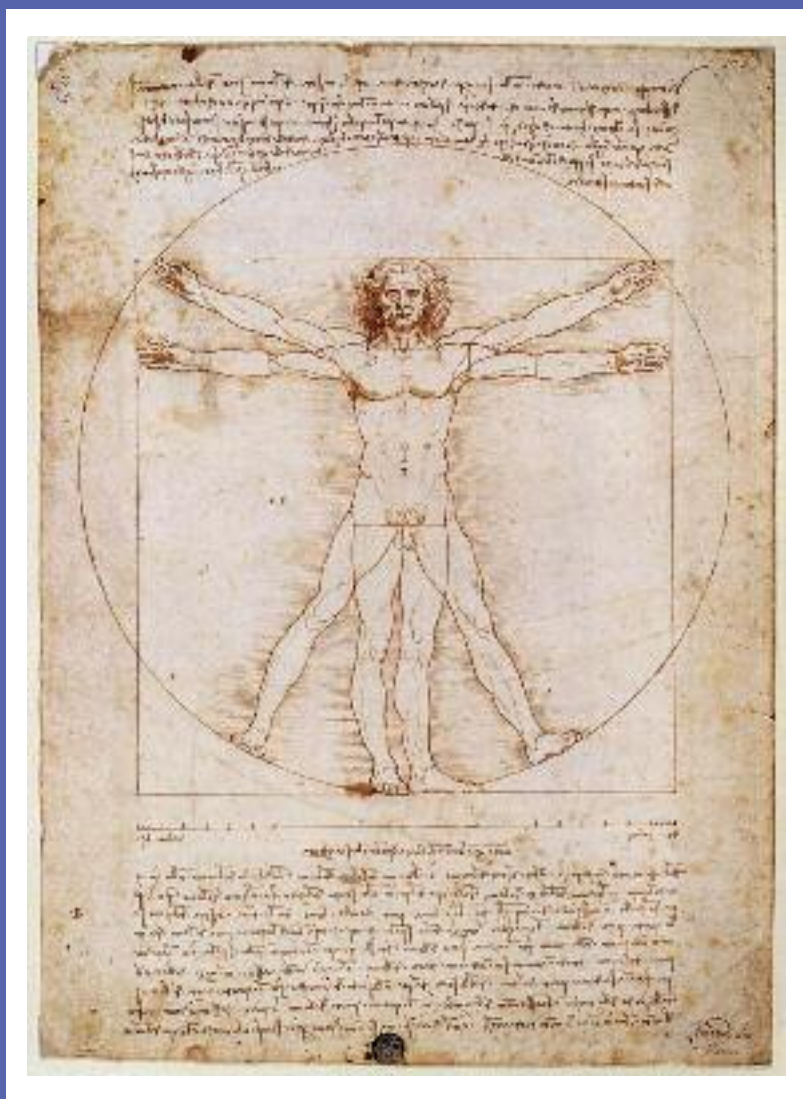


formation in virtues

educating the whole
person

*An introduction to
Catholic formation in
Virtues for Catholic
Educators*










Department of Catholic Education and Formation
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales

Formation in Virtues: Educating the Whole Person
Department of Catholic Education and Formation
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introduction

It ought not to be controversial for the Catholic Church to proclaim that her schools are profoundly humanist institutions, because for the Catholic Church, Christ is the universal norm of all human ethical action - Christ stands before us as the model human template, the 'new Adam' that redefines what it means to be human. As Catholics, we may venerate the stationary image of Christ on the cross, with his arms stretched wide, embracing all humanity in the moment when he suffers and dies for us all. But as his disciples, we celebrate our faith in Christ as always 'on the move', inhabiting our world so that we can truly abide in Him as we journey through time.

We celebrate what one of the early Fathers of the Church, St Gregory of Nyssa, said of Christ:

"Although he is great and holds all creation in the palm of his hand, you are able to hold him, he dwells in you and moves within you without constraint, for he has said: 'I will live and move among them.' (2 Corinthians 6:16)."

"[Catholic] schools are profoundly humanist institutions, because for the Catholic Church, Christ is the universal norm of all human ethical action "

And so, Catholic schools, whatever the differences in their individually expressed 'Mission Statements' - all have the person of Christ at their core, because Christ is at the core of every person that makes up the school community. There is a tendency to consider education as being a process of putting knowledge and skills into the students who attend school as if they were empty vessels, waiting to be filled with extraneous material. But the word 'education' derives from the Latin *educare*, meaning to 'bring out'. Catholic schools ought to be institutions which encourage the student community to discover what is contained in the depths of every human heart.

“The search for what is ‘true and good’ is the search which ought to encompass all aspects of human endeavour in Catholic schools.”

