



CHESTERTON ACADEMY
OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE

A Catholic Guide to Forming the Next Generation

By Dr. Keith A. Morneau

*“Education is simply the soul of a society as
it passes from one generation to another.”*

G. K. CHESTERTON

Illustrated London News, July 5, 1924

Introduction

"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

As Catholics, we are called to become saints, a universal vocation for all of us. Christ Himself calls us to perfection, not in worldly flawlessness, but in the perfection of love, virtue, and union with the Father. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that sanctity consists in willing what God wills (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.19, a.10). Sanctity is about aligning our will with God's, embracing His divine plan with trust and love. G.K. Chesterton writes that the saint "will generally be found restoring the world to sanity by exaggerating whatever the world neglects." (G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox*) Saints stand out because they emphasize what the world forgets: Truth, beauty, goodness, sacrifice, and love. In an age that neglects faith, saints live it boldly. As the Catechism states, spiritual progress tends toward an ever more intimate union with Christ (CCC 2014). Our spiritual journey is a continuous deepening of our union with Christ, which is the essence of Sanctity.

To educate in faith and virtue, our children's understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven fosters a sacredness fulfilling our duty and our hope as parents. Children are the future of the Church and Society and bearers of the Kingdom of Heaven in the present. "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14) "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5) Christ's words emphasize the sacredness of children and our responsibility to guide them toward Him. Every child is a gift and a soul to nurture in Truth and love. St. Thomas Aquinas on Teaching and Education states that "even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation than merely to contemplate." (Summa Theologica, II-II, q.188, a.6) Education is an act of profound charity, leading young minds from ignorance or error to Truth, which ultimately means leading them to Christ, who is Truth itself (John 14:6). G.K. Chesterton on Education states, "Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another." (*Illustrated London News*, July 5, 1924) Education is about passing down knowledge and forming a civilization's soul. A society's future depends on how it educates its children.

This guide aims to understand the importance of our children and our futures using the following sources:

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)
- St. Thomas Aquinas and G.K. Chesterton
- the Bible
- Other Catholic references

This paper acts as a guide for forming the next generation from a Catholic perspective. Catholic philosophy has evolved over thousands of years and can be considered a reliable source of Truth.

THE CATHOLIC VISION OF THE CHILD

The Dignity of the Child in God's Plan

God created every human person in the image and likeness of him. "God created mankind in His image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27). God created man to have a special relationship with him. "Of all visible creatures, only man is 'able to know and love his creator'... He alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life." (CCC 356) From the beginning, the Catholic Church teaches us when life begins. "Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception."

(CCC 2270) "From the moment of conception, the human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person, among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life." (CCC 2270) "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." (Jeremiah 1:5). In Didache, it states that "you shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish." (Didache 2:2) Society must protect and defend the dignity of the child. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:10). Every child is a gift from God, and we must treat children as gifts, not burdens.

The Innocence and Receptivity of Childhood

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3). G.K. Chesterton wrote on the wonder of childhood. "If we could destroy custom at a blow and see the stars as a child sees them, we should need no other apocalypse." ("A Defence of Baby-Worship," The Defendant, 1901) There is a role of grace and original sin. "Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also need the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God." (CCC 1250) "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)

The Role of Family in Education

Parents are the first educators of children. *"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road when you lie down, and when you get up."*

(Deuteronomy 6:6-7) Parents, including fathers, play a crucial role in the domestic Church, the family, and their children's virtue formation. *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."* *(Ephesians 6:4)*

Children need to be formed towards a Catholic Mind. *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* *(Romans 12:2)* There is a role of beauty in education. *"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."*

(Philippians 4:8) Sacramental life is of extreme importance in the family. Participating in the sacraments, attending Church on Sundays, and participating in the Eucharist are all noble endeavors. It is all part of the parents' job to educate their children. *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

(Joshua 24:15)

Faith and Reason in Harmony

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth." (*Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II, 1998, no.

1) Over 30 years ago, God called me to become a professor and administrator in higher education. My wife and I also raised and educated our children, and we see the benefits of enriching our children with a biblical worldview in their academic education and its many blessings. The idea that we can separate reason from faith in the formation of a person is not working. The culture is confused and needs direction. I see my students' daily struggles and wish they had faith to help them on their educational journey. Bringing faith and reason together in harmony is critical to healing our broken world. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."* (Proverbs 9:10)

Formation of the Whole Person: Intellect, Character, and Soul

"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance." (Proverbs 1:5). Not only should we be forming our children with important intellect, but also the character and soul are just as important.

Throughout my career as a university professor and academic administrator serving in higher education leadership since 1996, employers have told me repeatedly about the lack of soft skills and professionalism in graduates, and it has become even worse since 2020 with mobile devices and social media. Where do our children learn professionalism? It starts at home. My wife and I have instilled soft skills and professionalism in our kids by always being 15 minutes early to an event or appointment and appropriately dressing for the occasion. We have also instilled faith through the full practice of our Catholic faith. My sons serve as altar boys and have since they turned eight until they went to college. My oldest and youngest sons also served at 6:30 am daily Mass. Daily Mass is a transformative experience for all of us. Instilling faith is both a horizontal and vertical integration of God into our daily lives and should not be separated from forming the intellect. It has to be an integral part of it.

