Quarterly Review of the John Paul II Institute
EDUCATION: ISSUE ONE

Humanum
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EDUCATION

Education: First Steps

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A child has to be "brought up," and "led out" into the world. But what does this mean against the dominant backdrop of calling into question the essential features of childhood? What exactly is the child's relation to the world, and how exactly is that relation mediated by the "first educators" of the child, his or her parents? The answer to these questions will determine what we intend when we educate and what it is we are aiming at in bringing a child to adulthood.

PAGE

BOOK REVIEWS

ELLEN RODERICK: "I will arise and not go to my father": The New Child Citizen 4
LOUISE FRITH-POWELL: The "Preventive System": Walking Alongside 9
JOSÉ MEDINA, F.S.C.B.: Educating the Heart of Man, Just As God Made It 13
RUTH ASHFIELD: Religious Potential of the Child 15
LUKE PATRICK O'CONNELL: Communicating Certainty About Christ to Today's Teenagers 19
SIOBHÁN MALONEY LATAR: The Meaning of Story: Literature in the Formation of a Child 22
PATRICK F. FAGAN: "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Educates the World" 26
MARGARET LARACY: Attachment Parenting: The First Step 29

FEATURE ARTICLES

ROBERT SPAEMANN: Education as an Introduction to Reality 32
POPE BENEDICT XVI: On the Urgent Task of Educating Young People 41
JEANNE SCHINDLER: The Family: Our First Primary School 45

WITNESS

LÉONIE CALDECOTT: The Kitchen Table Classroom 49

EDITORIAL

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY: First Steps Into Reality 54

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BOOK REVIEW

“I will arise and not go to my father”: The New Child Citizen

ELLEN RODERICK

Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
James Block, *The Crucible of Consent: American Child Rearing and the Forging of Liberal Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

In the parable of the prodigal son, the repentant son returns to the house of his father having exhausted his inheritance and having found his new freedom in the world wanting. The killing of the fatted calf and the ensuing celebration underscore the father’s love for the son and his joy over the son’s return to his rightful place in the father’s house. This parable was popular in late eighteenth-century Anglo-American literature and iconography. But, as Jay Fliegelman explains in *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, it adopted a modern twist in the early years of America, one that reveals a profound shift in the dominant understanding of fatherhood, childhood, authority, and family.

New prodigal sons and daughters graced the pages of the best-selling novels of eighteenth-century America. They were the heroes and heroines of such works as David Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), and Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*. Each of these novels portrays the prodigal child in rather optimistic terms: even if life away from the father’s home is difficult, previous dependence on the father has to be rejected at all costs (113). “As the American colonies had chosen to escape tyranny and moral corruption, declared their independence, and fled to God’s protective embrace,” explains Fliegelman, “so, too, had a generation of sentimental heroes and heroines, prodigals and pilgrims similarly fled. To understand properly the history of one set of rebels is to understand better the history of the other” (5–6). Mediating structures such as the family and society are perceived as tyrannical, and therefore these prodigal sons and daughters reject all claims to their obedience, profess dependence on God alone, and set out to become pilgrims in the New World rather than return home under the authority of their fathers (71). This shift

evokes the question: What is it that makes the prodigal son become a pilgrim child at the beginning of the American nation?

All that said, there are instances where the hero does return home—but only if he can do so on his own terms, and as equal to his father and mother, with whom he becomes a fellow pilgrim. In the newly constituted family that results, we can see the icon of what Fliegelman calls the Lockean ideal of the “voluntaristic family” (51). Here, Locke’s political ideal of contractual relationships remakes the family in its own image: mother, father and child are above all equal citizens who freely bind themselves together. The ties that bind the family are no longer based on birth or blood, which are now perceived as merely accidental, but on voluntary association. This elevation of the will as the ideal basis of human relationships challenges the very essence of the traditional notion of the family, where the biological bonds represent a personal order to be valued and cherished precisely in its mysterious *un*chosenness.

> *These transformations of the meaning of childhood, fatherhood, and authority shed light as to why, in modern interpretations of the parable of the prodigal son, the child does not return home in the hopes of putting himself back under the authority of the father; rather, he strikes out as a fellow liberal pilgrim to make his way in the world.*

Fliegelman’s *Prodigals and Pilgrims* and James E. Block’s *The Crucible of Consent* both seek to shed light on the nature of this familial transformation and, in particular, its effect on the understanding of childhood. They argue that there is an intimate, yet often unnoted, relationship between the political developments in early America on the one hand, and, on the other, the re-imagining of basic family relationships and the notions of authority, dependence and education to which they are closely linked. Fliegelman’s focus is on the late eighteenth century while Block explores these political and cultural ideas as they mature and become firmly established in the political, pedagogical and family-rearing policies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Both authors adopt an interdisciplinary approach, blending politics with theology, pedagogy and philosophy, in the hopes of achieving a holistic and nuanced perspective on the development of what they perceive to be the American rejection of patriarchal authority as well as the uniquely American understanding of what it means to be a liberal citizen. In a word, they describe this liberal citizen as an individual who is radically responsible for his own self, bound to others only through his will and at the same time, someone who is to develop his potential within the guise of the greater community. He is someone who is both radically alone and bound together with others. While this ideal of liberal citizenship was portrayed in the late nineteenth century as being the mere fulfillment of man’s intrinsic biological and psychological forces, both authors seek to undermine this assumption (Block, 32). They do this by showing how liberal citizenship was carefully crafted into dominant political and educational theories, as well as national programs for childhood socialization that shaped school curricula at the state level. In addition to bringing all of this to light, both authors press the questions about what this ideal of the liberal citizen entails for our understanding of authority and dependence as well as adulthood and childhood, insights that

they argue have often remained implicit.

Despite some similarities, each book makes a unique contribution to our understanding of childhood and paternity in early America. Fliegelman tells us he set out to understand the literary and political traditions that gave rise to “filial autonomy,” which he perceived to be the “quintessential motif” of this age (3). The task of *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, he notes, is “to clarify the crucial thematic connections between key historical events and important literary pedagogical, theological and political texts of the period” (6). Noting the radical changes in the form and self-understanding of the family in the founding of America, Fliegelman seeks to understand who transmitted the Enlightenment ideals that were at the root of this transformation and how they were communicated so successfully within the family.

The political novelty of filial autonomy as found in America also motivates Block’s research. He is particularly interested in understanding the origins of the ideal of freedom in childhood in what he calls the political program of childhood socialization. Block’s main argument is that children are not born as liberal citizens but that they *become* liberal citizens through intense socialization within the family, schools and other institutions which make up the child’s social fabric. While this claim may seem obvious to some, Block argues that the relationship between childhood, pedagogy and the particular form of liberal freedom has not yet been made explicit: While Americans may believe that they are born free and that liberalism is merely a matter of man’s natural development, in fact, the liberal understanding of freedom has been shaped by diverse means of childhood socialization that have thus far gone unheeded. In other words, the “consent” upon which liberal society is founded, argues Block, has been forged in the “crucible” of early childhood.

Why has the significance of childhood been overlooked in the political discourse on the origin and nature of American liberalism? “The dependence of childhood represented the very type of disability that free and modern subjects wished to leave behind,” explains Block. He continues:

> In America, whether youth became free individuals in a free society as celebrated in the national narrative, and if so, how, was an inquiry better left alone. As a result, the ways Americans became specifically liberal subjects—hardly a matter of inadvertence—have remained inaccessible ever since. Instead Americans have looked to the idyll of an earlier Eden, a land where children form themselves out of their own ribs, becoming individuals self-conceived in the primordial land of the self-made. (ix)

If childhood and early education have been typically regarded by scholars as apolitical processes, as Block suggests—where “childhood is draped in an aura of innocence, and child development is systematically cloaked in the rhetoric of inevitability”—then a major achievement of Block’s research is to bring to light just how much the interpretation of child development in America is anything but neutral (24). In his discussion of the heated debates in the formation of a common national curriculum, Block shows how our understanding of childhood and of child development are deeply steeped in political, cultural and theological implications (194ff).

In this rich and varied reflection on the icon of the new voluntaristic family model, Block and Fliegelman do not shy away from discussing what they perceive to be its philosophical origin as well. Both authors attribute John Locke with being the inspiration behind the changes in the understanding of childhood and family in early America. Specifically, they point to his new

sensationalist epistemology and subsequent pedagogical theory. Fliegelman and Block clearly make the case for the profound influence of Locke's lesser-known work, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education,* in addition to his political works and explicitly philosophical writings in the shaping of the unique American interpretation of fatherhood and childhood, in both the political and familial realms. As Block explains, in *Some Thoughts*, "Locke redefined the path to voluntary adult membership in society by relocating it in the controllable confines of childhood" (19). He continues:

> The progression from natural freedom to contractual obedience was reframed as the shift each child makes under the pressure of socialization from potentially anarchic impulses to conformable social practice. … In relocating the site of liberal agency formation, Locke would in critical ways anticipate American practice. American liberalism after the revolution placed the future of its national project in the hands of the institutions of childhood socialization. This turn to socialization to surmount the crisis of its founding thus confirms the United States as it has always believed itself to be: the land quintessentially of Locke—not of his *Second Treatise*, with its political idyll of adults who live peacefully and contract rationally, but of his original *Education*, with its systematic shaping of children into citizens who would be able to engage in the adult liberal behavior in the Treatise. (19)

In a word, Locke's new epistemology emphasized the development of the child's reason, freedom and eventual self-mastery. He held that the child's mind was like a blank slate, amenable to receiving impressions through the senses which would go on to form the child's character. For Locke, the "bonds of birth and blood" which are found in the natural, given family relations are to be distrusted. The sentimentality and affection, which reflect such bonds, are seen as a threat to the proper formation of the child's character. Rather than taming the child's unruly will through force and the demand of obedience as in older models of education, in this new pedagogy, the parent's task was to nurture the child and facilitate his self-mastery and the development of his reason.

According to Fliegelman, what resulted was the "revolutionary insight" that "the title of the father was transferable" (197). "A true parent" was now understood to be the "one who forms a child's mind rather than one who brings that child into the world" (ibid). "Less a father in his own right than an agent of nature's paternity, the ideal parent cultivates 'his crop' by silently watching over his charge, neither obliging nor constraining specific obedience" (202). The notion of childhood underwent a similar revolution. The republican, liberal child, argues Block, arrives in nature as a bundle of potentiality waiting to be activated in order to achieve self-definition (163). He is dependent only for a time on the guiding influence of his parents who facilitate his arrival at a level of self-mastery necessary to assume his responsibility as a liberal citizen. A mature child is then free to join a new political or religious "family."

What results from this new understanding of father and child is a new parent-child bond "rooted in a positive, affective attachment" expressive of reason rather than nature. The new voluntaristic family is therefore sustained not by 'patriarchal obligation' but filial agreement" (57). Having "eliminated the father as a political presence," society is no longer likened to a family but rather a "collective of free people who think for themselves" (59). Fliegelman makes the point that this new pedagogy did not have as its aim the dissolution of the family or the creation of autonomous individuals; the family remained an important spiritual and civic

institution but was transformed into a more liberal and intentional community. “The granting of filial independence permitted the family to reorganize on a voluntaristic, equalitarian, affectional, and, consequently, more permanent basis,” explains Fliegelman (33). The intention to create individuals who would be more amiable to freely participating in society was what dominated.

There is tremendous value in Block’s research. He has carefully gathered and made cohesive the various literary, pedagogical, philosophical and governmental sources dealing with the notion of childhood and the relationship between parents and children as they relate to the formation of a mature liberal citizenship. Block brings to the fore the particular challenge that childhood, as the “last vestige of unnatural ungovernability,” poses to the liberal project (161). His research into the development of a “science of education”—making it a domain for trained experts rather than the wisdom of parents or local communities—and the interest of the state in forming public “common schools” for the dissemination of liberal principles in the early nineteenth century is also very illuminating. He demonstrates how the public school system was launched with the explicit agenda of forming child citizens who could both conform to and flourish within this form of government (216ff).

Together these books shed light on the complex history that has shaped the understanding of the family in modern America. Anyone wishing to understand the fate of the family in our current cultural situation would benefit from the careful exposition that these works offer of the political, educational and literary paths that led us where we are today. These transformations of the meaning of childhood, fatherhood, and authority shed light as to why, in modern interpretations of the parable of the prodigal son, the child does not return home in the hopes of putting himself back under the authority of the father; rather, he strikes out as a fellow liberal pilgrim to make his way in the world.

Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

James E. Block, *The Crucible of Consent: American Child Rearing and the Forging of Liberal Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

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BOOK REVIEW

The "Preventive System": Walking Alongside

LOUISE FRITH-POWELL

Paul P. Avallone SDP, *Keys to the Hearts of Youth* (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1999).

Saint John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855* (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 2010).

In 1988, to mark the centenary of John Bosco's death, Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to the Salesians praising St. John Bosco's unique contribution to the lives of young people throughout the world and to the field of education, especially through his educational method known as the "preventive system." He urged today's Salesians to rediscover, renew, and update their understanding of this innovative approach, the substance of which remains intact because it draws its inspiration "from the transcendent pedagogy of God."[i]

Keys to the Hearts of Youth was written in response to the Pope's invitation to a rediscovery. In it, Father Paul Avallone, an experienced Salesian educator and writer, explains the theory and practice of St. John Bosco's preventive system, linking its inception to the experiences of the saint's early life and in particular to a series of dreams, the first of which he had when he was only nine years old. *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855* was written by St. John Bosco himself, at the insistence of Pope Pius IX who recognized his holiness in his extraordinary work and life, and in the dreams that inspired him. Although Bosco was very reluctant to write his memoirs—putting it off for several years—his obedience to the Pope eventually compelled him to begin. He envisaged the memoirs as fatherly advice for his beloved Salesian sons, to help them know him better, to "overcome problems in the future by learning from the past" and "to make known how God has always been our guide" (30). The small volume was first published in English in 1989 and provides compelling insight into the mind and growth of the saint, not to mention the evolution of his educational idea.

