



John Paul the Great Catholic University

CREATED TO FLOURISH



HUMAN DIGNITY, THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION,
AND RECLAIMING CHRISTIAN FORMATION

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Childhood of Christ, Gerard van Honthorst, ca. 1620.

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Human Dignity, the Right to Education, and Reclaiming Christian Formation

Introduction

Throughout the development of Christian tradition, fulfillment of our human dignity is what we have come to understand as one of our moral purposes. We learn in Genesis that humanity is made in the image and likeness of God, meaning human dignity comes from the Creator and cannot be taken away.¹ As the fathers of the Second Vatican Council firmly stated, one of the rights all Christians are owed in accordance with their dignity is a rigorous formation in the faith. Herein lies the problem: generally speaking, modern Christian education is lacking. This failure of formation can turn our relationship with God into a mere obligation and leave us open to the influences of the secular world. Because of our dignity, we are entitled to Christian formation and education. If this right is not being exercised, it is doing harm to one's relationship with God the Father, sometimes resulting in a total disconnection from God, and leaving opportunity for disordered desires.

Understanding Human Dignity

Our Inalienable Dignity

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him."² God's choice to create us in His image implies an inherent greatness and divinity bestowed upon us at the very moment of conception.³ Therefore, every human is granted a fundamental common human dignity. We need to use this common dignity to pursue the Good.⁴ Natural Law Theory, given to

us by St. Thomas Aquinas, states that God has instilled into us His moral law. By using our human reason, we are able to know what is good and order ourselves towards that good.

This human dignity is owed to every person and doesn't exclude any party or group. Brother Francisco de Vitoria⁵ in the 16th century wrote *De Indis* to defend the rights of the indigenous from the Spaniards. He argues: because we have universal human dignity, everyone has rights by the nature of their souls. Certain fundamental human rights extend to all peoples, regardless of age, even if they are sinners, barbarians, unbelievers, or irrational men.⁶ This dignity to which we are owed is a right placed on our souls that mandates human flourishing.

Human Flourishing

In the document *Dignitatis Humanae* on religious freedom, we are told that man "is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life"⁷ If this is what we are called to do, wouldn't human flourishing be ordering our lives to God's word through our intellect and will?⁸ Because we are built in the image of a perfect and loving God, we aren't meant to survive, scraping by.⁹ Christ teaches us how to flourish by ordering ourselves to the Good through greater virtue. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."¹⁰ The definition of perfect in this case is not what we typically come to know. Matthew uses the Greek word "Teleios",¹¹ meaning in this case something similar to "whole" or complete.¹²

Jesus calls us to imitate him constantly in the Bible

¹ Because we are given free will and made through love we are called to further develop our intellect and will. This is a truth highlighted by the Second Vatican Council in documents like *Lumen Gentium* and *Gravissimum Educationis*.

² Genesis 1:28 New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (used hereafter unless stated otherwise).

³ The Catholic Church teaches that life begins at conception.

⁴ There is a difference between 'good' and 'The Good.' While 'good' refers to positive actions or virtues, 'The Good' (capitalized) refers to God Himself as the ultimate source of goodness. Seeking 'The Good' means aligning our lives with God's character and intentions.

⁵ Justin Panlasigui, "Foreword," in *The Catholic Contributions to the American Intellectual Tradition* (Escondido, CA: American Heritage Charter Schools, 2025). Paragraph 4. A religious brother during the 16th century.

⁶ In Vitoria: Political Writings, edited by Anthony Pagden.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁷ Vatican II Council, *Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Freedom*, Pope Paul VI prom. (Holy See: 1964), 50.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas teaches in his *Summa Theologica* that we are inclined as human beings to use this free will to order ourselves towards The Good.

⁹ If society denies someone this right or denies their dignity, we are blocking that person's ability to exercise their free will.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:48

¹¹ Further from Catholic Answers: "Matthew uses the Greek word teleios, an adjective which defines something as being complete, something which is "whole," "fully grown," "final."

