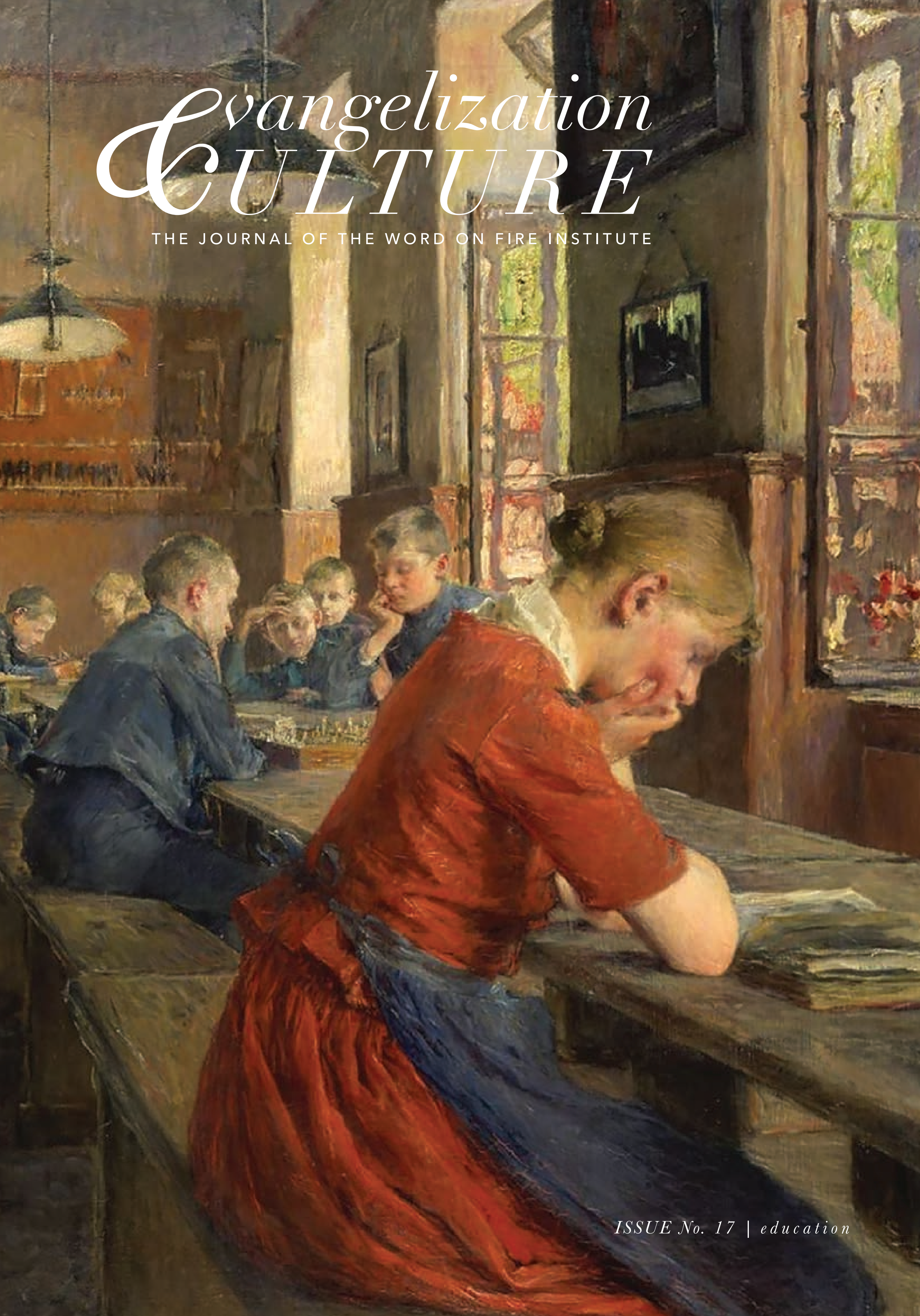

Evangelization & Culture

THE JOURNAL OF THE WORD ON FIRE INSTITUTE

ISSUE No. 17 | education

ON THE COVER: Gotthardt Kuehl, *Lübecker Waisenhaus*, 1894.

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AUTUMN 2023

THE JOURNAL OF THE WORD ON FIRE INSTITUTE

ART: Gotthardt Kuehl, *Im Waisenhaus*, 1886.

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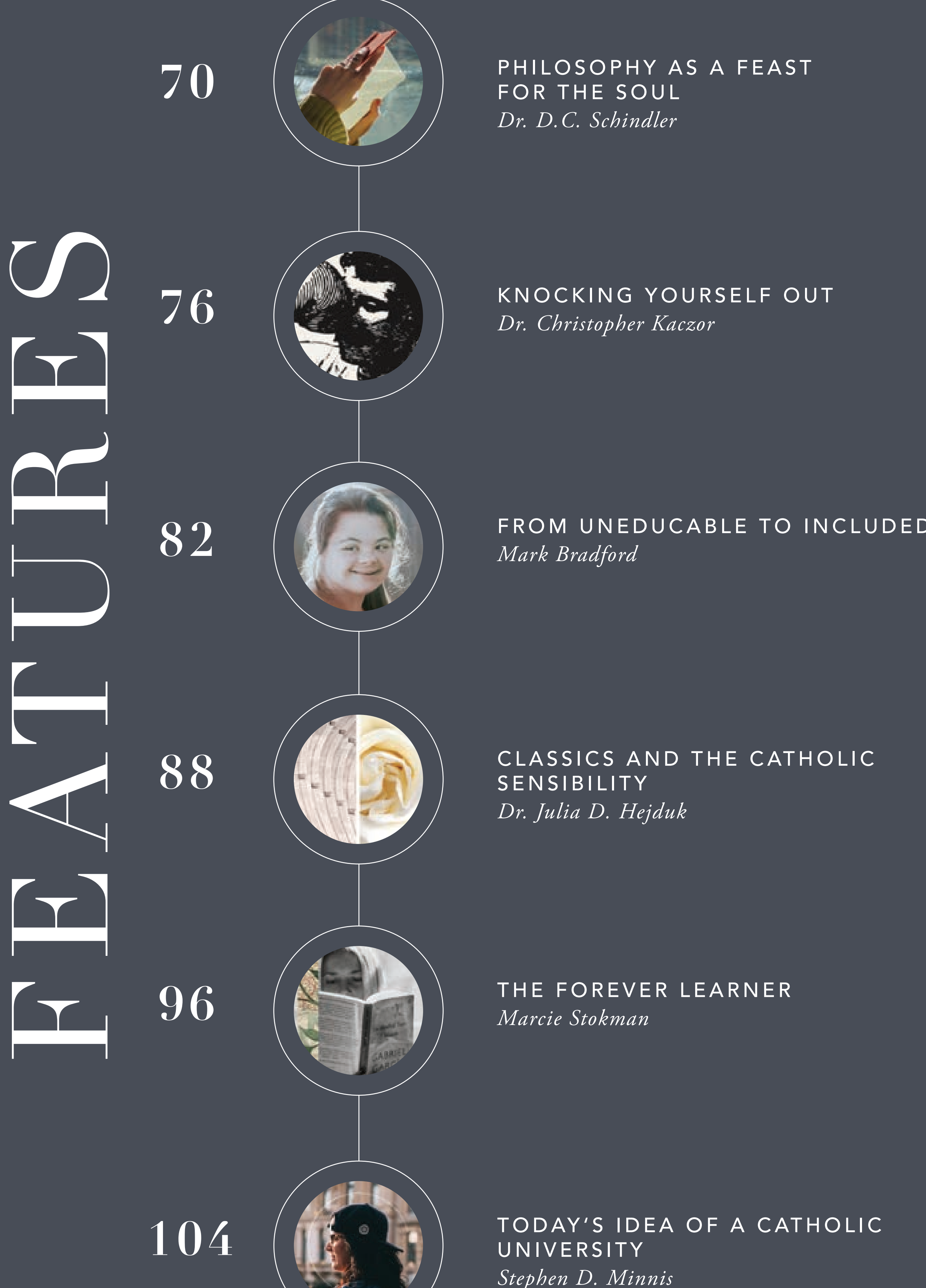

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From the Desk of Bishop Robert Barron

Education matters. I attended Church-affiliated educational institutions from first grade through graduate school, from Holy Name Elementary School in Birmingham, Michigan, to the Institut Catholique in Paris. That years-long immersion massively shaped my character, my sense of values, and my entire way of looking at the world. In fact, my whole life changed and was given its definitive direction when I was fourteen years old and a student at Fenwick High School outside Chicago. I learned of Thomas Aquinas' arguments for the existence of God, and I became so fascinated that I started down a path that I've never left. At its best, education opens us to what elevates the soul and, ultimately, teaches us to be saints.

It also shows us that everything we study is related to God. In his *Idea of a University*, Newman argues that the purpose of a university education is to cultivate the "liberal" mind—that is, the free (*liber*) mind, which is free precisely from utility. Religion, philosophy, history, literature, and art are the highest sort of disciplines, for they are subordinated to nothing outside of themselves. They exist for their own sake, endowed with intrinsic value. In this, they are to be differentiated from the practical arts and sciences, which exist for the sake of something else. One should never, of course, denigrate the sciences, but one should have the sense to subordinate them to those disciplines that are properly liberal.

This is why so many Catholic colleges and universities were dedicated to the liberal arts. Though Catholic institutions of higher learning have always been willing to offer the practical subjects, they stressed the liberal arts precisely because their founders were in the meaning business. The liberal arts are situated above the practical sciences, but among the liberal arts themselves, there is a sort of hierarchy, for all of them are reflective of and finally serve the supreme good, who is God. The most useless and therefore highest discipline of all is that which speaks of the source of meaning, that which treats of God. I believe there is a correlation between the disappearance of the liberal arts and the demonstrable rise in anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts—especially among the young today. When we push the subjects that treat of meaning to the side, are we surprised that people are finding life less and less meaningful?

This issue of *Evangelization & Culture* takes up this timely theme. You will read about Catholic university education, homeschool education, classical education, and special education, as well as the various subjects that shape the mind and heart in school: philosophy, beauty, logic, science, the environment, and more. My hope is that this issue gives you a renewed passion to cultivate a rich learning atmosphere in your homes, parishes, schools, and communities, one that lifts the soul to the things of God and that interprets everything—politics, arts, culture, etc.—from the standpoint of his incarnate Son.

+Robert Barron

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A Word from the Institute

Friends,

This summer, Gallup released the results of a new poll that demonstrated that belief in what they termed "spiritual entities" continues to decline. Belief in God, angels, the devil, heaven, and hell are seen more and more as lacking credibility.[1] Though believers in such spiritual realities still maintain a clear majority in the culture, the evident decline from previous surveys tracking these beliefs should be taken as alarming. What should believers do?

A multiplicity of approaches and strategies are necessary, one of which is to take a thorough look at the Church's educational practices and sincerely consider their efficacy. The Church has very specific doctrines that articulate what it believes about God, angels, the devil, heaven, and hell. These doctrines provide a language through which we can come to understand what the Church believes and why. It is critical that this language be taught, as it enables the Church to have the means to communicate not only internally but externally. The doctrinal language of the Church, taught and imparted effectively and faithfully, delivers the faithful from merely mythological understandings of sacred realities and allows them to see what differentiates the Church's faith from other religions.

However, education in the Church's doctrines is not merely a matter of abstraction or learning a kind of theological grammar. Salvation in Christ is not simply a matter of mind or of checking off a list of the correct ideas. Education in the faith requires witness, testimony to one's relationship with Christ and how one came to know, love, and serve him. This can be presented in words, but it most powerfully displays itself in a way of life that demonstrates how the revelatory truths of the faith expressed in doctrines are concretized in actions and activities. Education in the Church's faith falters and fails if it is not rooted in an invitation to accept a unique way of life. If the teacher does not embody this way of life in Christ-like behaviors, then the risk is that the doctrines might be presented correctly, but the meaning and mysticism of those doctrines will be thwarted.

It is clear from the Gallup poll that the prevailing culture cannot be relied upon as a means of supporting the Church's educational endeavors. In former days, there might have been enough residual influence of the Church's doctrines and way of life to help sustain the Church and enable it to have cultural relevance. This past is not the present. All the baptized must be intentional in their understanding and practice of the Church's faith. Concern for the Church's educational institutions and endeavors can no longer be delegated to a limited and limiting cadre of religious, lay professionals, or church bureaucrats. New forms of religious institutes are now necessary, as well as schools and universities. A catechesis directed by religious studies theorists must give way to one led by witnesses, one that is well-educated but that ultimately demonstrates the fullness of the Catholic faith in an evangelically fruitful way of life.

I believe you will find this issue of *Evangelization & Culture*, with its emphasis on education, extremely helpful. I hope its many insights and proposals enhance your own appropriation of the Church's educational mission, which is always evangelical and never just simply informational.

In Christ,

Rev. Stephen C. Grunow

Father Stephen Grunow
CEO / Executive Producer
Word on Fire

[1] Megan Brenan, "Belief in Five Spiritual Entities Edges Down to New Lows," Gallup, July 20, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/508886/belief-five-spiritual-entities-edges-down-new-lows.aspx.

PHOTO: Valery, Pexels.

MIDNIGHT OIL
musings since we last met

DR. TOD WORNER

In 1961, when interviewed by Esquire magazine, William F. Buckley asserted, "I would rather be governed by the first two thousand people in the telephone directory than by the Harvard University faculty." Shocking the sensibilities of a sophisticated readership convinced that ivory-tower intellectuals should run the world in a form of techno-geniocracy, Buckley quietly reveled in making them squirm. What those intellectuals lack, he implied, is the chastening gift of common sense.

This is why I think it is brilliant (as only God can be) that Christ selected fishermen as his original disciples. Now, I know, not *all* of the disciples were fishermen. He also chose a tax collector, a political revolutionary, and a woman possessed by demons. But everyone of them was familiar with struggle and suffering, with the grit and grime of daily life in Roman-occupied Palestine.

What happens when you are raised in a religiously minded culture where life is short, death is unforgiving, and political oppression is in the air you breathe? You quickly forego abstractions and plant your feet on the solid ground of practicality. This doesn't mean that a rich Jewish faith didn't inform the disciples. Rather, their faith guided them in daily life, but daily life was consumed with practical questions: How do I make a living? How do I feed my family? How do I educate my children?

It is this rootedness in the practical questions of daily life that made them the best students of (and, ultimately, Apostles for) the Lord. To be sure, Jesus taught timeless truths and performed jaw-dropping miracles. He engaged with theologians and governors. But it was when he was sitting around a fire with the disciples that we Catholics, in the twenty-first century, are most blessed by the clarifying questions of the men who still smelled like fish—by the figures Jesus plucked out of the telephone directory.

Questions like "Would you teach us to pray?" led to the Lord's Prayer. "How many times must I forgive my brother?" revealed the limitless nature of God's mercy (and our call to offer mercy ourselves). "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" showed that egotism is devilish and that humbling ourselves like children is essential to spiritual greatness. "How will we feed all of these people?" reminded us that while we are dependent on God, we are also the hands of God. "Why could we not drive [this demon] out?" unveiled the profound power of prayer and fasting.

These questions paired with the mistakes the disciples made give me clarity surrounding what God desires from me and hope that if Jesus could endure the brokenness of Matthew and the bumblings of Peter, I just may have a chance.

To be sure, in our Catholic faith, we need our own "faculty at Harvard" to explore the wonder that resides in the highest questions. But we also need the "folks in the phone book" to purify, clarify, and keep us grounded in the truth that will lead us on our daily walk to the heavenly mansions of the Lord.

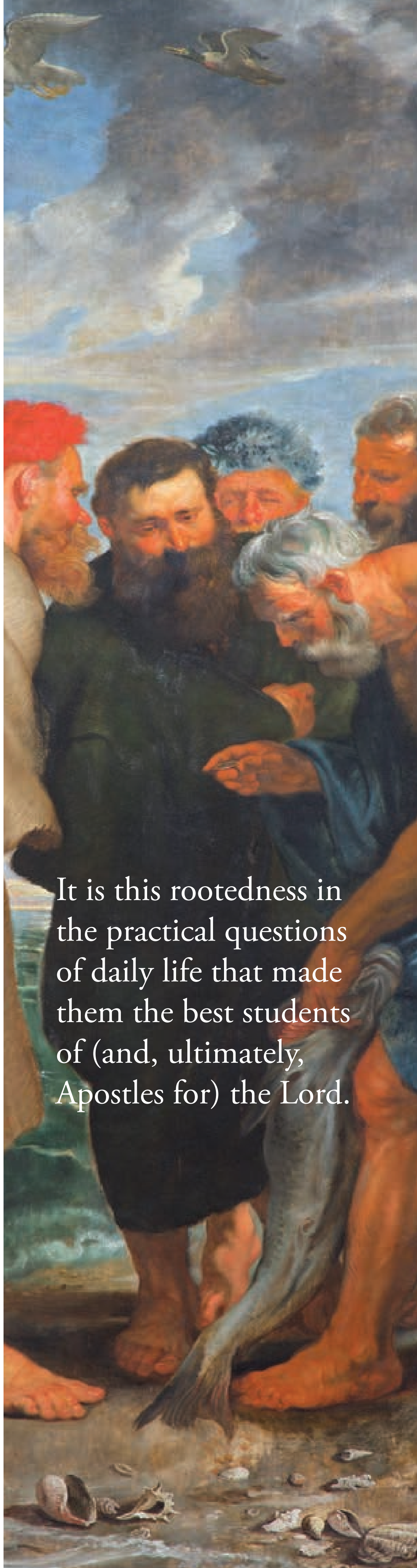
It is this rootedness in the practical questions of daily life that made them the best students of (and, ultimately, Apostles for) the Lord.

IMAGE: Jacob Jordaens *The Miraculous Draught of Fish* (triptych), 1618, iStock

To be sure, Churchill's "University of One" is a testimony to hunger and self-discipline in pursuit of knowledge.

In his autobiography, *My Early Life*, Winston Churchill recalled encountering historical figures with whom and concepts with which he was unfamiliar. Having concluded his years at Harrow and Sandhurst, he found himself heading off to India to fulfill his military obligations. But his mind was restless. "One day," he wrote, "before I left England, a friend of mine had said, 'Christ's gospel was the last word in Ethics.' This sounded good, but what were Ethics? They had never been mentioned to me at Harrow or Sandhurst."[1] "Then," he remembered, "someone had used the phrase 'the Socratic method.' What was that? It was apparently a way of giving your friend his head in an argument and progging him into a pit by cunning questions. Who was Socrates, anyhow?"[2]

A man of irrepressible action, Churchill had little respect for his contemporaries at universities "who were only in their books, while we were commanding men and guarding the Empire. . . . Nevertheless," he paused, "I had sometimes resented the apt and copious information which some of them seemed to possess, and I now wished I could find a competent teacher whom I could listen to and cross-examine for an hour or so every day."[3]

Things would come to a head when Churchill's father, Randolph, whom Churchill idolized even though his father disdained him, peppered him with questions on the Grand Remonstrance of 1641. "What did I know about that?" Winston asked himself. "I said that in the end the Parliament beat the king and cut his head off." Once again, Randolph shook his head in disappointment. "'Here,' said my father, 'is a grave parliamentary question affecting the whole structure of our constitutional history, lying near the center of the task you have been set, and you do not in the slightest degree appreciate the issues involved.' I was puzzled by his concern; I could not see at the time why it should matter so much. Now I wanted to know more about it."

Thus began the unending autodidact phase (which he dubbed "The University of One") of Winston Churchill's life. Once Churchill was stationed with the 4th Queen's Own Hussars in India, he began writing his mother to send him books: Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Macaulay's *Critical and Historical Essays*, Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Schopenhauer on *Pessimism*, Malthus on *Population*, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. He even had his mother send him twenty-seven volumes of the *Annual Register* (a record of British public events founded by Edmund Burke), from which Churchill would pen a stance on some parliamentary issue and then read the debates that ensued. This exercise was intended, as he

PHOTO: Alamy.

remembered, "to build up a scaffolding of logical and consistent views which will perhaps tend to the creation of a logical and consistent mind."[4]

"It was a curious education," Churchill mused, "first because I approached it with an empty hungry mind, and with fairly strong jaws; and what I got I bit; secondly because I had no one to tell me: 'This is discredited.' 'You should read the answer to that by so and so; the two together will give you the gist of the argument.' 'There is a much better book on that subject,' and so forth. I now began to envy those young cubs at the university who had the fine scholars to tell them what was what; professors who had devoted their lives to mastering and focusing ideas in every branch of learning; who were eager to distribute the treasures they had gathered before they were overtaken by the night."[5]

To be sure, Churchill's "University of One" is a testimony to hunger and self-discipline in pursuit of knowledge. And, in many of my lectures on Churchill, I have relayed this story as a gleaming example of the power in the hands of the autodidact. And while one must beware *who* your teacher is at universities nowadays, I lament that Churchill's faith (in his own testimony) suffered because much of what he read (from Gibbon and Darwin, Winwood Reade and William Lecky) was dubious if not antagonistic to Christianity. Such reading led him, by his own admission, to an anti-religious streak that only ended with a vague but good-natured agnosticism. "I could hardly be called a pillar of the Church," Churchill once quipped. "I am more in the nature of a buttress, for I support it from the outside."[6]

"Of course if I had been at a University," Churchill sighed, "my difficulties might have been resolved by the eminent professors and divines who are gathered there. At any rate, they would have shown me equally convincing books putting the opposite point of view."[7] But he read no equally convincing books because he didn't know what they were. No one was there to advise him on the right choice. What would Churchill's faith have been like if he had been mentored by John Henry Newman, Ronald Knox, or an earlier version of C.S. Lewis? What would Churchill's religious reasoning have sounded like if he poured over Augustine and Aquinas, Pascal and Chesterton? No one will ever know.

What is the moral of this story?

It is extraordinary to be an eager, disciplined autodidact. It is a true path to knowledge. But to arrive at wisdom, we need more than books. We need a thoughtful guide and an invested mentor.

PHOTO: Priscilla Du Preez, Unsplash.

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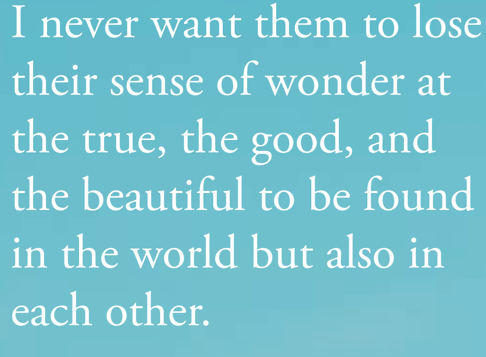
When I was a boy, my dad could make an adventure out of anything. A visit to the police department (to see an officer friend, mind you) would lead to my introduction to the mechanics of an unholstered pistol. A stop at his office (he was assistant superintendent of schools at the time) would introduce me to a colleague and Second World War veteran who had survived a gunshot to the head. "Look at the scar," they would insist as both my dad and the veteran would eagerly point to an unmissable gouge in his forehead. A trip to the bank would find not only my dad's checks but my dad and me touring the vault where all of the money is held. Without a hint of wackiness, my father was a modern day Herr Drosselmeyer, and I was the eager godson champing for the next trick.

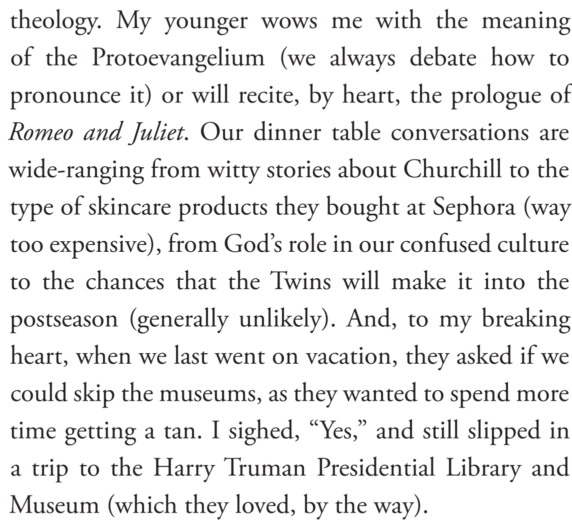
And so I would do the same for my two daughters. "Weekday Adventures" is what we called them. Week after week for years (until pesky school got in the way and we converted to "Weekend Adventures") we would jump in the car and ride off into wonder. "Where should we go today?" I asked my wide-eyed munchkins smiling back in the rearview mirror. Our visits were mixtures of beauty and education, the fantastic and the fun. At times, we would go to the Minnesota State Capitol with its ornate columns, its walls adorned with timeless legal quotes from Sir Edward Coke and Edmund Burke, and, of course, we would smooth-talk our way to the rooftop, where we would mug for the camera next to the gold-leafed quadriga of horses, chariot, and charioteer knows as "The Progress of the State of Minnesota." At other times, we traipsed through the majestic James J. Hill Library, explored rooms in the Landmark Center where famous mobsters were put on trial, and ended with bags of gummy bears and chocolates from Candyland, a legendary St. Paul institution. Art museums and mini-golf, the St. Paul Cathedral and the Sculpture Gardens, Twins' games and bowling. Sometimes we just biked to the neighborhood pool, where I would launch them from underwater (called "headshots") until we were all bleary and exhausted. We ate mostaccioli at Cossetta's and fish and chips at Brit's, lobster rolls at the St. Paul Hotel and nachos at Joe Senser's. And ice cream, ice cream, ice cream. I still remember holding Annabel's hand with Vivian on my shoulders until it was time for them to switch. It was absolute heaven.

Today, my girls are in high school. Grown so fast. And they are learning so much. My older can speak eloquently about Virgil's *Aeneid* or nuances of moral

PHOTO: Mike Cox, Unsplash.



I never want them to lose their sense of wonder at the true, the good, and the beautiful to be found in the world but also in each other.



theology. My younger wows me with the meaning of the Protoevangelium (we always debate how to pronounce it) or will recite, by heart, the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*. Our dinner table conversations are wide-ranging from witty stories about Churchill to the type of skincare products they bought at Sephora (way too expensive), from God's role in our confused culture to the chances that the Twins will make it into the postseason (generally unlikely). And, to my breaking heart, when we last went on vacation, they asked if we could skip the museums, as they wanted to spend more time getting a tan. I sighed, "Yes," and still slipped in a trip to the Harry Truman Presidential Library and Museum (which they loved, by the way).

And what exactly was the point of all of this—our "Weekday and Weekend Adventures"? It was not to pack their brains with facts or experiences in the hopes of, someday, getting an edge in an Ivy League University application (kind of like playing Mozart for babies from a strictly calculating angle—Blech! Just play Mozart because his music is beautiful and helps them fall asleep). No, my adventures with my baby girls were simply because I love them. And I want to spend time with them. And I never want them to lose their sense of wonder at the true, the good, and the beautiful to be found in the world but also in each other. What is most vivid on my adventures is not the architecture (even though majestic) or the art (though Viv did favor a particularly gory Crucifixion piece again and again) or the golf score (though I usually lost). Instead, what I can sense to this very day is the weight of my girl on my shoulders, their soft but firm grip of my hand, the high pitch of their young laughter, and the songs they would make up as we drove back home (for twenty-five miles, Annabel drowsily sang a self-composed paean to the golden ball on top of the Capitol—"Have you SEEN the golden ball? Have you SEEN the golden ball? HIGH up in the morning! Have You. Seen. That?").

The poet Robert Frost once purportedly noted, "I am not a teacher, but an awakener." In awakening my daughters to the loveliness (and the fun!) of the world around them, I hope I have also awakened them to just how lovely they are and how very, very much I love them.

After all, that's how every adventure should end.

An indispensable part of education is not simply what you know but "what you realize."

When I started medical school, we had an orientation that was a week long. You heard me correctly—a *week* long. Curriculum introduction, financial aid paperwork (man, there was a lot of that), faculty meet-and-greets, expectations and honor codes; it never seemed to end. And as the week wound down, we found ourselves listening to a study specialist who—in fifteen minutes—was going to demystify the secret to studying a mountain of material in a minimum amount of time.

She wasn't inspiring.

Rifling through a mess of papers, making little eye contact, and pacing nervously, this guide, this mentor—this Virgil for fifty Dantes lost in the wood midway through their lives—was supposed to show us the way. Fumbling and fidgeting, her talk never quite began. As the clock ticked, she muttered a few inaudible words before finishing with "The key is to study two hours out of school for every hour in school." And then she was gone. A few in the room with math degrees crunched the numbers—eight hours per day in class equals how much studying out of class? We all sank a bit deeper into our personal anxieties.

Subsequently, the years of classroom learning were filled with wall-to-wall information, countless handouts, and cramped hands from endless note-taking. Gross Anatomy and Biochemistry, Pathology and Pharmacology, Physiology and Physical Examination filled our forty-plus-hour weeks in the classroom or the lab. Quizzes succeeded quizzes. Tests followed tests. And while my recollections are a bit bleary from those days, one particular damning memory stands out. In almost any of the classes I attended where the professor was bulleting through their material, it was a fight to simply keep up. And if a student raised their hand to ask a question, the class universally groaned. The collective annoyance was palpable. Even I felt it. And the querying student sheepishly shrank back in his seat. The message in that groan was clear—it's not about understanding (*that* is self-actualization); *this* is about simply ingesting (basic survival).

To be sure, I made it through. And, yes, those millions of facts found their way into my experience, which, mercifully, transformed knowledge into wisdom. But I wonder if it all couldn't have been done differently. Sometimes, across the landscape of education, we overemphasize knowledge and efficiency and minimize experience and wonder. If you are in class eight hours per day and (thank you, study specialist) expected to study sixteen hours per day, there may be (just maybe) too much information. And the likelihood is that no one has asked the first and fundamental question: what can we cut? Furthermore, anytime a student actually *thinks* and wants to clarify something, they should not be harangued and told "just shut up and memorize." While I understand the need to handle immense material and stress and allow experience to utilize and purify down the road, we risk making our bright young students incurious, passive, passionless drones who have had wonder bled from them and replaced with soulless efficiency. And that's not formation. That is deformation.

Former Secretary of State George Shultz tells the story of an MIT instructor promoted to full professor and lauded for his impressive knowledge. In an august ceremony, the professor thanked his colleagues and administration for honoring him but admitted that, even more than *their* approval, he wanted the appreciation of the practical folks he once knew back home who were living their lives on Main Street. And so some intrepid reporter did their duty and visited the professor's hometown in Maine. Asked about the "local boy who made good," an old farmer remembered what a bright young boy the professor had been. But then, with a shaking head, he confessed, "He knows everything, but he don't realize nothin'!"

An indispensable part of education is not simply what you know but "what you realize." I have come to comprehend this since medical school. And the farmer, with his gritty real-world experience, understood this about his hometown acquaintance. Knowledge is the acquisition of facts layered heavily, like the earth's strata, one atop the other. "Realization," on the other hand, is an almost mystical—ineffable—perception or discernment of truth that lies eager for discovery within the mountain of facts. And what does it take to realize something as opposed to simply knowing it? Time and patience, wonder and humility, intuition and common sense, experience and sacrifice, hard work and tenacity. And love. To learn facts doesn't require love. But to seek truth does. This wisdom comes, in part, from the classroom, but it does not reside there. Rather, it comes into full flowering in a messy, gritty life earnestly lived.

Without question, I learned a lot in medical school.

But, ever since, I have realized even more.

PHOTO: Cottonbro Studio, Pexels.

I've never quite liked the word education. It strikes me as impersonal and antiseptic—too institutional. If one is to educate someone else, it seems to happen at some clunky remove. Formation, that's where the magic is. To form someone is to know them soul-deep—to mold, forge, craft them—down to the marrow—out of earnest love and pained devotion. To educate is to kindly pass on facts; to form is to "will the good of the other." To educate is to tell; to form is to accompany. Today, and forevermore, let us move beyond mere education to loving formation. Let us not cut off our children and our charges, settling for information. Rather, let us overwhelm them with the intensified sky, the law of the stars, and the winds of homecoming.

Ah, Not to Be Cut Off[8]

BY RAINER MARIA RILKE

Ah, not to be cut off,
not through the slightest partition
shut out from the law of the stars.
The inner—what is it?
if not intensified sky,
hurled through with birds and deep
with the winds of homecoming.

PHOTO: Yuting Gao, Pexels.

Books Received

- It seems only appropriate to begin with a few Word on Fire publications. The third volume of *The Word on Fire Bible: The Pentateuch* is yet another work of sheer delight. To immerse oneself into the origins of our journey with God, and to do so in the company of sublime art and timeless insights from saints and scholars, converts and commentators, is to *live* with the transcendentals—truth, goodness, and beauty. Along with everyone else, I can't wait for the next volume.

- Word on Fire excels at bringing brilliant minds and exquisite works of faith back from the oblivion in which they sometimes rest. *The Mystical Body of Christ* by the rousing mind of Archbishop Fulton Sheen is a wonderful reminder of who the Church is, not only in the modern world but in your life and mine. *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: Selected and Annotated Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* unfolds (at the talented hand of literary scholar Dr. Holly Ordway) the genius of the faith-filled but long-suffering Jesuit poet. Though his poetic approach can challenge, Dr. Ordway's guidance and a faithful tenacity will open the treasures of Hopkins that will deepen your spiritual life one poem at a time. In *Evangelization & Ideology*, Dr. Matthew Petrusek challenges with an incisive look at the secular ideologies that overtake our culture and seek to eclipse our faith. Dr. Petrusek is a sharp thinker and a sharper writer. Don't miss this excellent treatment of a terribly relevant issue. Finally, Matthew Warner has crafted *Why They Follow: Lessons in Church Communication from That One Lost Sheep*. Mr. Warner offers timely and much-needed insight on how Church leaders can practically and capably draw lost sheep back into the fold.

- Ignatius Press sent me *This Thing of Darkness*, a novel that explores love and war, fact and fiction, all surrounding the intriguing figure of Bela Lugosi, famous for his film portrayal of Count Dracula. To have horror films, fascinating characters, and gripping dialogue all against a backdrop of faith is something new and entrancing. My only hope is that authors Fiorella De Maria and K.V. Turley are already working on their next book.

- If you have not explored Ignatius Critical Editions (series edited by Joseph Pearce) in their entirety, now is the time. Resurrecting classics and offering classic and contemporary criticism that is both intellectual *and* faith-filled is so refreshing. They were kind enough to send me *Moby Dick*, and it did not disappoint. Whether it is William Shakespeare or Jane Austen, Herman Melville or Romantic poets, Ignatius Critical Editions are not to be missed.

- Christopher Hall has penned *A Different Way: Recentering the Christian Life Around Following Jesus*. Mr. Hall works to remind us of the refreshing simplicity to be found in following the way of Christ. An enjoyable read.

PHOTO: lil artsy, Pexels.