Just as in John Bosco's time, today's young people are often adrift,

affected as they are by family tensions and breakdown, discrimination and despair, influenced then by mass media and morally dubious celebrities, all the while lacking guidance in their disengagement from adults. More than ever they need guides to walk alongside them, full of confidence and warmth and a willingness to be present to them in their discovery of the world and of themselves.

John Bosco was not an "educationalist" or theoretician, but a practitioner. He began to educate in response to his dreams (which urged him to teach virtue to a crowd of ragamuffins through gentleness and to "win the hearts of these friends by sweetness and charity") and developed a method through trial and error, as he worked to save and to educate the alienated youth of industrial Turin. Starting with some boys recently released from prison and a few young men whom he befriended, John Bosco eventually housed and schooled hundreds of abandoned boys, guiding them to become "good Christians and useful citizens" by teaching them to read and write, playing games with them, instructing them in their faith, training them for work, and helping them to find jobs. His school at Valdocco, guided by his preventive system, became the center of his mission, and grew into a center for academic, creative, and vocational training as well as a model for Salesian schools throughout the world.

Avallone points out that Bosco's preventive system was not particularly innovative, drawing as it did on the ideas of other contemporary educators who were questioning the repressive or punitive system of education so prevalent in European schools at the time. Bosco however was concerned with bringing Christ to the heart of the child and stressed that education was a "matter of the heart," a matter of love. This emphasis meant, and still means, that his "system" had always to be flexible, capable of adapting to the needs and circumstances of the students in his care. His belief was that through the three tenets of his preventive system—namely Reason, Religion, and Loving Kindness—he could "appeal to the resources of intelligence, love and desire for God which everyone has in the depths of his being." His conviction was that by creating a loving family atmosphere, he could guide his students towards a joyful and meaningful life, helping them experience the Gospel message through recreation, prayer, work, joy, and above all love.

By "Reason," John Bosco referred to the need for a teacher to both teach and practice reason. He was, in particular, challenging the authoritarian pedagogical approach of the day, in which the teacher had little inclination to apply reason in dealing with the often impulsive and thoughtless actions of the young. Bosco sought to encourage teachers to understand their students—understanding, that is, their motives and enthusiasms, so that the teacher might start from "where they are." Teachers must "walk alongside" their students, spending time with them, being available to them, and joining them in their activities and moments of recreation. In this way, thought Bosco, a teacher could nurture a creative and dynamic rapport in which the students knew explicitly that they were loved. (How often do teachers today shy away from such informal contact, "graced moments" as John Bosco called them, overburdened by paperwork, fearing legal repercussions, or lacking the confidence that the young would value their involvement!)

Recognizing that most of his students were profoundly ignorant of their faith and living

through the perplexing time of adolescence, John Bosco undertook to offer basic catechesis and moral instruction. This is the second tenet of his educational method (i.e., “Religion”). Personal responsibility needs to be taught and demanded, thought Bosco; so he taught his boys to do good and avoid evil. He understood the deep aspirations of the young—for life, love, expansiveness, joy, freedom, future prospects—and he wanted to lead them gradually to see that their fulfilment lay in a life of grace. His memoirs reveal a real despair at the evil influences that his young people were prey to as soon as they returned to their homes or workplaces; and much of his work was inspired by his desire to save them.

Loving Kindness, the third tenet, required the teacher to create a familial environment; an atmosphere of love, peace, joy, encouragement, and praise and gentle correction… Inspired by St Paul’s writings to the Corinthians and by St. Gregory who said that the heart could never be conquered except by affection and kindness, Bosco tried, and by all accounts succeeded, never to punish in anger, and if possible, not to punish at all.

There is much in Bosco’s “system” that is uncontentious in modern schools. His intuition, that by gaining the confidence of his pupils through kindness and shared experience, he could then counsel, advise and correct, is confirmed by modern research in psychology and behavioral science. Modern education accepts that the young should enjoy learning, be encouraged and praised, and that teachers should walk alongside their pupils as they learn. Increasingly, schools recognize the need for moral and ethical instruction and there is much recent research into how to teach virtue in non-faith based schools (cf. Jubilee Centre for Character and Values, School of Education, University of Birmingham). However, there is something more that leaps from the pages of these books, particularly the *Memoirs*. John Bosco was a saint. Time and again, the most extraordinarily providential things happened. He was blessed with a prodigious memory, immense physical prowess, good and influential friends and confessors, miraculous happenings, timely solutions to the recurring problem of accommodating hundreds of unruly boys, and thwarted attempts on his life. But above all, he had confidence: confidence in his mission and in God. He gave this confidence to his young charges and they loved him for it. When, one Maundy Thursday, he realized some of them were unwilling to go with him to visit the altars of repose for fear of the ridicule and the contempt of onlookers, he responded by declaring they should march “in procession to make those visits, singing the Stabat Mater and chanting the Miserere.” When they set out, he reports “youngsters of every age and condition were seen joining us along the route and racing to join our lines” (*Memoirs*, 160).

In his introduction to *Keys to the Hearts of Youth*, Avallone reminds us of John Paul II’s great hope in the young, noting their enthusiasm and their desire for the truth. Just as in John Bosco’s time, today’s young people are often adrift, affected as they are by family tensions and breakdown, discrimination and despair, influenced then by mass media and morally dubious celebrities, all the while lacking guidance in their disengagement from adults. More than ever they need guides to walk alongside them, full of confidence and warmth and a willingness to be present to them in their discovery of the world and of themselves. St. John Bosco provides us with a timely and inspiring model, and these two books are a good introduction to him and his preventive system.

[i] Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19880131_iuvenum-patris.html.

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BOOK REVIEW

Educating the Heart of Man, Just As God Made It

JOSÉ MEDINA, F.S.C.B.

Msgr. Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny* (The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2001; First Italian edition, 1995).

Every time I have the opportunity to speak about education, a concerned parent always asks: *"How can I help my son fall in love with Jesus Christ?"* Catechetical curriculums aimed to present the Christian tradition via a myriad of activities do not seem to communicate the faith in an appealing way, and they don't encourage personal commitment. *"Why doesn't he show interest in the faith?"* is the common worry of parents.

Monsignor Luigi Giussani had a similar perception while conversing with high school students. Listening and observing his students, he concluded that a clear presentation of tradition was insufficient to generate conviction unless the adolescent is moved to make it his own. To do so, the adolescent must be educated to personally verify the tradition with his experience. Giussani continuously repeated to his students —"*I am not here so that you can take my ideas as your own; I'm here to teach you a true method so that you can judge the things I will tell you.*" Thus, according to Giussani, the chief concern of a genuine Christian education is to "educate the heart of man, just as God made it." This approach, he believed, was the only possibility for a faith that can thrive in a world where everything points in the opposite direction of Christianity.

> *The educator must be an authority* on *and the concrete living expression* of *the tradition. He must, that is, have the capacity to "arouse surprise, novelty and respect in the adolescent." He must be,*

that is, attractive.

For Giussani, the “heart,” far from being a collection of subjective emotions, is the innate and universal longing for truth, beauty, justice and good, ultimately God. As such the heart is the final standard of judgment. This does not mean, of course, that everyone arrives automatically at the knowledge of God. Because of original sin the heart is “hardened.” To add to the difficulty, Giussani thought that this existential disposition increases exponentially with the influence of the modern mentality so much that it has atrophied the person’s capacity to reason.

In *The Risk of Education*, the author explores the essential features of a genuine education of the young: tradition, authority, freedom and reason.

Tradition, for Giussani, is that hypothesis of meaning into which a child is born, and in which the child participates by imitating the parents. Later on, as an adolescent, he must be encouraged to make tradition his own by being taught to “verify” its validity in his personal life. And because Christianity is an event—that must be *lived through*, not merely read about or discussed—the tradition must be presented as something living, and in the educator himself.

The educator must be an authority *on* and the concrete living expression *of* the tradition. He must, that is, have the capacity to “arouse surprise, novelty and respect in the adolescent.” He must be, that is, *attractive*. In as much as the educator is an authority, he will encourage the adolescent to verify the validity of the hypothesis. In other words, the educator must foster growth.

Tradition and authority, though, do not automatically generate conviction. Ultimately, everything is placed in the fragile hands of freedom. Here lies the risk of education. It is not enough for the adolescent to hear the proposal. He must “prove to himself its value.” Only personal verification can secure conviction.

The Risk of Education is not a how-to book, but an in-depth exploration of the conditions and dimensions necessary to foster the verification of the faith. It provides the basis for the formation of thousands of young people and adults participating in the movement of *Communion and Liberation* in roughly eighty countries around the world.

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BOOK REVIEW

Religious Potential of the Child

RUTH ASHFIELD

Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child* (Liturgy Training Publications, 1992).
Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old: A Description of an Experience* (Liturgy Training Publications, 2002).

This article was featured previously in our inaugural issue on The Child (Fall 2011).

"The religious experience is fundamentally an experience of love... We believe that the child, more than any other, has need of love because the child himself is rich in love." So states Sofia Cavalletti, a noted biblical scholar and educator who lived in Rome and passed away in August 2011 at the age of 94 years. She once reluctantly agreed to a friend's request to give Bible study classes to three children, and was so struck by their interest and joy that she devoted the rest of her life to listening, observing and working with children in order to better understand and nurture the child's relationship with God. Together with Gianna Gobbi, a Montessori educator, she developed the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a unique and profound religious formation for children aged 3-12 years which is now present in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia.

In two beautiful, fascinating, surprising, and sometimes challenging books, *The Religious Potential of the Child* and *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old,* Cavalletti offers insights from her 45 years' experience of living religious formation with children, and describes the themes and presentations which make up the program of catechesis. However, as Cavalletti herself explains, "the primary intention is not to propose this program but to share what we have glimpsed of the relationship between God and his creatures." In a similar way this review will not explain the practical details of the catechesis, details which are certainly presented in the texts, but rather focus on Cavalletti's profound contribution to the question of the child and of religious formation, a contribution which the Church of today would do well to consider.

Cavalletti begins with the conviction, rooted in her direct experience with children, that there

exists a deep relationship between the child and God, a bond which manifests itself even before any religious education or experience of Church, and which may be described as "the certainty of a presence, a presence of love that attracts with a great force… but appears to await a response." She describes the child as "a metaphysical being, who moves with ease in the world of the transcendent and delights in contact with God," and offers many astonishing examples of this in the first chapter of *RPOC*, "God and the Child."

> *"In the adult the space of acceptance is never whole, yet it is in the child. The child is really capable of listening impartially and unselfishly, the child is receptive to the greatest degree."*

The primacy of this relationship between God and the child governs the whole of the Good Shepherd catechesis. Cavalletti has seen this bond flourish best through a clear proclamation of the essential truth of our faith: God, who reveals his love through his Christ. She does not believe that deep truths need to be simplified or avoided with children, rather she has seen that "the child is satisfied only with the great and essential things." The child is introduced directly into the mystery of the person of Christ through a few essential themes from the Bible and from Liturgy, which Cavalletti determined upon after having seen how the children responded to them with depth and joy (see *RPOC* chapters 3-8 and *RPOC 6-12 years* chapters 2-10).

The parable of the Good Shepherd is the central theme for the 3-6 year-old child, revealing the personal love and protective presence of Christ who calls us by name, knows us intimately, and to whom we learn to listen. "Through this parable the child's silent request to be loved and so to be able to love finds response and gratification." For the 6-12 year-old child this image is integrated with that of Jesus as the True Vine (John 15) which introduces the covenant relationship between the Father, Christ, and man, drawing the child into the mystery of a life-giving union with Christ which bears fruit for the world and inviting him to "remain" in this Love.

The depth of wisdom in such an approach to catechesis can be seen in Chapter 9 of *RPOC*, "Moral formation," where Cavalletti makes the strikingly simple point that if we wait to begin religious formation until the age of moral reasoning, as is widespread in the Church today, then "the meeting with God is confused with moral problems, and God will easily come to assume the aspect of judge." Indeed, we risk this being the primary way in which the person relates to God their entire life. Alternatively, Cavalletti has seen how the child who already knows the protective love of the Good Shepherd is able to navigate the moment of moral crisis in the certainty of being loved despite every incapacity. In this way morality can become an orientation of the whole person, a free response by the child to his encounter with the person of Christ, since "it is only in love, and not in fear, that one may have moral life worthy of the name."

This radically Christo-centric approach governs not only the content of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, but also its method; Cavalletti believes "method has a soul, and this soul should correlate to the content that is being transmitted." Since Biblical religion is that of the transcendent God who reveals himself in creation, throughout history and supremely in Christ,

Cavalletti employs "The Method of Signs" (*RPOC*, Chapter 10). A *sign* is something which indicates another thing different from itself; "it connect us to the sensible world while it urges us to reach toward the Invisible." It is an instrument in the education of faith, employed by Jesus himself in teaching in parables, kept alive in the Church through the liturgy.

The children are pointed towards the truth that is signified, but left with the work of reaching the reality for themselves. In this way both the truth and the child are respected: "It is a method filled with veneration for the mystery; it does not claim to explain or define. It is a method full of respect for the person and his capacities."

Concretely this means that in the Catechesis the child is presented, through texts and sensorial materials, with the history of the life and death of Jesus, with parables, with the symbols and gestures of the sacraments, and with the richness of salvation history and covenant theology. Cavalletti offers many examples of the fruit such an approach bears in the children; their words and artwork (see the Appendices of both books) reveal a richness of faith, a great deal of joy, and an attitude of humility and wonder in the face of the unfathomable gift which is the Christian message.

