, and we have limited time, but I do want to share just one of them. Rudyard Kipling's classic poem of boyhood, "If—," was recently stripped from a mural at Britain's University of Manchester by the self-described "Liberation and Access Officer" of the school's Student Union. The reason she gave is that "Kipling stands for the opposite of liberation, empowerment, and human rights – the things that we, as [a Student Union], stand for."

For those of you who don't know how dangerously regressive and masculine
Kipling's poem "If—," can be, here's a couple of stanzas:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise . . .
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue
Or walk with Kings nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the earth and everything in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a man my son.

One of the strangest results of my own generation's – the Boomer generation's – thirst for sexual liberation is that we now have a regime of sexual Stalinism to enforce it. Almost any imaginable sexual behavior is allowed and even approved for public consumption – unless men want to be men, and women want to be women, and they want to behave accordingly in a traditional moral sense. That kind of deviance is suspect. Sexual freedom turns out to be a grim and exacting business.

Whining about things doesn't achieve much, though. So how do we live right now with some hope and meaning as Christian men? Sometimes looking to the past makes the way forward easier to see. So let's do that. History is a good teacher.

Medieval knighthood began as a profession of heavily armed male thugs, men obsessed with vanity, violence, and rape. It took Europe's warrior class – guided and influenced by the Church – several centuries to limit and channel its dark side. Chivalry became the code that made this transformation possible. Chivalry gave knighthood its dignity and meaning. The true chevalier, or knight, was duty bound by oath to be a man of courage, loyalty, generosity, and nobility of spirit; a man committed to respecting and defending the honor of women, and protecting the weak.

This same spirit animated the new crusading religious orders like the Knights Templar, which sought to build a new order of new Christian men, skilled at arms, living as brothers, committed to prayer, austerity, and chastity, and devoting themselves radically to serving the Church and her people, especially the weak.

Of course, the ideals of chivalry and knighthood were often ignored or betrayed. Then as now, human beings are inventive and experienced sinners – every one of us. The author Karl Marlantes – who fought as a young Marine officer on exactly the same Hill 484 in Vietnam, two years after the photo in our booklets was taken – says that there's a reason we humans are at the top of our planet's food chain. Our species has an instinctive appetite for aggression that every civilization, and the Christian religion in particular, struggle to tame and redirect. In that light, the astounding thing is how often and how fruitfully the ideals of chivalry were actually embraced, pursued and lived by medieval men at arms, rather than abused.
My point is this. C.S. Lewis described Christianity as a "fighting religion." He meant that living the Gospel involves a very real kind of spiritual warfare: a struggle against the evil in ourselves and in the world around us. Our first weapons should always be generosity, patience, mercy, forgiveness, an eagerness to listen to and understand others, a strong personal witness of faith, and speaking the truth unambiguously with love. For the Christian, violence is always a last and unwelcome resort. It's to be used only in self-defense or in defending others. But at the same time, justice and courage are also key Christian virtues. And they have a special meaning in the life of the Christian man.

Men need a challenge. Men need to test and prove their worth. Men feel most alive when they're giving themselves to some purpose higher than their own comfort. This is why young men join the Marines or Rangers or SEALs. They do it not despite it being hard, but exactly because it's hard; because it hurts; because they want to be the best and earn a place among brothers who are also the very best. Men joined the early Capuchins and Jesuits not to escape the world but to transform it; to convert the world by demanding everything a man had – every drop of his energy, love, talent and intelligence – in service to a mission bigger and more important than any individual ego or appetite.

This is why the ideal of knighthood still has such a strong hold on the hearts and imaginations of men. Again, as men, we're hardwired by nature and confirmed by the Word of God to provide, to protect, and to lead – not for our own sake, not for our own empty vanities and appetites, but in service to others.

We men – all of us, both clergy and lay – bear a special responsibility because the Gospel tasks us as leaders. That doesn't make us better than anyone else. It takes nothing away from the equality of women and men. But human beings are not identical units. We're not interchangeable pieces of social machinery. Christian equality is based not in political ideology but in the reality of the differences and mutual dependencies of real men and women. As creatures we're designed to need each other, not replicate each other.

Men are meant to lead in a uniquely masculine way. This is why bishops who fail to live up to that standard are so profoundly damaging. There was nothing effeminate or devious or ethereal or bent about Jesus Christ, or the men who followed him. The Son of God called men – real men – to be his apostles, the first bishops. And the great saint of the early Eastern Church, John Chrysostom, described every human father as the bishop of his family. All of you fathers here today are bishops. And every father shapes the soul of the next generation with his love, his self-mastery and his courage, or the lack of them.

In the end, protecting and building up the Gospel in our age is the work of God. But he works through us. The privilege and challenge of that work belong to us. So we need to ask ourselves: What do I want my life to mean? If I claim to be a believing Catholic man, can I prove it with the patterns of my life? When do I pray? How often do I seek out the Sacrament of Penance? What am I doing for the poor? How am I serving the needy? Do I treat the women in my life with the honor, love, and fidelity they deserve? Do I really know Jesus Christ? Who am I leading to the Church? How many young people have I asked to consider a vocation? How much
time do I spend sharing about God with my wife, my children and my friends? How well and how often do I listen for God's presence in my own life?

