

I

Child, Person, Teacher

At the Heart of a Catholic School

A GREAT DEAL has been written about education without much consideration being given to the nature of the child. Of course, there has been plenty written about the *developmental psychology* of the child, but that is not quite what I mean. Social-scientific approaches have their place, but they are no substitute for one based on the lived experience—which we all share—of once having been a child, and of knowing children. Philosophy and theology have as much light to throw on this experience of being a child as psychology, sociology, or neuroscience.

What I am reaching for in this chapter is a balance between two philosophies of education that have been at war in our society for over a hundred years: what we might call the ‘romantic’ and the ‘classical’ tendencies; the tendency to become entirely child-centered *versus* the tendency to become entirely teacher-centered. Each side reacts to the excesses of the other, and yet the conflict can be avoided if we base ourselves on a more adequate and complete appreciation of the human nature both of the child and of the teacher. These must be understood as bound together in a relationship that transcends them, in service of a reality to which they both belong.

Revival of the Trivium

The modern revival of the Trivium or language arts was influenced by a famous essay called ‘The Lost Tools of Learning,’ by Dorothy L. Sayers (best known for her fictional detective, Lord Peter Wimsey). Sayers associated each of the three ‘ways’ or

arts—which she terms Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric—with a particular stage of child development.¹

The *Grammar* stage corresponds, Sayers thought, to that time in childhood when we love to learn things by heart, to chant nursery rhymes, and of course to learn words. It is well known that very young children possess an ability to learn multiple languages that is generally lost as they grow older. Teaching in this stage revolves around rhythmic games, including word and number games. The foundations of arithmetic and geometry are laid through play concerned with simple numbers and shapes, and through learning the ‘times tables’ which link the two. This is the *Sesame Street* stage of education, based on memory, which Sayers called the ‘Poll Parrot’ stage.

The *Logic* stage is concerned less with collecting facts than with relating them together in a framework that begins to make sense. The child can move on from lists of numbers and words to algebra and logic, from simple sentences to arguments and paragraphs, from lists of events and dates to the more complex historical narratives that connect them. Dorothy L. Sayers called it the ‘Pert’ stage, because the child is beginning to form opinions and may assume those opinions are always right.

Finally, the *Rhetoric* stage completes the whole process by teaching how to make an argument convincing to others, and how to communicate our own experience to the wider world. It is what Sayers called the ‘Poetic’ stage. We might also call it ‘romantic.’

All this is intuitively quite appealing. It reminds us we must accommodate education to the needs and capacities of the child,

1 Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘The Lost Tools of Learning,’ 107–35. In modern schools that have tried to revive the classical curriculum, these three phases of learning have been found useful in constructing a curriculum. Wisdom and virtue are cultivated by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty embodied in great books and works of art. The student is encouraged to perceive, attend, and remember the beauty in a great work, understanding it sufficiently to re-present it in an original form, or apply the idea in a new situation. Socratic dialogue-style techniques are used to develop the ability to criticize, to develop an independent view, by bringing hidden assumptions to light and examining possible implications.

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provided these are realistically understood. But I dare to say that realism has not been a hallmark of recent educational theory and practice. In most countries educators are polarized between two approaches. On the one hand, the old-style, classically-minded educators regard teaching as mainly a matter of conveying information (reading, writing, and arithmetic, plus in a Catholic context salvation history, moral commandments, and the deposit of faith). Much of this is to be learned by heart, backed up by a system of discipline involving examinations and penalties. The revival of this approach is periodically stimulated by panic at falling literacy levels and suchlike. On the other hand, ‘romantic’ educators believe that too much rote learning and compulsion will turn children against education altogether—and in Catholic circles away from the Church.

Romantic educators insist on an experiential style of teaching based on active learning projects, the teacher’s job being mainly to provide encouragement and suitable resources, such as stories, games, ideas, and (very occasionally) information.² Thus in English schools, even very good ones, recent years saw a tendency not to teach ‘correct’ spelling or grammar, on the grounds that the child should first acquire the love of self-expression. In American schools, prioritizing the need to bolster a child’s self-esteem has led to such absurdities as pupils being given certificates of recognition for ‘future achievements’ that may never happen, and a refusal to award low grades or admit failure. (This is equivalent, in the moral and sacramental context, to dropping the teachings on sin, on the grounds that God can forgive anything and wants all to be saved.)