It is this deep sense of wonder, naturally present in childhood, which Cavalletti seeks to foster and nourish, for "when wonder becomes the fundamental attitude of our spirit it will confer a religious character to our whole life." In the child, wonder at God's gifts inevitably flows into contemplation and enjoyment of the gifts, into prayer of praise and thanksgiving. The atrium (the name given to the room where the catechesis takes place), is a place of listening to God's Word, the basis of all prayer, and it becomes a holy ground where Christ is encountered in word and action.

Cavalletti's genius is to see, and to make a point of stressing repeatedly throughout her work, that the child and the adult *live together* this religious experience; the adult might proclaim the Word, but she too must listen. For Cavalletti a catechist is the "unworthy servant" of the Gospel, a mediator between God and the child who must withdraw as soon as contact is made between the Creator and his creature. "The catechist who does not know when to stop or how to keep silent, is one who is not conscious of one's limits and is lacking in faith, because one is not convinced that it is God and his creative Word who are active in the religious event."

I have been privileged to receive training in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and assist in an atrium for the last three years, and I can say from personal experience that these insights of Cavalletti are life changing. I have glimpsed how seeking to live in a spirit of poverty as a catechist, as Cavalletti suggests, means accepting that what we transmit does not belong to us and that we cannot claim the fruit. The beauty of making this step is that it leads us to discover afresh the very truth we are transmitting, and it is the children who point the way.

"In the adult the space of acceptance is never whole, yet it is in the child. The child is really capable of listening impartially and unselfishly, the child is receptive to the greatest degree." Living alongside children who are discovering with joy the reality of God's presence, we learn again how to receive the gift of being loved by Love and we might even hope to "change and become like them" (Matthew 18:3).

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Humanum
Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

Communicating Certainty About Christ to Today's Teenagers

LUKE PATRICK O'CONNELL

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age* (2008. Available at: www.usccb.org/about/evangelization-and-catechesis/... - 2011-08-09.).

In November of 2007 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops unanimously approved a curriculum meant to introduce Catholic students to an intimate knowledge of Christ: *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. This episcopal initiative affects over half a million students enrolled Catholic secondary education.[1] The introduction to the curriculum states three goals: First, it wishes to guide catechetical instruction for young people of high school age wherever and however it takes place: “in Catholic high schools, in parish religious education programs, with young people schooled at home, or within the context of the catechetical instruction which should be part of every youth ministry program.”[2] Second, it wishes to bring about national uniformity in catechetical instruction on the high school-age level, in view of the increasingly mobile character of modern society.[3] Such uniformity would mean chiefly a clearly articulated doctrinal content for high school age young people based on age and grade level. Third, and finally, the curriculum is designed to help those same young people “develop the necessary skills” to answer or address the “real questions that they face in life and in their Catholic faith.”[4] Put succinctly, the goal of the *Doctrinal Elements* is to educate all American students in Catholic doctrine so that they gain an intimate knowledge of Christ and build up the skills necessary to address real-life questions - all this, through national uniformity in a catechetical framework.

If the strength of the bishops’ document on catechesis is its call for

unity around a Christological center, what is perhaps left understated is the depth of the pedagogical challenge in the face of the contemporary culture when the document asks for an emphasis on apologetics.

The curricular framework is rightly constructed with an emphasis on Christology. In many ways it begins to recover the rigor and beauty of Scholastic thought which was too often deemphasized in earlier programs of catechetical instruction, built as they were upon amorphous concepts of religious experience or social justice. In centering the academic religious curriculum on the person of Jesus Christ, the bishops reorient American Catholic teachers and students toward the mystery of the Incarnation. What the bishops ask of teachers, in particular, is worth further comment: “Publishers and teachers or catechists are to strive to provide for a catechetical instruction and formation that is imbued with an apologetical approach.”[5] The document asks for Catholic doctrine to be presented in the following fashion: First-year students are introduced to Revelation through Scripture and Christ through formal study of the Old and New Testaments. As sophomores they encounter the Paschal Mystery and then ecclesiology. In the junior year they are to study sacraments and Christian ethics. Finally, in their senior year, students may choose from five electives: a more intensive study of Scripture; a course on the social teaching of the Church; a semester on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue; Church history; or a discussion of vocations to marriage and the religious life.

If the strength of the bishops’ document on catechesis is its call for unity around a Christological center, what is perhaps left understated is the depth of the pedagogical challenge in the face of the contemporary culture when the document asks for an emphasis on apologetics. John Courtney Murray had anticipated the challenge faced by American Catholic teachers in *Towards a Theology for the Layman* when he wrote, “Our problem is to form Christian men strong enough to be plunged into the modern secularized milieu and confidently left to the inner resources of a mature faith that is able to stand by itself, supported by the strength of its own deeply experienced reality.”[6] If young women and men are to know doctrine, answer real life questions, and grow in communion with Christ, they must be educated in such a way that leaves faith strong and mature. The *Doctrinal Framework* is the beginning of a response to the radical secularization and religious indifferentism in which many contemporary Catholic students are immersed. Murray, writing in the middle of the last century, highlights the need in Catholic religious formation for the *Doctrinal Framework.* Specifically, John Courtney Murray crystallizes the challenge to which the curriculum is a response: “In this situation, our tactics should be clear. To a radical and total challenge, one must fling a radical and total answer. To a complete system of thought one must oppose another system of thought, even more unitary, coherent, articulated.” In this sense the *Doctrinal Framework* is a necessary and profound first step for Catholic education in this country. Teachers can and should offer our children a complete and coherent way of life that begins and ends in communion with Christ.

[1] “Catholic Data, Catholic Statistics, Catholic Research.” *CARA - Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*. Web. 23 October 2011. <http://cara.georgetown.edu/CARAServices/requestedc…

[2] Introduction. *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. 2008. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. www.usccb.org/about/evangelization-and-catechesis/… - 2011-08-09.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] John Courtney Murray, S.J. 1. “Toward a Theology for the Layman: The Pedagogical Problem,” *Theological Studies* 5 (September 1944): 340–76.

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Humanum
Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

The Meaning of Story: Literature in the Formation of a Child

SIOBHÁN MALONEY LATAR

Sarah Clarkson, *Caught Up in a Story: Fostering a Storyformed Life of Great Books and Imagination with Your Children* (Colorado: Whole Heart Press, 2003).

> Stories are the lifeblood of existence. They are the heartbeat that pumps vision into a child's developing imagination and hope into his or her soul.

In her book, *Caught up in a Story*, Sarah Clarkson takes on the task of revealing the essential nature of good literature, of *story* itself for the formation and education of children. Drawing on her own childhood steeped in good literature, and her extensive study of literature in adulthood, she identifies the purpose of her book as two-fold: to uncover the role that good stories play in the formation and growth of the imagination, and to re-claim for us, especially parents, the importance of the imagination for all aspects of a fully human life.

The structure of the book follows the traditional "dramatic arc" structure found within many classic narratives, linking each point in the arc with a period of childhood: "Exposition" with early childhood, "Rising Action" with the elementary period, "Crisis" with adolescence, "Falling Action" with young adulthood, and "Dénouement" with the need for a "happy ending." Each chapter develops a different aspect of the reason why stories are so important at that particular stage of a young person's life, and ends with Clarkson's own suggestions of good books to be introduced during each stage.

In a certain sense, the reason that good literature is more crucial for today's child than ever before is because the modern child does not

> *come into the world aware of belonging to a family, much less a narrative, a history, a people, a reality that is beyond him or her.*

In the first two chapters Clarkson lays the groundwork of her argument by exploring more fully our culture's denigration of imagination, even for children:

> Parents today are often presented with a list of facts and skills they must pound into their children's heads. Childhood formation, according to many models, seems to be about the filling of a mental bucket rather than the forming of a whole, vibrant soul ready to act justly, love beauty, and bring goodness to the world.(7)

In contrast to such a view, which only gives value to what is "useful," stories reinforce for children the deeper realities that make life worth living; they build up and form the imagination. Today, Clarkson argues, *imagination* is too often relegated to a naïve childishness, a certain escapism… something opposed, at least on some level, to the common-sense, pragmatic world of adulthood. Rather, the understanding of imagination that Clarkson employs harkens back to the original, traditional sense of the term: that faculty of our intellect that allows us to form images of real things within our mind: to re-present, and hold onto a picture of the things we encounter in the world, even when not directly beholding them with our eyes. In this sense, imagination is a faculty that we cannot do without, at any age; it, in fact, is an essential component to our engaging with and comprehending reality at all.

In our pragmatic age, when we are consumed with practicalities and causes and results,

> it is easy to lose sight of the storied nature of existence. Conditioned as we are by a technological society in which productivity is success, our view of life often takes the shape of the goals we must accomplish, the money we must make, even the spiritual growth we must attain. This pragmatism extends to our view of childhood formation as well, as we hurry to teach children the right facts and habits so that they can take the right tests and accomplish the right things. But in our pressured drive to do many things, we forget what we were created to be: heroes and heroines in the great true tale of God. (15)

Clarkson argues that forming children in stories that give vivid introductions to what is good, true, and beautiful from the earliest years gives them the necessary ethos in which to experience the depth and wonder of the world, and the story to which they belong.

Literature expands the child's world through imagery; it introduces them to an array of settings, contexts and characters that incarnate and give form to such concepts as courage, goodness, and love. It also provides children with a rich and varied vocabulary by which to understand the world on a deeper level. Being introduced to different stories inspires children to take on, to "try out" the different roles and personas they encounter: they experiment living and walking in others' shoes. These experiences form the adult's ability to relate to others, to have the capacity to insert themselves within the stories and experiences of others.

The next chapters focus on the “Crisis” moment of a story—which, as we recall, the author has linked to the period of adolescence—and the “Falling Action” of young adulthood. Clarkson argues that without a richly developed imagination, not only is a child’s understanding of, and relation to, the world diminished, but also his sense of self. Without this sense of self, children lack the ability to enter into, and fully *participate in* the unfolding of their own “stories.” The result is a listless, apathetic and easily swayed generation of young people who follow blindly whatever cultural opinion wins out at the time, because they lack the tools to really *adhere* to things from the depths of a richly formed interior life. The contemporary drive of childhood formation tends to focus exclusively on external activities, to the detriment of forming a child’s interior life, resulting in children who know *what* to do, but not *why*: who have no habits of reflection and interior contemplation in which to know themselves and the world on a rich, deep level.

Here, Clarkson also identifies the danger of technology that plays into this problem. Technology, she maintains,

> is not a neutral force in the life of a child. When children learn early in their lives to depend on technology for entertainment and information, they lose the habit of imagination. Trained from an early age to turn to any available screen for entertainment, learning, or even comfort, they become unused to imagining something for themselves. … when children addicted to technology become adults, they will lack the creative faculty required to bring something new into existence… such children will lack a richly developed world within themselves, allowing them both to intuit spiritual realities beyond their sight, but also to perceive meaning within the beauty of the world.(23)

In contrast, stories are what give the young person, especially in moments of crisis, the *substance* of heroism, the real sense that one’s choices matter on a deep level, and that we have the *capacity* to choose, to risk all of ourselves.

Without a richly developed sense of self, one’s concept of heroism is also diminished. Children, Clarkson says, are growing up in a world that no longer believes heroism is realistic; indeed, a world which is so relativistic as to deny there is anything black and white to stand up for or against in the first place. It is the reality that our lives really do belong to a drama larger, deeper, and more significant than our lives alone that can restore to us this sense of heroism. “Heroism begins,” Clarkson says, “when we realize that we are called to join a story much larger than ourselves” (65).

In her last chapter, Clarkson focuses on *hope*: on the ability of stories to lead us into a “happy ending”. It is hope, Clarkson argues, which gives us the context in which to understand that the darkest periods, the hardest nights, the worst imaginable circumstances, as well as the drudgery of everyday banality are still not *all* of the story. When we are brought up steeped in stories in which other people walked through the darkest, hardest moments, and were brought to a happy ending, our minds and hearts and spirits learn to rely on the broader, deeper truth that the *immediate* problems, or the *immediate* disasters do not define, or sum up, the whole of our persons. Here, Clarkson speaks to the necessary *companionship* that the characters of good stories can offer to those living through the tumultuous periods of adolescence and young adulthood. As human beings, we need companions on the way, companions who can encourage us. And while she acknowledges that stories can never replace true, real companionship, Clarkson would still have us recognize the significance of having people such

as Wendell Berry's Hannah Coulter or Charles Dickens' Amy Dorritt as concrete examples to turn to along the way.

While she does not address this directly, what struck me in reading this book was the problem that stretches much deeper than our overuse of technology, or materialism, or loss of imagination. The deeper void that Clarkson is seeking to address is the fact that we live in a *narrative-less* society. Our modern culture is in many ways a "non-cultural culture," as Romano Guardini put it: we do not share a common way of life, formed and founded on a rich, full, history and tradition, passed on from one generation to another. In a certain sense, the reason that good literature is more crucial for today's child than ever before is because the modern child does not come into the world aware of belonging to a family, much less a narrative, a history, a people, a reality that is beyond him or her. Every other period of history has given to its young people a fully developed way of life. They grew up formed by the oral stories and traditions of their ancestors, of the people that had literally broken the ground on which they lived, had built the homes in which they dwelled, and had founded the world they inherited. They were surrounded by a very living and real companionship, a history to which they belonged, and from which they received themselves. This reality is foreign to us today. And in the face of such a reality, it is a gift to discover an artist such as Clarkson, who can remind us first of our need for this, and recall us to one of the ways we can still access this *storyformed* life: through the stories written for us from a world that still understood itself as an unfolding story belonging to something greater. In a world in which it is increasingly hard to look to those around us for real heroes, for examples of what real living looks like, good stories can be an access point, a reminder to us, and can give us the foundation to continue to build and live a true life.