¹² J. Steven Covington, "Be Perfect," Catholic Answers Magazine, September 1, 1999, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/be-perfect>.

as a way to follow Him. In Luke 6:39-40, Jesus tells us that when we are fully trained, we will be like our teacher. It seems as though the act of being fully formed is not something we can accomplish on our own. We must be in communion with our ultimate teacher, God, and allow the Holy Spirit to form and “train” us so that we might be like the Teacher. Ultimately, becoming “teleios” is how we are able to flourish using the full extent of our human dignity.

The Christian Right to Education.

How are we able to come to love or practice something we have no knowledge of? To be fully human, with a fully nurtured soul, requires education. In *Lumen Gentium*, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council unveiled a renewed vision for the laity, explicitly outlining their unique responsibilities. Central to this was a claim that high-quality formation is a birthright owed to every single person.¹³ Furthermore, in *Gravissimum Educationis*, the fathers of the council stated that all Christians have a right to a robust Christian formation.¹⁴

Role and Obligations of the Laity

Within *Lumen Gentium*, we are told that the laity have a very special and important part within the mission of the church; they are called to active participation.¹⁵ The laity, through baptism, are automatically opted into this mission and have a responsibility to fulfill it through the study of theology. In chapter V of *Lumen Gentium*, the council tells us that the study of theology isn't just for those in religious orders but for everyone, and education in theological matters of the faith is an obligation.¹⁶ Furthermore, our parents gave us life, and through that act they have the responsibility to educate and form us¹⁷. Our parents have the duty to educate us in matters of social, Christian, and familial atmosphere.¹⁸ Secular and lay institutions of education are also said by the council to have a responsibility to teach children to judge rightly,

to foster values, to prepare them for professional life, and to engage with their cultural legacy.

The Role of the Lay Educator

The lay teacher isn't just fulfilling a profession; it's a vocation that needs to be praised: “Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties.”¹⁹ The lay educator aids parents in educating their children. The council teaches that the lay educator is more than just a profession; their vocation as an educator is in adhering to bringing others closer to Christ and His mission. In secular schools, the lay teachers have the obligation to help children function in all aspects of the secular world. Furthermore, the lay educator is called to bear witness to Christ in these secular institutions.²⁰

The Church and Christian Institutions in Education

Within the Education of the church and Christian institutions, the Council gives a series of guidelines for these institutions, including the integration of both faith and science, and theology and sacred studies being available. Since the church's mission is linked with young people going to seek higher education, the pastors of the Church should take great care in making connections with secular universities.²¹ The relationship between secular education of the youth and the Catholic Church should be strong in order to spiritually feed the youth and care for their minds as well as their souls. Cooperation in scholastic matters between the church and lay educational institutions must be strong to further the mission of Christ.

Our Disconnect

Now what would happen if somebody were to grow up not knowing anything about their faith? Being educated in our faith enables us to know, love, and understand God. As we have seen, education is not just a right, but also an obligation. By not providing or seeking out this

¹³ In a document like *Gravissimum Educationis*, the council meticulously defines these educational requirements, tracing responsibility from parents, as primary educators, all the way to secular Institutions.

¹⁴ *Gravissimum Educationis*, 2.

¹⁵ Vatican II Council, *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Pope Paul VI prom. (Holy See: 1964), 31. with the text saying, “These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; They in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ.”

¹⁶ Furthermore, from birth, the council states that our parents are our primary educators who have the sole responsibility of introducing us to the faith and the love of Jesus Christ

¹⁷ Vatican II Council, *Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian Education*, Pope Paul VI prom. (Holy See: 1965), 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7. “The Church must be present with her own special affection and help for the great number who are being trained in

schools that are not Catholic. This is possible by the witness of the lives of those who teach and direct them, by the apostolic action of their fellow-students, but especially by the ministry of priests and laymen who give them the doctrine of salvation in a way suited to their age and circumstances and provide spiritual aid in every way the times and conditions allow.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10. “Since the destiny of society and of the Church itself is intimately linked with the progress of young people pursuing higher studies, the pastors of the Church are to expend their energies not only on the spiritual life of students who attend Catholic universities, but, solicitous for the spiritual formation of all their children, they must see to it, after consultations between bishops, that even at universities that are not Catholic there should be associations and university centers under Catholic auspices in which priests, religious and laity, carefully selected and prepared, should give abiding spiritual and intellectual assistance to the youth of the university.”

essential part of human life, we are violating this right to which we are owed, leaving opportunity for a disconnection with God.²²

