



# Humanum

ISSUES IN FAMILY, CULTURE & SCIENCE

2015 - ISSUE TWO

## Reading, Writing and Arithmetic: A Re-examination





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2015 - ISSUE TWO—READING, WRITING AND ARITHMETIC: A RE-EXAMINATION

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# A Re-examination

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

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With this second issue on education we delve into the teaching and learning of the disciplines in the environment of the school, be it the home-school, the parish or public school, the high school, or the university.

Our first issue on education dealt with education in its most basic sense, that of being introduced to reality, where the “introduction” and the “reality,” as well as the “student” and the “teacher” find their expression in the fact of being born to a father and mother and then led out (educare) by them into the world, beginning with their world... The fact that a child takes his “first steps” into the world, “on his own” between his mother and father cannot but permeate what education means when taking up the disciplines, as we do now. Simply put, and quotably so, as G.K. Chesterton said: “Education is only truth in a state of transmission.”

It is right that in an issue on schooling, the authors, reviewers, and we the readers should sit at the feet of the great masters, whether they are our contemporaries or not. For this reason we inaugurate our first column of “ReSource: Classic Texts,” beginning with an address given by Benedict XVI to educators at The Catholic University of America, and a selection of texts taken from Chesterton’s famous *What’s Wrong with the World*. As always, leading thinkers are featured throughout the reviews themselves, in this case, Christopher Dawson, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Stratford Caldecott, our late and much missed founding editor.

It is also fitting that in such an issue, we have so many teachers represented as reviewers and feature writers, be they home-schooling mothers (Carla Galdo), high school teachers (Anton Schmid, Stella Schindler, Roy Peachey, Aisling Maloney), university professors (Michael Hanby, Steve Brown, Robert Lopez, James Gaston, Christopher O. Blum), a Deputy Head and two school founders (Robert O’Brien, Dale Ahlquist, and Marco Sermarini).

We could draw on Chesterton’s exhortation to return “the whole truth of a thing” against the backdrop of an educational culture resembling “one wild divorce court” as a way of summing up the cluster of inter-related concerns in this issue.

The first of these concerns is the divorce of education from history, from the “burden” of a received tradition and the place one thereby belongs to, beginning with one’s parents. As Chesterton said (again!), “the problem is not that man has lost his way—man has always lost his way—the problem is that man has lost his address.” In keeping with the dominant educational mentality, one is not introduced into a world, a reality. One constructs it (with the only thing one has received, “skills”).

The second concern follows from the first. It is the disconnection between education as “information” and education as a life-changing response to and service (“diakonia”) of the truth (Benedict), of that which is greater than oneself, that which is “for its own sake.” Having no original address, a person is hardly receptive to “settling down” to serve something or someone (including oneself!). Instead, this diakonia of the truth gives way to the utilitarian fever of immediate satisfaction where “cold pragmatic calculations of utility . . . render the person little more than a pawn on a chess board” (Benedict), a listless “worker” resigned to the hamster wheel of modern-day employment. It is no accident, many of our authors contend, that the loss of real local community, and the breakdown of the family—and even the promotion of this—follows so closely behind this second “divorce.”

The third concern is that of the divorce between education and the religious question. Here we look first at the cultural question concerning us in the West. Do we have any idea of the extent to which the world we live in is a product of Christianity—and for centuries now, of our rebellion against it (Dawson)? Do we realize, that is, how much the “palliated echoes and haunting fragments of Christian moral theology”—charity for the poor, human rights, legal equality etc.—“would not exist had our ancestors not once believed that God is love, that charity is the foundation of all virtues, that all of us are equal before the eyes of God, that to fail to feed the hungry or care for the suffering is to sin against Christ, and that Christ laid down his life for the least of his brethren” (Hart)?

But more broadly still—regardless of our cultural heritage—the bigger question is whether or not it is possible to educate and be educated with an indifference to the question of God, without becoming at the same time indifferent to what is essential to one’s own humanity. It would be hard, if not impossible, to separate the philosophical, artistic, and literary traditions from the longing for God as though the latter were just a cultural by-product of these, not their generative source. The connection between the religious question and human learning, however universal, is, of course, central to Christianity in a unique way, on account of the fact of the Incarnation of the Word, in

the light of which “the mystery of man takes on light” (*Gaudium et spes*, 22). As Benedict says: “God’s desire to make himself known, and the innate desire of all human beings to know the truth, proved the context for human inquiry into the meaning of life.” It is precisely for this reason that the Christian world has had such a pivotal role in education as such, through the founding of universities, then high schools and parish schools (particularly in the US), not to mention filling religious orders to teach in them. It is for the same reason that it is incumbent on Catholic educators in particular to ask just what makes for a “Catholic” education, and whether or not it is enough to add a “religion class” or service projects on top of an otherwise secular education “soaked through and through with a contrary conception of life” (Chesterton). The question about the origin, current state, and fate of the Catholic school (and university) is not, however, a merely “parochial” matter. If Christians, by virtue of the Incarnation, are entrusted in a particular way with an “inquiry into the meaning of life”—that is, to education properly understood—then what they decide about Catholic education, they will decide about education as such. As Chesterton said, “take away the support and what remains is the unnatural.”

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# What's Wrong with the School?

G. K. CHESTERTON

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G.K. Chesterton, Excerpts from "Education: Or the Mistake About the Child," in What's Wrong with the World? (1910).

G.K. Chesterton, Excerpt from "The New Case For Catholic Schools," America, August 9, 1930.

Dale Ahlquist has written an insightful introduction to G.K. Chesterton's ideas on education for this issue of Humanum. Please click [here](#) to access it.

Education: Or The Mistake About The Child

From Chapter 5 - An Evil Cry

The fashionable fallacy is that by education we can give people something that we have not got. To hear people talk one would think it was some sort of magic chemistry, by which, out of a laborious hotchpotch of hygienic meals, baths, breathing exercises, fresh air and freehand drawing, we can produce something splendid by accident; we can create what we cannot conceive. These pages have, of course, no other general purpose than to point out that we cannot create anything good until we have conceived it. It is odd that these people, who in the matter of heredity are so sullenly attached to law, in the matter of environment seem almost to believe in miracle. They insist that nothing but what was in the bodies of the parents can go to make the bodies of the children. But they seem somehow to think that things can get into the heads of the children which were not in the heads of the parents, or, indeed, anywhere else.

There has arisen in this connection a foolish and wicked cry typical of the confusion. I mean the cry, "Save the children." It is, of course, part of that modern morbidity that insists on treating the State (which is the home of man) as a sort of desperate expedient in time of panic. This terrified opportunism is also the origin of the Socialist and other schemes. Just as they would collect and share all the food as men do in a famine, so they would divide the children from their fathers, as men do in a

shipwreck. That a human community might conceivably not be in a condition of famine or shipwreck never seems to cross their minds. This cry of “Save the children” has in it the hateful implication that it is impossible to save the fathers; in other words, that many millions of grown-up, sane, responsible and self-supporting Europeans are to be treated as dirt or debris and swept away out of the discussion; called dipsomaniacs because they drink in public houses instead of private houses; called unemployables because nobody knows how to get them work; called dullards if they still adhere to conventions, and called loafers if they still love liberty. Now I am concerned, first and last, to maintain that unless you can save the fathers, you cannot save the children; that at present we cannot save others, for we cannot save ourselves. We cannot teach citizenship if we are not citizens; we cannot free others if we have forgotten the appetite of freedom. Education is only truth in a state of transmission; and how can we pass on truth if it has never come into our hand? Thus we find that education is of all the cases the clearest for our general purpose. It is vain to save children; for they cannot remain children. By hypothesis we are teaching them to be men; and how can it be so simple to teach an ideal manhood to others if it is so vain and hopeless to find one for ourselves?

I know that certain crazy pedants have attempted to counter this difficulty by maintaining that education is not instruction at all, does not teach by authority at all. They present the process as coming, not from the outside, from the teacher, but entirely from inside the boy. Education, they say, is the Latin for leading out or drawing out the dormant faculties of each person. Somewhere far down in the dim boyish soul is a primordial yearning to learn Greek accents or to wear clean collars; and the schoolmaster only gently and tenderly liberates this imprisoned purpose. Sealed up in the newborn babe are the intrinsic secrets of how to eat asparagus and what was the date of Bannockburn. [A village in Central Scotland where Robert the Bruce led the Scots in the defeat of the English—in 1314.] The educator only draws out the child’s own unapparent love of long division; only leads out the child’s slightly veiled preference for milk pudding to tarts. I am not sure that I believe in the derivation; I have heard the disgraceful suggestion that “educator,” if applied to a Roman schoolmaster, did not mean leading our young functions into freedom; but only meant taking out little boys for a walk. But I am much more certain that I do not agree with the doctrine; I think it would be about as sane to say that the baby’s milk comes from the baby as to say that the baby’s educational merits do. There is, indeed, in each living creature a collection of forces and functions; but education means producing these in particular shapes and training them to particular purposes, or it means nothing at all. Speaking is the most practical instance of the whole situation.

You may indeed “draw out” squeals and grunts from the child by simply poking him and pulling him about, a pleasant but cruel pastime to which many psychologists are addicted. But you will wait and watch very patiently indeed before you draw the English language out of him. That you have got to put into him; and there is an end of the matter.

#### From Chapter 6 - Authority the Unavoidable

But the important point here is only that you cannot anyhow get rid of authority in education; it is not so much (as poor Conservatives say) that parental authority ought to be preserved, as that it cannot be destroyed. Mr. Bernard Shaw once said that he hated the idea of forming a child’s mind. In that case Mr. Bernard Shaw had better hang himself, for he hates something inseparable from human life. I only mentioned educere [“to lead out”] and the drawing out of the faculties in order to point out that even this mental trick does not avoid the inevitable idea of parental or scholastic authority. The educator drawing out is just as arbitrary and coercive as the instructor pouring in; for he draws out what he chooses. He decides what in the child shall be developed and what shall not be developed. He does not (I suppose) draw out the neglected faculty of forgery. He does not (so far at least) lead out, with timid steps, a shy talent for torture. The only result of all this pompous and precise distinction between the educator and the instructor is that the instructor pokes where he likes and the educator pulls where he likes. Exactly the same intellectual violence is done to the creature who is poked and pulled. Now we must all accept the responsibility of this intellectual violence. Education is violent; because it is creative. It is creative because it is human. It is as reckless as playing on the fiddle; as dogmatic as drawing a picture; as brutal as building a house. In short, it is what all human action is; it is an interference with life and growth. After that it is a trifling and even a jocular question whether we say of this tremendous tormentor, the artist Man, that he puts things into us like an apothecary, or draws things out of us, like a dentist.

The point is that Man does what he likes. He claims the right to take his mother Nature under his control; he claims the right to make his child the Superman, in his image. Once flinch from this creative authority of man, and the whole courageous raid which we call civilization wavers and falls to pieces. Now most modern freedom is at root fear. It is not so much that we are too bold to endure rules; it is rather that we are too timid to endure responsibilities. And Mr. Shaw and such people are especially shrinking from that awful and ancestral responsibility to which our fathers committed us when they took the wild step of becoming men. I mean the responsibility of affirming the truth of our human tradition and handing it on with a

voice of authority, an unshaken voice. That is the one eternal education; to be sure enough that something is true that you dare to tell it to a child. From this high audacious duty the moderns are fleeing on every side; and the only excuse for them is, (of course,) that their modern philosophies are so half-baked and hypothetical that they cannot convince themselves enough to convince even a newborn babe. This, of course, is connected with the decay of democracy; and is somewhat of a separate subject. The trouble in too many of our modern schools is that the State, being controlled so specially by the few, allows cranks and experiments to go straight to the schoolroom when they have never passed through the Parliament, the public house, the private house, the church, or the marketplace. 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 to-day 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 last 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. But this, as I say, is all due to the mere fact that we are managed by a little oligarchy; my system presupposes that men who govern themselves will govern their children. To-day we all use Popular Education as meaning education of the people. I wish I could use it as meaning education by the people.

#### From Chapter 7 - The Humility of Mrs. Grundy

The new education is as harsh as the old, whether or not it is as high. The freest fad, as much as the strictest formula, is stiff with authority. It is because the humane father thinks soldiers wrong that they are forbidden; there is no pretense, there can be no pretense, that the boy would think so. The average boy's impression certainly would be simply this: "If your father is a Methodist you must not play with soldiers on Sunday. If your father is a Socialist you must not play with them even on week days." All educationists are utterly dogmatic and authoritarian. You cannot have free education; for if you left a child free you would not educate him at all. Is there, then, no distinction or difference between the most hide-bound conventionalists and the most brilliant and bizarre innovators? Is there no difference between the heaviest heavy father and the most reckless and speculative maiden aunt? Yes; there is. The difference is that the heavy father, in his heavy way, is a democrat. He does not urge a thing merely because to his fancy it should be done; but, because (in his own admirable republican formula) "Everybody does it." The conventional authority does claim some popular mandate; the unconventional authority does not.

But there is a further complication. The more anarchic modern may again attempt to escape the dilemma by saying that education should only be an enlargement of the mind, an opening of all the organs of receptivity. Light (he says) should be brought into darkness; blinded and thwarted existences in all our ugly corners should merely be permitted to perceive and expand; in short, enlightenment should be shed over darkest London. Now here is just the trouble; that, in so far as this is involved, there is no darkest London. London is not dark at all; not even at night. We have said that if education is a solid substance, then there is none of it. We may now say that if education is an abstract expansion there is no lack of it. There is far too much of it. In fact, there is nothing else.

There are no uneducated people. Everybody in England is educated; only most people are educated wrong.

#### From Chapter 13 - The Outlawed Parent

There is one thing at least of which there is never so much as a whisper inside the popular schools; and that is the opinion of the people. The only persons who seem to have nothing to do with the education of the children are the parents. . .

#### The Completeness of A Catholic Education (1930)

The fundamental concept of Catholic Education is part of our demand for a complete culture, based on its own philosophy and religion. Our modern and scientific friends are never tired of telling us that education must be treated as a whole; that all parts of the mind affect each other; that nothing is too trivial to be significant and even symbolic; that all thoughts can be coloured by conscious or unconscious emotions, that knowledge can never be in watertight compartments, that what may seem a senseless detail may be the symbol of a deep desire; that nothing is negative, nothing is naked, nothing stands separate and alone.

They use these arguments for all sorts of purposes, some of them sensible enough, some of them almost insanely silly; but this is, broadly speaking, how they argue. And the one thing they do not know is that they are arguing in favour of Catholic education, and especially in favour of Catholic atmosphere in Catholic schools. Perhaps if they did know they would leave off.

As a matter of fact, those who refuse to understand that Catholic children must have

an entirely Catholic school are back in the bad old days, as they would express it, when nobody wanted education but only instruction. They are relics of the dead time when it was thought enough to drill pupils in two or three dull and detached lessons that were supposed to be quite mechanical. They regarded letters and figures as dead things, quite separate from each other and from a general view of life. They thought a calculating boy could be made like a calculating machine.

When somebody said to them, therefore, “These things must be taught in a spiritual atmosphere,” they thought it was nonsense; they had a vague idea that it meant that a child could only do a simple addition sum when surrounded with the smell of incense. But they thought simple addition much more simple than it is. When the Catholic controversialist said to them, “Even the alphabet can be learnt in a Catholic way,” they thought he was a raving bigot, they thought he meant that nobody must ever read anything but a Latin missal.

But he meant what he said, and what he said is thoroughly sound psychology. There is a Catholic view of learning the alphabet; for instance, it prevents you from thinking that the only thing that matters is learning the alphabet; or from despising better people than yourself, if they do not happen to have learnt the alphabet.

The old school of instructors used to say: “What possible sense can there be in mixing up arithmetic with religion?” But arithmetic is mixed up with religion, and with philosophy. It does make a great deal of difference whether the instructor implies that truth is real, or relative, or changeable, or an illusion. The man who said, “Two and two may make five in the fixed stars,” was teaching arithmetic in an anti-rational way, and, therefore, in an anti-Catholic way. The Catholic is much more certain about the fixed truths than about the fixed stars.

But I am not now arguing which philosophy is the better; I am only pointing out that every education teaches a philosophy; if not by dogma then by suggestion, by implication, by atmosphere. Every part of that education has a connection with every other part. If it does not all combine to convey some general view of life, it is not education at all. And the modern educationists, the modern psychologists, the modern men of science, all agree in asserting and reasserting this—until they begin to quarrel with Catholics over Catholic schools.

If there is a psychological truth discoverable by human reason, it is this; that Catholics must either go without Catholic teaching or possess and govern Catholic schools. There is a case for refusing to allow Catholic families to grow up Catholic, by any

machinery worth calling education in the existing sense. There is a case for refusing to make any concessions to Catholics at all, and ignoring their idiosyncrasy as if it were an insanity. There is a case for that, because there is and always has been a case for persecution; for the State acting on the principle that certain philosophies are false and dangerous and must be crushed even if they are sincerely held; indeed that they must be crushed, especially if they are sincerely held.

But if Catholics are to teach Catholicism all the time, they cannot merely teach Catholic theology for part of the time. It is our opponents, and not we, who give a really outrageous and superstitious position to dogmatic theology. It is they who suppose that the special “subject” called theology can be put into people by an experiment lasting half an hour; and that this magical inoculation will last them through a week in a world that is soaked through and through with a contrary conception of life.

Theology is only articulate religion; but, strange as it seems to the true Christians who criticise us, it is necessary to have religion as well as theology. And religion, as they are often obliging enough to remind us when this particular problem is not involved, is a thing for every day of the week and not merely for Sunday or Church services.

The truth is that the modern world has committed itself to two totally different and inconsistent conceptions about education. It is always trying to expand the scope of education; and always trying to exclude from it all religion and philosophy. But this is sheer nonsense. You can have an education that teaches atheism because atheism is true, and it can be, from its own point of view, a complete education. But you cannot have an education claiming to teach all truth, and then refuse to discuss whether atheism is true.

