Foreword

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I SHOULD LIKE to introduce Stratford Caldecott's wonderful and much needed book with an anecdote, followed by a brief survey of the wasteland. A few years ago I was at a book sale, at a local library in Canada. I hadn't found anything I liked, so a young girl came up to me to ask if she could help. She was a worker at the library, and was about to enter the most esteemed college in eastern Canada. 'What are you interested in?' she asked.

That was a hard question for me to answer, since we didn't really speak the same language. I could have said, 'Perceptive works in philosophy and theology,' or 'Great European novels,' but I don't think that would have advanced the conversation. I finally said that I was a college professor, and when she asked me what I taught, I mentioned Dante and the *Divine Comedy.*

'I don't mean any disrespect for your favorite author,' she said, smiling, 'but I've never heard of him.'

I could multiply this anecdote many times over. From what my freshmen now tell me, public schools in the United States have virtually abandoned the study of literature written before 1900, and their neglect of poetry in general is more thoroughgoing still. Some few of them have read perhaps a sonnet by John Donne, typically 'Death, Be Not Proud,' or a piece of the prologue of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Sometimes there's a play by Shakespeare, a *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*, taught, of course, without any reference to the Christian faith that formed the world wherein Shakespeare and his audience found their home. It's not as if their place were taken by the quintessentially American mythographers and poets. Hawthorne rarely makes it into the room; Melville and Longfellow more rarely still. *Huckleberry Finn* has fallen victim to political sensitivities, despite Mark

Twain's heroic championing of the goodness and wisdom of the slave, Jim. Robert Frost is forgotten, even in New England. James Fenimore Cooper is forgotten, even in New York. I am informed by my British colleagues that if I entertain some quaint notion that Wordsworth and Coleridge are remembered in England, I am seriously mistaken.

And yet somehow that neglect isn't the worst of it. When I find out what they do read, I'm struck by what can only be described as a perverse refusal to assign literature of any real beauty. There are the political novels, the exploration of what is ugly and tawdry in the modern world, and books assigned to 'open' the mind by exposing it to a favorite perversion, with a dash of obscenity or pornography to season the dish. The same faults may be found in the forgetting of history, and the turn towards the ephemera of current events; or in the neglect of the logic of language, grammar, for the benefit of self-expression, preferably of the daintily crude variety. I am tempted to conclude that there are only two things wrong with our schools: what they don't teach our children, and what they do.

That is where the criticism of our schools usually begins and ends. I don't wish to deny the validity of that criticism; it is scandalous that children in England will not know who Thomas Becket was, or that children in America will not know what happened at Yorktown. But as Stratford Caldecott so beautifully shows in his much-needed work, we suffer the consequences of a more fundamental error still. We do not know what or how to teach children, because we do not know what a child is, and we do not know what a child is, because we do not know what man is—and Him from whom and for whom man is.

How decisive for the Christian educator, or for any educator of good will, is the revelation that man is made in the image and likeness of the three-Personed God? That is like asking what difference it will make to us if we keep in mind that a human being is made not for the processing of data, but for wisdom; not for the utilitarian satisfaction of appetite, but for love; not for the domination of nature, but for participation in it; not for the autonomy of an isolated self, but for communion. It is no accident that Caldecott has structured his plan for a true education upon the three ways of the Trivium, which themselves reflect the three primary axes of being, revealed by God: of knowing, that is to say giving; of being known, that is to say receiving; and of the loving gift. As Dante puts it:

> O Light that dwell within Thyself alone,
> who alone know Thyself, are known, and smile
> with Love upon the Knowing and the Known!

If we did keep these things in mind, I doubt very much that we would trammel children up in great warehouses, built for the efficient delivery of services of quite dubious value. But more than that, we would desire to bring children into the garden of created being, and thought, and expression. Caldecott reminds us that for the medieval schoolmen, as for Plato, education was essentially musical, an education in the cosmos or lovely order that surrounds us and bears us up. Thus when we teach our youngest children by means of rhymes and songs, we do so not merely because rhymes and songs are actually effective mnemonic devices. We do so because we wish to form their souls by memory: we wish to bring them up as rememberers, as persons, born, as Caldecott points out, in certain localities, among certain people, who bear a certain history, and who claim our love and loyalty.