Clarkson's book is deep, and thought provoking. And it is a joy to read. Her argument about the value of good stories, about the importance of using language to articulate a rich picture of the world is reinforced in her own beautiful use of words, and her ability to do for us within her book exactly what she is arguing for: steeping the reader in the images and characters of so many stories within a book advocating for their necessity. I would highly recommend this book to parents, to educators, and to anyone feeling lost in an increasingly fast-paced, isolated, technological world, where our souls are parched for the rich, deep, satisfying, experience of being restored to the larger story of which all of our lives are an invaluable part.

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Humanum
Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

"The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Educates the World"

PATRICK F. FAGAN

Robert Karen, *Becoming Attached* (Warner Books, 1997).

President Obama's tax proposal to favor mothers who leave the home (and their children) to be part of the workplace is a recent manifestation of attempts made by both socialists and capitalists to detach the famous "hand that rocks the cradle" from the cradle, and so give birth to the new detached "citizen." President Obama should have read *Becoming Attached*, a rare social science book. The author, Robert Karen, is an award-winning journalist (with two cover stories in *Atlantic Monthly*—"Shame" and "Becoming Attached"—to his name) as well as a clinical psychologist with a practice in New York City. His ability to write with journalistic flair and professional insight makes the book a delight to read.

Using social science, the author illustrates the centrality of the role of stable attachment figures (the mother in particular) for the overall well-being of a child. For a child, the earliest relationship with one's mother serves as the building block of relationships, shaping the structure and patterns of one's inner emotional life and outward relationships for the rest of one's life. The attachment pattern established at childhood—be it attached, avoidant, or insecure—affects relationships with friends, spouses, future children, and ultimately God, if it is true that "grace builds on nature." The child who has the wonderful experience of a mother who is deeply and daily present to the changing needs and circumstances of the child has a mother who communicates implicitly: "I welcome you wholeheartedly into this world and I want you to feel totally at ease in it." As a result, it will be *this* child, who will be more able to stand on his own two feet and tackle life with confidence.

With attachment theory, the Christian doctrine received a sort of anthropological confirmation. It seems the Trinity may have replicated

something of its own dynamic relationship in man's relationship with man, first and foremost through man's relationship with his mother.

The book is a tour through the history, science and practice of attachment theory, in the personal company of those who shaped the field. You will get to know the founder John Bowlby, of Cambridge, and his pupil Mary Ainsworth, of Johns Hopkins, and the "Strange Situation test" (where one's type of attachment was ascertained). You will discover Bowlby's psychoanalytic social work colleague, James Robertson, who upended the hospital treatment of young children, the not-so-attaching Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, and the monkey-loving Harry Harlow of Wisconsin. Additionally, you will meet the work of the second generation of attachment theorists: Everett Waters and Alan Stroufe who brought field-altering contributions from other non-social science disciplines and went on to make the University of Minnesota one of the capitals of attachment theory. It is precisely the *personal* quality of the book that makes it so enjoyable.

The bottom line implications of attachment theory—and its subsequent research—is thus: early infant attachment is the relational building block of well-functioning families, marriages and societies. If this be so, then with all the current absence of real attachment, we are headed into a more and more insecure and avoidant society. The good news is that we now know how to help insecure and avoidant mothers break this cycle for their newborns.

At the highest levels of thought, Vatican II moved the dialogue between theology and philosophy to a new "trialogue," which included anthropology. To those engaged in this new meeting of traditions, attachment theory offers wonderful bridges to a myriad of topics. It is a way of looking at the natural interior life of man, how it is formed and how dependent it is on the love of others.

To belong may be the deepest attribute, definitely the most personal, of the Three Divine Persons. No persons belong to each other as the Divine Persons do. And yet, made in Their image and likeness, we too are made to belong. The more we live in a belonging way the more fully human we are, and the happier we are. With attachment theory, the Christian doctrine received a sort of anthropological confirmation. It seems the Trinity may have replicated something of its own dynamic relationship in man's relationship with man, first and foremost through man's relationship with his mother.

In contrast to the underlying deprecation of those who "rock the cradle" hidden in every tax proposal which *encourages* women to leave their babies, attachment theory suggests otherwise. Dedicated motherhood, especially in the early years, would be the rather enviable "job" of attaching one's child to their deepest roots. And everything is at stake here: unattached citizens are more easily manipulated by materialist governments (socialist or capitalist). The attached are better grounded in reality, common sense and will more confidently demand justice.

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Humanum
Issues in Family, Culture & Science

BOOK REVIEW

Attachment Parenting: The First Step

MARGARET LARACY

Daniel J. and Hartzell Siegel, *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive* (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2004).
Daniel J. and Bryson Siegel, *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture your Child's Developing Mind* (Bantam Books, 2012).

John Bowlby's articulation of attachment theory in the second half of the 20th century, bolstered by Mary Ainsworth's empirical work, represents a seminal development in the field of psychology, undeniably depicting the fundamentally relational nature of the human being. Fast forward a few decades from the birth of attachment theory and we find a cross-disciplinary field termed interpersonal neurobiology, which weds attachment with neuroscience. The human brain, we learn, is not only wired for interpersonal relationships but is also in need of them for healthy development. Thus both psychological and neurological findings, in tandem, show that the child needs contingent, attuned, and responsive interaction with their parents to grow in self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, and various other human capacities. A stable and healthy sense of self cannot develop in a vacuum, but only in the context of secure attachments. Indeed, being made in and for communion is manifest at all levels of the human person: we come to know, understand, and possess ourselves only through loving and affirming relationships.

The person is made by and for an Other—God—and what is most deep and essential in a child is not his brain but his heart, in the biblical sense of the term. Each child comes into the world with a need for love, happiness, and meaning which is not a mere epiphenomenon of brain

activity, but an image of the divine, of the One who fulfills these needs.

The primary educators of children, mothers and fathers, can learn much from the fruits of attachment theory and interpersonal neurobiology conveyed in these two books by Daniel Siegel and his colleagues: *Parenting from the Inside Out* and *The Whole-Brain Child*. They contain many accessible examples of how parent-child interaction and education impact on brain function in the developing child. In *Parenting from the Inside Out*, Siegel and Mary Hartzell draw from attachment research to depict how a parent's early life, self-understanding, and attachment narrative shape the bond a child forms with him or her. Parents learn about the importance of being mindful of their own mental states and of tuning in to the child's subjective experiences. This combination of self-reflection and active attunement to the child sets the context for secure attachment bonds to form, which in turn have positive repercussions for a child's developmental trajectory. The book offers practical tips and exercises for communicating constructively, processing difficult experiences with children, and repairing after ruptures. The authors recognize, however, that being a mother or father involves more than the application of skills: it entails the communication of oneself and a receptive posture before one's child. Though not stated in these terms, the parent is encouraged to welcome the other by honoring the unique inner life of his son or daughter, and learning to distinguish his own feelings and thoughts from those of his child. Careful self-reflection can help parents sort through wounds from their own early lives, thereby avoiding the intergenerational transmission of attachment trauma and insecurity. Thus, the book's core message is a hopeful one:

> We are not destined to repeat the patterns of the past because we can earn our security as an adult by making sense of our life experiences. In this way, those of us who have had difficult early life experiences can create coherence by making sense of the past and understanding its impact on the present and how it shapes our interactions with our children (248).

While *Parenting from the Inside Out* offers an accessible introduction to various findings in neuroscience, the focus on brain development is more prominent in *The Whole-Brain Child*. In this book, Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson suggest that parents often learn a great deal about their children's bodies—what to feed them, what bodily temperature constitutes a fever, and so on—but tend not to know much about children's brains. In authoring this book, they seek to fill that gap, providing "12 revolutionary strategies" to nurture children's minds founded upon neurological principles. Integration is the conceptual thread that runs throughout the book, with strategies offered to facilitate integration of the brain hemispheres, the lower and higher parts of the brain, aspects of memory, parts of the self, and the self with the other. First we learn about horizontal integration, which unites the "logical, literal, linguistic, and linear" left brain and the "intuitive, holistic, emotionally attuned" right brain. In order to facilitate integrative functioning of the two brain hemispheres, parents are provided with a strategy to "connect and redirect" when children's emotions run high. Parents learn to connect with their distressed children using right-brain to right-brain communication, tuning in to the child's emotional state and expressing this through nonverbal means (e.g., tone of voice, body language, facial expression) and verbal empathy. In a heightened state of distress or frustration, the child will not initially be responsive to left-brain logical reasoning. However, after experiencing the parent's connection, his left brain can often "join the conversation." The child will be more able to take in explanations and reasons once he has been soothed through

parental connection in a right-brain mode, at which point he can be “redirected” to reasons and explanations. This and other strategies have a practical utility and honor the developmental reality of the child.

A proper understanding of the child’s brain can certainly equip parents to educate their children better. At the same time, it is not the child’s brain that seeks understanding, learns, wonders, hopes, and loves; it is the child who does all of this; and it is not the brain of the child that is the object of parental education. It is misleading, therefore when we read in *The Whole-Brain Child* that “the drive to understand why things happen to us is so strong that the brain will continue to try making sense of an experience until it succeeds” (29). Knowledge of a part of the brain needs to be situated within a unitary understanding of the whole, namely, the child as a person-in-relation. The brain is fascinating because it is a *manifestion* of the person, which is not reduced to nor “explained” by it.

The person is made by and for an Other—God—and what is most deep and essential in a child is not his brain but his heart, in the biblical sense of the term. Each child comes into the world with a need for love, happiness, and meaning which is not a mere epiphenomenon of brain activity, but an image of the divine, of the One who fulfills these needs. It is certainly in accord with the dignity of the child to be validated, affirmed, and understood in the ways described in these books; however, if parents remain at the level of a brain-based perspective, they will fail to educate the whole child. Saint Paul taught us to “Test everything and retain what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and indeed there is much that is good and worth retaining in these books. Parents need to discover more about themselves in relation to their children, but more than this, they need to be in a state of wonder before the great desires and questions that constitute each child.

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Issues in Family, Culture & Science

FEATURE ARTICLE

Education as an Introduction to Reality

ROBERT SPAEMANN

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Today we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of a house that would not even exist if everything were right with the world. Behind this beautiful celebration lies death, sickness, guilt, all manner of confusion, complication and weakness. The house is called a "children's home" [*Kinderhaus*]. But if all things worked the way they were supposed to, there would not be a children's home, anymore than there would be a home for the elderly. Children and the elderly need to be part of all of our lives, if life is not to become unbearably impoverished. And they in turn need adults who are "fully engaged in life" if they are to avoid becoming marginalized themselves.

Those who run this house and work in it are called educators.[1] But they "earn their bread" taking care of children. None of this is "normal." Normally, raising children is not something one does professionally. One can give instruction professionally or one can be a teacher by profession, which means one communicates quite specialized knowledge and skills. But what sorts of knowledge and skills does an educator convey? Rousseau has the educator in his famous *Émile* say, "*Vivre c'est le métier que je veux lui apprendre*" (the career that I want to teach him is how to live). But how does one teach others how to live? Only by living among others and doing all sorts of things with them. Education is not a process we undertake in order to achieve a set goal. There is no special activity that we can identify as "educating." Education is rather a side effect, which comes about while someone is doing all kinds of other things.

> *"Educating for reality" is therefore just another word for "educating for love." Love is more than just an emotion. I can feel emotions to the point of tears at the cinema. But that has nothing to do with love, for the people there are of course not real. Love is something realistic; it is the most realistic thing there is.*

Now, it is true that every interaction we have with children has a profound indirect influence on them. But we speak of "education," on the other hand, only when we deliberately intend this influence, when we take responsibility for it and when, in certain circumstances, we do particular things in our interaction with children or keep ourselves from doing particular things for the sole reason that we intend our doing or not doing a particular thing to leave its stamp. And when in normal relations with children this sort of responsibility is neglected to an extreme degree, then homes like this one become necessary. Here that which would otherwise have been neglected is compensated for and to an otherwise unusual extent is forced to become an object of responsible planning. The consequence is that, now, even so-called normal parents often learn here how they can do a better job. The sense of responsibility that goes along with thinking about and asking over and over again what precisely this child needs now or what would be good for him leads of course to a competence that many parents could only dream about.

But that is not all there is to it. Why do we feel so happy when we enter this house, and particularly this house? That we feel so much at home here? That we leave this house strengthened and encouraged, as if we were returning to the desert from an oasis? The reason seems to me the very one that causes many of the colleagues of those who work here in the field of education to shake their heads. It is quite obvious that this house is not simply a reflection of everyday reality, anymore incidentally than an oasis is a reflection of the reality of the desert. For this reason it does not prepare the children enough for reality—or so more than a few people think. Education, they say, is meant to introduce one to reality.

No one would have any hesitation about agreeing with this statement, which incidentally comes from Sigmund Freud. But what in fact does it mean to educate for reality? What sort of goal is intended by this? One often hears talk of "educational goals" in pedagogical discussions. But most of these discussions are nevertheless misleading. It becomes clear how misleading they are above all the moment we ask, in the course of the discussion, precisely what sort of human type is ultimately meant to be produced as a result of the educational process. Previous centuries were familiar with such educational ideals, the ideal of the knight, the ideal of the gentleman, a particular ideal of the housewife, which was always determined to some extent by the class in question. These ideals were the common, standard images of a particular group of human beings, which were passed down through education from generation to generation. The education process was a process of growing up into a limited, but a common, world, the development of characteristic interests, knowledge, and skills that were specific to this world, the training of particular modes of behavior. The classes were different, to be sure—aristocrats and manual laborers had to look different; but there was general agreement about what each of them had to look like.