Our schools have claimed to develop all sides of human nature; that is, to produce a complete human being. You cannot do this and totally ignore a great living tradition, which teaches that a complete human being must be a Christian or Catholic human being. You must either persecute it out of existence or allow it to make its own education complete.

A convert to the Catholic Church, G.K. Chesterton was a novelist, journalist and essayist. He is one of the great writers of the twentieth century.

# Diakonia of Truth

POPE BENEDICT XVI

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"Meeting with Catholic Educators," Address of Benedict XVI given at the Catholic University of America on 17 April 2008. Available online:

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080417\\_cath-univ-washington.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080417_cath-univ-washington.html)

Previously entitled "Meeting with Catholic Educators," the new title—Diakonia of Truth—is taken from *A Reason Open to God: On Universities, Education, and Culture*, a collection of addresses given by Benedict XVI. The editor, [J. Steven Brown](#), writes for this issue of *Humanum*.

“How beautiful are the footsteps of those who bring good news” (Rom 10:15-17). With these words of Isaiah quoted by Saint Paul, I warmly greet each of you—bearers of wisdom—and through you the staff, students and families of the many and varied institutions of learning that you represent. It is my great pleasure to meet you and to share with you some thoughts regarding the nature and identity of Catholic education today. I especially wish to thank Father David O’Connell, President and Rector of the Catholic University of America. Your kind words of welcome are much appreciated. Please extend my heartfelt gratitude to the entire community—faculty, staff and students—of this University.

Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. [Spe Salvi](#),4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord’s

disciples, the Church.

The dynamic between personal encounter, knowledge and Christian witness is integral to the diakonia of truth which the Church exercises in the midst of humanity. God's revelation offers every generation the opportunity to discover the ultimate truth about its own life and the goal of history. This task is never easy; it involves the entire Christian community and motivates each generation of Christian educators to ensure that the power of God's truth permeates every dimension of the institutions they serve. In this way, Christ's Good News is set to work, guiding both teacher and student towards the objective truth which, in transcending the particular and the subjective, points to the universal and absolute that enables us to proclaim with confidence the hope which does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5). Set against personal struggles, moral confusion and fragmentation of knowledge, the noble goals of scholarship and education, founded on the unity of truth and in service of the person and the community, become an especially powerful instrument of hope.

Dear friends, the history of this nation includes many examples of the Church's commitment in this regard. The Catholic community here has in fact made education one of its highest priorities. This undertaking has not come without great sacrifice. Towering figures, like Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and other founders and foundresses, with great tenacity and foresight, laid the foundations of what is today a remarkable network of parochial schools contributing to the spiritual well-being of the Church and the nation. Some, like Saint Katharine Drexel, devoted their lives to educating those whom others had neglected—in her case, African Americans and Native Americans. Countless dedicated Religious Sisters, Brothers, and Priests together with selfless parents have, through Catholic schools, helped generations of immigrants to rise from poverty and take their place in mainstream society.

This sacrifice continues today. It is an outstanding apostolate of hope, seeking to address the material, intellectual and spiritual needs of over three million children and students. It also provides a highly commendable opportunity for the entire Catholic community to contribute generously to the financial needs of our institutions. Their long-term sustainability must be assured. Indeed, everything possible must be done, in cooperation with the wider community, to ensure that they are accessible to people of all social and economic strata. No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.

Some today question the Church's involvement in education, wondering whether her resources might be better placed elsewhere. Certainly in a nation such as this, the

State provides ample opportunities for education and attracts committed and generous men and women to this honorable profession. It is timely, then, to reflect on what is particular to our Catholic institutions. How do they contribute to the good of society through the Church's primary mission of evangelization?

All the Church's activities stem from her awareness that she is the bearer of a message which has its origin in God himself: in his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph 1:9; *Dei Verbum*, 2). God's desire to make himself known, and the innate desire of all human beings to know the truth, provide the context for human inquiry into the meaning of life. This unique encounter is sustained within our Christian community: the one who seeks the truth becomes the one who lives by faith (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 31). It can be described as a move from "I" to "we", leading the individual to be numbered among God's people.

This same dynamic of communal identity—to whom do I belong?—vivifies the ethos of our Catholic institutions. A university or school's Catholic identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is a question of conviction—do we really believe that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22)? Are we ready to commit our entire self—intellect and will, mind and heart—to God? Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools? Is it given fervent expression liturgically, sacramentally, through prayer, acts of charity, a concern for justice, and respect for God's creation? Only in this way do we really bear witness to the meaning of who we are and what we uphold.

From this perspective one can recognize that the contemporary "crisis of truth" is rooted in a "crisis of faith". Only through faith can we freely give our assent to God's testimony and acknowledge him as the transcendent guarantor of the truth he reveals. Again, we see why fostering personal intimacy with Jesus Christ and communal witness to his loving truth is indispensable in Catholic institutions of learning. Yet we all know, and observe with concern, the difficulty or reluctance many people have today in entrusting themselves to God. It is a complex phenomenon and one which I ponder continually. While we have sought diligently to engage the intellect of our young, perhaps we have neglected the will. Subsequently we observe, with distress, the notion of freedom being distorted. Freedom is not an opting out. It is an opting in—a participation in Being itself. Hence authentic freedom can never be attained by turning away from God. Such a choice would ultimately disregard the very truth we need in order to understand ourselves. A particular responsibility therefore for each of you, and your colleagues, is to evoke among the young the desire for the

act of faith, encouraging them to commit themselves to the ecclesial life that follows from this belief. It is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth. In choosing to live by that truth, we embrace the fullness of the life of faith which is given to us in the Church.

Clearly, then, Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated simply with orthodoxy or course content. It demands and inspires much more: namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith. Only in faith can truth become incarnate and reason truly human, capable of directing the will along the path of freedom (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 23). In this way our institutions make a vital contribution to the mission of the Church and truly serve society. They become places in which God's active presence in human affairs is recognized and in which every young person discovers the joy of entering into Christ's "being for others" (cf. *ibid.*, 28).

The Church's primary mission of evangelization, in which educational institutions play a crucial role, is consonant with a nation's fundamental aspiration to develop a society truly worthy of the human person's dignity. At times, however, the value of the Church's contribution to the public forum is questioned. It is important therefore to recall that the truths of faith and of reason never contradict one another (cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, IV: DS 3017; St. Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, III, 20, 43). The Church's mission, in fact, involves her in humanity's struggle to arrive at truth. In articulating revealed truth she serves all members of society by purifying reason, ensuring that it remains open to the consideration of ultimate truths. Drawing upon divine wisdom, she sheds light on the foundation of human morality and ethics, and reminds all groups in society that it is not praxis that creates truth but truth that should serve as the basis of praxis. Far from undermining the tolerance of legitimate diversity, such a contribution illuminates the very truth which makes consensus attainable, and helps to keep public debate rational, honest and accountable. Similarly the Church never tires of upholding the essential moral categories of right and wrong, without which hope could only wither, giving way to cold pragmatic calculations of utility which render the person little more than a pawn on some ideological chess-board.

With regard to the educational forum, the diakonia of truth takes on a heightened significance in societies where secularist ideology drives a wedge between truth and faith. This division has led to a tendency to equate truth with knowledge and to adopt a positivistic mentality which, in rejecting metaphysics, denies the foundations of

faith and rejects the need for a moral vision. Truth means more than knowledge: knowing the truth leads us to discover the good. Truth speaks to the individual in his or her entirety, inviting us to respond with our whole being. This optimistic vision is found in our Christian faith because such faith has been granted the vision of the Logos, God's creative Reason, which in the Incarnation, is revealed as Goodness itself. Far from being just a communication of factual data—"informative"—the loving truth of the Gospel is creative and life-changing—"performative" (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 2). With confidence, Christian educators can liberate the young from the limits of positivism and awaken receptivity to the truth, to God and his goodness. In this way you will also help to form their conscience which, enriched by faith, opens a sure path to inner peace and to respect for others.

It comes as no surprise, then, that not just our own ecclesial communities but society in general has high expectations of Catholic educators. This places upon you a responsibility and offers an opportunity. More and more people—parents in particular—recognize the need for excellence in the human formation of their children. As *Mater et Magistra*, the Church shares their concern. When nothing beyond the individual is recognized as definitive, the ultimate criterion of judgment becomes the self and the satisfaction of the individual's immediate wishes. The objectivity and perspective, which can only come through a recognition of the essential transcendent dimension of the human person, can be lost. Within such a relativistic horizon the goals of education are inevitably curtailed. Slowly, a lowering of standards occurs. We observe today a timidity in the face of the category of the good and an aimless pursuit of novelty parading as the realization of freedom. We witness an assumption that every experience is of equal worth and a reluctance to admit imperfection and mistakes. And particularly disturbing, is the reduction of the precious and delicate area of education in sexuality to management of 'risk', bereft of any reference to the beauty of conjugal love.

How might Christian educators respond? These harmful developments point to the particular urgency of what we might call "intellectual charity". This aspect of charity calls the educator to recognize that the profound responsibility to lead the young to truth is nothing less than an act of love. Indeed, the dignity of education lies in fostering the true perfection and happiness of those to be educated. In practice "intellectual charity" upholds the essential unity of knowledge against the fragmentation which ensues when reason is detached from the pursuit of truth. It guides the young towards the deep satisfaction of exercising freedom in relation to truth, and it strives to articulate the relationship between faith and all aspects of

family and civic life. Once their passion for the fullness and unity of truth has been awakened, young people will surely relish the discovery that the question of what they can know opens up the vast adventure of what they ought to do. Here they will experience “in what” and “in whom” it is possible to hope, and be inspired to contribute to society in a way that engenders hope in others.

Dear friends, I wish to conclude by focusing our attention specifically on the paramount importance of your own professionalism and witness within our Catholic universities and schools. First, let me thank you for your dedication and generosity. I know from my own days as a professor, and I have heard from your Bishops and officials of the Congregation for Catholic Education, that the reputation of Catholic institutes of learning in this country is largely due to yourselves and your predecessors. Your selfless contributions—from outstanding research to the dedication of those working in inner-city schools—serve both your country and the Church. For this I express my profound gratitude.

In regard to faculty members at Catholic colleges universities, I wish to reaffirm the great value of academic freedom. In virtue of this freedom you are called to search for the truth wherever careful analysis of evidence leads you. Yet it is also the case that any appeal to the principle of academic freedom in order to justify positions that contradict the faith and the teaching of the Church would obstruct or even betray the university's identity and mission; a mission at the heart of the Church's *munus docendi* and not somehow autonomous or independent of it.

Teachers and administrators, whether in universities or schools, have the duty and privilege to ensure that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice. This requires that public witness to the way of Christ, as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church's Magisterium, shapes all aspects of an institution's life, both inside and outside the classroom. Divergence from this vision weakens Catholic identity and, far from advancing freedom, inevitably leads to confusion, whether moral, intellectual or spiritual.

I wish also to express a particular word of encouragement to both lay and Religious teachers of catechesis who strive to ensure that young people become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith. Religious education is a challenging apostolate, yet there are many signs of a desire among young people to learn about the faith and practice it with vigor. If this awakening is to grow, teachers require a clear and precise understanding of the specific nature and role of Catholic education. They must also be ready to lead the commitment made by the entire school community to assist our

young people, and their families, to experience the harmony between faith, life and culture.

Here I wish to make a special appeal to Religious Brothers, Sisters and Priests: do not abandon the school apostolate; indeed, renew your commitment to schools especially those in poorer areas. In places where there are many hollow promises which lure young people away from the path of truth and genuine freedom, the consecrated person's witness to the evangelical counsels is an irreplaceable gift. I encourage the Religious present to bring renewed enthusiasm to the promotion of vocations. Know that your witness to the ideal of consecration and mission among the young is a source of great inspiration in faith for them and their families.

To all of you I say: bear witness to hope. Nourish your witness with prayer. Account for the hope that characterizes your lives (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) by living the truth which you propose to your students. Help them to know and love the One you have encountered, whose truth and goodness you have experienced with joy. With Saint Augustine, let us say: "we who speak and you who listen acknowledge ourselves as fellow disciples of a single teacher" (Sermons, 23:2). With these sentiments of communion, I gladly impart to you, your colleagues and students, and to your families, my Apostolic Blessing.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI served as pope from 2005 to 2013.

# Why Better Catholic Education is Better Education

MICHAEL HANBY

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This article was adapted from remarks given at the Catholic Classical Schools Conference, July 21, 2014, sponsored by the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education.

Virtually everyone seems to agree these days that education is in crisis, and virtually everyone has a plan to solve it—from increased STEM education to outfitting every high schooler with an iPad, surely the worst idea in a field that is littered with bad ideas. But virtually no one, it seems, has paused to ask what education actually is. Instead the general assumption seems to concur with the anodyne words of Common Core, that the point of education is to prepare children for “college, career, and life,” which of course is a self-justifying mantra for doubling-down on more STEM education and the acquisition of basic, practical skills.

I have seen the failure of this vision of education first hand, during the twelve years or so that I spent teaching Great Books, theology, and writing to university undergraduates. Now before I go on to explain this I should say that I am aware that the problems with contemporary education are much bigger than education, and I am aware that our schools are terribly overburdened with sociological functions that go far beyond, and often subsume, their core educational mission. Almost anyone who attempts to teach these days will find himself locked in a losing battle against a pop culture, made omnipresent by technology, that is stupefying us and our children and tricking us into believing that “thinking” means knowing how to do things with an iPad. There are also the well-documented pressures on the modern family. The fact that families have entrusted education to “professional educators” means that education is now largely external to family life, not something at the heart of family culture or that the family organizes itself around. It is the childhood version of a “career”—something one does for 40 hours a week—but not a way of life.

We expect schools to compensate for this breakdown of culture and the family, and if that challenge weren't daunting enough, we ask them to serve everybody and to make special accommodation for those who need it most. So we ask schools to function as social service agencies and teachers to serve as substitute parents, social workers,

dieticians, and counselors, and when they find time, to teach. Many do heroic work, and Catholic schools have a long and venerable tradition—one which should continue—of serving the “least of these.”

And yet many of the undergraduates that I have taught are not the “least of these.” They have come to expensive universities with good grades from good high schools, as these things are typically measured. If these kids are struggling, then the problem must be vast indeed. And my experience with these kids, those who on the whole are comparatively advantaged, has convinced me that this failure is fundamental and systemic, that we no longer have a coherent idea of what education even is, and that attempts at systematic reform like Common Core simply perpetuate a deeply defective understanding of education and are thus doomed to exacerbate the very problems that they attempt to overcome. I have taught a good many Catholic school kids, and I can report, unfortunately, that these kids don’t seem to fare much better than their public school counterparts. Catholic school teachers tend to be extremely dedicated, and Catholic schools typically offer a wholesome and nurturing learning environment, often doing heroic work reaching out to underserved populations. But they too have largely failed to ask “what is education?” or to bring the immense resources of Catholic tradition to bear on it. Most offer what is essentially a public school education, with a little extra morality and religious education tacked on.

The prevailing vision of education is thoroughly pragmatic and utilitarian. It is all about the acquisition of skills; this is what “preparing for college, career, and life” means in our society. The great irony is that this pragmatic and utilitarian approach to education has failed even in its attempts to cultivate basic skills. In my experience, few college freshmen—maybe two or three in ten—really know how to read, understand, and think about a good book. This is partly because they’ve read very few important books and partly because they are not taught to read them with the hope of discovering truth in them. It is also because most of them know next to nothing about history or the history of ideas. I hasten to add that it’s not the students’ fault. They are not stupid; indeed they are often very bright. But they haven’t been taught, or rather, they’ve learned all too well the lessons of this mercenary view of education: that their educations are about “preparing for college, career and life.” Their educations have made them the heirs of no tradition; they’ve received no coherent history. They simply accept on faith that the present is always better than the past, and so the only culture they know and think is important is the pop culture of the present moment.

Consequently the great art or great literature that express the traditional western understanding of life—the symbolism and the allusions to historical events, to other

works of literature, to the Bible—make little sense.

Many of these same students, easily half and probably more, cannot write a good English paragraph. Some cannot write a good English sentence. And if you cannot read well or write well, then it's very difficult to show that you can reason well. So college freshmen have a notoriously difficult time recognizing and constructing arguments; in fact, many have learned to mistake argument for personal insult.

Though contemporary education reduced to the acquisition of basic skills often fails by even this meager standard, this isn't the worst of it. Skills can be made up with hard work, and it's a dirty little secret that much of university instruction in the first couple of years is now remedial, developing skills that should have been learned earlier on.

The deeper problem is not how little the average freshman knows, but how listless he is about his ignorance. It is a persistent myth, and one which students are almost forced to believe, that their college years will be the "time of their lives." But in my experience they can be a pretty dispirited lot. They are what Robert Bartlett called "souls without longing," and little wonder. Not only has their education failed to give them skills. It has offered them no great proposal and no noble aspiration; it has made them heirs to no tradition. It makes no pretense to that comprehensive view of the order of things that once went by the name of wisdom. Indeed comprehensive views, apart from liberal pluralism, are regarded with suspicion. Their educations have not borne the conviction that truth—or anything else for that matter—is desirable for its own sake, for what it is rather than what it does. Instead these kids have learned what we've taught them: that education is just a means to an end, and that the end itself isn't any too clear or too exciting. I've sometimes tested this theory by asking students—hypothetically of course—if they'd be willing to forego my great books course in exchange for a B+ or an A- right from the start. Those answering "yes" were always a majority, because in a mercenary view of education, it is the grade and not the knowledge that is the point. As I've gotten to know these kids, I'm always amazed and sad at how few of them can give any real reason for being in college other than the fact that it's what they're supposed to do next. They're busy dutifully pursuing not what they love or what interests them, not what has gripped them as true, or good, or even important, but what they think their parents want or what they think they have to do to make a living. This is despite the fact that today's technology and technical skills will soon be obsolete and despite the documented fact that most will change jobs many times and few of them will do work directly relevant to their university degrees. So they spend huge gobs of their parents' money or take on huge mounds of debt for no clear reason—and they often get little more in return than a heap of fragmented

ideas and a certificate to enter the workforce. It is little wonder that so many university students are dispirited and listless about their education. Their educations have offered them no vision of life that is worthy of their desire. They have asked for bread and we've given them stones.