The romantic approach often ends up encouraging narcissism, overconfidence, and vacuous sentimentality. It gives an inadequate formation in basic skills, and undermines the determination to do well. Catholic teachers who merely encourage a child to pursue his or her own unique ‘faith journey’ without also

2 For a defense of the traditional teacher-centered method of education, as opposed to the ‘romantic-progressive’ approach, see Michael C. Zwaagstra, Rodney A. Clifton, and John C. Long, *What’s Wrong with Our Schools and How We Can Fix Them*.

teaching the elements and showing the coherence of faith, are making a fundamental mistake. Certainly there is a journey to be made in faith and to faith, but there is in Catholicism a certain content that cannot be found simply by searching, discussing, and arguing. It is called revelation. To take Catholicism seriously is to accept the authority of the Church to teach us what we could not know otherwise. On the other hand, it has to be said that the more classical educational style has a downside too. It may discourage intelligent inquiry, leading to the privatization of religion and a growing sense of irrelevance. A ‘cultural’ Catholicism that is kept going by little more than force of habit or nostalgia evaporates when the pressures imposed by school or family are released. So how do we find a new balance, a new approach that does justice to the positive in both of these methods of education?

Centering Education on the Child

It may help to glance at how this tension or conflict came about during the last few centuries, before we discuss how it may be resolved.

The modern period saw a transformation of educational theory and practice in favor of child-centered education. In the wake of the temperamentally Romantic *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (d. 1778) and as an extension or manifestation of the Romantic movement in general, modernity became associated with a growing respect for the particular nature and development of the child. Insight into the value of the child can be traced back to Christ, though it remained mainly implicit during most of the succeeding centuries, and it seems that before the eighteenth century childhood was often considered merely a stage of weakness and immaturity to be got through as quickly as possible. Rousseau himself—not a great educator, but a considerable influence through his novel *Emile*—believed in the natural goodness and value of the child, wanted education to be adapted to each new developmental stage, and placed great emphasis on the importance of the child’s activity or active involvement in the process. We can trace his influence through several of the best-known educationalists of the succeeding centuries (though a discussion of two of the most

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important, *Charlotte Mason* and *John Holt*, will be postponed until the chapter on education in the family, Chapter 6).

A century after Rousseau, *Friedrich Froebel* (d.1852) is best known for his invention of the *kindergarten*, which was conceived as the center of an interactive educational process based around the activity of the young child. (The idea of a ‘garden’ fitted with the romantic notion that the child was like a plant that needed nurturing, rather than a receptacle that needed filling.)³ Believing that children have an innate desire to learn, he concluded that the ‘game’ is the typical form of life in childhood, and play is the key to education, capable of laying solid foundations for the adult personality. (‘Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul.’) Children in the kindergarten typically learn through song, dance, gardening, and the use of geometrical and patterned blocks and toys—known as the Froebel ‘Gifts.’ These were supposed to represent the basic building blocks of the universe and the symmetries of the child’s own soul.

The Froebel Educational Institute lists the main elements of this approach as follows. Its influence on much modern educational practice is obvious.

1. *Principles include* • recognition of the uniqueness of each child’s capacity and potential • an holistic view of each child’s development • recognition of the importance of play as a central integrating element in a child’s development and learning • an ecological view of humankind in the natural world • recognition of the integrity of childhood in its own right • recognition of the child as part of a family and a community.

2. *Pedagogy involves* • knowledgeable and appropriately qualified early childhood professionals • skilled and informed observation of children, to support effective development,

3 Of course, although the organic metaphor is apt enough, ‘the child-garden is an intolerable idea as failing to recognize the essential property of a child, his personality, a property all but absent in a plant’ (*Charlotte Mason, Towards a Philosophy of Education*, 24).

learning, and teaching • awareness that education relates to all capabilities of each child: imaginative, creative, symbolic, linguistic, mathematical, musical, aesthetic, scientific, physical, social, moral, cultural, and spiritual • parents/caregivers and educators working in harmony and partnership • first-hand experience, play, talk, and reflection • activities and experiences that have sense, purpose, and meaning to the child, and involve joy, wonder, concentration, unity, and satisfaction • holistic approach to learning which recognizes children as active, feeling, and thinking human beings, seeing patterns and making connections • encouragement rather than punishment • individual and collaborative activity and play • an approach to learning which develops children's autonomy and self-confidence.