Love thy Father

Can you come to love and appreciate something you have no knowledge of? Our humanity is deeply rooted in the fact that we are made in God's image and likeness.²³ However, if we are never taught this reality, we begin to look for our worth in all of the wrong places.²⁴ Additionally, religion without a relationship is a heavy burden. It's no longer something we want by our own will; it is something we feel like we have to do, which eventually turns into quiet resentment. Knowing God requires the active work of discovering Him. If our faith were built entirely upon our feelings, nobody would continue to follow God the moment their feelings change. Furthermore, as an adult, if we don't understand the sacrifice of Christ Jesus, we have no criteria to filter the world around us; this inevitably leads us to disordered priorities. Without the gospel to give us a lens through which we view the world, we are more likely to blindly adopt cultural norms.

The Mandate for Formation: Reclaiming Catholic Education

To reclaim and push back against this cultural drift, we cannot remain passive spectators. We need to be able to reclaim our divine perspective. This requires an intentional path forward, a collective mandate for Spiritual formation that begins in the home and extends to the wider Church community.

A child's first educator is their parents. Parents are the very first witnesses to the faith that a child has. Parents cannot give to their families what they have no knowledge of; one must go further than just Mass twice a year or even once a week. Involvement in parishes is integral for the life of the family. This important duty cannot be completely outsourced to the hierarchy of the

Church or Catholic schools. Parents should be intimately involved in Parish education and reinforcing these lessons at the dinner table. When parents actively seek out formation for themselves, they transform the home into a living Sanctuary where faith is not viewed as a chore but as a shared family pursuit. Your children should want to come into the church through the example that you set, not because they are being forced.

Furthermore, Catholic adults must continue to stay deeply intentional about our cultural environments and the institutions we choose to be involved in.²⁵ This daily witness should extend to every professional field. If you're a marketer, you must market with absolute virtue; if you practice law, you must practice with unyielding integrity.²⁶ True evangelization happens when we take our faith into daily careers.

Finally, this reclamation cannot happen by itself; it requires the development of robust, Catholic programs that actively challenge the minds of kids and teens. The church and local parishes should strive to create solid catechism programs and sacramental classes that go beyond reaching the kids through purely emotional means.²⁷

Conclusion

Human dignity is not a theory, and Christian education is not an optional extra. Created in the image and likeness of God, every human soul demands to be formed, taught, and ordered towards the Good. When we settle for surface-level faith, weak catechesis, or total silence from our homes and parishes, we are not just failing a curriculum; we are committing a profound injustice against human dignity. If the faithful are left unformed by Truth, they will be conquered by the world, their connection to the Father will be severed, and they will surrender their desires to cultural chaos. Loving and giving what we don't know isn't possible. It is time for parents to stand as a first witness, for lay adults to transform secular spaces, and for the parishes to offer faith that challenges the intellect as much as it touches the heart. Our salvation requires it, and the next generation cannot live without it.

²² When we neglect this obligation to pass down the faith, we leave the next generation spiritually defenseless. A mind left empty of the truth will not stay empty for long. Instead, it becomes a blank canvas for the secular world to come in and take up space.

²³ Genesis 28

²⁴ Jesus Christ on the cross and his sacrifice becomes merely a historical event rather than something deeply great and the start of salvation.

²⁵ For Catholic adults who teach in secular institutions, this means bringing the heart of Christ to their students not through forced indoctrination or heavy-handed preaching but by being a gentle, undeniable witness through their everyday example.

²⁶ As Professor Joe Szalkiewicz taught me, virtue carries a quiet

beauty that touches coworkers' hearts. Bringing the light of Christ into our ordinary work lives creates the opportunity for that virtue to overflow into the lives of others.

²⁷ We must create environments for kids and teenagers where they are encouraged to ask questions, wrestle with tough apologetics, and deeply study the Theology of the church. By introducing them to the beautiful logic, reason, the depth of Scripture, and the lives of the Saints, we equip them with the durable shield of challenging their minds to ensure that their faith becomes an active living worldview rather than a childhood habit, preparing them to stand firm as confident witnesses for Christ in an increasingly secular world.



Saint John Baptist de La Salle at School, Cesare Mariani, 1888.