Our crisis in education is obviously a crisis of culture, and the prospects for large scale renewal appear pretty bleak. Our prevailing pragmatism is not an accident—it's rooted in the founding assumptions of our culture—and so a liberal society like ours seems all but destined for an educational crisis, especially as it decays, which means that the prospect of comprehensive and systematic educational reform is therefore probably doomed. A society with no shared understanding about the nature of the human person or the meaning of life beyond the vapid affirmation of choice and pluralism will be unable to agree on the meaning of education or the point of educating children in the first place. Much less will it be able to reach agreement about the meaning of history and about what children ought to know. The curriculum will necessarily be fragmented. It will look like the course offerings of a typical university department or the mish mash that is Common Core: a carefully negotiated settlement between competing ideologies and research interests. We will have to educate as if God doesn't exist, or as if his existence were only relevant in the privacy of individual hearts, lest this imply some comprehensive answer to these questions that might impinge upon the freedom of others.

And this brings us to the heart of the matter, though I grant that it will seem counterintuitive—even absurd—to many people. Of the many problems plaguing contemporary educations—and they are legion—the deepest problem, I would argue, is its secularity. It is stunning when one stops to think about it that it could be a matter of indifference to education whether or not God exists; that education happens to mean more or less the same thing whether we happen to be children loved into existence by God or whether we are merely accidental aggregations of matter thrown up by meaningless physical processes. One has to try very hard not to think in order to believe this.

Now my point is not that secular education is morally and spiritually empty; in fact, it can be overbearingly moralistic at times. My point is that resolute and systematic secularism makes education intellectually empty. Why so? In *Atheist Delusions*, a rebuttal to the superficiality of the so-called New Atheists, the Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart writes, "It is pointless to debate what it would mean for Western culture to renounce Christianity unless one first learns what it meant for Western

culture to adopt Christianity.”[1] Hart’s point is that Christianity has shaped the basic premises of our culture so deeply that its influence is largely invisible to us, and that we cannot therefore renounce this inheritance without throwing away much else besides. “A world from which the gospel had been banished,” he writes, “would surely be one in which millions more of our fellows would go unfed, un-nursed, unsheltered, and uneducated.”[2] But more deeply still, though we have forgotten it, “citizens of the West are inheritors of a social conscience whose ethical grammar would have been very different had it not been shaped by Christian theological, ontological, and moral premises.” “It is simply the case,” he continues,

that we distant children of the pagans would not be able to believe in things such as human rights, economic and social justice, providence for the indigent, legal equality, and basic human dignity—all palliated echoes and haunting fragments of Christian moral theology—had our ancestors not once believed that God is love, that charity is the foundation of all virtues, that all of us are equal before the eyes of God, that to fail to feed the hungry or care for the suffering is to sin against Christ, and that Christ laid down his life for the least of his brethren.[3]

St. John’s Gospel tell us that at Jesus’ crucifixion, Pilate had had inscribed over the Cross a sign which read, “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews,” and that it was written in “Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.” The symbolic significance of this fact would not have been lost on the early Christians and the Church Fathers, who would have understood it to symbolize that Jesus’ act—and by extension his Church—comprehends the whole world, unlikely though this might have seemed at the time when the Gospels were written. But eventually, Christianity did come to comprehend—to take up, transform, and synthesize within itself—the inheritance of Rome, Athens, and Jerusalem. One cannot separate this inheritance from the heart of Christianity itself, as Pope Benedict recognized. Jerusalem without Rome and Athens ends in the Reformation. Rome and Athens without Jerusalem ends in the Renaissance. The Gospel, traveling on Roman roads, penetrated a world already made one in some sense through Hellenization and through the Roman imperium. When it became necessary, at a crucial moment in the Church’s life, to clarify crucial points of Christological and Trinitarian doctrine, the Church borrowed categories of thought from Greek philosophy.

To see this is to understand the profundity of Hart’s point and its profound implications for education. One simply cannot erase the descent of Christ into the heart of the world and the subsequent penetration of human culture by Christianity, whether in the name of democratic order, or pluralism, or tolerance, or secular

neutrality, without profoundly distorting one's educational mission. When we deny the importance of God to Western and human culture or relegate the question God to a merely private, subjective realm we falsify history and cut ourselves off from our own past and our own culture. Our own art, architecture, literature, music, and philosophy become like a foreign language that we cannot read. They used to call the great Cathedrals, with their frescoes and stained glass, the schools of the poor and unlearned. Now most of the educated can no longer understand their intricate symbolism. The history that made us becomes unintelligible to us so that we can neither understand ourselves nor see beyond the present moment. Our souls become small; we become prisoners of the spirit of the age. And our children—especially Catholic children—are denied their birthright. To educate as if God doesn't exist, in other words, is to commit our children to ignorance.

More crucially still, we cannot expel God from the curriculum without expelling what is essential to our humanity along with him: the longing after God, the great search for truth which moved the West to philosophize, the longing after beauty which illuminated western art, architecture, and music and bequeathed to us the deep-seated notion of life as a pilgrimage or a quest—a theme variously expressed from the Bible and Homer, to Arthurian romances, to Dante, to Mark Twain and Tolkien. When God is rigorously excluded from thought, when we educate as if his existence were a matter of indifference, or when he is compartmentalized and relegated to religion class, "education" comes to mean rigorously not asking the great questions of human existence—What is true? What is good? Who is God? Who am I?—and not thinking about the answers that have been proposed to them through our greatest works of philosophy, art, music, and literature. In short, we come to confuse education with ignorance.

So when we exclude God and the Church from the curriculum, we both lose sight of the profoundest achievements of human culture, and we eliminate the very longing after truth that has always compelled people to desire education in the first place. Education then becomes merely pragmatic and instrumental, a matter of successfully learning to cope or manipulate the present moment. But since even the present is drained of anything objectively desirable, neither it nor the future really has very much to offer. This is ultimately why so many students seem so dispirited and are so indifferent to their own education. Contemporary education gives students little to wrestle with. It offers them no compelling proposal, no exalted vision of life to say yes to or even to reject, nothing great or noble to aspire to, nothing beautiful to love. Education in liberal society thus ceases to be liberal in the traditional sense; it does

not liberate the soul from its enslavement to base things or from the realm of necessity. Rather it teaches students to resign themselves to it.

As a teacher in theology and the humanities, it was natural for me to think about these things. As a father of two young sons, eager to help them avoid this fate, it became urgent. So I had already been thinking and writing this problem for a long time when, about five years ago, a parish-wide meeting was called to discuss the future of St. Jerome's school, which was then very much in doubt. The school was failing for all the complicated reasons that Catholic schools around the country are struggling. The world had changed beneath our feet. Demographics had changed. Enrollments were down. And to be honest, the educational offering wasn't very compelling despite the dedicated efforts of the many people who lovingly worked and taught there. Many families in the parish, who in the past would have sent their children to St. Jerome's as a matter of course, had forsaken the school, opting for homeschooling instead. I came away from the meeting impressed with the new principal, Mary Pat Donoghue, and hopeful that the school would survive, but I was unconvinced that it would or even should survive in its current form. I wrote her a letter offering my support, provided that she were interested in trying something more bold, and I included a paper I had written, a kind of manifesto for education, parts of which would eventually make their way into the *St. Jerome's plan*. Mary Pat then invited me to join a curriculum committee that she had already formed to think along similar lines, a remarkable collection of people.

We weren't given a mandate to invent a new school; in fact, we weren't really given a mandate at all. And we probably spent a good six weeks or so without a clear direction. Several of us were attracted to the idea of classical education and had read Dorothy Sayers' *The Lost Tools of Learning*. But we were suspicious that Sayers' understanding of classical learning was anachronistic and maybe not all that classical—in the Middle Ages, for example, grammar, logic and rhetoric were subjects, not stages—and the more we read about classical education and the more we looked at curricula of classical schools, the clearer it became that “classical education” did not have a single, self-evident meaning. It began to feel a bit as if we were trying to build a house beginning with the second floor. So we decided to go back to first principles and ask some very basic questions: What sort of people did we hope our children would become, and what would it be necessary for them to know and to love? But we realized we couldn't give very good answers to these questions without taking up some even more basic questions about God, the meaning of the human being, and the meaning of human history.

Our judgments about these questions are the foundation of what would become the St. Jerome Educational Plan, which was a foundational blueprint for a new school, founded on a philosophy of education, which rested, in turn, upon a philosophical and theological anthropology. To my mind, this is what is really unique about the St. Jerome's plan, that it thinks through a fundamental truth common to all attempts at education, but rarely acknowledged: that education presupposes anthropology—a philosophy of human nature—and a theology, even if this is only in the negative form of atheism. And everything in the plan flows from these philosophical and theological judgments: from the standard and principles of decision making, to our historical and interdisciplinary approach of the curriculum, to our disposition toward world cultures, to our “phenomenological” approach to nature studies, to our position toward technology in the classroom and the school, to the way the school is decorated, to the culture we are trying to create.

So, what then, are these judgments? The first is that the human being is creature with a built-in desire for God, even though this desire often goes by other names such as the desire for beauty or the pursuit of happiness, and is often not articulated or recognized at all. The second is that human culture is best and most fundamentally understood as an expression of that desire. This makes possible an approach to pre-Christian and un-Christian cultures that is simultaneously lovingly appreciative, sympathetic, and critical, rather like Paul at Mars Hill in Athens. The third is that God comes to meet and fulfill this desire in a surprising way in the Incarnation of Christ. And this means, finally, that the coming of Christ and the advent of the Church are therefore decisive events for the meaning of human history, a position which is defensible even on historical grounds, quite apart from philosophy and theology. It is Christianity then that takes up, transforms, and transmits to posterity the remnants of classical culture. It is Christianity that is responsible for giving rise to Europe, as a religious, cultural, and political entity distinct from Asia. Modernity, for good or for ill, is constituted in reaction to it. And so on.

On the basis of these judgments, we were then able to answer those earlier questions about what we wanted to achieve. First, we wanted to cultivate what is most human in our children: habits of mind and dispositions of soul—habits of wonder, memory, attention, and thought—that are integral to a fully human life and to happiness in God. And of course certain “skills,” reading well, writing well, speaking well, and thinking well, are implied by this as well as certain pedagogical techniques for cultivating these skills. Second, we wanted to awaken our children to the great questions of human existence, in order that they might come to know God and

themselves. Third, we therefore wanted to give them something better to love, principally because beauty and goodness are desirable for their own sake and without these there is no longing after truth, but also to help liberate them from the banality and hopelessness of much of popular culture. Fourth, we want to help overcome the separation of faith and life, to help them see that faith is not just a private, interior compartment but that being a creature comprehends all of reality, including culture, history, and the natural world. Finally, and for all these reasons, we wanted to incorporate them into the rich and beautiful tradition of Christian humanism, which for the historical and theological reasons just indicated, encompasses all that is good, and beautiful and true. We found all of this to be beautifully and powerfully summed up in a passage from Hugo Rahner’s *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, which we chose as an epigraph to the St. Jerome’s plan. Rahner writes,

[T]he very fact that it is the flesh of the Logos become man that ultimately defines the limits of Christian humanism contains the possibility of almost explosively extending those limits to what is really a limitless degree. Now we may dare—indeed dare we must—to take up with an all-embracing gesture into this pattern of the Christian man whatever in the long perspectives of history or in the depths of the soul is true and noble in thought or deed. All that is good and true has proceeded from the Logos and has its homing-point in the incarnate God, even though this be hidden from us, even though human thought and human goodwill may not have perceived it. Every great and noble deed flows from a power which the revealing Logos has shown us to be his own special grace. Because it is aware of this, Christian humanism rises superior to all purely historical or psychological interest in the development of human ideals. For the humanist Christian there is only one possible attitude he can take towards the world: he must love. Yet one can only love a person, and that is why the Christian humanist loves the person in every shape and form but only in him of whom St Paul says “all things were created in him.” Here is the meaning of those words written by an ancient Christian [Justin Martyr]... “Christ is the Logos, in whom the whole human race has a portion, and all who have lived according to this Logos are Christian, even though, like Socrates and Heraclitus among the Greeks, they are accounted godless.”[4]

I often cringe when I hear classical education referred to as the “classical method” — which echoes too much contemporary education’s obsession with technique—or the classical model, as if classical education were merely another educational technique. Of course, the aspirations and principles of the St. Jerome’s plan imply certain pedagogical practices—the emphasis on memory, on observation, on taking the time

to do things with care, on drawing, recitation, and discussion. But for us at least, classical education is not just a method, but content, a substance that flows from these fundamental judgments. Commenting on the work of Christopher Dawson, the late Stratford Caldecott, a lovely man and a true humanist, suggests in his *Beauty for Truth's Sake* that a simple revival of the trivium and quadrivium would be insufficient to face down the current crisis. Rather, he says, “young people need to be made aware of the spiritual unity out of which the separate activities of our civilization have arisen, and [Dawson’s] proposal was to do that historically....” “Teaching the story of Christian culture,” he says, “may be the best way to ‘maintain the tradition of liberal education against the growing pressure of scientific specialization and utilitarian vocationalism.’”<sup>[5]</sup>

Of course, Dawson and Caldecott are speaking principally about the university. But my experience is that by the time students reach the university, it is almost too late. Recovering this “spiritual unity” is really what the St. Jerome’s plan is attempting to do. This is why the plan cycles twice through the history of the world—whose hinge-point is the Incarnation—devoting two years each to antiquity and the Middle Ages. This is why we attempt to integrate world history and Church history, and to integrate these with the study of literature, art, architecture, and music. This is why we incorporate natural philosophy into the study of nature. This is why we attempt to cultivate habits of attention and wonder and patience through observation, memory, listening and recitation: in the hope of incorporating students into that unity of knowledge and insight which used to be known as wisdom, without which all of our knowledge falls into a jumbled heap. And this is why an education that is truly Catholic is also classical and why a truly Catholic education is simply a better education.

[1] David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 16.

[2] *Ibid.*, 16.

[3] *Ibid.*, 33.

[4] Hugo Rahner S.J., *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (New York: Bilbo and Tannen, 1971), xiv-xv.

[5] Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 27-28.

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# Bloom, In-Humanities and the Gay-Marriage Regime

ROBERT OSCAR LOPEZ

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Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Touchstone, 1987).

There is something in Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, even this many years after it was written, that smacks of hubris. It belongs to a heady historical moment: the book was published in 1987, in the latter years of a Cold War that no longer felt as scary as it once did, and which was bound to end in two years. Ronald Reagan was the president of the United States but the professoriate of the United States had comfortably defined its members as the counterweight to what they viewed, quite self-righteously, as a reactionary regime led by a brainless Hollywood actor.

In that critical juncture when the collapse of Communism loomed, writing such a book was not entirely intuitive. American professors had plentiful reasons to be complacent about the left-leaning postmodernism slowly casting its pall over higher education, and not make such a grouchy fuss about the supposed doom caused by "historicism," ethnic studies, relativism, and other such things Bloom found vexing. The various constituencies of grievance-mongering—defined by the triumvirate of race, class, and gender—were still less than a generation away from an earlier period when they were truly suffering. Very bad things had happened to women, people of color, and poor people, not long before Allan Bloom sat down to write *Closing*. In light of the visceral wounds only beginning to close by 1987, the effete manipulations of college curriculum were at least a welcome departure from the violent upheavals at places like Cornell University of twenty years prior.

When Allan Bloom's book was published, I was in the process of applying to college, including Yale, where I ultimately got accepted and attended. My Puerto Rican lesbian mother's health was declining and the toll of the unorthodox way that I was raised was starting to wear on me, but these specific details will be more relevant later in this essay. For now here is what matters: One of the first things I learned when I got to

New Haven was that the acceptance of women to the campus had not yet lasted **twenty years**. There were people in New Haven who had been around during the famous **Bobby Seale** trial of 1969–70.

In the late 1980s, the race/class/gender triptych still set a high bar for anyone wanting to make “liberation” claims. To have any credibility with the ascendant Left, one had to speak to categories that registered true and well-documented injustices. In those days, a wealthy gay white man would be challenged if he wanted to lead any leftist coalitions, nobody took transgenderism seriously, and the question of gay marriage was unthinkable since marriage was a politicized institution belonging to the “white male patriarchy.” The grievance caucuses had calmed down from the violence of the 1960s, but still had a kernel of legitimacy to their complaints.

That Bloom would author a polemic so powerfully indicting political correctness then, as opposed to now, speaks to either a prophetic instinct, or recklessness. He defends prejudice saying, “The mind that has no prejudices at the outset is empty”<sup>[i]</sup> at a time when Asian American freshmen might include people who were airlifted out of Saigon, and when some students had older brothers who remembered the day Martin Luther King Jr. was shot.

Such historical juxtaposition leads us to the second reason that Bloom’s writing of *Closing* was quite a bold act for its time. Just as the Left still had a point, so to speak, because memories of truly benighted days were still fresh in people’s minds, there were few signs that could alert the average intellectual to what was to come in the next quarter century. The Left wing’s shenanigans might have struck some of the more cautious minds of the day as a possible glitch on college campuses, but who could have guessed that gay causes would end up overshadowing and devouring social-justice causes? (For instance, as Charlotte Allen **reported in 2013**, the Southern Poverty Law Center withdrew from defending blacks on death row but went on to spend untold millions on pet causes dear to wealthy gays, such as shutting down **Jews offering new alternatives to healing** or **suing a school** in Michele Bachmann’s district to make them offer more gay curriculum.)