And so, for the Catholic Church the development of the inner character rather than mere academic achievement, is the leitmotif of its educational vision. The Church believes that the human vocation is to recover and develop in every person their likeness to Christ:

The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By his free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection ‘in seeking and loving what is true and good’. (CCC 1704)

This archetypal search for what is ‘true and good’ (GS15) is the search which ought to encompass all aspects of human endeavour in our schools, conducted within every classroom and school department, within the whole school curriculum and in all extra-curricular activities. It is a search that travels inwards in the acquisition of self-knowledge, as well as outwards in the acquisition of wisdom. The search itself ought to be the hallmark of every good school in the country but the good Catholic school would differ from others only in its explicit understanding that this search for the fullness of truth and for the good is undertaken in companionship with Christ, whom it acknowledges as the ‘Way’, as well as ‘Truth’ and ‘Life’ itself.

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Phil 4:8)

This is how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins its treatment of the virtues, going on to define a virtue as ‘an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts but to give the best of himself’. (CCC1753) So the search for the good is a moral enterprise, in which the school community ought to provide opportunities not only to ‘do the good’, but provide an education in the virtues for there to be any disposition towards the good that could be both ‘firm’ and ‘habitual’. Habits make us who we are. The educational challenge is to find ways that this enterprise can be imaginatively and engagingly undertaken in our schools, and the Catholic Education Service...

“The great educational task then, remains to identify these virtues in the lives of others, in the contemporary world.”

But to start, the virtues themselves need to be formally identified. What follows is a simple articulation the seven principal virtues - the four pivotal or ‘Cardinal’ human virtues around which all other virtues are grouped, and the three virtues which the Church identifies as lying behind all our attempts to resemble Christ, which are known as the ‘Theological’ virtues.

The great educational task then, remains to *identify* these virtues in the lives of others, whether in the contemporary world or in history and literature, and in those nearest to us in the school community, and also to recognise deficiencies in virtue, both in others and not least in ourselves. Once this process becomes ingrained in the life of the school community, then the fruits will become more apparent as people begin to make the pursuit of virtues a habit of life.

In what follows, these seven principal virtues are illustrated using the art of Giotto di Bondone, and using definitions drawn from Blessed John Henry Newman.

Giotto, sometimes called the ‘Father’ of Renaissance art, was commissioned to adorn the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. His work is considered one of the greatest masterpieces of Renaissance art, with the ceilings and upper walls of the chapel adorned with magnificent frescos on the life of the Virgin Mary and the Life of Christ.

As worshippers would have left this jewel-like chapel through the West Door after attending Mass, they emerged into the outside world from beneath the awesome scene of the Last Judgement. But on their way out, they would have passed by depictions of these seven virtues along the length of the nave on one wall and their corresponding vices on the opposite wall.

The virtues were painted on a human scale and at head height, in monochrome colours. Giotto seemed to be saying that as we travel along the way that will lead towards the Last Judgement, we need to deal with the practical business of aiming for these virtues or avoiding these vices.

Prudence

Discerning the end in every beginning, the origin in every end, and knowing how the path lies from one point to another

J.H.N



prudence

John Henry Newman described Prudence as the virtue which *'discerns the end in every beginning, the origin in every end, and knowing how the path lies from one to the other'*. In other words, Prudence is the ability to make decisions based on the reality of things, of things as they really are, in order to achieve what is good. So what do you need to be prudent? First, you need to learn from what has happened in the past. Then you need to be open-minded to the future - what are the likely consequences of any action you might take. And lastly, you need to be prepared to accept good advice from those who know better than you. Giotto imagines the virtue of Prudence as a student sitting at his desk, thoughtfully looking at himself in a mirror. In this way, He suggests Prudence means being grounded in reality, not in a fantasy world, or in wishful thinking.



“Prudence means being grounded in reality, not in a fantasy world, or in wishful thinking.”

The prudent person is someone who can see things clearly, who is living in the light of truth, ‘warts and all’ rather than the darkness of ignorance and wishful thinking. The virtue of Prudence is the foundation of all the other virtues which we need to acquire as we seek to be a noble human being.

By contrast, the lack of the virtue of Prudence is depicted as a clownish character, completely lacking in self-awareness. We might laugh at the fool, but there is something tragic about someone who is completely lacking in prudence, because he is unaware that he is lacking in the one virtue that will help him live a noble life.

Temperance

Learn to master your heart, curb your tongue and turn away your eye. Self-rule is what makes a man; without it a man is a slave.

J.H.N



temperance

Newman described Temperance as the ability to *'master your heart, curb your tongue, and turn away your eye. Self-rule is what makes a man; without it a man is a slave'*. When you describe someone as being 'bad tempered', you mean that they have lost control of themselves. We talk about someone 'losing their temper'.