The Church has lots of good reasons why people should believe in God, and in Jesus Christ, and in the beauty and urgency of her own mission. But she has only one irrefutable argument for the truth of what she teaches: the personal example of her saints.

So what does that mean? It means the world needs faithful Catholic men, men with a hunger to be saints. The role of a Catholic husband and father – a man who sacrifices his own desires, out of love, to serve the needs of his wife and children – is the living cornerstone of a Christian home. The Church in this country will face a very hard road in the next 20 years, and her sons need to step up and lead by the witness of their daily lives. We need the friendship of real brothers in the Lord to be the disciples and leaders God intends us to be. And there's no better place to pursue that friendship and renew our vocation as Christian men than right here, today, in the time we spend together as brothers.

I want to end these thoughts by going back for just a moment to that photograph of Hill 484 in our booklets. Today it's recognized as one of the great modern portraits of men at war. But at the time it was ignored and forgotten. In fact, it wasn't even published until 1971, after the photographer had been killed in Laos. You'll notice that the sergeant with the head wound is black. The young Marine who's lying in the dirt is white.

Those of you who are my age will remember the 1960s. They were a time of intense racial hatreds and violence – riots in dozens of cities; police water hoses and attack dogs; the Black Panthers and the Ku Klux Klan; and the murder of Martin Luther King. Racial poison penetrated nearly every aspect of our nation's life, including the military in Vietnam.

The sergeant in our photo was named Jeremiah Purdie. He had a tough young life. His mother died just a few weeks after he was born. He grew up poor and the wrong color in a segregated South. He entered the Marine Corps to better himself and fight for his country; a country that treated him as a second class citizen. Because he was black, he was barred from a combat unit. Instead, he was sent to food services school and put on kitchen duty – more or less as a paid servant. But he never let the bigotry that he endured infect him. He never became bitter. He simply did his job, and did his best. When segregation ended in the Corps, he transferred to a combat unit, and worked his way steadily up the ranks.

He's an old man in our 1966 photo – a man in his mid-30s leading 18 and 19 year olds after a ferocious firefight, most of them frightened, some of them dying. And all the while he has a piece of shrapnel in his head, and he's bleeding down his neck. But his heart and his focus are entirely fixed on someone else – one of his young Marines, a white kid, wounded in the mud.

The role of a Catholic husband and father – a man who sacrifices his own desires, out of love, to serve the needs of his wife and children – is the living cornerstone of a Christian home.

Why do men matter? I study that photo, and I know that at our best, we matter as men because when a man gives himself completely to the needs of others, even to the point of laying down his life for a brother or friend or wife and family, God
shows us a particular face of his own love. And that love draws the world a little closer to the beauty that God intended for us all.

Jeremiah Purdie won the Bronze Star and left the Marines in 1968, after two decades of service. But he was never an "ex-Marine." There are no ex-Marines. There are only Marines and former Marines. He was never forgotten. Many of the young men he led, both black and white, stayed in touch with Purdie until his death in 2005. And it will surprise no one in this room that the central passion of his life, from the time he was a young boy, through all of his military service, on Hill 484, and until the day he died, was his Christian faith. Jesus Christ was the Lord and anchor of his life, not just on that day in 1966, but on every other day before and after.

The lesson today, brothers, is very simple. Photographs fade. The legacy of a good man is forever. We remember the best among us for the excellence of their lives. But we're each called, no matter where God places us, to that same kind of witness. So may God grant all of us, as men, the courage, the grace and the integrity to be remembered in the same way.

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput

Three Resources to Help Balance
A Practical and Principled Catholic Education

This summer I attended a family picnic hosted by my in-laws. While sitting by a lake on a cloudless New England afternoon, my cousin in-law discussed her 14-year-old son, Ryan, who had recently finished his freshman year of high school. She told my wife and me that he was contemplating an eventual career – one in broadcast journalism – so that he could begin shopping for colleges. In fact, she wanted him, as a high school freshman, to begin touring several institutions. From this perspective, his choice of college would be driven by what career he chose to pursue.

The conversation gave me pause, as do many conversations about high school students choosing higher education. Ryan’s drive toward a career as a broadcast journalist is commendable. It will provide focus and order as he navigates his education. Nevertheless, I hope that, before he makes his career decision, he is exposed to an array of disciplines throughout the remainder of his secondary education. I hope that institutional overemphasis on professional utility does not deter Ryan from considering Catholic liberal arts universities.

My concern stems from the marketplace of public and secular private education, which increasingly seems to favor career-specialization at the expense of a well-rounded education. Much of this trend can be traced to families’ financial anxieties. Financial conditions and rising costs of college plague American families. Sometimes parents urge their sons and daughters to start making money as soon as possible to offset the debt. Of course, students feel the pressure of this financial duty as well. As a by-product, these conditions often construct a false binary that pits career-based higher education against liberal arts higher education. If given only two avenues to choose, a liberal arts education may not seem as attractive. To families who are anxious about paying for college, it may not seem as practically beneficial.