In 1987, who could have envisioned the two-year nadir of 2009–10, when not only the Democrats, but indeed, the very caricatured and politically correct academia of Bloom’s nightmares, would come to control the entire government of the United States: both houses of Congress, the White House, the military, most media, and indeed, all of higher education? Barack Obama’s ascendancy marked the rise, not of African Americans, but of the academic Left’s identity politics, including the bizarre

primacy gained by gay men, to whom Obama has shown excessive favoritism, and whose claims to historical oppression are almost laughably skim compared to slavery, women's being denied the right to vote, serfdom, and peonage.

Bloom's dismal vision of American universities ended up being far more prescient than even he would have intended. He feared that "openness, nevertheless, eventually won out over natural rights" (29)—something whose destructiveness became frighteningly apparent in the movement for gay marriage, which Bloom had no way of foreseeing. The scale on which Bloom was operating was too small to do his insights justice. Bloom claimed that his worries were directed only at a small elite of bright minds, which he feared might not attain their full transcendence because of their distracted and misguided professors. He describes his target subjects as "thousands of students of comparatively high intelligence, materially and spiritually free to do pretty much what they want with the few years of college they are privileged to have—in short, the kind of young persons who populate the twenty or thirty best universities" (22).

Bloom was simply carping about things going on at Cornell, whereas the triumph of relativist "openness" over "natural rights," which he dreaded, would do much more than render dormitory conversations banal in Ithaca. The trend destroyed the sacred institution of marriage and undermined the basic social unit, the family, for everyone on earth from the richest to the poorest.

To critique Bloom from my admittedly strange vantage point—from the perspective of a conservative classicist and son of a Latina lesbian, who would help form a countercultural movement of *children of gays* (COGs) against gay marriage and adoption—presents a paradox. For someone with such prophetic powers, he was shockingly naïve about what his oracles were denouncing, even as he was a lone voice warning the public that something was amiss. There is a wry air to his critiques, belying a sense on his part that the Left will do some pitiable damage, but nothing world-historical or fundamental. On the crumbling of education, he says, "the grownups are too busy at work, and the children are Left in a day-care center called the humanities in which the discussions have no echo in the adult world" (372). This is a shrewd and promising witticism, which could have, with only a little more brio, led Bloom to address the much severer phase of the decline he mourns.

Discussions that lack an echo in the adult world are bad enough, but why did Bloom halt there, and not speak to the future ugliness of 2015, when the people having these deracinated discussions have remade the world in their distorted self-image, and now

the world has no echo of any reasonable ideas? Bloom chose the comparatively harmless nursery space as the allegory for the closed American mind with his reference to the humanities as a “day-care center.” A more suitable allegory would be in the spaces of real power: banks, legislatures, courts, and corner offices filled with cruelty and venality. The frivolous conceits documented by Bloom came to exercise real power over people’s lives and inflicted damage. Bloom had the foresight to know the academy would be wrong, but he lacked the breadth to anticipate that the vacuum of “humanities” would be filled by inhumanities. Proof of this arrived on April 28, 2015, in the 40-mile corridor between Washington DC and Baltimore, Maryland.

### Bloom Comes Full Circle

On Tuesday, April 28, 2015, riot-stricken Baltimore was literally **burning**. Broken glass littered the sidewalk before gutted storefronts, militarized police units faced off against angry youths hurling debris, and smoke issued from cars and garbage cans set ablaze. Meanwhile well-heeled attorneys debated marriage before the Supreme Court, about forty-one miles away in Washington. It was a good time to revisit a line from Paul’s letters to the **Corinthians**:

But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Cor 7:8-10)

Is it better to marry than to burn? The collapse of a clear definition of marriage seemed to benefit wealthy gays, who were bound to keep more money with new tax breaks, but not people in poor neighborhoods, where most children were born outside of marriage. In the latter realm, larceny had come to replace the discreet redistribution of wealth that was so dignifying for lesbian millionaire Edie Windsor, the woman at the heart of the 2013 *US v. Windsor* case.

On April 28 the question—is it better to marry than burn?—was less allegorical and less rhetorical than it was meant to be, when Paul asked it of himself two thousand years earlier. For a nation to process the contradictions in what was happening in Washington and Baltimore simultaneously, there would have to be citizens with creativity, vigilance, acute perception, and critical thinking.

The nation would have to be a country of humanities, a tribe of people made perceptive by their sense of a deep connection to history and by an awareness of the past follies of civilization. The nation would need troubleshooters with knowledge of

precedence and appreciation for human beings' tendencies to make mistakes. They would have to follow the path of what Thomas Jefferson envisioned as the necessary trajectory of humanities students:

History by apprising them of the past will enable them to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume; and knowing it, to defeat its views [and] to render even them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree.[ii]

It seemed these qualities, the ones Bloom warned would atrophy under the reign of post-60s relativism, were lacking. The ironies were lost on people. As images flashed across CNN of shattered store windows, roving gaggles of rioters prodding and goading phalanxes of full-armored cops, and cars smoldering in the all-American streets of Maryland, **Mary Bonauto** stood in a tasteful business suit and fielded questions about whether gay couples should receive marriage licenses.

Setting aside the unproductive debates about whether to call the rioters “thugs” or “social justice warriors,” even the staunchest law-and-order conservatives must acknowledge the sheer anguish in Baltimore. I do not endorse mob violence or destruction of property, but I cannot fail to see that blacks in this city—in cities across America—feel abandoned. Many of them, too many, have been literally abandoned by their fathers and/or mothers. Most feel abandoned by the entrenched institutions that have been so loyal to gay marriage supporters and so helpful to their cause: the legal system (remember that gay marriage won, not by convincing Americans of gay people’s dignity, but rather, by getting judges to cede them concessions), the two-party political system, the schools, Hollywood, academia, the Obama-industrial complex, and corporate America with its hundreds of wealthy organizations lavishly funding gay charities while black unemployment outpaced the national average and poverty persisted.

Is it better to marry than to burn?

On that Tuesday morning, Mary Bonauto, a well-groomed lesbian lawyer, stood before the nine justices of the Supreme Court. She argued confidently that the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution meant that people of the same sex had to be issued marriage licenses and given the right to adopt children. To be given the

right to adopt children means, effectively, to be given children, and since no same-sex couple can have their own children, this means to be given other people's children, and more likely than not, the children of people who have not the means to keep their own children—in other words, poor people similar to those who were rioting in nearby Baltimore. This strange notion that the Constitution could guarantee one class of citizens control of other people's children never caused particular anxiety on April 28.

“Adoption” by this point had already been buried under so many obfuscations that gay advocates could talk about gays “adopting” children into loving homes when the reality behind these code words consisted of the brutal economics of **surrogacy** and **sperm banking**. They could quote the generously funded social-science research that claimed there was “no difference” between people raising children they conceive by lovemaking and people buying children from other people. The social scientists who supported gay marriage could claim things they could never possibly prove, because such was the state of the American mind. They could, essentially, lie with a straight face, and not even feel bad about it, because the rise of the gay movement had worked such devilish magic on language that the very obligations of speaking were erased in favor of an amoral economy of language.

With a glibness veering into unfathomable callousness, Ms. Bonauto and the nine justices of the Supreme Court toyed with the heritage of potentially millions of future citizens, as if playing, “he loves me, he loves me not” with flower petals. Should Justice Kennedy decide with the four liberal justices to formalize gay marriage as a constitutional right, millions of Americans—including children forced into same-sex couples' homes as a result of the new right to have loving and obedient children—would exist as a subclass outside of history, having neither a biological origin earlier than a twenty-first century laboratory, nor any cultural camaraderie with the billions of narratives of humans who came before, all with mothers and fathers. Should Justice Kennedy lean to the conservative justices' view, then all would be different, and these millions of Americans would remain intact within “history” as it is commonly and academically understood.

How does one belong to history at all, never mind the “right side” of history? Scholars have debated this endlessly. Let's take a controversial model, put forward by Hegel. In *Reason in History*, Hegel writes, “World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom—a progress whose necessity we have to investigate.”<sup>[iii]</sup> While I am not a Hegelian, I admit, it is worthwhile to humor this position for the sake of argument. In such a view the past lives on, even more powerfully when there is a rebellion against

it, which leads Hegel to imply that all of human evolution is the collective struggle of slaves yearning to be free from oppression. To be part of history, people must have a relationship with and awareness of—even if antagonistically—their origins. Freedom is rebelling against origin (a crude earlier version, perhaps, of what Freud would detail in his reading of *Oedipus Rex*). A class of people cut off from, and ignorant of, the generations that preceded them, then forbidden to critique the ahistorical “creators” who arrogantly designed them to please a peculiar pro-gay and very recent zeitgeist, cannot be even part of Hegel’s history, much less a more positive one. How could an entire class of humans be so sloppily and whimsically denied History with a capital H and given only an impoverished and uncontested history with a lower case “h,” existing as a subgenus to serve the emotional needs of others who claim their descent but deny such a rootedness to others?

The last time the United States had carved out a class of citizens so disenfranchised from history and targeted them to be bred for ownership, they called it slavery. This was the thing banned by the Thirteenth Amendment. The banning of such violence to human freedoms necessitated the Fourteenth Amendment, which was passed in 1868, three years after the Thirteenth. Yet the Constitution’s delicately balanced organs, designed to codify the wisdom learned from past history, were being set against one another in a kind of jurisprudential cannibalism. The Fourteenth Amendment was now cited to give a privileged group of citizens the right to violate the Thirteenth-Amendment rights of others, and breed children to own like property. Meanwhile, the masses of African Americans still carrying the weight of such mistakes in the past were setting fire to whole neighborhoods of Baltimore, feeling utterly abandoned by the mandarins of university faculties who were enthralled with the task of promoting gay marriage and its spawn, gay adoption. The LGBT advocacy community of Baltimore was particularly interested, not in protecting the descendants of slaves from the long-term social consequences left to them by history, but rather with the sufferings of a male-to-female transgender person who was arrested during the riots and detained with male arrestees rather than females. Why black heterosexual men should be exposed to the dangers of imprisonment with hardened male criminals, but black men who self-feminize should not, did not occur to these advocates as a relevant query.

What Bloom saw as academic disintegration became social cruelty on a massive scale. Five other children of gays and I had submitted these three amicus curiae briefs to the Court attempting to explain the profundity—indeed, the severity—involved in estranging people from their mother or father during infancy, when the poor helpless

baby has no way to consent or even understand the impending lifelong toll of never having what so many others have: the knowledge and dutiful attentions of the man and woman who gave him or her life. While Ms. Bonauto, a woman who was never raised by a gay couple, had ample time to go back and forth with nine powerful justices, none raised by gay couples, the six of us and the seventy other same-sex parenting cases we had studied and documented never received mention during the oral arguments.

In the brief submitted by me and B.N. Klein, we made ample references to Jephthah's Daughters, a book that compiled copious documentation of children feeling deep harm and experiencing a serious loss of "freedom" because they were placed under the control of gay people who insisted on being their parents even though they were not. Nobody listening to the oral arguments on April 28 would have any idea this perspective even existed. History as an exercise, whether Hegelian or otherwise, had been demolished by decades of the soulless education and scholarship Bloom chronicled wryly in 1987. Ideas no longer had to contend with the collision of ideological difference—thought was rather inscribed by one side of fatuous debates and railroaded to dead ends, with all the prophets slain by modern-day Ahabs.

With the devastation of the humanities in colleges—not only the thirty best colleges that preoccupied Allan Bloom, but indeed all the colleges and trade schools that trained all the business moguls, teachers, reporters, statesmen, lawyers, judges, editors, and chairmen all around the world—we are left with a sense of ethical language not only deluded, but perilously inhumane. To whomever the speaker such as Mary Bonauto spoke, nothing was owed to those listening—certainly not honesty, nor kindness, nor even decency. All speech acts were bound to only one creditor, a neo-liberal "superego" (Freud's detached and overarching consciousness limiting and trumping the id and the ego), which seemed to hover over all of society, its tendrils winding out to homes through the internet, its catchphrases and talking points ringing like Pavlovian bells in everyone's ears.

The neo-liberal superego is a strange creature, conceived at first from the polygamous wedding of race, class, and gender: inclined to speak in economic terms or other statistics, obsessed with identity, oppositional toward a mythical "white male patriarchy" on which all problems can be flippantly blamed. As Allan Bloom warned us, this reliance on identity politics, grievance, and agnostic emotion leads us away from a true pursuit of ethics, higher meaning, or human dignity. We face, in a real sense, a rolling back of all the intellectual progress that brought us to the twenty-first century. The future may hold a place full of an imploded social science, and nothing

but a physical, though not natural, science unfettered by any humanities. Computer programmers and genetic engineers will breed and indoctrinate people into the roles prescribed to them by global capitalism.

Bloom saw the American mind closing, but now we see it imploding. Bloom could see error but failed to understand cruelty; he thought the people ruining his beloved Cornell were merely foolish, but he never gave them the respect necessary to acknowledge that they could be self-serving and out to gain frightening power over others. Gay marriage became, for a world exhausted by its inability to fix class inequality, both a convenient distraction and the ideal battering ram for an elite to smash the last remaining social infrastructure that could protect the autonomy of the poor. This may be, perhaps, because he could not grapple with the part of the Left's academic project that came from truth. There was racism, sexism, and classism. Minorities, women, and the poor had suffered serious hardships based on more basic human needs than the drive for sexual pleasure, which is the sole basis for the new group claiming to be "oppressed"—gay men. In only 25 years the progressive camps evolved from defenders of the downtrodden to champions of the privileged, eager to take away the downtrodden's children. Nobody had a language to contest this or even point it out. The destruction of the humanities was not, as Bloom says, the sinking of a decaying Atlantis (371). It was a kamikaze mission, a suicide bombing that took human kindness down with it.

[i] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Touchstone, 1987), 43. Henceforth referenced within the text by page number alone.

[ii] Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia," in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, 198.

[iii] G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis: Bobb-Merrill, 1953), 24.

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# Perennial Childhood: Remarks on the “Discipline of Praise”

ANTON N. SCHMID

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Anton N. Schmid, *Disziplin des Lobens. Pädagogische Entgegnungen* (Sankt Gallen [Switzerland]: Stiftung Johannes Schulen, 2012). Available (for the time being only in German) at [www.johannesschulen.org](http://www.johannesschulen.org).

Author Anton Schmid presents an essay based on his own book, *Disziplin des Lobens* [The Discipline of Praise]. We express our gratitude to Adrian J. Walker for providing us with a translation from the original German.

The crisis of contemporary education is rooted in a tendency to look for the ever-fresh newness of the educational task in the wrong place, as if it lay in new pedagogical ideas rather than in new children capable of entrusting themselves with open, vulnerable hearts to the formation received from their teachers. Put another way, contemporary educators often ignore the enduring substance of their profession, turning their gaze from its enduring pattern to adapt themselves to the latest ideological fashions instead. But is there really anything radically new left to say about the learning and teaching of children, or about their growth to maturity, that wasn't already known to our ancestors?

The book presented in these pages harbors no revolutionary ambitions, then, but merely seeks to defend a few important, time-tested truths from three capitulations to the spirit of the age popular among educators in both the German-speaking world and beyond. These tendencies, which pose a dangerous, and perhaps lethal, threat to every healthy form of learning, are: (1) a pedagogical psychologism that, having reduced the substance of education to the (dialectical) relation between teacher and student, can at best teach tricks for “getting through” the material, but cannot appreciate the school subjects—which it ultimately regards as neutral, pedagogically insignificant shells—for what they truly are: the “third” that unites teacher and student around their common good; (2) a pedagogical “materialism” that, fixated on the subject-matter independently of any personal relation between teacher and student, tends (in its

“liberal” variety) to reduce the child’s person to his function within the educational machine, while simultaneously turning the teacher into a functionary of the same encompassing system (*mercenarius autem qui non est pastor, cuius non sunt oves propriae, dimittit oves*: “the hired hand, who is no shepherd and to whom the sheep do not belong, abandons the sheep,” Jn 10:12); (3) the “economic rationalization” of education, which prolongs the first two tendencies by bending both the subject-matter and the student-teacher relation to serve the same purely external objective or target: a numinous economic profit that, lying entirely in an endlessly deferred future, is incapable of filling the present moment with any real substance—and thus “faturizes” the saturated *kairos* of education to the detriment of the inner principle characterizing the genuine act of learning.

Ironically, all three tendencies fail to achieve the very aim they claim to secure. Given man’s natural unity of body and soul, in fact, “psychologism” cannot eliminate the subject-matter without losing the child’s soul into the bargain; pedagogical “materialism” inevitably ends up annihilating the subject-matter along with the soul; and “economic rationalization,” “thanks” to its reductively monetary model of “*oikonomia*,” eventually fails to be properly economical at all. This last point bears stressing: Paul, writing to the Ephesians, understands the “economy” precisely as a present fullness, as the fulfillment offered here and now in a privileged *kairos* (*eis oikonomian tou plêrômatos tôn kairôn*: Eph 1:10).

It doesn’t require much imagination to predict what will happen to children exposed to a formation like this. Such children, in fact, will very quickly unlearn their intuitive appreciation of the joyful discipline and disciplined joy of learning. An appreciation abundantly manifest in the effervescent excitement with which they practically overwhelmed their teachers on their first day of school!

