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THE CATHOLIC TEACHER: OUR GREATEST RESOURCE

JOHN KING MUSSIO, J.C.D.

Late Bishop of Steubenville

The 56th annual meeting of the National Catholic Educational Association was held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1959. The following essay is a transcript of a talk delivered at that meeting on March 31, by the then Bishop of Steubenville, Ohio, the Most Reverend John King Mussio. He was speaking to the Secondary School Department about the importance of Catholic high schools and the vital role of teachers in the education and formation of youth. Although over 40 years have passed, Mussio cites many problems and challenges facing Catholic educators that are still with us today. His praise of teachers is almost poetic; his love of Catholic education is profound. Calling teachers the fifth mark of Church, Mussio clearly values the Catholic school system and those whose example and teaching help youth "to keep in step with Christ."

The importance of the secondary school teacher is drawn from the pre-eminence of the Catholic secondary school in the field of education. If forced to choose today one of the three levels of education (primary, secondary, or collegiate), we would well serve the imperative needs of modern education by selecting the secondary level of schooling. To put it conversely, if the educational process lacked Catholic secondary school training, then the primary training would lose its aims and direction in the pragmatism of the so-called neutral high school, and the collegiate level would lose patronage to its secular rival because of the false orientation given in the nebulous atmosphere of a pointless secondary training. We must never be forced to make such a choice. But the thought emphasizes the vital importance of Catholic secondary education and spotlights the tremendous responsibility of those to whom have been entrusted as teachers the right training and proper direction of youths who stand in the vestibule of their maturity.

The process of growing up brings with it a swing toward independence. We have heard much of the id in our human makeup, those raw drives that correspond to our human wants. In infants these drives are uninhibited and unrestrained, but sooner or later they must be channeled into that larger plan of life which takes into account the needs and rights of others. This is the emergence of the ego. Although the process of restraint begins early, it reaches its critical point during adolescence, that time when the young boy or girl comes under the direction of the high school teacher. How vital it is, then, that the teacher, in character, temperament, and training, be prepared to meet this tremendous responsibility of youth formation. Such a teacher must fully understand the divine pattern of human life and be motivated by principles of duty which draw force from the love of Christ and find sustenance in His grace. Teaching, then, becomes more than a profession; it is a vocation, a God-given call to a duty whose core is the fulfillment in youth of the divine will. Teachers, then, must be drenched with the Truth of God, saturated with a love of Christ, running over with the longing to give to others the blessing of their own learning.

Maturity involves a breaking away which, if not orderly, will be disastrous to the youth. With adolescence comes the adventurous period: Home ties are loosened; a wider circle of acquaintances is developed; a reappraisal of values is made; the interchange of ideas is explored; parental authority is offset by outside influences, by the code of teenage habits, by a nagging sense of independence continually troubling the young person. The training inculcated at home during those first years of preparation is now under the fire of experimentation and stress. The youth is looking away from home for direction during this adolescent period, and unless choices made reflect the Christian principles of right living the youth is bound to end in a quagmire of confusion. Note the words of an address given on January 4, 1954, by our Holy Father, Pius XII:

For at this period growing adolescents begin to set themselves free from subjection to their parents and it often happens that they set up an opposition between the teacher and the father, the school and the home. Many parents find themselves at such a time almost deprived of all authority before the bizarre humor of their children, and some errors that are committed in these years can eventually turn out to be unfortunate for the equilibrium of the adolescent. (1960a, p. 480)

This experimentation, value testing, probing, and readjustment take place during this most crucial time of secondary school training. For the youth, it is the time to do or die, make or break. That is why the secondary school period is of such primary importance.

The home is not pulling its weight in supporting education. This may be due to internal domestic conditions, lack of personal responsibility, failure of