The memory, too, gives the child both the strength and the armor he needs for what comes next, and that is thought itself—strength to search for truth, and armor against easy and plausible falsehoods. I often hear well-meaning people say that they do not teach children *what* to think, but *how* to think. What they mean is that they reward genuine thought, rather than thoughtless repetition of what the teacher has said. Yet this way of looking at things is wholly inadequate, because it does not originate in truth, nor does it have truth as its ardent aim. Consider an analogy. Suppose an art teacher should say, 'I do not teach my students what to draw, but how to draw.' Yet one cannot proceed one step in drawing without the what. The what and the how are inextricably bound. That is the case too for the relationship between memory and thought. Yes, there are rules of logic, which Caldecott, wise Socratic as he is, duly emphasizes. But he knows also that reason itself is far more than the nominally correct use of deductive rules. It involves the whole mind and its apprehension of the *what* outside: grass, and dogs, and rivers, and justice, and love. So the study of how to think is also a deepening of one's first memories, or one's first encounters with truth. Or we might put it another way, and say that the Son reveals to us the Father, and that the Son does only what He sees the Father do.

Yet what good would all this be to us, if we were to put the lamp under a bushel basket, or retire, guru-like, into the mountains, in calm separation from the lot of our fellow men? Thus Caldecott completes his art of education with Speaking: with the Spirit. He recalls for us the *ruah* or the breath of God, stirring upon the waters of creation; it is that same breath that inspired, literally in-breathed, the apostles at Pentecost. Only then could these very ordinary men go forth, in courage, to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. The Lord who made the mute to speak, made the disciples to preach. The art of rhetoric, the third course of the Trivium, is not for political gain, as the Sophists of ancient Greece once boasted that they could teach young men to sway the democratic assemblies whichever way they would. It is for the attractive showing of truth: it wins for truth with eloquence, and beauty, and the love-born wish to bring others into communion with those who see that truth.

This is an education in reality—the reality of the world, and of persons. It involves, in memory, the child's appropriation of realities; in thinking, the older child's exploration of those realities; in speaking, the youth's sharing of those realities with others, in a community. It is an education that penetrates the heart and the mind with light. After so long a journey into the depths of the drab and the dispirited, it is as if we were beckoned by this wise and happy man to ascend with him at last, and see, once more, the stars.

Introduction

The Need for Foundations

WE LIVE at a time when many parents are trying to take back control of schools and schooling from politicians and bureaucrats who have lost their trust. In Britain, some politicians are willing to give it back to them. New opportunities for school reform, and the creation of Academy schools and Free schools, comparable to American Charter schools, make it possible again to think radically about education. In order to do that, we must make an effort to understand the elements and assumptions that make a good education possible.

In the United States, the public school system has long been a cultural disaster. Hope lies largely with the homeschooling movement, and with attempts to revive classical education, both at home and in a growing number of schools and small liberal arts colleges. But there is a need to look more closely at the philosophy that underlies these movements.

Ideas have consequences.[1] They shape our society, our economy, our very lives. The gravest threat our civilization faces is in fact not ecological but philosophical. It is the widespread belief that there is no objective truth and no 'true' way of considering the world and its history, only a plurality of subjective points of view, each point of view being of equal value and deserving equal respect. Of course, there are also limits to the views that can be given respect, and these limits are supposed to exclude any perspective that might give rise to violent behavior (such as Nazism or Islamism). Ironically, since our society has given up the notion of objective truth, these undesirable opinions cannot be engaged rationally. Instead they must simply be suppressed, with more or less subtle violence—violence that often feeds the grievances of the suppressed community.

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[1] This is the title of a well-known book by Richard Weaver that has had a great influence on the conservative movement in America.

This book asserts that we need truth. We need a philosophy that can guide us as we found new schools, or enrich and improve existing schools, or attempt to design a curriculum for teaching our children at home. Our curricula have become fragmented and incoherent because we have lost any sense of how all knowledge fits together. Students graduate with some knowledge of, say, the Tudors or the Second World War, Romantic poetry or astrophysics, without any awareness of other historical periods or the classical origins of our civilization. It is as though we were attempting to construct the top floor of a building without bothering with the lower floors or foundations. And most importantly of all, if education is to be effective it needs to be based on knowledge about the nature and purpose of human life—a true, or at least adequate, 'anthropology.' This knowledge is what the modern relativist thinks impossible. But religious believers hold that the truth has been revealed, even if our grasp of it remains limited and unreliable. I write from within the Catholic tradition, according to which Jesus Christ reveals us to ourselves (to borrow an expression from Vatican II) and shows us that love is the true meaning of the world.