In 2006, Bernhard Bueb, then headmaster of an elite private school near Lake Constance in Southern Germany, published a thin volume that instantly became a bestseller throughout the German-speaking world. *Lob der Disziplin* [In Praise of Discipline], which would earn Bueb the not entirely flattering title of “Germany’s strictest teacher,” issued a ringing call for a revival of the old-fashioned and, in the author’s view, unjustly neglected virtue of classroom discipline. Although Bueb’s plea for a new culture of discipline quickly ignited a firestorm of controversy among German-speaking educators, most of his critics failed to notice the intellectual presuppositions underlying his argument. Echoing Nietzsche (on whom he had written his PhD thesis), Bueb essentially identifies classroom discipline with the teacher’s rigorous exercise of something like the “will to power” —as a foil for the

pupil's ceaseless self-overcoming, which, in Bueb's view, represents the sure path to the latter's truly autonomous self-possession.

If Bueb—instantly pilloried by Left-leaning critics for his “Brown” educational ideas—had delved more deeply into the substance of his favorite word, he might have discovered at the root of his much-praised “disciplina” an etymological richness whose dormant pedagogical potential deserved to be reawakened from its slumber. For the primary meaning of the word is precisely not “disciplined behavior.” Consider the following etymologically related terms: “disciplina”—in the sense of a school subject (e.g. *disciplina mathematica*)—“discipulus” (pupil or disciple), and “discipere” (to come to know), which, taken together, suggest that the disciplined exercise of real learning (“discere”) can occur only if, instead of casting about in the dark, much less “fishing in troubled waters,” we recover a sorely missing clarity. Clarity, that is, about the beauty and importance of the classical “school subjects,” about the humanity of the “pupil,” and about the true structure of the “cognitive act.” As Goethe put it: “If yesterday is clear and open,/and your work today both strong and free,/tomorrow, too, is sure to greet you,/with a joy to equal these.”<sup>[i]</sup>

What happens, in fact, when the “disciplinae,” which ought to unite us around the real, actually miss the ultimate goal of education, i.e., a properly human life (Jörg Splett)? Or what happens when a child cannot become a true “discipulus” because some teacher-cum-functionary lacks either the capability or the “authorization” to receive the personal gift that he, the child, would like to entrust to his care (a gift that is the child himself)? Or, finally, what happens when the school leaves no room for any real “discipere,” the cognitive act whose form is a “loving inclination to the real” common to both student and teacher? The answer is clear: No learning (*discere*) can flourish, and discipline can only be imposed with authoritarian violence “from above,” rather than being called forth intrinsically by authoritative command of the subject-matter itself.

Bueb's inverted sense of discipline called, then, for an “inversion” of its own. Hence the title of our book, which turns his “praise of discipline” on its head and speaks of a *Disziplin des Lobens*, a “discipline of praise,” instead. This title reflects our conviction that to “praise” the object of study—to love, approve, and affirm its goodness—is to receive from it the kind of discipline its nature demands. It bears repeating that such discipline is not primarily an external duty to be enforced by the teacher, but an attitude born of loving praise, which, by its very nature, engenders the disposition of soul that undergirds concrete, competent, and successful learning, by which it is

augmented in turn.

As the foregoing suggests, the pedagogical act is founded upon a common “loving inclination to the real.” Put another way, the joy of (and between) teacher and student presupposes a shared affection inclining both towards an intrinsically lovable, and jointly beloved, “Third”: the subject-matter that forms their specific “condilectum,” as Richard of Saint Victor might have put it. The affection that teacher and pupil express here is not, however, primarily a psychological mood. It is above all a form of justice rooted in the subject-matter itself; it is a response evoked by the depth and human significance of the realities taught and studied, realities which unite teacher and student while enabling them to transcend themselves at the same time. It is within this triadic structure that children learn, and no real learning can take place outside it. “The opposition between autonomy and heteronomy” invoked by Bueb “is [thus] a violent rupture that occurs only when the substantive realities binding us together fade from our view” (Robert Spaemann).

It goes without saying that the ideas presented in our book have to take flesh in an appropriate environment, one finding its measure in a truly human aesthetic (in the Greek sense of “aesthêsis,” meaning “apprehension” or “sensation”). Three points suggest themselves here:

(i) The child can experience his surroundings as “beautiful” only if both the school and the student body are small enough to “take in at a glance,” as it were. The school can become an aesthetic education only if it is a perspicuous, beautifully ordered whole in its own right.

(ii) Although the sexual difference fundamentally shapes the aesthetic of our human world, it is consistently flattened out by our schools, which prefer to focus their pedagogical efforts on cultivating equality while undervaluing difference. In order to do fuller justice to both the unity and the diversity of boys and girls, then, we propose a model of “parallel monoeducation,” which provides for a mixed-sex school offering instruction in single-sex classrooms (while leaving ample room for common events and activities that form an important part of the pedagogical program). In our view, this model could prove particularly helpful for boys, who—having become uncertain of their role in school and society—are already being written off as “losers” in the education game.

(iii) The effort to get the aesthetics of education right could further benefit from mobilizing another rich, though sadly neglected pedagogical resource: the interaction

among the school's different age-groups, which can complement one another in all sorts of educationally interesting ways, as when older students tutor and mentor their younger peers both inside and outside the classroom. In the age of the only child, the importance of experiences like these can hardly be exaggerated.

The teacher's concern for the future can serve as a basis for education only if it is rooted in a love of his origin. The best teacher, in other words, is the one who inwardly remains in the "grace" of childhood, to which, after all, he is permanently indebted for all that he is. It is just this perennial childhood, in fact, that enables the teacher to prolong, in a new time and place, the experience that Hans Urs von Balthasar describes with such profundity in his last book, dedicated to the divine-human child who, binding up the wounds of his fellow children, leads them home to the great feast in the encompassing Mystery of the Father (Lk 10:25ff; 15:11ff).

Now, this experience, which Balthasar locates at the origin of the child's first awakening to consciousness, is the revelation of the beautiful, the good, and the true in their mutual interpenetration. The heart of education lies here, in the disclosure of being's limitless plenitude, the praise of whose riches engenders both the common discipline and the common joy of both teacher and student alike.

We can fittingly conclude with Balthasar's description of the child's first awakening to consciousness, which, as the present book seeks to show, remains the perennial source of the entire pedagogical act:

When, standing just a short distance away, the mother looks smilingly at her child, she prepares the occurrence of a wonder, for one day the child, in his turn, will recognize the sheltering love expressed on his mother's face, and he will answer this love with a first smile of his own. This event enacts with primal force an intuition so perfect, so immediate, that the only proper response is to marvel at it as a miraculous wonder: love, that most original principle, has been understood, and through this understanding the slumbering bud of self-consciousness begins to open in the child; love between I and Thou becomes the disclosure of the world and, more deeply, of being itself in its absolute, limitless plenitude. And insofar as this opening occurs by reason of love, being's unlimited fullness shows itself as the quintessence of all consistency and rectitude, in short, as a truth that is identical with the Good. The intuition described here always occurs as part of the concrete encounter between mother and child, and it therefore conveys just the opposite of an abstract concept of being. Nevertheless, it, too, bears a limitless fullness, one reaching into ultimacy, into the divine, which explains why, at first, the child cannot conceive any separation between his

parents' [or teachers': AS] love and God himself. Love, it thus becomes clear to him, realizes itself only in a vis-à-vis, which is held together in its difference by the spirit of love, which, far from threatening the vis-à-vis, intensifies it in this very act.[ii]

[i] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Zahme Xenien, IV."

[ii] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Wenn Ihr nicht werdet wie dieses Kind* (Freiburg: Johannesverlag, 1998), 19f.

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# Joined Up Thinking: Renewing the Primary Curriculum

ROBERT O'BRIEN

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Westminster Cathedral Choir School, where I'm privileged to teach, sits snugly behind the neo-Byzantine arches and domes of the Cathedral, a stone's throw from Parliament and Westminster Abbey in one direction and Buckingham Palace in the other. Founded in 1902 to educate Roman Catholic boys (aged 8-13) as choristers for Cardinal Vaughan's newly-erected cathedral, over the decades it has admitted increasing numbers of day-boys to the school (they don't sing in the cathedral choir). Today, day-boys outnumber choristers by nearly five-to-one, but the choristers' musical training makes them still the transformative element in the school's culture.

Choristers board at the school and at 7:30 a.m. every room and corridor comes alive with boys tussling with their instruments before assembling for song school where they practice the music for that evening's Mass. Typically this will be a range of medieval plainsong, Renaissance polyphony and work by distinguished modern composers such as James MacMillan, many of whom have been commissioned to write pieces for the choir. By the time academic lessons begin at 9:15 a.m. the choristers are hitting the ground running and the day-boys have to keep pace.

The choir school tradition is a venerable one: England's first school was a choir school, established by St. Augustine of Canterbury soon after his arrival to evangelize the Anglo-Saxons in 597 AD. The medieval curriculum of trivium and quadrivium taught boys how to sing and understand the liturgy and enabled them to maintain the culture of western monasticism. After the Reformation the abbeys and cathedrals became "bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang"<sup>[1]</sup> but at Westminster Cathedral we proudly claim to continue the tradition; all other prestigious choir schools are in the Anglican tradition.

The musical tradition has been in place since 1902 but we have only more recently sought to renew our curriculum, aided by the writings of Stratford Caldecott. The English Catholic historian, [Christopher Dawson](#) (1889-1970), whom Caldecott greatly admired, recognized that the modern conservative's options were limited when it came to the curriculum. To simply turn back the clock meant a classical curriculum

hewn solely from the rock of Greek and Roman culture. This was the standard English “public school” education (as in Eton, Harrow and Winchester—the latter Dawson’s own school) as it existed prior to the Second World War.

As with so much that seemed impervious to change, the edifice of the classical curriculum crumbled in the mid-twentieth century as advocates of child-centered learning prioritized the “how” (learning style) over the “what” (content). As John Dewey conceived it, education became a democratic process accessible to everyone; exams were frowned on, or just dumbed down so that everyone could pass them, while “elitist” subjects such as Latin and Greek became a rarity. In an age of relativism, who was to say that one book was better than another? Why Shakespeare? Why so many dead white males? I wasn’t teaching at the time, but *The Corruption of the Curriculum* edited by Robert Whelan is a sobering read. The academic content of every subject was undermined. Geography was no longer about maps but about sustainability and green issues; science was no longer about understanding the material order but about healthy eating; in the teaching of languages, grammar was out and learning was by immersion, as though we continue to learn foreign languages in the way we learned our mother tongue as infants.

But with the old curriculum banished to the dustbin of history, what alternative to progressive education remains? In *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961), Dawson wrote that:

the old humanist education, with all its limitations and faults, possessed something that modern education has lost. It possessed an intelligible form, owing to the fact that the classical culture which it studied was seen as a whole, not only in its literary manifestations but also in its social structure and its historical development. Modern education has lacked this formal unity, because it has never attempted to study modern civilization with the care and earnestness which humanist education devoted to classical culture. Consequently, the common background of humanist culture has been lost, and modern education finds its goal in competing specialisms.[2]

At our school I have begun the task of building a curriculum that has an “intelligible form” because without such a form the pupils will be lost. Inspired by the [curriculum plan of St. Jerome Academy](#) (located in Hyattsville, Maryland)[3], each year takes an epoch of civilization, beginning with the Ancient Year in Grade 2 and cycling through Medieval and Modern years twice over a pupil’s time at the school. My own poetry

anthologies make literary links to what the pupils study in History, and the Art curriculum has been similarly designed to present an integrated picture of culture. While links are plentiful, the lines between subject disciplines are retained; in fact, they are emphasized.

If the content side of our new curriculum originates in Dawson, then it is complemented by Caldecott, who salvages much that is good in child-centred learning, particularly as applied to the early years of education. Caldecott's thinking is imbued with the personalism of John Paul II and he avoids any objectification of the curriculum separated from its role in the development of the pupil. However, he also recognizes that, "In modern progressive education," the skills of "thinking, remembering, communicating, calculating ... have been neglected, leading at times to an over-reaction in conservative schools where they may be drilled into children more assiduously."<sup>[4]</sup> So we are seeking a golden mean.

One of the great joys of our new curriculum has been our regular assemblies dedicated to poetry declamations. I remember distinctly one seven-year-old boy reciting "The Lord is my Shepherd" (from the Authorized Version), an eight-year-old duo declaiming Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade," and a twelve-year-old's barnstorming rendition of Henry V's St. Crispin's Day oration. Every boy in the year learns the same poem and the winner performs the piece before the school and their parents. The results have been remarkable and the building of confidence that comes from well-rehearsed performance is a great gift for life.

I am sure that in the past memorization (of dates, catechism, poetry) was learned through empty formalism reinforced by brutality, but we should judge an activity by its best rendering rather than its worst. Whereas the old humanist education was arguably preoccupied with the translation of Latin and Greek into English (or even from Latin into Greek and vice versa), a modern liberal education will be more humane, with a higher regard for what Caldecott calls "the education of the imagination [which] is the education of the heart." A modern liberal education—as sketched by Caldecott in his chapter "Dreaming a Catholic School" in *Beauty in the Word*—will give academic structure but also room for personal growth. I think I've seen some glimpses of this vision.

Not so long ago, a colleague came to see me in the staff room. I had taught English to the fourth grade before handing them over to him for History. They had stood behind their chairs—as they should—but then something unexpected happened that my colleague had assumed was a piece of mischief on my part. The class en masse began

to declaim G. K. Chesterton's great battle poem "Lepanto." The truth was that the idea had come entirely from them and was a first fruit of our new curriculum structure. The boys were beginning to see culture as a coherent whole. In this case, Chesterton's narrative masterpiece was being discussed, memorized and declaimed in English at the same time as they studied the Elizabethans, Philip II and the Ottoman Empire in History. Various light-bulbs were being switched on. As Chesterton wrote in *Orthodoxy*, "Thinking means connecting things, and stops if they cannot be connected." Our curriculum is designed to enable the boys to make as many connections across subjects as possible and thus, aided by the more strictly logical subjects—math and Latin, particularly—to learn to think.

I would be using poetic license to the extreme if I reported spontaneous outbreaks of popular enthusiasm from every class—it wouldn't be school then, would it?—but the boys are definitely on board with the project. This applies even to the activities that don't plug into their imagination. With my Fourth Grade class, I spent a lot of time earlier in the year re-introducing the Palmer method of cursive script (having taught it to myself first). When I was satisfied with the improvement, I left cursive on the back burner for a few weeks, half-thinking they would be glad of a rest. "When are we going to do handwriting again, sir?" they soon asked me. Handwriting lessons are a miniature illustration of true liberal education. Progressive education—no handwriting lessons. Rigidly conservative education—everyone writes in the same way. Liberal education—learn the conventions and then develop your own style. Kitty Burns Florey's *Script & Scribble: The Rise and Fall of Handwriting* is a particularly enjoyable apologia for handwriting.

Like handwriting, teaching formal grammar is associated with dry-as-dust formalism, but it ain't necessarily so. A heavy dose of irony often helps. "Let's get this poem out of the way quickly, boys, so that we can spend more time on grammar today." After wry and sceptical glances the class is usually won over to the eight parts of speech, adverbial phrases and subordinate clauses. I always emphasize that they use these grammatical forms every day in the playground; we are just putting a name to a face. As with handwriting, it's through repetition that the boys make progress, and they quite like the repetition. We do drill after drill: I don't get any complaints, though after fifteen minutes it's usually time for something more light-hearted. Little and often seems to work well with formal grammar. If you are serious about teaching grammar, try to get hold of a copy of Tim Ledgard's *The Grammar Book*.

As a prep school teacher, I'm glad that I don't teach punctuation and grammar all day. Whereas I teach English to the Fourth Grade, I teach History to the Sixth. Sixth Grade

covers my favourite period in English history—1066-1485—and is a fairly brisk walk-through of the great kings and saints of medieval England. We have a particular devotion to the Jesuit martyr St. Edmund Campion (d. 1581), who at his trial in Westminster Hall (just down the road from us), spoke of “our own ancestors, all our ancient bishops and kings, all that was once the glory of England—the island of saints, and the most devoted child of the See of Peter.” If the Reformation attempted to sever generations of Englishmen from that heritage, it’s a satisfying thought that we might be restoring the historical and imaginative link between England and Christendom.

But no period of history is a truly golden age and we’ve looked at the fascinating figure of St. Joan of Arc, who after defeating the English in a flurry of battles was captured, imprisoned and burned to death by her English enemies and the treacherous Burgundians in Rouen in 1431. Joan was a very witty young woman who liked to tell the priests that “my Lord has a book that you have not read” and when questioned by a clerk with a strong southern accent what language St. Margaret and St. Michael spoke in the visions she received, retorted, “Better than yours!”; and, asked whether she believed in God, her response was, “More than you!” Having been burned to death by the English as a witch and a heretic, I hope she is pleased that at an all-boys Catholic school in London we cherish her memory and heroism.

In practical terms we have had to work hard to put together the resources for this part of the curriculum. In History we have the benefit of the actual trial records—of the trial that condemned her and of the rehabilitation trial a quarter of a century later—and so we have the words of her accusers, her friends and of Joan herself; the work of Régine Pernoud (Ignatius Press) is particularly useful. In English the boys have studied excerpts from Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part 1*, and various passages from Mark Twain’s splendid novel, *Joan of Arc* (the novel is rather too long for class use so I’ve produced a booklet of fifteen excerpts with questions). In Religious Studies, where we have been studying the sacraments, it was not too much of a digression to teach a double lesson on Joan, with her remarkable piety, confessing frequently and receiving Holy Communion daily whenever she could. Pope Benedict’s 2011 papal audience on Joan is the ideal resource to adapt for classroom use.

I could go on with examples of joined-up thinking in the curriculum. But what are we striving to achieve, at a deeper level? To understand what we are aiming at I would recommend Stratford Caldecott’s book on the trivium, *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education*. It is a profound and impressive work, summarizing the ideas of many writers that, frankly, few teachers would otherwise encounter. Caldecott

reminds us of the deeper reasons for why we teach language to children:

Language, grammar, syntax, and vocabulary exist for a purpose and that purpose is revealed only in the search for truth. As Chesterton saw, it is the search for truth that keeps us sane, because it always brings us back to reality. And why is reality so important? It is what we are made for. Reality is the food of the soul.[5]

Liberal education is a tradition rather than an ideology, and part of its beauty is that no two liberal arts schools will be identical. This is what Dawson and Caldecott sought for modern education—a curriculum that had a coherent form, that was broad in its coverage and which was truly open to the human person—teacher and pupil—in all his dimensions.

