

The Three Pillars of Catholic Education

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Introduction

On February 13, 1999, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger visited St. Patrick's Seminary and University in Menlo Park, California. He gave a lecture entitled, "Faith and Culture." Pope St. John Paul II had only back in September of the previous year published his momentous encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. Purposely placing his own remarks under the umbrella of that encyclical, Cardinal Ratzinger used the opportunity at St. Patrick's Seminary to discuss the growing relativism which was even at that time eroding our culture.

He began his lecture by using an example from C. S. Lewis's great work *The Screwtape Letters*. The future Pope remarked:

This book consists of fictional letters from a senior devil who is giving advice on how best to proceed to one beginning in the work of leading men astray. The younger devil has expressed concern to his superior that especially intelligent people, in particular, might read the books of wisdom of the ancients and might thus come upon the track of the truth. Screwtape calms him by pointing out that the "Historical point of View," with which the intellectuals of the Western world have fortunately been inculcated by the devils, means in fact that "when a learned man is presented with any statement in an ancient author, the one question he never asks is whether it

is true. He asks who influenced the ancient writer, and how far the statement is consistent with what he said in other books, and what phase in the writer's development, or in the general history of thought, it illustrates, and how it affected other writers," and so on.¹

The startling truth is that now, almost twenty-five years later, what Cardinal Ratzinger articulated back in 1999 has only crystallized. In almost every area of our culture, the notion of truth has receded due to the acidic encroachment of relativism. As a culture we have given up on any hope of finding truth and instead consigned reality to something that is determined by the individual. We see the extent to which this relativism has taken hold of our culture in the now-famous words of Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."² In this breathtaking statement, Justice Kennedy seemingly makes irrelevant the entire history of Western civilization. The irony, of course, is that it is precisely the course of Western philosophy and thought which has steered the culture in such a direction that it could produce a Supreme Court justice who would articulate such a bewildering statement. For we do not, nor can we, exist in a philosophical vacuum. And such is the great irony of this moment that we occupy—it is on the ash heap of Western civilization that relativists stand attacking the very history which brought them to be there in the first place.

Given this sad reality, we can see Cardinal Ratzinger's criticism from 1999 as a clarion call, and as prophetic in describing what has transpired in the decades since. The complete dominance of relativism in all its forms demands that we return to the primacy of truth. But it is not only unfettered relativism that necessitates this return to truth. The return to the splendor of truth becomes all the more important for us as Christians. As the First Letter of St. Peter makes clear, the Christian is to purify his soul by obedience to the truth (1 Pet 1:22). And in the Gospel of St. John, we are told that Christ is the true Light who enlightens all, and who gives the power to become children of God to those who receive him (John 1:9–11).

In this vein, I would like to present what I believe is the strength of Catholic education and the need to restore a truly Catholic vision. To this end, I believe Cardinal Ratzinger was correct in his forecast of the repercussions of bracketing out truth from our culture. While the broader repercussions of

¹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Faith and Culture," *The Patrician*, February 1999.

² *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

this are too far in scope for this talk, I would like to frame my discussion as a response to bringing truth back into the academic environment, especially in higher education. To do so, I will discuss the goal of a Catholic worldview—that is, the flourishing of the human person. With this established, I will then discuss the three pillars of Catholic education: faith and reason, virtue, and the sacramental principle.

The Catholic Worldview: The Flourishing of the Human Person

From the time of the ancients, the human person has been understood as oriented toward the good. Aristotle believed that authentic happiness occurs when we do what is good for us. And what is good for us as human persons sets us apart from other creatures. But this raises the question: what is the good? For Aristotle, the ultimate good was *eudaimonia*, a life of well-being and flourishing constituted by human goods and activities. This is helpful because it shows that the human person is naturally oriented toward something larger than himself. To use Aristotle's language, the human person has a natural end by which he or she is directed toward the good.³

By the medieval period, St. Thomas Aquinas built off this Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia*, but now grounding it in grace, specifically in *beatitudo*. This is a relational dimension of the human person that reflects on, and partakes in, the goodness, the beauty, and the holiness of God. St. Thomas clearly understood that the human person has as his or her ultimate graced end the beatific vision: divine beatitude, that is, happiness with God, in a word, *beatitudo*.⁴ The relevance of this for our topic of discussion is that *beatitudo* defines the entire expression of a life well lived, of the ultimate good, and, as one might say, of a "graced *eudaimonia*."