As an educator of first-year college courses at various institutions throughout the years, I have witnessed students’ cynicism toward the liberal arts. Sometimes, students can be forthright in telling me that they want college to emphasize professional job training so that they can land a job directly and begin paying off their debt. From the institutional sphere, I have additionally heard of colleges and universities – often, secular schools – actually refer to students as “customers” and “consumers of information.” Despite Catholic institutions often resisting such corporate language, these cultural perspectives can still influence students in Catholic schools – much as they can influence our materials, pedagogies, and curriculum. Therefore, in the classroom I find myself cheerleading students toward more nuanced, sustainable understandings of education: one that can help students succeed at a university (toward a stable career), all the while developing their personhood.

Rooted in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Catholic education stands in an optimal position to facilitate this sustainable balance. Below I share three resources that can help foster – and remind ourselves – of such harmony within Catholic education so that we can remain vigilant about our Catholic identity in today’s professional training-focused climate.
Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*.

As a work that has had a great impact on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Aristotle’s classical text holds more importance now than ever. As I have noticed when teaching college ethics courses, students automatically, almost instinctively, apply utilitarian criteria to ethical questions. I find that students feel so comfortable applying utilitarianism partially because the ethics of utility has been normalized by American mainstream culture. Since utilitarianism offers a different set of priorities than that of Catholic ethical thinking, this normalization can be problematic. Specifically, an ethic of utility can provide a philosophical framework to treat people as functional means rather than dignified human creatures. Aristotle, on the other hand, provides a challenge to utility-based thinking. Aristotle’s virtue ethics emphasizes formation, temperance, and how to develop virtuous habits. His ethics prioritizes the formation of the soul, rather than external utility, as the criterion of ethical evaluation. By association, Aristotle’s virtue ethics promises an education that transcends mere job training and can help edify one’s soul.

John Henry Newman. “Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Profession Skill” (Discourse VII) found in *The Idea of the University*.

Although Newman discusses higher education in *The Idea of the University*, primary and secondary educators may find this section of Newman’s book useful as well. After all, primary and secondary educational tiers prepare students for higher education. Throughout his book, Newman differentiates “liberal education” (liberal arts) from “professional education” (job training) while also theorizing how “liberal education” can benefit professional education. In other words, he recognizes the importance of the liberal arts in the professions. Specific arguments found in “Discourse VII” can inform in-class discussions, teacher-to-teacher conversation, or administrative dialogue about the fruits of formative education in respect to students’ professional utility.


In today’s digital era, information is widely distributed online. Students can learn about American Revolution history from YouTube tutorials. Students can learn about human anatomy and animal biology from shared online Prezi presentations. Formation, in contrast, is more holistic and immersive. Formation is not only concerned with learning facts. It requires a college classroom experience – and also willpower and habits that seek greater truths and values. Written in 1920 and inspired by the work of Thomas Aquinas, Sertillanges’ practical (and often overlooked) book offers a concise guide that inspires truth-driven, Catholic intellectual practices. Although the book’s title may seem lofty, it highlights the role of formation in education, including spiritual contemplation and mental discipline. For teachers and students who may routinely drift toward professional skill-building over and against Catholic Liberal Arts education, *The Intellectual Life* can help bring their teaching and learning habits back into balance.

According to Collegeboard, the average debt of individual college graduates in 2015-2016 was close to $30,000. Such financial burden can cause parents and students to look for quick temporary solutions. These solutions can involve distilling education down to a person’s utility rather than a person’s sanctity. Catholic Education offers – as it
always has – sustainability by guiding “how to be” rather than only “what career to do.” The above three texts can inspire virtue, formation, and truth-seeking in respect to today’s increasing career-based priorities. In these tense times of heightened anxiety about college decisions and debt, it may be worth looking back at such resources to recalibrate the equilibrium between professional skills and principled knowledge.

Gavin F. Hurley, Ph.D.

(original publication)
France: Cell Phones Banned at Schools

The French government becomes the first to send this "signal to society."

With 62 votes in favor and only one against – the rest of the representatives present abstained – the French National Assembly definitively approved a new law that bans cell phones and smart phones in educational establishments, from kindergarten and elementary school through middle school. The rule, which goes into effect starting this month, doesn’t affect high school, which students in France usually start at the age of 15.

The law, which fulfills a promise made during the past presidential electoral campaign by current French president Emmanuel Macron, then the leader of the En Marche! (“On the Move!”) movement, will fill the void left in the application of the Education Code (July 12, 2010). It had already banned the use of cell phones in class, but only about half of French schools had updated their own internal rules.

While today at least 93 percent of French youth aged 12 to 17 own (or have access to) a cell phone or smart phone – this statistic emerges from a study carried out in 2016 by the ARCEP (Authority for the Regulation of Electronic Communications and Mail, abbreviated from its title in French) – the ban isn’t absolute. The internal rules of each school can, in fact, create zones where the use of the devices is permitted, and can establish some exceptions “for pedagogical uses” or for students with a disability. The law doesn’t establish penalties for infractions.

Political Debate

With this legislation, the En Marche! movement – according to the head of the group in the National Assembly, Richard Ferrand – hopes to improve the social and relational abilities of French children. “These days, children don’t play at break time anymore, they are just all in front of their smartphones and from an educational point of view that’s a problem,” said the Education Minister, Jean-Michel Blanquer, the father of four children.

Beyond sending a “message to French society,” the government of prime minister Édouard Philippe wanted to give “a much more solid legal foundation” to 2010’s Education Code, said the Education Minister, quoted by Ouest France. On the occasion of the vote after the first reading, last June 7, Blanquer described the proposal as “a 21st century law, a law of entry into the digital revolution.”

