

Nascantur in Admiracione (Let them be born in wonder)

"Know, Sancho, I was born in this Iron Age to restore the age of Gold." - Don Quixote

Education cannot be bought or sold. The beginning of the Republic of Plato shows this, where the students of Socrates kidnap him and try to force him to teach. Socrates enjoys the joke, because his students have grasped this elementary truth.

Education is rather like one's heart, liberal learning must be given away, all learners must give themselves to the service of the truth. A teacher is not a huckster of whatever the public thinks it wants; nor is he in the business of creating desires for his "product."

An academic gown used to have a large pocket in the back which the teacher could not access. It was called the eleemosynary pocket, from the Latin word for almsgiving. That is, the teacher in the Middle Ages would be outside the classroom and his students would place alms in the pocket, great or small, and he would not know which gave him what. There is a reason academic gowns no longer have that pocket in them.

St. Lawrence the martyr was once demanded by the pagans to yield, to give up the treasures of the Church. He pointed to his congregation made up of the poor, the blind, the lame, the sick and the destitute, and said, "Behold, the poor!" Among the poor today are students in most schools, and especially undergraduates at big universities. They have everything that money can buy but almost nothing that money cannot buy.

Why go to the university at all? Why read the great books? Why read what Matthew Arnold called "The best that has been thought and said?" Certainly not to learn the convictions of the teachers. St. Augustine once asked, "Who would be so stupidly curious as to send his son to school in order that he may learn what the teacher thinks?"

What Plato says is far more important than what we say of him, but it is not the point of education to learn even the convictions of Plato. The greatest of Plato's students, Aristotle, declared that as much as he loved his teacher, he loved the truth still more.

I can't remember who said this, I think it is from Jacques Barzun, but the quote is this: "The teacher, of course, must have authority over the student before he can be respected in the way the student wants to respect him. But authority comes naturally with knowledge that is lucid as the liberal arts make knowledge lucid. the teacher who is not a liberal artist may indoctrinate or charm, but he will not teach. Indoctrination makes the teacher's thought prevail, but teaching is less a matter of what either the teacher or the student thinks than of what the mind itself, the third person, decides and says."

Why read the Great Books? Western Civilization – which is the only civilization that has ever existed – has made a judgment on these. Not to know Plato and Homer and Virgil and Caesar and the Bible is simply to be uneducated. Merely to know *about* them is comparable to knowing about food without actually eating any. I'm sure that if paleontologists dig up the ruins of K.U. and find the strata from the 70's, they will conclude that there was an author called Cliff who wrote everything. Piles of Cliff Notes will be discovered and papers will be written as to the true identity of Cliff.

To know the Great Books in fragments is to be fragmentarily educated. It is worth repeating however, that the knowledge of books is not the aim of education. One of my professors, Dr. Dennis Quinn, heard a student say something about what a professor in another class said, and he responded "Oh he read that in a book somewhere." No. The aim of education is the truth, an understanding of the permanent things, the things which every person encounters in life.

To be a student is to be alive to intelligence, and the beginning of such a life is wonder. In our day wonder has been so cheapened by sensationalism and so crippled by skepticism that the student in high school say, instead of being born in wonder, instead of being newly awakened to the excitement of learning, is often instead like one who has never been born. To such a young person learning is so much drudgery and routine, alien to his real interests, remote from reality itself. His science classes are largely answers to questions which he has never asked.

To revive wonder is the task of education, especially Catholic education in our times. I speak of an elementary approach, and elemental series of courses, where one discovers the love of wisdom; a course for beginners, who look upon the primary things of the world, as it were, for the first time. This can be accomplished in homeschooling.

All of this kind of thought is derided as Quixotic. The student who declares that he wants to study literature is immediately asked, "How are you going to make money on that?" Don Quixote has been both ridiculed and admired because he lived the chivalrous life when it was out of fashion. Note – he did not just talk about chivalry. He did it. As he took knight-errantry seriously, so I make this afternoon a plea to take Don Quixote seriously.

Cervantes great character was a kind of patron saint of a program of studies I had the great fortune to take when I was a student at the University of Kansas in the 70's. It was called the Pearson Integrated Humanities Program. Some of you have heard of it, and may have wondered why there were so many converts to the Catholic Faith which came out of it; why so many vocations to the priestly and religious life, why so many good marriages and families, given that the Faith was never taught explicitly in the classroom. But the soil was well prepared for the seed of the Word of God.

I'd like to cover briefly some of the reasons this soil was prepared. First, understand that the Program was an attempt – and a very successful one at that – to teach by the muses, whom the ancient Greeks thought were the sources of knowledge. There were nine of them, and their connection to the act of wonder is deep. As Plato once wrote, "Shall we begin then, with the acknowledgment that education is first given through Apollo and the Muses?"