- When I was in medical school, there were certain study guides that were winsome yet puckish, like *Microbiology Made Ridiculously Simple* or *Biochemistry Made Ridiculously Simple*. Louis Hall crafted *Angelic Twaddle Comics (Volume I)* to demystify and render approachable (to young and old) teachings from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. From concupiscence to Marian medals, from fear to vanity, from saints to Judgment Day, this little book allows cartoons, *Catechism* references, and conversation-starting questions to lead you to a deeper faith with God.

- Finally, as a book-lover, I was ecstatic to receive a box of Cluny Media's works. From Georges Bernanos to Charles Péguy, from Sigrid Undset to Jacques Maritain, these classy volumes bring the greatest hits and the lesser knowns of great minds and towering spirits of the faith. I am always nervous to peruse the Cluny Media website (clunymedia.com) because I will just want another dozen or two of their works. Check them out!

To submit books for consideration in Books Received*, please send to tworner@wordonfire.org.*

Dr. Tod Worner is a husband, father, practicing internal medicine physician, and the Managing Editor of *Evangelization & Culture*, the journal of the Word on Fire Institute. He is also the host of *The Evangelization & Culture Podcast*. His writing can be found at Word on Fire, Aleteia, Law and Liberty, *National Review*, the *New York Post*, and on X @thinkercatholic. He enjoys being constantly outsmarted by his two clever daughters.

Notes

[1] Winston Churchill, *My Early Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1930), 109.

[2] Churchill, 110.

[3] Churchill, 110.

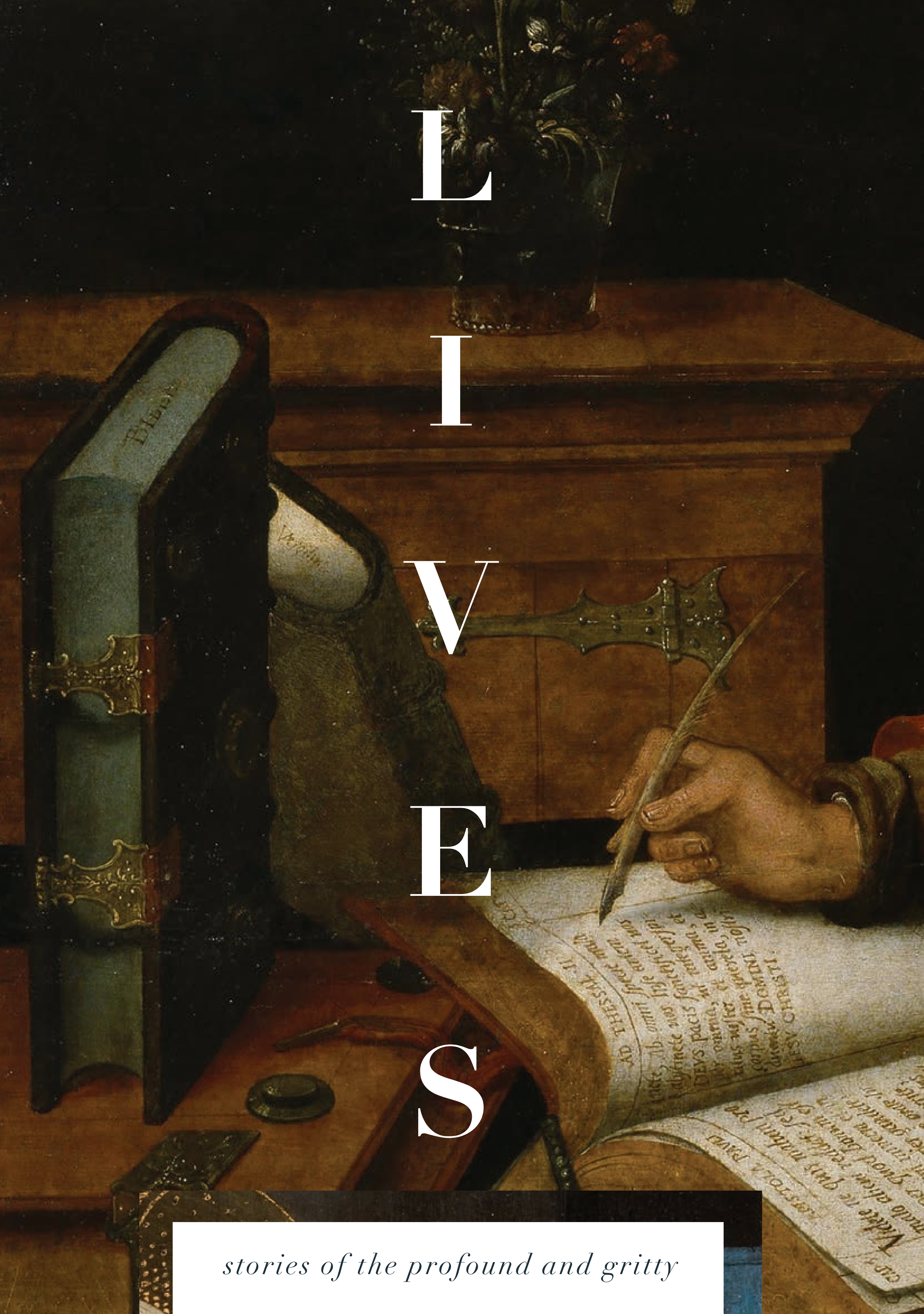
[4] William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill*, vol. 1, *Visions of Glory 1874–1932* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1983), 244.

[5] Churchill, *My Early Life*, 112.

[6] Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 49.

[7] Churchill, *My Early Life*, 115.

[8] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke* (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 191.


L
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stories of the profound and gritty

The Virtue of Being a Generalist:

Wisdom from St. Albert the Great

DR. MATTHEW R. PETRUSEK

The "expert" is secular society's priest and guru. Cable news channels, corporate marketing suites, government bureaucracies, and academic departments alike now endow "expertise" with oracular power on questions that used to fall comfortably within the confines of common sense. Should you force healthy children to wear masks in preschool? Scientists know best. Are you a racist? Consult your company's DEI department. Wondering if you might be a woman? Gender theorists stand by, ready to help. Curious if you should lose some weight? "Doctors" used to have something useful to say on that topic, but best go to your local sociologist for a reliable answer nowadays. Have more home than you need? City planners will advise. Think you have a right to speak freely? Better run that by a trust and safety committee. Should inching toward nuclear war be a nation's foreign policy? Silly citizen, only a PhD can crack that riddle.

Perhaps the oddest feature of secularity's expertopia is the inverse relationship it establishes between the specificity of experts' purported knowledge on the one hand and the scope of their epistemic and moral authority on the other. The more culturally approved "specialists" ostensibly know about one thing, the more entitled they feel to pontificate on everything. Celebrity culture paradigmatically represents this phenomenon. Presumably, celebrities are good at singing, dancing, and/or pretending to be other people. They also may be good looking. But for some reason, this very specific skill set—or luck of the genetic draw—authorizes them to publicly opine on complex social, economic, health, and even meteorological questions, and all of us are supposed to pay attention.

To be sure, not all experts get this kind of deference (Has an underwater welder ever been given the honor of addressing the United Nations?), and some experts clearly know what they're doing—one of them just saved my dad's life from a silently impending heart attack.

ART: Master with the Parrot, *St. Luke Writing*, 1525–1550, Wikimedia Commons.

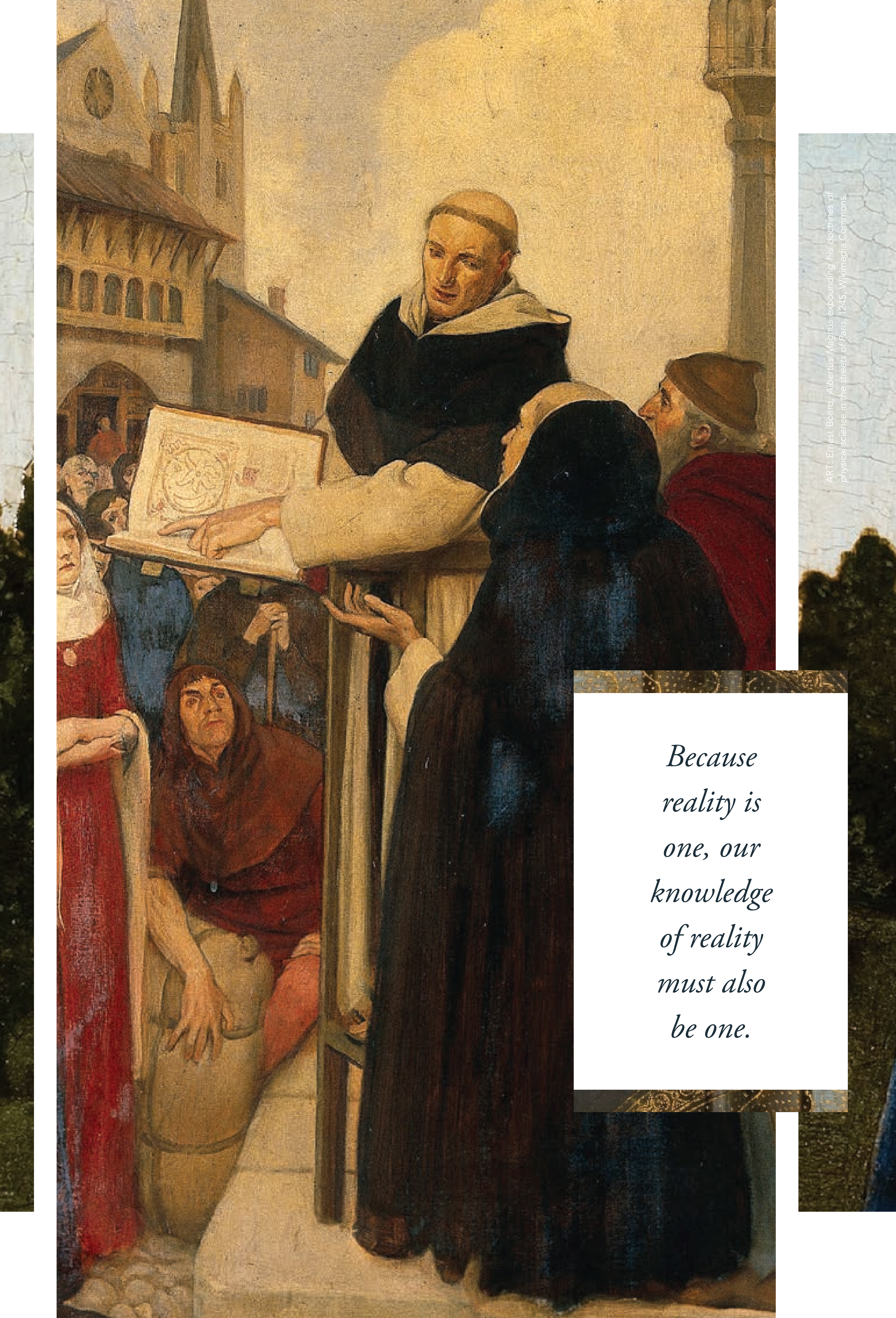
But all in all, following the experts' ubiquitous and frequently threat-laden "advice" (Disobey us at your peril, rubes!) has not been making people healthier, happier, or more prosperous. The experts, in other words, are failing just about everyone—except for themselves.

What can be done to right this ship? As the Catholic intellectual tradition teaches, moving forward often requires looking back. The great medieval saint Albert the Great, for example, has much to teach on the malaise of expertise and how to fix it.

St. Albert, also known as "Albertus Magnus," is the patron saint of scientists, philosophers, and educators. Born in Germany in the year 1200, Albert became known for desiring to know everything about everything early in life. Like St. Thomas Aquinas—whom he would later teach and befriend at the University of Paris—Albert joined the Dominican order against his family's wishes at the age of sixteen and, over the course of a long career, became one of the most learned men in the history of the Church (and, indeed, the world), writing thirty-eight books before his death in 1280. Pope Pius XI proclaimed Albert a saint and Doctor of the Church on December 16, 1931.

St. Albert earned the moniker "great" because of his erudition and love of teaching. He wrote works in what we would call the "hard sciences"—including chemistry, physics, geology, botany, and astronomy—composed philosophical and theological treatises in conversation with the recently rediscovered work of Aristotle (he defended St. Thomas Aquinas from accusations of heresy for St. Thomas' own engagement with Aristotle), served the Church as bishop and papal diplomat, frequently preached on Scripture, and even composed hymns to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was the quintessential "Renaissance Man" long before the Renaissance.

Two quotes aptly capture St. Albert's profoundly Catholic blend of hard-nosed commitment to intellectual inquiry and soft-hearted devotion to God. He writes in one of his scientific treatises, "The aim of natural science is not simply to accept the statements of others, but to investigate the causes that are at work in nature."[1] And elsewhere he is quoted as saying, "Above all, one should accept everything, in general and individually, in oneself or in others, agreeable or disagreeable, with a prompt and confident spirit as coming from the hand of His Infallible Providence or the order He has arranged."[2] The secular mind reads these words as contradictions: either you are a reasonable person of science who investigates nature (quote one) or you are a superstitious person of faith who sees "God" everywhere (quote two).



ART: Ernest Board, *Albertus Magnus expounding his doctrines of physical science in the streets of Paris*, 1245, Wikimedia Commons.

Because reality is one, our knowledge of reality must also be one.

Knowledge is ultimately worthless if it does not serve one overriding and unifying purpose: loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Yet that is precisely the genius of St. Albert's approach to learning, which is paradigmatic of the Catholic intellectual tradition as a whole: because God not only is but is one, reality is one; and because reality is one, our knowledge of reality must also be one—which is to say, faith and reason, empirical investigation and trust in God's providence, cannot be opposed epistemologically (how we know what we know) because they are not opposed ontologically (the nature of existence itself).

How does this theological and philosophical synthesis speak to today's crisis of expertise? The modern mind often diminishes the intellectual achievements of what it wildly mislabels the "Dark Ages" because the intellectual universe was so small back then. The only reason you could have men like St. Albert the Great, who knew so much about so much, the claim goes, is because there was

very little to be known in the first place. Yet even if we grant that there has been an exponential explosion of information in the past few centuries (and especially the past few decades), this disparaging of the Middle Ages misses the point: the genius of St. Albert is not defined by how much he knew, impressive as it was; rather, it is based on his capacity to synthesize different categories of knowledge and, equally important, different methodologies for acquiring knowledge. St. Albert was a scientist who was also a philosopher who was also a theologian who was also a diplomat who was also a poet who was also an administrator who was also a priest who is also a saint.

It is exceedingly unlikely (I would say impossible) for secular culture to produce a man like St. Albert—a man who has authentic expertise in a variety of areas and can explain how they are all related—because secularity has no mechanism for either integrating knowledge into a coherent whole or rationally explaining what the acquisition of knowledge is ultimately for. Indeed, it is because secularity has no underlying shared vision of reality that it forces the acquisition of knowledge into disparate silos that, metaphysically speaking, have nothing to do with each other. Conveniently, these silos also serve the function of isolating knowledge from those outside the silos; if there is no shared reality among all human beings, then there is no shared rationality, and if there is no shared rationality, then "truth" will be determined by whoever occupies the silos of knowledge—which is exactly how "experts" gain their cultural and political power.

St. Albert and the Catholic intellectual tradition offer an alternative. Grounded in the Logos—the divine reason—of God (including Jesus Christ, the Logos made flesh), Catholicism recognizes truth as constituting the very structure of reality, which makes it accessible to all human beings, "educated" and "uneducated" alike. Those with the aptitude to do so can (and should!) use their God-given intellect to study a particular subset of that reality, seeking to understand all its complexity. In other words, there is nothing wrong with becoming an "expert" from a Catholic perspective. Yet the pursuit of that specialized knowledge is ultimately worthless if it does not serve one overriding and unifying purpose: loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and loving your neighbor as yourself.

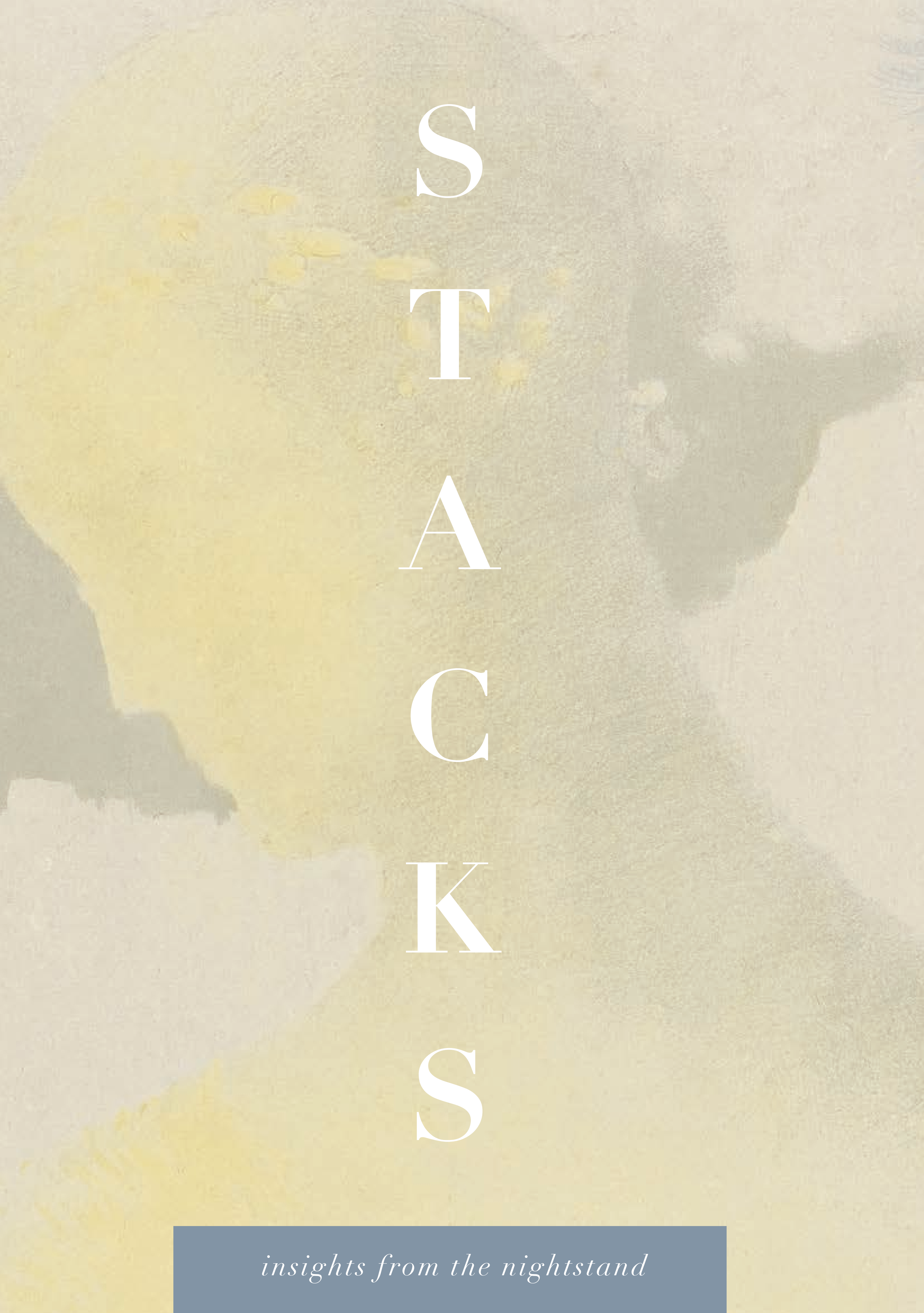
That is the great lesson of Albertus Magnus: the reason he was so good at knowing so many different specific things—and communicating that knowledge to others—is because he was so good at knowing the most general "thing" of all: the one true God.

Matthew R. Petrusek, PhD, is the Assistant Director and Professor of Catholic Ethics at the Word on Fire Institute.

Notes

[1] Maggie Ciskanik, "St. Albert the Great: The Patron Saint of Scientists and Philosophers," Magis Center, November 15, 2022, https://www.magiscenter.com/blog/st.-albert-the-great-the-patron-saint-of-scientists-and-philosophers.

[2] Ciskanik.


STACKS
insights from the nightstand

Philosophy and Prophecy in the Thought of Augusto Del Noce

MICHAEL HANBY

Augusto Del Noce (1910–1989) was an Italian Catholic philosopher who was virtually unknown in the English-speaking world during his lifetime. But he is presently enjoying something of a second life in the Anglosphere thanks to the excellent translation of three of his works into English by CUNY mathematician and physicist Carlo Lancellotti.[1] The first two volumes, *The Crisis of Modernity* and *The Age of Secularization*, are essay collections spanning the course of Del Noce's career. The most recent volume, *The Crisis of Atheism*—arguably Del Noce's magnum opus and his best-known work—was originally published in Italian in 1964.

The renewed interest in Del Noce is well-earned. His insightful analysis of the civilizational crisis of modern society, especially as it has developed since the Second World War, deserves to be mentioned alongside and indeed deepens and complements the analyses of other great Catholic thinkers, from Charles Péguy and Maurice Blondel in the early twentieth century to Karol Wojtyła, Joseph Ratzinger, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor in these latter days.

Del Noce's prose can be dense and his references obscure, particularly for an American readership, but his central thesis is elegantly simple. In order truly to understand the history of the twentieth century and beyond, it must be understood philosophically, or more precisely, as the social and practical outworking of a philosophy whose defining characteristic is a new and unprecedented kind of atheism that he calls "irreligion" and that issues in what he calls a "new totalitarianism," more total if less obviously violent than the old.[2]

Irreligion differs from those earlier forms of atheism committed to the rational demonstration of God's nonexistence in that its conception of the world and of reason excludes every form of transcendence—God, being, nature, and truth—and God simply ceases to be a meaningful question. God thus becomes unthinkable; his nonexistence and/or irrelevance is not argued but assumed as the unconscious presupposition of human society and its activities, and we never know what we are missing. (One will recognize a certain resonance here with John Paul II and Benedict XVI's warnings about "the eclipse of the sense of God and man.") The "new totalitarianism" that follows differs from the old in that it is "not a political movement that aims at world domination" with some positive, substantive vision.[3] Rather, it is a process for the progressive destruction of every form of transcendence, "a quest to bring about the disintegration of one part of the world (in the case at hand, Europe)."[4] This war against every form of antecedent order ultimately destroys the very condition of possibility for genuine politics.

ART: Odilon Redon, *Beatrice*, 1897, Art Institute of Chicago, Unsplash.

These phenomena come about, according to Del Noce, because of the simultaneous triumph and defeat of Marxism in the West, a paradox that he calls "the suicide of the revolution."[5] We can summarize this complex story by saying that Marxism's defeat as a political and economic alternative to liberal capitalism is brought about by its underlying essence as "total revolution," which naturally breaks the narrow confines of "class conflict" and expands into a generalized "war against repression," especially as Marxist thought is fused with psychoanalysis in the twentieth century. The result is that Marxism negates its own "moral" and "eschatological" vision and ends up realizing its essence in its apparent opposite when viewed from a political rather than a philosophical point of view: the pure bourgeois and his utilitarian desecration of all values.[6]

The key here is the place that Del Noce accords to Marx in the history of philosophy, not just political theory, though the Marxist phrase "Philosophy becomes world" denotes the wholesale dissolution of philosophy *into* politics.[7] Marx understood Hegel's speculative idealism to be the culmination of the "philosophy of comprehension" begun with Plato. Marx's famous inversion of Hegel marks not only a radical break with this philosophy but a new conception of thought and its purpose. As Marx famously says in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."[8] To invert Hegel is to say that philosophy resolves itself not in understanding but in action—in praxis. But in this case, every form of transcendence—God, being, nature, truth—simply ceases to matter, and the very possibility of metaphysics or contemplation becomes unintelligible. What matters now is history: the past historical and material conditions that make all truth claims into an expression of ideology and the future historical conditions that will be changed by human praxis—that is, by science and political action, whose "truth" is verified by its effectiveness. Within this new conception of "reason," God, nature, even truth itself have become, strictly speaking, unthinkable. The world is conceived as "a system of forces, not of values,"[9] and the scientific knowledge that manipulates those forces in the natural sphere, and the sociological and political knowledge that analyzes and manipulates these power relations in the personal and social spheres, exhaust the meaning of knowledge as such.

Now, some more familiar with Anglo-American thought than Del Noce seems to have been—the tradition of thought extending from Francis Bacon and John Locke all the way up through John Dewey and Richard Rorty—might question the singular emphasis that Del Noce puts on Marxist thought. It can be argued that American pragmatism—understood not merely as one philosophical option but as the American spirit become philosophically conscious of itself—realizes "total revolution" at least as perfectly as Marxism does, precisely because its conflation of thought and practice never required a "speculative" interlude.[10] It was "irreligious" already. But whatever the causes of the crisis of modernity, Del Noce has clearly seen into its essence and recognized its signs. His insight into the logic of total revolution and its negation of transcendence allows him to see the underlying unity of two defining features of our age that are usually considered separately or viewed merely in moral terms: scientism, the often unspoken conviction that scientific reason is the whole of reason and that only what can be known by scientific methods is real; and eroticism, the rebellion against sexual norms, the natural family, and now, it seems, even human nature itself.[11] Total revolution against every transcendent reality and every given form of order, perpetually fueled by our scientific and technological dominance of nature, becomes total in sexual revolution.

Del Noce's is one of a number of profound insights into the logic of the late modern age, but this alone does

not suffice for his extraordinary "second life" in the English-speaking world. One large reason for the revival of interest in Del Noce is the "prophetic" character of his thought, the fact that it seems truer of our own time than his own. With remarkable prescience, he anticipated the eventuality of same-sex "marriage" decades before it entered into public consciousness. While he certainly did not anticipate the transgender revolution—no one did—his thought is indispensable for understanding its logic. There is no other thinker, moreover, who better illuminates the present frenzy to destroy our civilizational memory and inheritance or the rebellion against being itself.

And while the rediscovery of Del Noce seems largely due to his analysis of secular society and its politics, his insight into our ecclesial predicament—the question of the Church in the modern world that necessitated the Second Vatican Council—is no less prophetic. His analysis of the "neo-modernism" of Catholic progressivism—its replacement of the vertical transcendence of eternity with a horizontal transcendence of futurity, its acquiescence in the reduction of truth to ideology, its reduction of the Church from a mystical and sacramental entity to a political and sociological entity, its substitution of sociology and psychology for philosophy and theology as the Church's primary mode of thinking and speaking, and even his advance critique of the "listening Church"—all seems as if it was written for 2023.[12]

Against the neo-modernism of Catholic progressivism, to say nothing of the modern dissolution of being into history and truth into ideology, Del Noce insists upon the primacy of contemplation and the recovery of the Church's metaphysical vision:

> Primacy of contemplation just means the superiority of the immutable over the changeable. It just expresses the essential metaphysical principle of the Catholic tradition, which says that everything that *is* participates necessarily in universal principles, which are the eternal and immutable essences contained in the permanent actuality of the divine intellect. . . . The primacy of contemplation, the primacy of the immutable, the reality of an eternal order are equivalent affirmations, which coincide with taking intellectual intuition as the definition of the model of knowledge. The recognition of this form of knowledge is inseparable from the very possibility of metaphysical thought.[13]

Insofar as he is correct that "for the first time in history worldly survival is entrusted to religious conversion," this may be his most important and enduring insight.

Michael Hanby is Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy of Science at the John Paul II Institute at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He lectures widely and is the author of two books and numerous journal articles.

ART: Odilon Redon, *Beatrice*, 1897, Art Institute of Chicago, Unsplash.

Notes

[1] For an excellent introduction to Del Noce's thought, see Carlo Lancellotti, "Augusto Del Noce on Marx's Abolition of Human Nature," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 48, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2019): 566–584. See also Lancellotti's Introduction to Del Noce, *The Problem of Atheism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021), xiii–xliii.

[2] Del Noce, *The Problem of Atheism*, 237–271.

[3] Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 87.

[4] Del Noce, 87.

[5] Del Noce, 46.

[6] Del Noce, 59–84.

[7] Del Noce, *The Problem of Atheism*, 101–139.

[8] Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* 11, 1888, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm.

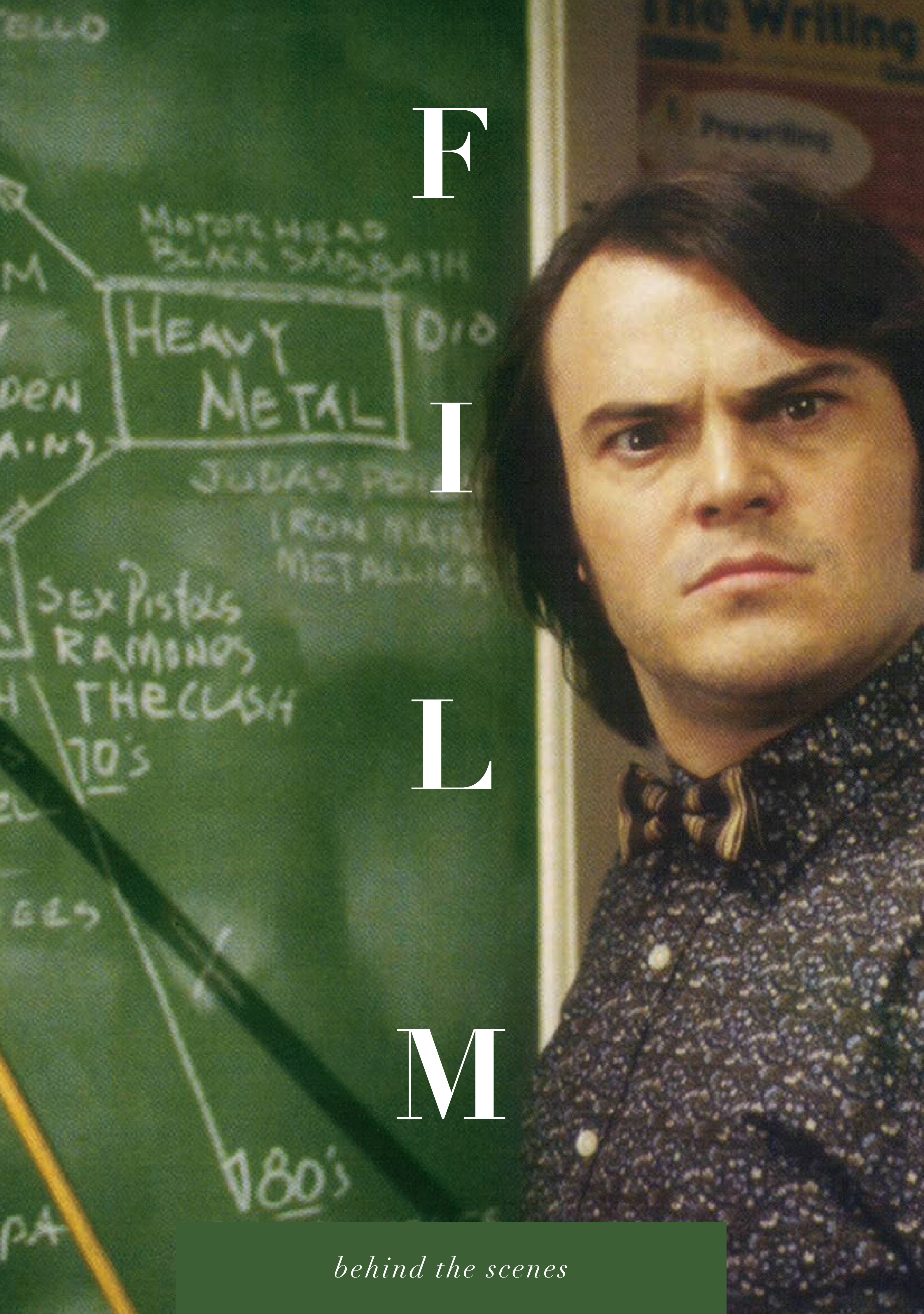
[9] Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 232.

[10] I have made this argument in Hanby, "American Revolution as Total Revolution: Del Noce and the American Experiment," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 48 (Fall 2021), 450–486.

[11] On the unity of scientism and eroticism, see Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 87–117.

[12] Augusto Del Noce, *The Age of Secularization* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 217–266; *The Problem of Atheism*, 222–271.

[13] Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, 45.



FILM

behind the scenes

The Education *of* Dewey Finn

MATTHEW BECKLO

Among the many films about education, some are inspiring and rich, and many are silly and lighthearted, but precious few are both. One glaring exception is *School of Rock*, the highly rewatchable 2003 comedy starring Jack Black as Dewey Finn, a down-and-out guitarist who poses as a substitute teacher at an elite prep school.

From one angle, the film is just a superficial comedy of errors. It puts a rock-and-roll twist on a familiar theme: stagnant students meet rebel teacher, teacher breathes fresh life into the students, students learn valuable life lessons. But something deeper is going on here, and it has to do with the hapless protagonist as the real pupil of the School of Rock.

The comedy's richness is traceable, at least in part, to the man behind the camera: Richard Linklater. From romantic masterpieces like *Before Sunrise*, to experimental odysseys like *Waking Life*, to more lighthearted fare like *Dazed and Confused*, the Austin auteur's films always have an eye for immersing us in ordinary people and conversations. In one scene of *Waking Life*, a character reflects on Catholic film critic André Bazin's theory that cinema should embrace realism and long takes, so as to capture a "holy moment" and reflect God's ongoing creation of the world. Linklater's own approach to film has always been about such holy moments—even when, as in *School of Rock*, they also happen to be hilarious.

When we first meet Dewey Finn, he is the quintessential struggling musician and aging man-child: he can't let the dream go but also can't make ends meet. He crashes on the floor of the house of his old bandmate, Ned Schneebly, whose girlfriend has had enough. An upcoming Battle of the Bands promises rent money, but Dewey's current bandmates are so fed up with his long guitar solos and unrequited stage dives that they vote to kick him out. Out of options, he decides to pose as Ned and accept a substitute teaching gig for a fourth-grade class at Horace Green Prep School.

Dewey enters the classroom hungover, hungry, broke, defeated—and completely indifferent to the kids and their education. Finn's own name—a mash-up of John Dewey and Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*—suggests a pedagogical air that is completely absent. Not only is he not a man of letters; he doesn't even know how to spell Schneebly's last name. When he sees a sticker chart of merits and demerits, he asks, "What kind of a sick school is this?"—promptly ripping it to shreds. In Dewey's classroom, it will be all recess, all day.

PHOTO: Alamy.

Of course, the kids get bored; so does their anti-teacher. The next day, he stares off into space at the front of the classroom as the kids sit dutifully at their desks. After a long silence, one girl asks, reasonably enough, "Are you gonna teach us anything, or are we just gonna sit here?" His response? "Just do whatever you want." He finally relents and teaches them something: Give up and quit, "because the world is run by the Man."

But after Dewey overhears the kids in music class, he gets a spring in his step and begins to work with them on a top-secret project: "Rock Band." He has no thought to the future or, at first, to the kids: this is just a way to keep rocking and hopefully make some quick cash.