The opposition on the right speaks instead of a “simulacrum” and a “nice deception,” while according to the Socialist Party, it’s a “purely aesthetic change,” according to the Huffington Post, which also cites the opinion of Patrick Hetzel. According to that representative of Les Républicains, the law isn’t good for much, because the “text doesn’t provide any framework or any penalty for a lack of implementation.”

Parents’ Associations and Unions

The rule doesn’t convince the largest parents’ association either, the Federation of Councils of Parents of Students (Fédération des Conseils de Parents d’Élèves, or FCPE). “This text doesn’t add anything of pedagogical interest” and doesn’t include “any educational component for users of digital devices,” states a press release made
public last June 7. For the FCPE, it’s “a text that doesn’t result in anything” and doesn’t even seem “to respond to the challenges to come” for French youth.

Another important federation of parents, the Federation of Parents of Students in Public Education (Fédération des Parents d’Elèves de l’Enseignement Public), is skeptical, but not just because its members think it will be difficult to put the legislation into effect. “We don’t think it’s possible at the moment,” declared the organization’s national president, Gérard Pommier. “Imagine a secondary school with 600 pupils. Are they going to put all their phones in a box?” he asked.

For his part, the general secretary of the National Union of Directive Personnel of National Education (Syndicat National des Personnels de Direction de l’Éducation Nationale, or SNPDEN), Philippe Vincent, pointed out that cell phones continue to be “significant” sources of distraction in classrooms, because of the rings, the vibrations, and the fact that students start to write messages as soon as the teachers turn their backs. It’s a problem felt particularly at middle schools.

A “Detox” Law is Useful

The debate on the pros and cons has swiftly surpassed the French borders. In an article published this past June 8 in the British paper The Mirror, journalist Eva Simpson, who is the mother of one daughter, “applauds” the French government’s initiative, because “mobile phones have no place in schools.”

According to Simpson, “From the moment they wake up – for many it’s the first thing they see as they use them as alarm clocks – to the time they go to bed, children are connected to social media, games and YouTube and many don’t have the maturity to switch off.” Not only that, she adds, but “let’s face it, most adults don’t know when to switch off.”

Among the dangers tied to the excessive use of cell phones, the author mentions (among others) childhood obesity—instead of playing outside, the children prefer to be glued to their little screens—and addiction. “These games encourage users to keep playing,” Simpson observes, before mentioning the risk of other mental disorders beyond addiction. “Scientists at the University of Korea in Seoul found children addicted to their phones were more likely to have mental disorders such as depression and anxiety,” the author explains. To conclude, she mentions a 2015 study by the London School of Economics, according to which banning cell phones in scholastic environments has the same effect on children as adding an extra week of classes.

The Need to Educate Young People

Other commentators and experts, however, underline the importance of educating children and young people, who will be the adults of tomorrow, in the use of smart phones and other electronic devices. “And our schools need to be on the frontline of making sure [children] are able to use the internet safely and productively,” explains Peter Twining, Professor of Education at the Open University and former teacher, in the article in Mirror.

“Encompassing smartphone use into the curriculum at school could mean youngsters are better equipped to make the most of technological changes that will define their future,” Twining concludes.
That opinion is shared by Simone Fleischmann, president of the association of Bavarian teachers. “Our task as teachers is to prepare children for tomorrow’s society. And tomorrow’s society will be digital,” he writes in Spiegel Online.

“If they don’t learn how to face the challenges of the digital era at school, where will they?” Fleischmann continues, adding that “many teachers […] help their students to learn how to use the new media safely and with critical sense: what is reasonable, and what isn’t? Where are the limits? What is allowed, and what isn’t?”

Peter Holnick, father of two daughters and director of the Institute for Pedagogy of Media and Communication (Institut für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikation) in Darmstadt, in Germany, also emphasizes in the Süddeutsche Zeitung the importance of integrating new technologies in the school curriculum.

It is necessary, he says, to teach young people knowledge such as the pitfalls and risks tied to the use of the internet and cell phones, and the tricks used by the industries of publicity and music. “It’s in their interest that people spend the most time possible using their cell phone,” Holnick explains. And young people will say, “That’s something we didn’t know!”

Paul de Maeyer

Lebanon: Catholic Schools Face Crisis

On the eve of the start of the new school year, for the second year in a row, Catholic schools and all non-state schools in Lebanon begin classes in a situation of serious crisis, which has been at the center of the work of the XXV Annual Conference of Catholic Schools, which began Tuesday, September 4, at the Antonine Sisters school of Ghazir. The situation was reported by Fides News Agency.

This year the conference focuses precisely on the problems that put at risk the continuity of the presence of Catholic schools in the current Lebanese context: from 2005 to 2018 at least 24 Catholic educational institutions were closed, and in the last two years the prospect of failure looms over the future of a growing number of schools run by religious congregations. What made the continuity of the educational service offered by many Catholic schools unsustainable from an economic point of view – as was reiterated by all the speakers of the Conference – was the law with which in the summer of 2017 the government at the time ordered new “salary grids” for workers in the public sector, including the school sector. The salary increases imposed by new government rules, which immediately came into force for state school teachers, represent a serious problem – still unresolved – for the financial sustainability of the entire reality of Lebanese private schools.

