

MUSINGS FROM THE EDITOR



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DEAR READERS

In a series of lectures delivered at Yale University (later published as *Education at the Crossroads*), Jacques Maritain offered an assessment of the state of education in 1943. He described several misconceptions relative to the education in his day. The fundamental misconnection for Maritain was developing an approach to education that does not consider toward what end education should be directed. While educational science can offer pedagogical insight to the teacher, it does not provide a vision of the sort of person that this education seeks to form. A school, for example, may be made up of a cadre

of astute pedagogues, who each have distinct understandings of humanity's ultimate purpose. For some, education is successful when a person is made a critical thinker, able to pierce beyond the power structures set up by human society. Others may argue that the end of an education is the creation of a young man or woman who enters into society ready to contribute in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The government, partially responsible for setting the curriculum of this school, may offer other ends to consider, embodied in standardized tests and required curricula.

The existence of Catholic education remains an interruptive and thus evangelizing force to this limited vision of education. At the heart of Catholic education is the reality that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Word made flesh, the One sent from the Father, seeks to sanctify our humanity through love. Other forms of education may seek to promote goodness, kindness, and compassion, but a Catholic education seeks nothing less than the slow transformation of our humanity into an icon of self-giving love. In the science classroom, we gaze at up at the stars and discover the wonder of a creation that is being ever renewed, ever expanded, and we praise the Creator for the gift of this chaotic order. In the English classroom, the beauty of speech, of narratives that draw us into the drama of being human, slowly reveal to us the depths of the humanity that Christ came to save. In theology, that subject which epitomizes the strangeness of the Catholic school vis-à-vis non-religious forms of education, our reason learns to savor those salutary images found in the Scriptures, in Christian doctrine, in the social teaching of the Church, and in the life of prayer—and slowly, our vision of what constitutes reality is transfigured. Our education is not about us, it's not about the future elite university that we will attend; it is about the transfiguration of our humanity in love. This cosmic and eschatological vision of humanity, transfigured through Christ, is the ultimate end of any education that calls itself Catholic. Education seeks to form human beings capacitated for gratitude.

Perhaps this is why the most important subject in a Catholic school's curriculum is the Eucharist itself. Not simply theological instruction regarding what constitutes the Church's robust Eucharistic teaching. Rather, that full, conscious, and active participation in the Eucharistic rites of the Church whereby every facet of our humanity is lifted up to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Our failures in the classroom, our being turned down by the college of our dreams, the broken

family and friendships that mark the life of an adolescent are lifted up to the Father, offered as a Eucharistic sacrifice of love, and transformed with the bread and wine offered on the altar. Teachers at such schools (whose salaries are low and whose extra-curricular responsibilities are high) dare to perceive their work not as a series of tasks to be performed but a Eucharistic offering of self whereby their attention to grading, their answering of student emails, the failures and successes of teaching are integral to their vocation. The centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the school is a constant reminder that Catholic education does not exist simply to worship at the altar of success, of excellence, of technological innovation that drives an economy of consumption. Rather, Catholic education exists to restore all things in Christ, all aspects of being a student, of being a teacher, as we enter more deeply into the intellectual and spiritual richness of the Church.

Indeed, this is why the Catholic school cannot be separated from the educational mission of the parish. Schools focusing exclusively upon the educational aims implicit in contemporary pedagogy will cease meditating upon the vision of humanity presented by Christ, a memory constantly savored in the Eucharistic life of the parish. In the parish, our humanity is transformed not simply through intellectual formation—by cultivating critical thought, succeeding in standardized tests, or chasing down the latest educational fad. Instead, the entirety of human life is gradually lifted up to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Women and men discover alternative ways of being human, ones in which faith, hope, and love are the supreme virtues. The parish, and its practice of formation that begins at birth and concludes with death, is a source of constant refreshment to the Catholic schools, seeking to limit their educational aims.

Despite the rather robust vision of Catholic education outlined above, there remains a rather intractable problem. Those of us involved in Catholic education in parishes and schools alike can easily forget that while Catholic institutions may seek to restore all things in Christ, we do so only because we participate in the larger mission of the Church. That is, we do not form our students at Catholic institutions so that they might become faithful alums of our school. We do not want them to remember fondly that the highlight of their immersion into Christ's life took place at the ages of fourteen or twenty-one. Rather, for our Catholic students, we seek to promote faith in the Church itself, because the Church is not simply Pope Francis, the bishops, those teachers who are charged with teaching theology. Instead, the Church is the Body of Christ, a sacrament that mediates divine love to the world through the glorious poverty of the preached Word, of the sacramental life of the Church. At times, such faith is difficult. Our leaders, both ordained and lay, may fail to carry out this self-giving love. The preaching, the sacramental life of the Church, may be performed in a perfunctory manner, which seemingly deadens the faith of those gathered into this Body. But we cannot dismiss the Church, because it is within this Body that we come to encounter Christ Himself.

Thus, if we as Catholic educators really want to form our students in the mission of Catholic education, then we'll teach them not simply a love for the intellectual life, for service, even for leading prayer services. Instead, we'll teach them a love for the Christ who comes to us in bread once bread and wine once wine. We'll show them that the Catholic school's deepest identity is learned in the wise but foolish school of the Church in which intellect and power and prestige are burned away by Christ's own love.

Catholic educational institutions, therefore, have quite a mission to uphold. Not one composed by a committee of faculty, staff, and students. Not one handed down from a diocesan office. Rather, the mission is nothing less than the transformation of all humanity into an icon of Christ's own love for the life of the world. Catholic education is concerned about the marginalized, those perceived by society and culture alike as unworthy of education, precisely because of the ultimate vision of reality in which it operates. We see reality, all of creation, as a gift to be savored.

Thus, this edition of *Church Life* contemplates the ultimate vision of gift that is to direct Catholic educational institutions. It does not attend to issues in educational policy or novel approaches to pedagogy developed in journals of educational philosophy. Instead, in this issue, the reader is invited to consider the *telos*, the ultimate aim of Catholic education as the renewal of humanity in Christ. In this way, it seeks not simply to make an argument relative to what constitutes Catholic education in parish and school alike. Rather, we hope that through this vision, those involved in the educational mission of the Church will discover that their own vision of their work will be transformed.