Hilarity ensues, as does a gradual change in the students. They break out of their shells, discover dormant talents, and receive a beaming affirmation that they seem starved for—an affirmation not for what they do but simply for who they are. One girl begins to sing "Amazing Grace," and Dewey responds—not facetiously, but with genuine enthusiasm—"Stop, before I start crying, because I've found the missing ingredient. You're in the band." A look of surprise and an elated smile shoot across her face.

Like all great teachers, Dewey is simply communicating his own passion for his subject, which in turn inspires his students. He knows all things rock because he loves all things rock.

Like all great teachers, Dewey is simply communicating his own passion for his subject, which in turn inspires his students. He knows all things rock because he loves all things rock. Earlier in the film, Ned challenges him to sell one of his guitars, and Dewey shoots back, "Would you ask Picasso to sell his guitars?" Although a laugh line, Picasso did, in fact, have

PHOTO: Alamy.

multiple paintings focused on a guitar or guitarist, and even a sculpture titled *Guitar*. Did Dewey know this? At least when it comes to music, he may not be as big of a dolt as he seems.

Not that Dewey is any kind of hero—far from it. In a single take lasting two minutes—a "holy moment" very much in the spirit of Bazin—Dewey teaches the kids his vision for the song he would like them to learn: "The Legend of the Rent." It begins, he explains, with a beam of light on him and his guitar. Then he starts singing: "In the end of time / There was a man who knew the road / And the writing was written on the stone. . . ." The man in question, the lyrics go on to say, is a certain noble artist who can't pay the rent and was kicked out of his own band: "How can you kick me out," he dramatically crescendos, "of what is mine?"

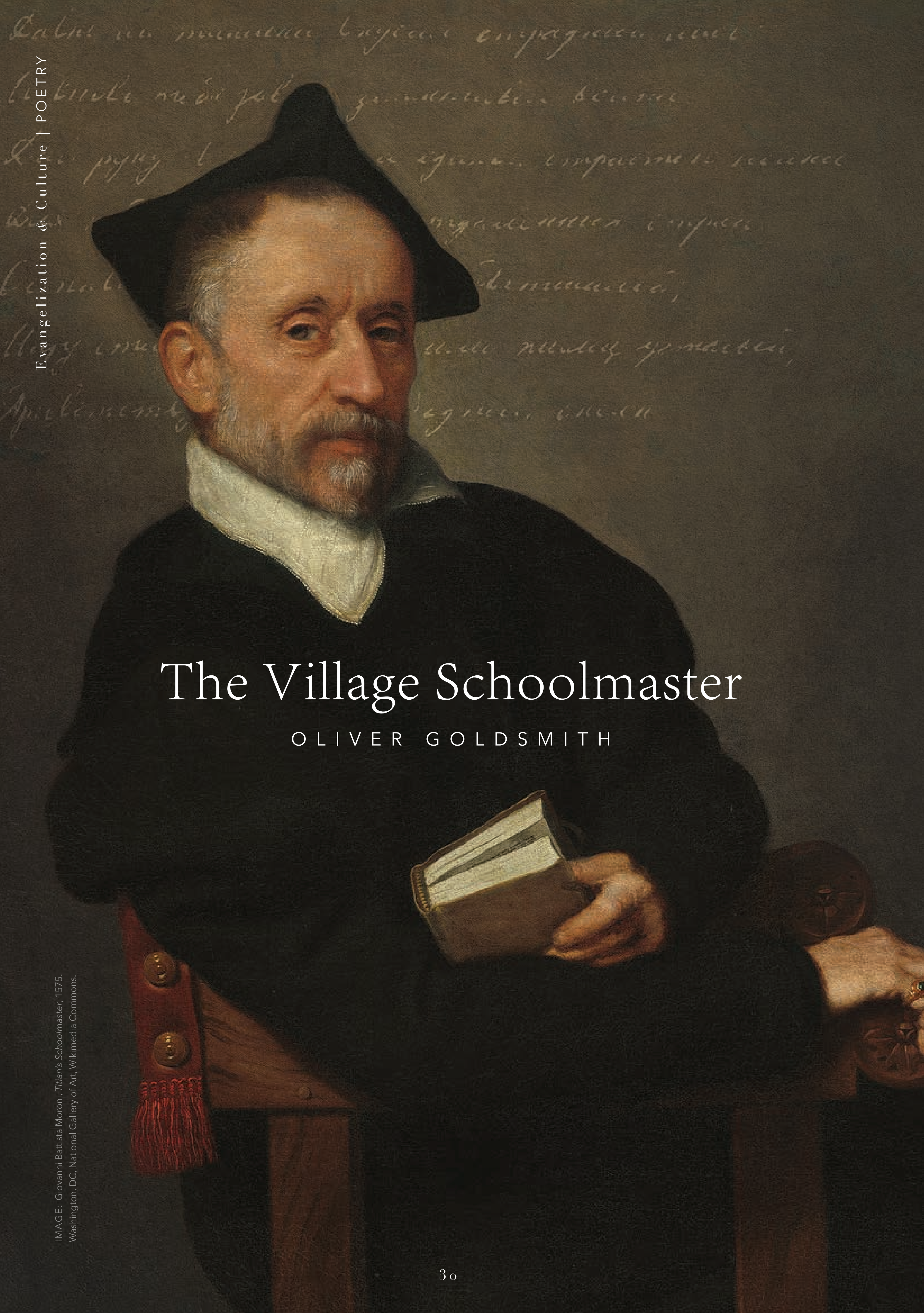
It's not just Black's physical comedy that makes this scene so funny; it is the sharp incongruity of artist and audience. As he passionately sings and dances his own self-hagiography, the camera zooms out to show the backs of the heads of a bunch of motionless, attentive fourth-graders whose parents are paying top-dollar for them to receive the best education possible. Yet, somehow, they have earned themselves front-row seats to Dewey Finn's mess of a one-man show. It is all about himself.

They practice the song but don't end up playing it at the Battle of the Bands—which would have been a disaster for both Dewey and the kids. Instead, they go with a song written by one of Dewey's own students, Zack. The performance is such a smash hit that it momentarily cools the rage of the horrified parents. Dewey is even able to take center stage in a beam of light, unleash a killer guitar solo, and pull off a successful stage dive—all because he left his own ego-drama behind.

Dewey Finn taught these students that it's okay to have fun and make mistakes, which is a valuable enough lesson for kids under tremendous pressure to succeed. But they were the true teachers. At the School of Rock, Dewey Finn learned how to stop marinating in his own juices and start living. Before that, he only saw two ways out: being a musician and failing at life, or getting a job and failing at music. The first meant never becoming a man, and the second meant letting the Man win. But he discovered a third way: teaching the love of music to others—not because he wasn't any good at music, but because he was especially good at loving it.

There are many Dewey Finns in the world today: aspiring rock stars and rappers, actors and models, artists and writers, influencers and entrepreneurs. For many years, they have focused on making it big, and in their twenties, thirties, or even forties, they are beginning to realize that they might never do it. They are at a crossroads. *School of Rock* is an encouraging reminder: maybe they were never meant to. Maybe God has a greater plan in store for them, and they are the missing ingredient in some other band waiting for what they have to offer. It just might take a semester or two in his school of life.

Matthew Becklo is a husband and father, cultural commentator, and the Publishing Director for Bishop Robert Barron's Word on Fire Catholic Ministries. His writing can be found at Word on Fire, Strange Notions, and Aleteia.



The Village Schoolmaster

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

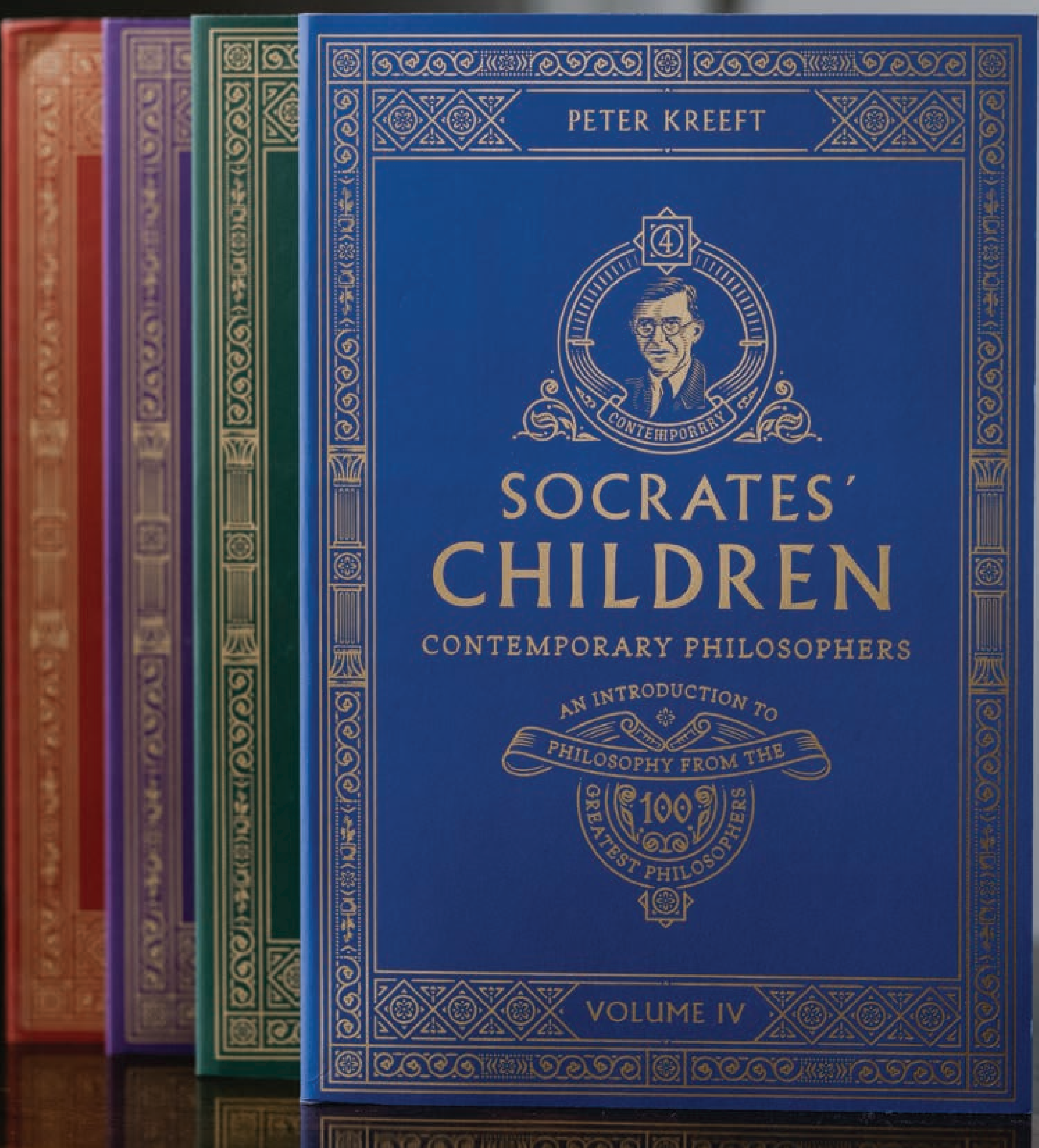
IMAGE: Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Titian's Schoolmaster*, 1575. Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art, Wikimedia Commons.

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way
With blossom'd furze unprofitably gay,
There, in his noisy mansion, skill'd to rule,
The village master taught his little school;
A man severe he was, and stern to view,
I knew him well, and every truant knew;
Well had the boding tremblers learn'd to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face;
Full well they laugh'd with counterfeited glee,
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he:
Full well the busy whisper, circling round,
Convey'd the dismal tidings when he frown'd:
Yet he was kind; or if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault.
The village all declar'd how much he knew;
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too:
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And e'en the story ran that he could gauge.
In arguing too, the parson own'd his skill,
For e'en though vanquish'd he could argue still;
While words of learned length and thund'ring sound
Amazed the gazing rustics rang'd around;
And still they gaz'd and still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew.
But past is all his fame. The very spot
Where many a time he triumph'd is forgot.

Excerpted from "*The Deserted Village*" by Oliver Goldsmith.

TURNING TOWARD BETTER TEACHERS

Peter Kreeft on *Socrates' Children*

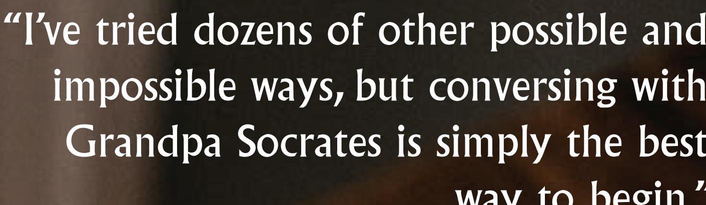

PETER KREEFT
CONTEMPORARY
SOCRATES'
CHILDREN
CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS
AN INTRODUCTION TO
PHILOSOPHY FROM THE
100
GREATEST PHILOSOPHERS
VOLUME IV

Recently Tod Worner, the Managing Editor of Evangelization & Culture, *had a chance to catch up with the eminent Dr. Peter Kreeft about* Socrates' Children*, his brilliant series introducing readers to philosophy through the one hundred greatest philosophers.*

TOD WORNER: *Dr. Kreeft, it is a true honor to have this conversation with you about your extraordinary collection,* Socrates' Children*! Let's begin (ahem) with an easy question. Why philosophy? Why do the seemingly abstruse thoughts of long dead philosophical thinkers matter to the modern world? Do ideas, in fact, have consequences?*

Peter Kreeft: I usually find "easy questions" hard and hard ones easy. Okay, here's my attempt to say a lifetime in a paragraph. (1) "Philosophy," according to those who invented it and named it, is "the love of wisdom," and without wisdom, which is the understanding of truth and goodness in all things, the whole of life that is distinctively human regresses to the animal level. (2) What the academic establishment today calls "philosophy" is indeed "abstruse," abstract, and often technical, in idolatrous imitation of science, since we are far better at science and worse at philosophy than our ancestors. (3) "Ideas have consequences," e.g., Hey, let's try to control this terrifying thing we call fire! Was all that we see and all that we are created by a Vastly Superior Being, and if so what should we do about that? The good life means winning all your wars, right? Why should I sacrifice my immediate pleasures for anyone else? What will happen to me when I die? Will the world be saved by killing other tribes, Jews, capitalists, or unwanted babies? Why do bad things happen to good people? What are people for? What is sex for?

TW: Socrates' Children *is broken down into four volumes: Ancient Philosophers, Medieval Philosophers, Modern Philosophers, and Contemporary Philosophers (well over eight hundred pages in total). In introducing these thinkers, you offer a concise biography, philosophical high points, and even some excerpts of their most consequential works. Your writing is clear yet comprehensive, abbreviated without being cursory. How were you capable of achieving this great feat of distillation?*



PK: I have no idea. Where do our ideas come from? Not from a finely organized bunch of molecules in our heads, and not from California, and not from aliens from another planet. We all have talents in one area and are klutzes or worse in other areas. Bertrand Russell was brilliant and funny but disastrously wrong and literally could not learn to boil water for tea. The safest answer to your question is that just possibly the Author and Designer of everything may have had something to do with it, as he had something to do with your ability to ask that question.

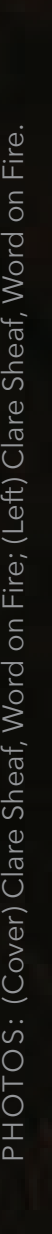
TW: *Let's begin with the Ancient Philosophers. Most people have some familiarity with Socrates (as told through Plato) and Aristotle. Why have these Greek philosophers been so consequential?*

PK: I think part of the answer is this: for the same reason there's more growth in the first two years of life than in any two after it. "Well begun is half done," says the ancient Greek parable. "What is great can only begin great," says Heidegger. That things improve or evolve is obvious, but that they begin is an amazing achievement.

Also, we can often learn more studying children because they are simpler and clearer—things like why there is war, how we learn that words signify things, and how we learn to cooperate with each other and to begin to do science. I find that Socrates and Plato are the very best way to introduce beginners to philosophy. I've tried dozens of other possible and impossible ways, but conversing with Grandpa Socrates is simply the best way to begin.

The Greeks are consequential for all subsequent thinkers because the present and the future are always in continuity with the past. We may try to be a new Adam and begin all over again, but we simply can't.

And the choices we make at the beginning of a journey have greater consequences as we proceed. Start at Washington, DC, walk west, and a tiny difference in your path out of the city, one just a little more north and the other just a little more south, will determine whether you end up in San Francisco or Seattle.



PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS

AL-GHAZALI

NICHOLAS OF CUSA

TW: *Among the Medieval Philosophers, of course, you unpack St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure and William of Ockham. However, there are many unfamiliar names that have made it into your canon, such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Al-Ghazali, and Nicholas of Cusa. What do such lesser-known philosophers have to add to the aforementioned towering figures of philosophy?*

PK: Different answers for each one. Dionysius gives us the foundations of nearly all subsequent mystical theologians. Al-Ghazali gives us a short Muslim equivalent of Augustine's *Confessions*. Nicholas of Cusa, though medieval, shows us a modern, open universe based on the mathematics of infinity. Each philosophy, like each personality, is irreplaceable and unique. Sometimes the unique contribution is a distinctive error, like Averroes' and Siger of Brabant's "double truth" theory or Ockham's nominalism.

TW: *As we move into the Modern Philosophers, we meet the epistemological philosophers such as Descartes and Kant, Hume and Hegel. What is an epistemological philosopher, and how did this class of philosophers differ from and build off of their predecessors?*

PK: Modern philosophy begins with a new question, the question of epistemology: "How do we know?" Pre-teens ask the metaphysical question first: "What's that? What is the world?" Teens ask "What am I and how can I be sure?" Both are natural beginnings, but they are different. And each implies the other. For "what is that" (the metaphysical question) implies that I can know that (which is an answer to the epistemological question), and "How can I know that" (the epistemological question) implies that that is there to be known (which is an answer to the metaphysical question).

DESCARTES

HUME

HEGEL

ILLUSTRATIONS: Peter Voth.

TW: *Also within the Modern Philosopher category, we encounter the political philosophers of Machiavelli and Hobbes, Rousseau and Marx. From the pages of Plato's* Republic, *politics has always figured into philosophy, but with these newer philosophers, it seems that trouble started to brew. What went wrong, and are there redeeming lessons to be learned from these latter-day political philosophers that are often obscured by the darkness that accompanied them?*

PK: Trouble-brewing did not begin with Machiavelli but with Adam. We find insights and errors in every political philosophy and in every philosopher, as we do in every person. Plato's *Republic* is a masterpiece and a defense of many great and necessary things, but it's also a benign totalitarianism and a naïvely optimistic oversimplification. Marx's critique of capitalism is telling and not yet adequately answered, but his alternative is hellishly worse.

TW: *Finally, we come to the Contemporary Philosophers who branch endlessly into existentialists and pragmatists, positivists and phenomenologists. And, of course, we can't forget about the Thomists! Have you found points of waste and wisdom within each of these schools? Or can we comfortably dismiss certain schools as consequential but hopelessly wayward?*

PK: Philosophy is easily ordered into different schools of thought in ancient, medieval, and early modern times, but not in contemporary times. But it remains true that even in this more confused and "messy" period insights and mistakes, or at least lacunae, continue in each school of thought. Thomism remains the philosophy that has proved the most long-lasting, foundational, and able to assimilate other branches (existentialism, phenomenology, personalism, analytic philosophy).

"We find insights and errors in every political philosophy and in every philosopher, as we do in every person."

PHOTO: Clare Sheaf, Word on Fire.

TW: *Dr. Kreeft, in your conclusion you remind that philosophers "claim to be your teachers; they try to lead you out of your cave. It is up to you to decide if they are just leading you into their own caves." Is there one school of thought that, in your opinion, finds itself most faithful to and most compatible with the theology of the Catholic Church? How can the eager reader protect against error? Of what must faithful Catholics be aware as they dive deep into the turbulent waters of philosophy?*

PK: The Church has consistently recommended the "golden wisdom" of St. Thomas but without discouraging many other additions. What is compatible with the Church's teachings is pretty clear, since those teachings are clear, and they are the answer to how to detect dangerous errors. What helpful positive insights to look for is far less clear and more experimental. We should not be afraid to experiment in thought, as in the material world, with things that may well not turn out well, as long as we do not use our theories to question and contradict the Church's dogmas, which are from God.

TW: *How does a solid footing in philosophy help Catholics evangelize others as well as deepen their own interior lives?*

PK: This is a catholic (universal) as well as a Catholic (Roman) issue. Philosophical reason can "evangelize" in all religions and even in none, since reason, like conscience, is God's invention and instrument. Reason and conscience (moral reason) are God's universal prophets. When Catholics "evangelize" Protestants they should appeal to Protestant (biblical) authority, not distinctively Catholic (Church) authority. When Christians evangelize Jews, they should appeal to Jewish (Torah, Old Testament) authority. When evangelizing Muslims, appeal to the Quran. When evangelizing others, appeal to the reason that is common to all mankind.

> "Reason and conscience (moral reason) are God's universal prophets."

ILLUSTRATION: Peter Voth.

> "Good authorities, 'experts,' and teachers always look up to their superiors and recommend them."

And this appeal to reason works practically even within our own attempts to deepen our interior lives, as demonstrated in C.S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed.* In worrying about "the problem of evil" personally I find Lewis' use of reason to regain and strengthen his faith instructive. He cannot understand why God makes him suffer so awfully when the great joy of his life, his new wife Joy Davidman, dies of painful cancer very young. And he writes, "Is it really necessary that such tortures should occur? Well, take your choice. The tortures do occur. Therefore either they are necessary for us, or there is no God, or a bad one. For no even moderately good Being would impose them on us if they were not necessary." Thus reason itself validates the perhaps most wonderful but difficult-to-believe verse in Scripture, Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good for those who love God."

TW: *Could you say a few words about the "Doable Do-It-Yourself Course in the Classics of Philosophy" that you recommend to your readers in* Socrates' Children*?*

PK: Good authorities, "experts," and teachers always look up to their superiors and recommend them. One of the most important things a teacher can give to his students is to turn him toward other, better, teachers. A true expert is one who knows who the real experts are. As a philosopher I recommend these better philosophers.

TW: *I know this sounds impossibly naïve, but do you have a favorite philosopher and philosophical work? If so, why?*

PK: Augustine's *Confessions*. He is us: the whole package, but with increased light (brilliance) and heat (passion), like the sun. For sheer brilliance and clarity, Aquinas' *Summa*. For personal example to imitate, Socrates.

TW: *Finally, Dr. Kreeft, you began your book with an introduction positing that philosophy begins with wonder. "It starts with surprise. It leads to questioning. It ends with deepened appreciation." After these many years of reading philosophy, have you arrived at a rich state of deepened appreciation? How do you live differently given all that you have learned?*

PK: The content I've learned from philosophers fades into insignificance compared with their example. This is what students of great teachers usually say about their teachers. And even that—their example—fades in importance compared with that of Christ. And even Christ as our example and model fades into an abstraction compared with his personal ongoing presence in the Eucharist. If philosophy is truly the love of wisdom and if wisdom is to be lived and practiced, there is no more powerful way to do philosophy than by Eucharistic Adoration.

"There is no more powerful way to do philosophy than by Eucharistic Adoration."

PHOTO: Clare Sheaf, Word on Fire.

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A good Catholic school should help all its students to become *saints.*

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POPE BENEDICT XVI

MINDS
affirming truth

Faith and Reason in Newman's *The Idea of a University*

BY DR. MATTHEW LEVERING

PHOTO: The exterior of Oxford University's Bodleian Library. Samuel Isaacs, Unsplash.

Newman was keenly aware of the troubles caused by universities, and he was equally aware of the troubles that arise when good universities are lacking. Catholics today may benefit from his warnings on both fronts.

In his *Rise and Progress of Universities*, Newman tells much of the history of Catholic universities. Thanks to reforms instituted by Charlemagne in the ninth century, a network of seminaries emerged, and it was out of these seminaries that universities first arose. But the universities came to overshadow the seminaries, so much so that "by the date of the Council of Trent, Seminaries had all but ceased to exist."[1] Newman points out that in the late-medieval world, the result was rationalism.

Lacking the spiritual formation needed for engaging the Christian mysteries with humility and a well-formed intellect, students fell into "a critical, carping, curious spirit" that rendered them unfit to handle the deeper problems of theology, understood as faith seeking understanding rather than as a display of technical subtlety.[2] In response, the Council of Trent separated theo-

PHOTOS: Wikimedia Commons.

logical training from the universities. Newman comments, "Episcopal Seminaries were restored; ecclesiastical Colleges in Universities suppressed; the profounder studies were to be taught under the Bishop's eye."[3] Since Trent, says Newman, universities have been out of ecclesiastical favor.

In Newman's day, the tide was turning in favor of universities. Newman names a number of new foundations: the Seminario Pio in Rome (essentially a university); the *L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes* in Paris; the revived University of Louvain. As Newman puts it, all around are signs that "the Church feels herself strong enough in provisions and safeguards which a painful experience has suggested against prospective dangers to recommence the age of Universities."[4]

And yet, the danger of rationalism remained on Newman's mind. One of Newman's close friends from his Anglican days, Edward Pusey, had studied in Germany as a young man and had reacted negatively to rationalism he found in the German universities. Newman was not opposed to historical biblical criticism, but he was alarmed by the liberal Protestantism that he found in Friedrich Schleiermacher and others associated with the University of Berlin.

Newman gravitated instead toward the Catholic Tübingen School—a precursor of the twentieth-century Ressourcement movement—whose central thinkers included Johann Adam Möhler, whose work helped Newman in the 1830s to think through doctrinal development. In 1847, two years after his conversion to Catholicism, Newman met Ignaz von Döllinger, a professor at the University of Munich and the editor of Möhler's collected works. Then known for Ultramontanist views, Döllinger within a decade became the leader of German Catholic opposition to Rome. A brilliant Church historian, Döllinger had been influenced by Anglican thinkers who argued that if a doctrine is not found explicitly in the first five centuries, then it is not a truth of Christian faith—a position that Newman rejected in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

Newman in the 1850s maintained a high regard for Döllinger's expertise. When he made plans to set up the Catholic university in Dublin, he invited Döllinger to deliver a course of lectures on theology. Döllinger was unable to do so, but Newman clearly "wanted his new university's reputation to be enhanced by the international

regard for Döllinger, and by extension, the 'scientific' historical approach to theology occurring in the Catholic faculties of Munich and Tübingen."[5] At the same time, Newman did not offer Döllinger a full-time faculty position. Historical research, Newman felt, could offer much but could not substitute for theology.[6]

In Rome, educational reform was underway. The Jesuits had been suppressed in 1773, but they were reestablished in 1814. In 1824, Pope Leo XII enabled the Jesuits to open the Roman College. The faculty there was strong, led by the brilliant young Giovanni Perrone. When Newman arrived in Rome shortly after his conversion, he benefited from Perrone's presence, and Perrone, in turn, promoted Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Yet, Roman theological training still did not exemplify the critical, cutting-edge historical work found in the German universities. Indeed, Döllinger developed a sharp disdain for the Roman universities as he came increasingly to believe that Church historians should be the ones guiding the doctrinal life of the Church. Döllinger ended up rejecting the dogma of papal infallibility in 1870 because he considered it to be absent from the Church Fathers. He died excommunicant.

Unlike Döllinger, Newman was strongly attuned to the problem of rationalism that had plagued late-medieval Catholic universities. Matthew Muller and Kenneth Parker have remarked that Newman "believed that, left to its own devices, a university would eventually, because of the frailties of human nature, undermine its own existence," not least by separating itself from Catholicism.[7] A Catholic university, says Newman, will remain Catholic only if, in addition to possessing faculty who affirm the teachings of the Church, "the Church breathes her own pure and unearthly spirit into it, and fashions and moulds its organisation, and watches over its teaching, and knits together its pupils, and superintends its actions."[8]

This statement may sound almost authoritarian. What would it mean for the Church, instantiated in the local bishop and also in the Vatican with its universal jurisdiction, to "watch over" the teaching of a university's professors? Newman has in mind wise, prudential governance, not arbitrary oppression. He is quite aware, however, that this governance must have real power. Furthermore, since all the disciplines must in some way be ordered to (and by) theology, theology has particular importance in a Catholic university—so long as it is a theology that is faithful to the Gospel as handed on by the Church.

In *The Idea of a University*, Newman calls for "a direct and active jurisdiction of the Church over [the university] and in it."[9] Otherwise the university will end up becoming "the rival of the Church with the community at large in those theological matters which to the Church are exclusively committed."[10] Newman had seen this happen at the University of Oxford, where theologians promoted a religious liberalism that watered down or even denied the truth of Christian doctrine about Jesus Christ in the name of "acting as the representative of intellect."[11] Newman contends that, given human fallenness, the ungoverned intellect will inevitably seek in pride to master and ultimately to stamp out what Newman calls "the religious principle."[12]

Newman does not say this out of anti-intellectualism. He simply recognizes that it is easy for both the sciences and the liberal arts to stop short of the Creator and instead to make utility (the sciences) or earthly beauty (the liberal arts) the ultimate end of all inquiry. Newman states, "It is not that you will at once reject Catholicism, but you will measure and proportion it by an earthly standard. You will throw its highest and most momentous disclosures into the background, you will deny its principles, explain away its doctrines, re-arrange its precepts, and make light of its practices, even while you profess it."[13] Newman is deeply sensitive to the tendency of a robust intellectual life toward pride. He remarks in this vein, "Knowledge, viewed as Knowledge, exerts a subtle influence in throwing us back on ourselves, and making us our own centre, and our minds the measure of all things."[14]

In his 1864 *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*—a response to his Anglican critic Charles Kingsley—Newman argues that we need a Church that is able to teach infallibly. For Kingsley, this reeked of authoritari-

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anism. But in Newman's view, the intellect is a power that does not thrive without some external governance. If fallen human reason is fully in charge, then "the energy of human scepticism" will win the day; reason will jump into "suicidal excesses."[15]

Historically speaking, Newman argues that the infallible teaching office of the Church has in fact served to promote the creativity and insight of human reason. He conceives of human reason and Church authority as existing in a fruitful relationship of opposition to each other, the one pushing forward boldly, the other governing and pruning. He describes the Church as "a vast assemblage of human beings with wilful intellects and wild passions, brought together into one by the beauty and the majesty of a Superhuman Power—into what may be called a large reformatory or training-school," in which the human intellect comes into its own in a non-rationalistic manner.[16] Reason does not merely submit to Church authority but, rather, creatively probes ever more deeply in response to the dictates of Church authority.

Having witnessed firsthand the push toward religious liberalism (the undoing of dogma and Church authority) at the University of Oxford, Newman in his *The Idea of a University* warns against a university's tendency toward rationalism, as we have seen. But he also makes clear that without a thriving, vigorous university, the Church's theology will become sterile and dated and will not be able to defend or explicate the faith in light of contemporary gains in knowledge. Newman particularly appreciates the knowledge acquired by the natural sciences—which were expanding rapidly in his day—as well as the knowledge acquired by critical historical research. For Newman, the Church greatly needs the university, both because Catholics live in the world and must have a thorough knowledge of this-worldly things, and because "it is not the way to learn to swim in troubled waters, never to have gone into them." Without the benefit of university learning, Catholics will be utterly unprepared when they encounter the world.[17]

To sum up: On the one hand, an ignorant Church will not be able to evangelize either the world or its own members, let alone spread its true spirit—grounded in the truth and beauty of Christ—throughout the various departments of a university. But on the other hand, a rationalistic university will fail to be Catholic and will end up, in pride, abusing the lofty powers of human reason and thereby turning reason against itself, with grave consequences for the faith of young people and for the whole society. Thus, for St. Newman, the Church greatly needs the university and the university greatly needs the Church. Put simply, faith and reason sink or swim together.[18]

Put simply, faith and reason sink or swim together.

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Notes

[1] John Henry Newman, *Rise and Progress of Universities and Benedictine Essays*, ed. Mary Katherine Tillman (Notre Dame, IN : University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 243.

[2] Newman, 243.

[3] Newman, 244.

[4] Newman, 251.

[5] Matthew Muller and Kenneth Parker, "Newman, Theological Development, and the Catholic University," in *Theology, History, and the Modern German University*, ed. Kevin M. Vander Schel and Michael P. DeJonge (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 165–186, at 179.

[6] For further discussion of Newman's theology of history, which he worked out partly in critical conversation with Döllinger, see chapter 5 of my *Newman on Doctrinal Corruption* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2022).

[7] Muller and Parker, "Newman, Theological Development, and the Catholic University," 180.

[8] John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University: Defined and Illustrated in Nine Discourses Delivered to the Catholics of Dublin and in Occasional Lectures and Essays Addressed to the Members of the Catholic University*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 164.

[9] Newman, 163.

[10] Newman, 163.

[11] Newman, 163.

[12] Newman, 163.

[13] Newman, 165.

[14] Newman, 165.

[15] John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 322–323.

[16] Newman, 328–329.

[17] Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 177.

[18] For further discussion, see Reinhard Hütter, *John Henry Newman on Truth and Its Counterfeits: A Guide for Our Times* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), chapter 4.

It is
always
in season
for old
men to
learn.