As reported by Fides, the Maronite Bishops already in early September 2017 had asked the government to review the mechanism of the salary increase set in motion by the new rules on the salary grid or to take charge of the costs foreseen to also finance the increase of salaries for private school teachers. Since then, all the initiatives taken to sensitize political institutions to find solutions to the Lebanese educational emergency have not been successful. The vast majority of private schools have not yet fully implemented the law, which provides for the increase in teachers’ salaries, to avoid having to increase the fees and contributions paid by the students’ parents. The authorities have so far ignored requests for subsidies from private schools run by the General Secretariat of Catholic schools.

The crisis – as pointed out in his speech by Hanna Rahme, Maronite Bishop of Baalbek – has increased discord also within the educational community, fueling conflicting attitudes. In his speech, Maronite Patriarch, Béchara Boutros Raï, starting from the problems of the schools and the lack of adequate responses from the political institutions, used very harsh words towards the Lebanese political forces, accusing them of pushing Lebanon to an almost total paralysis, preventing economic growth and reforms, fueling corruption and giving rise to a sectarian and partisan management of national institutions and resources. “This regime”, said among other things the Patriarch, referring to politicians “allows them to remain in power and divide shares, vacancies and wealth of the state, while excluding the non-partisan majority of the population”. The Primate of the Maronite Church also recalled “the duty of the State to help the students’ parents who have chosen a private school, in a socio-political situation in which the economic crisis and rising unemployment rates also push many middle-class families towards poverty.

During the conference the service rendered to the construction of the entire Lebanese nation by Catholic schools was strongly recalled, real educational presences committed to instilling an attitude to
solidarity in younger generations among different religious communities and the application of the principles of citizenship and the fight against sectarian discrimination.

Zenit Staff

https://zenit.org/articles/lebanon-catholic-schools-face-crisis/
Northeastern Syria: Kurds Close Several Christian Schools

“For years I have been saying that the Kurds are trying to eliminate the Christian presence in this part of Syria,” the Syriac Catholic Archbishop Jacques Behnam Hindo of Al Hasakah-Nisibi, which is located in the northeastern part of Syria, explained. In an interview reported by Aid to the Church in Need, he confirmed the closure of several Christian schools through the Democratic Federation of North Syria, a de facto autonomous region located in northern and northeastern Syria. The region is not officially recognized by the Syrian government and is governed by a coalition in which the “Democratic Union”, a Kurdish political party, holds the majority.

“Since the beginning of the year, the local government has already taken possession of about one hundred state-run schools and introduced their own curriculum and textbooks. The Kurdish officials had assured us that they would not even look at the private schools, but they not only looked at them, they closed them.” The official reason given for the closure of several Christian schools in the cities of Qamishli, Al-Darbasiyah and Al-Malikiyah was that these institutions had refused to conform to the curriculum introduced by the local authorities.

“They do not want us to instruct pupils in the liturgical language, Syriac, and they do not want us to teach history because they prefer to drum their own history into the heads of pupils.”

Archbishop Hindo did not withhold his concerns about the likely closure of further Christian schools – there are six more in Al Hasakah alone – as well as about the extensive damage that the “Kurdish” curriculum, which differs from the official Syrian curriculum, might do to pupils. “I told a Kurdish official that this was penalizing an entire generation because they will not have any access to higher levels of education. He answered me that they were even prepared to sacrifice six or seven generations to disseminate their ideology.”

What has happened is evidence of the planned “Kurdification” of the region. According to Archbishop Hino, this also includes the elimination of the local Christian presence. “We have been warning against this danger since at least 2015. They want to oust us Christians to strengthen their own presence. To date, Kurds make up only 20 percent of the population, but, thanks to Western support, are disproportionately represented in the local government.”

Through Aid to the Church in Need, the archbishop has directed an appeal to the international community and particularly to European states. “The closure of our schools is painful to us. The church has been in charge of these institutions since 1932 and we never thought that they would ever be closed. The West cannot keep silent. If you are truly Christian, you are obligated to bring everything that is happening out into the open and prevent further violations of our rights and further threats to our presence in this region.”

Zenit Staff

https://zenit.org/articles/northeastern-syria-kurds-close-several-christian-schools/
Education Should Not Be Fearful

At the beginning of the summer, an open letter by the heads of eight private schools in Washington D.C. appeared in the Washington Post and caused waves throughout education circles on the internet. In this letter, these modern-day educators announced that they were taking the supposedly radical step of eliminating Advanced Placement (AP) courses from their curricula. For the blessedly uninitiated, AP courses are specific high school classes that are geared towards preparing a student to take a standardized AP test at the end of the year, the score of which will hopefully give them college credit after they graduate.

While much of the letter from the independent schools provides for interesting reflection, one line in particular stood out, and I believe it is a line on which all those interested in education should pay attention. They said, “in the belief that failing to take an AP course may hurt their college prospects, students reluctantly pass up more interesting, more engaging and potentially more intellectually transformative and rewarding courses.” In other words, out of fear that they won’t be able to get into college, the students often pass up courses that they have a genuine desire to take. Here, the educators reveal a deeper, more foundational issue at stake within modern education: oftentimes the primary motivating tool used by today’s schools in educating young people is fear.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that fear is the avoidance of “a future evil, arduous and not to be easily avoided.” Fear is when man recoils from an evil that he perceives to be difficult to overcome. Furthermore, fear can, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, be conducive “to working well, in so far as it causes a certain solicitude and makes a man take counsel and work with greater attention.” It can cause us to focus our attention on the task in front of as we try to avoid the arduous evil. For instance, think of how a fear of hell can help us pay closer attention to the decisions we are making day in and day out.