For this reason, the Catholic worldview, building from natural reason's insights found in Greek philosophy and advancing into revealed knowledge given through Holy Scripture, is especially interested in developing the human person holistically, with an eye toward that ultimate graced end of happiness with God. Hence, every aspect of Catholic education must be subordinate toward this ultimate end, and every component of Catholic education must have this as its fundamental goal. From this foundation we can now understand the mission of Catholic education: to serve the Church's mission of sanctification and evangelization.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7.1097b28.

⁴ *Summa Theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 2, a. 8.

The Mission of Catholic Education and the Three Pillars: Faith and Reason, Virtue, and the Sacramental Worldview

If the ultimate graced end of the human person is *beatitudo*, then it should not surprise us that the mission of Catholic education is to serve the Church's mission of sanctification and evangelization. The entire point of the Church is to sanctify her members and to bring others into her fold. But, with this understanding of Catholic education, we must reorient our everyday understanding of "success." Typically, many students of higher education assume success in purely worldly terms. Questions asked might be: Will my major get me into a high-powered and high-paying career? Will this program increase my chances of finding the perfect internship? In other words, students often have high academic expectations, but solely as a means to an end—the end being a worldly, and thus material, success. It seems that, in the eyes of most, a university education is nothing more than a high-end vocational school, training for a high-end job.

For any Catholic education, however, academic rigor and high expectations are priorities for their own sake. The Catholic Church, indeed, has provided some of the greatest minds ever to live, from poets and writers to philosophers and theologians, to the greatest physicists and chemists. Intellectual achievement needs to be an important hallmark of any Catholic higher education. Yet, given the Catholic worldview, this very important good must also be subordinated to the larger end of *beatitudo*. The Church, in the final analysis, has as its divine mandate to create saints and to bring people to Christ. For this reason, success for Catholic education is defined by parameters different from those usually understood in the contemporary secular academic world, for it is defined by souls captivated and redeemed by the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The First Pillar: Faith and Reason

While true success for Catholic education is not solely defined by academic rigor, the fact is that knowledge is a key ingredient in achieving that ultimate graced end of *beatitudo*. As St. Thomas Aquinas famously put it, "You cannot love what you do not know."⁵ And so, in the great wisdom of the Church, there has always been an insistence on the roles of both faith and reason. St. Augustine recognized that there can be no opposition between intellectual understanding of God and our own emotive and intuitive appetites.⁶ They

⁵ ST I-II, q. 27, a. 2.

⁶ See, for example, *De civitate Dei* 8.8.

support each other, and the intellectual can help ground our emotions and intuitions in such a way as to give them vital structure.

In many ways, we can see the truly Catholic appreciation of the interplay between faith and reason as a rejection of two mutually exclusive extremes. On one side is the Protestant notion of radical depravity which has its theological roots in Martin Luther yet was also the hallmark of the influential twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth. For Barth, there is an intrinsic correlation between a human person totally depraved and a total reliance upon Christ for any real knowledge. This is seen in his twofold analogy, that of being and that of faith. His quip that the analogy of being—*analogia entis*—is the invention of the anti-Christ shows his tremendous fear for any role of natural knowledge.⁷ On the other hand, his use of the so-called *analogia fidei* is an attempt to bridge a gap between an obvious need for a religious epistemology and a subject of knowing, but remains incapable of finding the human person capable of knowledge without the light of grace. This relegates knowledge of this world to an intolerable place. Does the fall of mankind truly make us incapable of knowing that two plus two equals four? Does not the natural world provide a reality that is at the same time both predictable and successive? It would seem clear that the human person is capable of arriving at some knowledge by his or her own natural faculties, even if it is always limited. Ultimately, this extreme Reformed position represents the error of ignoring any role for reason and the total annihilation of any natural faculties within the human person.

At the other extreme is the error of Pelagianism in its various forms. While Pelagianism comes in different degrees, what unites them all is the basic belief that the human person is by nature capable of justifying himself or herself through natural moral achievements. The corresponding epistemology that fits Pelagianism is a view of the human mind which has no limitations, a pure access to reality as such. Here the light of reason is so exalted that grace almost seems superfluous. One must only remember the unspeakable tragedies perpetrated by the atheistic regimes of the last century to dispel any doubt about the danger of a glorified and triumphant view of human nature untouched by grace. This extreme position espouses a view of reason that is too triumphant, to the detriment and the necessity of faith.