Whereas Rousseau was a freethinker and Froebel a Lutheran,⁴ *Don Bosco* (d. 1888) was a Catholic priest and became a saint. His approach was akin to theirs in some ways, and yet crucially rather different in others. Loving children as much as any romantic, he was more concerned than Rousseau with their fragility and moral danger—more aware, let us say, of the legacy and implications of original sin than most of the romantics. His educational philosophy was intended to produce 'good Christians and honest citizens'; that is, good citizens on earth in order to become good citizens in heaven. For Bosco, nature and grace are not opposed, but interpenetrate for the sake of a final goal that is the supernatural fulfilment of the natural. Education must serve the supernatural dignity and destiny of the child, allowing it to blossom in the social dimension.

Bosco rejected the repressive approach to education in favour of a preventive approach based on friendship, appealing directly to the heart and to the innate desire for God ('reason, religion, and

4 Both Rousseau and Froebel of course had predecessors, notably the seventeenth-century Protestant (Moravian) encyclopedist John Amos Comenius, himself influenced by Jacob Boehme on the one hand and Francis Bacon on the other, whose idea of universal education 'according to nature' was expressed in the textbooks he wrote and schools he organized in Sweden, with lasting effect especially in Scandinavia.

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loving-kindness’ was one formulation, ‘cheerfulness, study, and piety’ another). His pedagogy made use of music, theatre, comedy, walks, and excursions. Though this approach is still child-centered, it places a great responsibility on the person of the educator, since the young person is not expected to flourish naturally in this world without a relationship that offers personal attention and genuine love. But in this context, if such a relationship can be established, grace is able to flow and the development of reasonableness, imagination, empathy, and conscience is much more secure. It involves a kind of partnership between child and teacher.

Another significant figure is *Rudolf Steiner* (d. 1925), the founder of Anthroposophy and the inspiration for a thousand Waldorf Schools around the world. The schools began in 1919 when Steiner was invited to create one for the children of workers at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory, based on the ideas in his 1909 book, *The Education of the Child*. Steiner believed in the need to educate with the spiritual as well as emotional, cultural, and physical needs of children in mind, and taught that they progress through a series of developmental stages corresponding to the evolution of human consciousness itself. Abstract and conceptual thinking develops late, around the age of fourteen, and so the early years are more focused on art, imagination, and feeling. Subjects tend to be presented in a pictorial way, usually involving music, rhythm, routine, and repetition (exposure to television and computers is minimized). The system relies on a strong relationship with a class teacher who normally stays with the same children from ages seven to fourteen. Prior to that, the children attend a kindergarten where child-led play alternates with teacher-led activities in a carefully structured environment. The Upper School curriculum fosters independent thinking and is taught by specialist teachers.

Waldorf Schools are run collegially rather than by a head teacher, and assessment is by the teachers’ observation of the children in their care rather than by formal examination. The children are helped to compile their own lesson books by hand in the Lower School, which prepares them for independent note-taking in the later phase. In general, this holistic approach seems to work—children are happy and sociable, and academic stan-

dards are often judged to be higher than in conventional mainstream schools. Particularly valuable is the emphasis on seeing ‘parts’ in the context of ‘wholes,’ and connecting the topics taught with everyday life and experience through art and craft—that is, by engaging the child’s senses and imagination in the process of learning.

The Italian doctor, *Maria Montessori* (d.1952), like Bosco a Catholic, developed her ideas around the same time as Steiner—by 1907 she thought she had discovered the true ‘normal’ nature of the child by working with the disabled, and her work subsequently was to create an environment in which children (especially young children, up to the age of six) could help to direct their own learning. The normalization of the child took place through a state of deep concentration, evoked by some task of the child’s own choosing. The younger child has an immense capacity to absorb experiences and concepts that become foundations of the later personality, and a particular sensitivity to music, although, in common with most educational theories, abstract reasoning was held to develop later. The curriculum in a typical Montessori school or play-group is not pre-set, but consists in a series of challenges introduced by the teacher when the child seems ready for them.