[1] William Shakespeare, Sonnet 73.

[2] Christopher Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education* (Catholic University of America, 2010), 91.

[3] Christopher Blum reviews this curriculum in the current issue of *Humanum*.

[4] Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* (Angelico Press, 2012), 117.

[5] *Ibid.*, 70.

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# An Italian Initiative: The Scuola Libera G.K. Chesterton

MARCO SERMARINI

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When I was nineteen, after a difficult high school experience, I made myself a promise: if the Eternal Father would give me the chance, I would try, somehow, to establish a genuine school. Mine was not. Like most Italian schools, it was secular and public. While there, I found myself drowning in the midst of an ocean, unable to find my way home. Although I had been raised a Catholic, I was in danger of losing my faith. I reasoned that the problem had to be the school; my religious beliefs and family's traditions found little support there. Because of the absence of freedom in education, students like me were practically forced to attend a school where our ideas and religious heritage were not prioritized. Even though parents technically had the right to choose how to educate their children, at a practical level they had little choice.

The Constitution of Italy does in fact allow a free choice with regard to education: yet this provision is little known and few take advantage of it. There is the right of the parents to support, instruct and educate their children (article 30), and freedom to teach the arts and sciences (article 33). Put simply, parents may educate their children at home, following their own ideas. For me, this discovery was a light in the darkness—a means of escaping the tunnel. But there was more: since our family belonged to the “Shady Fellows,” a confraternity based on the one founded by Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati in 1924[i], we started to work together in order to seize this opportunity. We wanted to establish an actual school based on these provisions. Pope Benedict XVI also motivated us: his ideas about the “educational emergency” and the union of faith and reason confirmed our quest, but it was a couple of searing quotations from Chesterton that provided the final push:

People are inundated, blinded, deafened and mentally paralyzed by a flood of vulgar and tasteless externals, leaving them no time for leisure, thought, or creation from within themselves. (G. K. Chesterton, speaking in Toronto, 1930)

That same Chesterton, responding to a question about which posed the greatest danger, capitalism or socialism, also spoke with great prescience of “standardization by

a low standard.” We were determined to educate our children differently.

And so it was that in July 2008 a group of us in Le Marche (Italy) decided to start the Scuola Libera Gilbert Keith Chesterton (“libera” meaning free, as in non-governmental). In September of that year, lessons began for four children, including my son, Pier Giorgio. We asked the families to provide the instruction, each parent teaching a different subject. We started with a middle school, for children from eleven to thirteen years of age. Since then we have added a high school providing a classical education. There are now 28 students in the middle school, and 32 in the high school. In this way we rediscovered the fundamental right and correlative duty of families to educate their children following their own ethos. For us the Catholic faith is an indispensable perspective, one we could not renounce: it is the one that made Italy beautiful, that promoted a real culture of life, that flourished in the charity of thousands of saints.

Another joyful discovery we made during those early years were Chesterton’s distributist ideas. Our school was a clear expression of these and creating it, we reasoned, was a true work of distributism. Some years later, through Fr. Spencer Howe, a young American priest studying in Italy, we discovered our twin school, the Chesterton Academy of Edina (Minnesota), which had started around the same time as ours, inspired by the very words of GKC’s which launched ours. Now we are working together with the same aims and ideals, under the same name. Connections such as these are so important: one plus one makes not two, but a thousand times two!

The idea of family, so illuminated by Chesterton, led us to our dear friend Stratford Caldecott and his writings, through which we rediscovered the importance of the liberal arts—their power of awakening and re-enchantment. We have started to practice this ethos, in which faith and reason and a warm sense of hope prevail, for these ideas are not some strange dream, but a powerful opportunity. I can say the same thing about meeting Fr. Cassian Folsom and the monks of Norcia: in such places, these ideas are put into practice every day at the deepest level: in prayer, work, liturgy and study. I remember Stratford saying: “We are a team.” This is so true. We are grateful to find such resonance in different places, all working together for the Church.

I think that this alliance of ideas and people, of tradition and adventure, can lead to great things for the life of the Catholic Church, of families and of the whole world. Living in this way, with no fear of affirming and exploring our identity, can only be a good thing. Small groups like ours (we consider ourselves a creative minority, to use Pope Benedict’s term) can indeed change the world as the monastic movement

originally did. This is a solid road for any fellowship to set out on!

[i] The Italian name for our group is the Compagnia dei Tipi Loschi de beato Pier Giorgio Frassati. It is an association of the lay faithful that has been in existence since 1993. In 2004, it was formally approved by our bishop.

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# On Chesterton

DALE AHLQUIST

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This article is a brief introduction to G. K. Chesterton's thought on education. Excerpts of Chesterton's work on this theme can be found in our new [Re-Source: Classic Texts](#) section.

The one thing that is never taught by any chance in the atmosphere of public schools is this: that there is a whole truth of things, and that in knowing it and speaking it we are happy.

—G.K. Chesterton, "The Boy," *All Things Considered*.

When G.K. Chesterton identifies “what’s wrong with the world” in his prophetic 1910 book of that title, he lists “public education” as one of the main culprits, along with Big Government, Big Business, and Feminism. The reason? All of them have combined to undermine the family. When the job becomes more important than the family, the family falters. When the job takes both father and mother out of the home, the family falters. When the family falls apart, there is only one entity that can replace it and will replace it: the state. And when the state takes over education, it replaces the authority of the family. The public school system, created with the best of intentions, was once locally controlled and accountable to the parents who sent their children to the schools. Now the state has made the parents answerable and no longer reflects their values and convictions—the very things they would want taught to their children. The public school not only separates parent from child, it separates subject from subject. The “whole truth of things,” celebrated by Chesterton above, is lost. Learning becomes fragmented, succumbing to the modern trend of separating everything from everything else, so that the world has become, in Chesterton’s phrase, “one wild divorce court.”

“There is a tendency,” he says, “to forget that the school is only a preparation for the home, and not the home a mere jumping off place for the school.” The school is secondary to the home. So is everything else in the world. The home is the place of freedom and creativity. The outside world is the place of conformity and fads and trends and all forms of slavery, political and commercial and cultural.

In *What's Wrong with the World*, Chesterton says that the problem is not that man has lost his way—man has always lost his way—the problem is that man has lost his address. We are plagued by purposelessness. Along with that we have lost the purpose of education. It is supposed to be “truth in the state of transmission,” the process of passing the truth from one generation to another. The school has not only lost the purpose of education, it has lost the truth. It is not that public school is evil; it is that it no longer does what a school is supposed to do. The teacher is supposed to work on behalf of the parent, not instead of the parent, and certainly not against the parent. And the private schools have basically copied the public schools in this regard, only with a higher tuition. And saddest of all, most Catholic schools have merely aped the other private schools as well as the public schools. Even the extra religion class has been separated from everything else, rather than integrated into the whole. The whole truth of things is not taught.

And the problem is that most parents, even though they know the system is not working, feel powerless, and simply put up with it. We have succumbed to the huge modern heresy of altering the human soul to fit the conditions of the modern world, instead of altering the conditions of the world to fit the human soul.

In 1937, the president of the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins, addressed the National Catholic Education Association. He said the Catholic Church possessed “the longest intellectual tradition of any institution in the contemporary world”; yet Catholic education in the United States had “imitated the worst features of secular education.” But, unfortunately, Catholic educators failed to heed Hutchins’s warning, and the Catholic schools have continued to imitate secular education even more up to the present time. The latest development has been Catholic schools adopting the “Common Core” program.

I think the Chestertonian response to the proposition of “Common Core” is that it’s not common, and it’s not the core. It is exactly what Chesterton warned about in a speech in 1927 at the University of London, called “Culture and the Coming Peril”: “To put it shortly, the evil I am trying to warn you of is not excessive democracy, it is not excessive ugliness, it is not excessive anarchy. It might be stated thus: It is standardisation by a low standard.”

The solution? If Education is, as Chesterton says, merely truth in the state of transmission, then we need to start by teaching the Truth. In other words, we have to center a curriculum around the Incarnation. Without that, whatever we teach is “windy and barren.” We have seen the results of taking God out of the curriculum. We

have created a myriad of social and psychological problems for ourselves by deliberately teaching something less than the truth. Chesterton says, “Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural.”

The point is, if Christianity is true, it is a truth that affects everything. If Christ has died for the sins of the world and risen with the promise of eternal life, then all history, all literature, all art, all philosophy, all science is part of the story of salvation. There is no understanding of current events without understanding the Fall. Even mathematics must stand in awe of the perfect equation which is the Trinity.

The Gospel is the whole truth of things that makes us happy. The true Common Core is Christ that makes everything else fit together. Without the ultimate meaning of things, whatever facts we gather are merely broken pieces, which are confusing and which most people do not recognize as anything they hold in common.

We must teach what is right, what is true, what is good, what is beautiful, the classical precepts which do not change and are still lively and provocative with each new hearing. The history of education for almost the past two centuries has been one new educational philosophy after another, one fad replacing another fad. Chesterton says that children are continually exposed to educational ideas that are younger than they are. The result? A steady decline in education even as the education industry swells. It is destined for total collapse and the whole culture is in danger of collapsing with it. That is what happens from following the fads instead of following the truth.

Chesterton’s classical understanding explains why his ideas have stood the test of time, and why the following excerpts from his writings reveal an extraordinary analysis of the problems with our schools today.

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# A Childhood Confined

CARLA GALDO

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John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (2nd edition, New Society Publishers, 2002).

John Taylor Gatto has written and spoken himself into a unique position. As a thirty-year veteran of the New York City public school system, and recipient of several “Teacher of the Year” awards, he quit his job and became an acerbic critic of the American public education system. With experience in both affluent and struggling schools, Gatto’s voice is confident, unapologetic, and laced with enough hyperbole to turn heads and get people talking. “School is a twelve-year jail sentence where bad habits are the only curriculum truly learned,” he pontificates (19). In an award acceptance speech before the New York State Senate, he lobs the fiery assertion that “well-schooled people are irrelevant...[H]uman beings...useless to others and useless to themselves” (23). For Gatto, education and schooling are vastly different propositions; the former happening very little in the context of what he calls “government monopoly schooling” and the latter serving mainly to squash curiosity and any aptitude for true learning.

Gatto’s perspective as a well-intentioned and skilled teacher who worked “within the system” is what makes his diagnosis of the concrete difficulties faced by students and teachers both convincing and worth reading. He knows of what he speaks. At the same time, his perspective is markedly individualistic, with a strong libertarian flavor. He holds any authority in intense suspicion, whether it be the state or the church, and asserts that truth is best learned through a dialectical model of trial and error amongst unguided individuals, unfettered by predetermined laws proscribed from above. For the Catholic educator, such a perspective is certainly problematic. But there is much in Gatto’s book worth considering. And while the paths of a purely-Gatto inspired educator and a Catholic educator will of necessity diverge, there is much common ground to cover in discerning a creative response to the problems of state-run schools, and, by extension, the private schools whose structures echo those of the public.

## What do we really need?

The question of what's wrong with the public education system is best approached by asking what it is that we as people, members of the human family, really need. Only then can the purpose of schooling, and its form, be properly determined. Gatto boils this down eloquently into a question of meaning and purpose, with a side note of connection-with-place and family:

Most of us who've had a taste of loving families, even a little taste, want our kids to be part of one. One other thing I know is that eventually you have to come to be part of a place-- part of its hills and streets and waters and people-- or you will live a very, very sorry life as an exile forever. Discovering meaning for yourself as well as discovering satisfying purpose for yourself is a big part of what education is. How this can be done by locking children away from the world is beyond me. (61)

[Education] should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves whatever you are doing, wherever you are, whomever you are with; it should teach you what is important: how to live and how to die. (68)

Life in one's family, joy and satisfaction in one's place, and the slow and joyful discovery of one's unique vocation—these are the essence, for Gatto, of a proper and true education. For a Catholic educator, these are all admirable goals worthy of embracing.

## What's wrong with “the system”?

According to Gatto, public education, in its current form, has different ends than these in mind. He ascribes a variety of origins to the current state of public education,<sup>[1]</sup> but what he sees as its ultimate, and somewhat sinister systemic goal, is, first, the “eliminat[ion] of human variation” that arises within the family, and, second, the production of dependent, nearly brainwashed wage earners who will play their obedient part in the national-turned-global economy, and who lack the independent spirit to question the all-encompassing dictates of the government. Schools enable this dependence by what boils down to a form of psychological manipulation—making students emotionally dependent upon their grades, convincing them that they are either “good” or “bad” students and allowing them to label themselves as such, as well as incentivizing students lacking creativity who do precisely what they are told to do. Gatto is careful to point out that while this creation of mind-numbing dependence may be the insidious logic of “government monopoly education,” there are many well-

meaning, even heroic educators working within the public schools of America, who honestly desire to teach children well. However, he claims, they are forced to primarily teach obedience to the system, and he says the system has done its job well. He points to the Department of Labor statistics for proof: the two most common jobs in the American economy are that of cashier and fast-food worker. The work performed in both positions ultimately lacks creativity and often reduces the person to little more than a walking, talking cog in a machine without much opportunity to problem solve or innovate.

Here it begins to become apparent how the problem of education is intertwined with a myriad of other problems, and it is difficult to untangle the strands or discern the causal relationships between them. If an economy based on mechanistic, unthinking labor necessitates the “dumbing down” of students through the current educational system, then re-envisioning education would involve a hand-in-hand re-envisioning of the economy. David Allen, in the book’s introduction, half-whimsically, half-seriously suggests an economy with more “artists, dancers, poets, self-sufficient farmers, tree-lovers, devoted followers of...non-materialist cults, Christian or otherwise—handicraft workers, makers of their own beer, stay-at-home moms and dads” who in the current state of things, “endure on the margins and at the periphery of the social economy” (xxv).

Gatto places high value on the integration of people and families within their communities, and he bemoans the weakened state of many American locales today. Neighborhoods have become ghost towns, with all of the actors who formerly peopled the streets and porches siphoned off into institutions—children into an uninterrupted stream of school, homework, and extra-curricular activities, the elderly to nursing homes, and both spouses to full time, non-home-based employment. “In a healthy community, [the teaching function] belongs to everyone,” emphasizes Gatto (16). Yet who is left to teach in today’s eviscerated American communities? Re-imagining education also involves a hand-in-hand re-imagining of community.

Families and the homes they form, which should be cornerstones of their local communities, are allowing much of their role to be usurped by schools. Schools are being encouraged to serve as a “synthetic family” for children, due often to the failure of families to function as such. But this seems to be a chicken-and-the-egg problem. Gatto asserts that

schools are already a major cause of weak families and weak communities. They

separate parents and children from vital interaction with each other and from true curiosity about each other's lives. Schools stifle family originality by appropriating the critical time needed for any sound idea of family to develop-- then they blame the family for its failure to be a family. It's like a malicious person lifting a photograph from the developing chemicals too early, and then pronouncing the photographer incompetent. (67)

The intergenerational relationships in a family, a lesson in themselves, are replaced by all-day immersion in flocks of peers, all struggling to learn disconnected facts which lack meaning for them and only enhance their confusion about the world. The "system" even endeavors to weave its greedy fingers into the home, requiring students, once released from their institutional "jail," to continue working for it, assigning hours on end of homework.

Gatto faults the school system for actively preventing children from learning lessons in "self-motivation, perseverance, self-reliance, courage, dignity, love, and...service to others" (19). He points to statistics noting increasingly frequent bouts of youth depression, addiction, and suicide, as well as an indifference to adult experience and adult life that often leads to an extended adolescence which continues through the post-college twenties and contributes to later and later ages for marriage, or a complete avoidance of commitment all together. Troupes of smartphone-toting youths are addicted to distraction, afraid of solitude, fearful of intimacy, and lacking in curiosity, all at once(17). Is such broad access to virtual connections at fault for this, or is it, as Gatto asserts, the fault of the system of schooling?

### What is to be done?

Looking to the not-so-distant past, including his own childhood in the 1930's and 40's, Gatto reflects on what childhood and adolescence used to consist in:

[it] would have been occupied in real work, real charity, real adventures, and the realistic search for mentors who might teach you what you really wanted to learn. A great deal of time was spent in community pursuits, practicing affection, meeting and studying every level of the community, learning how to make a home, and dozens of other tasks necessary to become a whole man or woman. (25)

Time, possibly the most precious resource exploited by the school system, was what allowed this relaxed growth within the home and the community. Extra-curricular activities were rarer and homework was less daunting or non-existent. How then to

reconfigure the schooling of the young to achieve a more meaningful education similar to what Gatto suggests here? He himself suggests something of a free-market solution, suggesting that smaller, more local schools (even home-based schools), competing freely with one another, would be able to more adequately address the unique needs of individual students. This would be in contrast to large, “government monopoly,” factory-like institutions that house thousands of students and force their intellectual pursuits to start and stop in response to the beck and call of bells and hall monitors.

Homeschooling, with a smattering of Montessori and co-ops thrown in the mix, is the educational path that our family has chosen, for the time being, for our children. While our initial inspiration was not connected with Gatto’s critiques directly, many of them did resonate with our family’s educational experiences thus far. While I write this, three hours before the public school bus will roll down our dirt road, my eight year old son is done with his schoolwork for the day and scrounging about in our barn for scrap metal to attempt to create an electromagnet. I am not providing much help in the matter, but that hasn’t hindered him, as he was inspired to the project by perusing our science books and encyclopedias, and has been turning to them for guidance. My six year old son, also done with his formal schooling for the day, is voluntarily snuggling up with his three year old brother and reading him a book, practicing his newly acquired reading skills and performing an important service for his article-writing mommy at the same time. Time—golden minutes of personally-directed learning and exploration, even after several hours of farm chores, prayers, formal lessons, and house clean-up—is the greatest gift which homeschooling has given our children.