The truly Catholic position threads the needle between these two extremes, taking the truth that each offers and leaving behind what they negate. The light of faith and the light of reason are precisely complementary

⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I/1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 1* (London: T&T Clark, 1975), xiii, 239.

and illuminate each other. Such is the beauty and splendor of truth. Truth is so powerful as a transcendental that the light of both reason and faith illuminate it, but from different modes and in different degrees. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*:

Only in truth does charity shine forth, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith, through which the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity: it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance, and communion. Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. (§3)

What Pope Benedict XVI shows is the cooperation between these two lights working in tandem because they are both at the service of the truth. Therefore, Catholic education must capture this need for cooperation between the two. A truly Catholic institution of higher learning will allow for a mutual penetration of the theological into the other sciences and vice versa, while still keeping their appropriate scientific methods separate. The thriving of both the properly secular and the theological means that both have a seat at the academic table, maintaining the scientific methods appropriate to both.

For example, St. Thomas Aquinas argued that the fact that natural science, mathematics, and metaphysics all share objects of speculation as their *obiectum materiale* does not guarantee that they will arrive at the same conclusions: “The unity of a faculty or habit is to be gauged by its object, not indeed in its material aspect, but as regards the precise formality under which it is an object.”⁸ In this regard, the *obiectum formale* (formal object) must be taken into account, that is, the *obiectum formale quod* (what is focused on) and *obiectum formale quo* (how it is focused on). In terms of the speculative sciences, even though there may be a common material object, the individual sciences are diversified by their particular *formale quo* and *formale quod*, that is, what they focus on and the methodology by which they focus on it. What this shows is that the diversity of sciences is mutually beneficial—the sciences benefit from each other, as long as they avoid the pitfalls of conflation and contradiction. The light of reason and the light of faith make it necessary to respect and utilize all sciences, while upholding their appropriate distinctions.

⁸ *ST*, I, q. 1, a. 3, resp. See also Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986).

The Second Pillar: Virtues and the Natural Law

Following our Catholic worldview of a graced *eudemonia* and realizing the Catholic appreciation for both faith and reason, it is important once again to return to the insights of Aristotle. For Aristotle, human flourishing required a life of developing virtues, creating habits that over time orient the human person toward his end. Here Aristotle is echoing his master, Plato, who taught that only the philosophical soul which has mastered the ethical life could eventually reach the heights of the Forms.⁹ From human reason, it is possible to know that there is a need to develop virtues in order to flourish. Moreover, there is an inherent correlation between the natural law and the development of virtues in the human person. The moral theologian Paul Wadell writes: “The natural law expresses how God has created us so that we can, by carefully attending to the fundamental inclinations of our nature, flourish both individually and communally.”¹⁰

Here the insights of the Angelic Doctor can help us once again. Borrowing from St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas argues that the human person is, by nature, attracted toward the good, and hence the natural law (which is determined by ends, that is, by goods) is the way in which the human person may find fulfillment in God’s eternal plan for salvation (*beatitudo*).¹¹ Given this background, I would like to focus on two specific virtues that I believe are foundational to all—that is, they are the necessary first steps to acquiring the other virtues—namely, humility and chastity. These virtues will also help orient Catholic education back to a graced human flourishing.

THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

Modern society belittles the virtue of humility. We live in a culture that prioritizes selfish ambition over self-sacrifice for the good and love of others. Because of this, humility has become a virtue that is seen as a weakness, as something that will not get you forward in life. And if we are operating from an understanding of success as defined by the world, then this rejection of humility makes complete sense. However, when we understand that true human flourishing is found in developing habits that orient the human person toward his or her ultimate graced end, these worldly values no longer hold the same sway over us. Correctly understood, humility is a virtue based on reality as such, on the way things are. “Humility” comes from the

⁹ See, for example, *Republic* 6.508a–518b.

¹⁰ Paul Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 88.

¹¹ *ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 4, resp.

Latin word *humus*, which means “earth.”¹² Humility means lowliness, as in being close to the earth. But the earth is the ground upon which we walk, so humility is what grounds us so that we can walk successfully through the many vicissitudes of life. Humility means that we realistically account for where we are now and where we are going. It means realistically accepting one’s own limitations and surrendering the need to overvalue or undervalue either the self or others. Humility is essentially, in this context, a recognition of reality and a willingness to embrace our limitations rather than struggle against them.