the marriage, delinquency of one or both parents, or outside influences which continually belittle the influence of the home in the life of the growing youth. Under such a handicap, the secondary school must, whether it likes the idea or not, play the part of the home. Whether secondary school teachers welcome the responsibility or not, they must in certain instances assume the character of the parent. Perhaps unfair advantages have been taken, perhaps there has been an unjust shifting of responsibility, but the fact is that the social mores of our time do not make the home the center of youth activity during the adolescent period; they do not give to the parent that undivided position of authority which guarantees good direction. Blame it on the times, on our modern social habits, on the backwash of recurrent world wars, on the uncertainties arising from the obligation of military service, or on the baneful effects of such training itself. The fact remains that this is the modern atmosphere in which the educational endeavor must function. Unless school and teacher face the situation honestly and frankly, both are but living in a textbook; certainly not in the realities facing youth today. Pope Pius XI in his December 31, 1929, encyclical, *Education of the Redeemed Man*, spoke sadly of "the present-day lamentable decline in family education...whereas for the fundamental duty and obligation of educating their children, many parents have little or no preparation, immersed as they are in temporal cares" (1960, p. 233). Is the teacher to ignore the student who will not or cannot be found at home? Some will cry out in exasperation: "I can't do everything!" Surely this is not the spirit of a teacher's vocation. As Pius XII elaborated in his address to the Italian Women Teachers on October 24, 1955: "A professional educator must develop within herself a maternal spirit through her own efforts and her own good will" (1960b, p. 511). This is exactly the kind of spirit our youth need and seek.

A teacher, then, must be all things to the young person in this vital formation period. Misguided, abused, and love-starved young people, mixed-up kids, street-running exiles from homes, castoffs of parental care—they are all objects of a teacher's care because they all belong to God and are destined to reach Him. We must rid ourselves of the idea that as teachers we are concerned only with the narrow interests of a narrow classroom. On the contrary, a teacher is dedicated to educate—and educate means a pointing to God. If the youth of today are looking to the school rather than to home for direction, then we must give counsel while at the same time returning parental control to its proper place in young people's lives. If youth find companionship in the circle of school friends and seek in the school environment and facilities an outlet for social drives, then the school must provide a supervised social program or forfeit the confidence of youth and stultify its own educational effort. We must not work on the assumption that if the school does not attend to these social and personal needs of youth, does not attempt to straighten out their distorted ideas and reconcile their conflicting emotions, that they will

seek this guidance at home. On the contrary, youth will seek direction and stimulation in an atmosphere most hostile to the Christian goals of the school, in sordid spots geared commercially to exploit every craving. It is for the teacher to avoid any narrowness in outlook which might convince students that the school is more concerned with the paraphernalia of schooling than with them. This is truly a critical time for both teacher and student.

While facing the challenge of the weakened home, the teacher must likewise fight the implications of a secular state. There is a nicely set distinction between family, church, and state in the role of education. Each has a precisely drawn field of action, but unfortunately in life things do not always follow these orderly divisions of allotted work. The state is in danger of weakening the educational structure because of its secular-mindedness. It is not equipped to give that education which is complete and satisfying to us. Unless education is geared to reach all the way to God, it is a delusion; worse, it is a snare. The state can fulfill its own divine mission in the education of its subjects only with the help of the home and the Church. These two forces give soul to the state's regulations for education. The home, however, has shunted much of its responsibility to the school. Only the teacher motivated by the mission of the Church and galvanized to action by divine grace can bear this added burden. As to the state, when left to itself, it thinks only of itself. Krushchev drew a good picture of what happens when the state takes over without family or church influence. Such state totalitarianism snares man into a servitude which makes life meaningless, sacrifice foolish, and living a drudging slavery. This is the streamline design for an assembly line that rolls out manufactured puppets, which are not the fruit of a true educational process. This will not be the fate of American youth as long as our state, secular-minded as it may be, keeps to its constitutional form allowing the influence of the Church and the prime authority of the parents in the education of children. Teachers are the balancing force; they give increase where there is lack, restraint where there is undue pressure, and often are a martyr to their cause.

We live in a rather revolutionary period of education. Methods are undergoing radical changes; requirements are broadening to a frightening degree; problems of administration, discipline, and accommodations are multiplying with almost rocket speed because of an unhealthy social climate which seeks its cure in the services of an already over-burdened school curriculum. Unless we keep before our eyes the core of true education we are apt to be swamped by this multiplication of detail and complexity of administration. Our danger is that we might consider education simply in the bare, cold apparatus of text and office detail. No one can find inspiration in a syllabus, a schedule, teaching aids, or involved reports unless these be vivified by a true service to the good of the students. They are the center of the educative process; the life of the teacher's efforts; and the worthwhileness of the recurring days of hard

and grinding routine. How rewarding to the teacher, however, are those young people who respond to direction and unfold in person and to the ways of God's gracious design for right living. Such students are a channel of grace helping teachers draw closer to their own fulfillment in Christ Jesus. As Pius XII notes in his prayer for teachers written on December 28, 1957: "who following in Thy footsteps desire to be Catholic teachers worthy of that name and to guide souls in the sure paths that lead to Thee and through Thee to eternal happiness" (1960c, p. 564).