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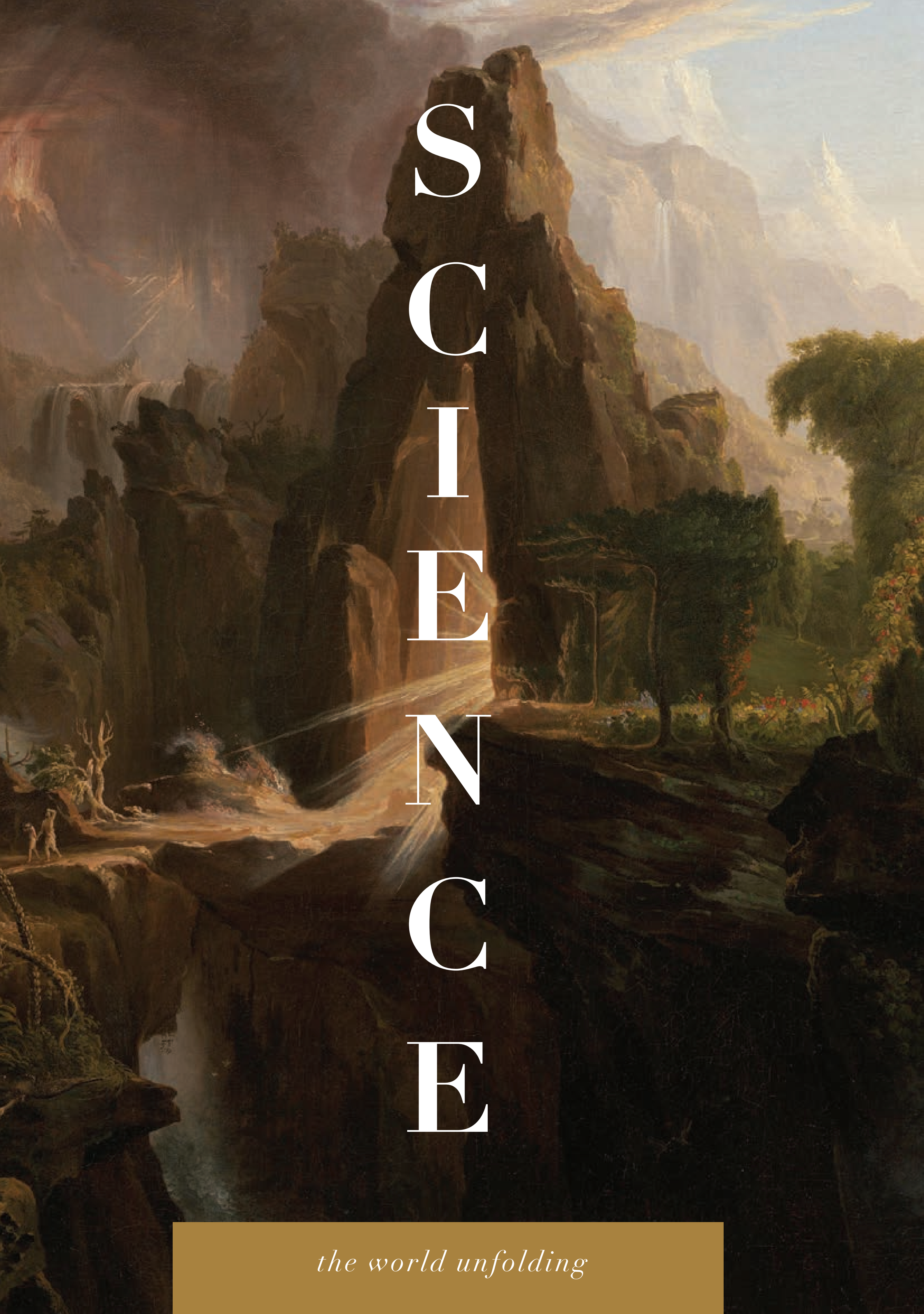
AESCHYLUS


SCIENCE
the world unfolding

The End as It Was in the Beginning

Joseph Ratzinger on "Old Creation" and "New Creation"

CHRISTOPHER T. BAGLOW

It is now a theological cliché to observe that Catholic thinkers will be reflecting on the work of the late Joseph Ratzinger for decades (generations? centuries?) to come. This essay is an exercise in drinking from the rich springs that run through the foothills, the ground level, of Ratzinger's thought.

In this regard, let's contemplate the way in which Ratzinger explained and developed the Catholic doctrine of the beginning, the "Old Creation," the reality of this universe of creatures, and the end, the "New Creation," the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of human history. He uses a simple, two-step method of interpreting Sacred Scripture in regard to both. As is well-known, the *End* corresponds roughly to the end of the Bible, to the New Testament, the *Beginning* to the beginning of the Bible, to the first chapters of the book of Genesis. We will begin at the Beginning, briefly considering Ratzinger's interpretation of the first creation account (the narrative of the seven days, Genesis 1 and a bit of 2). Then we will consider his use of the same steps to glean the meaning of New Testament passages that speak of the signs marking the advent of the New Creation, specifically the return, the glorious Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In regard to Genesis, Ratzinger introduces us to a crisis that often troubles contemporary Christian meditation on the first creation account, the story of the seven days—the crisis caused by modern science. If modern science has given us vastly different details about the origins of the universe than we find in Genesis, how can Genesis still be God's word, the truth about the Beginning?[1] According to Ratzinger, the details of Genesis 1 are images that point beyond themselves to a truth that is deeper and greater than any human expression—that the universe was created in and through divine Reason, God's *Logos* who is also God's Son, and is therefore orderly, true, and good. The images—the seven days, the order of creation, the sky dome—are like holy water or blessed salt; they are *verbal sacramentals*. When we read them in faith, just as when we bless ourselves, we are called to focus not on them but through them on the mysteries they symbolize. Here we have the first step—to distinguish between what he calls the "form of portrayal" and the deeper content it symbolizes. The forms of portrayal in Genesis are the images given—seven days, order of creation, etc. The content is the revealed truth that shines through these symbols.[2]

Sensible enough. But the greatness of Ratzinger is captured precisely in his lack of satisfaction with ending here: "I believe that this view is correct, but it is not enough."[3] He begins to ask a new set of questions. Are the images simply to be thrown away like peanut shells or candy wrappers? Should we rewrite the text with new details, scientifically demonstrated ones? If so, Ratzinger bluntly suggests, then "the Church's faith is like a jellyfish—no one can get a grip on it and it has no firm center."[4]

And so he offers an equally essential step, which moves the reader beyond literary competence and into a more penetrating theological reflection—recognition of the enduring

ART: Thomas Cole, *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, 1828, Wikimedia Commons.

significance of the images. We have all heard Marshall McLuhan's saying: "The medium is the message." In the first step, Ratzinger is saying that the message is ever greater than the medium, in step two that the medium has an indispensable part to play, a rich meaning that is lost when it is overlooked: "[The details] too, express the truth—in another way, to be sure, than is the case in physics and biology. *They represent truth in the way that symbols do* [italics mine]—just as, for example, the Gothic window gives us a deep insight into reality."[5]

Here we see that when form and content, image and reality, are distinguished, only half of the work is done. We must then seek the resurrection of the form through careful appreciation. Only in this way can every word of Scripture be understood in its unending significance. For example, God speaks ten times in the account, which calls to mind the Ten Commandments. This symbolizes the truth that the universe is created as a space for human goodness, for the sake of goodness.

Also, God only deliberates when he creates human beings. This is symbolic of the uniqueness of human beings, who like God also deliberate. Of all the creatures known to the human authors of the account, only human beings are capable of rationality as the image of God's own perfect Reason. Also, God never beholds his human creatures, nor declares their goodness simply by virtue of their existence, as he does with other creatures. He only gives them their mission. The symbolism is clear: human goodness is not simply up to God, but to God and to us. Our goodness is a question in suspense—it is up to us to freely cooperate with the Creator and to thereby realize the goodness by which and in which God has created us.

Tutored in Ratzinger's two-step approach, we can now move to his theology of the End, to his interpretation of New Testament eschatology. Very early in his *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* it is clear that the first step, distinguishing between the "deeper, greater truth" and the forms of portrayal, will be needed here as well: the interpreter must recognize the distinction "between reality on the one hand and the literary schemata used by the [biblical] word on the other."[6] This is because God's fulfillment of all things is greater than any human words, even those used in the Bible. He repeats this assertion in many ways: "the detailed particularities of the world of the resurrection are beyond our conceiving"[7]; "the new world cannot be imagined"; "Christ's coming cannot in any way be calculated from the evidence of history."[8] Ratzinger warns against assuming that the forms of portrayal, the eschatological images of the New Testament, are identical with the realities.

Yet these images have an enduring symbolism that must be appreciated in itself (step two). Let's apply this to the object of much misconceived fascination for many Christians, the return of Christ. Ratzinger points us to two passages, one a parable of Jesus (Matt. 25:1–6), the other a prophecy of St. Paul (1 Cor. 15:51–52). Both indicate the Second Coming by reference to sound, the first, a shout, the second, a trumpet blast. As we will see, they are actually *the same sound*:

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

For those unfamiliar with the Judaism of Jesus' day, the shout and the trumpet blast may seem like special, secret information about the end of days. But actually, our Lord and St. Paul are both drawing on Jewish liturgical practices, distinguishing between their form of portrayal and their content to describe the Second Coming. The cry and the trumpet blast signified then and now the coming of the new year in the Jewish Feast of the New Year, Rosh Hashanah, literally the Feast of Trumpet Blasts. Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of creation, the Jewish "birthday feast" of the world. It is all about making peace in the community and striving to be a better person. We all know about the experience of a new year, the promise of the future, our hope that life will improve, that we will improve.

Key to the feast is the "shout" of the *shofar*, a ram's horn trumpet. And so, by reference to the shout and the trumpet blast, Christ and St. Paul tell us that the return of Christ will usher in the fulfillment of all expectation. Here we have step two, identifying the enduring significance of the form of the text:

It signifies, then the beginning of the new 'year' of God, the eternal wedding-feast which he celebrates with his own . . . these texts [describe] the mystery of the Parousia in the language of liturgical tradition . . . The Parousia [i.e., the Second Coming] is the highest intensification and fulfillment of the Liturgy. And the Liturgy is Parousia, a Parousia-like event taking place in our midst.[9]

The return of Christ will complete the liturgy, in which Christ is personally present in an already but not yet sort of way. In the second volume of his *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy, Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI quotes St. Bernard of Clairvaux:

We have come to know the threefold coming of the Lord. The third coming takes place between the other two . . . his first coming was in flesh and weakness [the Incarnation], his middle coming is in the spirit and power [now, in the liturgy], the last coming will be glory and majesty.[10]

In our expectation of Christ's return at the heart of every liturgy, we are praying that all of reality will become liturgy, that the universe will become like the Eucharist, in which God is "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

ART: Segna di Bonaventura, *Christ du Jugement dernier*, 1305, Wikimedia Commons.

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Notes

[1] Joseph Ratzinger, *"In the Beginning": A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 3.

[2] Ratzinger, 5.

[3] Ratzinger, 6.

[4] Ratzinger, 7.

[5] Ratzinger, 25–26.

[6] Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed., trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 46.

[7] Ratzinger, 192.

[8] Ratzinger, 194.

[9] Ratzinger, 202–203.

[10] Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Adventu Domini*, Sermon 3.4, quoted in Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), 290.

ARCHITECTURE

building the foundations

Beauty School

BY TODD R. FLANDERS

"Every child goes to school in a building that looks like a duplicating-machine replacement-parts wholesale distribution warehouse. Not even the school commissioners, who commissioned it and approved the plans, can figure out how it happened. The main thing is to try to avoid having to explain it to the parents." —Tom Wolfe [1]

"We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us." —Winston Churchill [2]

If you Google images of "beautiful schools," you will discover what most people think schools should look like. If you Google "ugly" ones, you will see many of Tom Wolfe's "wholesale distribution warehouses." While issues of aesthetics can't truly be addressed this way, the results of algorithms drawing upon millions of impressions are at least suggestive. People tend to think that beauty matters and that they know it when they see it.

I serve at a pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade Catholic school, Providence Academy in Minnesota, that was designed and built according to what people think a school should look like. In the mid-1990s, the school's founder passed around a style book containing about fifty pages of architectural photographs. He asked several people, separately, to identify the structure they most associated with the idea of a good school. Every person chose precisely the same one: the Wren Building at the College of William and Mary. Not incidentally, I think, it is the oldest college building still standing in the United States, one that itself drew on long-standing perceptions about educational architecture. Our school, opened in 2001, was modeled on it.

That our academy was designed according to what people think a good school should look like has had a curious afterlife. Frequently, its facade is used in regional and national media when an image of a school is called for. In recent years, it has been featured on a Fox News story, on the TV series "Resident Alien," in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, on the cover of a Chicago private school guide, on a national blog post, and in a social media promotion for a "Prep School Murder Mystery." Notably, none of these usages had anything to do with Providence Academy.

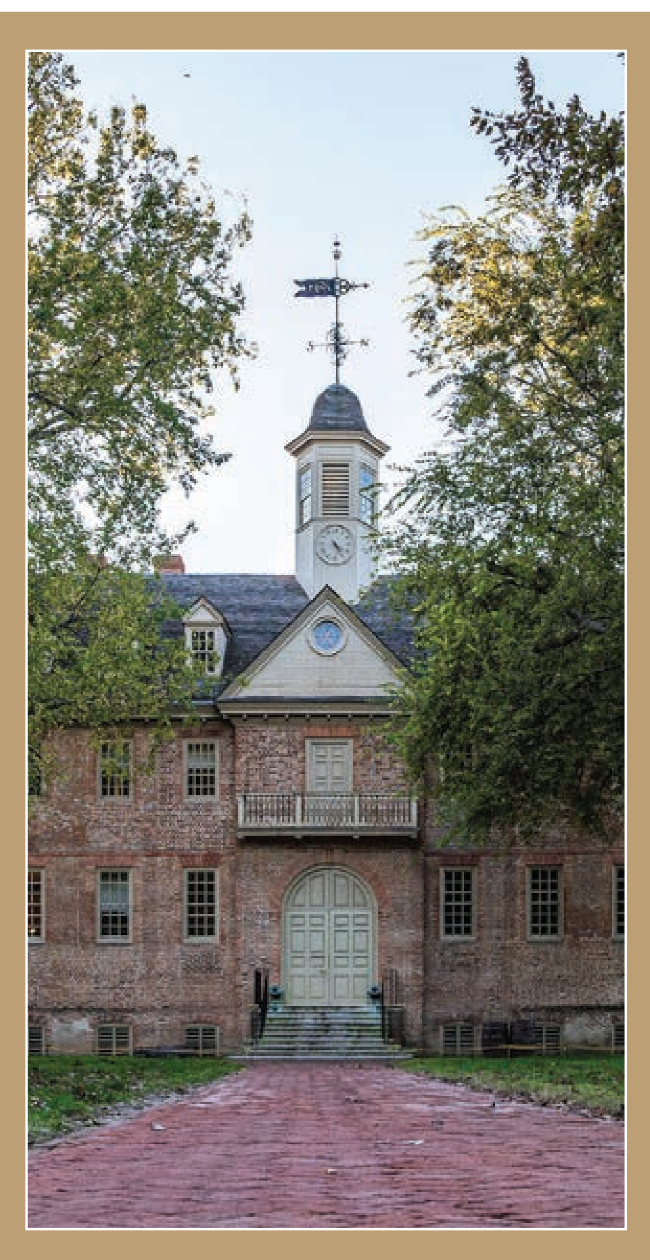


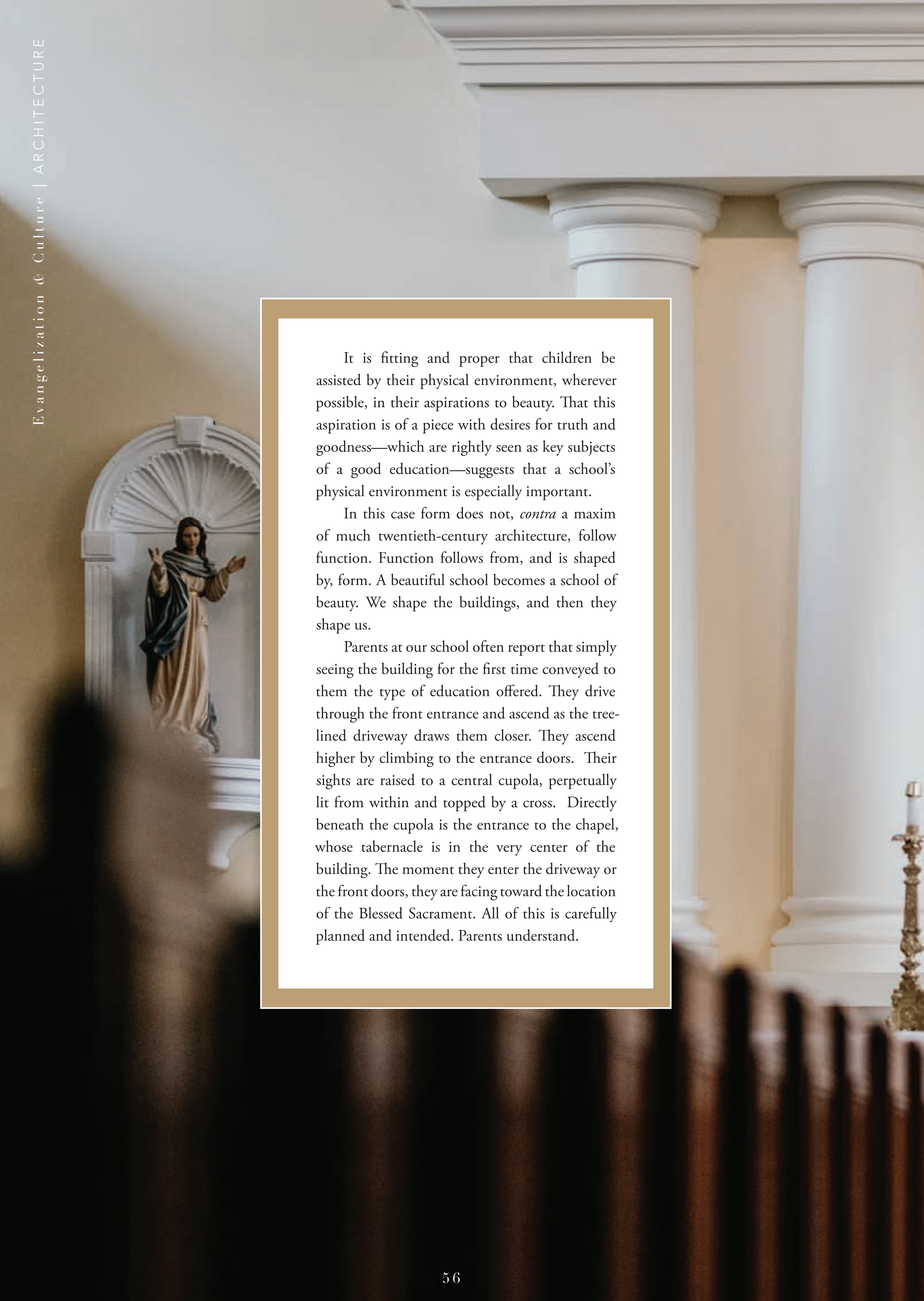
PHOTO: Miguel Yerena, Wikimedia Commons.

Does it matter what people think matters about the architecture and design of schools? It does if their intuitions are about something real. Even to raise the question connects us with a deeper one: Is beauty real? Is it an objective value, what philosophers have called a transcendental attribute of Being itself, one that is knowable across times and cultures? Or is it merely subjective, an opinion that varies with the eye and milieu of every beholder?

Which answer is correct? If beauty is objective, then a school's role is to present and instill artistic sensibilities that accord with a reality that uplifts. If beauty is, rather, merely subjective, then there is no uplifting to be done, no aesthetic knowledge to be conveyed. A school could offer nothing but neutral spaces in which students develop individualized tastes. This latter answer has brought the architectural tendency in modern school design.

The Catholic faith affirms the former answer. The *Catechism* teaches that beauty, along with truth and goodness, "reflect[s] the infinite perfection of God."[3] People are created capable of perceiving the reflection. Socrates would have understood this. Standing before the Parthenon and admiring it, he mused that "each column, each piece of marble, each statue, each of the temple's architectural elements makes its own contribution to the overall harmony of the whole; the beauty of the structure emerges from the way in which the parts are arranged."[4] Beauty is related to symmetries, to harmonies, to relations of parts to wholes, to the order of things.

PHOTO: Erik Witsoe, Unsplash.



It is fitting and proper that children be assisted by their physical environment, wherever possible, in their aspirations to beauty. That this aspiration is of a piece with desires for truth and goodness—which are rightly seen as key subjects of a good education—suggests that a school's physical environment is especially important.

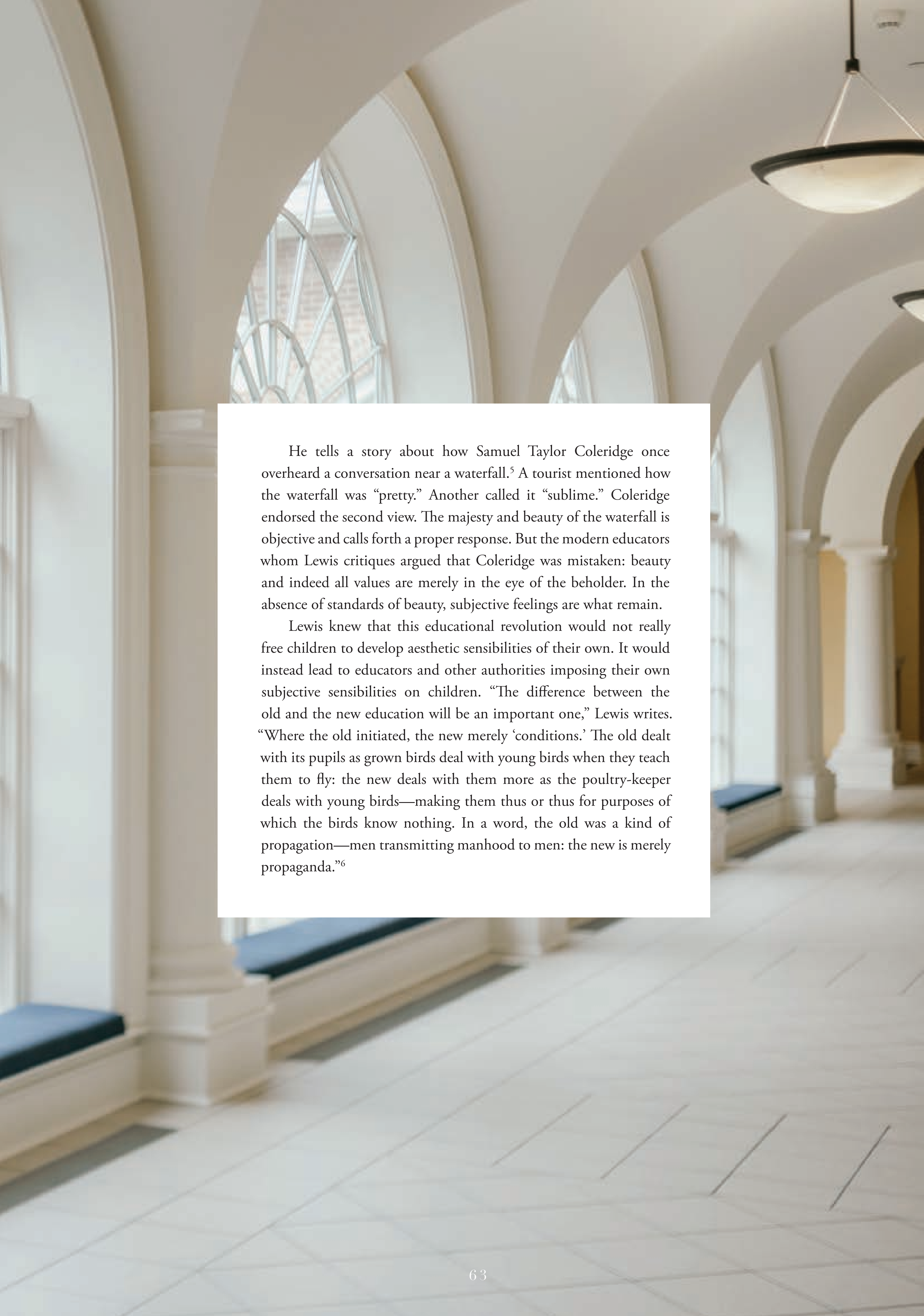
In this case form does not, *contra* a maxim of much twentieth-century architecture, follow function. Function follows from, and is shaped by, form. A beautiful school becomes a school of beauty. We shape the buildings, and then they shape us.

Parents at our school often report that simply seeing the building for the first time conveyed to them the type of education offered. They drive through the front entrance and ascend as the tree-lined driveway draws them closer. They ascend higher by climbing to the entrance doors. Their sights are raised to a central cupola, perpetually lit from within and topped by a cross. Directly beneath the cupola is the entrance to the chapel, whose tabernacle is in the very center of the building. The moment they enter the driveway or the front doors, they are facing toward the location of the Blessed Sacrament. All of this is carefully planned and intended. Parents understand.

So do students. The spaces they inhabit affect choices and actions. There are, for example, no food fights in a tasteful and carpeted lunch room. Classrooms, hallways, and even restrooms are designed to signify the dignity of the human person. Students respond by being more dignified—as mentioned repeatedly by visitors and those who encounter our students in the broader community. Of course, many factors contribute to student thoughts and behaviors, but the building literally comprehends them all. Its humane proportions, its harmoniousness, and its symmetries bespeak an orderly cosmos of which all are a part. They bespeak a world of meaning that provides a sense of continuity with students and customs that have gone before. That continuity instills a sense of home, of rootedness, and of belonging.

A century ago, even public school buildings were built with such a vision. That vision has not been lost so much as squandered. C.S. Lewis little 1944 masterpiece *The Abolition of Man* was prescient about tendencies of modern educational trends. He saw that progressive theorists were intentionally replacing the classic emphasis on objective values such as beauty with subjective sentiments. Lewis argued, with subtlety and precision, that nothing less than the future of human nature itself was at stake.

ART: Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, *Waterfall at Terni,* 1826, Wikimedia Commons.



He tells a story about how Samuel Taylor Coleridge once overheard a conversation near a waterfall.[5] A tourist mentioned how the waterfall was "pretty." Another called it "sublime." Coleridge endorsed the second view. The majesty and beauty of the waterfall is objective and calls forth a proper response. But the modern educators whom Lewis critiques argued that Coleridge was mistaken: beauty and indeed all values are merely in the eye of the beholder. In the absence of standards of beauty, subjective feelings are what remain.

Lewis knew that this educational revolution would not really free children to develop aesthetic sensibilities of their own. It would instead lead to educators and other authorities imposing their own subjective sensibilities on children. "The difference between the old and the new education will be an important one," Lewis writes. "Where the old initiated, the new merely 'conditions.' The old dealt with its pupils as grown birds deal with young birds when they teach them to fly: the new deals with them more as the poultry-keeper deals with young birds—making them thus or thus for purposes of which the birds know nothing. In a word, the old was a kind of propagation—men transmitting manhood to men: the new is merely propaganda."[6]

Children delight in wonder, in song,
in prayer, in dance, in beautiful things
and paintings and statues and buildings. . . .

. . . participating in a small way in God's own creativity,
they marvel in trying their hands at
making lovely things themselves.

The good news is that children want and need Lewis' "old education." They are created by God to share in a common human nature. It is a nature that seeks the things that reflect the infinite perfections of God. As the Roman poet Horace famously said, "You can drive out nature with a pitchfork, but she keeps on coming back."[7] Children naturally are, as Christ calls us all to be, "childlike." They delight in wonder, in song, in prayer, in dance, in beautiful things and paintings and statues and buildings. They intuit, and want to know, what is real. And, participating in a small way in God's own creativity, they marvel in trying their hands at making lovely things themselves.

"Something of the child's pure delight in creation survives in every pure work of art," notes philosopher Roger Scruton.[8] Children can be inspired by their surroundings to raise their sights, as all great artists do, to see with eyes of transcendence. So uplifted, they may come to see their world, even amid appearances of ugliness and meaninglessness, as it really is: charged with the grandeur of God. It is shot through with meaning and purpose. So inspired, each child may discover a vocation to help make his or her own world a truer, better, and more beautiful place.

Todd R. Flanders is Headmaster of Providence Academy in Plymouth, Minnesota, and an instructor in the Harry J. Flynn Catechetical Institute at the Saint Paul Seminary.

Notes

[1] Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (New York: Picador, 1981), 1.

[2] Winston Churchill, Speech to the House of Commons, October 28, 1943.

[3] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 41.

[4] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, quoted in Paul Herrick, *Philosophy, Reasoned Belief, and Faith* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), chap. 4, Kindle.

[5] C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 2–4.

[6] Lewis, 23.

[7] Horace, *Epistles*, Book 1:10.

[8] Roger Scruton, "Why Beauty Matters," directed by Louise Lockwood (London: BBC 2, 2009).

The first thing
I shall do, as
soon as the
money arrives,
is to buy some
Greek authors,
after that I shall
buy clothes.

”

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS

What is education?

Derived from the Latin words *educare*, *educere*, and *educatum*, it can mean, variously, “to nourish,” “to bring up,” “to lead forth,” or “to draw out.”

But today, the word “education” can conjure less-than-lofty images. Notwithstanding august buildings and green campuses, the classrooms and lecture halls within can seem impossibly large and hollow. Teachers (or their proxies) can appear cool and far away. Amidst a sea of fellow students, many feel unaccompanied and alone. And as the space empties out, what often remains are barren echoes. With too much material and too little relevance, many learners feel unmoored from their foundations and adrift in their aims. Has education become too clinical and programmatic, too institutional and impersonal? Has education somehow lost its way?

In some quarters, yes.

But then—as we all have encountered—there is education that is *pure magic*.

The teacher who breathes life into an inscrutable topic. The tutor who lingers just a bit longer to ensure their student understands. The professor who makes those breakthrough connections. The headmaster who mentors eager young educators. The coaches who sculpt. The parents who mold. It is Christ and his disciples. The Church and its flock. Altogether, education involves guides who fundamentally give a damn.

True education awakens and enlivens. It overflows with epiphanies and insights. It challenges and reforms. Education involves raised eyebrows as well as furrowed brows, expansive smiles and even head-shaking grimaces. It is a blazing fire that we receive and can’t wait to pass on. It transcends knowledge simply satisfied to “get along” and imparts wisdom that strives to live in brilliant fullness. It is the delicate but indispensable link between ancestry and posterity. Done with great care, education simply makes us better.

In this issue of *Evangelization & Culture*, we explore the riches to be found in education. Dr. D.C. Schindler examines how an education in philosophy is “useless” and, as such, indispensable. Mark Bradford considers how far education of the intellectually and developmentally disabled has come (and how far it has yet to go). Dr. Christopher Kaczor examines how illogical, self-defeating statements interfere with our ability to apprehend truth. Dr. Julia D. Hejduk champions the classics in educating the Catholic sensibility. Marcie Stokman challenges mothers and others finished with their formal education to be “forever learners.” And, in our special feature, President Stephen Minnis of Benedictine College unfolds what the “idea of a Catholic university” looks like in today’s secular age.

What is education?

It is one person ushering another, in wisdom and charity, to the Spirit-infused joy of greater understanding. And perhaps, in that understanding, we will each sense the greatness of truth and see a clearer way to Christ.

EDUCATION

philo

FEATURE

sophy *as a Feast for the Soul*

DR. D.C. SCHINDLER

PHOTO: cottonbro studio, Pexels.

In the endeavor to capture and help form the hearts of students in the great task of education, philosophy has this advantage over every other subject apart from theology: it lies closest to the essence of human happiness. The ancients identified the highest human act as the contemplation of truth. Appropriating this notion, the Christian tradition extended the activity into eternity and expanded its scope to include every single human being without exception, not just the leisure class and those intellectually inclined: we are all called to contemplate the true God in wonder, in love, and in ecstatic joy, forever in heaven. If all the other subjects of study offer glimmers of the thrill of learning something new, and so delighting in the joy of the contemplation of truth, there is no other subject for which such contemplation is the whole point. Aristotle said that philosophy is the freest science, by which he meant that it is essentially non-utilitarian, precisely because there is no higher thing to which it can be subordinated as a mere instrument. As I have often told students, philosophy is *useless*—just as love and friendship are useless. And, indeed, philosophy is a kind of friendship and a kind of love: *philo-sophia*.

The proximity of philosophy to the happiness to which we are all called reveals the gravity of the crisis into which the teaching of philosophy has fallen in the modern age, a crisis that has intensified in recent years. Philosophy departments are disappearing from universities, largely because of swiftly declining demand. It is difficult, particularly in times of economic uncertainty, to justify the study of something that prides itself in being *useless*, for which there are few obvious job prospects. Indeed, philosophy does not really fit well in an obscenely high-cost, professionalized university: there is something evidently unbecoming, not to say shameful, in paying for love, even the love of wisdom. To justify itself in such an ill-fitting context, philosophy often attempts to demonstrate how useful it can be, in spite of its reputation, since it teaches students to read critically, to think well, to write clearly, and to formulate rigorous and compelling arguments (and, to be sure, it *is* the case that philosophy majors tend to be among the highest scorers in MCATs and LSATs). If this doesn't work, philosophy professors may try to show at least that it can be *fun*. Who can fail to appreciate the pleasure afforded by the public dismantling of an opponent's arguments? But such "fun" has little to do with human happiness, and it certainly does not capture and transform the heart.

It is important that we see that there is a connection between the drift away from philosophy in higher education and the drift away from the meaning of life—the central, universal human vocation to contemplating, in love, the truth of God. In this respect, alienation

from philosophy may be read as a kind of symptom of man's self-alienation. This is not just a temporary problem. Christians might be tempted to concede that, if we end up making a mess of things on earth, we can nevertheless count on God fixing things in the eschaton. But such a view is short-sighted. Plato wisely observed that *education* is the only acquisition that one carries across the threshold of death and into the afterlife. He said this to make clear why the task of education warrants our supreme attention. Christians have always explained the trial of temporal existence as a preparation for the eschaton. Too often, we think of this in purely moral terms according to a punishment/reward scheme: if you are good, you go to heaven; if you are bad, you do not. But there is another dimension to the preparation for the afterlife—or as Socrates puts it in one of Plato's dialogues, the "practice for death." Temporal existence is not a mere "pass-fail" test; it is instead a task of forming one's soul, shaping one's character, training one's capacity to see, to wonder, to receive, to appropriate, and to realize the goodness, truth, and beauty of the reality God has created, in which his very being is expressed. We learn to love God in things so that we can love God in himself in the joy of eternal life. We do indeed take our education or lack thereof, understood in this broader sense, with us into the afterlife—which is to say, the soul that is saved is a soul either poor or rich in its capacity to receive. *This* is the ultimate reason why philosophy is important.

Considered thus *sub specie aeternitatis*, the crisis into which philosophy has fallen is especially disturbing; but the proximity philosophy has to human happiness presents at the same time an unshakeable foundation for hope. Because the desire for happiness is universal, there is no human being who does not in principle have an appetite for philosophy. Aristotle famously begins his *Metaphysics* with the observation that "all men by nature desire to know." Note that, by associating this

IMAGE: Jonathan Borba, Pexels.

desire with our *nature*, he is saying that it defines us, making us the kind of thing that we are, and that it lies deep in the core of our being. When students retort that Aristotle must have been speaking to a long bygone age, since they know plenty of people that evince no such desire, I point them to the very next sentence in Aristotle's text: "An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses." It is indeed difficult to find a single human being, even in our age, that does not take pleasure in sense experience. If anything, this indication has become even more prevalent.

But what is the connection between sensual pleasure and philosophy, which has the (regrettably well-earned) reputation for being abstract and disconnected from anything evidently *vital*? The key is the *delight* that Aristotle indicates. The word he uses here is in fact love, *agapē*, and what he has in mind is something distinct from the kind of pleasure one gets in the gratification of a need, such as contentedness after a filling meal. It is instead what the classical tradition would call the pleasure of *contemplation*: we take delight in sense experience, we *love* it, because we desire to know what something feels like, what it tastes like; we enjoy listening to and watching things not first in order to obtain useful information but simply because of the delight such activity brings in itself. (The entertainment industry depends entirely on—one might say, "exploits"—the fact that all human beings are latent philosophers.) Philosophy is just the highest and most concentrated form of this universal human love.

