INTRODUCTION: EDUCATION

The Summer 2025 issue of Communio is dedicated to "Education." Many of its essays are the maturation of insights first presented at a conference at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at The Catholic University of America during the fall of 2024, with the theme, "The Rediscovery of Reality: Education and the Catholic Imagination." Prominent among the many questions considered by our authors are the importance of the "transcendent horizon" within which genuine education must take place, the relationship between the teacher and the student, the self-disclosure of being to the intellect through tangible and incarnate realities, and the maturation toward truth and freedom that education facilitates.

In "*Quaerere Deum*: What Is Education and Why Is It Catholic?," **Michael Hanby** invites us to consider a the crisis in contemporary Catholic education as a particular reflection of a crisis in education broadly: the exclusion of a transcendent horizon capable of encompassing all of the human questions studied by the various disciplines in such a way that these disciplines are viewed in light of and pursued for the sake of a unified end of human existence. Catholic education in the United States experiences this crisis in a subtle way, and the effects of the crisis are in a way more problematic because less immediately perceived. While the exclusion of the question of God in secular education is overt and unapologetic, even celebrated, promoting an understanding of God as an irrational intrusion into the life of study, Catholic schools run the risk of unintentionally encouraging the

same mindset, to the extent that they structure their curricula along secular lines and add in "religion" as their contribution to forming the faith lives of their students. The difficulty of connecting the students' theological studies in an intrinsic way to their other subjects, to say nothing of the task of conveying a thoroughly Catholic "culture" within an overarching worldview, is no doubt enormous given the secularization of the culture broadly. Yet as Hanby demonstrates, this difficulty is not simply due to the destructive power of secularization from the outside culture, but is itself the offshoot of a "tension" present from the beginning of the Catholic school system in America, given its dual mission both to inculcate children in a faith that was distinctively Catholic while at the same time helping them assimilate into a broader culture that was suspicious of Catholicism. None of this is meant, Hanby insists, to denigrate the good work that Catholic schools have done in America, or to belittle the magnitude of the accomplishment of establishing the parochial school system in the first place. Nevertheless, if Catholic education is to be truly Catholic, it must rethink not simply the adjective, but the noun: what is education itself? Recalling the foundational Allegory of the Cave, Hanby describes education as a conversion, a liberation, that frees us to think in accord with what is true. It is "a strenuous ascent from an immanent realm of images, shadows, and falsehoods to the transcendent realm of the Good, from whose vantage it is possible to judge the things of this world—including one's former thoughts—for what they are." Education presupposes, in other words, that reality does in fact present itself to the intellect and will under the aspects of the good, the true, and the beautiful, moving the person not externally but from within. It requires and fosters the virtue of trust within the student: trust in the goodness of the gift of reality and in the insight of one's teacher, whose instruction can be compelling to the extent that the teacher is himself compelled by the truth that precedes and transcends him. Because education is an introduction into reality, it matters profoundly that reality is "creation," that is, the work of a good, loving, and supremely free God, who is utterly transcendent to reality precisely because he is at the same time perfectly immanent to it. If reality is created by such a God, everything is "bottomless," and the task of education—introducing students to reality—is infinite.

Genuine education unfolds within the fact that we are by nature relational beings. In "Educating the Human Person: A Theological Presupposition," **Antonio López** describes education as the introduction of the person to the whole of reality. Such a view clearly runs counter to the prevailing understanding of education today, an understanding that in turn reflects and perpetuates the modern tendency toward fragmentation and a secularization. To counter the modern worldview with its impoverished understanding of education as the acquisition of information or skills, López proposes to explore the "twofold theological presupposition" that makes true education possible, namely, education's "theological horizon" and the "mystery" of the personal nature of the one whom education forms. This means, regarding the first component, that reality is not mere malleable facticity, but rather *creation*, in other words, that it originates from and is sustained in existence by God. A "theological horizon" means precisely that the world is in its entirety encompassed and defined by its Creator, who is transcendently present to all of its parts no matter which way one turns. It means that the Creator's splendor shines upon and through reality such that it inherently reveals its Creator with its participatory goodness, truth, and beauty; and it means, moreover, that this revelation is the very reason it was brought into being in the first place. With this step, López brings us to see the logic of God creating personal creatures such as us: the intrinsic intelligibility, goodness, and beauty of being call for spiritual creatures who can understand, love, and stand in wonder before it. This is man's chief task, just as it is the chief task of education to make man capable of it. In this, we are not mere spectators to whom the rest of creation remains indifferent. Rather, being's intelligibility is *fulfilled* in our understanding; its goodness, in our loving; its beauty, in our reverencing. Such is the "dominion" given to us by God in Genesis, which in essence means, according to López, that we "allow reality to bear the fruit it contains within itself but cannot yield without man's collaboration," that is, without the "work" of personal creatures whose participatory activity receptively welcomes the creative activity of the tri-personal God. Not only does this characterize our activity towards the rest of creation, but—perhaps even more so—it orders human activity with regard to ourselves. In this respect López says beautifully: "Education is the continuation in