For education, then, to stand aside and allow its purpose to be usurped and destroyed because of its refusal to use revolutionary weapons of defense when needed, to scrap outmoded methods and archaic procedures when the demand is for something new, something fresh, something extraordinary in outlook and execution is nothing less than educational blasphemy. The mission of education is the perfection of humankind. Pope Pius XI wrote: "Education consists in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do here below in order to attain the sublime end for which he was created" (1960, p. 203). Unless teachers understand exactly what constitutes perfection, they can never truly direct the education of youth. Saint Augustine puts it this way: "The end, therefore, of our purpose is Christ, for however much we attempt, in Him we are made perfect. This is our perfection, that we come home to Him." Too much of the disruption in the spirit and formation of youth is due to this failure in linking human perfection to our ultimate end in God. The exclusion of God from the formative processes of the development of our youth is getting us nowhere fast. By trying to give education direction without God we not only eviscerate the training system but we betray youth into the hands of its despoilers. The Catholic teacher must have a spirit of dedication that shares with the martyrs and the confessors of the faith that same inexhaustible well of devotion to the truth which gives substance to service.

Teachers, then, take their meaning from the essential purpose of education, a meaning which incorporates boundless love, fearless courage, and endless sacrifice. It means that should all others fail in their duty to schooling, the Christian teacher is ready to carry the burden of directing and developing youth. Otherwise how can God's will be fulfilled in the minds and hearts of young people and how can teachers keep unblemished the one salient ideal of their vocation to bring all to God? Pope Pius XII said: "As teachers you have the joy of being able to co-operate powerfully in the religious renewal of your generation" (1960a, p. 481). Adult delinquency is laying at the door of the teacher a tremendous burden of supervision, training, and direction. A teacher cannot turn from this burden without abandoning youth to their own devices. We have confidence that Catholic-school teachers know well the cross of their dedication and how to carry it.

Without an understanding of the essence of Catholic education, the teacher remains an enigma. First of all, education has the same origin and purpose as humankind and is our progression along the path of eternal destiny. "It is therefore as important to make no mistake in education as it is to make no mistake in the pursuit of the last end, with which the whole work of education is intimately and necessarily connected" (Pius XI, 1960, p. 202). So spoke Pius XI in his encyclical on education. Evaluation of the word "progress" is the measure of the worth of our training. If it leads us anywhere but to God it is a fraud and a stumbling block. God gave us our meaning and our purpose. "This people have I formed for Myself, they shall show forth My praise" (Isaiah 18:21). God gave us an intellect and a will that distinguish us from all other creatures of the universe. In these high faculties are we the image and likeness of God; and in the exercise of these faculties shall we find our purpose in giving praise and glory to the Creator. The drive of the intellect, by God's design, is to know the truth; that of the will is to find the good. God is all truth and all good, making Him by His own divine plan the only lasting satisfaction for the drives of our human nature. This is the basic truth of any effective educational action. True teachers understand their truth, fulfilling in their teaching not only the perfection of the student but their own perfection as well.

From this consideration it is clear that the most important aspect of life for us is that which fulfills our eternal destiny, that brings us closer to the fulfillment of our purpose in life, to the attainment of all our very nature leans toward. Because of the upsetting influence of original sin in our life, this light can be dimmed in the glare of dazzling self-satisfying delights; this way can be pushed back into a misty legend-land by the exactions of everyday practicality. Education to serve must pierce through these beguiling factors and reveal in unquestionable and convincing terms the vital and fundamental principles of life. Education must make us see ourselves as we are. It cannot do the thinking in our stead. Enslaving us is not educating us. Educated people are trained to use their own faculties to see the handiwork of God in themselves and all about them; are taught to use creatures only that they fulfill in themselves their own God-given purposes; learn to measure progress through a better understanding of what God would have us do, in a deepening of the spiritual signification of their daily actions. The words of the Book of Sirach give a basic definition of education: "He filled them with the knowledge of understanding...that they might praise the name which he hath sanctified; and glory in his wondrous state, that they might declare the glorious things of his works" (17:7,10). The knowledge of understanding is the meat of education. God started this educational process; teachers carry it on, being sanctified and ennobled by a work that enables true searchers to find within themselves the fingerprint of the divine.

Education, then, must be concerned basically with people and not with their circumstances of time or place. These elements concern themselves with education only after we have been oriented to the scheme of divine planning. Without this basic understanding of purpose and end, nothing has meaning; everything is confusing. Cardinal Newman had this in mind when he said: "...education teaches one to see things as they are." Things truly are just as God so appointed them.