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Human Dignity, the Right to Education, and Reclaiming Christian Formation

Full Text. Submitted to Prof. Panlasigui, Aug 2026, in partial fulfillment of HUMA491

Introduction

At the very beginning of Christian tradition, human dignity is what we have come to understand as one of our moral purposes. Sacred Scripture reveals in Genesis that our dignity is made in the image and likeness of God, meaning our worth comes from our Creator and cannot be taken away. Thomas Aquinas takes this principle and develops it further through natural law theory, stating that human beings have a natural inclination towards the good. Later in the 16th century, Brother Francisco de Victoria defended this by arguing that every human person possesses inherent dignity, a truth regardless of your status, intellect, or standing with God.

Having human dignity isn't something passive; it is an active calling to flourish and reach the fullness of what God made us to be. Because we are given free will and made through love we are called to further develop our intellect and will. This is a truth highlighted by the Father of the Second Vatican Council in documents like *Lumen Gentium* and *Gravissimum Educationis*. Here lies the problem: generally speaking, modern Christian education is lacking and simply isn't enough. It either isn't strong or simply isn't being taught. This failure of formation gives way to a dangerous problem of turning our relationship with God into an obligation and leaving us open to the influences of the secular world.

Addressing this problem requires going back: every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. It is through the image and likeness that we are also given our human dignity. Because of our dignity, we are entitled to Christian formation and education. If this right is not being exercised, it is doing harm to one's relationship with God the Father, thus severing the connection and leaving opportunity for desires that are disordered.

Understanding Human Dignity

Our Inalienable Dignity

Every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. This is established in Genesis when God forms Adam, declaring, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him."¹ As the supreme, omniscient Creator, God's choice to create mankind in His image implies an inherent worth and sacredness bestowed upon us at the very moment of conception.² Because we are made in His image with holiness, every human is granted a fundamental and universal human dignity. Humanity must use this gift in fulfillment of The Good.³ In the 13th century, St. Thomas Aquinas systematized Natural Law Theory, integrating Aristotle's framework with Catholic theology. This theory states that God has inscribed into us His moral law.⁴ By using our human reason, human beings are able to discern and recognize what is evil.⁵ "Good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided." All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this.⁶

This universal human dignity is owed to every person without exclusion. Brother Francisco de Vitoria, a Dominican theologian in the 16th century. He was outraged by exploitation of indigenous peoples during Spanish colonization. He wrote *De Indis* to defend the rights of the indigenous. He uses Thomas Aquinas' Natural Law Theory to argue: because we have universal human dignity, everyone has rights by the nature of their souls. Certain fundamental human rights extend to all peoples, regardless of age, even if they are sinners, barbarians, unbelievers, or irrational men.⁷ This dignity to which we are owed is a right placed on our souls that mandates human flourishing.

¹ Genesis 1:28 New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (used hereafter unless stated otherwise).

² The catholic church teaches that life begins at conception.

³ There is a difference between 'good' and 'The Good.' While 'good' refers to positive actions or virtues, 'The Good' (capitalized) refers to God Himself as the ultimate source of goodness. Seeking 'The Good' means aligning our lives with God's character and intentions.

⁴ This can also be referred to as Moral Compass, having an understanding of what is good or bad, or having a conscious.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 94, a. 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1920; New Advent, 2017), <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1094.htm>.

⁶ Ibid., ia. Q94, a2.

⁷ In Vitoria: Political Writings, edited by Anthony Pagden. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

This dignity is an inalienable right placed on our souls that mandates human flourishing. Humans are given the faculties of intellect and will. By using these gifts individuals can order themselves towards the greatness they are destined to achieve: a living reflection of The Creator. Human dignity is the key given to us at our conception to unlock the flourishing of our human souls. This key should be used to order ourselves to the Good.

Human Flourishing

In the document *Dignitatis Humanae* on religious freedom, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council affirms that the human person “is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life”⁸ Consequently, authentic human flourishing consists in aligning one's life with divine truth through the proper exercise of intellect and will. Thomas Aquinas teaches in the *Summa Theologica* that we are inclined as human beings to use this free will to order ourselves towards the Good, the Good being God⁹. Because we are built in the image of a perfect and loving God, we aren't meant to merely survive scraping by; we are meant to thrive through virtue. It is our natural inclination to do so. If society denies someone this right or denies their dignity, we are blocking that person's ability to fully exercise their free will.