When teaching philosophy, it is very helpful to keep in mind this basic connection with the delight in sense experience. Sense experience has an inevitable immediacy and reality: you cannot sense something that isn't actually there. And there is a direct involvement too, a properly *subjective* dimension to it (in the sense of "subjectivity" developed, for example, by John Paul II). No one, not even the greatest poet, can tell you what "green" actually looks like; there is just no way to get around seeing it for yourself. Similarly, philosophy, as a love of wisdom, is a desire for intimate knowledge, the kind that cannot be adequately translated into so much information. There is a difference, in this respect, between learning *about* philosophical ideas, *about* the people who formulated them, *about* the historical context in which they did so, and so forth, and learning philosophy itself. This is not a discrete "content" that can simply be mastered or absorbed *en masse* as one crams for the final. Instead, philosophy has to be "undergone" (as the ancient poet said of the "things of God," they must be learned through suffering: *mathein pathein*). It demands that one be present—*really* present, in all of the dimensions of that word (which is why "distance learning" is positively anti-philosophical, and "Zoom" classes are detrimental not only to the teaching of philosophy but to the teaching of all subjects to the extent that they are approached in a philosophical spirit). One *needs* to show up, but doing so does not suffice in itself. More than this, one needs to collect oneself, to gather one's energies and focus one's attention, as one would, for example, in listening to a close friend relating a matter of deep personal significance.

It is reasonable here to object that to require such a presence is simply to expect too much of the average student, and the objection would be quite justified if this disposition were something like an a priori condition of possibility that the student had to "gin up" on his own and "bring to the table" as a complete state, produced through a sheer act of will. But in fact the disposition to philosophize, which is to say, the gathering of one's attention in order to be able to listen, to behold, and to "take in," is something that philosophy itself provides—again, by its very nature. The philosophical tradition is brimming with insights that cannot fail to provoke in the recipient the disposition of openness pervaded by

There are insights in the tradition that cannot be grasped without wonder.

desire that the ancients called wonder (more on that in a moment). These insights are analogous to the kinds of statements recognized as essentially *self-evident*, which means they cannot be understood without one already giving one's assent—for example, that a part is necessarily smaller than the whole of which it is a part, or that the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied of the same thing at the same time in the same respect. Similarly, there are insights in the tradition (such as the irreducible transcendence of intelligible form) that cannot be grasped without wonder. In other words, simply to understand such ideas is to enter into a state of wonder. In this case, to teach these ideas, to the extent that one does in fact communicate their logic, is already to introduce the students into the requisite disposition. But even these treasures are not, so to speak, mere museum pieces. Instead, they inevitably bear some connection to, or shed some light on, everyday experience that *all* of us have had, in one respect or another, insofar as we are human. Because the desire to know belongs to our very nature, it means that, however strange philosophy might initially seem or how much work and training it might require of us, it comes to us perfectly naturally.

A paradigmatic example of this is the experience we have just mentioned—namely, the phenomenon of wonder. Plato and Aristotle, two of the greatest thinkers of antiquity who stand guard, as it were, at the gateway of the classical philosophical tradition, pointed to the experience (or better the "passion": *pathē*) of wonder as the essential principle or origin (*archē*) of philosophizing. Their statements on this matter are not just "theories," which may be indifferently compared to other theories, but have something genuinely authoritative about them—not (simply) because of their ancient provenance but because they can be shown to reveal, in a compelling way, something essential about the nature of philosophy. Part of the demonstration of this point comes in asking students to enter in to their own experience of wonder, to see "what it is like," not just to dissect it as a corpse on a table but to think about it precisely from the inside. They enter more deeply into this experience as they attempt to distinguish it from other, similar experiences (such as admiration, or doubt, or awe) and to consider some of its implications. It is not difficult to wonder about wonder. The teacher's role in this is to "toggle" back and forth, as it were, between the texts of the classic philosophers and the students' own experience, allowing the former to guide and shed light on the latter, and the latter to enliven the former and reveal its meaning more immediately. (One can eventually explain to the students that this disciplined "living through" is called "phenomenology," but there is no reason they would have to know this at the outset.) If all goes well, we find ourselves already *inside* philosophy itself before we begin talking *about* it, and that makes all the difference. It transforms the *way* we talk about it.

If one thus enters into philosophy through the gate—with the help of the proper gatekeepers, rather than, like a thief, climbing over the wall—one emerges into a genuinely nourishing pasture, which is seemingly infinite in scope. Having passed through the proper gate allows us to retain a living relationship with the source of philosophy and acquire a sense of mystery that does not compete with knowledge, which would thus require a deliberate ignorance to be cultivated, but grows and deepens in tandem with knowledge. The more we know, the more mysterious things become, and the more we attend intelligently to the mystery, the better we understand. Cultivating this reciprocity brings us into community with the tradition and with each other—in principle with all human beings, who share by nature a desire to know. Plato depicted the soul's relation to truth as a kind of celebratory feast, which nourishes in a truly transcendent way, filling a need that we as human beings have for something that lies beyond all (material) need. A feast is "useless," just as philosophy is useless and love is useless—though there is nothing more necessary to a properly human existence. Not by accident, the eschatological consummation of human happiness is depicted as a "heavenly banquet." It is the aim, and indeed the extraordinary privilege, of the teaching of philosophy to prepare, even now, for this ultimate celebration.

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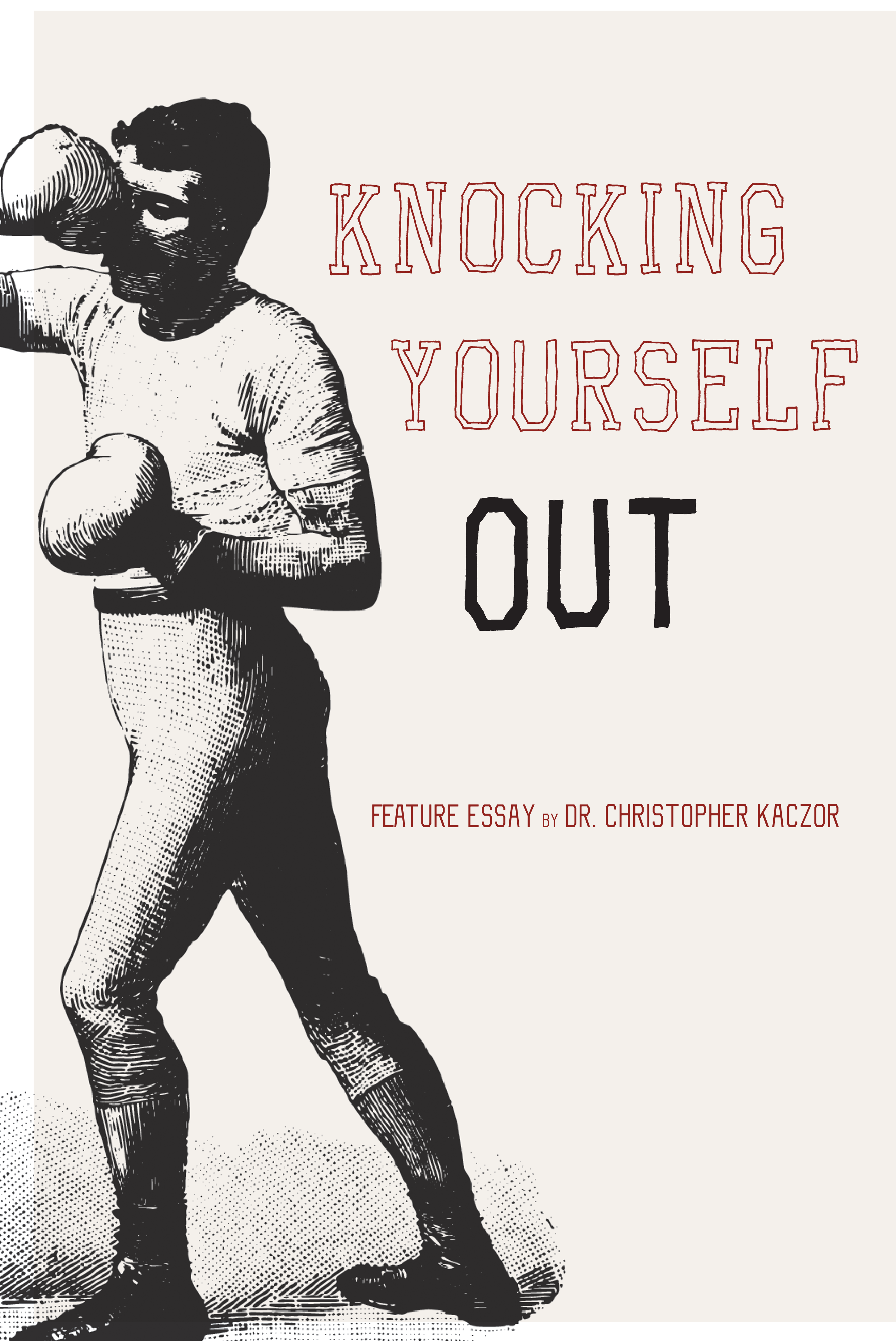
Total non-retention has kept my education from being a burden to me.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR



KNOCKING YOURSELF OUT

FEATURE ESSAY BY DR. CHRISTOPHER KACZOR

In one of Edward St. Aubyn's novels, a man is asked if he is his own worst enemy. "I certainly hope so," the man replies. "I dread to think what would happen if somebody else turned out to be better at it than me."[1]

In the life of the mind, one way to be your own worst enemy is by means of self-defeating statements, such as, "I am not writing in English right now" or "I never, never, never use the word never." A self-defeating statement cannot possibly be true because the claim being made is undermined by the claim being made. A statement that is self-defeating is like a mixed martial arts fighter who knocks himself out (yes, this happens).

Relativists often make self-defeating statements. In his book *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey*, Sir Roger Scruton notes, "A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is 'merely relative', is asking you not to believe him. So don't."[2] If there is no truth, the statement "there is no truth" is not true. Likewise, if there are no absolutes, the statement "there are no absolutes" is not true, for the statement itself is an absolute.

Timothy Keller, author of *The Reason for God*, provides other examples of self-defeating statements: "Everyone in the world is an evangelist. Even telling someone they can't proselytize is a form of proselytizing your views" (@timkellernyc, January 12, 2021). He notes, "Everyone makes exclusive truth claims. You may say 'no religion should say their view of reality is superior to everyone else's' but at that moment you are claiming that your view of reality is superior—more worthy of acceptance—than theirs" (@timkellernyc, February 12, 2023). Keller also points out that "to insist doctrine doesn't matter is really a doctrine itself," and "How could you possibly know that no religion can see the whole truth unless you yourself have the superior, comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality you just claimed none of the religions have?" (@timkellernyc, August 13, 2018).

Pointing to self-defeating statements may seem like a verbal trick. But the self-defeating nature of such claims is grounded not in trickery but in reality. What reality? Aristotle pointed out that all thinking, all speaking, and all doing relies on the bedrock reality of the principle of noncontradiction—namely, that "a thing cannot be and not be at the same time and in the same respect," as Aristotle notes in his in *Metaphysics*.[3] Even children playing hide-and-seek implicitly use this principle. They know that their friend cannot both be and not be hiding in the pantry.

"A THING CANNOT BE AND NOT BE
AT THE SAME TIME AND IN THE SAME RESPECT."

–ARISTOTLE

ILLUSTRATION: Creative Market.

Of course, some people do deny the principle of noncontradiction. In such cases, the medieval Islamic philosopher Avicenna suggested tough medicine: "Anyone who denies the law of non-contradiction should be beaten and burned until he admits that to be beaten is not the same as not to be beaten, and to be burned is not the same as not to be burned."[4] A more gentle approach is to point out that all people (including those who deny the principle) rely on the principle of noncontradiction every day whenever they think something, say something, or do something. They are thinking rather than not thinking, speaking rather than not speaking, doing rather than not doing. Even to deny the principle of noncontradiction is to unwittingly rely on the principle of noncontradiction.

Given the principle of noncontradiction, a statement cannot be both true and not true at the same time and in the same respect. If it were true that each and every sentence I write is exactly three words long, then this sentence would also be exactly three words long. But it isn't. Self-defeating statements are statements that assert some claim but at the same time are a denial of that very claim.

Scientists are not immune from expressing self-defeating statements. For example, Richard Dawkins writes, "Truth is real and science is the best way we have of finding it. 'Alternative ways of knowing' may be consoling, they may be sincere, they may be quaint, they may have a poetic or mythic beauty, but the one thing they are not is true."[5] Science does indeed help us discover various truths, and it is indeed the best way to discover particular kinds of truth, like what medications are best for asthma treatment. But it does not follow from these claims that other ways of knowing—philosophy, for example—are not true. The claim that "alternative ways of knowing are not true" is *not* itself a claim of science, so any attempted justification must be based on alternative ways of knowing. The fundamental claim of scientism that "science and science alone provides the truth" is not proven scientifically. There is no experiment in physics or biology or chemistry or any other science that shows that science and science alone is true. So Dawkins must rely on "other ways of knowing" in his denial that "other ways of knowing" can come to the truth.

Dawkins, and everyone else, in fact use non-scientific ways of knowing every single day. Ludwig

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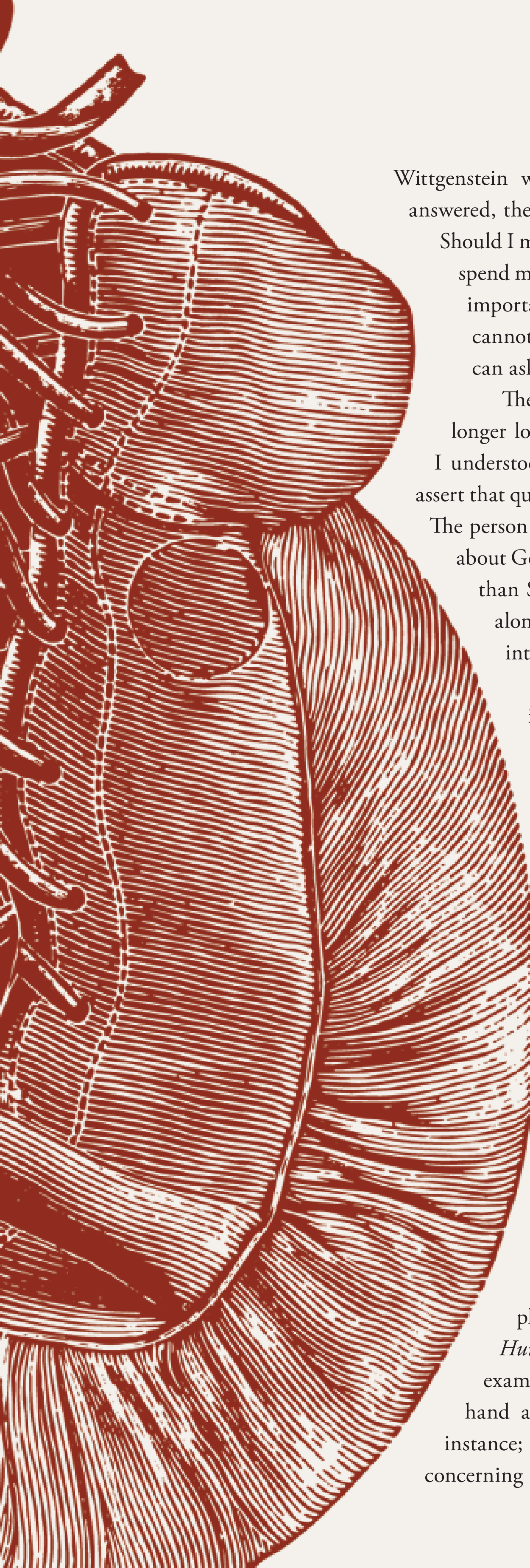

Wittgenstein wrote, "Even if all *possible* scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all."[6] Should I marry this person? Should I have a child? How should I spend my limited time, treasure, and talent? Some of the most important questions in life are simply questions that science cannot answer. Among the most important questions we can ask are questions about God.

The late, great film critic Roger Ebert wrote, "I no longer lost any sleep over the questions of God and infinity. I understood they could have no answers."[7] But of course, to assert that questions about God have no answers is itself an answer. The person who responds to the question "What can be known about God?" with "nothing at all" is offering no less an answer than St. Thomas Aquinas, who believed that using reason alone we can know of the existence of one God who is intelligent, good, and loving.[8]

Indeed, claiming we can know *nothing* about God, including whether God exists, is a rather bold claim. This assertion presupposes that all those many philosophical arguments for God's existence by philosophers ancient like Aristotle, medieval like Aquinas, and contemporary like Al Plantinga are mistaken. But have all of these arguments really been evaluated and found wanting? Some people who claim "we can know nothing about God" haven't read a single one of these arguments and yet dogmatically assert that they must all be mistaken. You might call it the ostrich defense. Rather than engage with the views of those with whom you disagree, you put your head in the sand and pretend that these arguments don't exist. In any case, to claim "we can know nothing about God" is self-defeating, for this claim itself is a knowledge claim about what we can know about God.

Self-defeating statements are also found among philosophers. In his 1748 book *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume provided a great example in what is called Hume's fork: "If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any

ILLUSTRATION: Creative Market.

. . .THAT SHOWS THAT SCIENCE
AND SCIENCE ALONE
IS TRUE.

experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."[9] But note, does this quotation from Hume contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence? No. Then, according to Hume's own principles, we should commit his writing to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. With his fork, Hume stabs himself.

In his 1781 work *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant responded to Hume but ended up falling into a similar trap. Kant came to the conclusion that we cannot know things in themselves (*noumena*) but only the appearance of those things (*phenomena*). In drawing this distinction, Kant drew a limit to our thinking. One of these limits, according to Kant, is that we cannot reason from the reality of the created order to the reality of a Creator, since in the end, we cannot even know the reality of the created order.

Yet as Wittgenstein pointed out, "in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought)."[10] If this is true, then we should reject Kant's claim that we cannot know things in themselves. As Peter Kreeft notes, "If we can't know anything about things-in-themselves, or objective reality, how can we know that it even exists? Kant tries to limit thought to the subjective, but in order to draw a limit or border to anything, we have to think both sides of the border. So in order to limit the thinkable we have to think the unthinkable."[11] But to claim to think the unthinkable is to involve oneself in a self-defeating claim. So, it turns out that to conclude that we cannot know reality is, in the end, a self-defeating statement. If we cannot know reality, then we cannot know the reality of the statement that we cannot know reality.

IF WE CANNOT KNOW REALITY, THEN WE CANNOT KNOW THE REALITY OF THE STATEMENT THAT WE CANNOT KNOW REALITY.

Rather than focusing on what we can know, as did Kant, a twenty-four-year-old philosopher named A.J. Ayer focused on the meaning of language. In his 1936 book *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Ayer's focus was not epistemological but rather linguistic. In what is called "logical positivism," Ayer taught that no proposition is meaningful if it is neither a tautology (e.g., "A bachelor is an unmarried man") nor empirically verifiable by scientific experiments, at least in principle (e.g. "There are twenty pennies in this jar"). A statement that is not a tautology and that is not at least in principle empirically verifiable is not true or false, but rather meaningless. But the claim "No proposition is meaningful if it is neither a tautology nor empirically verifiable" is itself neither a tautology nor empirically verifiable. So logical positivism, according to its own standards, is meaningless. In 1976, Bryan Magee asked Ayer, "Logical positivism must have had real defects. What do you now, in retrospect, think the main ones were?" Ayer replied, "Well, I suppose the most important of the defects was that nearly all of it was false."[12] Who says philosophy never makes progress?

We will make no progress, however, if we embrace skepticism. As Peter Kreeft points out,

> All forms of skepticism are self-contradictory. Is it true that there is no truth? Is it certain that there is no certainty? Is it an objective truth that truth is not objective? Is it an absolute that there are no absolutes? Is it universally true that there are no universals? Is it infallible that there is no infallibility? Is it merely probable that there is only probability? Is it reliable knowledge that all our knowledge is unreliable? Is it proved by the scientific method that there is no truth except the scientific method? Et cetera, et cetera ad infinitum. If you don't break the grips of the python of skepticism right from the beginning, you never will; the snake will just squeeze you tighter into itself every time you move.[13]

In the end, we must live in accordance with our best understanding of reality, including our best understanding of the ultimate questions. We must live either as if God exists or as if God does not exist. Our lives reflect one reality or the other. We cannot evade the choice, not even by self-defeating statements.

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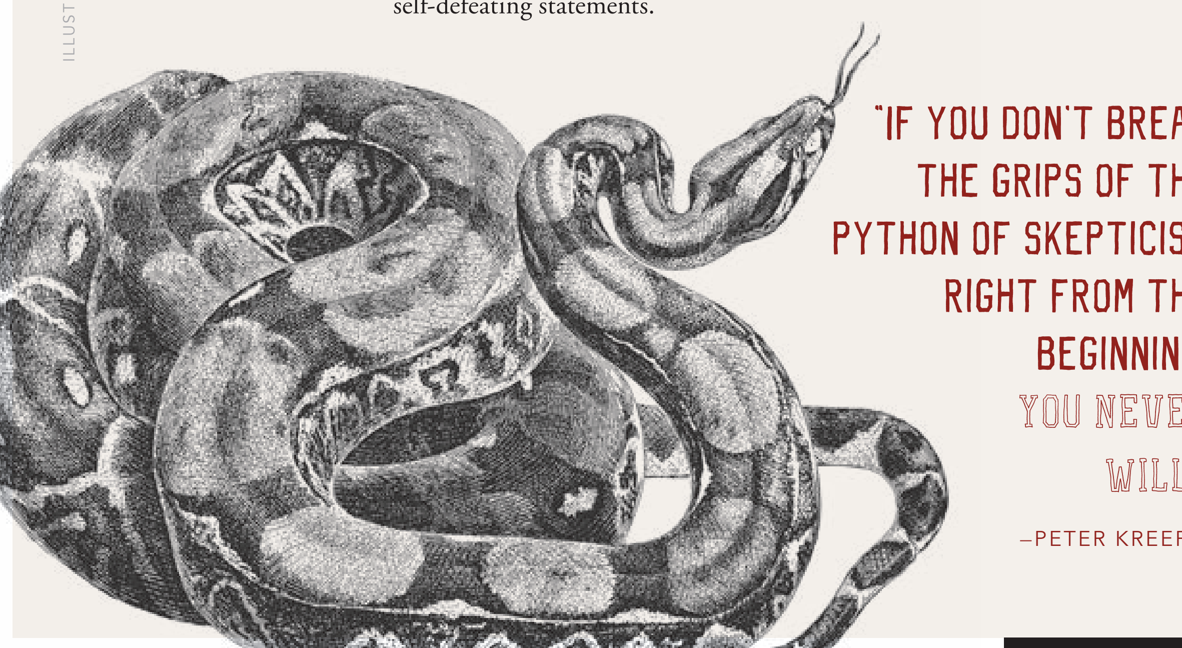

"IF YOU DON'T BREAK THE GRIPS OF THE PYTHON OF SKEPTICISM RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING. YOU NEVER WILL."

—PETER KREEFT

Notes

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Dr. Christopher Kaczor is Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Loyola Marymount University and the St. Thomas Aquinas Fellow for the Renewal of Catholic Intellectual Life at the Word on Fire Institute. He has authored or edited fifteen books, including *Jordan Peterson, God, and Christianity: The Search for a Meaningful Life* (with Matthew Petrusek) and more than one hundred scholarly articles. His research on issues of ethics, philosophy, and religion has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, Huffington Post, *National Review*, NPR, BBC, EWTN, ABC, NBC, FOX, CBS, MSNBC, and the *Today* show. He can be found on X at @Prof_Kaczor.

from

UNEDUCABLE

to

I N C L U D E D

It's been a long road

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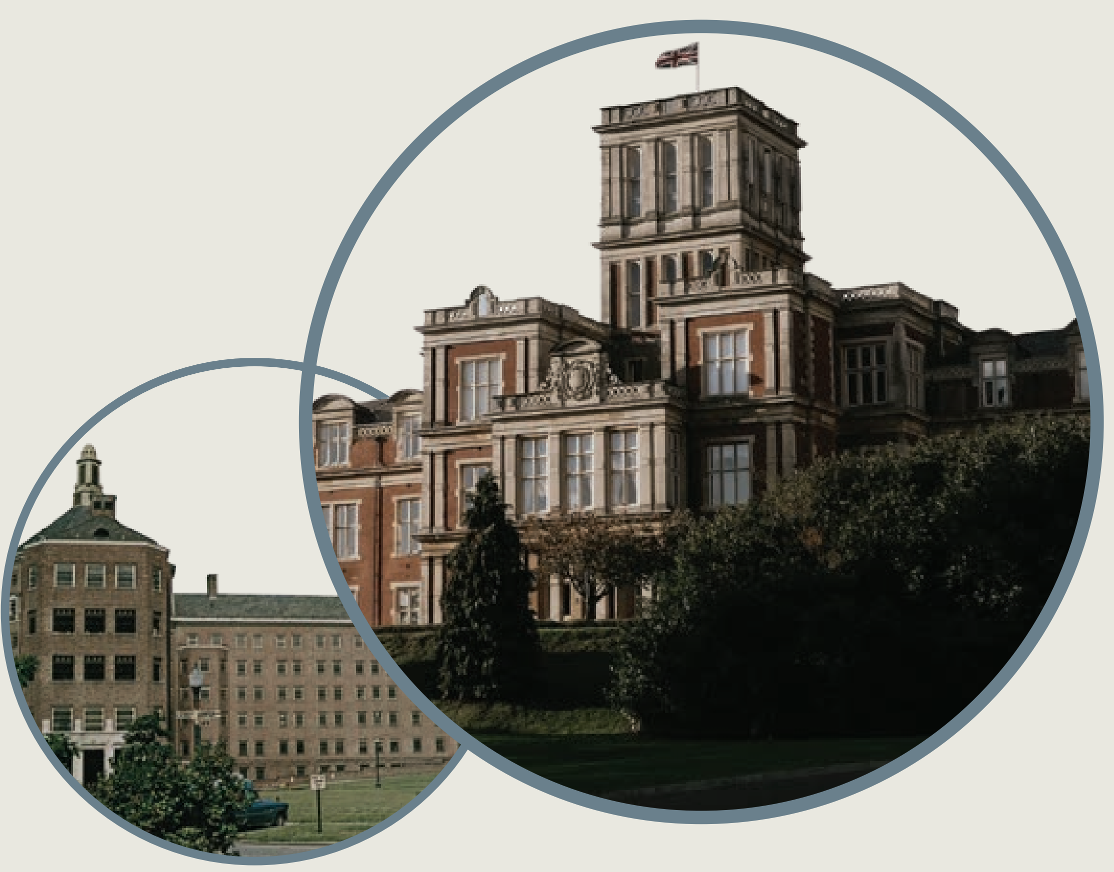
1958 was a watershed year for those living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. That was the year that a young, French geneticist named Jerome Lejeune discovered that Down syndrome was caused by an extra copy of the twenty-first chromosome. His discovery began a long evolutionary process for those living with this disability. No longer would they be a source of fear and superstition. Their isolation and institutionalization would eventually come to an end, and advocates would emerge who would rally for greater educational opportunities and employment, acceptance, and inclusion.

As the father of a son living with Down syndrome, I sometimes try to imagine what life might have been like if we were living sixty-five years ago. When Lejeune made his groundbreaking discovery, many thought that Down syndrome was the result of sin—perhaps incest or some sexually transmitted disease. People would have looked at our family with suspicion or pity. They would cross the street to avoid us lest they come too close to our "mongoloid."

That word, "mongoloid," is a horrible (and thankfully outdated) description of my son. Dr. John Langdon Down, who first described the familiar features of Down syndrome in 1862, is the one who chose it.[1] It would be almost another one hundred years before Lejeune would discover that Down syndrome was the result of genetics and not sin. He would show the world that these delightful individuals carry an extra twenty-first chromosome in the nucleus of their cells.

Rather than condemn Langdon Down's nineteenth-century practice with our twenty-first-century wisdom, it is important to understand his work in context. He was merely following the science by applying a popular classification system that thought head shape, as recognized within various ethnic groups, had something to do with intelligence.[2] He saw in the features of his patients with Down syndrome a similarity to Mongols, and so the descriptive stuck as an adjective used before another now offensive word—"idiot." Unfortunately, the term endured long after Dr. Langdon Down abandoned the theory, but you might still occasionally hear it used today.



Dr. Langdon Down's research was done at an institution outside of London called the Royal Earlswood Asylum. As late as the 1980s, individuals born with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities were thought to be uneducable. Parents were encouraged to put them into institutions like Earlswood, where they were poorly treated, abused, and denied medical care and education.

Willowbrook State School on Staten Island was another such institution. Its doors opened in 1947 with great hope that it would be a refuge for those who were "mentally and physically defective and feeble minded"—a place where they could be cared for with a "high degree of tenderness and affection."[3] Not too many years later, only euphemistically called a school, the name "Willowbrook" would become synonymous with neglect, squalid conditions, and sexual and physical abuse. At its peak, Willowbrook housed 6,200 individuals in these horrific conditions. It would finally close in 1987 after its abuses were uncovered by a journalist, Geraldo Rivera, and put on national television.[4] Due to institutional conditions like these, average life expectancy of residents in these facilities was short. A person with Down syndrome in 1960 only lived an average of ten years.[5]

Things are much better now. Thanks to better medical care and the closing of the abusive institutions of neglect, today my family can expect that our son will live well into his sixties.[6] Educational methods and opportunities for employment have also improved so that the intellectually disabled are now able to achieve academically and hold jobs. Achievement and community reinforce their sense of self-worth as contributing members of society.

PHOTO: Roger W. Haworth, Wikimedia Commons; Wikimedia Commons; Alamy.

It is important to tell this story to fully appreciate the radical improvements in quality of life and opportunities that were to eventually follow for those with Down syndrome and all persons living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. No longer thought uneducable, my son and his peers don't have to live with the stigma once associated with Down syndrome. When he was four, he was welcomed into a loving preschool with a group of typical kids and teachers who were excited about what he would add to their classroom. He was then homeschooled until my wife and I enrolled him into St. Katharine's Day School, one of four schools of special education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

St. Katharine's is a traditional special education program and not an inclusion program, but it did provide what you would hope to find in a Catholic special education environment: loving and attentive teachers who were willing to sacrifice a much better salary elsewhere to educate and care for their students and nurture them in the faith. A priest would visit often to offer Mass, and seminarians came once each week on their day of pastoral service. While not perfect, St. Katharine's offered a strong institutional commitment to prepare him, in the best way they could, for the dreaded "cliff" that parents who have children with disabilities know all too well, that is, the point when they age out of the "system" and parents are faced with an uncertain future: either scramble to find rare opportunities for employment, recreation, and community, or face isolation and a life of video games and television at home.

In addition to Lejeune's 1958 scientific discovery, there was another twentieth-century event that supercharged a national movement in the United States to secure the rights of individuals with disabilities. That was the birth, in 1918, of Rosemary Kennedy. Rosemary was the eldest daughter of Joseph P. Kennedy Sr. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy. Most significantly, she was the sister of President John F. Kennedy.

Rosemary's is a complicated story. She was a slow learner and thought to have been intellectually disabled when she was very young. As she aged through her teens, her behavior became unpredictable and rebellious, and so her father, Joseph Kennedy, made the decision to have her lobotomized when she was twenty-two. He was told the experimental procedure would calm her erratic behavior. The result was that it left her physically compromised and reduced her mental capacity to that of a two-year-old. Rosemary was eventually moved to Jefferson, Wisconsin, to reside at the St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children. Her father had a small house built for her on the grounds there, where she lived a comfortable life until her death in 2005 at the age of eighty-six. Her father never saw her again, and sadly neither her mother nor her siblings saw her for twenty years, until after Joseph Kennedy suffered a debilitating stroke.[7]

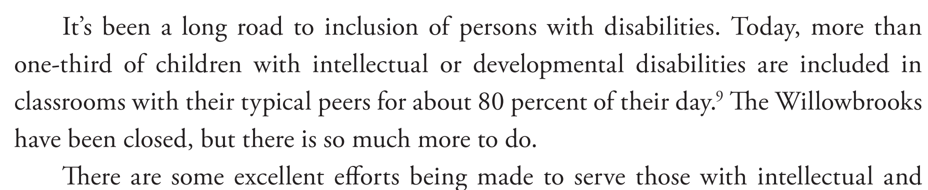
With their personal family experience, President Kennedy and his siblings saw the importance of bringing the needs of persons living with disabilities out of hiding and into full public view. In 1962, the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation awarded Jerome Lejeune the first Kennedy Prize to acknowledge his research and discovery of the genetic cause of Down syndrome.

PHOTO: Alamy.

JFK also established the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development to support research on intellectual disability (then called mental retardation), and nine months after his inauguration he established the President's Council on Mental Retardation that still exists today as the President's Committee on Intellectual Disability. These initiatives would eventually give birth to legislation ensuring public education and protections from discrimination.

The Kennedys were also responsible for establishing the Special Olympics, Best Buddies, and Very Special Arts to enrich the lives of those living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These organizations serve millions of individuals to provide competitive sports opportunities, friendship, and artistic expression.

The Kennedys' is an incredible legacy that continued to inspire legislative initiatives to protect and serve those living with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law in 1990 as a long-delayed addition to the Civil Rights Act that had been passed in 1964. Prior to 1975, public education wasn't available to many children with disabilities. Some states even had laws that excluded children with disabilities from schools. This began to change when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was signed into law in 1975. It finally required that children with disabilities in public schools receive a "free appropriate public education." In 1990, the law was reauthorized and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),[8] and children with disabilities can now receive an individualized education program (IEP) to support their learning and development in inclusive classrooms taught by teachers trained in the best methods of instruction for special learners.



It's been a long road to inclusion of persons with disabilities. Today, more than one-third of children with intellectual or developmental disabilities are included in classrooms with their typical peers for about 80 percent of their day.[9] The Willowbrooks have been closed, but there is so much more to do.

There are some excellent efforts being made to serve those with intellectual and developmental disabilities in some Catholic schools,[10] but many families are forced into public or non-Catholic schools because Catholic schools are unable to provide for their children's educational needs. What better way to continue to affirm the dignity of individuals living with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and to also affirm the Church's pro-life position, than to welcome them into a Catholic school to be formed in faith and reason with their peers?

Mark Bradford was appointed Fellow for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities at the beginning of 2023. For over twenty years, he has been blessed to serve in leadership positions in various church ministries, including as the founding president of the Jerome Lejeune Foundation in the US. Mark and his wife Denise are parents to Thomas, their sixth child (and first son), who happens to have been gifted with an extra twenty-first chromosome. Mark is a passionate advocate for those born with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. He especially advocates against the threat of abortion following a prenatal diagnosis at every opportunity. The Bradfords reside in the Philadelphia suburbs.

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CLASSICS *and the* CATHOLIC SENSIBILITY

DR. JULIA D. HEJDUK

"Classics—you mean, like *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*?" That half of my title, at least, is easy to clarify: "No, I mean ancient Greek and Roman texts and culture." The other half is harder. While I have often spoken about the enduring value of my ancient friends,[1] figuring out what they have to say about the "modern Catholic sensibility" presents a unique challenge. What makes Catholicism distinctive? And how can I convey in a two-thousand-word essay the consonance between my faith and my life's work?