At the same time, humility is also a Christian virtue—indeed, a quintessential Christian virtue—which in turn is based on the fact that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God. God instills in human nature a desire to seek and respect the basic goals of human existence. Respecting basic human goods means conforming oneself to objective norms that exist as givens in the created order. Here we return to the notion of the natural law. According to these norms, certain human goods must always be respected: life, truth, beauty, love, friendship, and others. Moreover, there are also particular goals that are revealed in personal prayer, which is conversation with God. A humble person approaches God in prayer and asks, “Lord, what do you want me to do? What are you asking of me?” These are the questions every person must ask God if that person is to live out his or her life in a manner befitting an ultimate graced end. In this sense, there is both an objective and a subjective element to humility.

On the objective level, the humble person is governed by those human goals that are essential to everyone in order to flourish, such as love, friendship, sacrifice, and justice. On the subjective level, the humble person presents himself or herself in totality and in honesty before our Lord, who always seeks to bring out more goodness and love from within us. The reality is that persons are made by God to love, praise, and honor him. The virtue of humility is the regular disposition and practice by which a person acknowledges his or her true defects and gifts, and in light of those, submits to God’s will. In other words, a humble person accepts his or her limitations and imperfections and, at the same time, uses his or her gifts and abilities to praise God and to serve him. As St. Augustine is supposed to have said, “humility is the foundation of all other virtues; hence in the soul in which this virtue does not exist, there cannot be any other virtue except in mere

¹² Arthur Devine, “Humility,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910).

appearance.”¹³ And St. Teresa of Ávila is also supposed to have said, “there is more value in a little study of humility and in a single act of it than in all the knowledge of the world.”¹⁴

Hence, from what I have articulated, the truly humble person has three convictions: first, the need to recognize his or her limitations, imperfections, and the reality that all of us are sinners; second, that he or she is made in the image and likeness of God and therefore, despite his or her sins and limitations, also has gifts that are bestowed on him or her by God the Creator; and third, the desire to strive to fulfil God’s personal plan and goals given in prayer. Through the encouragement and engagement of the virtue of humility in Catholic education, the student is given the possibility to grow closer to the person God created him or her to be, which is a person fully alive, fully flourishing in Christ’s grace.

THE VIRTUE OF CHASTITY

Just as the virtue of humility is at best misunderstood in our culture, and at worst outright mocked, so too with the virtue of chastity. In some ways, the virtue of chastity is abhorred the most of all. Part of the reason for this is due to the misunderstanding that chastity is something purely negative, a deprivation, giving up something, namely, the suppression of the sexual appetite. Furthermore, many people assume that chastity is something that primarily applies to young people and unmarried people. In truth, though, chastity is a virtue to be developed and lived in every age and in every state in life.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines chastity as “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being” (§2337). Another way to put it is that chastity is the constant disposition to love another person the way that person ought to be loved, corresponding to the person’s intrinsic human dignity. Hence, already we can see the breakdown of any superficial understanding of chastity as simply abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage. Certainly, observance of this moral norm is absolutely necessary for one to be chaste, but by itself this is insufficient for acquiring the virtue of chastity in its more profound fullness.

The constant disposition to love another person as that person should be loved applies equally to married couples as to those who are not married.

¹³ For an example of Augustine’s beautiful insight into the exalting power of humility, see *De civitate Dei* 14.12.

¹⁴ For Teresa’s conception of humility as the quality of soul most attractive to God, see *Way of Perfection* 16.1–2, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2000).

But an obvious question immediately arises: what is the true meaning of love? Given the distorted and demeaning answers to this question we find all around us, creating enormous confusion in the minds of many people, we have a huge challenge before us. Returning to the insights of St. Thomas Aquinas, the classical definition of love is the giving of oneself to the other *for the good of the other*.¹⁵ Love requires respecting and always affirming the intrinsic dignity of the other and in every way, and never treating the other as a means to an end, as a way of getting some personal benefit, even unconsciously.

Chastity as genuine love (not merely physical attraction) for another person stresses the person's willingness to extend oneself to the utmost limits to do things that are for the good of another person. A necessary characteristic for acting always with this motivation is that one must be selfless. But one also must understand that some acts, such as the marriage act, while they have attractive qualities, work for the good of the other person, including the offspring, only when they are performed in the context of marriage.