If humanity is called to this human flourishing, how do we get there? In the Gospels of the Bible, Christ teaches us how to flourish by being fully formed and by ordering ourselves to the Good through greater virtue. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”¹⁰ The definition of perfect is not what we typically come to know. Matthew uses the Greek word “Teleios”,¹¹ meaning in this case something similar to “whole” or complete.¹² Furthermore, Jesus calls us to imitate him constantly in the Bible as a way to follow Him. He teaches that we must allow the Holy Spirit to guide and shape us.

Jesus tells us in In Luke 6:39-40 that when we are fully trained, we will be like our Teacher. It seems as though the act of being fully formed is not something we can accomplish on our own. We must be in communion with our ultimate Teacher, God, and allow the Holy Spirit to form and “train” us so that we might be

like the Teacher. Ultimately, becoming “teleios” is how we are able to flourish using the full extent of our human dignity.

The Christian Right to Education.

How are we able to come to love or practice something we have no knowledge of? Beyond our natural inclination to what is objectively good, how do we come to practice and flourish if we are first and foremost not being taught or “trained”¹³ in something? To be fully human, with a fully nurtured soul, requires education. The Catholic Church emphasizes this truth during the Second Vatican Council in 1962, a council called to clear cultural confusion and spark spiritual renewal. Throughout the document *Lumen Gentium* the Father of the Council unveiled a renewed vision for the laity, explicitly outlining their unique responsibilities. Central to this was a claim that high-quality formation is a birthright owed to every single person.

In *Gravissimum Educationis*, the council meticulously defines these educational requirements, tracing responsibility from parents, as primary educators, all the way to secular Institutions.

Role and Obligations of the Laity

Within *Lumen Gentium* we are told that the laity have a very special and important part within the mission of the church. They are called to active participation within the mission of Christ, with the text saying, “These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; They in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ”¹⁴ The laity through baptism are automatically opted into this mission and have a responsibility to fulfill it to the best of their ability.

One of the ways the council calls for the laity to fulfill this mission is through the study of theology. In chapter V of *Lumen Gentium* titled “The Universal Call to Holiness,” the council tells us that the study of theology isn't just for those in religious orders but for everyone, and education in theological matters of the faith is an obligation. The laity have a universal right to education, we must use it as our driving point to demand from the Church the knowledge we are owed through our dignity.

⁸ Vatican II Council, *Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Freedom*, Pope Paul VI prom. (Holy See: 1964), 50.

⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:48

¹¹ Further from catholic answers: “Matthew uses the Greek word teleios, an adjective which defines something as being complete, something which is “whole,” “fully grown,” “final.” Teleios may itself be a translation of the Semitic word tamim, which also conveys something which affirmed this truth during the Second Vatican Council in 1962,

a landmark convention convened to clarify has become “whole” and “complete.””

¹² J. Steven Covington, “Be Perfect,” Catholic Answers Magazine, September 1, 1999, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/be-perfect>.

¹³ Luke 6:40

¹⁴ Vatican II Council, *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Pope Paul VI prom. (Holy See: 1964), 31.

This doesn't just go for Christian studies, it goes for all things, including secular education.

From birth, the council states that our parents are our primary educators who have the sole responsibility of introducing us to the faith and the love of Jesus Christ. Our parents gave us life, and through that act they have the responsibility to educate us and form us¹⁵. Our parents have the duty to educate us in matters of the social, Christian, and familial atmosphere¹⁶. In this, the lay people have the blessing of being parents and have this added responsibility to learn in order to teach. To teach a child properly, one must be knowledgeable about what they are teaching them in order to answer questions the child may have. The catechism being taught within the home is infinitely valuable. The Fathers of the Council teach that a child's encounter with the family is important as it is the first encounter with the church and other humans. It is the responsibility of the parent to raise the child in a loving Christian household.¹⁷

Catholic institutions and the church also have a responsibility to aid the parents and provide a good Catholic education. The Church has the responsibility to provide the education of the way to salvation however, we as the laity have the responsibility to seek out that education. Secular and lay institutions of education are also said by the council to have a responsibility to teach children who attend to judge rightly, foster values, prepare them for professional life, and to engage with their cultural legacy. The council even mentions that the state has a duty to education too: "In addition, it is the task of the state to see to it that all citizens are able to come to a suitable share in culture and are properly prepared to exercise their civic duties and rights."¹⁸ All of these factors have a duty and obligation to the education of the lay people.