Because I spent the first twenty years of my life as an agnostic, the next seventeen as a Protestant, and the past nineteen as a Catholic, I do have some sense of what changes took place throughout that journey. I can see especially how Mary, our mother, has been gently and surely drawing me closer to her son.[2] I'll focus here on some of the fruit from a Marian inspiration I received five years ago, which has helped me understand the Catholic faith as *incarnational*, *intertextual*, and *nuptial*.

The Incarnate Reality of Jesus' World

Mary's fiat *is the key to everything.*[3] Catholicism is, above all, incarnational, affirming the inseparable union of material and spiritual *reality* (from Latin *res*, "thing").[4] It was through Mary's perfect "yes" to God that the Word was made flesh. Though I went to an Episcopal school and recited the Nicene Creed at chapel each week, I always choked on "born of the virgin Mary"; the defining moment in my conversion to Christianity was when I accepted that the miraculous virginal conception of Jesus *really* happened. My love for the Catholic faith is grounded in the knowledge that God himself is *really* present in the Eucharistic host consecrated by a successor to the Apostles, just as he was when lying hidden in Mary's womb.

Spending time with the classics helps make *real* the world in which Jesus lived. In an era where yesterday's tweet is old news, our temporal distance from Jesus' earthly life presents a major psychological barrier to accepting his relevance to us today. After I became a classics major my sophomore year of college, an important intellectual piece of my conversion was the simple fact of the Bible's existence in the ancient world I was increasingly coming to know. The Gospels give us four narratives relating perspectives that are noticeably different in emphasis but clearly based on the same basic events, each conveying seemingly pointless details in a prosaic style unlike anything that came before. The most reasonable explanation for their existence is that they were based on eyewitness reports of things that *really* happened.

Another essential aspect of incarnate reality is that it is messy. Because the ancient "them" is not in competition with "us," we have more freedom to bypass our tribal instincts and explore them as human beings who are morally complicated—and who in turn have explored, sometimes with profound insight, the complexity of their fellow humans. Virgil's *Aeneid*, the text at the center of the Great Texts enterprise, has been read both as a

TITLE PAGE: João Marcelo Martins, Unsplash; Marlon Michelle Corado, Unsplash.
IMAGES: K Adams, Unsplash; Camillo Procaccini, *The Visitation*, c. 1602, Wikimedia Commons.

glorification and as a subversive critique of the Roman Empire; I believe it is actually both. We are meant to thrill at the epic voice of Jupiter prophesying empire without end *and* to weep for the suffering of betrayed Dido and conquered Turnus, to see Aeneas as a virtuous leader *and* as a merciless killer.

Morally complicated texts can change the way we approach the text of the world. Reflecting on a course on the *Odes* and *Epodes* of Horace, whose sublime lyrics often portray cringeworthy mores, one student remarked that before the class, she "had an expectation that if something is beautiful and valuable, it should also be easy." By wrestling with a difficult author—especially in companionship with the other students, both inside and outside the classroom—she developed more patience in finding beauty, truth, and goodness even where these are mingled with their opposites. Extending that grace to ancient authors may help us extend it to our contemporaries as well.

The Habit of Intertextual Reading

Mary's fiat *is the key to everything.* Not only did that word unlock our prison by ushering in the Incarnation, but it also provides an interpretive key to the whole story. Mary's *fiat mihi* is the creaturely complement to God's *fiat lux*;[5] she is the New Eve, untying with her perfect trust the knot of sin and death tied by our first mother's distrust. She is also the New Rachel, the New Queen Mother, the New Ark of the Covenant . . . even the New Jael and Judith, "blessed among women" for crushing the head of the enemy with the invincible weapon of humility.[6] The Bible is the supremely "intertextual" work, with everything in the Old Testament finding its fulfillment in the New.[7]

One of the things that attracted me to classics, and especially to Latin poetry, was its pervasive intertextuality. For instance, Virgil's *Aeneid* is structured as a long allusion to Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*; it derives much of its meaning from the changing roles Aeneas plays, and especially the way he comes to channel the wrath-filled hero Achilles and goddess Juno. The idea for my doctoral dissertation came from noticing a verbal echo between Juno's speech at the beginning of the *Aeneid* and Aeneas' speech at the end, both of which reference someone named "Pallas." The mental habit of alertness to echoes and parallels has helped me to see the beautiful coherence of the biblical narrative—from the resonances forward and backward of Gabriel's "Rejoice!" to God's strange insistence, years before the Beloved Disciple was even conceived, that the first Friend of the Bridegroom be named John as well.

Immersion in the classics also brings into focus how the grand narrative of salvation history interacts "intertextually" with the grand narrative of human history altogether. Luke begins his infancy story, "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed" (Luke 2:1 KJV). Reading Augustan poets like Virgil, Horace, and Ovid underscores why that introduction matters. Augustus was not just the most powerful man the world had ever known, but was considered the son of a god (his adoptive father was the deified Julius Caesar), and

IMAGE: Angelica Kauffmann, *Virgil Reading the Aeneid to Augustus and Octavia*, 1788, Wikimedia Commons.

his reign was supposed to inaugurate a new Golden Age. It was an exquisite and characteristically ironic twist by the Author of Authors that the real son of God, the King who would restore our lost paradise, began the definitive campaign of his great rescue mission by sneaking into a cave in an obscure corner of the Augustan empire.

Finally, our lives *are* profoundly intertextual, whether we acknowledge it or not. In my pre-Christian days, I was impressed by the theory I encountered in psychiatrist Eric Berne that we subconsciously create and follow "scripts" for our own lives.[8] As a Christian, I came to see that I am also a player in the "theo-drama" not of my own making. One of the seminal events in my journey occurred when, during a period where God had been doing a lot of work on my soul, I complained that I was tired of all this spiritual stuff (I used a stronger word than "stuff") and just wanted to rest; at that moment I felt what can only be described as the wrath of God, and heard in my mind very clearly the words, "the fleshpots of Egypt" (Exod. 16:3). It was then that I realized the story of Exodus *really was my story*—that I was one of the Israelites preferring worldly comforts to the desert path leading to the Promised Land. Similarly, in his spiritual autobiography, Henri Nouwen explores how his fascination with Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son* helped him see that the beloved parable was the master narrative for his own life, as he played the role of each main character in turn.[9]

Eros, Divinization, and the Nuptial Mystery

Mary's fiat *is the key to everything.* Her spouse the Holy Spirit consummated their marriage only after her full and free consent. God created marriage to be an icon of his relationship with us; Mary's physical conception of Jesus is, among other things, a sign of the new life that begins to grow in us when we give God *our* consent. We are made to enjoy forever the perfect, blissful, all-fulfilling intimacy awaiting us at the wedding feast of heaven. On the present earth, however, nuptial intimacy with God requires that we share, as Mary did more deeply than anyone, in the mystery of the cross.

The classics can give us a deeper understanding of the enormous role that erotic love plays in the human psyche. In *The Anti-Mary Exposed*, Carrie Gress writes, "Songs have not been written for nagging, angry, self-absorbed women. These are simply not the qualities that lift men's souls."[10] Though the second sentence may be true, the first is not. The "anti-Mary" *femme fatale* is the norm in ancient erotic poetry: many women (as my husband frequently remarks with some bitterness) choose cads over dads, and many men choose *femmes* over moms. Our word "mistress," meaning "woman in an extra-marital relationship," derives from the Latin trope that casts the lover as subjected to his *domina*, "mistress (of slaves)." Catullus takes his mistress Lesbia's cursing as proof of her love;[11] Propertius revels in his mistress Cynthia's *wrath*;[12] and Tibullus gives his dominatrix the pseudonym

IMAGES: (left) Benjamin West, *Helen Brought to Paris*, 1776, Wikimedia Commons; (bottom) Noelle, Unsplash.

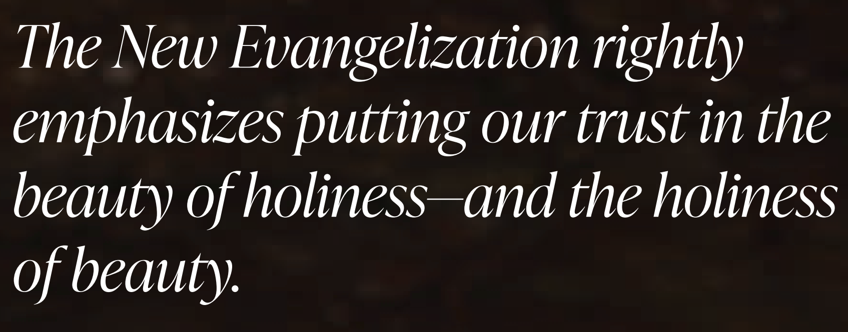
Nemesis, goddess of revenge! When Virgil wrote, "Love conquers everything,"[13] he was thinking not of the Hallmark channel but of a force deadlier than poison, fire, and plague. Augustus succeeded in transforming Rome from republic to empire, but his legislation attempting to regulate sexual (mis)behavior was a failure.

The allure of disordered *eros* is not just a product of degenerate, urbanized society. Witness the paradigmatic affair that launched a thousand ships and Western literature. When the Trojan prince Paris, given the unenviable task of judging a divine beauty contest, was offered bribes of power, wisdom, or the world's most beautiful woman, as my late mentor Elaine Fantham remarked, "The ninny chose sex, which shows how very young he was." It also shows how very human he was. The elders of Troy do not say, "Can you believe we put our entire civilization in jeopardy over that slut Helen?" They say, "Let no one blame the Trojans and Greeks for fighting so long over a woman like this: her face is terribly similar to the immortal goddesses."[14]

Rather than merely condemning the unruly sexual passions so ubiquitous in art and life, we would do well to recognize that the Trojan elders are onto something. They see that Paris, for all his civilization-wrecking folly, is seeking in supreme female beauty something *divine*. Ironically, it is *disordered* love—*eros* brought to its greatest intensity, usually because its object is forbidden—that most truly mirrors our "God-sized" longing for intimacy and immortality. As Propertius declares after a particularly passionate nocturnal brawl with Cynthia, "In one night like this *any* man could become a god!"[15] Yet the ancient poets also confirm that when we *attain* an idol, including the romantic love so many consider the *summum bonum*, it always disappoints. Ovid, who delights in reducing the ironies of love to their absurd conclusions, even implores his mistress' husband to start guarding her better so that his own adultery will not grow dull.[16]

While the classics rarely model rightly ordered sexuality, they do underscore that we humans are "broken gods." Every deadly sin is the distortion of a divine longing, which Satan works hard to corrupt, because these longings are the fuel propelling us toward divinization.[17] That approach is likely to be more fruitful than scolding people, which generally does less than no good. The New Evangelization rightly emphasizes putting our trust in the beauty of holiness—and the holiness of beauty. As another of my wonderful students observed, "Whenever I spend too much time with a great pagan poet, I start seeing how all the brokenness and longing and questions and glimmers of truth point to the Savior."

IMAGE: Federico Barocci, *Annunciation*, 1582–84, Wikimedia Commons.



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Notes

[1] Most recently, see "The Liberal Arts and Virgil's *Aeneid*: What Can the Greatest Text Teach Us?", *Principia: A Journal of Classical Education* 1 (2022): 15–26; "'Friending' the Dead (Part 1)," *Christian Scholar's Review*, January 12, 2022, https://christianscholars.com/friending-the-dead-part-1/; "'Friending' the Dead (Part 2): Friendship with the Living," *Christian Scholar's Review*, January 13, 2022, https://christianscholars.com/friending-the-dead-part-2-friendship-with-the-living/; "Reflections on *Purgatorio* 22," Baylor University Honors College, *100 Days of Dante*, https://100daysofdante.com/canto-videos-listing/; and "Lessons from the Doctor of Irony: A Reflection on Donna Zuckerberg's *Not All Dead White Men*," *Arethusa* 53 (2020): 239–246.

[2] I write about this experience in "The Mystery of Miscarriage: Mary, Joseph, and the Theology of Pre-Natal Life," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, June 3, 2021, https://www.hprweb.com/2021/06/the-mystery-of-miscarriage/. Other Marian articles from which I draw in the present essay are "Gabriel's Hello," *Christian Scholar's Review*, March 25, 2022, https://christianscholars.com/gabriels-hello/; "Gabriel's Word to Woman," *Church Life Journal*, March 25, 2022, https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/gabriels-word-to-the-woman/; and "The Riddle at Cana: Mary and the Biblical Mystery," *Church Life Journal*, November 17, 2020, https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-riddle-at-cana-mary-and-the-biblical-mystery/.

[3] "Let it be with me [*fiat mihi*] according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

[4] The classics professor in me cannot resist pointing out that the *re* peppering our inboxes is the ablative case of this word (meaning "regarding this thing"), not an abbreviation for "reply." What might happen if this humble word started inspiring quick prayers of thanksgiving for the *Re*al Presence?

[5] "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3).

[6] Judg. 5:24; Jth. 13:18; Luke 1:42; Gen. 3:15.

[7] The most lucid and compelling account I have seen of Mary's "intertextuality" is Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary: Unveiling the Mother of the Messiah* (New York: Image, 2018).

[8] Eric Berne, *What Do You Say After You Say Hello?: The Psychology of Human Destiny* (New York: Bantam, 1973).

[9] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Image, 1994).

[10] Carrie Gress, *The Anti-Mary Exposed: Rescuing the Culture from Toxic Femininity* (Charlotte, NC: TAN, 2019), 157.

[11] Catullus, poem 92.

[12] Propertius, poem 3.8.

[13] Virgil, *Eclogue* 10.69.

[14] Homer, *Iliad* 3.156–58.

[15] Propertius, poem 2.15.40.

[16] Ovid, *Amores* 2.19.

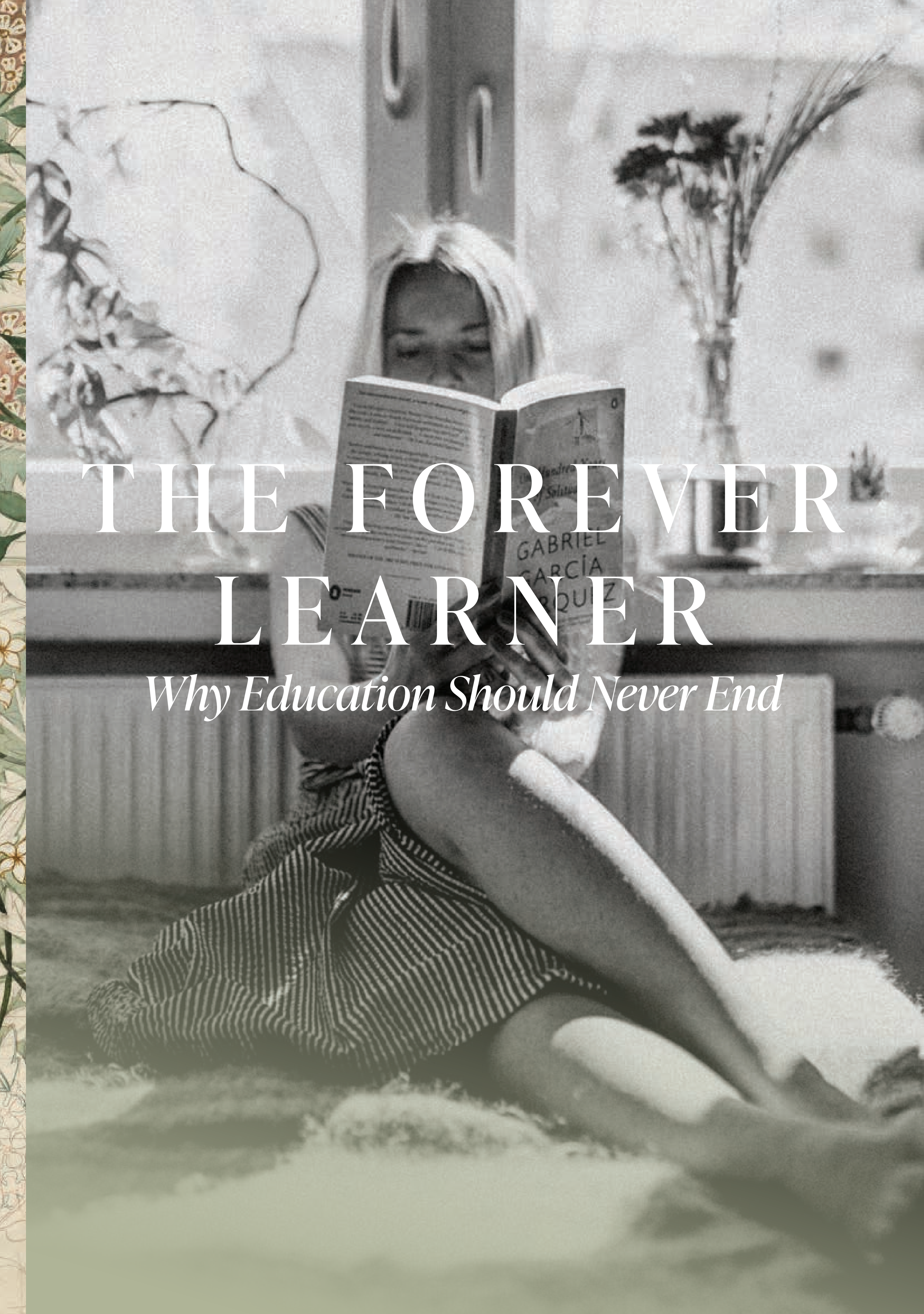
[17] See Gregory Popcak, *Broken Gods: Hope, Healing, and the Seven Longings of the Human Heart* (New York: Image, 2015). I write about this important insight in "Anger Reconsidered," *Christian Scholar's Review*, August 31, 2021, https://christianscholars.com/anger-reconsidered/.

IMAGES: (left) Av8erPhotography, Adobe Stock; (top) Henry Co, Unsplash.

Let your chief study be to acquaint yourself with God because there is nothing greater than God.

”

ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON



THE FOREVER LEARNER

Why Education Should Never End

IMAGES: Kinga Howard, Unsplash; Birmingham Museums Trust, Unsplash.

FEATURE
by MARCIE STOKMAN

WHY DOES FOREVER-LEARNING MATTER?

When I was post-college, married, mothering, working, and managing a household, the pace of life accelerated quickly. Something in my schedule had to give. Reading for pleasure, I began to believe, was a luxury I couldn't afford to maintain.

Not that I stopped reading altogether; I tackled books on parenting, Christian living, and work-related journals. But what seemed less essential and, dare I say, even a waste of time was the leisurely reading of literature for my personal enjoyment.

Like many, I am committed to lifelong learning; to grow and to learn is an essential part of being human. What I didn't understand at the time was the unique, formative role literature plays in cultivating personal development and a virtuous life. So, without much of a fight or concern, I quit reading literature. Because, in my mind, sitting down with a novel in the midst of a full and busy life squandered time and energy I didn't have.

But past experience told me something different. Reading literature was not a waste of time. For ten years, I had attended a book club with a group of friends. Being new to this kind of reading, I struggled along and often didn't get the selection completed before the next meeting. But I was determined! Propping the book in front of my kitchen sink, I pondered a paragraph or two while washing dishes.

My motto became, *Read what you can in the time you have*. I left guilt behind.

Surprisingly, with consistent perseverance, my reading comprehension and ability to focus my attention improved, and so did my enjoyment of reading and discussing literature.

A friend in the group put words to my experience: "I live better when I'm in the pages of these kinds of books." I agreed. Reading great and worthy books with friends brought benefits. Ordinary life became more fascinating and richer in meaning, and so did my conversations with others.

What is it about reading and discussing these kinds of books that helps us live better?

Great and worthy literature, I was beginning to realize, fosters deep thinking, is a catalyst for meaningful conversation, and has the inert potential to wake up our hearts. Surely reading literature and forever-learning go hand in hand.

But if my experience in the book club was so incredibly life-giving, why did I let it fall by the wayside? Why didn't I fight to continue nurturing this discipline?

Because we moved to a new city.
Because Pete and I had more children.
Because our family grew, and life picked up speed.

Soon I found myself surviving, not thriving.

Looking back, I see that almost every to-do task for our family of seven children took precedence over the life-enriching practice of reading literature. And I was burning out.

One day, on a thirty-five-mile drive to our son John's cross-country meet, I found myself alone in our twelve-passenger van. In a moment of pause, I recognized my exhaustion: *I can't keep going like this. I'm absolutely on empty. I have nothing left to give, and no one in the family seems to understand.*

With twenty miles to go, I pulled into Caribou Coffee, thinking a large latte might bring the surge of energy I needed. Then, surprising myself, instead of getting back in the van and on the road, I sat in the coffee shop and stared at the wall. I remember thinking, *If I don't get going right now, I am going to miss John's race.* I kept sitting. I missed the meet.

Later that week, I phoned my friend from Italy and shared my concern. "Elisabetta, I just sat there and didn't move; I missed John's race. What is wrong with me?"

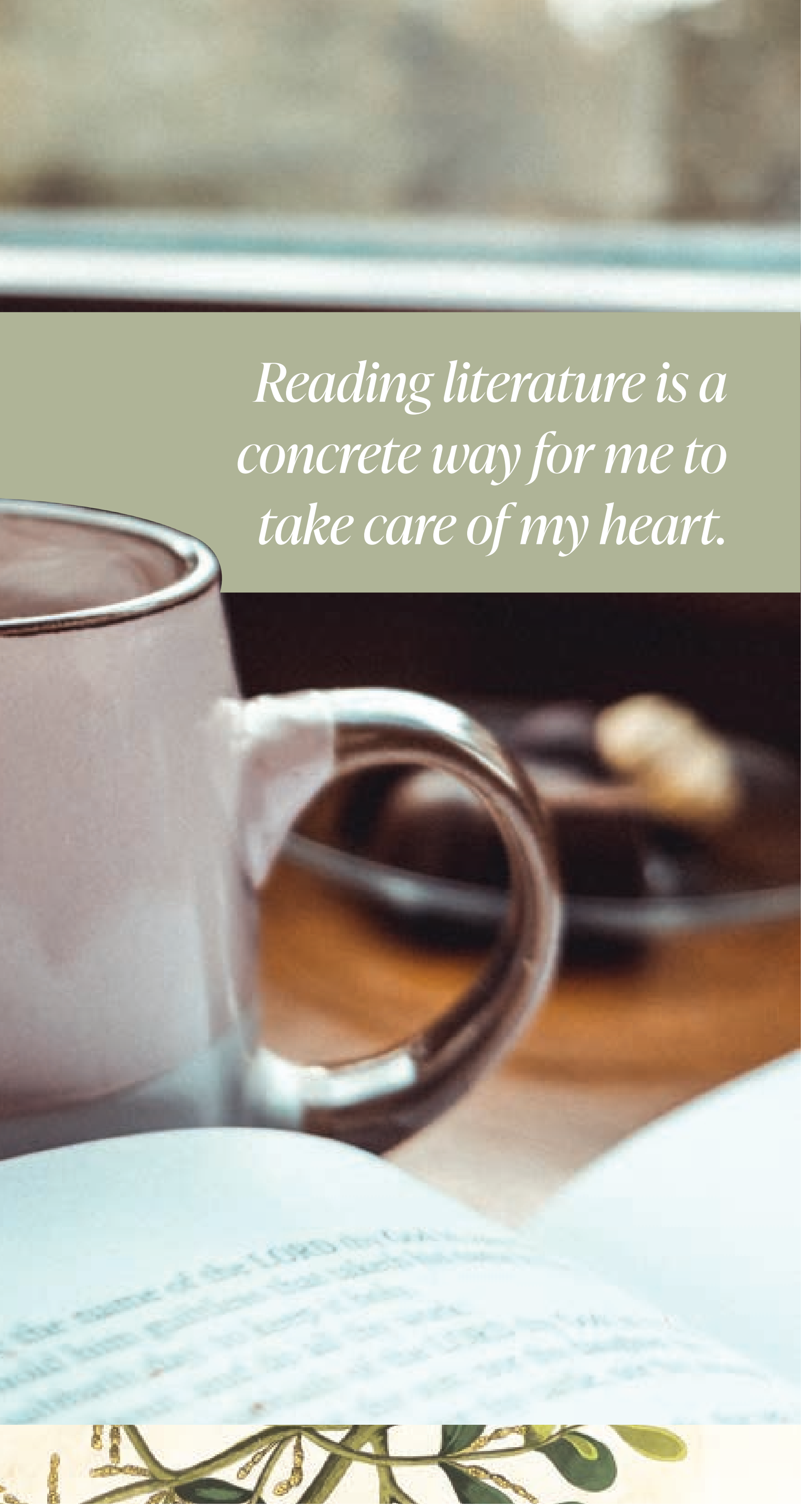
She went on to speak words that would change not only my life but also my conception of motherhood.

"If your kids want to run, let them run, but you . . . *take care of your heart*; that's how you mother."

Her words rang true. And I knew it. Still, I was perplexed. *What does it mean to take care of my heart? And how does this impact being a mother?*

I thought back to the ten years of reading great and worthy books. My heart was alive with a greater intensity of life and depth of friendship. I looked forward to the monthly meetings and rich conversations. Accountability kept me faithful in my reading practice. Time was built in to see my friends, which countered the loneliness and isolation so common in the early years of motherhood. And I reaped personal blessings in my relationship with Pete and the children too.

I made a judgment: *Reading literature is a concrete way for me to take care of my heart*. The decision was made. This life-transforming practice would become a priority in my life again, and it happened this way.



> *Reading literature is a concrete way for me to take care of my heart.*

IMAGES: Tetiana Padurets, Unsplash; Boston Public Library, Unsplash.

HOW DID WELL-READ MOM COME ABOUT?

In 2012, my daughter Bethany, a new mom at the time, called me nearly in tears. "Mom, I'm not going back to that mother's group," she said. "I've been there three times, and all they talk about is their kids and what kind of diapers to buy. Isn't there a place after college where women get together and talk about the real questions of life?"

I heard a cry of loneliness in her voice. What was really going on? Beth was longing for more connection, meaning, conversation, and friendship.

At this time, I was giving a series of talks to three different mothers groups in northern Minnesota, where I live. I titled this series "Well-Read Mom." Even though, at this time in my life, I wasn't reading literature on a regular basis, I was curious to learn what literature *other* women were engaging in. Truthfully, it was an attempt to resurrect my own reading practice.

Each time I spoke, however, I drove home sad. Why? Most of the women were not reading . . . anything. The number one reason given: "I don't have time."

In fact, not one woman was reading quality literature for her own enjoyment and leisure. And I was struggling too. All of us agreed: reading is important and essential for our children. Yet, this form of lifelong learning wasn't happening in *our* lives.

The talk I presented left us feeling inadequate. It was like I was there to point out:

You're not doing enough.
You're not reading enough.
And you're not smart enough.

This was not my intention! I wanted to encourage the women—and myself—to enjoy literature. But we lacked a clear proposal with a concrete step in this direction.

So when Beth called that day, the idea sparked. Her desire for meaningful conversation and friendship merged with my desire to read more and read well. And just like that, Well-Read Mom was born.

The idea was simple. We would read great and worthy books together and hold each other accountable. Beth would gather a group of friends in St. Paul, Minnesota, and I would do the same in Crosby. I put together a five-year book list and offered to record a short introduction audio and write up a few questions to jump-start our discussions.

It started simple, and through word-of-mouth, interest grew. By the end of the first year, over

one hundred women were following along with us. By the end of the second year, there were nearly one thousand. Clearly, Well-Read Mom was meeting a need. Beth was not the only one with a cry of the heart. It is a human cry.

And the grassroots growth has continued. Today we are over six thousand members in over eight hundred groups across the United States. The program is not just for moms; we have single women, married women without children, empty-nesters, and widows. Our oldest member is eighty-six.

Women are hungry for a place of meaningful friendship and ongoing intellectual growth.

At Well-Read Mom, we have been privileged to witness thousands of women—in the midst of busy lives—find their way back to reading great books or discovering this dimension of learning for the first time.

And what is it we are discovering? That education should never end. That women are hungry for a place of meaningful friendship and ongoing intellectual growth. That even the busiest of women will make time for what nourishes their minds and enriches their souls.

WHAT ARE THE FRUITS?

Why literature? What is it about engaging in great and worthy books that holds such promise for our transformation?

A scientist shared her experience reading and discussing literature in Well-Read Mom: "I've taken eighty-four exams to get to where I am in my career," she told me, "but this is a new kind of education. It is an education of my heart." Her eyes were opened to the value of good fiction.

In modernity, the heart is often wrongly reduced to feelings, but the heart, according to Servant of God Fr. Luigi Giussani, indicates "the unity of feelings and reason. It is the heart, as reason and affectivity, which is the condition necessary for the healthy realization of reason."[1]

Formal education involves head knowledge: working the mind. But stories, "written from a perspective in which the truth as Christians know it, has been used as a light to see the world," educate in another way.[2] They show us how the world works. There are consequences for the characters' actions. We see our fallen nature and our need for a Savior. By engaging our imagination, stories carry knowledge to the heart.[3]

We have a deep-down need to hear our story, the story of our family, our nation. Through fiction, we are helped to understand that we're part of an even larger story, God's story.

IMAGES: Jingxi Lau, Unsplash; Boston Public Library, Unsplash.

WHY IS THIS KNOWLEDGE SO IMPORTANT?

Carl Jung said, "One day . . . the world will ask you who you are. And if you don't know, the world will tell you." We need to know more deeply who we are, our story. To paraphrase Alasdair MacIntrye, "I can only answer the questions that ask, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story . . . do I find myself a part?'"[4] As a Catholic, every time I attend Mass, I enter more deeply into the story I am part of. Through the Scriptures and the liturgy, I am reminded: I have a Father, I am loved, I belong to Christ.

Yet even when we know who we are, it is easy to forget. Our awareness gets covered over by daily concerns, some weighty, most trivial. Without realizing it, we begin to construe systems of thought and live in our minds.

Ours is an age of specialization, breaking things down into smaller and smaller parts. The potential danger for us is missing out on an understanding of the whole, the bigger story we are part of.

Literature's specialization is just this: through concrete particulars, a great writer shows a manifestation of the whole. "The universal has to be embodied in the particular," Myron Magnet writes.[5] Universal questions that beg us to contemplate a bigger picture of life surface: Why do I love? Why do I hate? How should I live? What path makes for a beautiful life?

Recently, reading Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, I recognized a path I needed to take. As the novel began, I wondered if spending hours ensnared in the inner dialogues of the murderer, Raskolnikov, was a healthy outlet for me. Again and again, this unlikeable character construes his own system of thought to rationalize and justify his behavior.

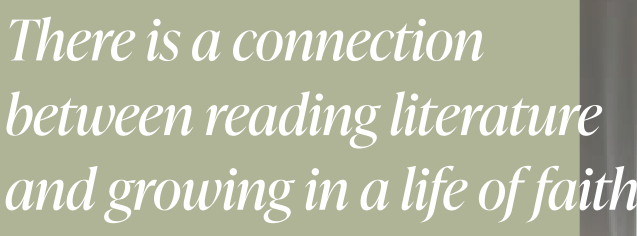
A friend pointed out that one word for crime in Russian is *Prestupleniye*, which means to "step over." A crime is "stepping over" the law. Raskolnikov believes he is above God's law. His senseless, brutal act of murder is something he can "step over." And again and again, Raskolnikov's wrongdoings go undetected, and it seems escaping punishment is possible. Or is it?

Increasingly, Raskolnikov bears an agonizing punishment within. Enslaved by his sin, he cannot step over God's law.

After I finished the story, I pondered a situation I wanted to step over. A friend from my parish and I had a falling out. We hadn't talked in months. I prayed for our relationship, went to confession, and asked for forgiveness. But, like Raskolnikov, I rationalized myself out of the awkward step I needed to take—facing my friend.

Jesus said that if "your brother or sister has something against you . . . first be reconciled to your brother or sister" (Matt. 5:23–24). Couldn't I just pray for our relationship? Wasn't that enough? I was not at peace.

Through one of the strangest novels I have ever read, I knew what I needed to do. My feet needed to move. In a beautiful exchange with my estranged friend in the Adoration chapel, our relationship was restored.



Reading *Crime and Punishment* illuminated what my heart had forgotten: we are made to love and be loved. Asking for forgiveness is necessary for restoration. Through story, my reason and affection understood the step I needed to take. My heart was enlarged.

Servant of God Dorothy Day, a voracious reader of literature, prayed diligently with the Psalmist, "Enlargest thou my heart oh Lord, that Thou mayest enter in" (cf. Ps. 118). Her heart was enlarged, and it came about, at least in part, through reading literature. Dorothy makes a recommendation: "Turn off your radio, put away your daily paper, read one review of events a week, *and spend some time reading good books*."[6]

There is a connection between reading literature and growing in a life of faith. Becoming well-read to enrich our souls is not a small thing. From head knowledge to heart knowledge, the reading journey can bring about our transformation and draw us closer to the Lord and one another.

This is the "forever-learning" we are interested in, the kind that continually stretches our human development and enlarges our hearts. In twelve years of leading Well-Read Mom, I know more deeply now than I did before that great and worthy books, interpreted through the lens of our Christian tradition, play a part not just in our personal growth but in evangelization and culture. Join us on the reading journey.

It is easy to start a group, join in person, join online, or follow on your own at wellreadmom.com.

IMAGES: Gabrielle Dickson, Unsplash; Birmingham Museums Trust, Unsplash.

Marcie Stokman is the founder and president of Well-Read Mom. As a former clinical nurse practitioner in mental health and longtime homeschooler, she writes and speaks to encourage parents to read more and read well. Marcie and her husband, Peter, reside in northern Minnesota. They have seven children and seventeen grandchildren.

Notes

[1] Luigi Giussani, *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*, ed. Julián Carrón (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022).

[2] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery & Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. Robert and Sally Fitzgerald (London: Faber, 2014).

[3] Louise Cowan, *The Necessity of the Classics*, Mars Hill Audio, 1998, https://marshillaudio.org/products/arp-6-m?_pos=1&_sid=694254b85&_ss=r.

[4] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[5] Myron Magnet, "What Use Is Literature?" Catholic Education Resource Center, 2003, https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/art/what-use-is-literature.html.

[6] Dorothy Day, *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (New York: Image, 2011).

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I
cannot
live
without
books.

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THOMAS JEFFERSON

Today's Idea of a Catholic University

SPECIAL FEATURE *by* STEPHEN D. MINNIS

A couple of months after the *Dobbs* Supreme Court decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, a local medical school planned a panel discussion about the impact that *Dobbs* would have on women's healthcare. It was easy for the planners to find two OB-GYNs to be on the panel to discuss how damaging the decision was to women. What wasn't easy was to find a doctor to take the pro-life position.

Finally, a second-year medical student stepped forward to tell his fellow students, doctors, and other healthcare providers that the decision was something that should be celebrated because it was a doctor's duty to protect life. This medical student went against the grain at his medical school and put his future at risk in front of his dean and professors.