Chastity is also obviously central to the vocation of priesthood and religious life. Also in these cases, candidates for these two vocations must healthily integrate their sexuality with their interior life. If this does not occur, the priest, nun or brother will not be able to interact well with other people.

While the vocation to the priesthood and religious life is necessary and important, many young people are called to marriage, and marital chastity is equally central to a couple's happiness and perseverance in their vocation. Given the profound self-giving that is the key ingredient in true love, the human person will simply not find true, deep happiness in life without acquiring the virtue of chastity.

Chastity, then, together with humility (without which chastity—like all other virtues—is impossible) is what enables a person to live beyond a mere superficial, banal existence that ends in a life of boredom and loneliness. Acquiring these two virtues enables one to live a life that is other-centered and open to the transcendent; it enables one to look beyond the surface, beyond the physical, to the other's interior life, and it enables one to live out these deep human goods in very concrete ways, in the body.

Fortunately, teachers have many opportunities in the classroom to emphasize the importance of the education of the entire person—physical, intellectual, emotional, and social, all integrated into the spiritual and interior life of the individual. This is obviously the case in the teaching of

¹⁵ See, for example, *ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 3, resp. and ad 3.

religion, but this topic can be addressed from a number of other perspectives as well in all other areas of education: literature, history, biology, languages, the physical sciences, and so forth. Regardless, a truly Catholic education will incorporate these virtues—indeed all the virtues—as the way in which the human person can flourish and achieve that ultimate graced end.

The Third Pillar: The Sacramental Principle

In 1934, the Swiss philosopher and Jewish convert to Catholicism Max Picard wrote the classic *The Flight from God*.¹⁶ In this insightful work, Picard argues that the perennial crisis of man is, precisely as the title indicates, his flight from God. Even in 1934, Picard could see a new and dangerous religious crisis that was forming. Flight from God had become so all-encompassing, so systematized, that it was beginning to penetrate all forms of daily life. Whereas before, a flight from God would have still been a flight into a culture of faith, even already in Picard's times, he could see that, when man flees from God, the world will flee with man. What in a prior age happened only on the individual level now was happening collectively: the loss of faith and, with it, the loss of the sacred.

Now, almost ninety years later, this crisis as seen by Picard has only intensified. There is a flattening happening to our world. With the receding of truth comes even the inability to tolerate divergent opinions. Our societal instinct has become to flatten out difference, and many times—ironically and tragically—in the very name of diversity.

Nowhere do we see this flattening out more than in the signs and symbols of faith. We have lost the importance of symbols. Yet the human person needs symbols, and, in fact, despite ourselves, we still have a deep intuition of their importance. Rather than dismiss them totally, we pick and choose which symbols are still relevant and which we disregard. As an example, just look at the controversy over flag burning: people on both sides of that debate know that we are not talking simply about a piece of colorful cloth. No self-respecting American, for example, would ever dream of tearing up a flag and use it to wash his car.

No, much more than a piece of colorful cloth, the flag makes present to us all what our nation stands for: its values, its founding principles, and all those who have made it great, especially at the cost of such great sacrifice, most especially the supreme sacrifice of giving their lives to defend our freedom. In fact, I still remember a story I heard on NPR several years ago about the “flag sergeant” in the Civil War. The flag sergeant was the one who had

¹⁶ Max Picard, *The Flight from God* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2015).

the honor of carrying the flag into battle. If he was hit, another would take his place and assume that honor, and at great risk to his own life. No, this is something far more than—in fact, quite different from—the idea of “just a symbol, not reality.” And that is why—have you noticed?—when we recite the Pledge of Allegiance, we pledge our allegiance not only to the republic for which the flag stands, but to the flag itself.

What these examples show is that we have an inherent need for real symbols, understood as a sign which both points to a bigger reality beyond itself and makes that reality present. Indeed, symbols are part and parcel of all cultures. We see that in the etymology of the word “culture,” as it arises from the word “cult”—connected to worship. In an important way, culture is derived from an already-perceived value of worship and the types of cultic practices that have developed from that. And all cultic practices involve the use of symbols to mediate religious belief.

As the philosopher Paul Ricœur has remarked regarding religious symbols, they are not merely “decorative with an emotional value but no informational value.”¹⁷ In other words, symbols are not mere ornamental trappings, but rather convey the content of religious discourse. However, as true as that is about all religious discourse, there is something unique about Christianity, a uniqueness which derives from the mystery of the Incarnation. In the Incarnation, visible and concrete materiality is caught up into the deeply mysterious and invisible reality of God. In the physical person of Jesus of Nazareth, we see not only a Galilean carpenter, but through him, the visible face of the invisible God. And so, this sacramental principle, which can be defined as “the invisible made visible through the physical,” imbues the entire way in which we, as Catholics, view our world, which is why we have always understood that symbols teach more powerfully than words.