In addition to giving my children time to pursue their inspirations, our homeschooling experience has also been marked by opportunities to make connections with mentors in our community. My oldest son still remembers the day when Dan, a member of my husband’s choir, and a geologist by trade, came over to sit on our back porch, toting a ziploc bag full of rock samples and an enthusiasm for his field that inspired my son, then only five years old. Dan talked about each of the rocks and where he had found them, thus fueling my son’s growing interest in geology and rock classification. Since then, in his free time, my son has catalogued his rock collection, performed hardness tests, and read all the books about rocks and minerals he can get his hands on, and insists he will be a geologist “when he grows up.” Other days have found my boys, together with a passel of their friends, exploring creeks with their moms and little siblings, taking apart lawnmower engines while learning about

internal combustion with my husband, or trying on Antarctic explorer's gear when my father was a guest teacher for our in-home class.

Homeschooling has the potential to address many of the critiques that Gatto makes of public schools—we can, for example, do math in half the time, tailoring it precisely to the ability of each student. Student interest in Rome or World War II can be channeled into more palatable handwriting lessons or writing assignments than those that come from impersonal workbooks. History can be taught with a greater sense of continuity and without the disjointed jumping from era to era so often experienced in public schools. Homeschooling also allows for constant opportunities to interweave the family's values and faith throughout the day. Yet it is not, and should not be seen, as a utopia. The focused, extended time spent together leads to an intensifying of not only the joys but also the struggles and growing pains common to any authentic community. In the constant journey towards virtue, direct and often painful confrontation with vice is coupled with the ever-present rhythm of transgression, forgiveness, and healing. While it is a privilege to be able to shepherd one's children on this path, it is not necessarily an easy, painless solution to the challenges presented by the public education system, nor is it a panacea available or appropriate for every family.

While Gatto repeatedly proclaims the impossibility of reforming the system as it is now, throughout the country there are privately run charter schools, all-age Montessori schools, classical academies, part-time academies, virtual online classes, co-ops, and home-schools proliferating. While not all have Gatto's philosophy as their root motivation, and he would most likely chafe at the adherence to tradition and religious authority of many of them, they do serve as models for a potential way forward for improving education in America on a larger scale.

[1] [The Underground History of American Education: A Schoolteacher's Intimate Investigation Into the Problem of Modern Schooling](#) (Oxford Village Press, 2000) is Gatto's extended work on this subject.

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# Habits of Attention

CHRISTOPHER O. BLUM

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St. Jerome Curriculum Group, The Educational Plan of St. Jerome Classical School (2010. Available at [http://www.stjeromes.org/stjeromeschool/classical\\_education.htm](http://www.stjeromes.org/stjeromeschool/classical_education.htm)).

After a few years' steady use of the internet, journalist Nicholas Carr began to worry about his "inability to pay attention to one thing for more than a couple of minutes." In his bestselling exposé, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* (2010), Carr pinned the blame for his wandering mind squarely on technology. This is only the most recent warning on the subject. Two decades ago psychologist Edward S. Reed judged that "we are allowing our mental resources to erode," and he wrote before the internet became either a household tool or a hand-held preoccupation (see Reed's *The Necessity of Experience*, Yale, 1996).

It would seem difficult to deny that ours is now a culture of distraction, and so it is inspiring to see a grammar school squarely confront the challenge of the smart phone, and indeed throw down the gauntlet before it. "Real education," write the authors of *The Educational Plan of St. Jerome Classical School*, "requires a space where children can experience a measure of freedom from these technologies and develop independently of them." Such candor is refreshing, yet what is remarkable about the vision of St. Jerome's is how it not only opposes our technological distractions but also includes—and arguably at its center—a coherent and principled plan to inculcate the opposing habits of attention.

Billing itself as "a Catholic Classical school in Prince George's County," St. Jerome's Academy is a parochial school, with a kindergarten and grades 1 through 8. [The Educational Plan of St. Jerome Classical School](#) is a comprehensive overview of the school's curriculum. It includes a narrative statement of principles, a discussion of the pedagogical aims of each of the main divisions of the curriculum, a thorough catalogue of the objectives or intended learning outcomes of the classes, reading lists for each grade, and, finally, a thoughtful collection of appendices that give additional guidance to parents and teachers about the school's philosophy and its expectations

for daily life, from dress code to liturgy.

Those familiar with the revival of classical education in parochial, charter, and independent schools, as well as the classical or liberal-education part of the homeschooling movement, will here find many recognizable themes, figures, and texts. The study of grammar is prominent—both the English and the Latin—as are those of the other arts of the trivium, rhetoric and logic. Music and mathematics are both pursued with an eye to classical standards of harmony and intelligibility. As is common in the better schools, a sound cultural formation in literature and history is provided. And a renewed catechetical approach to the teaching of the Catholic faith—using the Ignatius Press Faith & Life series—occupies a privileged place in the whole. All of it nourishing fare.

From the curricular point of view, two items stand out in particular. First, at St. Jerome's Academy experience of nature—and especially of living things—is a major part of the children's education. They keep nature notebooks in which to record their field work, dissections, and attempts at classification, and are encouraged to revere nature and its intelligibility as gifts from the Creator. Second, the architects of the curriculum have striven to present cultural artifacts that avoid the all-too-common pitfall of the "Great Books" approach, a premature sophistication of texts, problems, and subjects. The reading lists provided for the literature and history classes show that the innocent wonder and delight of the students will not be sacrificed to the desire of parents or teachers to have children hurried along into cultural elitism. That being said, the curriculum does include a Socratic component of open discussion as well as an emphasis on reading aloud, both of which activities are meant to put before the children "great works which seem slightly out of reach" in an effort to help them "discover the wonders of language" and the "power of big ideas." To my mind, however, the books listed for these activities seem suited to achieve those goals without the collateral damage of encouraging the jaded, ironic snobbery that, sadly, sometimes masquerades as liberal learning today.

It is less the content of its curriculum, however, than the pedagogical aims of its vision statement that makes St. Jerome's Academy so remarkable and so highly encouraging. In their Educational Plan, the authors often return to the subject of habits of attention as the foundation of their endeavor. So, classes in art, music, and biology are intended "to cultivate within the students habits and powers of looking, seeing, and noticing," which "in turn, imply a capacity for concentration, whole-hearted attention, silence, and stillness of both body and soul." Students will sketch in order to be trained "to

attend closely to detail.” They will be prompted to listen in their music class for the same reason, because “the study of music should be to the sense of hearing what the study of art is to the sense of sight.” Even their physical education classes—in such humble, everyday sports as baseball and soccer—are understood to be for the sake of “concentration, self-discipline, and mental stamina.” The memorization of poems and speeches is another way of developing the “capacity for sustained attention,” as is the simple but time-honored practice of learning to “sit still” and to “carefully observe” a work of art. How like the sage’s observation from of old: “the possession of understanding and knowledge is produced by the soul’s settling down out of the restlessness natural to it” (Aristotle, *Physics* 7.3.247b18-20).

One should not, however, get the impression that mere passivity is the goal of the St. Jerome curriculum. All of this receptivity is harnessed to creative activity and plenty of it. Over their nine years in the program, the children will be asked to identify plants, to perform Shakespeare, to dance in squares and lines and to sing Latin chants, to argue, to solve problems, to sketch and to write, and, above all, to pray. It is an adventure in knowing and doing that the students are invited to join, because we are born to learn and to love what we know, and all these disciplines and activities are unto that high end. “Education,” write the St. Jerome teachers, “develops what is most human in students: the capacity for wisdom and love which requires insightful reading, depth of thought, and the autonomy that comes from virtuous self-command. These, in turn, require disciplined habits of patience, attentiveness, memory, and concentration, and a desire for what is truly good and beautiful.”

In the face of so much inanity, despair, posturing and waste in the world of education at large, it is indeed a consolation to see such a realistic and even earthy statement of curricular aims and pedagogical practices. Schools built upon models such as these are not inexpensive—although there is ample help for the sons and daughters of the less wealthy at St. Jerome’s—for the kind of care necessary to instill these good habits and encourage the attainment of these high ends always requires great labor from many laborers. A charge of elitism, then, may be expected by those who put forward plans such as St. Jerome’s. It may be asked, however, whether as a society we should tolerate the growing gulf between those few who are able to attend to arguments and to the differences that reveal the natures of things and the many who are prey to the tyranny of a digital distraction disorder. However expensive or quixotic it may seem to some, the educational ideal promoted by the St. Jerome Academy could one day soon be recognized as nothing less than a matter of the life and death of our souls.

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# Heroic Effort: The History of Catholic Schools in America

AISSLING MALONEY

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Timothy Walch, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996).

When seeking to understand a thing, you must investigate its origins. In this vein, when we consider the nature of education and what it means to educate, especially within the changing contours of modern society, it is crucial to root our investigation historically, allowing our reflection on the present and the future to be enriched by the story of the past.

In his book, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present*, historian Timothy Walch offers a comprehensive historical study of the origins and growth of Catholic schools in America.

Walch acknowledges this as “a story worth telling” (5), and yet “one of the most neglected in American historiography” (2). It is a story of sacrifice and heroic commitment by individuals within the Church, animated by the conviction that education is crucially important, one of the most important things we give to our children, and that it is the privilege and responsibility of the family and of the Church to be good stewards of this gift.

Walch begins the story with the Spanish and French missionary efforts—which, however fruitless they may have seemed, were nonetheless heroic—and with the experience of Catholic colonists, who faced a life in this New World even more anti-Catholic than what they left behind. From its beginnings, then, the rise of Catholic schooling is a tale of sacrifice, struggle, and survival: an attempt to preserve and pass on a way of life to the next generation, amid a foreign and hostile environment.

This was true of the 19th century as well, which introduced over 5 million immigrant Catholics into American culture and society, dramatically and forever altering the life and work of the Church. One of the most significant factors in the history of American

Catholic schools, the immigrants prompted a conflation of “Catholic” and “foreign” and sparked new, violent confrontations that would reverberate for generations to come. Common public schools arose in an effort to safely homogenize foreigners into (Protestant) American society—but they “failed to understand...that there were fundamental differences between their own educational assumptions and those of the Catholic Church” (28). Not only did these proposed common schools threaten to alienate Catholic children from their religious, cultural, and familial heritage, they also started from the assumption that the task of education should belong to the state.

The one thing, Walch notes, upon which everyone agreed was “the importance of schools,” indeed, that “the future belongs to him that controls the schools” (65). The urgency of this conviction shaped the next few decades. Even the pope, Pius IX, alerted to the state of need in America, urged: “Every effort must be made to increase the number and quality of parochial schools” (59). But whether or not parochial schools were established and functioned successfully within a particular diocese depended largely upon the individual commitment of the bishop and his priests, as well as the support of the laity. At the end of the day, when this ideal met the lives of real people, real families, real parishes, in many places, the Church simply could not meet the need.

One of the primary factors upon which the development of schools depended was the work and presence of religious sisters. “It would not be difficult to make the case,” Walch asserts, “that sister-teachers were the single most important element in the Catholic educational establishment” (151). By 1900, there were more than 40,000 religious sisters staffing parish schools. More than 1,600 of these belonged to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton’s order, which “became the framework for the growth of Catholic schooling during these formative years and the decades that followed” (20). The work of these sister-teachers was a heroic response to a great need. For several decades, there were no real teacher training programs in place, and teachers relied on a sort of “craft system,” where novices were mentored by more experienced teachers. Because it was not possible for the Church to expand the school system and to improve the quality of its educators, simply staffing classrooms took priority. These sisters came to their work, then, with little or no training, varying degrees of experience, and often directly from a foreign country. Their sacrifice and dedication carried the work of Catholic schools into the modern era.

At the turn of the century, Catholic education in America had grown to such a scale that the Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Education had to acknowledge its massive

work. Decades of rapid growth created a situation in great need of order and organization, initiating a movement of centralization and leading to the development of school boards and superintendents. Furthermore, as the world changed, racked by economic depression and world wars and flooded with new philosophies, new pedagogical approaches were growing up in abundance, and leaders in Catholic education were faced with pressing questions about the future of parochial schools, their content and purpose. Some were eager to imitate and learn from experimentation happening in public schools, while others perceived within American culture the growing dangers of materialism, hedonism, and immorality, and were wary of accepting what might prove a recipe for social and moral disaster. Everyone recognized, however, that “Catholic schooling was a necessity if the Church was to survive and flourish in Protestant America” (87). The real question became: what is Catholic schooling? And while it was agreed that it did not mean simply secular education with prayers and the Catechism tacked on, what it did mean was not easily answered.

In many ways, the second half of the 20th century “caused Catholic educators to question the viability and survival of the parish schools they had worked so hard to preserve” (169). The rapid growth of the 1950’s could not be sustained, and Catholic schools were becoming an economic burden upon a people that was no longer sure it really wanted or needed them. The decline in religious vocations left many schools without teachers, the secularization of public schools removed the threat of proselytization and the conflict that had driven the early growth of the parish school system. In addition, Walch notes how values and ideas were changing, thereby changing the story of Catholic schools—schools which had depended on great sacrifices of time and money, the heroic self-gift of so many persons certain of the value of this work, and the conviction of families that the development of the soul mattered infinitely more than that of a career. The future of Catholic schools, then, rests “on the foundation of parental commitment” (240) because, at the end of the day, it is the parents who are the primary educators, and they have to want Catholic education for their children in order for parochial schools to thrive.

It is important to note that, having written the book in 1996, Walch’s “present” is now a couple of decades into our past. There is certainly, therefore, more to be said, studied, and shared about how Catholic schools have grown into the twenty-first century. But for the years it comprehends, this work provides an impressively thorough overview, and a helpful foundation for further study.

It is also worth noting that the narrative is often driven by a strong sense of conflict,

or power-struggle, and that this perspective undeniably colors the author's language and assertions, as well as what aspects of this history he is best conveying. Nonetheless, a fascinating, insightful, and at times haunting work, *Parish School* is a worthy read for anyone interested in Catholic education and American life, offering a rich context in which to understand where we have been and hopefully to shape where we are going.

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# Attentive To What Lies Within

STELLA SCHINDLER

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Senechal, Diana, *The Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture* (R and L Education, 2012).

From far away I heard you speak today,  
the way we hear bells in a slant of sun,  
knowing they ring at five: the calendar  
itself makes words, the very rays make chords.  
A teacher must have rushed there after school,  
arrived breathless, flopped in a seat, arranged  
her coat and hair, leaned into heed, and found  
a rampart in the very listening.  
Something to sit up for, something to hold  
one's head up for, a time to put aside  
one's foibles for, even a distant time,  
this came my way today, a reckoning.  
I grasped that there was loneliness in gold  
and gold in air, and debt in everything.

So begins Diana Senechal's *The Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture* (2012), a book whose very title announces a crisis at the heart of the modern world: when we allow the current trends in education and American society to clutter even our interior spaces, we ignore the capacity—and even lose the desire—to

recognize and be moved by what is real, good, beautiful, and true.

Senechal cuts right to the heart of both the constructivist mindset that has permeated the field for the past four decades and the business models upon which much of current education reform is built. Regarding the latter, she traces how the values of industrialization and economics have transferred to education, steering it in the direction of efficiency and productivity, immediate gratification and visible results, strategies and skills. To see these concepts in light of their effects on solitude is to invite us to remember what education is in the first place. Senechal counters the insistence on external, measurable success as well as the utilitarian view of subject matter. To be sure, she acknowledges that externals and skill-building are important. When taken as the primary ends of why we educate, however, “. . . we lose the gradation between the unseen and the seen, between the visible and invisible”(125). She proposes an integration, noting that the seen and the visible point to something beyond themselves, to the unseen and the invisible. We need to recover the priority of the subject matter and to discern through a cultivated solitude that a kind of internal success can come by way of doing or practicing something simply for its own sake.

Senechal also recognizes that technology plays a key role with respect to the culture's crowding out of the immeasurable and the invisible. Given the ubiquitous effects of technology, she does not merely devote an isolated chapter to the problem, but rather weaves her observations throughout the entire book. She reveals that introducing technology into a classroom—or any other environment—is not simply about the number of machines in the room, but about the very dynamics and attitudes involved in teaching, in family life, in friendships, etc. Here, along with Neil Postman (and others), she shows that technology is not simply a neutral tool that can be used positively or negatively. On the contrary, technology and its emphasis on immediacy, efficiency, and productivity have contributed to what she calls the “flattening”(117) of our definition of success and of the ends of the subjects we teach, leading to the tendency to make the avoidance of boredom, the visible busy-ness of activity, information retrieval, and the quick collection of data the be-all and end-all.

Regarding the constructivist mindset mentioned above, Senechal counters the prevalent view that students construct their own meaning with the view that students make meaning their own. This “own-ing,” however, never reduces to possessiveness. For Senechal, as the “debt” in the last line of her poem above suggests, the meaning in the world has already been given to us; we have to discover it, “lean

into it,” toy and tinker with it. This kind of “practice,” she describes, “is not solipsism; at its best, it is a relationship with something outside us, a relationship that grows more intimate over time. Sometimes it goes through periods of estrangement, when we realize how little we know and what beginners we are”(185). This relationship underscores that the end of study is wisdom—a process that involves humility and a search for excellence, instead of empowerment that orients all things to the self.

Grounding education in this search for wisdom and excellence also provides a way to resist the tendency towards cynicism. Senechal recognizes that “[we] cannot enter into this relationship [with what is outside us] with a sneer”(54). Study involves “honor[ing] things through thought and longing”(54), and the very act of honoring—one that begins by inviting these subjects into our interior spaces—makes us value the subject more. With this attitude towards education, Senechal sees how “[s]olitude allows us to cast off the pretense of casualness”(185) and to discover instead “something to sit up for, something to hold one’s head up for.” And it is in solitude, she adds, that one can discern a reasonable, honest, courageous response to this discovery.