In love we see the beauty that moves the sun and stars, the beauty that draws together all the sciences and arts of man into a whole vision of reality. This is the beauty of Wisdom, 'more moving than any motion,' the 'brightness of the everlasting light.'[2] It is the love of Wisdom that inspires a Catholic philosophy of education.

An Education in Freedom

The kind of education we want is one that fits us to know the truth that will set us free. 'All human beings by nature stretch themselves out toward knowing,' said Aristotle.[3] All human beings desire to know the truth, to know reality. There are many who wish to deceive others, but few who want to be deceived (and therefore enslaved).

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[2] Wisdom 7:24–6, KJV. See Endnote 8 for more about Wisdom.

[3] The first line of the Metaphysics, from *Aristotle's Metaphysics*.

Ideally, Catholicism fulfils and brings to perfection the natural educational process, which is the transmission in creative freedom of a cultural tradition to our children. Whether Catholic or not, the particular educational tradition to which the readers of this book will be assumed to belong is that of European civilization. This is associated with what have been termed the 'liberal arts.' The liberal arts are a golden thread that comes from the Greeks, from Pythagoras and his successors both Islamic and Christian, especially St Augustine; a thread that weaves its way through the history of our civilization. These arts were intended for the cultivation of freedom and the raising of our humanity to its highest possible level.

In ancient times, the liberal arts were reserved for an elite—an elite of men, that is, excluding women, and of free men only, excluding slaves. Today, in democratic societies, all men and women participate together in ruling our society, even if only by electing representatives to do so, and the education that used to be reserved to aristocrats is now a necessary qualification for everyone. If we are all to rule, we all need to become wise, and the key to wisdom is to understand the unity or interrelationship of all human knowledge, which is where the liberal arts come in.

The liberal arts were sevenfold, and the first three, the *Trivium* ('place where three roads meet'), on which this book is focused, were about the use of *verbal symbols* to think and communicate. These arts consisted in Grammar, Dialectic (also called Logic), and Rhetoric. According to Hugh of Saint Victor, summarizing this tradition in the high Middle Ages, 'Grammar is the knowledge of how to speak without error; dialectic is clear-sighted argument which separates the true from the false; rhetoric is the discipline of persuading to every suitable thing.'[4] The second group, the 'meeting of four ways' or *Quadrivium*, was about the use of mathematical symbols in Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy.[5]

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[4] *The* Didascalicon *of Hugh of Saint Victor*, 82.

[5] See Endnote 1 for a summary of the history of the liberal arts.

The first three, the arts of language, have been neglected in recent years in our thinking about education and the core curriculum. In this book I am interested less in the historical realization of this ideal in the Middle Ages—which was always far from perfect—than in the inspiration that lay behind it. I want to derive inspiration from the liberal arts for our present. That is the reason you will find the chapter on Grammar headed 'Remembering,' the one on Dialectic headed 'Thinking,' and the one on Rhetoric headed 'Speaking.' I wanted to emphasize the fact that we are discussing the fundamental skills of humanity itself. So under 'Remembering' I reflect on the birth of language and how Being reveals itself in speech. Under 'Thinking' I am concerned more precisely with the use of language to reveal *what is true* and what is not, and the question of how we know which is which. Under 'Speaking' I look at how we *communicate* what we know to others within a moral community of free persons.

We need also to pay some attention to the visual and other arts, not to mention history and the study of nature, which are often overlooked in the 'Great Books' approach to Classical Education but which certainly belong integrally to a rounded curriculum. The seven liberal arts were in any case never intended to constitute the whole of education. They were embedded in a broader tradition of *paideia* or human formation, which included 'gymnastics' for the education of the body and 'music' for the education of the soul (terms that have changed and narrowed in meaning over the centuries). The arts were intended to prepare the ground for the attainment of wisdom and truth in philosophy and theology. The full range of subjects studied would include practical skills associated with the arts and crafts (*techne*) through to the highest reaches of wisdom (*sophia*). Today, those skills and associated abilities would include a facility with machines and computers. The ability to think critically and for oneself is a part of this tradition, but not in separation from the moral virtues. Conceptual and dialectical thought is not the highest activity of man, but gives way before contemplation and the development of the spirit through love.

I have already written in *Beauty for Truth's Sake* about the 'disenchantment' of the world that took place in modern times. We have *educated ourselves to believe* that meaning and purpose, if they exist at all, are not given by a Creator or divine source but are invented and imposed upon the world by man. If, as a society, we agree on certain values it must be because we have negotiated such agreement through the procedures of Market or State, not because we have submitted ourselves to an objective truth. I wrote in that book of the need to recover a 'poetic' way of knowing the meaning of things by reforging the connection between self and world. The self is not a separate substance, condemned only to observe the world from a distance, but can understand it from the inside by a kind of imaginative sympathy, learning to read (no doubt at first naively) the language of nature.