The Role of the Lay Educator

The lay educator and the lay institutions have an obligation to form the laity in other ways than in Christian ways. The lay teacher isn't just fulfilling a profession; it's a vocation that needs to be praised: "Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties and who, as representatives of the human community, undertake the task of education in schools. This vocation demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and to adapt."¹⁹ Not only do they just teach, but the vocation demands extra work

to be able to provide this care of education to others.

The lay educator aids parents in educating their children and furthers the education of those seeking knowledge of earthly things. The council teaches that the lay educator is more than just a profession; their vocation as an educator is in adhering to bringing others closer to Christ and His mission. They can do this by bearing witness to Christ and his people. The teacher, knowing this, also "recognizes that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world."²⁰

Furthermore, the lay teachers within non-Catholic schools also have an extremely important job within the education of others. In secular schools, the teachers have the obligation to help form the children to receive and function in aspects of the secular world. While Christian studies are important, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council also give importance to these other aspects of the education. They need to be brought up not only with values but must be taught how to be a functioning member of society.

The Church must be present with her own special affection and help for the great number who are being trained in schools that are not Catholic. This is possible by the witness of the lives of those who teach and direct them, by the apostolic action of their fellow-students, but especially by the ministry of priests and laymen who give them the doctrine of salvation in a way suited to their age and circumstances and provide spiritual aid in every way the times and conditions allow.²¹

The church's presence within the schools bears witness to the life of Christ and should not be taken lightly.

The Church and Christian Institutions in Education

Within the Education of the church and Christian institutions, the Council states a series of guidelines for these institutions. The council puts great emphasis on the importance of combining both faith and science, especially within catholic universities. In addition, they state that these institutions or universities should be conveniently placed for the accessibility of the laity. Furthermore,

¹⁵ Vatican II Council, *Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian Education*, Pope Paul VI prom. (Holy See: 1965), 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

theology and sacred studies should be available, recommending a chair of theology even if the program is not present in order to lecture to the laity in a way they understand.

Since the church's mission is linked with the importance of young people going to seek higher education, the pastors of the church should take great care in making connections with secular universities as well as taking care of the education of the youth, stating

Since the destiny of society and of the Church itself is intimately linked with the progress of young people pursuing higher studies, the pastors of the Church are to expend their energies not only on the spiritual life of students who attend Catholic universities, but, solicitous for the spiritual formation of all their children, they must see to it, after consultations between bishops, that even at universities that are not Catholic there should be associations and university centers under Catholic auspices in which priests, religious and laity, carefully selected and prepared, should give abiding spiritual and intellectual assistance to the youth of the university.²²

The relationship between secular education of the youth and the Catholic Church should be strong in order to spiritually feed the youth and care for their mind as well as their souls.

The education of the youth is important to the Church's mission and should be treated with the utmost importance. Furthermore, the interconnectedness between the family unit and education plays a vital role in the catechesis of the family and home life. Within this solidified understanding of the active participation of the laity, the council now more than ever asserts that we, as the People of God, should actively seek education in all aspects of the faith and in scholastic matters.

Our Disconnect

Now what would happen if somebody were to grow up not knowing anything about their faith? Being educated in our faith enables us to know, love, and understand God. As we have seen, education is not just a right, but also an obligation. We're obligated to educate ourselves and those we are responsible for. By not providing or seeking out this essential part of human life, we are violating this right to which we are owed and even leaving opportunity for a disconnection with God. Through this disconnection, it leaves the opportunity for others who

have ill intentions to invade our minds and disorder our moral compasses.

When we neglect this obligation to pass down the faith, we leave the next generation spiritually defenseless. Spiritual education acts as a protective shield for the soul, without it, children grow up in a state of vulnerability. A mind left empty of the truth will not stay empty for long. Instead, it becomes a blank canvas for the secular world to come in and take up space. By failing to provide an essential foundation, parents and Guardians are inadvertently handing over the keys of their child's mind to the culture of our secular world.