A truly Catholic education must hold out the sacramental principle not only as the center of religious sensibility, but also as the center of the understanding of all reality. The human person craves the deep intuitive longing for the spiritual that is communicated in symbols. And nowhere does this longing meet its end more than in the Catholic Faith, a faith intimately correlated to the intrinsic relationship between the physical and spiritual. In the use of the sacramental principle, we see the rejection of a purely material view of reality and, instead, the recognition of the spiritual. In other words, we see both the search for truth and its fulfillment—a truth that moves the mind from the purely passing material reality to the eternity of the spiritual.

¹⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred*, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995), 17.

Concluding Remarks

The influential German theologian Romano Guardini famously quipped that the *logos* must precede the *ethos*.¹⁸ The principle that Guardini was insisting upon was that truth must come before practice. There can be no coherent action without first being cognizant of the truth. In 1987, then-Cardinal Ratzinger captured the importance of this principle in his work *Principles of Catholic Theology*:

If the word “orthopraxis” is pushed to its most radical meaning, it presumes that no truth exists that is antecedent to praxis, but rather that truth can be established only on the basis of correct *praxis*, which has the task of creating meaning out of and in the face of meaninglessness. Theology becomes no more than a guide to action, which, by reflecting on *praxis*, continually develops new modes of praxis.¹⁹

The temptation for a worldview that reverses the order and places praxis prior to truth was a temptation for many liberation theologians who were deeply influenced by Marxism.²⁰ This temptation to bracket out truth from practice is certainly very much a mark of our age. Indeed, I would unambiguously maintain that this reversal of order is destroying our culture and, ultimately, is dehumanizing. The rejection of truth in favor of pure praxis replaces the vital understanding of human flourishing with a purely subjective relativism that has no ability to speak to the inner spiritual yearning that exists in every human soul.

It is precisely because of this momentous societal breakdown that the mission of Catholic education has become paramount. Through reestablishing the three pillars of Catholic education—namely, faith and reason, formation in the virtues, and the sacramental principle—education will be structured in such a way that it can support basic human needs. These pillars encourage students to discover the answers to deep and abiding questions that arise and cannot be answered by a purely materialistic and

¹⁸ See Roland Millare, “The Primacy of Logos over Ethos: The Influence of Romano Guardini on Post-Conciliar Theology,” *Heythrop Journal* 57 (2016): 974–83.

¹⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 318.

²⁰ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation”* (1984), X, no. 3.

worldly perspective. Moreover, these pillars buttress areas of the human person that are crumbling under the dictatorship of relativism.²¹

This is accomplished only because of the wisdom of our Catholic Faith. The Catholic worldview has always prioritized the flourishing of the human person. Here the best of Western civilization is brought to bear upon Sacred Revelation and graced knowledge. In other words, in the Catholic worldview, human reason and its insights into *eudemonia* on the human level find fulfillment in *beatitudo*—the graced beatific vision. For this reason, Catholic education as I have articulated it can be part of the solution to an age that has lost its way. It is true that charting a truly Catholic course in higher education is daunting and there are strong gale force winds against us, but there is no greater challenge and opportunity than this moment. And, with God's grace, we can rise to the occasion.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church was able to rebuild civilization, and to do so in a Christian way. The Church was able to preserve order against disorder, beauty against the ugliness of brutality, and truth against ignorance and error. We are called once again to a similar endeavor in our own age, for we are in the midst of nothing less than a huge civilizational collapse. We, as Catholics, are once again called to rebuild civilization, and to do so in a Christian way. And the good news is that this is something we know we can, with the help of God's grace, accomplish. In fact, ultimately this active remembrance of our shared past is something only the Catholic Church can give to a society and culture that has lost its way. In the final analysis, the Church is humanity's only hope—and Catholic education is on the front lines of bringing that hope to the next generation. Thank you for what you do to make this hope a reality. N.V.

²¹ For the genesis of this apt characterization of our age, see Joseph Ratzinger's homily at the Mass of the Papal Chapel, "Pro eligendo Romano Pontifice," April 18, 2005, https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html.