But what kind of education would enable a child to progress in the rational understanding of the world without losing his poetic and artistic appreciation of it? This is what I am searching for in the present book. Inadequate though my answers may be, I know the questions are valid. Rationality and poetry, science and art, need not be opposed. After all, we owe scientific breakthroughs as much to great acts of imagination as to feats of observation or calculation (one thinks of Einstein trying to picture running alongside a beam of light, or comparing in his mind's eye the experience of being in a falling lift or elevator with that of floating freely in space, on the basis of which he developed the special and general theories of relativity). It must be possible to use this intrinsic connection between reason and imagination to overcome the alienation between the humanities and sciences.

The central idea of the present book is very simple. It is that education is not primarily about the acquisition of information. It is not even about the acquisition of 'skills' in the conventional sense, to equip us for particular roles in society. It is about how we become more human (and therefore more free, in the truest sense of that word). This is a broader and a deeper question, but no less practical. Too often we have not been educating our humanity. We have been educating ourselves for *doing* rather than for *being*. We live in an excessively activist civilization, in which contemplation and interiority are often despised and suppressed in favor of mere action and reaction. The task before us is not only to renew the foundations of education, but to rediscover our own relationship to Being (the secret of childhood), and our place in a cosmos that is *beautiful in the Word*.

The Specific Mission of a Catholic School

It will be obvious that this book is addressed partly, though not exclusively, to Roman Catholics. In an address to the Bishops of the United Kingdom during his visit in September 2010, as in many other speeches in other Western countries, Benedict XVI reiterated the Church's call for a New Evangelization, meaning the 'urgent need to proclaim the Gospel afresh in a highly secularized environment.' This has implications for education, for, as the Church often repeats, a *Catholic school is by its nature a place of evangelization*. 'The mission of the Church is to evangelize, for the interior transformation and the renewal of humanity. For young people, the school is one of the ways for this evangelization to take place.'[6]

Such remarks might cause trepidation, in a world perceived as full of rampaging religious fanatics. Are our schools to be training grounds for holy warriors? Not at all. The 'New Evangelization' is not about making converts at the point of the sword. In an interview given to journalists on his way to Scotland in September 2010, Pope Benedict XVI stressed that the duty to evangelize did not even mean that we must be particularly concerned with numbers, or with struggling to act in such a way that more people will convert. For:

> One might say that a church which seeks above all to be attractive would already be on the wrong path, because the Church does not work for herself, does not work to increase

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[6] Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 33, 66. A subsequent document by the Congregation, 'The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium' (1997), reiterated this point in the light of the growing 'crisis of values which, in highly developed societies in particular, assumes the form, often exalted by the media, of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism' (section 1). All the Congregation's documents are freely available at *www.vatican.va* (the Vatican website).

> her numbers so as to have more power. The Church is at the service of Another; she does not serve herself, seeking to be a strong body, but strives to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ accessible, the great truths, the great powers of love and of reconciliation that appeared in this figure and that come always from the presence of Jesus Christ. In this sense, the Church does not seek to be attractive, but rather to make herself transparent for Jesus Christ. And in the measure in which the Church is not for herself, as a strong and powerful body in the world that wishes to have power, but simply is herself the voice of Another, she becomes truly transparent to the great figure of Jesus Christ and the great truths that he has brought to humanity, the power of love; it is then when the Church is heard and accepted. She should not consider herself, but assist in considering the Other, and should herself see and speak of the Other and for the Other.[7]

The mission to evangelize does not imply, either, that we who happen to be Catholics believe ourselves to be saved by virtue of our membership in the Church, while all others are destined for hellfire unless they repent and join us. Such misconceptions have been laid to rest by the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Others may not be saved by their own religions; but they can be saved *within* them, by virtue of the grace of Christ that is made available to everyone who does not deliberately reject it—the 'true light that enlightens every man' (John 1:9). Nevertheless, as a believer, I want to share the fullness of God's self-revelation with everyone. In that sense I do want to make converts, not for the sake of numbers, but to draw others towards Christ in the Church. I should like everyone to have the benefit of God's intimate presence in the sacraments.[8] Evangelization is part of the mission of a Catholic, and part of the mission of a Catholic school—provided we understand that we must constantly evangelize ourselves first, turning ourselves back to the true service of Christ.