Temperance is the virtue which enables someone who has their emotions under control. It has been described as having a 'serenity of spirit', or being 'balanced' in life. Giotto portrays Temperance as an elegant figure who is in the process of binding up the sword which he holds in his hand. In other words, he doesn't need a weapon to control his life. And his tongue is bridled; Temperance is about controlling your tongue... Which isn't to say that we should not speak out on occasions, or that we shouldn't get angry sometimes. We just need to know when and where.



“Temperance is about controlling your tongue.”

There are two Vices opposite to the Virtue of Temperance:

On the one side there is Wrath. 'Wrath' is uncontrolled anger, when we give in to temptation to let fly with our tongue and our fists, without thinking of the damage that it will do not only to others but to ourselves.

We lose control when we lose our temper, and we end up looking stupid. On the other side there is 'Lust': We give in to our passions, and treat others as objects of desire rather than as dignified human beings.

Both of these vices leave us feeling empty, whereas Temperance leaves us feeling recollected and full of dignity.

Justice

The general love of order, congruity, and symmetry is an original principle of human nature, which is to give all their due.

J.H.N



justice

In Giotto's depiction, Justice is the only virtue illustrated with other people in the picture. Everything is ordered, symmetrical and in 'congruity' or in a balanced relationship. Justice is the habit of giving to each person what is their due. When you behave justly, people will admire you, and the more you practise justice the better you become as a person. But Justice becomes a true virtue only when you derive *pleasure* from behaving in a just way to other people. Justice radiates goodness.

On the other hand, injustice radiates evil, because the unjust treat some people as more human than others. Wherever justice is lacking, the whole well-being of society is affected. Social life begins to break down and the weakest are the ones who suffer the most. In the same way that you can practise behaving justly, you can also fall into the habit of being partial and unfair in the way you behave towards others.

If you get into that habit, then before very long you become unfeeling and hard-hearted, and you end up losing your own humanity. Don't think of institutions as buildings, or flags but people! The words "It's not fair" might spring to your lips every time an institution like a school decides something that inconveniences you.

Sometimes you'll be right, but you have to remember - Justice demands that you owe institutions their due, as much if not more than you owe your neighbours their due, because all institutions are comprised of human beings. Your grave responsibility as a Catholic is to try and change any and every institution so that it seems more human. You can do this by promoting true justice in your dealings with every institution, in the same way that you should rightfully expect justice from that institution for your neighbour first, and only then for yourself.

“Justice is the habit of giving to each person what is their due”



Fortitude

He who has nothing to hope from the world, has nothing to fear from it.

J.H.N



fortitude

Giotto depicts the virtue of Fortitude dressed in lion skins, and with the symbol of the lion on his shield, because lions symbolise bravery. But the virtue is depicted in a defensive rather than aggressive posture. Newman said of this virtue, *'He who has nothing to hope from this world, has nothing to fear from it.'* When you're brave, you're prepared to suffer, because something or someone that matters to you is under threat.

If you're being brave for someone else, then that is obviously an example of the virtue of Fortitude, because we are all valuable. But if you're being brave for something else, then that 'something' has to be really important, really valuable. So first, before being brave, you need to know what really matters, and for that you need the Virtue of Prudence. Prudence teaches us the real value of things. And then you need to be brave for a just cause, so you need the Virtue of Justice. These virtues come before Fortitude.

"When you're brave, you're prepared to suffer, because something or someone that matters to you is under threat."



Christian Martyrdom is the perfect example of the Virtue of Fortitude: The Martyr is battling against evil itself, and he wins the battle against evil by losing his life.

The two vices which oppose Fortitude are rashness and cowardice. The rash behave as if everything, even trivial, silly things, are just as valuable as important things, so they end up thinking that nothing has real value.

They risk everything for nothing, and it is very close to the definition of cowardice which is risking nothing for everything, because the coward thinks nothing is worth fighting for. Such people have no values; Giotto depicts them as living unbalanced lives, blown this way and that by the winds of fate that bring fortune and misfortune. They run away when they're challenged with real evil.

Faith

The mind's perception of heavenly things, arising from trust in the truth of the word.

J.H.N



faith

John Henry Newman described the virtue of Faith as *'The mind's perception of heavenly things, arising from trust in the truth of the word'*. In other words, Faith enables you to accept God, to accept his Word as the truth, and to commit yourself to him. It is a gift offered to you by God, and is often associated with sight and vision. We talk about people 'seeing with the light of faith'.

Giotto imagines Faith as a figure looking over our heads into the distance, while holding the Cross and the Scriptures in his hands. The gift of Faith is founded upon what we hear of God in the Scriptures and the realisation of God's love for us, symbolised in the Cross. With this gift we become long-sighted, able to see beyond all the fleeting concerns which clamour for our attention.