Pondering the cultural loss of solitude also involves a playful turning inside out of the many buzzwords and jargon in education. Instead of the “higher-order thinking” called for in education reform, Senechal proposes “medium-order thinking.” Here, for example, she works through a Newton theorem from his Principia “[t]o show how a specific problem in a specific subject can draw on the history of the field and lead to new insights”(104). Rather than isolate the theorem to practice generic “problem-solving” (a higher order thinking skill), Senechal expands it by digging into its details, showing how it relates to other theorems and reveals the depths of simple shapes. In this concrete approach, a person can also recognize better the good, the order, perhaps even the beauty of a thing for its own sake, marveling at these further connections and sensing satisfaction in just knowing them, without having to “do” or make something or turn it toward some “productive” end.

In a humorous anecdote, she recalls being asked during a conversation with some lawyer-friends, “Do you think inside the box or outside the box?” She gave the question some thought, and then finally answered, (WARNING: SPOILER ALERT!) “inside the box.” This surprise twist points again to her call to be fully present to what is present, attentive to the inner-workings of a thing, to its inherent meaning and logic as the truest path to imaginative thinking. Viewing creativity as something that comes simply from the outside is symptomatic of the modern-day fragmentation of reality, and Senechal shows that such fragmentation contributes much to the

deterioration of our interior spaces.

The Republic of Noise reveals the beautiful paradoxes of cultivating an interior space. For example when it comes to relationships, Senechal proposes that “[t]he opposite of solitude is not community but absolute currentness”(34). With the easy access and speedy communication of social media, a universal friendliness abounds in our culture, but real friendships require discernment, patience, presence, and time. Solitude can even bring us into a deeper sense of community, broadening it to include more than only one’s immediate surroundings or only people with similar “likes.” Pointing to literary works such as *Jane Eyre* and *Antigone*, Senechal draws out the sense of interior belonging gained from “the company of principle”(67) that allows people to discern what is true and to stand up and live out these things even when it is difficult or unpopular.

Senechal concludes with a chapter entitled “Setting Up Shop,” asking the question, “which things deserve the dedication of solitude?”(209). In unfolding the answer, she shows that “[t]o take time for thought is to invite a crisis”(209)—one that can be fruitful, if often difficult and painful, for it can lead us to what is true and real. She addresses the current tendencies in our schools to want to provide unlimited choices, to emphasize group work, to tailor instruction to each individual, and to make the material “relevant.” To be sure, this may sound worthy of praise, not criticism. The problem, however, lies in the loss of a sense of solitude that these things bring with them. For example, she presents collaborative group work as being perhaps successful on the surface: the teacher steps to the side as the students work busily on their assigned tasks and create a visible product to demonstrate their accomplishment. But this typically does not leave ample time and space for individual thinking in the midst of the “majority rules” or “might over right” dynamic that often occurs in groups.

Senechal also addresses the role of the teacher, who today is often asked to be a “guide on the side,” not a “sage on the stage” with the goal of more effective student engagement. Such a goal, however, she points out, becomes superficial and sentimental when it relies simply on students’ choices or feelings. Teachers, by their lives—their questions, their attitudes, their care for both the students and their subjects—demonstrate what a life of taking a subject seriously—and enjoying it—looks like.

Lest this quest for solitude sound romantic or idealistic, Senechal emphasizes the effort and commitment involved in cultivating an interior life. It requires a shift in what we honor, what we love, what we give time to—and most definitely it requires a

risk. A few good works of literature wouldn't hurt either. Through sensing something amiss in our schools and culture and naming it a loss of solitude, Senechal invites us to live more fully, more nobly and more humbly, as a part of the world and apart from it. She invites us to educate ourselves and our children to that careful looking and listening she calls solitude so that it might expand and ignite what is deeply human in us all: wonder, gratitude, compassion, and wisdom.

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# Beyond the Liberal Arts

ROY PEACHEY

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Caldecott, Stratford, *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009).

Caldecott, Stratford, *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2012).

It is a truth universally acknowledged that we are in living in an era of educational crisis. What is less clear is the nature of that crisis. Is it ideological, structural or pedagogical? Is cultural illiteracy, progressivism or relativism the greater problem? The answer to these questions probably depends a great deal on where you are reading this review. On my side of the Atlantic, educational reform has become a fiercely political issue. In France, for example, much of the debate in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks has focused on reform of the curriculum, with Latin, German and, most recently, History suffering collateral damage as the state desperately tries to educate its citizens out of extremism. In the UK, the combative former Education Secretary, Michael Gove, also sought to reshape the curriculum, and especially the enacted curriculum (what is actually taught in the classroom as opposed to what appears on the syllabus), by reforming the examination system, while simultaneously beefing up school inspectors' powers to investigate and, where necessary, enforce so-called British values.

Political reform in Britain and France has been complemented by a lively debate among educationalists with Rémi Brague laying out his *éducation rêvée* in *Modérément Moderne* and Daisy Christodoulou setting the cat among the British establishment pigeons with *Seven Myths About Education*, to choose just two examples. It has been a lively debate, but, given the public's antipathy towards politicians and its skepticism about educationalists, the ideas of Brague and Christodoulou have had less of an impact than might have been expected.

Nevertheless, the debate continues, with an added twist in Catholic circles where many believe that at least some of our Catholic schools have lost their way and now

march to the drum of the secular world, whether that drum be examination results, inspection regimes, or unchallenged secularist assumptions. And if our schools are not flat-out marching in time with the secular world then there is still the danger that they tone down their Catholicism for fear of offending. The self-description of one British independent Catholic school could well describe the attitude of others: we “warmly welcome children of all faiths into our warm Christian environment, where 2000 years of Catholic tradition have evolved into a gentle Catholicism.”

So where do Stratford Caldecott’s two books about education—*Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* and *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education*—fit into this debate?

*Beauty for Truth’s Sake* and *Beauty in the Word* are not straightforwardly or narrowly books about school or college education: they examine the Seven Liberal Arts but are also, Caldecott himself tells us, “about the search for beauty in art, science, and the cosmos—in short, the search for Logos” (*Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, 16). They are, in other words, typical products of Caldecott’s catholic approach, an approach which, as David L. Schindler pointed out, can be surprising and unsettling, though ultimately liberating.<sup>[i]</sup> If we pick up these books wanting to learn about curriculum reform we are going to be disappointed, not because Caldecott ignores the topic but because he takes on dozens of other issues while doing so. He quotes widely, ranges broadly over time and space, and challenges preconceptions at every turn. If you are trying to work out how to shoehorn his ideas into a lesson, you are going to struggle.

Even the order of the two books is surprising. The first of the two to be written, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, deals with the Quadrivium—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music—while the second (and, to my mind, stronger) book, *Beauty in the Word*, addresses the foundational Trivium: grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. The two books clearly belong together but it makes sense to read them in reverse order.

However, it is also true that, despite initial appearances, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake* and *Beauty in the Word* are not exclusively books about the Liberal Arts. As Caldecott reminds us on more than one occasion, the Seven Liberal Arts were never meant to be the be-all and end-all of education. They were part of a wider educational and theological project and were acutely responsive to historical conditions, which is why, “if the Seven Liberal Arts model is to become an adequate basis for education today, whether in colleges or in less formal settings, it needs to be broadened and adapted” (*Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, 27). However, this perception raises awkward questions in turn. How is the model to be broadened? How adapted?

The significance of these questions is made clear if we look at some of the more surprising institutions to have jumped onto the Liberal Arts bandwagon. The University of Exeter is one of several British universities to have introduced Liberal Arts degrees recently, but what it means by the Liberal Arts is quite different from the manifesto outlined by Stratford Caldecott. “Imagine a degree,” the University of Exeter’s promotional video begins, “where one minute you’re studying the art of reading and writing through the words of iconic figures like Barack Obama, to the next minute when you’re exploring uses of the body in religion, pornography and advertising.”<sup>[ii]</sup>

Clearly this is not the renovation of the Liberal Arts that Stratford Caldecott was arguing for, but it does illustrate the problem. If we agree with him—and I do—that our schools and colleges are afflicted by the fragmentation of knowledge and the separation of faith and reason then the Liberal Arts model certainly provides one possible solution. However, what no one has yet done is provide a comprehensive analysis of our educational woes together with a practical solution to the difficulties we face that could then become the basis for a widely practiced educational renewal. Stratford Caldecott was himself fully aware of this and had begun work on developing his educational vision into teaching materials before his untimely death, but there is still a great deal more to be done.

This is not to say that Caldecott writes only about ideas. Indeed, some of the strongest passages in the books are those where he draws out the teaching implications of his forays into the worlds of theology, philosophy and much else besides. In *Beauty in the Word*, for instance, there is a wonderful section on the importance of memory which anticipates some of the arguments used by Christodoulou in *Seven Myths About Education* but which goes one step further by also making use of the thought of St. Augustine. Later on in the same book there is a fascinating section on how to implement the insight that the communion of the school originates in the Mass. Caldecott was not a schoolteacher but he was alive to the specific needs of children in their particular situations (though it is also true that “Dreaming a Catholic School” in *Beauty in the Word* is not wholly convincing as a curriculum model, not in the least because it is so brief).

These two books are challenging and invigorating but they are by no means the final educational word, partly because, in casting his net so widely, Caldecott inadvertently makes it tricky for others to develop his thoughts into practical action. As J.R.R. Tolkien, one of his heroes, demonstrated, it is possible to be too successful. Wanting to create a mythology for England, Tolkien was so wildly successful in

creating (or re-creating) Middle Earth that what followed was not a revival of English lore but mere fantasy. Similarly, Stratford Caldecott's vision was so wide that it becomes difficult to know where to begin in implementing it.

Maybe the study of history is the place to begin. While Caldecott draws upon the work of Christopher Dawson, I feel sure that he would also have appreciated the writings of François Hartog, whose analysis of what he calls "regimes of historicity," a culture's understanding of the interrelationship between past, present and future, resonates strongly with the thinking of Pope Benedict XVI. Hartog argues that our current regime of historicity is shaped by an omnipresent and often unacknowledged presentism, which we might gloss as an inability to escape the prejudices of our own age.<sup>[iii]</sup> If our students (and our educational institutions) are working with a philosophy of history that is essentially shaped by presentist thinking, we are never going to be able to implement the ideas developed in Caldecott's books. However, if we get our relationship with history right, then we can do more than rethink the foundations of education, as Stratford Caldecott did: we can start the rebuilding.

[i] "In Memoriam: Stratford Caldecott (1953–2014)," *Communio* 41 (Summer 2014): 504–506.

[ii] <http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/liberalarts/bamlibarts/>. Accessed 26 April 2015.

[iii] François Hartog and Saskia Brown, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). See also, François Hartog, *Croire en l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013).

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# A Reason Open to God

J. STEVEN BROWN

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Pope Benedict XVI, *A Reason Open to God: On Universities, Education, and Culture* ([ed. J. Steven Brown] Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013).

Pope Benedict XVI characterizes the challenge we face as a great “educational emergency.” But what is at the root of this “emergency” and how are we to respond? The problem cannot be resolved by means of technocratic solutions. Rather, it is related to our inability to communicate certainty and meaning at a time of a profound theological and anthropological crisis—we simply do not know who we are without God.

As editor of a collection of addresses by Pope Benedict XVI on education, universities, and culture, I chose as its title *A Reason Open to God: On Universities, Education, and Culture* to suggest what I believe is at the root of much of this “emergency” as Benedict understands it: a reduced use of reason, cut off, that is, from transcendence, mystery, and the question of God. These days, it is as though the only sure things in life were those that can be touched, manipulated, demonstrated, and empirically registered. Anything not “understood” by these methods is taken to be fundamentally irrelevant to human existence. Naturally a “reduced reason” has no small effect on the question of God and its relevance for human life. But are these methods the only ones for knowing?

Benedict’s answer to this question is clear in his insistence to broaden reason through a greater dialogue between faith and reason. In his own words, “A purely positivistic culture that tried to drive the question concerning God into the subjective realm, as being unscientific, would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities, and hence a disaster for humanity, with very grave consequences” (235-36).

In *A Reason Open to God* Benedict XVI provides the keys to solving the “educational emergency.” He invites us into the “service (diakonia) of truth,” beginning with

“broadening our concept of reason and its application.” (17-18). As I wrote in the preface,

The Pope’s contribution presents 2000 years of lived tradition with a striking newness that is able to respond to our contemporary problems. It is my hope that, once these texts have been studied, the reader will also see, as I do, that the contribution made by Pope Benedict XVI to this crucial and significant issue will have an enduring, historical impact. (viii)

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# The Generative Role of Christianity in Western Culture

JAMES GASTON

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Christopher Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education* (Catholic University Press, 2010).

This classic book by Christopher Dawson (1889–1970) first appeared in 1961 and it remains until this day as perhaps the most brilliantly trenchant assessment of the plight of modern education in the West. That he should present such an incisive critique comes as no surprise for Dawson was one of the greatest Catholic intellectuals of his or any time. His life spanned a goodly portion of the 20th century, and his intellectual pursuits reflected his deep concern with this tumultuous period. He bequeathed a treasure trove of over thirty books and 200 articles assessing literally the history of mankind, with an especial focus on the West and the Roman Catholic Church.

In order to appreciate fully Dawson's argument in *The Crisis of Western Education*, it is important to situate it within the broad context of his sweeping and synthetic scholarly vision. Key to this vision was his childhood and formal education because both made him unusually aware of the nature of the radical change in Western culture and the advent of modernity. In Wales as a youth he witnessed first-hand the desultory effects of the changing economic and social order associated with the march of industrialism. At Oxford he was one of the last to benefit from an integrated liberal arts education founded upon the great Western tradition of classical humanism; he relished this excellent education but also clearly grasped its limitations. This same educational experience formed the minds of other great contemporary scholars, such as G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, C. S. Lewis, and Jacques Maritain to name but a few. Common to all of them was the fear that 20th century Europe, and by extension the world, was in a severe crisis, and each investigated the origins and nature of this tragedy in their distinctive manner.

Dawson's view was that the crisis of the 20th century was due primarily to the

modernists' failure to appreciate fully the role of Christianity in the formation and character of Europe, and this omission was in turn due to their inability or unwillingness to grasp the integral role of religion in the life of man. Such a unitive vision of culture, which had been partially present in the classical humanist view of man, had been replaced, argued Dawson, by a secular humanist vision often pointedly anti-Christian and abetted by the onslaught of utilitarianism, scientific specialization and technology. All of Dawson's work focuses on some aspect of the importance of religion to man, of Christianity to Europe, and of the multiple detrimental ramifications of modern materialism for the West and the world. But a key concern of his was the central and devastating role of modern education in the malformation of the mind and the advance of the state. A summary of this concern constitutes *The Crisis of Western Education*. He approaches his subject in a tri-partite manner.

In Part One, "The History of Liberal Education in the West," Dawson renders this difficult and extensive subject in a manner that is both brilliant and incapable of summation. For those interested in this important and complex subject, there is little need to venture to further sources except for clarifying detail. Simply put, there is no better account of the history of liberal education in the West.

In Part Two, "The Situation of Christian Education in the Modern World," Dawson addresses the real task at hand. The problem, Dawson argues, is that the old humanist educational tradition and paradigm is being replaced by a compulsory state education format, democratic and utilitarian in character, based upon the nation-state model and by the ideal of scientific specialization. The challenge is to find a new method of study that will counteract this erroneous approach. Two recent alternatives have been unable to stem this disintegration, or to offer a more perfected vision of a true liberal arts education. First, the "general study" of Western civilization, signifying a general integrative study of culture, or a "core" of courses, falls short because it fails to acknowledge the Christian vision of the cosmos as the dominant unitive principle of Western culture. As a result it vitiates our attempt to interpret our past because the inherent aversion to the non-material in effect causes such general "subjects" to become "an amorphous collection of alternative courses." The second alternative, often referred to as a "great books" type of education, is misleading because it is overly attentive to classical humanist sources or too culturally specialized in its focus on "the highest level of cultivated intelligence" (102-04). Dawson argues that the only real alternative is the study of Christian culture because Christianity did in fact form Europe, and because culture as a whole constitutes the only true holistic object for the study of man.

For Dawson, culture should be understood as a subject that constitutes the whole pattern of human life and thought in a living society. Culture constitutes a definite historical unity and is much more real and extensive than any political unit, and it alone provides us with an intelligible field of study. Such an approach requires both a sociological and historical perspective. However, he astutely warns us that “[w]hat we need is not an encyclopedic knowledge of all the products of Christian culture, but a study of the culture process itself from its spiritual and theological roots, through its organic historical growth to its cultural fruits. It is this organic relation between theology, history and culture which provides the integrative principle in Catholic higher education, and the only one that is capable of taking the place of the old classical humanism . . .” (105–6). Stated most succinctly, Dawson’s vision is truly incarnational, for he argues that education must embrace the chain of relationships that run from Christ to the Church, to man, to his intellect, and, ultimately, to the cultural expression of his overall vision. It is only in such a series of relations, via religion and culture, that one can discern man in an intelligible manner, and teach him.

In Part Three, “Western Man and the Technological Order,” Dawson laments the sub-religious, pagan and technological character of the modern world. Modern man is dehumanized and, hence, selfish, and the present spiritual and moral vacuum facilitates the rise of a police state under the guise of “the democratic way of life.” Catholic intellectuals and educators must revitalize Western culture by conveying the reality of, and truly good way of life associated with, the Christian religion and culture. In Dawson’s mind, the best hope for such re-evangelization lies in the United States because our Founding principles would engender the rise of centers of educational renewal, such as the present-day Pontifical John Paul II Institute.

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