The person who grows up in a democratic and pluralistic society finds himself in an altogether different situation. In this situation, all people are meant to be educated in view of the same goal. But there is in fact no general consensus about what in fact the goal ought to be, what a human being is meant to be, and how he ought to live. In this case, the young person does not grow into a closed world, with generally recognized standards of right and wrong. And he is not predetermined, a priori, to belong to a particular group in this society, to carry out particular tasks, from which we are able "functionally," as it were, to infer more or less what a person is meant to look like and what sorts of things he ought to be capable of doing in order to be adequate to these tasks. To be sure, even in our society there is a certain minimal standard of common values. Without this minimal standard, the existence of a free society would not in fact be possible. But it is nevertheless an illusion to think that this minimum, which is for example laid down in our country's constitution, is able to serve as the foundation for an education worthy of the name, an education that aims to enable people to become human beings [*die Menschwerdung des Menschen*]. The opposite is in fact the case: the minimal consensus that comes to expression in our constitution and that holds together our society is sustained by more profound sources and that need to flow more fully, sources that therefore cannot conversely be sustained by this minimal consensus. If—to stay with this image—our groundwater had to replenish itself only from the water that runs from the public pipes, there would soon be nothing coming from our faucets.

Since we cannot steal it, where can we draw the water from? The talk about educational goals has the dilemma of giving us the impression that we could invent such goals, as if it were a matter of an option to be chosen, a deliberate reflection, a matter of taking pedagogical responsibility for the particular values on which we want to base our children's education. But this is just what it is not. We do not choose values for the end of education. We are unable to invent educational goals for our children precisely because education is a side effect of human interaction with children, of our living with them. We can only allow children to participate in what fulfills us ourselves, what is truly real to us. Here the proverb holds true: "A scoundrel is a person who gives more than he has." Children cannot be deceived in the long run by checks that cannot be cashed. This is why the self-formation of the educator is so important. One cannot in the end be "trained" to be an educator, one must already *be* someone oneself, one must have already become someone. One must be able to live in order to be able to teach how to live. One must have interests oneself in order to be able to awaken interests in others.

The way we learn a language is a paradigm of education. One's native language is not taught by way of an organized curriculum of instruction. Moreover, the language that we teach our children is not something we invent ourselves; rather, it is the language that we ourselves use. A native language [*die Muttersprache*, one's mother tongue] is the language one's mother speaks [*die Sprache der Mutter*]. The child learns to speak the language insofar as his mother and the other people who interact with him bring the child into their language community and talk with them. Language is not in the first place an instrument by which we engage with the world and communicate. Instead, the world is first given to us only in linguistic interpretation. To teach someone to speak and to open up reality to him is one and the same thing. According to Christian belief, what stands at the beginning and the end of all reality is the *Logos*, the Word. But whether or not a person shares this belief, its implication is apparent to anyone the moment he reflects on the matter: the world is given to us only in its linguistic interpretation. Teaching a language is the model for all other education. To educate means to introduce a person into one's own world, to interpret the world, to train a person to make distinctions, whether it be the distinction between a blackbird and a robin, between a brook and a canal, and between a Mercedes and a Volkswagen, or on the other hand the distinction between the important and the trivial, between the beautiful and the ugly, and between good and evil.

The distinctions just mentioned are not ones we can learn in a merely theoretical way. We learn to distinguish between the important and the trivial only through the practice of acts of preference, deferral, and renunciation. We learn to distinguish between "beautiful" and "ugly" by growing out of the crude judgments that "I like that" and "I don't like that," and by fashioning in ourselves an organ for the perception of objective qualities. But this happens in the first place through an encounter with beauty, through involvement with the beautiful, and through learning to do whatever one does in a beautiful manner. The distinction between good and evil, however, is something we acquire only by learning to take one side and to be against the other—and perhaps in certain circumstances even to be against ourselves; we acquire it by learning that the world is a battlefield between good and evil and that this battle goes on even in our own heart.

Today, many difficult obstacles stand in the way of growing up into a common world, and therefore in the way of education. To be sure, we have a common native language, and there is no dispute among the members of our language community regarding the difference between a robin and a blackbird, between a brook and a canal, or between a Mercedes and a Volkswagen. But the distinctions that keep us rooted and thereby enable us to grow, the distinctions between the important and the trivial, between beauty and ugliness, and between good and evil, are all of them broadly in dispute. This holds even more when we consider in addition the distinction between the holy and the profane, a distinction that many believe simply has no foundation in reality. In this situation, many think that the only way out is simply to bracket out of education whatever is in dispute, to fashion the basis of education only out of that about which society has a minimal consensus. With respect to everything else, they say we ought simply to expose young people "non-judgmentally" to various possible worldviews. An exposure of this sort is supposed to be what first teaches a person the attitude of general tolerance, and for the rest, when a person cannot avoid making a choice, it teaches the ability to make a free decision. As if it were possible to choose something that one never got to know from the inside!

This way of looking at things is a profound and fateful anthropological and pedagogical error. If a person believes that there are many different paths man could take to reach his goal, he does not infer the resolution to follow one of them in a faithful way. Instead, he draws the inference that there is no need to follow any particular path, and he leaves them all as hypothetical. The pathological inability to make a commitment that afflicts many young adults today is already the product of such an approach to education. We prevent young people from experiencing the power that a demanding view of the world and man has to open up reality, merely because we want to give them the possibility of looking at reality from some other perspective. This is a great injustice to children.

The premature exposure to the pluralism of our society leads almost inevitably to the death of man's deeper spiritual and intellectual powers; it leads to relativism. Relativism is man's capitulation with respect to the task of acquiring a mature relationship to reality that is worthy of him. It makes man petty and allows him to make everything else petty. He simply levels out everything that is in dispute among people to the lowest common denominator. The result is what Nietzsche described as the last man: "'What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?', asks the Last Man, and he blinks. The earth has become small, and on it hops the last man, who makes everything small. . . . 'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink."[2]

The St. Raphael Children's Home has never swallowed the resignation at the root of the last man. Everything that happens here is borne of the faith that Matthias Claudius expressed in simple words: "We are born for something better." This is not about utopia, an unrealistic

dream about making a new man. What we are talking about instead is the insight that it is possible for a man to become new and that he can be new in every moment—not the “last man,” but always a “first man” again and again. This sounds unrealistic, and in fact what people tend to accuse this house of is precisely a lack of realism.

An interesting accusation. For it leads to the question what we mean by “reality,” and thus what it means to educate one for reality. I already said that Freud is the one who coined the phrase “educating for reality.” But what does “reality” mean for Freud? For him, reality means the resistance that man encounters in his pursuit of pleasure. Freud distinguished the pleasure principle from the reality principle. The two are not connected to one another by a meaningful bond, by a “logos.” What the individual person is concerned with is for the most part only subjective satisfaction. This he achieves by means of assimilation, contact, and appropriation. Everything that does not unresistingly conform to this striving stands opposed to human happiness. In order to survive, in order to have at least some delight, man has to learn to adapt to this resistant reality, to submit to its conditions, and to work out some sort of compromise with it. Thus, educating for reality means teaching a person to adapt, to compromise with what one cannot change. The only goal of such a theory can be compromise, not friendship, not the affirmation of reality. Reality remains once and for all a threat to one’s happiness. And so Freud is simply being consistent when he writes that human civilization fundamentally does not allow people to be happy. One simply has to learn how to put up with it in order to survive.

In the 1960s, during the European cultural revolution, the revolution’s protagonist, Herbert Marcuse, proclaimed that Freud’s reality principle had come to an end. The society of abundance, he thought, now allowed us to put an end to compromise and to work toward the complete satisfaction of the pleasure principle, of the individual’s subjective desires, without regard for any sort of opposing conditions of reality. Instead, we simply had to change these conditions, and we had the ability to do so. “Power to the imagination!” was the motto one found painted on the walls of the Sorbonne in Paris. How long ago all this was, and how distant it is from us now! The first oil crisis—1973—made us aware that we were not living in the land of plenty. Today we would all be happy if we knew that we would be able somehow to survive in a dignified way. For those who considered the land of plenty to be a state of pleasure, a new slogan was already at hand: “No future!” As if all we had before was a dream that has turned out to be unrealizable.[3] The despair over the future has the same origin as the utopian vision of the fulfillment of Freud’s pleasure principle. It stems from a view of the world in which reality is not in the first place and above all a gift, but rather something that represents an obstacle to my self-realization.

How different reality appears in this house! “You are not living in reality!” people have said, and they point to the fact that there aren’t even any televisions here, that they live as if discotheques didn’t even exist. This makes me think of Plato’s famous allegory of the cave. There, people have sat their entire lives chained inside a theater. They take what they can see on the wall to be reality, and if someone wants to lead them outside into the light, because real things can supposedly be seen there, then they say: “He’s crazy! Reality is obviously right here before our eyes!” There are in fact people today who think that what they see on TV is more real than what goes on around them. There is already mass tourism for the “Schwarzwaldklinik”![4]

The St. Raphael Children’s Home has remained in the real world for 25 years. And when the world, when the living present, when everyday things have their full weight and their full significance, then there is no need to keep anyone from fleeing into the emotional rush of the discotheques. The need doesn’t even arise. What distinguishes this house from others is not that it hides from reality, but that it has more reality, it has greater possibilities to experience

reality. Nevertheless, the concept of reality in play here is not a statistical one. Nor should it be. If ninety-nine people suffer from headaches, one can of course suggest that the hundredth person, who does not have a headache, is sick, that he is not normal and not well adapted. One can give him the same pills that the others are swallowing. In that case, they may indeed give him a headache. But health is not something determined by statistical comparisons. That is something that everyone who suffers knows. And if there is a person who is free from suffering, then he would do better to help the ninety-nine than to attempt to adapt himself to them. Christianity has always known this. The Christian doctrine of original sin says exactly this: The statistical average state of humanity is not a state of healthy, mature human existence, but rather the opposite. This is why we cannot draw our educational goals from statistics. As Jean Paul has said, "The child is not to be educated for the present—for this is done without our aid unceasingly and powerfully—but for the remote future, and often in opposition to the immediate future. The spirit which is to be shunned should be known."[5]

Educating young people for reality includes not imposing the structure of scientific civilization and technological specialization on them in such a way that they never get their feet on the ground. Of course, we live in a civilization that has been influenced by science and is therefore highly abstract. Today one can find attempts to rebel against this, the so-called "alternative lifestyle" communities. But every adult will have to be expected to abstract from the context of life to a certain degree. It all depends on how young people are prepared for this: whether they learn to understand simple life situations or whether the abstract, specialized form of life is so imposed on them that they remain forever immature and are able to exist only by shifting back and forth from the role of being producers to that of being consumers. It is almost inevitable that people are kept immature when the abstract structures of civilization are not learned in gradual steps that can be imitated, when the concrete experiences of basic life situations do not come first. A home in which the young people are essentially consumers cannot educate them for reality; in fact it cannot educate them at all.

One of the most essential elements of this house is that everyone here is occupied with the necessary tasks of everyday life. Not only is there no TV in this house, there is also no dishwasher. Everyone has chores in the kitchen, everyone is responsible for the garden, everyone has a role to play in cleaning the house and maintaining it. And that includes the educators. As I said at the outset, education is a side-effect. If the head educator's job is to educate, but not to help work in the kitchen or in the garden, to help maintain the building, etc., —what in fact is the medium of his education supposed to be? How to fill one's free time? As far as I can recall, I have never once heard the expression "free time" in this house. Free time is something empty that then has somehow to be filled. And whatever it is that fills it is automatically denigrated into a "pastime," or "time-filler." We don't say that we "fill our work time," but simply that we work. Work that is done simply to fill the time that we are "on the clock," as everyone knows, is bad work. In this house, people pray, they read, they play, they sing, they ski, they hike, but they do not "kill time." People do not do these things simply because you have to do *something* once work is finished; instead, they do what they do because it is necessary, or because it is helpful, or simply because it is beautiful.

But beauty is not just some ornament to life; it is the very meaning of life. There is nothing more serious, nothing that is more worth pursuing, than beauty. Beauty is what is truly redemptive, because it is what is truly real; it is the *splendor veri*, the splendor of truth, as Thomas Aquinas says. I do not know how many hours were spent practicing the play that you will see later; I suspect in fact that no one here has been counting the hours. On Saturday evening, the musicians practice the music in this room that they will play to wake up the sleepers here on Sunday morning. A great deal of care and reflection went into picking out the pictures that adorn this house. What lies at the center of this home is celebration. For in

celebration we experience reality in its most real form. Here, we do not do something because it is good for something else, which we do in turn for yet another reason. We do not celebrate in order to restore our energies to be able to work, but instead we work in order to be able to celebrate. In celebration, everything is simply itself. In celebration, we make the holy present, the absolute present, the ground of all reality. We do not give thanks for this and that particular thing, but rather, as it says in the ancient Christian prayer, "for Your great glory." Here reality appears wholly as it truly is, not as foreign, as begrudging, as frustrating, but as awe-inspiring, powerful, and at the same time as friendly and brightly lit. Whoever has not experienced it in this way will think that celebration is an escape from reality into an illusory world, that it is just another sort of discotheque. The only thing to do with such a person is to invite him to celebrate along with us and in this way to discover for himself what the difference is between illusion and reality.

Children live spontaneously in this reality, as long as one does not break them of the habit. It's in their nature. Especially if they have already left behind, like a nightmare, the experience of a reality that excluded all celebration. Children have a completely immediate sense for the divine. When the brakes are not constantly applied, as happens today in so many families, and children are kept from unfolding their wings, then they are quite quickly able to become the teachers of their educators, as people often experience in this house. If the children's religious sense is able to develop here with such energy, with such magnanimity, it is only because God himself is truly present to the educators in this house, because they speak in the first place, not with the children about God, but above all with God about their children. This is why miracles are not only hoped for in this house, but also experienced. Only the person who believes in miracles is a realist.