The biggest influence of all, though he lacked the spiritual depth of the others, is probably the American empiricist and pragmatist *John Dewey*, who died in the same year as Montessori (1952). His books on education from 1897 to 1938 argued that the purpose of education was two-fold: the realization of the child’s full potential, and the facilitation of social change—education being the midwife of democracy. In 1915 he wrote these rather telling words that later became a charter for the progressive movement in the United States: “children should be allowed as much freedom as possible. . . . No individual child is [to be] forced to a task that does not appeal. . . . A discipline based on moral ground [is] a mere excuse for forcing [pupils] to do something simply because some grown-up person wants it done.”⁵ Realizing too late some of the dangers in the overly child-reliant

5 John Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*, 211.

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approach, he tried to develop his notion of experiential education to balance the interests and experience of the pupil against the importance of subject content and the role of the teacher as a partner in the process of learning. The focus was supposed to be less on the child and its cognitive development than on a theory of experience (the interaction of past experience with present to facilitate learning and the growth of an ability to think for oneself). But it seems that Dewey's approach remained too theoretical, and was easily manipulated by those who wanted to use education to change society for ideological purposes.

What can we learn from this? Great educators differ in their conclusions about the nature of the child and the developmental stages that need to be taken into account, and even about the nature of the learning process, but each tries to devise an environment in which the child's natural, impulsive quest for knowledge—or for beauty, goodness, and truth—can be pursued with the teacher's help. The basis for a good education is, on the one hand, the self-motivation of the child to pursue what engages and interests him, and on the other, the creativity, responsiveness, and love of the teacher, who sets the terms for learning and encourages the child to flourish. If the romantic tends to underestimate the effects of the Fall, he is at least correct that children retain a desire to learn that needs to be encouraged. But a framework conducive to learning—as the classical approach sometimes emphasizes to excess—must include the habits of discipline and attention without which such desires are easily dissipated. It is important, too, without being too rigid about it, to appreciate that different stages of development have different needs. An emphasis on educational play may be less appropriate at a stage when more solid content is required.

To Be a Child

We all know there is a child still within us. That child may be ignorant, selfish, immature, confused. It may be desperately in need of love it has never received. But it is innocent and pure. I think it was in that sense that Georges Bernanos wrote:

What does my life matter? I just want it to be faithful, to the end, to the child I used to be. Yes, what honor I have, and my bit of courage, I inherit from the little creature, so mysterious to me now, scuttling through the September rain across streaming meadows, his heart heavy at the thought of going back to school.⁶

Christianity has given a particular importance to childhood. It certainly transformed, over time, the way children were perceived in classical civilizations.⁷ From the statement of Christ, ‘Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it’ (Mark 10:15), it followed that there was something valuable and to be imitated in the state of childhood. Throughout human history, children had been told to grow up and become like adults, not the other way around. For Christ there is no contradiction between being mature and being childlike.

In fact we find in the Gospels very little about our Lord’s childhood, except the incident in the Temple when he was lost by his parents at the age of twelve, and then his response to them demonstrates considerable maturity—while his words and actions in adulthood show a childlike spirit that never leaves him.⁸ Childhood is an undeveloped stage, but in some ways it also represents a more perfect state, when we can see more completely what it is simply to be human. Until Mary Immaculate (in the words of Bernanos, ‘younger than sin’),⁹ no one had lived that human existence perfectly, but in her and in her newborn Child we see what it is to receive one’s being straight from the hand of God and to show forth what it is to be loved and to love.

This is not to romanticize or idealize childhood, but to understand it in the light of a new fact: the Incarnation of the second person of the divine Trinity. God has a Son. We are made in God’s image. The child, as Christ taught implicitly when he

6 Cited in John Saward, *The Way of the Lamb* (99), which contains a developed theology of childhood.

7 This history is traced by C. John Sommerville in *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*.

8 See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*.

9 Cited in Saward, *The Way of the Lamb*, 117.

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placed a child in the center among his disciples and told them to become like him, is the paradigmatic image of God, as well as a revelation of the meaning of being—existence as sheer gift, *ex nihilo*. It is the central image of man, a sign and pointer towards his origin and the purity of his original being. The child is a metaphysical revelation, a revelation of ontology (the structure of being). It is ontogenesis in action. This primordial meaning of the child is present even in fallen man, but clouded over and confused as time goes by and as the child grows.

It is not always easy to remember or recall what it felt like to be a child. Children possess what we later lose, namely a sense of infinity. It is not a real infinity, since the child is more constricted than he realizes, and will learn it soon enough. But it gives a particular depth and breadth to the experience of life as a child which we miss as we look back over several decades. It is an 'intensive' infinity. And there is something true about this quality of a child's experience, because it symbolizes and gives a foretaste of the actual infinity that belongs to God, and to everyone who lives in God.