Today’s schools use this aspect of fear as the primary motivation to get their students to work. Having oftentimes reduced education to a preparation for college and career, the modern school drives home the necessity of current learning by emphasizing the danger of future failure. Students are told that they will need this material later in life. The difficulty of college is so greatly emphasized that students feel they must learn this now or they are certain to fail in the future. In short, students are unconsciously threatened, as it were, with future pain and misery if they do not accept the demands of their high school. Indeed, even the educators from D.C., who say that ditching AP courses “will encourage student motivation driven by their innate curiosity and love of learning,” allude to the belief that college courses require “critical thinking and rigorous analysis” and that “colleges and universities want the most capable and hard-working students.” Even while expressing a desire to motivate students in a different manner, these educators still can’t help but emphasize the supposed difficulty of the modern university and real life.

However, the great danger of using fear as a motivating factor to action was highlighted by the great St. Thomas centuries ago, and his words ring true in regards to our high school youth. For instance, in the section of the Summa Theologiae quoted above, immediately after highlighting how fear can help us focus on our actions, St Thomas
goes on to give this warning: “If, however, fear increases so much as to disturb the reason, it hinders action even on the part of the soul.” In particular, St. Thomas describes two types of fear that tend to be the two different reactions of young people today to threats regarding their future lives. On the one hand, he says that an evil might be extrinsic to one’s person and “unforeseen … thus future misfortunes are feared, and fear of this kind is called anxiety.” Many young people today, driven to fear life after high school as a means of motivating them to work, become so anxious about their grades they will argue miniscule points. In recent years, an increase in anxiety has been noted among teenagers. An article published in Time magazine in 2016 entitled “Teen Depression and Anxiety: Why the Kids Are Not Alright” states, “About 30% of girls and 20% of boys—totaling 6.3 million teens—have had an anxiety disorder, according to data from the National Institute of Mental Health.” While multiple factors go into this increase in anxiety, the overuse of failure as a motivating tool in getting children to work cannot be helping. We so often emphasize the trials that lie ahead in a young person’s life that often even the most capable of students feel paralyzed about what might come.

On the other hand, many students today go to the other extreme. If they do not fall into anxiety, they often fall into laziness by simply opting out of the obligations altogether. Convinced that the real world will be too hard, they simply choose not to become a part of it. Herein lies the stereotype of the young man or young woman who refuses to go to school or do homework. It is the young person who refuses to get a job or move out of their parents’ house, as can be seen in the recent case of the 30-year-old man forced to move out of his parents’ home. It is the young adult who becomes absorbed in the world of video games, because at least there they feel they can accomplish something. Hence, St. Thomas lists laziness as a type of fear, since laziness is “when a man shrinks from work for fear of too much toil.” Today’s young people often shrink from toil because, rather than being accustomed to it, they have been conditioned to fear it. Ironically, modern schools often use this fear of difficult work in the future to try to make students do difficult work now, and some just simply refuse to do either.

Fear, though, does not have to be the primary motivating factor in a child’s education. While understanding the importance of forming young people who are competent enough to take on the responsibilities of adult life, we ought also to emphasize the desirability of knowing the truth for its own sake if we wish students to actively partake in their education. Indeed, in line with a more traditional notion of a liberal education, we need to start forming in children a love for the good, the true, and the beautiful. Education, and especially Catholic education, needs to begin to ask itself “How do we form in children a love for the knowledge of truth?” As the American Catholic author and teacher John Senior says in his The Restoration of Christian Culture, “The restoration of reason presupposes the restoration of love, and we can only love what we know because we have first touched, tasted, smelled, and seen. From that encounter with exterior reality, interior responses naturally arise, movements motivating, urging, releasing energies, infinitely greater than atoms, of intelligence and will.”

Teaching our children how to love the truth by exposing them to what is good is the ultimate solution to the problem of desire raised by these D.C. educators. We cannot
simply substitute certain courses for others while maintaining fear of failure as the ultimate motivational tool. Instead, we must begin to form a desire for knowledge in students by exposing them to the beautiful riches of Western Civilization: the songs, poems, stories and, most importantly, the religion that shaped what was once known as Christendom. Until we do this, we will only worsen the anxiety and laziness of the next generation through our overuse of fear.

Matthew Anderson

https://www.crisismagazine.com/2018/education-should-not-be-fearful#.W5u0qbBo0yI.email
Monroe Catholic High School tends to inspire long-term loyalty in its graduates, as evidenced by the trip alumni Robert Nelson made to Alaska from Texas this past spring to attend the school’s 60th graduation celebration. The retired engineer actually matriculated from the school’s first-ever graduating class in 1959. In May, Nelson sat down with The Alaskan Shepherd to talk about his experiences attending Fairbanks’ Catholic high school in the late 1950s.