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[7] Interview with journalists during Apostolic Visit to the United Kingdom, 16 September 2010, translation from *www.vatican.va* (slightly edited).

[8] Even if, to our shame, having this benefit has not made us noticeably better than our neighbors. Perhaps we should admit the fact that the closer we come to Christ, or he to us (and in the Eucharist he comes as close as he can),

In fact, before his election as Pope, in 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger gave a wonderful discourse on the principles and methods of the New Evangelization to catechists and religion teachers.[9] In it he began: 'Our life is an open question, an incomplete project, still to be brought to fruition and realized. Each man's fundamental question is: How will this be realized—becoming man? How does one learn the art of living? Which is the path toward happiness?' And he continued: 'To evangelize means: to show this path—to teach the art of living. . . . But this art is not the object of a science—this art can only be communicated by [one] who has life—he who is the Gospel personified.'

The news of the Incarnation is not some piece of information that, once communicated, can be filed away, and which changes nothing. If true, it changes everything. It reveals the meaning and purpose of life, and this releases the floodgates of human creativity. And yet the beginning and end of the Christian life is not evangelization but love, as Benedict XVI taught in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. Love is the beginning and end of education, because love is the way we become more human. This is why a 'Catholic identity' poses no threat to human freedom, and why on the contrary it offers greater possibilities for human flourishing even to non-believers.

The 'Catholicism' in a Catholic school cannot simply be added on to an existing curriculum or atmosphere. Precisely because a

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the more graces we may obtain, but also the more dangers and temptations beset us—including the temptation to self-righteousness, which is a form of pride, the sin of sins. We can become saints; but we may also become veritable devils if we are not extremely careful. There is no way back. Once embarked on the narrow way to God's house, we cannot turn or wander off the track as we could when we lived in the pleasant meadows of ignorance. If that sounds harsh and difficult, it is also exciting and consoling. For God is close, and that is what creates both the danger and the promise. 'He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death' (Rev. 2:11).

[9] 12 December 2000, *www.ewtn.com/new_evangelization/Ratzinger.htm* (accessed 30 July 2011).

religious faith affects everything, even changing the way we view the cosmos, it cannot be compartmentalized. (This is why faith seems so dangerous to some non-believers.) Revelation subtly alters the way every subject is taught as well as the relationships between them. What is revealed connects them severally and together to our own destiny, to the desire of our hearts for union with infinite truth. At that point, *everything* becomes interesting. There are no 'boring' subjects—nothing can be ugly or pointless unless we make it so, turning our backs on the Giver of Being.

The Heart of the Book

So what is this book trying to say, and why are the chapters on Grammar, Dialectic, and Rhetoric at its heart? To those who have been cut off and feel some sense of alienation from the great tradition and community of our civilization, the book is trying to say:

Be!
(Grammar)

Think! **Speak!**
(Dialectic) (Rhetoric)

The Trinitarian structure is intentional. It may help to keep it in mind as you progress through the book. The following notes on this structure will probably make more sense when you reach the end.

An education for freedom (a 'liberal' education) is underpinned by a Trinitarian theology as follows.

In order to *Be* we must remember our origin and end, the grammar of our existence. This is the beginning of all communication—communication from God, who loves us before we love him. We come from the Father.

In discovering the Father we become *thinkers*, we awaken thought in ourselves, which is the following of the light of truth, walking with the Son, the Logos incarnate, leading to the face-to-face knowledge of the Father that only the Son possesses, and those with whom he shares it.

The sharing is done through the Spirit, the *Ruah* or breath of the Father that carries the Word. The breath is the atmosphere, the conversation, the kiss by which the two are united in giving and receiving. It is the way we follow ('The wind blows where it wills, . . . so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit,' John 3: 8). 'Communication' is closely related to 'communion.' The Spirit is the Rhetoric of God.

These are the theological foundations of this approach, expressed as succinctly as possible. But of course we are not aiming at an education that will exclude all but theologians and believers. The theology helps us understand our humanity, including our needs and desires; the purpose of education is to enable that humanity to grow and flourish. The first chapter will make that clearer by focusing our attention on the heart of the school, and the relationship of pupil and teacher.

A Key to the Book: Eight Threes

Mythos	*Logos*	*Ethos*
Grammar	Dialectic	Rhetoric
Remembering	Thinking	Speaking
Music/dance	Visual arts	Drama
One	True	Good
True	Good	Beautiful
Given	Received	Shared
Father	Son	Spirit