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparell'd in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore; –
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

These opening lines of William Wordsworth's ode, 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,' capture the poet's nostalgic recollection of this intensive quality of the child's experience. It does not have to be lost. Some have retained it or regained it, seemingly, in adult life (one thinks of English mystics such as William Blake and Thomas Traherne).¹⁰ Poets and painters try to recapture it through their art, and some

10 See Thomas Traherne, *Centuries*, especially the first part of 'The Third Century,' 109–121, for an account of this type of consciousness.

succeed. It is an awareness of the world as wondrous, as (in Chesterton's meaning of the term) 'magic.' We shall come back to this in the next chapter.

The pure gaze of innocence is one that does not secretly look for what can be *got out of* something or someone. It sees things as they are in their own right. The energy behind the gaze is not diverted by a variety of other passions. When a baby wants something, it wants that thing *completely*, as anyone who has witnessed a tantrum must see. Thus the child lives each moment more intensely than those who have grown old in sin. His eyes are clearer, his ears keener, his energy stronger. He lives in a universe that seems to go on forever, for he has not had the experience of many winters and summers, and of the flickering parade of birthdays through the years. He has no yardstick against which to measure his life. This intensity of experience is partly a function of the way memory and imagination work. It is the memory of time that makes us old; remembering eternity makes us young again.

The child who has not yet sinned—or in the case of Mary and Jesus, the child full of grace who manages never to sin—lives partly in eternity even while on earth; he has the fragrance of eternity around him. Purity is the reason childhood is so fascinating, and why it is targeted by evil for desecration. To be pure is to be *simple*, in the sense of undivided. For every sin sets part of me against the rest. Impurity involves a loss of integrity, of integration; it is a dissonance, a crack in the mirror of the soul.

I have dwelt on this point at some length, because I think the first priority of the Catholic school must be to preserve and nurture the spirit of childhood in this sense—to help to restore (through the sacraments, especially the sacrament of confession) the purity that alone will enable us to 'see God' (Matt. 5:8).¹¹

That implies rules that insist on a certain minimal level of good manners, courtesy, and discipline, banning pornography, lying, swearing, and so on. Such rules are not there primarily for the sake of social order, tradition, or convention; they exist for the sake of the order of the soul, its spiritual development and happiness. Yet an overly moralistic approach would also be counter-

11 See Endnote 2.

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productive. Not only can we not rely on the policing of corridors for the preservation of purity and the development of conscience, these are far from the best way to begin. The soul needs love, as the positive force around which all its powers will congregate. It needs a degree of tenderness, if it is to flourish without fear. It needs attention, in the sense that others—the teacher especially—must listen to it and be receptive to what it has to offer, if it is to discover for itself what that is.

Attention

The greatest teachers I have known have been able to give that quality of attention. It is as though they possessed the awareness of which C.S. Lewis famously writes in *The Weight of Glory*—the awareness that there are no ‘ordinary’ people, no average children.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another . . . , all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.

Or as Thomas J. Norris writes, ‘In the face of every boy and girl before me there is mirrored the mystery of his or her origin, the potential for his or her itinerary through life and society, and the promise of a success, not only earthly, but above all transcendent.’¹² It is a serious thing to be a teacher, just as it is a serious thing to be a parent. (In both cases the burden of responsibility would be too great for us if it rested on our shoulders alone. Luckily the destiny of the child does not depend on us.)

12 Thomas J. Norris, *Getting Real About Education*, 25.

If attention to the child is the key to the teacher's success, it is the child's own quality of attention that is the key to the learning process, or so Simone Weil asserts in her 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies.'¹³ She almost goes as far as to say that the subject studied and its contents are irrelevant; the important thing, the real goal of study, is the 'development of attention.' Why? Because *prayer consists of attention*, and all worldly study is really a stretching of the soul towards prayer. 'Never in any case whatever is a genuine effort of the attention wasted. It always has its effect on the spiritual plane and in consequence on the lower one of the intelligence, for all spiritual light lightens the mind.' An attempt to grasp one truth—even if it fails, and even in a seemingly unrelated subject—will assist us in grasping another.