time of the mystery of our own birth," and just as our own birth is an interpersonal, relational event, so too with education. Any adequate treatment of education, therefore, cannot bypass an exploration of what it means to be a person, whom López defines as a being who in essence is a "living dialogue with God." Affirming Wojtyła's anthropology in which the person is an irreducible, incommunicable being possessing himself and called to the gift of self, López reflects on the person in three aspects: the person in terms of "recognition," "freedom," and "mission"; and each of these, from the vantage points of theology and anthropology. As recognition, the person exists through being acknowledged by God and by others, and by acknowledging them in turn; education, therefore, is a labor of communion. As freedom, the person accepts the indwelling of the other in himself and lovingly gives himself to dwell in the other and be received by him. As mission, the person discovers his identity as "sent" by God to glorify him; education reaches fulfillment when it matures the student in love and orients his freedom toward the definitive gift of self. In this way, López insists, education is revealed as co-working with God to form the person in truth and goodness, an introduction to reality that is never complete because it participates in the inexhaustible depth of God himself.

In "Of Cicadas and Mayflies: Literary Education," **James Matthew Wilson** asks how literature forms the soul. How can a work of fiction lead one into truth? Is it a mere aid for those not yet ready to face reality directly, or does it remain essential even at the highest stages of contemplation? Wilson answers that the literary—*poiesis* and *mythos* broadly understood—marks the full arc of education, beginning in an *exitus* and culminating in a *reditus*. Literature initiates the movement of the soul toward reality and fulfills it in the vision of form. Drawing on Plato, he shows that Socrates understood poetry as the opposite of sophistry: the latter "beneath reason," using speech to obscure truth; the former "above reason," revealing truth through image and symbol. Poetry presents to the soul what reason can reach only by slow ascent. It sends the soul forth toward truth, yet also remains the ground to which thought returns in rest—the beginning and the end of contemplation. For Wilson, this rhythm defines all genuine education. Works of art are not diversions from reality but encounters with it. They begin as responses to the world and

become explorations of it, calling us not to abstraction but to dwell with the concrete form in its fullness, where the particular and the universal, the made and the real, meet. The work of art, he continues, is itself a mode of knowing. The act of making expresses a bodily, incarnate intelligence, and the finished work embodies a truth that can be contemplated. "The made work of fine art participates in an essential manner in the act of knowing," he writes, "in the intellectual response that rational animals make to reality, to being as it gives itself." Following Maritain, Wilson joins poetic and metaphysical knowledge: one seeks essences, the other encounters existence. From Augustine, he draws the insight that our patterns of making mirror the creative patterns of reality itself. Against Etienne Gilson, who sought to divide artistic fact from aesthetic reflection, Wilson insists that both belong to one movement of knowledge—the soul's going forth and return within the order of being. Education, in its final sense, is therefore an act of contemplation, a "kind of aesthetic dwelling." We should avoid dissolving form into abstractions; rather, we must see "into" it, until its unity discloses itself as the form of reality. Wilson ends with Richard Wilbur's "Mayflies," which captures for our author the experience of being wounded by the beautiful form contemplated to the one who has consented to receive being through that form's fullness.

If words cannot fully capture the realities they signify, is truth communicated by them? In "Truly Defective Words: Teaching and the Sacramental Imagination," **Daniel Gibbons** asks what it means to teach through signs that are always, in some sense, inadequate. Beginning from Augustine's conviction that no one can truly teach without grace, and extending through Aquinas's account of the natural efficacy of signs, Gibbons explores what it would mean for both literature and pedagogy to be "sacramental." If sacraments are "visible signs of invisible grace," then the literary word operates in an analogous sense: not primarily conveying ideas, but, as he writes, forming "habits of love—good or bad habits, depending on what we are reading and how carefully we shield our hearts while performing it." Words, in this view, are "signs . . . that draw people's attention to something other than themselves," pointing beyond their own meaning toward the invisible reality they signify. Gibbons challenges the didactic impulse common to classrooms both in