So what in the end does it mean to "educate for reality"? What is the goal of education? Its goal is that a person learn to take what is real as real. Reality is not real for every person. Things and other people do not appear to every person as they truly are, but rather under the subjective perspective of what is pleasant or unpleasant, useful or harmful. What do we call it when something—or someone—becomes for us what it or he truly is? In this case we speak of love. Love is when the other becomes real for me. "Educating for reality" is therefore just another word for "educating for love." Love is more than just an emotion. I can feel emotions to the point of tears at the cinema. But that has nothing to do with love, for the people there are of course not real. Love is something realistic; it is the most realistic thing there is. Education, moreover, is something that starts on the outside and moves inward. "Education for love: for in children action awakens desire, though the opposite is the case with men."[6] To do something for the other and perhaps, if we're lucky, to see how it makes him happy is much more important than many desires to improve the world. Education for reality is taking place whenever opportunities are created, like this, to do something for other people. But the perception of such opportunities, the perception of the reality of the other, presupposes that a child has first become real to himself. And the child becomes real for himself when he is loved, in a manner that is as matter-of-fact as it is unconditional.

Many children live here because previously the minimal amount of love they experienced was lacking either unconditionality or even matter-of-factness. "That's how it always starts!" sobbed a child that had been here in the house for only a few weeks. He sat on the cellar stairs. Some people had yelled at him because he was bad and had slammed the door in their faces. And now he was crying, because he was afraid he would be sent away, just as he had already been sent away from six other houses! Mrs. X said to him: "Listen. We don't like it when you're bad. But send you away? No. After all, you belong to us. You can be as bad as you want, but you still belong to us. We are certainly not going to ship you off somewhere else!" And through the tears, the child became radiant. He began to discover something new: here, he was

unconditionally accepted, even if he sometimes got a swat. Here, he was something precious. He was real. This is one of the most important experiences that there is.

There is a responsible way and an irresponsible way to treat oneself. A person can neglect himself and his immediate surroundings; he can neglect his head and his heart just as much as his bedroom and his clothes. To educate for reality also means to teach children that they are absolutely real for themselves, that their identity does not consist simply in what they are for themselves, nor in what they are for others; it means to teach them that they belong neither simply to themselves, nor simply to others. They belong to God. And this means, translated into practical terms, that their importance, their preciousness, does not depend either on themselves or on some other person. They are important, because they are real for God. They are loved.

To awaken this consciousness is the most extraordinary thing that can happen in a house like this. And it does indeed happen. When one considers the later *curriculum vitae* of so many of the people who once lived in this house, they are admittedly not all pure success stories. Inherited burdens, early childhood experiences and wounds often imply a fate that no one can overcome. And yet it makes a difference, a decisive difference, whether someone, when he is standing in mud up to his neck, just gives up on himself, as it were, or whether he recalls the word that has credibly been communicated to him here: "You shall never perish, and no one will take you out of my hand" (Jn 10:28).

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[1] [The German word translated as "education" in this essay is *Erziehung*, which is more literally translated as "upbringing," i.e., the rearing of children. The word "educators," here, is "*Erzieher*," literally, the "upbringers," those who are responsible for raising children. –Ed.]

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, 1982), 129.

[3] [Spaemann's sentence here, translated literally, is "As if there were nothing between the trees that grow in heaven, and indeed there weren't any trees." It is apparently a comment on the German expression, "Die Bäume wachsen nicht im Himmel," i.e., "Trees don't grow in heaven," which means "You can't have everything." –Ed.]

[4] ["Schwarzwaldklinik," which ran from 1985 to 1989, was one of the most popular TV series in Germany. It is, as it were, the German version of "General Hospital"—which indeed is said to be one of the programs it was modeled after. –Ed.]

[5] Jean Paul Richter, *Levana, or: The Doctrine of Education* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company, 1890), sec. 30, 117.

[6] Jean Paul, *Levana*, 348.

Robert Spaemann (1927–2018) was a preeminent German philosopher.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

On the Urgent Task of Educating Young People

POPE BENEDICT XVI

This letter of his Holiness Benedict XVI, dated 21 January 2008, was written to the faithful of the diocese and city of Rome. It is available on the Vatican website.

Dear Faithful of Rome,

I thought of addressing this Letter to you in order to speak to you about a problem of which you yourselves are aware and to which the various members of our Church are applying themselves: the problem of education. We all have at heart the good of the people we love, especially our children, adolescents and young people. Indeed, we know that it is on them that the future of our City depends. Therefore, it is impossible not to be concerned about the formation of the new generations, about their ability to give their lives a direction and to discern good from evil, and about their health, not only physical but also moral.

Educating, however, has never been an easy task and today seems to be becoming ever more difficult. Parents, teachers, priests and everyone who has direct educational responsibilities are well aware of this. Hence, there is talk of a great "educational emergency," confirmed by the failures we encounter all too often in our efforts to form sound people who can cooperate with others and give their own lives meaning. Thus, it is natural to think of laying the blame on the new generations, as though children born today were different from those born in the past. There is also talk of a "generation gap" which certainly exists and is making itself felt, but is the effect rather than the cause of the failure to transmit certainties and values.

Must we therefore blame today's adults for no longer being able to educate? There is certainly a strong temptation among both parents and teachers as well as educators in general to give up, since they run the risk of not even understanding what their role or rather the mission entrusted to them is.

What may be the deepest difficulty for a true educational endeavour

consists precisely in this: the fact that at the root of the crisis of education lies a crisis of trust in life.

In fact, it is not only the personal responsibilities of adults or young people, which nonetheless exist and must not be concealed, that are called into question but also a widespread atmosphere, a mindset and form of culture which induce one to have doubt about the value of the human person, about the very meaning of truth and good, and ultimately about the goodness of life. It then becomes difficult to pass on from one generation to the next something that is valid and certain, rules of conduct, credible objectives around which to build life itself.

Dear brothers and sisters of Rome, at this point I would like to say some very simple words to you: Do not be afraid! In fact, none of these difficulties is insurmountable. They are, as it were, the other side of the coin of that great and precious gift which is our freedom, with the responsibility that rightly goes with it. As opposed to what happens in the technical or financial fields, where today's advances can be added to those of the past, no similar accumulation is possible in the area of people's formation and moral growth, because the person's freedom is ever new. As a result, each person and each generation must make his own decision anew, alone. Not even the greatest values of the past can be simply inherited; they must be claimed by us and renewed through an often anguishing personal option.

When the foundations are shaken, however, and essential certainties are lacking, the impelling need for those values once again makes itself felt: thus today, the request for an education which is truly such is in fact increasing. Parents, anxious and often anguished about the future of their children, are asking for it; a great many teachers going through the sorrowful experience of their schools' deterioration are asking for it; society overall, seeing doubts cast on the very foundations of coexistence, is asking for it; children and young people themselves who do not want to be left to face life's challenges on their own are also asking for it in their inmost being. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, moreover, have a further and stronger reason for not being afraid: they know in fact that God does not abandon us, that his love reaches us wherever we are and just as we are, in our wretchedness and weakness, in order to offer us a new possibility of good.

Dear brothers and sisters, to make my considerations more meaningful, it might be useful to identify several common requirements of an authentic education. It needs first of all that closeness and trust which are born from love: I am thinking of the first and fundamental experience of love which children have, or at least should have, from their parents. Yet every true teacher knows that if he is to educate he must give a part of himself, and that it is only in this way that he can help his pupils overcome selfishness and become in their turn capable of authentic love.

In a small child there is already a strong desire to know and to understand, which is expressed in his stream of questions and constant demands for explanations. Therefore, an education would be most impoverished if it were limited to providing notions and information and neglected the important question about the truth, especially that truth which can be a guide in life.

Suffering is also part of the truth of our life. So, by seeking to shield the youngest from every difficulty and experience of suffering, we risk raising brittle and ungenerous people, despite our good intentions: indeed, the capacity for loving corresponds to the capacity for suffering

and for suffering together.

We thus arrive, dear friends of Rome, at what is perhaps the most delicate point in the task of education: finding the right balance between freedom and discipline. If no standard of behavior and rule of life is applied even in small daily matters, the character is not formed and the person will not be ready to face the trials that will come in the future. The educational relationship, however, is first of all the encounter of two kinds of freedom, and successful education means teaching the correct use of freedom. As the child gradually grows up, he becomes an adolescent and then a young person; we must therefore accept the risk of freedom and be constantly attentive in order to help him to correct wrong ideas and choices. However, what we must never do is to support him when he errs, to pretend we do not see the errors or worse, that we share them as if they were the new boundaries of human progress.

Education cannot, therefore, dispense with that authoritativeness which makes the exercise of authority possible. It is the fruit of experience and competence, but is acquired above all with the coherence of one's own life and personal involvement, an expression of true love. The educator is thus a witness of truth and goodness. He too, of course, is fragile and can be mistaken, but he will constantly endeavor to be in tune with his mission.

Dear faithful of Rome, from these simple observations it becomes clear that in education a sense of responsibility is crucial: the responsibility of the educator, of course, but also, as he grows up, the responsibility of the child, the student, the young person who enters the world of work. Those who can measure up to themselves and to others are responsible. Those who believe seek further; indeed, they seek to respond to God who loved them first.

Responsibility is in the first place personal, but there is also a responsibility which we share as citizens in the same city and of one nation, as members of the human family and, if we are believers, as children of the one God and members of the Church. Indeed, ideas, lifestyles, laws, the orientations in general of the society in which we live and the image it has of itself through the mass media exercise a great influence on the formation of the new generations, for good but often also for evil. However, society is not an abstraction; in the end we are ourselves all together, with the orientations, rules and representatives we give one another, although the roles and responsibilities of each person are different. Thus, the contribution of each one of us, of each person, family or social group, is necessary if society, starting with our City of Rome, is to become a more favorable context for education.

Lastly, I would like to offer you a thought which I developed in my recent Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* on Christian hope: the soul of education, as of the whole of life, can only be a dependable hope. Today, our hope is threatened on many sides and we even risk becoming, like the ancient pagans, people "having no hope and without God in the world", as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of Ephesus (Eph 2: 12). What may be the deepest difficulty for a true educational endeavour consists precisely in this: the fact that at the root of the crisis of education lies a crisis of trust in life.

I cannot finish this Letter, therefore, without a warm invitation to place our hope in God. He alone is the hope that withstands every disappointment; his love alone cannot be destroyed by death; his justice and mercy alone can heal injustices and recompense the suffering experienced. Hope that is addressed to God is never hope for oneself alone, it is always also hope for others; it does not isolate us but renders us supportive in goodness and encourages us to educate one another in truth and in love.

I express my affection for you and assure you of my special remembrance in prayer, as I impart my Blessing to you all.

Pope Benedict XVI served as pope from 2005 to 2013.

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Issues in Family, Culture & Science

FEATURE ARTICLE

The Family: Our First Primary School

JEANNE SCHINDLER

In the 1980s observers from different quarters voiced concern over the state of the American family. Though emerging a mere decade after the introduction of no-fault divorce, the data from such varied fields as education, counseling, social work, and law enforcement suggested the same thing: as divorce loomed ever-larger on the social scene, the family was increasingly unstable and children from homes thus broken were faring poorly on any number of indices. Interestingly enough, concern over the state of the family was not new. Writing in 1953, eminent sociologist Robert Nisbet noted, “Nowhere is the concern with the problem of community in Western society more intense than with respect to the family. The contemporary family, as countless books, articles, college courses, and marital clinics make plain, has become an obsessive problem.”[i]

For Nisbet, the psychologists, ethicists, and pastors of his day were undertaking a nearly futile task, namely, to shore up the affective bonds of marriage and family in an era in which the family’s institutional importance had declined dramatically. According to Nisbet’s reading of history, in order for institutions like the family or church to retain authority, command respect, and elicit devotion, they have to have enduring functional significance, that is, they have to *do* what other social organs cannot. Moreover, these indispensable functions have to be recognized as such within the larger social order. But the modern period, he insists, has been characterized precisely by a progressive expropriation of the functions once resident in the family and household. In an earlier age, the household was the site of economic production, education, care for the sick and aging, and the transmission of a religious heritage; these important activities were what bolstered the ties of kinship. As Nisbet summarizes, “[T]he family was far more than an interpersonal relationship based upon affection and moral probity. It was an indispensable institution” (60).

Parents are teachers, the first teachers; the home is a school, the first school. Its “curriculum” concerns life’s most profound truths and

deepest mysteries, revealed in the quotidian realities of domestic life.

Not so by the 1950s. As Nisbet saw it, the social landscape at mid-century evinced the triumph of liberalism whose logic and dynamism paved the way for the omnicompetent state and corporation, both of which undermined the richly variegated social order of the medieval period mainly by appropriating the functions formerly belonging to the institutions of civil society. “Our present crisis,” Nisbet remarks, “lies in the fact that whereas the small traditional associations, founded upon kinship, faith, or locality, are still expected to communicate to individuals the principal moral ends and psychological gratifications of society, they have manifestly become detached from positions of functional relevance to the larger economic and political decisions of our society. Family, local community, church, and the whole network of informal interpersonal relationships,” he continues, “have ceased to play a determining role in our institutional systems of mutual aid, welfare, education, recreation, and economic production and distribution”(54).

Nisbet paints a sobering picture, but his larger argument in *Quest for Community* actually provides grounds for hope, since his thesis about the decline of civil society vis-à-vis the centralized state attests to the power of ideas. The fate of the family, kinship network, neighborhood, guild, and church was not an accident of history; these social institutions were not simply victims of unidentifiable, impersonal forces. Rather, Nisbet shows quite convincingly that a philosophical revolution, a revolution in ideas, lay at the origin of modernity, and that the political and economic developments of the last four hundred years owe much to a specific vision of man and the cosmos—one that can and should be challenged. And, for purposes of this essay, it should be challenged with respect to its understanding of the family and education.