Every effort adds a little gold to a treasure no power on earth can take away. The useless efforts made by the Curé d'Ars, for long and painful years, in his attempt to learn Latin bore fruit in the marvelous discernment that enabled him to see the very soul of his penitents behind their words and even their silences.¹⁴

Attention is desire; it is the desire for light, for truth, for understanding, for possession. It follows, according to Weil, that the intelligence 'grows and bears fruit in joy,' and that the promise or anticipation of joy is what arouses the effort of attention: it is what makes students of us.

Making known to the child or student the special way of 'waiting on truth' in every problem, whether in language or mathematics or any other subject, is what Weil identifies as the first duty of the teacher. For this makes it an exercise in 'waiting on God,' which God will one day reward with tenderness. 'Every school exercise, thought of in this way, is like a sacrament.' School studies have a higher purpose than the acquisition of information or worldly skills. These acquisitions will follow, but

13 Simone Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God,' 44–52.

14 *Ibid.*, 46.

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they are subordinate to the orienting of the soul to God, implicit in the act of attention.

To my mind, in these remarks Simone Weil has put her finger on the essence of education, and practically on the essence of Christianity itself. The love of God is of the same substance, she points out, as the love of neighbor. Both are 'attentive,' based on a way of looking that requires the soul to empty itself of all its contents 'in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.' This is the truth that sets us free, that turns us from servants into friends. The teacher must model this attentiveness for the student, by loving him in the same way.

The attentive concentration on that which is sought and desired unites teacher and pupil through the presence of the 'third,' which is the living truth (the 'content,' if you like) not yet possessed and yet somehow invisibly present, implicit in the relationship itself. The relationship is what makes the truth flow. We learn because we love. The teacher's job is to bring about that relationship, that state of attention, or to be aware of it and nurture it when it arises, by loving the child.

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While part of the problem with modern education has been an extreme tendency to center everything on the child to the exclusion of actual instruction (the problem of content-free, pupil-centered learning), it is true that education is about the *human person*, and finding ways to enable that person to flourish through a certain quality of attention. The unity of knowledge that we seek in our vision of education has its center in the person, understood as a kind of relational existence with others. This is also the key to achieving the right balance between the child and the teacher, since both, viewed as persons, are part of something larger than themselves. So before we look in detail at the meaning of the Trivium, let us focus on this general principle, and its bearing on the nature and ethos of the school (education in the home will be discussed later).

'Personalism' is a name we give to a philosophy that gives priority to the person as distinct from the individual. Here the 'indi-

vidual' means the particular human being thought of as possessing an identity quite separate from others, and as entering into relationships with them—if at all—by choice. The 'person,' on the other hand, means the human being determined in his identity (from within, as it were) by *relationships* both chosen and unchosen. The relationships into which we are born—with our family, our village, our tribe, or our nation, and above all with God—help to make up our identity as a person, but hardly count for the 'individual' at all. The individualist thinks of himself as a free-floating atom or particle, whereas the personalist is content to be bound up in a molecule or part of a body with other atoms (which is not to say that such bonds may not ever be dissolved or transferred).

The personalist tendency is found in a wide range of Catholic authors in the past century or so, from Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier to Dietrich von Hildebrand and John Paul II. Thanks to the latter it can be said finally to have gone mainstream. In doing so it became closely allied with the *ressourcement* movement which sought to return to the sources of tradition (Henri de Lubac, Louis Bouyer, Hans Urs von Balthasar). This broad movement of Catholic thought gives us a new understanding firstly of the human being, secondly of the relationship between nature and grace, and thirdly of beauty in its relationship to truth and goodness.

First, it consists in the insight that we are creatures of freedom, by which we shape our own destiny. Our nature is determined by relationship to others, and is fulfilled by the gift of self in love. This is connected with the second set of insights concerning grace, for it turns out that human freedom and the power to love is itself a gift, by which we are enabled to share in the freedom of God. Furthermore, our freedom has no ultimate fulfilment which is purely 'natural,' but is satisfied and perfected only by the giving of the self to its supernatural object: God. The life that is ours by nature, as persons, is therefore not opposed to the life of grace or supernatural gift. (What is opposed to grace is sin, a misuse of freedom which destroys the harmony of nature and grace.)