At Benedictine College, we are proud of that second-year medical student because he is an alumnus of ours. He majored in both biology and philosophy and while here immersed himself in our mission. It is this mission—to educate within a community of faith and scholarship—modeled after St. John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University* that gave him the formation and courage to speak the truth.

THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY

After small beginnings as a series of talks in mid-nineteenth century Ireland by the newly Catholic Anglican convert Fr. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* has had an enormous, unstoppable influence.

Newman's text is still considered a basic statement of what the university should be, inside and outside the Church, throughout the United States and around the world.

Unfortunately, Newman's work has picked up an "ivory tower" reputation: the idea that he did not appreciate the way in which higher education is intended not just as a place to foster scholars and intellectual vitality but also to serve as a ladder for opportunity. However, that is far from the truth. Newman well understood that higher education, for most students, is a way in which they can prepare themselves to make a positive contribution to their community: "It prepares him to fill any post with credit, and to master any subject with facility."[1]

PHOTOS: Laura Stanley, Pexels; Ekaterina Novitskaya, Unsplash.

It does this, however, not just by providing instruction in skills but in combining that with true intellectual challenge, provoking wonder, and refining judgment: "University training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life."[2]

In other words, higher education is about formation as well as instruction, and it is both a means of preparing individual students for successful careers and a means of transforming culture.

The urgent question for our time is how to reconstruct Newman's university in a world where the true meaning of education is almost lost—at a time when our university systems seem to largely cluster around the poles of job training on the one hand and indoctrination on the other.

THE IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY FOR TODAY

What does this mean for universities today? How can the modern university look to Newman for guidance?

I can only speak from my experience. At Benedictine College, where I have served as president for eighteen years, we take seriously the call to look at our education as a good both for our students as individuals and for our society as a whole.

Early in my presidency, we developed a strategic plan based on our vision to build one of the great Catholic colleges in America. To pursue that vision, we focused on hiring and developing excellent faculty, recruiting and forming excellent students, and building excellent facilities.

It was also during the life of this plan that we did the most important thing we have done during my time at Benedictine: consecrating the campus to the care and protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Our college has always had a special connection with Our Lady. The original founder, Fr. Henry Lemke, left this story in his diary: One evening, shortly after coming to Kansas, he was coming back from saying Mass in a neighboring town when a blinding storm with torrential rains broke over him. He was alone and very soon completely lost in the trackless prairies outside of Atchison. Flash flooding was a significant danger. The prairie was crisscrossed with ditches, and he had no source of light, so he fell into ditch after ditch, some filling with water as he scrambled out.

As the night wore on, he grew weaker with no food or water; he began to shake with chills and fever. He could see no sign of life around him, and he seriously doubted he would make it back to Atchison alive. He fell to his knees and begged the Virgin Mary for her help. As he raised his head from his prayer, a light suddenly pierced the blackness of the night. With renewed energy he made for the source of the light—an isolated cabin out on the prairie with a lantern shining in the window.

When he reached the cabin, he found a woman alone in the cabin with her daughter, as her husband was away on business. Recognizing the itinerant priest, she invited him in.

When Fr. Lemke asked her why she had suddenly put the light in the window, she told him that she and her daughter had been asleep when suddenly the little girl woke her up, saying that a woman, dressed in white, had appeared at the foot of her bed and

PHOTOS: Annie Spratt, Unsplash; Nathan Dumlao, Unsplash; iStock.

told her to go wake her mother. The woman got up, lit the lantern, and placed it in the only window of the house to care for her daughter.

Fr. Lemke remained convinced throughout his life that this was an apparition of the Blessed Virgin answering his prayer. Two years after Our Lady spared Fr. Lemke's life, Benedictine College was founded in 1858—the same year that a Lady dressed in white appeared to St. Bernadette at a grotto in Lourdes, France. This connection is why we now have a Marian grotto based off the grotto in Lourdes. Without Mary's intervention, Benedictine College would not exist.

Thus, from the start, we have believed that the college is under the special care and protection of the Blessed Virgin, and consecrating the college to her was a simple recognition of this fact. I am convinced that it was through this consecration in 2013 and reconsecration in 2018 that we were led to recognize a new urgency in pursuing our mission. Our vision to build one of the great Catholic colleges in America was paying off; by every objective measure we were stronger and more vibrant as a community of faith and scholarship.

But as it was time to consider a new strategic plan, it became clear that we were not aiming high enough. It was not what Newman had called us and all universities to do.

I was blessed in 2013 to be invited to the Vatican's *Ecclesia in America* conference held in Mexico City. There my devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe was strengthened. As I stood in front of the miraculous tilma, her words to St. Juan Diego echoed in my head: "Listen, my child: There are many I could send, but you are the one I have chosen for this task."

As we worked as a community to develop a vision that would guide the next strategic plan, these words were never far from my heart. Finally, it dawned on me: our previous vision was ambitious, it was energizing, and it was significant, but it was also very inward-facing. We never asked ourselves why. *Why* do we want to be one of the great Catholic colleges in America?

During this process, which included experts from all walks of life and from all over the country, it became clear that what concerned the group most was the culture. The culture brings about loneliness, hopelessness, truthlessness, and faithlessness. The culture is broken, and we need to do something about it.

This revelation, under the guidance of Our Lady, led us to embrace a new, much more ambitious vision: to transform culture in America.

Without Mary's intervention, Benedictine College would not exist.

In fact, the Catholic university exists to transform culture. The word "culture" appears more than fifty times in St. John Paul II's apostolic constitution on higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, including, significantly, in the document's conclusion, where the Holy Father says universities are necessary "for the future of culture and of all cultures."[3]

It is necessary for a university to cultivate students by forming them in a community that takes seriously the philosophical habits of mind as well as inculcating in them virtue and a deepened faith life. By doing so, the university prepares graduates to go out to transform the culture. This is Benedictine's mission and daily work: forming students in community, faith, and scholarship, first in a university setting and then in the world.

COMMUNITY

Embracing community means that we must first call our students, faculty, and staff to be intentional as we work together to achieve a shared goal. Our emphasis on community is pervasive, in ways large and small. For example, we may be the last college in America that has its freshmen wear beanies the first week of school. We do this not as a hazing ritual, but so that freshmen can recognize each other—in the dining hall, in the classroom, even just on the sidewalk—so they can start building relationships with their classmates, and so that returning students can provide a warm welcome or additional help.

More significantly, we have an extremely intentional approach to student life formation. We ensure that the programs we offer are for more than just having fun or blowing off steam; they are geared toward helping students develop key community-building and leadership skills. We want to make sure that our students experience the joys and challenges that come from learning to develop friendships and to relate to people who may be very different from them in some ways but are united in a search for truth, both inside and outside the classroom.

Our college mascot is a raven, and that identity as a raven is deep and meaningful to them. If you're ever on our campus or even see someone in an airport wearing a Benedictine College T-shirt, you can say to them "Once a Raven" and you'll almost certainly get the immediate reply "Always a Raven."

> We want to make sure that our students experience the joys and challenges that come from learning to develop friendships.

PHOTOS: Priscilla Du Preez, Unsplash; Nathan Dumlao, Unsplash; Ekaterina Novitskaya, Unsplash.

FAITH

The depth of the community is enriched and sustained by the fact that it is a community of faith. We are an unequivocally Catholic institution, and the Church's teachings—especially the guidance in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*—shape everything we do at Benedictine College.[4] Not everyone at the college is Catholic—indeed, we're very proud that every year we have several converts who enter the Church on Divine Mercy Sunday before the archbishop and abbot. We welcome people of all faiths into our community. We do not expect everyone at the college to be Catholic, but we do expect everyone to respect the fact that we are.

We require all our students, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, to take courses in Catholic theology—not to proselytize but to share. We strongly believe that it is our duty to share the beauty and richness of the Catholic faith with all those who study here. And throughout their time here, our students are surrounded by reminders—such as the abbey bells that tell the hours and call them to Mass, the artwork and statues throughout the campus that remind them of the story of creation and salvation, and the beautiful Marian grotto that has pride of place in the center of campus—of the importance of their faith and the pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

PHOTO: Arina Krasnikova, Pexels.

SCHOLARSHIP

Our faith commitment is also inherent in our curriculum because we are a community of both faith and scholarship. Our philosophy and theology requirements demonstrate the fundamental unity of faith and reason. Like Cardinal Newman, we believe that "religious truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge"[5] and that "knowledge and reason are sure ministers to faith."[6]

We have a robust liberal education program that takes up about half of a typical student's curriculum, because we believe that acquainting students with the great achievements of thought and culture and helping them develop sound principles of practical and theoretical judgment will set them on a path to pursue truth throughout their life.

Of course we offer major programs that are specifically tailored to careers—nursing, architecture, and engineering, for example—but we believe that the broader formation students get through a comprehensive general education program provides a foundation for success in life even beyond career preparation.

Our students go on to very successful careers, but we recognize that they are more than doctors, lawyers, bank presidents, or CEOs—they are also mothers, fathers, scout leaders, Little League coaches, and parish council members; they are children of God.

We believe that this cultivation of the values that are inherent in the intentional creation of a community of faith and scholarship are the answer to the brokenness of our culture.

TRANSFORMING CULTURE

We want the students to live the mission of community, faith, and scholarship while they are at Benedictine College not for our sake, but so that they will live the mission after they leave.

When they leave, they will understand the power of community, that the whole is stronger than its individual parts. Humans are social beings, and we need each other to be fully alive. We all know this better now than ever before coming out of the pandemic. During the pandemic, society said that we can't build community, we can't build friendships or relationships. We had to wear masks and couldn't even get within six feet of people. And we missed something. We are now seeing the ramifications of those decisions; even the Surgeon General of the United States has declared that we have an "epidemic of loneliness." We know relationship-building is important, and that is why community is a vital part of our mission.

Secondly, we work to ensure that our students develop a close and personal relationship with Jesus Christ, understanding that true happiness comes from doing God's will. Humans have an innate desire to worship. If they don't worship the true God, then they will find other things to worship—things like the internet, social media, video games, prestige, popularity, even pornography. These are the false gods that our culture has raised up. That is why we provide our students with regular, meaningful opportunities to grow closer to Christ, so they will continue that relationship long after they are gone.

Finally, we form graduates to be lifelong learners, curious and constantly seeking the truth. Contemporary society is information-rich but analysis-poor. We are bombarded with a nonstop torrent of information every day. We can take out our phones and get any website around the world. But the question is whether we can take that information, analyze it, and make good decisions. If our graduates have a foundation in the liberal arts—a foundation in art, literature, language, culture, history, theology, and philosophy—then when they are inundated with information, they can rely on this foundation of the great works to, as St. Paul says, "test everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). This is what our type of scholarship—rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition—can do for our graduates.

> In an age of loneliness and polarization, community is the answer.

And it is community, faith, and scholarship that will transform culture in America.

In an age of loneliness and polarization, community is the answer.

In a time of hopelessness and incivility, faith is the key.

In a no-truth era where we are information-rich and analysis-poor, scholarship is the foundation.

PHOTOS: Helena Lopes, Pexels; Laura Stanley, Pexels.

Integrating community, faith, and scholarship provides not just the means but, more importantly, the courage to transform the culture.

This is what that young medical student had when he stepped forward to express pro-life views at his medical school. Was he universally accepted? No; on the contrary, he was threatened with having key research opportunities taken away from him. But those from the Catholic medical student club he helped establish were heartened and supported by his example. And after his well-reasoned argument as to why the medical profession should be pro-life, he had quiet conversations with several people whose hearts and minds were changed.

This Benedictine College alumnus who embodies the courage that comes from being firmly rooted in community, faith, and scholarship on that day began to transform the culture. All thanks to an education contemplated by Newman's idea of a university that lives on right here in Atchison, Kansas.

Stephen D. Minnis is the President of Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas.

Notes

[1] John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 135.

[2] Newman, 134.

[3] John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, apostolic constitution, August 15, 1990, vatican.va.

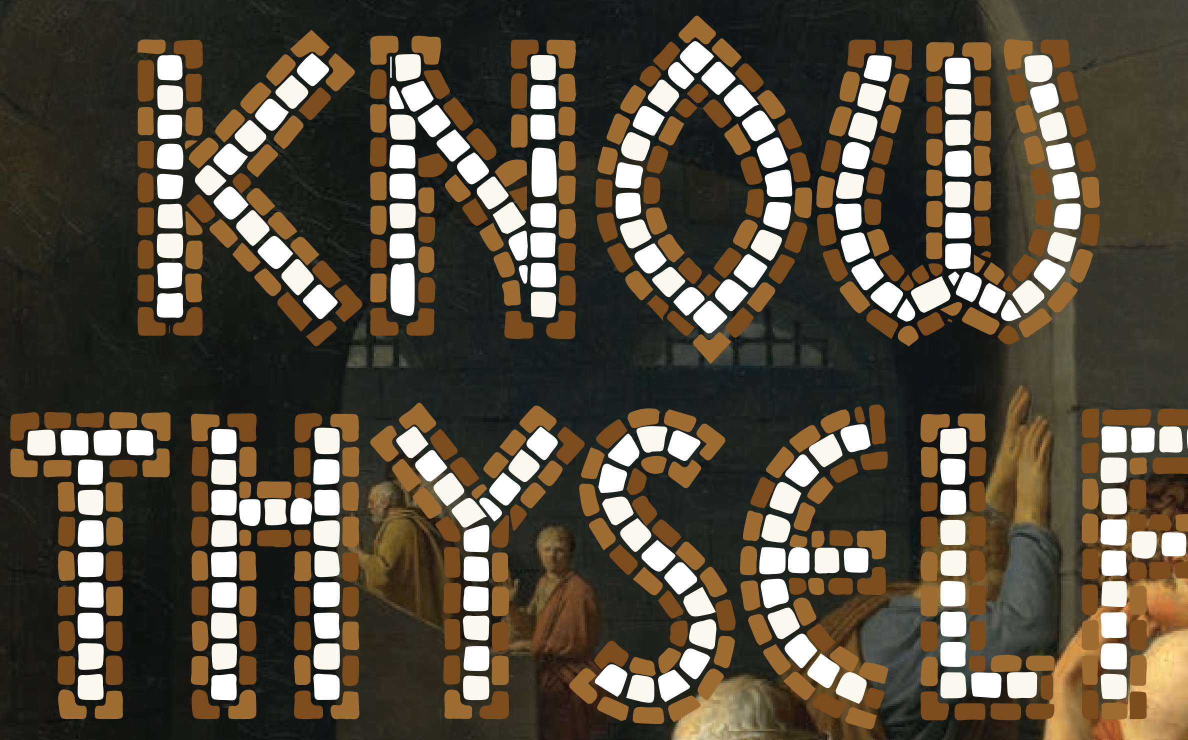
[4] See Newman, *Idea of a University*, 164: "It is no sufficient security for the Catholicity of a University, even that the whole of Catholic theology should be professed in it, unless the Church breathes her own pure and unearthly spirit into it, and fashions and moulds its organization, and watches over its teaching and knits together is pupils, and superintends its action."

[5] Newman, 52.

[6] Newman, xxxviii.

WORD ON FIRE

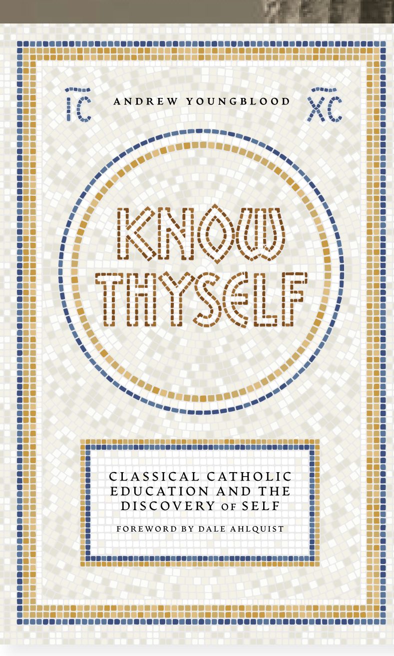
SPOTLIGHT



The Transformative Power and Beauty of Classical Catholic Education

ANDREW YOUNGBLOOD

ART: Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Socrates*, 1787.



The following is an excerpt from the book *Know Thyself: Classical Catholic Education and the Discovery of Self* from Word on Fire.

THE INSCRIPTION

It seems a fitting metaphor that the path up the mountain was gradual, uneven, yet beautiful. The marble stones of the Sacred Way, elegant and refined, reinforced the sense of a pilgrimage. As he walked up this path, the man's gaze fell continually upon the peaceful valley below, covered by thousands of olive trees gently swaying in the wind and creating the illusion of a green ocean with soft waves. Somehow, this too must have reinforced the metaphor of his journey, for he was on a quest for answers, intellectual if not spiritual. As he turned his gaze away from the Valley of Phocis below, the majestic temple sanctuary came into view. He continued his pilgrimage up Mount Parnassus.

The details of his physical appearance are scant in ancient literature. It is possible that he was thin and lanky, resulting in an unhealthy appearance. But given that these details are recorded by a comic playwright who did not much care for him or his famous friend, it is entirely possible that this description bears the exaggeration of artistic license. Although well-known and a man of importance in Athenian society, his friendship with Socrates would become the trait for which history would remember him. In literature, he appears as a faithful companion to the controversial Athenian sage. And this journey, made with an impetuousness that was perhaps characteristic, was the most famous moment of Chaerephon's life.

The events that caused this pilgrimage are unknown. Perhaps his friend's tendency to be a polarizing figure in Athens was already becoming an issue that required some intervention. Perhaps he was overwhelmed, like so many others, by his friend's sagacity, or confused by the latter's constant insistence, contrary to his fame and reputation, that he was the most ignorant of all men. Whatever the reason, Chaerephon was determined to resolve the issue by consulting the Oracle of Delphi.

As he entered the sacred ground of the sanctuary, he continued his procession with

the other pilgrims to the temple of Apollo. Believed by the Greeks to be the center of the world, the temple was famous for the cryptic, prophetic utterances that the elderly priestess, the Pythia, delivered in a trancelike state. It was her insight that Chaerephon sought in order to resolve the question that stirred him as so many others: "Was any man wiser than Socrates?"[1] Her eventual response that no one was wiser only accelerated the chain of events that led to the trial and death of Socrates, which would transform the life of the great philosopher's student, Plato. In turn, the life and teaching of Plato, and his equally famous student, Aristotle, would amplify the philosophical and scientific revolution that had been brewing in Greek society for over two hundred years and would officially birth Western civilization.

But all of this was in the unknown future. At the moment, under the warm sun, surrounded by the beautiful buildings of the sacred sanctuary, with the temple entrance in front of him, Chaerephon journeyed on his quest for confirmation of what he already knew to be true. Socrates and his relentless pursuit of truth and wisdom had brought about this journey. But Chaerephon's pilgrimage for answers, if the first to be caused by Socrates, was by no means the last. Plato and, to a greater or lesser degree, nearly every student since would be impacted by the argumentative sage of Athens. And as he entered the shrine of Apollo, approaching the famous oracle, Chaerephon looked up and saw the famous yet enigmatic inscription carved in stone above the temple entrance: *know thyself*.

KNOW THYSELF

Education, both classical and non-classical, finds a stimulus and origin in the person of Socrates. He was a complex character, both inspirational and enigmatic, whose life and teachings marked a revolutionary new beginning in the Western intellectual tradition and in education. Since he did not write anything himself, we know of his life and teachings through the writings of his students, primarily Plato, and some of his detractors. When his friend Chaerephon returned from the Oracle of Delphi with confirmation that Socrates was indeed the wisest of all men, he responded not by boasting or celebrating but by trying to prove the oracle wrong. He set out to discover if anyone knew the secret of a meaningful life because such a person would surely be wiser than him. He began questioning everyone he could find, asking deeper and deeper questions about the important aspects of beauty, friendship, knowledge, etc., but no one could give him satisfactory answers. Instead, they pretended to know more than they actually did. Socrates began to understand that true wisdom came from embracing our ignorance. Only after accepting that we do not know can we begin the journey of education. Eventually, Socrates realized that the oracle had been right all along. He was wise, not because of what he knew, but because he was able to admit that he was ignorant. His methods of investigation, however, resulted in some noble and important men of Athens looking foolish. This caused him to be admired by some and despised by others.

His approach, today known as the Socratic Method, caused great polarization in Athens. He was accused of impiety against the gods and corrupting the minds of the youth, for which he was brought before the Athenian Senate. Plato's dialogue the *Apology* recounts Socrates' defense during the trial, where he stated that he had done nothing but attempt to prove the oracle wrong. The jury was not swayed by his

> *He was wise, not because of what he knew, but because he was able to admit that he was ignorant.*

PHOTO: Zde, *Temple of Apollo in Delphi*.

ART: Louis Joseph LeBrun, *Socrates' Address*, 1867

argument, however, and convicted Socrates by a vote of 280 to 221. The law allowed a convicted citizen to propose an alternative punishment, but, instead of suggesting exile, Socrates suggested he be honored by the city for his services and be compensated for his work. The jury was not amused by his defiance and sentenced him to death by drinking a mixture of poison hemlock. Before his execution, his friends and disciples, including Plato, offered to bribe the guards and help him escape. He declined, stating he was not afraid of death. Socrates drank the lethal mixture without hesitation.

The life and work of Socrates did not happen in isolation. He was the product of a rich philosophical and scientific tradition that had been developing for almost two hundred years. But his brash and unapologetic methodology resulted in a rigorous search for the essence of things in a way that had not hitherto been utilized. His quest for wisdom inspired Plato and led to the creation of his school, the Academy, the prototype for Western education.[2] But even more than an inspiration for schools, Socrates provided a pedagogy and a purpose to education. He forces us to leave our comfortable lives and the safe places where we exist unchallenged and enter on a quest for self-improvement through knowledge. We are compelled to enter the dark space of accepting our ignorance and embracing the struggle to change. This can be a difficult journey, and one where we are constantly confronted with our own limitations, but Socrates has left us no choice. We must seek to understand the world around us and, in so doing, discover the truth of who we are. We must learn to know ourselves.

THE RESURGENCE OF CLASSICAL CATHOLIC EDUCATION

For most of the next 2300 years, classical education, built on the principles of ancient Greece, was the accepted form of pedagogy and instruction. This changed dramatically in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries, when the principles of Socratic education were largely discarded. Within a generation, however, a revival of classical pedagogy began to take place. During a course on education given at Oxford in 1947, the English author Dorothy Sayers gave a lecture in which she applied the three traditional liberal arts related to language acquisition—grammar, logic, and rhetoric, collectively referred to as the “trivium”—to stages of growth in students. Using this framework, Sayers set forth a pedagogy of education that transferred the structure of classical education to educational pedagogy and child development. No longer were the liberal arts only the *what* of education, but also the *how*. This lecture is seen as the starting point for the modern revival of classical education, a movement that continues to experience significant popularity and exponential growth in certain circles.[3]

Modern pedagogy, however, by its own admission, has a strong emphasis on job preparation and earning potential. This is markedly different from classical education in which the goal is to help students thrive not just at work but in the very art of living by cultivating a life of flourishing through personal excellence.

When encountering classical education for the first time, parents invariably and understandably want to know the difference between it and the more prevalent pedagogy in public, parochial, and private schools. I had this same experience, but in reverse. Having experienced classical education in college and then working in classical school environments, I wanted to understand what non-classical education was and how it was different from the classical model when I was hired to run a classical program in a diocesan school that used common core educational standards for its classes. In order to appreciate the benefit of classical pedagogy, it is important to understand the difference.

One of my first observations, and one that I continually experience as a point of confusion when talking with parents, is that many people do not realize how much education has changed in the past twenty years. I had always experienced my exposure to classical education as somewhat consistent with my experience in parochial high school in the 1980s. This was one of the reasons that I was somewhat skeptical of all the chatter about the current state of education that surrounded the lightning-fast adoption of Common Core standards in 2010. Modern pedagogy, however, by its own admission, has a strong emphasis on job preparation and earning potential. This is markedly different from classical education, in which the goal is to help students thrive not just at work but in the very art of living by cultivating a life of flourishing through personal excellence.

My basic experience of student formation as head of a classical primary school included aspects of mimetic instruction,[4] classroom discussions, repetition of core ideas for mastery, and integration of learning for enhanced student involvement and efficacy. An easy and straightforward example of these pedagogical principles included the use of songs in the elementary years for acquisition of grammatical knowledge in English or a foreign language (in the case of schools where I worked, Latin). They were fun and had a tremendous impact on

recall. This allowed the students to have easy access to core information as their understanding of a particular subject increased. They could apply basic knowledge to material that was gradually increasing in difficulty, leading to greater and greater mastery. This did not seem very controversial or revolutionary. It actually seemed like common sense.

Other basic principles, such as the use of cumulative practice for ingrained knowledge of essential and basic information like math facts or consistent training through easy, age-appropriate writing exercises, seemed also undeniably beneficial. Assessing student engagement through kinetic learning, narration, or thoughtful conversation seemed equally obvious. Using constant monitoring of individual learning through some variation of seminar discussion with older students, which allowed the teacher continual feedback about where each and every student was with the internalization and mastery of new concepts, seemed to me to be the very essence of what it meant to be a teacher. It was confusing when I heard these techniques being actively discouraged and even labeled as harmful for students in non-classical settings. That is when I began to realize how classical pedagogy has a wealth of knowledge and experience to bring to the current discussion about education.

And this leads to a first observation about the discussion surrounding classical education. The discrepancy between classical education and non-classical education might arise from our unfamiliarity with the former but also with the basic principles of the latter. It is possible that people speaking about education today assume that there is little or no difference between classical education and current educational trends. If you went to Catholic school in the twentieth century, your experience might be more similar to the standards of classical education than most modern standards. In this case, it is not just classical education that you need to understand. It is how much education has changed in the early years of the twenty-first century.

APOLOGIA (A DEFENSE)

I experience classical Catholic education every day in my high school classroom. It is inspiring, engaging, and diverse. It focuses on the whole child and unabashedly states that it is more focused on a student's success at life and their relationship with Christ than simply job training. It asks questions about the nature of love and friendship, law and civic duty, purpose and discernment. For those who are interested in learning about my program, I let them talk to the students. They are always my best ambassadors. And I am in a unique situation in that the students who participate in my classical program also take non-classical classes in our archdiocesan high school. So they are especially qualified to explain what they love about classical education and how they experience it in contrast to non-classical classes.

Classical education also has its detractors.[5] They complain that it is impractical, outdated, or worse, judgmental. These objections stem from a lack of understanding or misunderstanding of classical Catholic education. Others, like the criticisms that it is not in line with modern philosophical trends or that it is religious, are not only true but speak to the core of the mission of a classical Catholic school. When addressing concerns and misconceptions, rather than answer objections and criticisms directly, I focus on the beauty that I see in classical Catholic education as someone who has experienced it both as a student and as a teacher. I have witnessed the benefit of this environment on the intellectual, spiritual, and character development of hundreds of my students.

People who have been exposed to classical Catholic education know how beautiful and successful it is as an approach to forming students. Although anecdotal, during my twenty years of teaching, and especially during my many years working in a high school, I have seen students achieve remarkable results, both academically and personally. But this observation needs some qualification. Some students are naturally gifted when it comes to the realm of school learning. These students have done well throughout their academic career, they do well on standardized tests, and, generally speaking, they have natural executive functioning skills. In my estimation, they account for about 25 percent of students. When I say that classical education produces remarkable results, I am not speaking solely about this group.

Most of education is geared toward the 50 to 60 percent of students in the middle range. These students vary in their strengths and areas of challenge. Classical education works very well with this group since it is naturally differentiated and can help build foundational skills that are lacking for accelerated future growth. There are also a group of students who have academic challenges and/or are in need of remediation. It is with this group that I see the most exciting transformations. So when I say that I have seen remarkable results, it is with all three groups simultaneously. This is one of the strongest aspects of classical learning. It is naturally differentiated, meaning it can build different skills in different students working at the same time.

On average, I have seen students experience a year and a half of academic progress in an academic calendar year. As a teacher, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing a student in need of remediation experience three to four years of academic growth in one year. I have seen it many times. In my opinion, it speaks to the power of classical education.

But, as convinced as those with experience of this amazing pedagogy are, it is difficult to answer the question "What is classical Catholic education?" succinctly. Any definition will have to speak to the unity of truth in the various and varied fields of study and how all learning is one impulse for knowledge that leads to one encounter with truth. Central to a definition will be the understanding that reality is permeated by truth, goodness, and beauty. The definition will need to highlight the role of human experience in history as well as the importance of the interpersonal experience of a seminar approach to learning. God's love as the ultimate goal of formation and the role of his Church as the guide on that path are also essential elements that would need to be mentioned. But as difficult as the task may be, it is important that we do exactly that: provide a straightforward and engaging answer to a complex question. So here it goes:

> *Classical Catholic education immerses students in the unity of truth, transforms them through a metaphysical worldview, and, through engaging discussion, encourages them to embrace a life of flourishing fulfilled in God's call to divine intimacy with Christ in his Church.*

This definition has several elements: (1) A classical Catholic education will present the various subjects in an integrated fashion. Truth is one, and learning, which focuses on truth, must be one integrated reality looked at from the various standpoints of math, literature, science, philosophy, the arts, history, and theology. A perfect model of this integrated aspect of education can be found in the first philosopher of the Western tradition, Thales of Miletus.

(2) Since all truth is one and finds its origin in the work of the Creator, all reality shares certain essential characteristics of truth, beauty, and goodness. Known as the transcendentals, these essential aspects of all being help provide the student with a metaphysical worldview that is profoundly transformative. (3) The example of Socrates, who bequeathed to the world his famous pedagogical methodology, the Socratic seminar, is an essential part of a classical Catholic educational pedagogy—not because it is old and classic but because it is engaging, energizing, and healing for the students. Along with Plato and Aristotle, this great philosopher focused on what it means to excel in the art and craft of living. (4) Lastly, a classical Catholic education will have the Incarnation of Christ as the central reality that informs our worldview and teaches students to think with the mind of the Church. If Socrates and Aristotle encourage a life of excellence, Jesus Christ transforms our understanding of the human person by promising that we are to be "participants of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). This promise serves as the starting point and ultimate goal of every journey, including the journey of education. Although these elements might be employed partially or arbitrarily in modern pedagogy, when taken together, these components provide the essential characteristics of a classical Catholic high school education.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Classical education predates the coming of Christ. It provided its students with those skills and areas of knowledge that the ancient world believed one needed to possess in order to be an engaged member of society. These arts needed by a free member of society were grouped together into the seven liberal arts. Today, in an analogous way, the liberal arts, as opposed to vocational training, help us to become educated members of the world around us with a valuable contribution that only we can add. In the process, we discover who we are and how we can flourish in this life. It is not job training, but life training. Regardless of what our many jobs or careers might be, whether we are successful in our careers or chronically underemployed, or how happy or challenging our home and personal lives end up being, education with a classical Catholic pedagogy will help orient students toward that which is true, good, and beautiful. Ultimately, it will help students learn to see themselves as children of God, unconditionally loved by the Father, and called to be heirs to the heavenly kingdom and members of his Church.

Not a bad way to spend the four years of high school.

Notes

[1] The reference to Chaerephon visiting the Oracle of Delphi is given in Plato's dialogue the *Apology*, which presents itself as a transcription of Socrates' defense during his trial. Xenophon also provides a version of Socrates' defense and mentions the visit. Chaerephon is described by the playwright Aristophanes in his work *The Clouds*. The phrase "Know thyself" was inscribed in the forecourt (*prónaos*) of the temple of Apollo in Delphi. Many associate the saying with Socrates, and both Xenophon and Plato mention that it was a topic of conversation that he broached on several occasions.

[2] Above the entrance to Plato's Academy was the inscription, "Let no one ignorant of Geometry enter here." The saying might be surprising to some, but it highlights the connection of Plato's school to the liberal arts and the integrated view of education.

[3] The article in question is "The Lost Tools of Learning" by Dorothy Sayers. I agree with Shawn Barnett's article criticizing Sayers approach, but the catalyst effect that the speech had is widely acknowledged. See his "Dorothy Sayers Was Wrong: The Trivium and Child Development," Circe Institute, August 9, 2019, https://circeinstitute.org/blog/blog-dorothy-sayers-was-wrong-trivium-and-child-development/.

[4] Mimetic instruction is a form of pedagogy that engages the student through the journey of knowledge acquisition. It is a core practice in classical schools and comes from the Latin word meaning "to imitate." It is rooted in the understanding that learning is a journey that begins with an invitation and gradually grows into a mastery of new knowledge.

[5] A sample of objections to classical education can be found in a foreword written by Peter Kreeft to the book *Liberal Arts Tradition: A Philosophy of Christian Classical Education* by Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2021 [2014]), xv–xvii. The foreword, with a list of the objections, can be found at Christopher Perrin, "Dr. Peter Kreeft on the Benefits of Classical Education," Inside Classical Education, February 4, 2015, https://insideclassicaled.com/dr-peter-kreeft-on-the-benefits-of-classical-education/.

Andrew Youngblood **has been a classical educator and education consultant for over twenty years. He has helped found over thirty classical Catholic high schools and trained countless administrators and teachers on how to implement classical education from pre-K through college. In all his work, Youngblood draws from his brief experience as a contemplative Benedictine monk. In stark contrast to the monastic silence he once experienced, he now lives in the suburbs of Philadelphia, working as the head of a classical Catholic school and surrounded at home by a houseful of teenagers and dogs.**

A classical Catholic education will have the Incarnation of Christ as the central reality that informs our worldview and teaches students to think with the mind of the Church.

ART: Jean François Pierre Peyron, *Death of Socrates*, 1790.

An Impasse

JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

A haze of light obscures the distant towers,
 Yellowed and thickening as the sun descends,
While homeward drivers sit, ensnared for hours,
 Before they reach the place where their road bends.

Imprisoned thus, alone, what fills their minds?
 What figure lurks within the cloud of thought?
Or does a song distract from what thought finds
 As if our peace could be so cheaply bought?

Decades ago, school teachers used to say
 A well-stocked mind is never bored; but we,
Can we say that? Or does it sound cliché,
 At one remove from hard reality?

We have, for too long now, been told all learning
 Has for its end to make or work machines,
And that, in turn, just for the sake of earning
 To question whether this is all it means.

A salesman I met at a family wedding
  Stood tall amid the music, wine, and light
And said school serves to help us in the shedding
  Of lies and cons in some bare-knuckled fight.

Amid the shifting lanes of creeping steel,
  The car horns blaring and then trailing off,
His may be the suspicion we most feel.
  We raise one hand to mask a sudden cough.

We may, as well, think of that distant sky
  Beyond the twilight smoldering with smoke
Where in wide circles stars and planets fly
  Of which the old philosophers once spoke;

Their words were useless and their questions odd,
  Which never ceased until their final breath;
And while some laugh at them and some heads nod,
  They alone travel fearless unto death.

ART: Collage of Unsplash images by Alexander Grey, Joel Filipe, Kier In Sight Archives, Scott Webb, Yan Ots, Benjamin Child, Rodrigo Abreu, Sahaj Patel, and cashoyboy.