The Role of the Catholic School

The mission of Catholic education is to form a new generation of joyful leaders and saints. As the Church teaches in *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican II, 1965), the goal of proper education is "the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which he is a member" (no. 1).

Catholic schools are thus entrusted with the vital task of leading souls toward Christ, equipping them with both intellectual excellence and moral virtue.

There is an urgent need in our country today. Our nation, culture, and Church are in crisis. Pope Benedict XVI (2011) warned that "the seriousness of the challenges which the Church in America ... is called to confront in the near future cannot be underestimated," and later spoke of "a profound crisis of faith" (Benedict XVI, 2012). The family, the first school of virtue and faith, is attacked by numerous forces seeking to weaken or redefine it (*Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II, 1981, no. 6).

Without a firm foundation in the foundational narrative of salvation history and Catholic tradition, our youth are increasingly disconnected from world and Church history, the Catholic faith, and the eternal Truth of the Gospel. As generations lose touch with this historical and spiritual heritage, we see a growing departure from the faith. A 2018 national study found that most young people who leave the Church stop identifying as Catholic between ages 10 and 20, at a median age of 13 (CARA & Saint Mary's Press, 2018). Even more alarming, about half of these disaffiliated young people now identify as atheist, agnostic, or have no religious affiliation (CARA & Saint Mary's Press, 2018); across all ages, 54% of former Catholics are religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Center, 2025). This loss of religious identity has broader consequences.

Research indicates that religious Americans give more to charity and are more engaged in civic life than their secular neighbors (Putnam & Campbell, 2010).

Scripture's words speak powerfully to our times: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6, ESV), and Christ's Great Commission remains our enduring call: "Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20, ESV). Catholic education must answer this urgent call with renewed vigor and joyful fidelity.

The Cultivation of Virtue Through Catholic Education

Catholic education must form children in the four cardinal virtues of prudence, Justice, fortitude, and Temperance.

Prudence is about teaching children to seek the Truth. "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty." (Proverbs 27:12). Justice forms children in moral responsibility. "Justice consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor." (CCC 1807) *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Micah 6:8) In a world that says you can be anyone and you have your Truth, we must instill the real Truth and morals into our children throughout their childhood. Fortitude is the strength to defend the faith.

Forming our children in the faith is critical today so that as they enter adulthood, they do not lose their faith like so many do today. "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." (1 Corinthians 16:13). Temperance teaches moderation in a materialistic world. One of the legacies of Pope Francis was his rejection of materialism for service to God and his neighbor. We need to instill in our children that happiness and joy do not come from material things but only through God and service to our neighbors. "Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods." (CCC 1809). *"Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control."* (Proverbs 25:28). Forming our children constantly in the cardinal virtues will help our children learn to be happy and joyful through worship to God and service to our neighbors. Forming these virtues is a partnership between the family and Catholic education. It cannot be an either-or.

Catholic Leadership and Evangelization

As Catholics, we need to step up and start leading and evangelizing our Catholic faith to everyone in a world that completely rejects it. First, defending Catholic education in a secular world has become paramount, and raising our children to be these leaders is critically important today.

"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ." (Colossians 2:8) . Also, "the right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable." (CCC 2221) Preparing our children for leadership and evangelization cannot be left to everyone else. It needs to start with us. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19). "Always be prepared to answer everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15) I will provide an example of my oldest daughter who wanted to major in dance in college against my wishes. I ask her to have a minor as a backup. She attended DeSales University for two years, and those two years opened my eyes. She had her final capstone project in her last year in her major. She and her professor did not see eye to eye at all. She wanted to do a pro-life dance, but the professor said it was too subjective. Being pro-life is not subjective but is an objective reality. Her professor told her she would not get anything higher than a D in the class if she did it. Well, she stood her ground and did the pro-life dance. She had most of the DeSales pro-life community at her final defense and got a D in the class. My daughter had the leadership and understanding beyond her years. That came through her formation as a child. She was able to lead and also evangelize through her dance the pro-life message.

My wife and I were so proud of her, and a story I share often. God calls us leaders to evangelize our Catholic faith to a broken world through our words and actions.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

Ultimately, we are called by God to be saints. Sainthood is not for a select few; we are all called by God to become saints. Part of our job in our journey in life is to form our children in the Catholic faith to be happy and joyful—St. Thomas Aquinas on Education and the Good Life. "Happiness is secured through virtue; it is a good attained by man's own will." (*Philosophical Texts*, ed. T. Gilby, 1951) "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) In a world where our children are losing their faith in record number, we must form our children throughout their childhood so they will not depart from the beauty of our Catholic faith. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." (Luke 10:2). "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." (Proverbs 16:3)

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