Love thy Father

Can you come to love and appreciate something you have no knowledge of? If you have no knowledge of how you obtain salvation, how are you supposed to appreciate and act upon the fulfillment of your human dignity? When you aren't educating others or seeking out the education for yourself, all of the information needed for your salvation is no longer there. You have no idea what it takes or even what it took for Christ Jesus to make the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of our salvation. After all, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for the sake of our salvation.²³ That is a huge sacrifice, and if we aren't acting upon that or pursuing what it truly means, we can never come to know or understand what exactly was done for the sake of the human race.

Our humanity is deeply rooted in the fact that we are made in His image and likeness.²⁴ However, if we are never taught this reality, we begin to look for our worth in all of the wrong places. Jesus Christ on the cross and his sacrifice can become merely a historical event. In John 3:16, we hear about a love that is so profound that it requires the ultimate sacrifice of the Son of God.²⁵ Yet a lack of education can internally reduce this earth-shattering mystery into something hollow. Without the active study and pursuit of what this truly means, we treat the cost of redemption as something cheap while remaining ignorant of the heavy price paid for the salvation of our souls.

Furthermore, religion without a relationship is a heavy burden. If we don't actively pursue a relationship with God, our spiritual lives can become defined merely by obligation. It is no longer something we want by our own will; it is something we feel like we have to do. If we find ourselves just going through the motions, this can eventually turn into a possible quiet resentment towards God. This mechanical routine can turn faith into

²² Ibid., 10.

²³ John 3:16.

²⁴ Genesis 28.

²⁵ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that

everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." John 3:16.

something of a required obligation or punishment rather than a relationship built on love. By going through the motions, our soul begins to tire. This can allow for people to start viewing God as something distant, a tyrant who only gives us restrictions rather than a loving Creator who offers us freedom. This bitterness can grow quietly in the heart while slowly driving a wedge between the Father and us.

We cannot love what we don't know, and knowing God is not merely a matter of emotions. Knowing God requires the active work of discovering Him. If our faith were built entirely upon our feelings, nobody would continue to follow God the moment something feels off, or they feel different. Having a true relationship with God demands that we move past the superficial feelings and dig deeper. Feelings can sometimes be unstable, they change based on our mood, our struggles, and our daily lives. If we only pray when we need to feel inspired or when it feels good just at that moment, our faith is built upon sand ²⁶ that will crumble as soon as we're faced with hardship. True discipleship is when we are thinking of our faith with our intellect, will, and love. It requires that we show up to Mass when we're not feeling okay, praying to God when we feel his absence, and digging deep into Scripture and tradition to discover the character of God.

Furthermore, as an adult, if we don't understand the sacrifice of Christ Jesus, we have no criteria to filter the world around us; we have no idea what lens to look at the world through. This can inevitably lead us to our disordered priorities. When our spiritual education stops, our cultural conditioning can take over. As a result, our views on certain aspects of the church, such as marriage, relationships, personal identity, and other important dogmatic teachings, can become warped against the Church. This means our views could be aligned more with how secular society wants us to view things rather than how God wants us to view things as.

Without the gospel to give us a lens through which we view the world, we are more likely to blindly adopt cultural norms. When that conditioning takes over, begin to view things like marriage as not a lifelong, sacrificial Sacrament ²⁷ reflecting Christ's love for the church, but as a temporary contract based on personal convenience. Our understanding of human identity becomes anchored not in our status as children of God. Leaving us to define ourselves by worldly metrics, trends, and superficial desires. Even crucial dogmatic and moral teachings such as the sacredness of human life and pro-life principles get twisted by a secular society that prioritizes utility over intrinsic God-given dignity. By stopping our education, we allow our minds to be conquered by the world,

thereby completely losing the Divine perspective God intended for our fulfillment.