These first two developments were consolidated by the authoritative documents of the Second Vatican Council in the

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1960s. They were taken a stage further theologically by Hans Urs von Balthasar, who explored the underlying form of the grace that fulfills the world. This is where 'beauty' comes into the picture. In the divine object of love he saw the mutual coinherence of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Of course, none of this is really new. It is all implicit in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, right down to that 'Doctor' of our own age, Blessed John Henry Newman. Though implicit, it remained for a long time undeveloped within the Church, hidden under a crust of dry Scholastic theology. The renewal of theology in our day turns it back into what it was for the Fathers and Saints, a science of love, at one and the same time precise, systematic, and practical. Love has been rescued from the marshes of sentiment and reinstated as the bedrock of God's revelation to humanity, a revelation about nature, ourselves, and God.

In Catholic personalism, the inner structure of love is revealed as Trinitarian. In any complete act of love the self of the lover is simultaneously given, received, and shared. To be united with another through love is not to lose one's distinctive identity, but to be confirmed in it. From her knowledge of the structure of love, derived from a meditation on the revealed Trinity, the Church is able to unfold a comprehensive ethical and social teaching, according to which human society is understood as a *communio*: that is, a communion of persons called to fulfilment in mutual service or solidarity. And by virtue of the fact that physical bodies belong to our essence as persons, this solidarity extends to the very limits of the natural world.

Developments such as these in theology give some hope of a renewal to come in education, if ways can be found to apply them in practice. They should help to dissipate any sense that religion is irrelevant to everyday life, or that it is opposed to science. They should provide a basis on which to defend the objectivity of standards and a framework of absolute values within education. The same set of developments should help to ensure respect for the freedom, inviolable conscience, and personal experience of each student, by valuing persons above mere ideas and information. Furthermore, they deepen our understanding of the role of authority in the teaching process.

Given the widespread modern antipathy to the very idea of authority, a word more is needed to expand that last remark. Essentially, Catholic personalism gives the notion of *obedience* a spiritual value,¹⁵ but far from subjecting us to the whims of every tyrant who comes along, this sets limits to any merely human authority by placing it in ordered relationship to the divine authority who rules all things with justice and mercy.

A person must become detached with respect to the self, in order to become capable of unreserved attachment to God as the soul's true center. The student submits to a teacher, not out of respect for the teacher's personal qualities, which may sometimes be hard to discern (I once had a teacher who chased his pupils around the school to beat them with a slipper), but out of respect for the role or office—in other words, for the authority the teacher is commissioned to represent. The teacher must therefore be the one who submits first. He must submit to God, and to the objective truth he hopes to teach. It is only in the name of that prior obedience, and the limitations it implies, that the teacher has a right to demand obedience of the student. It follows from this also that genuine authority must grow in proportion to humility (as the example of the saints demonstrates beyond all doubt).

A personalist philosophy of education therefore starts from the premise that the human person should be educated for relationship, attention, empathy, and imagination. The school (which receives its authority over children ultimately from their parents) does not exist simply to feed the industrial machine with workers, or the market with consumers. It is oriented towards the family and family life. The process of education certainly involves the communication of useful information and skills, but only in the context of an initiation into a community of relationships extending through time, the family first of all, then broadening to the lived experience of a cultural tradition. The more human we become, the more our own lives and experience connect with different aspects of the culture into which we are progressively initiated by the school.

15 The root of the word *obedience* means to 'listen' or 'pay attention.'

A Catholic Philosophy of Education

According to the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1–20), faith is like a seed: it needs fertile ground in which to grow, but once it is grown, it transforms both the soil in which it was planted and the landscape around it. The ground, however, is important. Dry, shallow soil is not good enough to set down roots. In the same way, we may make our schools and homes inhospitable to the seed of faith by depriving our children of the experiences, the culture, and the language in which faith may be received and supported and nurtured.

To make the content of the curriculum relevant to the everyday life of the pupil, it is essential not to shrink the content to match the pupil's present experience, but to expand the life of the pupil to match the proposed curriculum. The key is the fact that to grow as a person we must learn self-transcendence. For Christianity, a world centered on the ego must give way to a world centered on the other(s). And in this process, the *ethos* of the school is always at least as important as its curriculum and teaching methods. Growth in prayer and in love is at the heart of education, for prayer involves interior opening to the supreme Other. It is the relationship to God made possible by this opening that strengthens us in our attempts to know and love the whole creation, and our neighbor as ourselves.