*What has changed about Fairbanks since you went to high school here?*

The strange thing is, it’s changed but it hasn’t changed. It still feels like a small town. There are so many more businesses and people, but I can still find my way around town. It’s one of those places that feels the same no matter how big it grows.

*How did attending Fairbanks’ first Catholic school in the 1950s benefit you?*

One of the best things was that the school was started and run by Jesuits, who believed in giving you a solid, classical education no matter what. If the school had been started today, the founders would do a cost-benefit analysis and say you have to cut corners because there are just a handful of students. But not the Jesuits. They didn’t think like that. They didn’t care whether there was one student or a dozen, they were going to give you the best education they could. I had several classes, like physics, where there was only one or two of us and we were still given rigorous lectures and expected to perform to high standards.

*Tell us about one of your best memories of attending Monroe Catholic High School.*

I have a lot of great memories. It was such a small school that you got to do everything, be in every club, go to every activity. But I have an especially good memory of the trips we took to Copper Valley, the Catholic boarding school in Glennallen, which is a little outside of Anchorage. We would take a bus to get there and it would take us all day. The trips were for the experience of the exchange.
This 13th-Century Advice Given to Students is Still Relevant Today

September is back-to-school time, and there are countless tips in magazines and even newspapers for making the most of it.

But why not go to the heights of wisdom to get some good advice? Legend has it St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1275) offered timely guidance to a student who asked him what he should do to “find the treasure of wisdom.”

The answer is simple, short, direct, and wonderful – and it’s as relevant for us today as it was in the 13th century.

The first thing St. Thomas asks us is not to go “directly to the sea, but to access it by the rivers.” That is, start with the simple things; the complicated ones will come in due time. Then he adds some more advice “for your personal life”:

1. Think first before saying anything. Avoid gatherings “where you talk too much.”

2. Make sure that “there is no duplicity” in your conscience.

3. Be “constant in prayer” and “fall in love with recollection,” because only when we are saved from the noise of the world will we find the “light to understand.”

4. Always treat everyone with kindness and “inwardly, do not condemn anyone.”

5. Do not gossip. It only causes disparagement and distraction.

6. He advises the student to stay informed about what is going on in the world, but not to be worldly.

7. At the center of his advice, St. Thomas makes it clear that to learn something in depth, you have to set clear goals, “avoiding all dispersion.” He says this is achieved by following the paths “that the best have marked out.”

8. We rely heavily on our computer and smartphone today, but we would be wise to follow what St. Thomas suggests: “Store in your memory” – your own, not your device’s – “all the good that you hear or see, wherever it comes from.”

9. Google or Wikipedia aside, he reminds us that it’s not enough to have easy access to information: “Strive to understand. Clear up the doubts that might arise. Fill your mind with things like someone who fills a glass, little by little.”

10. Finally, it is necessary to measure our strength and never overreach oneself. In other words, don’t bite off more than you can chew.

Aquinas ends his brief letter by saying: “If you do all this, as long as you live, you will be like a fruitful vine in the vineyard of the Lord. In addition, you will achieve whatever you set out to do.”

Jaime Septién

Selfless Teen Helps Distraught 6th Grader Who Took the Wrong Bus

Reaching out to a new student was second nature to this generous-hearted high schooler.

Starting a new school can be daunting, especially when you’re 11 years old, taking an unfamiliar bus route, and feeling scared. This is exactly how an anonymous sixth grader, who recently started middle school, felt when he realized he’d got on the wrong public bus, without any additional money for the one he was supposed to take. Worse still, had no phone to reach out for help.

Luckily, 15-year-old Tom O’Brien happened to be riding the same bus, saw what had happened, and generously gave the crying 11-year-old $13 to get a taxi home. According to the Liverpool Echo, the teen, who goes to Holy Family Catholic High School, thought it was totally normal to reach out to the distressed 6th grade student.

According to Tom’s father, Kenny, a youth center manager, the teen helps out his friends at the center.

And the kindness continued. Two other 6th graders waited with the lost boy until the taxi arrived. What gives this story an even happier ending is that the taxi driver, hearing about the boy’s story, didn’t charge him for the ride.

The boy’s parents eventually returned the money to Tom O’Brien, and the incident has received some attention on Facebook and in the British press. But in his true selfless style, Tom is just happy to show teenagers in a positive light for a change, and that the boy got home safely.

Cerith Gardiner

Praying for a Nun

Dame Consolation stands beside my desk. Her arms are crossed under her white scapular, and she has an understanding smile.

Although Boethius’s Dame is a personification of philosophy and its solaces, she is also a feminine form with human features, one I had met many years before I ever read *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which contains many of the old verities of the Church Fathers, found also in Plato, especially his *Phaedo*, an early source of the precepts of service to others, sacrifice, the suffering and purification of the soul, the soul’s immortality, the dignity of the human person, and the pursuit of the Good—the bedrock of Christian eschatology.

They were also evident in the daily life of Sr. Martin de Porres, O.P. (formerly Corinne Recker, 1928-1979).

Sister Martin, who taught everything a second-grader needed to know, or at least everything in the second-grade curriculum, had been standing behind me for several minutes with her arms folded under her scapular. Sister was young and tall and pleasant.

I was gazing out of a large classroom window at the leafy street below, daydreaming of the Flats.