The Mandate for Formation: Reclaiming Catholic Education

To reclaim and push back against this cultural drift, we cannot remain passive spectators. We need to be able to reclaim our divine perspective. This requires an intentional path forward, a collective mandate for Spiritual formation that begins in the home and extends to the wider Church community. This is not simply a pass of hope but a call to active battle for the minds and souls of the next generation. We must realize that we cannot give what we do not have; if we desire our children to possess an unshakable moral compass, we must first anchor our own. Reversing the type of secular conditioning demands a multi-layered approach that transforms the home, the institutions we trust, and the parish programs we build.

First Witness: The Parents

A child's first educators are their parents. Their parents are the very first witness to the faith a child has. Starting with baptism, parents make a promise to bring up and educate their children in the faith, so a relationship starts with their commitment to this. Parents, cannot give what you don't have; they can't teach what they don't know. So as parents, they are called to not only educate but also grow in a relationship with God so that they can bring that relationship and witness to their children. One must go further than just Mass twice a year or even once a week.

One might get involved in their Parish communities so that they can confidently articulate the truth to the next generation. This important duty cannot be completely outsourced to the church or Catholic schools; while the Church and Catholic schools all have an important part in a responsibility in aiding the parent, education starts from the moment a child is born. Parents should be intimately involved in Parish education and reinforcing these lessons at the dinner table. When parents actively seek out formation for themselves, they transform the home into a living sanctuary where faith is not viewed as a chore but as a shared family pursuit. Children should want to come into the Church through the example that parents set, not because they are being forced.

Uncompromised Influence

Catholic adults must continue to stay deeply intentional about their cultural environments and the institutions

²⁶ Matthew 7:24-27.

²⁷ Genesis 2:18-25, Matthew 19:1-9, Mark 10:2-12, Romans 7:2-3.

they choose to be involved in. As Catholic adults, they must bring their support and presence to institutions, deliberately focusing their time to remain fiercely strong in the faith. However, their duty does not stop at supporting safe havens; we are also called to transform the secular spaces we occupy. For Catholic adults who teach in secular institutions, this means bringing the heart of Christ to their students not through forced indoctrination or heavy-handed preaching but by being a gentle, undeniable witness through their everyday example.

This daily witness should extend to every professional field; true evangelization happens when we take our faith into daily careers. If you're a marketer, you must market with absolute virtue; if you practice law, you must practice with unyielding integrity. Excellent virtue alone possesses a quiet beauty that can touch a coworker's heart. Furthermore, we must not halt devotion when we leave the church doors. Small radical acts of public faith, such as pausing to pray before a meal in a secular lunchroom, served as a powerful quiet testimony to the Church in the modern workplace.

Dedication to the next generation

Finally, this Reclamation cannot happen by itself; it requires the development of robust, intellectually rigorous Catholic programs within the parish that actively challenge the minds of kids and teens. The church and local parishes should strive to create solid catechism programs and sacramental classes that go beyond reaching the kids through purely emotional means. While reaching kids and teenagers through an emotional connection can be a very strong tactic, it's useless when not paired with teaching them what exactly this emotional connection means. For too long, youth ministry has relied on entertainment, emotional highs, and surface-level activities to keep

young people engaged.

But as we have seen, a faith built purely on feelings collapses the moment a young person encounters the intellectual pressure of modern secular culture. Our parishes must pivot away from this form of youth ministry and instead offer formation that respects our youth's intelligence. We must create environments for kids and teenagers where they are encouraged to ask questions, wrestle with tough apologetics, and deeply study the Theology of the Church. By introducing them to the beautiful logic, reason, the depth of Scripture, and the lives of the Saints, we equip them with the durable shield of challenging their minds to ensure that their faith becomes an active living worldview rather than a childhood habit, preparing them to stand firm as confident witnesses for Christ in an increasingly secular world.

Conclusion

Human dignity is not a theory, and Christian education is not an optional extra. Created in the image and likeness of God, every human soul demands to be formed, taught, and ordered towards the Good. When we settle for surface-level faith, weak catechesis, or total silence from our homes and parishes, we are not just failing a curriculum, we are committing a profound injustice against human dignity. A mind left unformed by truth will be conquered by the world, severing our connection to the Father and surrendering our desires to cultural chaos. Loving and giving what we don't know isn't possible. It is time for parents to stand as a first witness, for lay adults to transform secular spaces, and for the parishes to offer faith that challenges the intellect as much as it touches the heart. Our salvation requires it, and the next generation cannot live without it.

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