Pope Benedict compared the 'Light of Faith' to a stained-glass window in an ancient church: Stained glass windows tell a story. The light comes into the church through

"Faith enables you to accept God, his Word as the truth, and to commit yourself to him."



those coloured pictures in the glass, pictures which tell the story of our salvation. In the same way, God's light comes through the story of his saving love for you.

Giotto depicts those without faith as having darkened eyes, living in the shade, and substituting faith in God for faith in something which is not God.

In other words, they risk becoming idol worshippers. It has been said that those who choose not to put their trust in God, must instead hear the noise of countless idols whispering: "put your trust in me."

For all of us, man-made idols compete for our attention, but we discover that none provide true happiness, because we end up realizing that idols are man-made.

Hope

The making present of what is in the future, loosened from every tie which binds the soul to earth.

J.H.N



hope

Newman described Hope as ‘the making present of what is future, loosened from every tie that binds the soul to earth’. With the gift of Hope, we are able to rise above our difficulties, and unlock some of the joy which is in store for us, so that it can help to lighten our journey through life.

Fittingly, Giotto depicts Hope as an angelic figure, in flight and reaching heavenwards for the crown which God holds out for those who put their lives into the perspective of Paradise.

“With the gift of Hope, we are able to rise above our difficulties, and unlock some of the joy which is in store for us, so that it can help to lighten our journey through life.”



The opposite of hope is despair. Just as we imagine the gift of hope bringing lightness of being, so the absence of that gift means that we are liable to be dragged down and engrossed in darkness, where nothing can lift our spirits.

Newman said: ‘Take away the Light and we are utterly wretched, - we know not where we are, nor how we are sustained, nor what will become of us’.

Today, the world is quick to describe these as symptoms of depression and medicalise them. But we can think of depression as being more than just a clinical sickness; it has a spiritual dimension, and we should pray for the gift of Hope when everything seems dark.

Charity

*It was charity that brought Christ down,
and it will be charity that we reach into
the next world.*

J.H.N



charity

We commonly use the word 'Charity' to describe the practice of demonstrating love of our neighbour. It describes love as not being theoretical; love shows itself in practice. Newman said, *'It was charity that brought Christ down, and it will be by charity that we reach into the next world'*. With the gift of charity, we are able to abide in the love of God. Charity has been called the 'mother of all virtues', because it is charity which inspires us to practice all the other virtues.

Giotto depicts Charity as a figure who is totally focussed on God, and in receiving all the gifts which God is providing. But the figure of Charity doesn't use these gifts for himself. He is the picture of generosity, passing these fruits onwards so that they can nourish the lives of others. Notice how the figure of Charity tramples bags of money underfoot. They are worthless, other than as a stepping stone towards being more charitable.

"Charity has been called the 'mother of all virtues', because it is charity which inspires us to practice all the other virtues."

For Giotto, the vice that is most obviously opposed to the virtue of Charity is envy, which he depicts as grasping, and self-centred, clutching a money bag and desperate to snatch anything he can.

He is midway to losing his humanity, with distorted ears and a poisonous tongue which issues from his mouth, only to return and further poison the mind.

The other vice that is opposed to Charity is spiritual sloth, when a person can't be bothered to lift a finger for anyone, least of all God. The picture of selfishness.



conclusion

Formation is a whole-school mission, therefore this document is designed to speak to all aspects of school life, from the curriculum to the management of the school itself.

Virtues, and indeed the language of virtues, need to permeate into all parts of the school, this way the teaching of the virtues can be a lived experience where pupils can see them as more than just a subject taught in a Religious Education lesson.

When we open our minds to the language of virtues outlined in this document, we are able to see the multitude of ways virtues can be expressed throughout the school. From PSHE, to behaviour policies, from history to mathematics, and from school budget meetings to the PTA, there are many ways that the language of virtues can be creatively woven into the fabric of school life.

As such, it is appropriate to consider the delivery of formation in virtues with a degree of prudence. That is to say, it is often the best approach to focus on one virtue (and its corresponding vice) at a time, so to give it a sensible amount of whole-school time and consideration.

As we said in the introduction, we as educators need to work on the practical business of inspiring young people to walk in the light of the virtues and avoid the vices. This can be done most effectively when we allow an in-depth investigation of each of the virtues as opposed to trying to tackle all seven of them, all at once.

Formation in virtues is a life-long pursuit and as we get older the challenges we face and our internal conflict between virtues and vice become ever more prominent. Moreover, given the context of modern society, it is more important than ever that young people see virtues 'lived' as opposed to abstract concepts in a textbook.

By living these virtues, not only will we be preparing young people for their time in this life, but for eternity in the next.

For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.

2 Peter 1: 5-7



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