secular and religiously affiliated institutions, that is, the desire to translate poems and stories into moral or theological propositions. Through figures such as Chaucer and Sidney, he shows that Christian literature resists such reduction. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* leaves readers not with certainty but with contradiction and repentance, while Sidney argues paradoxically that poetry may be "the least lyer" because it never claims to assert literal truth. In both, language teaches by shaping affections rather than delivering doctrine, moving readers to love the good through beauty and signification. At the heart of Gibbons's argument is the Eucharist, which he calls the supreme "sign of contradiction." In the Consecration, the substance of bread and wine is wholly changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, even as their appearances remain. This paradox of the Real Presence, where the sensible signs conceal what they reveal, offers the pattern for all truly Christian poetics. Such signs, he writes, "un-mean as much as they mean," disclosing truth through the humility of form rather than clarity of concept. The liturgy itself forms the imagination not by conveying information but by shaping dispositions of faith, repentance, and gratitude through embodied speech. Teaching literature, then, must follow the same logic. To read well is not to master a work's meaning but to dwell with it, allowing its signs to work upon the imagination. The teacher's task is not to solve mystery but to cultivate docility before it, to help students become, in the phrase from the Gospel of John, "docible of God." In that humility of attention, words may again become sacramental: "defective" in themselves, but made efficacious through the grace that empowers them to disclose the realities they signify.

Education, Plato tells us, is the "art of turning around the whole soul." In "The Symbolic Formation of the Heart: On the Art of Conversion," **D.C. Schindler** takes up this claim and asks what it means for a human being to be reoriented toward reality in that comprehensive sense. Schindler interprets this reorientation not as a merely intellectual alteration, but as a transformation of the whole person: *per se unum*, body and soul. In this conversion, the soul, notes Schindler, can turn only around its own "center," which Schindler locates in the heart. Following Aristotle and Aquinas, he describes the heart not as a mere metaphor for emotion but as the first mover of the living organism,

the visible principle through which the soul gives life to the body. The heart is the meeting point between interior and exterior life, between knowing and loving. Against modern viewpoints that divide spirit from matter, Schindler insists that the heart is not simply a symbol of unity but a symbol *that is itself unity*: the joining together (*sym-ballein*) of body and soul, of the physical and the spiritual. If education, therefore, is to move the person as a whole, it must be directed toward this center. The heart, being symbolic by nature, is moved not by abstract information but by symbols, that is, by embodied forms that make meaning present. True pedagogy is not simply techniques, then, but formation, which takes places through ritual, imagination, and memory. These are habits that dispose the heart to recognize truth, goodness, and beauty as realities that are always-already given. Imagination, for Schindler, is the place where meaning becomes incarnate, where the soul learns to dwell with what it knows. Memory likewise belongs to the heart's life: to "learn by heart" is to receive form into oneself, to interiorize the whole of something. All genuine teaching is thus symbolic: it communicates life through the embodied presence of the teacher, who becomes "a signpost, in his very person, that points to the truth, beauty, and goodness of reality." The teacher, however, does not "produce" the conversion of the student, but enables him to receive it, as a "soul-shaking discovery of what was always-already there, always-already given—which is precisely what it means to receive the real as a gift."

What conclusions can we draw from theological reflection, and what methods are at our disposal for coming to those conclusions? Some conclusions follow from necessity—for instance, the logical implications of divine attributes that have been definitively revealed. Other conclusions, however, can be reached through the category of *convenientia*, or "fittingness": God does not have to act in a particular way, but it is "fitting" that he does so, given who he is and what he has freely promised to do on behalf of the human race. In his essay, "*Quisnam Convenientia?* The Education of Jesus in St. Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar," **Lawrence D. Goodall** poses a question of particular relevance for this issue's theme of Education: would it have been fitting for Christ, fully God and fully man, to learn from human teachers during his life on earth, especially the Blessed

Mother and St. Joseph? To answer this, he surveys the various responses to related questions given by theologians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as summarizing magisterial teachings to those same questions. Next he looks more closely at the traditional Thomistic view, which, on the basis of fittingness, considered it beneath the dignity of Truth incarnate to be taught by any human beings. Challenging the Angelic Doctor, Goodall argues that the genuine humanity taken on by Christ, as well as the constant piety of the Christian faithful towards the the fatherly protection of St. Joseph and the divine and ecclesial motherhood of Mary, demonstrate that it was in fact fitting for Christ to be capable of receiving intellectual formation from those whose Creator he was and to whose care he had entrusted himself. In the face of such opposing conclusions on the basis of "fittingness," Goodall offers some criteria for judging the adequacy of arguments from *convenientia*, in the hopes of rendering this line of reasoning more fruitful for the Church and less prone to biases that merely are the result of cultural or historical contingency.