“Michael, where are you?” she asked.

I told her. I said, “Sister, I’m on the Flats.”

“I see. And where might that be?”

It was too late; I had returned to my other world, and Sister never received an answer.

Whenever I wasn’t daydreaming, I knew when Sister Martin was near. I could smell her habit—the narrow piece of white cloth worn from her neck to her ankles, required of the Dominican teaching order, was heavily starched.

One summer, many years later, when I was trying to navigate the poetry of St. John of the Cross and bumped into St. Teresa of Avila, I first learned of “the odour of sanctity” and how it is said to linger about holy individuals. Not having any other reference, I recalled Sister Martin.

In her classroom, reading was a reward. Once students completed their daily math workbook exercises, they could read anything they wished to read. Of course, a book had to pass “inspection,” and if a student did not have access to a favorite book, he could find one quickly in the school library.

Not long after the daydreaming episode, my mother received a telephone call. It was Sister Martin with her unanswered question about the Flats.

“It’s where Michael and his father go fishing,” my mother explained.

We fished in the winter months, went out far on the ice with shanty and spud. On the way, we passed small perch and bass frozen in wavy glass. They came to the shallow water late in the season for warmth, or food, and stayed too long, stayed until their bodies were too sluggish to return to the deep. As I stepped across them carefully, stiff in their clear winter tombs, I wondered if in the spring they wouldn’t wake, shake themselves, and swim out to join the other fish that were concerned about their
whereabouts and had many questions to ask them.

While I was dreaming about the next fishing trip, I was still in class, and there was math to do. I completed in record time the most complex mathematical problems ever to confront the second-grade mind. The first to finish my workbook, I was at the head of my class.

Sister Martin was nearby. I could tell.

“Michael, I see you have finished the assignment. And so soon. Let’s have a look, shall we?”

She gave a kind smile, though it was a little sad. Sister knew what I knew, and what the other students didn’t know: that I had scribbled down any numbers that came to mind. We had done this before, and Sister was beginning to understand that the future of mathematics would go on without me, and so she did the next best thing.

She gave me back my book about sea adventures and pirates and how a boy with unruly hair might stow away on a ship bound for an unchartered island and buried treasure.

At the time, for me, this was simply an act of kindness. I did not understand its importance then, although through the years it’s become clearer to me. Sister Martin communicated a silent message: that she cared more for an individual’s intrinsic worth – and in my case, my reading interests – than what the individual could produce. In a few moments, in the time it took her to make her decision, she had taught me about understanding self-worth, unconditional acceptance, and trust. And I now know, after 32 years of teaching literature and writing, that Sister’s faith and compassion were not misplaced. As for mathematics, her influence remains beyond calculation.

For me to pray for Sister Martin would be presumptuous on many counts. Besides, if suffering purifies form ("whoever suffers in the body is done with sin,” 1 Pet. 4:1), then her earthly agonies as a middle-aged cancer victim for more than three years must be a mitigating, if not an exclusionary, condition.

I never saw Sister Martin after second grade. I have often thought that memory sculpts reality, and its reconstruction is its gift: Often, working at my writing desk, I will stop for some unexplained vagary as if waiting to be born, look out the window, and see myself praying for Sister Martin, praying for her Presence, for her dream of the ideal Good, for her Company.

Michael Gessner


*A special note of gratitude to Lisa Schell, Congregation Archivist of the Adrian Dominican Motherhouse, without whose assistance this column could not have been written.
Catholic Education Group Applauds Australian School Funding Plan

A $4.6 billion funding package for Catholic and independent schools in Australia has won the support of a national Catholic education group, which says the plan corrects key flaws from the previous funding model.

“Families can only have school choice if there is an affordable alternative to free, comprehensive government schools,” said Ray Collins, acting executive director of the National Catholic Education Commission.

“If the only option is a high-fee school, choice is restricted to those parents rich enough to afford high fees.”

The National Catholic Education Commission has given its full support to the new funding package, announced Thursday by Prime Minister Scott Morrison. The plan includes $3.2 billion to fund non-government schools through a new model over the next decade. It also includes a $1.2 billion “choice and affordability fund” to support rural and drought-affected schools and other schools that require extra aid.

Morrison stressed the importance of school choice, while also reiterating a commitment to government schools, which will receive increased funding, from $7.3 billion this year to $13.7 billion in 2029, according to The Guardian.

The plan replaces a controversial 2107 funding model, which had been criticized for its geographically-based methodology of determining how much funding each non-government school required. This process, Collins said, “was flawed because it assumed all families from the same neighborhood were equally wealthy.” Many Catholic schools argued that their students often came from less-wealthy families in wealthier neighborhoods.

“Hundreds of primary schools would have been forced to double or triple their fees because of the previous model’s very narrow interpretation of ‘need’. This would have rendered those schools unaffordable to most Australian families, denying them the schooling choice that has been available in those areas for decades,” Collins said.

The new plan will calculate a school’s financial data based on parental income collected from tax information rather than geographical census data.

Collins said that while a few technical questions with the 2017 school funding model must still be resolved, the new plan goes a long way toward making Catholic schools a viable option for all Australians.

According to the National Catholic Education Commission, one in five Australian students attends a Catholic school, for a total of some 765,000 students in 1741 schools.

CNA Daily News