We are the apple of God's eye and therefore should and must be the center of all educational effort. On this point Aquinas writes: "Nature intends not merely the generation of off-spring but also its development and advance to the perfection of man considered as man, that is, to the state of virtue" (*Summa Theologica*. Supplement E, Question #41, part a, #1). We cannot without violence to truth divorce the concept of human beings from the end God has appointed for us in eternity. As Fitzpatrick states: "...this human being, being sensitive on many sides to the complex modern world, will have the capacity to view things *sub specie aeternitatis*" (1927, pp. 72-77).

Welton, in his work *What Do We Mean by Education*, follows this line of thought as follows: "If the pursuit of any subject strengthens the higher spiritual elements in any person, that subject is a factor in his liberal education..." (1918, pp. 65-71).

Webster's definition of education implies all of this fundamental knowledge. "Education," Webster defines, "is the totality of the information and qualities acquired through instruction and training, which further the development of an individual physically, mentally, and morally" (1957, p. 818). Now this is a blind definition unless we know at the same time just what constitutes development. True development travels in the line of man's God-given direction; it is the drive of right thinking. There can be no appraisal of development unless first there is at the same time a proper appraisal of human nature. And we will never solve what might seem the riddle of our nature unless first we see ourselves in our relation to God. This is the kernel of Catholic education; this is the key to effective teaching. "No educational method...can give perfect and lasting results if it disagrees with Christian principles, or scorns their values or fails to use true Christian means..." (Pius XII, 1960b, p. 510).

Whether he knew it or not, Epictetus had something of the above truth in mind when he said that only the educated are free. The fundamental idea of any freedom is having a destination. The aimless are not free. They have no place to go and consequently are not concerned about getting there. Our calling to reach God is the reason why freedom is the tremendous power spring of our nature. It is the elbow room we need to fulfill our purpose. Knowledge and drive go hand in hand. This is why education is the cradle of freedom, and why God is the fire of education. Perhaps this is the idea behind the words of Cawthorn when in his work *The Birth and Education of Genius* he

says: "Education makes the man" (1771, p. 36). What is a man but one who uses mind and will to fulfill his purpose in life, to reach his fulfillment in God! In other words, existence alone is not our destiny, but that kind of living which gets things done for us rightly and effectively. To do all this one must be taught. To put it another way, the real character of living, namely one with purpose and an end, is the stuff of education. All of what has been said can find its best expression in the panoramic picture of education drawn by Pope Pius XI: "Christian education takes in the whole aggregate of human life, physical and spiritual, intellectual and moral... in order to elevate, regulate, and perfect it, in accordance with the example and teaching of Christ" (1960, p. 243).

Catholic education is true education. Any other system going by this name which excludes in any degree this fundamental concept of the proper function of education fails in its purpose. We Catholics have the truth. Whether we seem presumptuous or arrogant, intolerant or intransigent, we must hold to this truth and act according to it. Unless we do this there will be no education worth the name for anyone, anywhere, at any time. Remember that "the true product of Christian education is the supernatural man who thinks, judges, and acts consistently in accordance with right reason illuminated by the supernatural light of the example and teaching of Christ" (Pius XI, 1960, p. 244). How can this be accomplished unless education be wed to the truth we have in Christ, be inspired by the vision of that truth as it is unveiled before our searching minds, be powered by His grace which accomplishes what our frail human efforts alone reach for but cannot touch? This is the work of the teacher. Need we wonder why it is said that the teacher must be a complete person and an integral Christian?

Only when we know the fundamental nature of education can we fully appreciate the tremendous character of the teacher. Education cannot perform its function without teachers; it remains a dry and lifeless form without their vivifying action. As Pius XII so well put it in his address of December 31, 1956: "The teacher is the soul of the school; he gives it its spirit" (1960d, p. 535). The world often wastes its time and honors courting those whose only claim to fame is some transient service to expediency. To the teacher, however, is owed a lasting recognition and an unfading paean of gratitude for a service without which man's limping would be his chief characteristic. "For the teaching office is a lofty one which calls for intellectual discernment and goodness of heart, has a capacity for intuition and delicacy of spirit, and renunciation as well as human depth capable of bearing everything for the love of neighbor" (Address given to the Fifth Inter-American Congress on Catholic Education, January 12, 1954) (Pius XII, 1960e, p. 482). This is the unfailing recipe for Christlikeness. It must be breathtaking for the teacher to hear these words of Pius XII: "A good teacher should have a perfect human formation, intellectual and moral" (1960e, p. 482). And yet if teachers trust

to the grace of God and to their own dedicated efforts, what is there to fear? To work side by side with Christ in the lifting up of humans to their high calling is surely a work that is its own reward.