As noted above, in Nisbet’s analysis, education was once the precinct of the household, informed from first to last by the values and aspirations of the family. Over the course of a few centuries, however, this function was moved into the public realm, largely appropriated by the state. So complete has this appropriation become in our day that boards of education throughout the U.S. have adopted curricula and social policies directly at odds with the religious and cultural heritage of their students, leaving parents hamstrung and helpless. (Think, for instance, of the oppressive “gender inclusion” mandate imposed on the children of Massachusetts a few years ago.) Both the schools and the parents in this scenario labor under a grave error, namely, that the state, through its pedagogical arm, is the preeminent authority concerning the education of children. This error is subtly coupled with another: the state is not beholden to an objective standard of natural justice, truth, or goodness. This modern situation would not surprise Nisbet; he might have predicted it. An expansive and intrusive state overrunning the authority of parents is simply the logical result of liberalism come to the schoolhouse.

But liberalism is not the only public philosophy on offer. In an insightful, courageous, and engaging book, *Reclaiming Catholic Social Teaching: A Defense of the Church’s True Teachings on Marriage, Family, and the State*[ii], Anthony Esolen helpfully reminds us that there is an alternative vision of the social order available, and its vision of man and his communal life is beautiful. As he well conveys, at the heart of this vision is divine love—surely a surprising starting point for social-political thought in our day. But Esolen insists that we won’t understand law, the state, the economy, or any other facet of our common life unless we approach it comprehensively, which requires theological reflection. Catholic social teaching provides just this sort of reflection.

The cornerstone of Catholic social teaching, he observes, is the concept of the *imago Dei*. Man is made in the image and likeness of God, who is a loving communion of persons. Man is thus made for communion, divine and human, a fact symbolized and realized through the sexually differentiated body. "Male and female" he created them. As Genesis makes clear, man and woman *together* image the relational God—supremely so when they become, indissolubly, "one flesh" and engender new life. Marriage and family, Esolen rightly insists, are natural realities, designed by God for a sublime end: the full flourishing of every human being in a joyful communion with God.

Many elements of our culture obscure this point. From Hollywood to Madison Avenue to Capitol Hill, the genuine nature of the body, sexuality, marriage, and family is assailed. Esolen underscores how pernicious the political assault on these realities is by reminding the reader of an elemental truth (strenuously defended by Leo XIII): such institutions as marriage and the family are *pre-political*. Neither is a creature of the state; neither can be intruded upon by the state; neither can be redefined by the state. Rather, the state is in the service of man and his primary societies, marriage and the family. When it adopts policies inimical to the flourishing of either—no-fault divorce, homosexual "marriage," "safe" fornication training—the state has *ipso facto* violated its charge.

The temptation for the state to overstep its proper bounds is perennial. Today, the temptation to encroach upon the precincts of parental authority is especially powerful, given the frailty of the family. Esolen cites one particularly striking example in this regard, the case of Canadian education officials declaring themselves to be "co-parents" (87): Nisbet's declension of the family taken to its logical conclusion. But Esolen won't surrender the family and its prerogatives, especially concerning education. Drawing upon a central tenet of Catholic social thought, he avers, "Parents are to raise children sound in both body and soul. *Their prime duty after working for one another's salvation, is to teach their children what will avail them in this world and in the next*" (85, emphasis in original). Parents must orient their children toward God, protecting them from falsehood and corrupt influences at large and in the schools and nourishing their minds with "works that form the imagination and move their hearts and minds to love the truth" (87).

Esolen's brief but illuminating discussion of the educational role of the family recalls the insights of *Familiaris Consortio*, an encyclical of John Paul II that should be required reading for any serious student of education. The depth and beauty and power of this text are difficult to overestimate. It is a substantial remedy for the problem Nisbet identifies—the family becoming evacuated of its functions—because the document resoundingly affirms that parents are "the first and foremost educators of their children" (36). Indeed:

> The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is irreplaceable and inalienable and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others. (36)

Parents are teachers, the first teachers; the home is a school, the first school. Its "curriculum" concerns life's most profound truths and deepest mysteries, revealed in the quotidian realities of domestic life. Through steadfast fidelity and service to one another, spouses teach their children what it means to love; husband and wife become thereby "the first heralds of the Gospel for their children" (39). Their sons and daughters are thus given an intimation of divine

love—faithful, generous, self-diffusive. Building upon this experiential catechesis, parents further “their ministry of educating” by “praying with their children, reading the word of God with them and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the body of Christ—both the Eucharistic and the ecclesial body” (39).

The lessons learned in the daily rhythms of the home are profoundly formative, teaching a child what it means to be human, what it means to be a Christian, and how to live in a community. As John Paul II observes, “All members of the family, each according to his or her own gift, have the grace and responsibility of building day by day the communion of persons, making the family a ‘school of deeper humanity.’ This happens,” he explains, “where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick, the aged; where there is mutual service every day; when there is a sharing of goods, of joys and sorrows” (21). A child thus formed can enter the world equipped to serve and celebrate it.

The intimate pedagogy of a child’s heart and soul, so tenderly described by John Paul II, can only take place in the family, because a mother and a father, sisters and brothers bear a uniquely privileged relationship to him. Nisbet need not despair. Whatever the pretentions of the modern state, the family alone is the “domestic church” and the primary school of love.

[i] Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953; Reprinted 1969), 58.

[ii] Anthony Esolen, *Reclaiming Catholic Social Teaching: A Defense of the Church's True Teachings on Marriage, Family, and the State* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2014).

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WITNESS

The Kitchen Table Classroom

LÉONIE CALDECOTT

Since my husband died last year, I've been dwelling in a hall of mirrors. His death was much earlier than it should have been, but late enough to see his first grandchild. And now, I find myself with impressions, images, and memories reverberating off the resonant boards of my mind. Did we do all that? Did we witness all those things?

For me now, it is first and foremost about the human fruits of our marriage. It is about our children, but also those they have allied themselves with, those they have married and will marry, and their children, a small procession appearing in the corner of my eye, on a new horizon which is nonetheless umbilically linked to the old. I watch our middle daughter negotiate the pleasures and perils of parenthood, alongside her young husband, and the focus, the point of it all, is not an abstraction. It is a person. A small child, now on her feet, running down the hallway, using her endlessly dexterous hands to interact with the world around her, filling the house with the merry sound of her verge-of-verbal babble. "Hi!" she says, waving her hand like the Queen. "Heyllo!" she calls, gracing us with a smile like a slice of sunshine passing across a rainy landscape. "Wow!" she exclaims, as I scoop her up into my arms and she points at something, a light or some bright tulips in a luminescent vase, or the family dog passing by with a nonchalant swish of his tail. It is as if she were saying: "Who made all this incredible stuff? Who cooked up all these wonders?"

Contemplating the rapidity with which a baby develops, becoming a small child, learning to interact, play, walk and talk, all within the space of a year or two, reveals what it means to "educate." For everything is there, *in potentia*, in the new human being. At the baseline of parenthood, our task is simply to draw it out: *e-ducere*. When people ask me how we brought up our children, that is all I can say, really. They came, we saw, God conquered. We simply tried to pay attention, we held them and played with them and tried to draw out what was in them, marveling all the way.

The family radiates a love which can only be called trinitarian. Not

because the people in it are "holy" in a pious sense (we were not): but because that never ending waltz of love between persons—one, two, three and onward, outward—is the only thing that makes life livable.

Our first child, Teresa, was born when we were working in Boston, having recently entered the Catholic Church. The wonder of the new life in front of us echoed the wonder of our own new lives. Our discovery of the treasures of faith paralleled the exploratory hands and feet of our eldest child as she began to grapple with what it means to be part of the human family. Jokingly we photographed her soon after she learned to sit up, apparently reading an issue of *Communio*. Little did I know that this dear serious face would one day bend over such pages for real, after obtaining a degree in theology, and eventually provide invaluable assistance to us in our own work. Little did I know that this little girl would develop a beautiful voice and manner with which she would soothe a thousand problems into order.

The year after we returned to the UK, our second daughter, Sophie, was born. Now we had the chance to see what it meant for children to have companions, siblings. Very soon the two girls were inseparable. But they had very different temperaments and so we began to see how each child needs something a little different, even while they had to live "in community" with the rest of the family. The key to Sophie—named in part because all the readings the week she was born were from the Book of Wisdom—was her need to understand the deeper patterns of how people feel and live. As a toddler, this meant constantly testing the limits of parental tolerance. No wonder her favorite book was *The Runaway Bunny* (which she is now reading to her own little one—oh the layers of delight!). Sophie, like I, needed to describe, in words, relationships and their vicissitudes, as well as the symbolic resonance of the world in which those relationships take place, in order to be able to live and breathe freely. She learned to play the flute, then the harp, and set a poem by Tolkien to music, all because of the resonance of sound, the enchantment that word and note could strike in the ear. Like me, she became a writer.

Once we had more than one child, we began to see how the quality of attention parents give to each individual child can help them become a better functioning part of the group, precisely because they feel secure in themselves and loved for who they are, not for who we might wish them to be. Tiffs and tantrums are inevitable, but if children feel they are equally loved and have an ineradicable legitimacy in the heart of the family, they get over those, and learn from them. They learn to be moral beings by being treated as though they are capable of being just that. They learn to love because they bask in your love. They learn to learn because you are passionate about learning. They learn to pray because they catch you at it.And they learn the spiritual sense of time, because you weave a familiar pattern of sacredness around their days, not such that other things are stifled, but rather like rosary beads which space out the events of daily life, giving them meaning and structure, keeping their mystery.

When our third daughter was born, she was above all a mystery. We named her Rose-Marie, because in the days before I went into labor the roses were still in bloom…harbingers of late summer, spreading their scent into the season of harvest. She arrived three days before the birthday of Our Lady, on the very day they abolished the Communist party in the recently disbanded Soviet Union. Her older sisters clustered about her in the hospital with miniature roses and soft toys, caressing her soft cheeks and asking if they could hold her. Thus motherhood was born in them too, the notion that they could encompass another human being in their arms, wrap their soul about her and rejoice with God that this tiny creature

came among them with all her strangeness and promise. They held Rosie’s hands as she learned to walk, they dressed her up as a tiny hedgehog, they taught her to sing. Later on she became an artist and a musician. She was imbued with a vision which had to be expressed. Her older sisters helped that to gestate, by the quality of their own attention, the security of the love they wove about her, in collaboration with us: so that her voice could soar and her hand could use the painterly genes from her father’s family, the musical genes from mine. In the pursuit of beauty and harmony, a passion that all of us shared and that her father wrote about with such eloquence towards the end of his life, our youngest child more than made up for the fact that we were not granted any more children after her.

* * *

The primary classroom of the family is of course the kitchen. Our children learned to cook because it was a chance to learn practical skills whilst having a good conversation. In striving after something that would taste good, natural motivation encountered the requirements of discipline and skill. This took time and a fair amount of spilt milk and broken eggs. But my daughters eventually became the bakers I had struggled and never quite managed to be. On the way there they mastered the basics, too. One day they shut us out of the kitchen and insisted they were going to handle supper (our eldest, always the careful, responsible one, was by now old enough to invigilate safely). An hour later we were invited in to eat overcooked pasta in tomato sauce with an accompaniment of fish fingers. All beautifully presented, of course.

I realize now that we instinctively followed the intuition about children that Maria Montessori also had: that you can educate them from an early age to take responsibility for their actions. The culinary experiments typified this approach: by learning to cook, you learn to do something serious and central to human life—to provide nourishment. But you also learn that order, proportion, respect for the laws of chemistry, and timing are all crucial if the experiment is to succeed. You learn manual skills whilst focusing on a profoundly human and incarnate objective. O taste and see: this is both the fruit of the earth and the work of our own, human hands.

The secondary classroom of the family is the dinner table. Ours was always open, and noisy. We never managed to abide by the principle that children should be seen and not heard. We talked about everything at that table, even when they were quite young. As they grew into teenagers, their peers joined us and enlivened the conversation even more. By eating with us, both adult and non-adult friends came to know what we were about. And we came to know about others, which is important, if you are not to live in a ghetto. Grace was said, yes, but grace was implied too, in the human discourse that followed. The whole of our family life came to revolve around that table, those meals, that endlessly repeated and embellished *conversatio.* The most perplexing questions could be raised here, discussed, not necessarily resolved all at once; but at least they were there, on the table, where they could be reflected on.

The deepest level of discourse was reserved for bedtime. We fell into a fairly byzantine regimen during which Strat or I would read our favorite fantasy (Tolkien for him, George MacDonald for me), for far longer than was really warranted. Our youngest daughter is still addicted to being read to. Bedtime prayers were woven in, and as the girls grew older, the serious conversations about the more delicate issues of growing up, all its wonder and weirdness. The best way to preserve your children’s innocence, I have found, is to revere their childhood so that they come to revere it too, even after they have passed out of it. This, however, should be done without hampering their journey into maturity.

Form and content cannot be separated when you are educating children. You teach them to be kind by being kind, to be just by being just, to listen by being a good listener. You teach them that failure is not the end of the story by being contrite after you have lost your temper, or trying to laugh when something goes wrong. You teach them about God first and foremost by smiling into their tiny faces, then by being there for them when they call. In some sense our children were as much our teachers in faith as we were theirs, because they challenged us to take our faith seriously enough to do something about it. I didn't preach (that's for the preachers) – I tried to explain, as best as I could, being honest when it got too difficult and referring the most difficult issues to the professional theologian in the family. He referred the matters of the heart to me because, well, that's my thing.