First is Calliope, the Muse of Epic Poetry. So in the program we read quite a few epic poems, beginning with the Iliad of Homer. But we read it and all the other books not with analysis, not placing the work on the table as if it were a dead thing soaked in the formaldehyde of skepticism and modern criticism, but with wonder. Wondering like the Greeks did when the first saw the walls of Troy, which Homer says were built by the gods. Wondering about anything which exceeds human ability prepares the soil for the forgiveness of God

Second is Clio, the muse of history. We read the Persian Wars by Herodotus. And he said that history was a record of the deeds of great men, and that those deeds had a purpose. We heard these deeds and wondered if we could do something great, and what it would take to do something great. And knowing that things had a purpose prepared the soil for the idea of the true Promised Land, the New Jerusalem.

Third is Euterpe, the muse of song and elegiac poetry. All our classes began with a song. We sang *Flow Gently Sweet Afton*, or *Home on the Range*, or *The Minstral Boy*. We memorized Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, and recited it in a cemetery, alone, since the first strophe is:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness, and to me.

It changes a man's soul to recite that poem in the evening, in a churchyard. This prepared the soil for the great book of Ecclesiastes, and for the Latin Requiem Mass.

The fourth is Erato, the Muse of lyric poetry. We memorized *The Destruction of Sennacharib* by Byron;

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold,
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

As good as Byron is, the lyric poetry of the Our Father is greater, especially in the traditional translation.

The fifth is Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy, and we read with gusto the Song of Roland. The song was sung by Tallifuer the Jongluer, as Duke William marched against the Saxon shield wall at Hastings. As G.K. Chesterton wrote about that great Medieval *chanson de geste*, "It is well to note, in the real Norman story, that the very bard in front of their battle line was shouting the glorification of failure. It testifies to a truth in the very heart of Christendom that even the court poet of William the Conqueror was celebrating Roland the Conquered. This prepared the soil for understanding the failure of the Cross; which is a folly to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews.

The sixth Muse is Polyhymnia, the Muse of hymns. We sang the Navy Hymn:

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

St. Paul told us that if we wanted to follow the Lord, we should sing Psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles. We were prepared for this in the singing we did.

The seventh Muse is Terpsichore, the Muse of Dance. Dancing, real dancing, orders the soul by ordering the movement of the body, thus tuning and elevating the whole person to that order which may be seen in the stars. We used the waltz. This prepared us to many things.

Gymnastic (radical separation), Poetic, Gentleman, Lady, seeking to put the other at their ease (Newman), Modesty, Chastity

The eighth Muse is Thalia, the Muse of Comedy. There was much laughter in the program, an abundance of it really. We read and discussed Ivanhoe, by Sir Walter Scott. The comedy we prepared us for belief in the Resurrection.

And the ninth Muse is of course Urania, so we went out and gazed at the stars, and learned the names of the constellations. An ancient philosopher once said to look at the stars is to become a lover of wisdom. This prepared us to understand the great hymn which the angels sang at the Nativity, which we call the Gloria. For Sacred Scripture says that the heavens declare the glory of God.

We were also required to listen to the three professors of the program, I mean really listen. We were forbidden to take notes during the lectures, since taking notes is not listening, it is recording, which is different. The professors thought that our ability to listen had been damaged, and needed to recover, and they were right.

When we wrote assignments, we used calligraphy. Compare calligraphy to computer generated print. Calligraphy, which means beautiful writing literally in the Greek, is not difficult to learn, requires no artistic talent, and be learned by very young children. Typing is unbeautiful writing, impoverished, starved writing. In typing on the computer, all that is beautiful is sacrificed for sheer mechanical utility. In the modern scribble now tolerated in school, both utility and beauty are sacrificed for debased ideas of "self-expression" and "freedom," which are really merely confused with disorder.

Calligraphy is rich; there is about it an overplus. To do it, one must submit to its rules and its order. Do so, and one participates in the true freedom of all things loved for their own sake, and one's true personality emerges.

Doing poetry is Quixotic – memorizing it, reciting it; being mannerly and waltzing are Quixotic, taking sides. Words like truth and faith and honor and love and courtesy and courtship and decency and simplicity and modesty are Quixotic. And the realities for which those words stand are, in the Iron Age, so Quixotic as to be positively despised by the sophisticated. I assert that such realities are not sentimental "impossible dream," no crazy anachronism, but rather the objects of an entirely possible dream which is the paradigm of sanity.

And there is not a single thing we did in that great program, that you cannot do in homeschooling. May your children be born in wonder.