Good teachers are those with a clear professional Catholic conscience, a soul burning with apostolic zeal, an exact idea of doctrine which must penetrate all their teaching, and a profound conviction of serving the highest spiritual and cultural interests and that in a field of special privilege and responsibility. (1960e, p. 482)

How otherwise can the teacher serve education that it be efficacious in its purpose of service to youth? The animating atmosphere of this formative work lies in the personal example of the truly and deeply religious teacher. With these words of Pius XII we return to the idea that the teacher is the soul of education, that the personal qualifications of the teacher give tone to the process of education. In the greatness of this concept lies the need for a humility that fears only mediocrity.

This applies in a most pertinent manner to the secondary school teacher of today. Christliness is a "must." Look at the other side of the coin. Selfishness will cast aside the added responsibility thrust upon the teacher by a delinquent home and a hesitant state, leaving the youth truly an angry person; detachment will keep office hours but not the confidence of the young; cold professionalism will try to slice the youth into compartments of convenience for the teacher and yet will, at the same time, kill in students their desire to cooperate in the learning process; disinterest will perhaps lessen the burden of teaching but it will also deprive it of its meaning. A real teacher is a hero to the developing adolescent. And it is imperative that this hero be a Christ image, an inspiration for youth to look further and beyond to Him who is the true font of a young person's high idealism. Above all, it is necessary that students see teachers practice what they teach. Truth has validity for the young especially only in that degree in which it is embraced in practice by those who would inculcate its lessons. To sell truth to youth means that teachers must be sincerely sold on that truth. What they are is a teacher's best selling point. In their own field, they are God's representative, selling the wares of Christ and giving the "spiel" of the Christlikeness of their own character. "Good teachers are careful to educate rather than merely to instruct; capable, above all, of forming and of molding souls chiefly through contact with their own" (Pius XII, 1960e, p. 483). Such teachers, in the words of Pius XII, serve Christ and His Church as well as they would in the highest form of the lay apostolate. There is no other time when the youth to be trained is more susceptible to example and inspiration in relation to his teacher than that of the secondary school period. Teachers who give themselves completely to the reasonable yet urgent needs of youth are those who are closest to Christ.

It is well to consider the best methods of teaching, to inquire into the latest instruments or helps in learning, to delve into the various solutions to problems involving administration and finance, to examine the newest in textbooks, and to study the most up-to-date designs in school construction. But none of these have any meaning whatsoever if the basic educational effort does not function. Tools, the best of them, are a danger in the hands of the inept. It is the teachers who remain always the key to the proper functioning of the educational process. Without dedicated teachers who know their business as that of God, this convention is a waste of time. Without teachers willing to unselfishly keep youth in step with Christ, this convention is useless. Without teachers who are ready to be mother, father, companion, friend, hero, counselor, confidant, and, shall we say, babysitter, this convention is all of straw. Where Christian teachers are, there is education. We might call them the fifth mark of the Church. Men and women we have, religious and lay, who are consecrated to this great teaching vocation with a spirit born in grace and a purpose beloved of God. We must pray for our teachers, for their continued sanctification and enlightenment, for how can each new generation have the light unless it be made known to them? And how can this be unless that light shines through those given to them as guides, models, and teachers. Young people do not speak of their education; they speak of their teacher. God grant that they speak of that teacher with the gentleness and wonder of one who has caught a glimpse of the Divine. I close with this excerpt from the prayer composed for teachers by Pope Pius XII:

Above all, fill us with Thy spirit of love; love for Thee, our kind and only Father, that we may sacrifice ourselves in Thy holy service; love for our profession, that we may see it a high vocation and not merely an ordinary occupation; love for our own sanctification as the chief source of our labors and our apostolate; love of the truth, that we may never deliberately betray it; love for ourselves, whom we are to mold and fashion to truth and goodness; love of our pupils, that we may train them to be exemplary citizens and faithful children of the Church; love for our beloved youths and children, that we may feel toward them a true paternal affection that is more sublime, more deliberate, and more unselfish than that of their natural parents. (1960c, p. 565)

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