What is the teacher's role in the soul's approach to truth? In "Man the Measured: The Socratic Exemplar of the Teacher's Calling to Magnify," **Erik van Versendaal** argues that this role consists in the gift of self, in which it is precisely the encounter with being in the teacher's own person that is offered to the student. Drawing on Kierkegaard's famous contrast between Socrates and Christ, he asks whether the distance between them is as absolute as Kierkegaard suggests. For Kierkegaard, Socrates serves only as the "occasion" for recollection—the midwife who awakens what lies dormant in the soul—while Christ himself, recreating the believer through grace, bestows upon the Christian the conditions for true knowledge. Yet, suggests van Versendaal, the figure of Socrates is not so different from Christ as Kierkegaard would have us believe. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates already exemplifies a kind of personal, transformative presence that prepares the way for the revelation of the divine Teacher. In the *Phaedrus*, van Versendaal finds a figure of the teacher whose disappearance is not negation but fruitfulness. Socrates's apparent withdrawal conceals a deeper presence: the guide who bears responsibility for his student's growth precisely because, through his teaching, he makes room for it. True teaching, van Versendaal argues, occurs when the master enters the student's searching from within,

and allows himself to be changed through the encounter: the teacher is "led in the act of leading." The teacher's eros, then, must be purified from the envy that seeks possession; only love for the truth first can sustain love for the learner. Against Lysias's self-protective non-lover, Socrates presents a "holy eros" that delights in another's flourishing. Education thus becomes an act of generosity, not transaction: the teacher gives himself so that the student may be freed to see for himself, like those in chains in the Allegory of the Cave to whom the philosopher returns to reveal the true light. In his palinode, Socrates recasts eros as divine madness, a participation in the gods' own vision of beauty and truth. The philosopher, drawn by the sight of beauty in another, discovers within that beauty a likeness to the divine and seeks to "adorn" the beloved, not as an idol, but as an image of God. Teaching, then, is the contemplative extension of love: the teacher magnifies the divine likeness already latent in the student by initiating him into the vision that first inspired the teacher himself. "As intermediary guide," writes van Versendaal, "the philosopher's service . . . consists in giving himself in the inspired word whereby he gives heaven to the other and, within this, gives the other to heaven." The teacher's call, both Socratic and Christological, is to bear witness through self-emptying presence: to magnify another into truth by giving himself away.

In "What Kind of Hope Allows Us to Face Cultural Devastation?," **José Noriega** reads Jonathan Lear's account of the cultural devastation of the Crow people as a mirror for the disintegration currently happening in own culture and within the Church. With the striking statement, "after this nothing happened," Lear shows that when a society loses its telos, a shared horizon, individual actions and events cease to have meaning in the real sense. Among the Crow, as Lear shows, there were three responses to collapse: the "Ghost Dance movement," which sought to eliminate the White people through a ritual ecstatic dance and thus to restore the previous way of life; a nostalgic preservation on the reservation of forms of life that had lost their meaning and place, such as inter-tribal warfare, and the creative realism of Chief Plenty Coups, who imagined a future his people could not yet see. Lear's "radical hope," the anticipation of a good beyond current understanding, becomes for Noriega a way to ask what Christian hope truly is. He applies Lear's analysis to

the crises of the modern West and the Church: "after the pill, nothing happened," when sex and freedom were severed from their generative purpose; and "after Singapore," when the Christian telos of salvation is obscured. Noriega situates Lear within the theology of hope, and turns to Benedict XVI, Josef Pieper, and St. Thomas Aquinas as examples of theologies of the virtue of hope. On the basis of their thought, Noriega argues that Christian hope is not "already but not yet," but rather "already, though even more." For the theological virtue of hope made possible by the infusion of grace into the heart of the believer and having God himself as its object, makes the eschaton operative now. Finally, Noriega connects the theology of hope expressed in the Church's magisterial and theological tradition with the cultural questions Lear poses, proposing that theological hope cannot be separated from cultural forms that express and embody hope. This means, Noriega argues, that we need a "sacramental imagination," one that rebuilds a culture in which our final telos finds concrete expressions as both "actualized and anticipated."

Finally, in our Notes & Comments section, we are happy to conclude our study of the theme of Education with an Appendix from *Truth on Trial: The Rise and Fall of the Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Kansa*s, a forthcoming volume from Catholic Education Press. This Appendix and its Introduction by Editor **Nicholas J. Healy** is presented here under the title, "A Sign of Contradiction: John Senior and the Integrated Humanities Program." From 1970 to 1979 in the I.H.P., John Senior and two colleagues at the University of Kansas conducted what remains one of the most interesting experiments in education in modern American history. As Healy explains, the influence of this Great Books program at a secular university far exceeded what one would expect from such a short-lived endeavor. The Appendix provided here is comprised of two newspaper articles from 1977 about the program, which are particularly interesting because they offer an outsider's perspective that, in Healy's words, is "not entirely sympathetic" with I.H.P.'s goals or methods, and indeed expresses dismay at the results that it had already achieved. Though written almost fifty years ago, these newspaper accounts express many of the same questions, hesitations, concerns, and objections to the study of the great works of Western culture that the intellectual heirs of the Integrated Humanities

Program continue to encounter today. May all those inspired by John Senior to contemplate the light of eternal wisdom through the study of its incarnation in culture be of equal blessing to the students of tomorrow. □

—The Editors.