MISSION

finding the way home

Kathleen Vogt

WORD ON FIRE INSTITUTE MEMBER

Kathleen, it is a delight to speak with you! Given that this issue is dedicated to the theme of education, it is especially nice to connect given your considerable experience with homeschooling. But before we discuss homeschooling, tell us a little about yourself and your Catholic upbringing.

KATHLEEN VOGT: I grew up in Orlando as a cradle Catholic and attended Catholic school through eighth grade. My family attended Mass each Sunday and prayed before meals, but if you can believe it, I had never been to Eucharistic Adoration, I didn't know what it meant to be pro-life, and I had no significant prayer life. That changed when I went to Florida State University and joined the Catholic campus ministry run by the Brotherhood of Hope. I was shown the full beauty and truth of Catholicism. My faith came alive, which also helped my then-fiancé, Brandon, decide to enter the Church. As we moved toward marriage and began discussing the possibility of children, homeschooling was immediately attractive because we could keep our children close to home, teach them what we valued, and immerse them in the faith.

You are married to Brandon Vogt (Senior Publishing Director at Word on Fire) and are the mother of eight lovely children. Could you describe what a day in the life of the Vogt family looks like and, especially, how the rhythms of your Catholic faith play out in the midst of countless daily demands?

KV: Our kids usually wake up around 6:00 a.m.—we're early sleepers and early risers—and they first knock out their "five daily habits": get dressed, brush their teeth, make their bed, get breakfast, and clean up (the older kids help the younger ones). We're then usually ready to begin school around 7:30 a.m.

This past year, we homeschooled five children, who were in first, third, fifth, sixth, and eighth grades (we also had a preschooler, toddler, and infant).

Each weekend, I create a weekly checklist for each child, which the kids use to get started. Our older children are able to work on several subjects independently, only occasionally needing help. This has revealed one surprising benefit of homeschooling, that as our kids get older, they have become more self-directed, able to read, study, and learn on their own, which are all invaluable skills.

We typically work on school from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. before taking a break to pray Morning Prayer as a family, and then we all attend our parish's daily Mass at 9:15 a.m. We are home by 10:00 a.m., and the kids will quickly get a snack before working on school again for a couple more hours until noon.

The Mass and family Liturgy of the Hours have become the two pillars of our day. Even if the rest of the day is chaotic and unproductive, but we're able to pray and worship as a family, we consider it a good day. Prayer takes precedence.

PHOTOS: Kelly Meets World.

We want our children to witness, from an early age, how we prioritize God and our relationship with him.

After lunch, we all take a break until 1:00 p.m. While the kids are playing, I often sneak away to listen to quiet music or read. This recovery time in the middle of the day is restorative and, I think, necessary. Without it, I would burn out quickly.

During the rest of the afternoon, the younger children play together while I help the older children finish school. (Since our younger children require more one-on-one time, I try to focus on them in the mornings, and then in the afternoons, I help the older ones with any subjects they are struggling with.)

We want our children to witness, from an early age, how we prioritize God and our relationship with him.

Around 4:00 p.m., I start coming up with something for dinner. The kids get to take turns helping me in the kitchen, so it isn't overwhelming having nine of us crammed in the kitchen together.

Dinner is typically ready by 5:30 p.m., as Brandon wraps up work and comes in from his home office. We eat as a family, clean up, play outside a bit, pray Evening Prayer together, read some books or watch a movie, and then it's bedtime for the kids, usually around 7:30 or 8:00 p.m. The kids are required to be in their rooms, mainly so Brandon and I can spend time together, but that doesn't mean they fall asleep right away, as the sun is often still out. Therefore many times, with nothing else to do, they bring schoolwork to their rooms to get a jump start on the next day. They know getting ahead tonight means more free playtime tomorrow! Of course, it's fine by us, as long as they stay in their rooms. By that hour, I need my own quiet time to keep sane! Brandon and I will then spend an hour or two together before ending with Night Prayer and going to bed.

Kathleen, you have homeschooled all of your children. Trained in elementary education at Florida State University, when did you first encounter the call to homeschool?

KV: Ironically, it was one of my first education professors in college, where I was training to be a public school teacher, who first introduced me to a more positive view of homeschooling. He was Catholic, and after my first year, seeing that I was active in the Catholic campus ministry, he approached me and asked if I would be willing to serve as a Mommy's Helper for his wife, who was a homeschooling mother to three girls. It was by interacting with this vibrant Catholic family and seeing how they were able to infuse their learning with their Catholic faith that I first became inspired to one day homeschool my own children.

After becoming parents ourselves, Brandon and I knew two things: it was our primary goal to get our children to heaven, and we wanted to maximize the time we had with them. We felt homeschooling would give us the best opportunity for both.

PHOTOS: Kelly Meets World.

What is your approach to teaching your own children? How have you balanced the demands of different ages, different learning styles, and different curricula?

KV: There are a dizzying number of homeschooling options, and they each have their benefits and drawbacks. I've tried to pull the best from each of them. For example, we appreciate the child-centered independence of Maria Montessori, the emphasis on observation and detail from Charlotte Mason, and the rigorous, cyclical, integrated curriculum of the classical education model. Because of this, we definitely have a more eclectic style of homeschooling—we mix and match a lot.

The best advice I was given as a new homeschooling mom was "Each child, each year." In other words, don't think you have to come up with a permanent, one-size-fits-all solution for all the kids in your family. Reassess each year and for each child. Focus on the needs of *your* family in the here and now. What worked one year for one child might not necessarily work for the next. (This also applies to homeschooling in general. Homeschooling might be a good fit for some of your children, in some stages of life, but not every kid, every year. So, pray and discern.)

One other game changer has been finding subjects that all the kids in our family can study but on different levels. For example, we might all study ancient Egypt, but while the younger children learn about pyramids and create their own out of Legos, the older children read *Tales of Ancient Egypt* by Roger Lancelyn Green and write their own mythical stories centered during this time period. While the older kids read a classic book, the younger kids read the junior version.

We were part of a wonderful local homeschool co-op group, Catholic Schoolhouse, which followed this same model. Each week, all the kids, regardless of grade level, studied the same time period in history, learning about the same people, places, and events (e.g., ancient Greece, medieval Europe, or twentieth-century America). This led to great conversations in the car and around the dinner table, since the whole family was studying one thing together. Everyone could chime in.

What kinds of resources are available for the homeschooling parent? Is there an element of isolation, or have you found a rich community with fellow like-minded parents and children?

"Each child, each year."

KV: We live in a golden age for homeschooling resources. Sometimes, that huge selection can be overwhelming, especially for first-time homeschoolers. If you're intimidated, I strongly recommend starting with one of the all-inclusive curriculums, which are totally scripted, telling parents exactly what to do and say, and contain everything you need in a single box. Other curriculums allow more flexibility and creativity on the part of the parent, and you might even choose to mix and match different curriculums. But in the end, talk to other parents, discern, and then just pick one and go with it. You can always shift in the future. Don't fall prey to the lie that you will "ruin" your child by choosing the wrong curriculum. It's not true.

I would also recommend joining a homeschool co-op group, if possible. We have been incredibly blessed to be a part of several groups over the years. Through these co-ops, our children have found lifelong friends, and I have gained mom-friends who share our ideals in raising children to become saints. If you can't find any co-ops near you, check social media, ask your friends, or even ask your pastor if he knows of any nearby homeschooling families.

With an increasing number of families who are choosing to homeschool, more and more groups are forming in order to meet their needs.

In what way has your Catholic faith been threaded through your curriculum? Along with their intellectual development, what have you seen in your children's spiritual development?

KV: The Catholic faith imbues everything we do. In our homeschooling setup, we don't just have one religion class. God is woven through every subject, tying them all together. For example, we

> *We try to show our children that our faith isn't just something we isolate in one corner of our life or in one subject at school. Rather, it's the ground on which everything else stands.*

help them to marvel at the ordered patterns found in math, to observe the splendor of God's design in science, and to see how God has providently acted in the world through history.

We try to show our children that our faith isn't just something we isolate in one corner of our life or in one subject at school. Rather, it's the ground on which everything else stands.

We also draw our kids to heavenly things by the beautiful, the *via pulchritudinis* (way of beauty) that Bishop Barron advocates. Our children gaze on and discuss beautiful artwork, listen to beautiful music, and read and memorize beautiful poems.

Finally, we want our kids to value reason. We teach them to think critically, seek the truth, ask questions, write and communicate well, and defend their beliefs. We teach them that Catholicism is a smart religion and that there is no conflict between faith and science. Only when they have wrestled with these questions independently will they be able to confidently defend their faith in an increasingly secularized world.

What is the hardest part of homeschooling your children? How do you sustain yourself?

KV: The hardest part of homeschooling is always being "on." For twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I wear the hats of teacher, principal, dean, nurse, chef, housekeeper, taxi driver, librarian, and more. Always being surrounded by little kids can be both wonderful and draining at the same time.

That is why it's critical to build in times of rest and rejuvenation—and to vigorously safeguard them. I know I operate best when I set aside periods of quiet reflection each day. Each morning, I wake up early, around 5:30 a.m., to go on a long walk for about forty-five to sixty minutes where I pray the Rosary, spend time in personal prayer, and sometimes listen to uplifting podcasts. Then around 12:00 p.m., as noted above, I set aside at least thirty minutes of quiet time to assess the day and make adjustments for the evening.

Finally, I prioritize my relationship with my husband. We frequently have stay-at-home date nights to talk and recharge our relationship. This is vital for us.

PHOTOS: Kelly Meets World.

What advice would you give to parents who are discerning whether to homeschool their children? What advice would you offer to those who are struggling with homeschooling?

KV: For those discerning whether or not to homeschool their children, I would admit homeschooling isn't for everyone. You're in constant demand, all day every day. It's difficult. It can be overwhelming.

Yet there are few commitments that will give you more control over your life as a parent than homeschooling. In a traditional school setting, you're at the mercy of the school's schedule, culture, assignments, and educational philosophy. But each child is unique.

For instance, one of my sons likes to work in short chunks. He takes a quick break between subjects to go outside and shoot baskets. On the other hand, one of my daughters prefers to block her time into finishing school as quickly as possible so she can then listen to audiobooks while crocheting. If these children attended a traditional brick-and-mortar school, they wouldn't have the flexibility to learn in a manner best suited for them (much less the flexibility to make up games and build forts, or go outside and poke around the woods).

So, I would encourage parents to weigh the difficulties against the many benefits and then make an informed decision. Don't let others decide for you. Do what's best for your family. You're the only one who can determine that.

As for those struggling with homeschooling, I'd suggest looking for ways to build in more time for yourself into the schedule. Maybe it's establishing a quiet time each afternoon or setting your alarm fifteen minutes earlier each morning before the children wake. You can't pour from an empty bucket. Take the time.

Because we are unapologetic bibliophiles at Word on Fire, what are you reading for your own continued growth and what reading would you recommend to others?

TP: Two books I find myself coming back to each summer are *A Mother's Rule of Life: How to Bring Order to Your Home and Peace to Your Soul* by Holly Pierlot and *Teaching from Rest: A Homeschooler's Guide to Unshakable Peace* by Sarah Mackenzie. For anyone beginning their homeschool journey or even just needing a personal retreat to fall in love with homeschooling again, I recommend both!

Kathleen Vogt is a member of the Word on Fire Institute and is married to Brandon Vogt, Word on Fire's Senior Publishing Director.

notes from the inside

Forging Fathers

BY FR. JOHN P. FLOEDER

"Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied" (John 14:8). Philip's request to Jesus reveals the deepest longing of the human heart: to be known and loved and to be brought to the very source of love. Yet many are reluctant, or even hostile, toward expressing and seeking to fulfill this same desire. The depictions of fathers in our culture obscure the deep need for fatherhood. Fathers can be oafs like Homer Simpson or destructive seekers of power like Walter White. More immediately, each of our own fathers have wounded us or not been there for us when and how we needed them. Fatherhood becomes something to be ignored, if not rejected, because it is at best benign and at worst dominance and violence. This undermining of fatherhood has hit the Church and priests particularly hard. The abuse of the vulnerable by Catholic priests, those who we call father, has only deepened the wound. The meaning of both fatherhood and priesthood have been eclipsed.[1] In my own context, I have the task of forming future priests and helping other priest formators learn how to be formators. My role is to help men become fathers and help spiritual fathers in the art of fathering. How can this be done in this milieu? How can any man be a father?

Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.

JOHN 14:8

At the start, fatherhood, biological or spiritual, is something that needs to be learned and grown into. Motherhood is largely innate to women given that they carry the child within them and in their "genius" are receptive and attentive to the person.[2] For men, fatherhood is "not so much an inevitable natural reality as a cultural and personal achievement."[3] Too often men step into the role of being a father with the attitude that they need to exert their fatherhood on their sons, whether it be "father knows best" or a warped headship. Fatherhood becomes something one has and then is dispensed to others. The reality is much different: "You have one Father—the one in heaven" (Matt. 23:9). The fullness of fatherhood in any form is only in the Father. We can only participate in it, and that participation must be learned and grow over time.

My greatest failures as a spiritual father have come when I tried too hard to be a father. There were incidents with seminarians where I had to

PHOTO: Ante Hamersmit, Unsplash (altered).

give them tough challenges, and many of them were justified, but the way in which I gave them were based in the mindset that I knew what they needed to do, and if they would just do it, everything would be fine. This might be needed with a toddler, but for adult men the way I did it was both disrespectful and not effective. I had to be open to new ways of sharing my fatherly heart and my desire for them to be good priests. This included consulting with my peers about better ways to share difficult feedback. One of the best things I learned was to ask the men, "Can I give you some feedback?" This honored their dignity as a person by not assaulting them with my critiques. It is an appropriation of the care of Jesus: "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:6). It also gets them to commit to receive the feedback and be open to it. Until they want to grow and change, they will merely conform. Until I was ready to embrace growth and change, they did not want to hear it.[4]

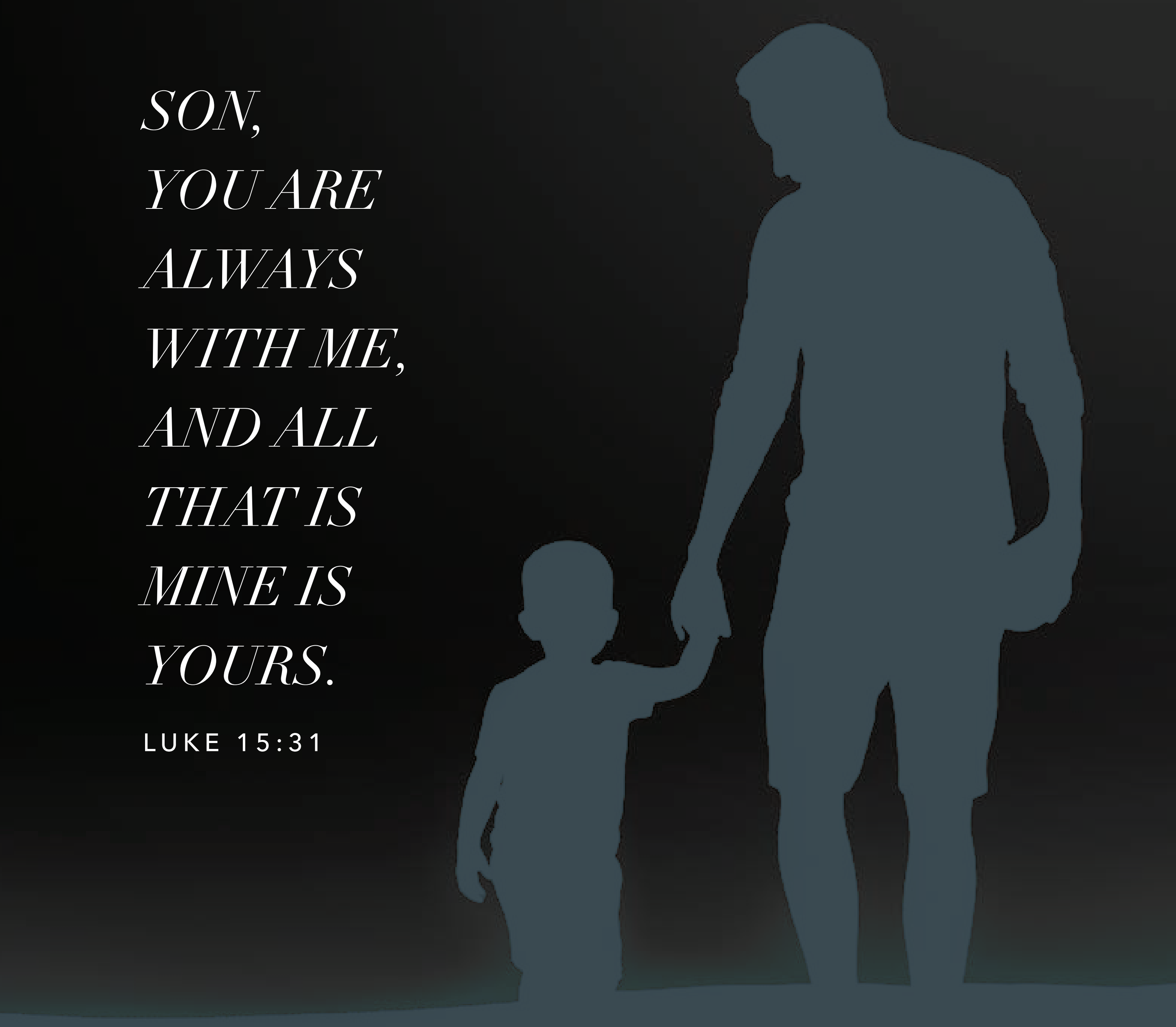
Living in close quarters in our formation house, the seminarians know I am not perfect. It was only when I could own my mistakes and not try to look good that the men began to receive what guidance and support I could give them. One of the most powerful fatherhood moments was when I was working in the kitchen and snapped at one of the seminarians in my own dad's voice. Catching myself, I circled back with him and apologized. Later that week when I met with him one-on-one, he shared in tears that his own father would never have apologized. He felt my care for him and the love of the Father in my apology. It is through such encounters that I learned I can only be a father if I am willing to admit my own poverty, learn from my mistakes, and grow into the person of Jesus who reveals the Father: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

The fullness of fatherhood in any form is only in the Father.

Perhaps the most important thing that has helped me learn how to be a father was to stop trying to be a father. Jacques Philippe says it very plainly: "We cannot truly be a father without first being a son. We must be a son above all in our relationship with God. The spiritual fatherhood that we are trying to develop is not just a human work, one that we can achieve purely by our own efforts. It is more like a grace, something to ask for and to receive, a participation in the ineffable paternity of God."[5] I have only grown in my ability to serve seminarians in their formation to the degree that I have embraced my own sonship, the reality that even in my poverty and sinfulness the Father loves me. The Father has patiently been telling me of his love for me for years as the parable of the prodigal son keeps coming to me on my yearly retreats: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (Luke 15:31). It is only in allowing myself to receive the love of the Father that I can find myself. The more I receive and live in that love, the more the Holy Spirit moves my heart to share similar words with the seminarians in my care, like, "You are not too much for God," "You are not your wounds," or simply, "I noticed that you did that. Well done. I'm proud of you." This love I receive as a son then becomes the heart of a spiritual father within me that can love these men into being who they are: "We say a person 'blossoms' when undergoing the experience of being loved; that he becomes wholly himself for the first time; that a 'new life' is beginning for him."[6]

I have had to learn how to be a father through many mistakes, and I ask forgiveness from any along the way who have not seen Jesus and the Father in me. Once I learned to recognize my mistakes as opportunities for growth, I began to learn and enter deeper into my sonship, Jesus, and thus the Father. It is in walking this path myself that I hope to form future priestly fathers and support those who form them. Fathers are forged only in the crucible of divine love. The first person of the Blessed Trinity is the only source of fatherhood. I am not that source. But I can receive his love, be transformed by it, and, in Jesus, be an icon of the Father. You can too.

PHOTO: kieferpix, Adobe Stock (altered).



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Notes

[1] José Granados, "Priesthood: A Sacrament of the Father," *Communio* 36 (Summer 2009) 187.
See also Angelo Cardinal Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 239ff.

[2] John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* 18, apostolic letter, August 15, 1988, vatican.va.

[3] Carter Griffin, *Why Celibacy? Reclaiming the Fatherhood of the Priest*
(Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2019), 105.

[4] See Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballentine, 2016).

[5] Jacques Philippe, *Priestly Fatherhood: Treasure in Earthen Vessels* (New York: Scepter, 2021), 63–64.

[6] Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1997), 174.

PERIPHERIES
notes from the inside

An Environmental Education

What a Christian Environmental Ethic Looks Like

BY CHRISTOPHER BARNARD

When Roe v. Wade was overturned last year, prominent climate groups such as the Sunrise Movement and Fridays For Future could be found among the many pro-abortion protestors outside the Supreme Court. That's not abnormal for them—progressive environmental organizations have a long history of anti-natalism. The idea that more humans on the planet inevitably leads to environmental catastrophe was first promulgated in the eighteenth century by Thomas Malthus, who infamously predicted that society would soon collapse due to overpopulation. Senator Bernie Sanders once argued that population control should be part of our strategy to tackle climate change.[1]

This approach to environmental issues alienates Christians. In our secular society dominated by feel-good spirituality, modern environmentalism has taken on a religious dimension of its own. Climate activism is often soaked with themes of sin and redemption. Rapacious human consumption is the original sin, while ecological collapse and species extinction are the apocalyptic end days. Humans are the problem and only a return to nature can save us. For many people, especially my Gen Z peers, this narrative is highly appealing—precisely because it provides a new, God-shaped sense of meaning. Facts and science become subservient to ideology and emotion.

Yet, it's clear that modern climate activism has been misled by a fundamental misconception of the proper environmentalist mindset. In *Green Philosophy*,[2] the British philosopher Roger Scruton sets the record straight: "The goal is to pass on to future generations, and meanwhile to maintain and enhance, the order of which we are the temporary trustees." Fundamentally, our commitment to protecting the environment around us stems not from a self-indulgent Gaianism that pits humans versus nature, but from a direct duty to our children and grandchildren.

Another British thinker, Edmund Burke, summarizes this sentiment somewhat more abstractly: Society is a partnership "between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."[3] In this most simple of statements, he captures the very essence of the pro-life ethic. Our understanding of society and human interaction is not merely horizontal, defined by our relationship with those currently around us. It is also fundamentally vertical. We honor our *forefathers* by accepting—with gratitude and

IMAGES: (opposite) Holly Landkammer, Unsplash; (top) Detail from *The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise*, Giovanni di Paolo, 1445, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

reverence—the world and traditions they have entrusted us with and committing ourselves to passing on this inheritance to our *descendants*. The implicit premise is that stewardship of the gifts we have received is only relevant insofar as it honors the sanctity of *future* life.

This mandate for stewardship obviously includes the natural world around us. Indeed, care for the environment saturates our religious and ethical inheritance. In Genesis 1:26, God commands us to exercise stewardship over all of creation. Later, Noah secures a spot for all species on his ark, thereby ensuring the continuation of creation for future generations. The rest of the Old Testament is replete with natural imagery, from "the trees of the forest [that] sing for joy" (Ps. 96:12) to "the wild animals [that] honor [him]" (Isa. 43:20), while the New Testament emphasizes the reconciliation of all creation to God (see Col. 1:19–20).

In his pro-life treatise *The Gospel of Life*, Pope St. John Paul II emphasizes that "man has a specific responsibility toward the environment . . . for the present but also for future generations."[4] More recently, Pope Francis published *Laudato Si'*, his call to Catholics to take climate change and environmental protection seriously. As he argues, stewardship of God's creation is axiomatic to our ethical awareness as Christians. We must protect the environment in order to protect life and allow humanity to flourish.

Unfortunately, Christians have failed to truly heed these calls and stand up for our own, pro-human environmental ethic. We've allowed the religious alarmism of radical climate ideology to wreak serious consequences on society. One in five children in Britain, for example, experiences "climate nightmares" at night.[5] Four in ten young women report being hesitant to have children due to climate change.[6] Some environmentalists, echoing Sanders' comments, go as far as arguing that abortion is a key tool in the fight against climate change.[7] Yet, the evidence points in the other direction. In their recent book *Superabundance: The Story of Population Growth, Innovation, and Human Flourishing on an Infinitely Bountiful Planet*,[8] my friend Marian Tupy and his colleague Gale Pooley present data showing that population growth is actually correlated with greater resource abundance. The simple reason is that the human brain, designed in God's image, is infinitely creative and resourceful. More humans equals more brains, and therefore greater capacity for problem-solving and innovation. God's command to "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28), similarly to his mandate for stewardship, offers us a harmonious—rather than an exploitative—relationship with nature.

If only the modern climate movement took this view of humanity. What a strange paradigm to live in, to encourage ending present unborn life for the sake of the survival of future unborn life. The anti-natalism of zealous climate activism collapses under the weight of its self-contradiction. Christians need to push back against climate ideology that supports life in some cases but not in others. We need to commit ourselves to a proper re-ordering of what it means to be an environmentalist and how it is inseparable from our moral obligation to steward all of creation. One of the most powerful tools to achieve this is education. As a lifelong Christian and environmentalist myself, I propose three main ways to engage the next generation on these issues in a faith-filled, serious, and effective manner.

IMAGES: Ronan Furuta, Unsplash; Mika Baumeister, Unsplash; Markus Spiske, Unsplash.

First, we should take time to meditate on the relationship between God and His Creation. We must re-acquaint ourselves and our children with what Scripture tells us about the natural world that surrounds us and how God expects us to relate to it. Christian environmentalists have called this concept "creation care," or the idea that God not only created the world and everything in it but also gave mankind exclusive responsibility over it. Creation care can be broken down into several principles that are worth pondering, discussing, and praying about as a family and community:

GOD CREATED THE EARTH

John 1:3

"All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."

EVERY LIVING THING IS PART OF GOD'S CREATION

Isaiah 43:20–21

"The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise."

GOD USES THE EARTH TO TEACH US

Job 12:7–10

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being."

WE ARE ASKED TO TAKE CARE OF CREATION

Genesis 1:26

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'"

Second, go outside. Being in nature, whether it's the beach in California, the mountains of Colorado, or the woods of Vermont, not only reinvigorates our soul but also gives us a deeper appreciation for God's creation. In the modern world, too many children are stuck indoors behind computer screens, which separates us—both physically and spiritually—from our natural inheritance. Spending time in nature allows us to meditate on the beauty of creation, leaving us in awe not just of the world around us but also of the One who created it. Take your children on a hike, or take them camping, or go play on the beach. Inspire in them a spirit of outdoorsy adventure, and don't forget to remind them that there is a Creator who loves both them and the natural world they are playing in. Teach them that when the environment thrives, they thrive too, and that humans should live in harmony with nature, not in opposition to it.

PHOTOS: Ron Lach, Pexels; Shushmita Nag, Unsplash.

The benefits aren't just spiritual, either. Studies show that spending more time outdoors reduces stress, anxiety, and risk of diseases like cancer.[9] God created a wonderful, marvelous, mysterious world—so why not spend more time in it?

Third, we can take concrete steps to clean up our local communities. A faith-filled and personal understanding of our relationship with the natural world empowers us to put biblical stewardship into action. My church in Washington, DC, for example, frequently organizes river and park clean-ups, where members of the congregation come together to pick up litter in their local green spaces. The idea is that by exercising our mandate to take care of creation, we not only feel a sense of accomplishment but also develop a deeper understanding of the negative impact our actions can and do have on nature. This offers an opportunity to teach children about the merits of recycling, reducing waste, and stewarding our resources responsibly.

Taking time as a community or family to contemplate why activities like this are for the common good grants us agency, especially giving children a sense of meaning and taking matters into their own hands. The hopelessness and pessimism of modern climate activism can be counteracted with community-oriented and measurable steps to improve the environment around us, as research at Yale University indicates.[10] For parents interested in exploring this further, Keep America Beautiful is a nation-wide campaign that connects people with these kinds of activities in their local communities.

Ultimately, these are just a few ways Christians can reorient the environmental conversation back to the principles we know to be true. We agree with climate activists' passion for protecting the planet, yet we must stand against policy or ideology that denigrates human life and pits us against the natural world we inhabit. Fundamentally, the Christian environmental ethic can be summed up like this: we love and care for the environment because we recognize the sanctity of life—past, present, and future.

Christopher Barnard is the President of the American Conservation Coalition.

Notes

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[5] "One in five UK children report nightmares about climate change," Reuters, March 2, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/climate-change-children/one-in-five-uk-children-report-nightmares-about-climate-change-idUSL1N2AV1FF.

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[10] "Yale Experts Explain Climate Anxiety," Yale Sustainability, March 13, 2023, https://sustainability.yale.edu/explainers/yale-experts-explain-climate-anxiety.

ART: *The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise*, Giovanni di Paolo, 1445, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

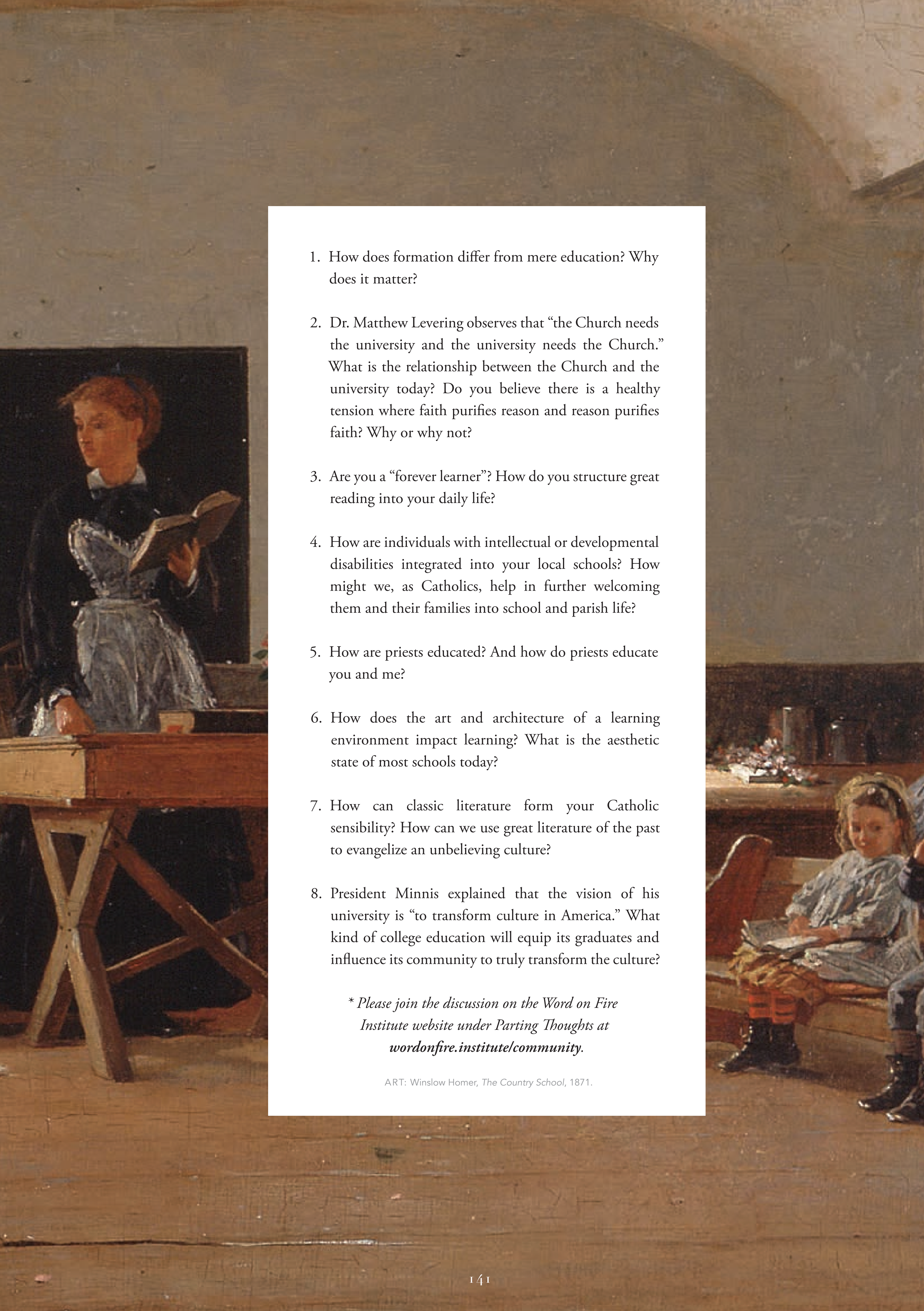
The Spelling Test

JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

The children, as they stumble in from school,
Casting their backpacks down like needless weights
Never again to be borne up, call out
To me their hollered greeting, more a sound
Than anything we recognize as words.
And then they're gone again, already, off—
The smell of playground sweat and mud-stained knees
That burst into the kitchen for a moment
And filled it up, now fades once more to stillness.
And, left in their haphazard wake, a paper,
Folded across and crinkled at the corners,
Its surface dingy with a scuff of shoe tread.
The top side bears a map in those thick lines
A dull and hard-pressed pencil will produce;
And on the obverse, marked in smooth red pen,
One finds the ruins of a spelling test
Performed—not quite—to anyone's satisfaction.
It seems that in the long-appointed hour,
Prepared for every evening through the week,
The words, with their familiar sounds and meanings,
Refused the order to arrange themselves
As letters on the page. Although a pen
In kindly retrospect turns "-skun" to "-tion"
And crosses out gratuitous i's and e's,
It's clear the pupil had some other aim
In mind, and found those words mere obstacles
That stood between the heart and jungle gym
Or swing set. Or perhaps it was a freedom
Closer at hand that drew our speller's thought,
One gained—and instantly—by turning over
The test's white sheet: that other side, who blank
And empty, waited without prior rule
To serve as field, foundation, formless waste,
While through a worn-down lead the quick hand brought
With crooked lines a whole new world to being.

parting thoughts

meditatio & contemplatio



1. How does formation differ from mere education? Why does it matter?

2. Dr. Matthew Levering observes that "the Church needs the university and the university needs the Church." What is the relationship between the Church and the university today? Do you believe there is a healthy tension where faith purifies reason and reason purifies faith? Why or why not?

3. Are you a "forever learner"? How do you structure great reading into your daily life?

4. How are individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities integrated into your local schools? How might we, as Catholics, help in further welcoming them and their families into school and parish life?

5. How are priests educated? And how do priests educate you and me?

6. How does the art and architecture of a learning environment impact learning? What is the aesthetic state of most schools today?

7. How can classic literature form your Catholic sensibility? How can we use great literature of the past to evangelize an unbelieving culture?

8. President Minnis explained that the vision of his university is "to transform culture in America." What kind of college education will equip its graduates and influence its community to truly transform the culture?

** Please join the discussion on the Word on Fire Institute website under Parting Thoughts at* ***wordonfire.institute/community****.*

ART: Winslow Homer, *The Country School*, 1871.

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