We endeavored always to feed the imaginations of our children where faith was concerned, and to foster a social context in which that faith could grow in community. To this end I, to a certain extent, shelved my professional life as a writer in order to concentrate on catechesis and youth work. I organized pilgrimages, parish events, and adoration at the crib because Epiphany was a template for the host of smaller epiphanies when the Host was elevated at Mass. I tried to swallow my embarrassment when my children turned the holy water green after an over-enthusiastic use of the felt-tip markers during the children's liturgy, or ran riot after discovering the wonderful acoustics in the church.

Our children eventually became contributors in their own right, playing in the little orchestra at the family Mass, helping to organize fund-raising events and oversee teenagers at World Youth Days. When I branched out into the theatre as a means of exploring the life of faith in the ecclesial community, our eldest daughter developed her considerable directorial skill as a means of making the vision incarnate. When her father was very ill, our middle daughter used her writing and networking skills to organize the now legendary "Cap-for-Strat" campaign to keep her father's spirits up (having no idea it would go viral in the way it did). On the evening of her father's funeral, our youngest daughter opened an exhibition of her degree work and dedicated it to him. This was not a sentimental gesture: as the statement she read to our family and friends explained, her father's ideas about form and beauty were at the very core of her practice as an artist.

There are so many clichés about family life. It is, of course, very true that "the family that prays together stays together." But it is also important to laugh together… and cry together, sometimes. To me the definition of a family is the place where you can be vulnerable, where you can fail, without anyone else dining out on your misfortune or foolishness. The place where you can share without sacrificing your privacy. The place you can always return to and be known and loved as who you really are: where criticism is an extension of appreciation, not malice or envy. The place where others will take genuine delight in your accomplishments, and offer genuine and swift assistance in your troubles. The family radiates a love which can only be called trinitarian. Not because the people in it are "holy" in a pious sense (we were not): but because that never ending waltz of love between persons—one, two, three and onward, outward—is the only thing that makes life livable.

This is all you need to know in order to educate children. There is kenosis too, of course. Suffering. You have to be willing to be stretched, yes, sometimes to the point of utter exhaustion, the breaking point where you are running on empty. You have to be honest about your slender resources as human beings. You have to be able to say, I cannot cope if you continue to do this, and you need me to be able to cope. And prepared to say, patiently, no, don't do that, it-will-do-you-no-good oh-dear-what-did-I-say, oh well…tomorrow is another day.

There is always another day, to see what a gift your children are, what a gift we all are to one

another. As the women of our family cluster together in this shocking year, missing the gift that the husband and father was to all of us, we remember that this new day is an eternal one, that the story-telling goes on, and that the sacred table of love has been laid forever, and cannot be taken away.

Léonie Caldecott is the UK editor of both Humanum *and* Magnificat*. With her late husband Stratford she founded the Center for Faith and Culture in Oxford, its summer school and its journal* Second Spring*. Her eldest daughter Teresa, along with other colleagues, now work with her to take Strat's contribution forward into the future.*

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Humanum
Issues in Family, Culture & Science

EDITORIAL

First Steps Into Reality

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

Humanum was launched four years ago with an inaugural issue on "The Child." The reason for that beginning was that the child, in our judgment, exhibits essential features of the human face—playfulness, dependence—whose features are increasingly at risk of being overlooked, disregarded, or disparaged in our culture, all at great cost to us. We cannot help but think of the draconian practices aimed at children especially when their childlikeness is particularly imposing at the beginning of life, or those aimed at the elderly and infirm when the same childlikeness reasserts itself towards the end. But the stakes are high for all of us. Childhood, after all, is not just a stage to grow out of quickly at the beginning, or to avoid at all costs at the end. Were we not told to "become like a child"? And are we not told to do so in order "to enter the Kingdom of Heaven," in order, that is, to live? Childlikeness, then, is a matter of life or death for every one of us.

The most obvious fact which childhood sets before us is the fact that we were born. In a culture which prides itself on self-making, and which understands the tool of that same self-making (namely, freedom) to be the absence of any bonds, especially prior ones, this fact cannot but be problematic, something to be surmounted or overcome. Being born, we have an origin that precedes our own making, doing, and choosing. In our second year, dedicated to *Recovering Origins*, we saw the various ways in which we try to disentangle ourselves from our origins (or our children from theirs), by removing children from parents through divorce, artificial reproductive technology, same-sex household arrangements, and absent fatherhood. In each of these cases, however much we still—for the moment—have to be put into the world by others, the fact of owing ourselves to others becomes a faint memory, and in many cases, increasingly, a sorrowful one, one to forget altogether.

Allan Bloom, in the introduction to his translation of *Émile*, writes of Rousseau's ideal future student—whose "bible" is Robinson Crusoe—that "he cares no more for his father than his dog."[1]

In a way, the doubt about the goodness of one's origins is nothing new. Ancient myths are replete with cannibalistic fathers and patricidal sons and daughters. But the newness of our situation as moderns and post-moderns is that the judgment on our origin has become a

matter of principle—a “state of nature”—and not a matter of the Fall. Adam, as Locke said, had the unique fortune of being created in the perfect state, because he was not born. We are supposed to alienate ourselves from our origins. What was once a tragic flaw, or result of original sin, then, is now the “new normal,” not to mention a self-fulfilling prophecy. Like obedient children (sic) we rush to fulfill our duty, whether we like it or not!

> *As Jean-François Millet shows us so clearly in his painting (on the cover of this issue), the fact that a child takes his “first steps” into the world “on his own” between his mother and father serves as the paradigm of education, and is not its temporary exception or suspect beginning.*

It is against this backdrop that we take up what Benedict XVI called the “emergency” of education. The child, of course, has to be “brought up,” and “led out” (*e-ducare*) into the world. But what does this mean against the dominant backdrop of calling into question the essential features of childhood, those features so necessary for living? What exactly is the child’s relation to the world, and how exactly is that relation mediated by the “first educators” of the child, his or her parents? That is, what is their role? The answer to these questions will determine (as they already do) what we intend when we educate and what it is we are aiming at tacitly in bringing a child to adulthood.

In his essay “On the urgent task of educating young people,” Pope Benedict XVI notes the two critical points of the “educational emergency.” The first of these raises the question about the subject matter of education, about what is to be communicated in education, if anything at all. It is the “crisis of trust in life,” where “essential certainties are lacking,” above all the goodness of life. In the current situation of profound doubt about life, can there any longer be anything to hand on (*tradere*): a patrimony, a culture? And can we really think of introducing a child to the world, of leading him out into a relation with it? Moreover, can we really think that we are taking him anywhere in particular, according to some concept of humanity, as did the traditional *paideia* (education of the young in view of the ideal)?

The profound doubt about the goodness of life in fact renounces all of this in favor of a “constructivist” approach which would disencumber the child of his past, and equip him only with “problem-solving skills” by which to confront the raw material of the world: all for the goal of “constructing his own meaning.” Instead of leading the child anywhere, we would merely push him forward, as it were, once he has been fashioned into a self-determining, choosing self, so that he can turn in any which direction, and “follow his dreams.” But here is the problem. Instead of great spurts of freedom and engagement, which such “dreams” promised to release, there is great apathy. Robert Spaemann, whose analysis of the current state of education is similar to his coeval, Benedict, notes in his magnificent essay “Education as an Introduction to Reality”:

> If a person believes that there are many different paths man could take to reach his goal, he does not infer the resolution to follow one of them in a

> faithful way. Instead, he draws the inference that there is no need to follow any particular path, and he leaves them all as hypothetical. The pathological inability to make a commitment that afflicts many young adults today is already the product of such an approach to education.

Bloom puts it succinctly in his *Closing of the American Mind*: young people “can be anything they want to be, but they have no particular reason to want to be anything in particular” (87).

Everything hangs on whether or not life is good, in essence. If it is good, education will be an introduction to reality, as Spaemann and Luigi Giussani describe it. This is not, of course, an introduction to Freud’s “reality principle” which is to bring about a compromise with the “pleasure principle,” the two having no inner relation to the other. Nor indeed is it an introduction to statistical “reality,” namely, what most people do (allowing the regular use of contractions instead of teaching good grammar, permitting endless use of the TV, etc.). Rather, it will be, an introduction to *real* reality—however seldom it is sought or seen: to the good, the beautiful and the true, manifest first in the faces of one’s mother and father, who betoken the promise of fulfillment (pace Freud), even if desire has to be educated along the way. And, since one’s relation to the world would not be principally negative and defensive, one would be trained to have a relation with it, wanting to know it as it is, “for its own sake,” not merely as something useful: an attitude for which a child, whose very work is to play, is already well equipped. He will be drawn into it, into a “greater than himself,” to the point of being drawn into the Greater than himself and the world put together. Not a pious spirituality or ethical add-on, the question of God will be a necessary dimension of questions about the world, questions like “what is that?”, “why is that?”, and “who am I?,” as Sophia Cavalletti recognized so aptly.

The second critical point which Benedict XVI notes is the doubt about the role of the educator itself. If life is not good, the role of the educator can be neither to pass on anything (e.g. a tradition), nor of course to suggest a view of the world (except a cultureless one, which is, of course, still a view of the world!). She would have to go to great lengths to “be objective,” making sure she does not communicate anything she has committed herself to, since it can only have been “a choice,” one of many possible choices. The educator can only present the “menu items,” again, with an eye to turning her student into someone who “makes his or her own choices” and learns, accordingly, to tolerate others who make theirs.

This view makes itself felt especially where the “first educators” are concerned. They, after all, have handed down to their children their very lives, and with it, a genetic code, a family, a place, a home, a language, a family name. They have saddled their children, that is, with a tradition of the most radical sort. It is not without reason that, beginning at the dawn of our fledgling liberal nation, treatises on education were aimed at the discipline of parents, as James Block and Jay Fliegelman explain in their fascinating books on the topic of rearing the “child-citizen” in the New World. And it is no wonder that there is a growing trend to think of parents as suspect “gate-keepers” in principle and advocate that it would be desirable to provide children with a more “neutral” substitute. The French Minister of Education proposed one such substitute by proposing the institutionalization of children as early as two years old (e.g. into state-funded day care) so as to “wrest from them every possible social, philosophical, familial and religious determinism”! (Quoted from a letter to chief education officers dated 4 January 2013, in *L’Express*, 2 September 2012.)

If, by contrast, there can be a deep trust in the goodness of life, then we would turn principally to those who first introduced us to life in order to learn about what the role of the educator is. The mother and father would not only be the first in a line of educators—the most willing

subjects for the care of young children—nor merely the ones to decide how, where, and when their children get their schooling (thought that is certainly also true!). Rather, the mother and father would be the archetype of the educator. As we have said, it is clear that by being born one is faced with a tradition, literally incarnate in the faces of one's own parents. One is "Caught up in a Story," as Sarah Clarkson would put it. But this fact, this "back-pack," as Giussani calls it in *The Risk of Education*, far from being a burden, coincides with the introduction to the very *logos* of reality. Spaemann reminds us of the obvious: a child learns what to call things—"that's the moon" and "those are the stars"—by learning his "mother tongue." Then too, it is because of a good dependence that the child achieves a good independence, as is being confirmed in the field of psychology under the label of "attachment parenting," by figures such as Daniel J. Siegel, Mary Hartzell, Tina Payne Bryson, and Robert Karen, reviewed herein.

There are other features of the educator that we can garner from the "first educators" and which have been adopted by some of the great educator saints. We can think, for example, of Don Bosco whose "preventative method" meant above all the personal investment of "walking alongside" troubled at-risk-adolescents (in his case), communicating to them above all that they are loved in a family-like atmosphere. Then too, there is the "risk" with the freedom of the adolescent, who must always "decide" "starting anew," though accompanied by the correction of love, and not the tolerance of indifference. As Benedict says:

> The educational relationship…is first of all the encounter of two kinds of freedom, and successful education means teaching the correct use of freedom. As the child gradually grows up, he becomes an adolescent and then a young person; we must therefore accept the risk of freedom and be constantly attentive in order to help him to correct wrong ideas and choices. However, what we must never do is to support him when he errs, to pretend we do not see the errors or worse, that we share them as if they were the new boundaries of human progress.

Above all the educator is a "witness of the truth and goodness" of the world and of life. He or she is the incarnate presence of an all-encompassing positivity—"life is good, beautiful and true"—and a positivity, moreover, which is addressed to the child: "it is good that you exist!" All of this, of course, may be offered imperfectly and partially. The child will have to eventually judge this "witness" against "his heart as God made it" (Giussani) and the "love and desire for God which everyone has in the depths of his being" (Bosco). This is why we will ultimately need witnesses who have been caught up by the very Incarnation of the Good, True, and Beautiful to guarantee his certainty, as the US Bishops have said in their 2007 instructions on the religious education of adolescents, *Doctrinal Elements*.

As you see, in this issue, we are taking up education at the most basic level, asking what it means to be "brought up" and led out into the world. Beginning with our "reprints" from Benedict XVI and Robert Spaemann, then with our beautiful witness piece from Léonie Caldecott, moving to our features on Catholic Social Doctrine (written by Jeanne Schindler) and the political challenges to education (by Ellen Roderick) and our multiple book reviews, we are taking our cues from nature (and Catholic Social Doctrine) that the paradigm of education (its students, subject material, and teachers) can be found in the "first educators" of every child. As Jean-François Millet shows us so clearly in his painting (on the cover of this issue), the fact that a child takes his "first steps" into the world "on his own" between his mother and father serves as the paradigm of education, and is not its temporary exception or suspect beginning.

In our second issue on education we will take up the question of schooling in the disciplines. We will then look at sex education, broadly conceived as the education of girls and boys to the point of becoming men and women who are capable of making irrevocable gifts of themselves to each other or to God in their states of life. Finally, we will take up the vexed question of technology as it pertains to all levels of education.

[1] Allan Bloom, introduction to *Emile, or: On Education*, by Jean Jacques Rousseau, trans. Allan Bloom, (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 15.

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