

What Makes the School Catholic?

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The Basilian motto: *Bonitatem, et disciplinam, et scientiam doce me: teach me goodness, discipline, and knowledge*, taken from Psalm 118, is addressed to God. While in a Basilian school it continues to be addressed to God, it is also addressed to those who teach and work in those schools. And while students don't intentionally and consciously direct this motto to their teachers, they don't actually say, "please teach me goodness, discipline, and knowledge," their parents confidence in Basilian schools and the presence of our students means that they are asking for a specific form and vision of education, and this motto stands to serve a Catholic vision of education. The kind of goodness, discipline, and knowledge imparted is one matter—and discipline here is envisaged as an invitation to grow in freedom, love, knowledge and holiness, rather than a narrow view of discipline as punishment, which is never educational. Why the young need goodness, discipline and knowledge as integral to their personal and communal growth, development, and flourishing, is another matter. Both must go together. Personal goodness, discipline and knowledge must serve us throughout life. In a school, however, this motto stands at the service of education. Education is an intentional, planned, and purposeful activity, and directed to a goal and end. In response to the call of Christ to follow Him, the educator must then ask the secondary reflective questions: why must goodness be the concern of the school; why not leave it to parents and the Church? What kind of discipline is required in order to grow and flourish as a human being marked by personal and internal freedom, as God intended? Is knowledge only a theoretical, heady exercise, or does it impinge on the living of life? Our society supports the opposite position with greater devotion. Goodness means obeying the law and not harming others, and then choosing to do and live as one chooses. Freedom is reduced simply to freedom of the will alone, and not as a stepping-stone to greater internal and spiritual freedom. Discipline is in service of economic and financial success, with others left to fend for themselves—the common good then becomes a collection of individual goods narrowly defined. And knowledge is in service of a material world, governed by a scientific, technological, and mechanistic worldview. The real is then reduced to only that which you can experience through the senses. Love, justice, courage, selflessness, charity, care, faith, hope, prudence, community, the common good, etc., as these are not sensible experiences, as we do not encounter them through our five senses, they are either relativized or left to the privacy of the Church and family. Education is thus narrowed to scientific and technical, measurable skills in service of employment and material prosperity alone. Paying lip service to goodness, discipline, and knowledge to appease one's teachers, without learning why they are integral to human freedom and liberation, and vital in that perennial journey into growing into the image and likeness of God, would mean the breakdown of Catholic education, and in our case, the failure of Basilian education.

The Basilian motto can also be read through a transformative passage found in the first document from The Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, 1977, # 56: "Education is not given for the purpose of gaining power but as an aid towards a fuller understanding of, and communion with men [and women], events and things. Knowledge is not to be considered as a means of material prosperity and success, but as a call to serve and be responsible for others." Why must human beings strive for goodness; and how does its absence compromise their humanity? Why must human beings instill personal and communal discipline in their lives, without which they are enslaved rather than free? And why is the diversity of knowledge—as the school curriculum so powerfully attests to—so vital for human growth and development? While there isn't a Catholic physics or Catholic baseball, why is it that a school deprived of the sciences or sports would fail to be Catholic? The Basilian motto finds echoes in the Church's educational documents. Today, more so than ever, we need to educate the young who, we hope and pray from the position of their later adulthood, will give

praise and thanks to God for their teachers who intentionally and systematically lived out their Christian call.

Everything that is carried out during the school day must witness as to why goodness, discipline, and knowledge enables our students to continue to grow in their humanity and to respond each day to Christ's call to follow Him.

Basilian Archbishop Michael Miller presents five elements essential to the identity of a Catholic school:

1. Inspired by a supernatural vision: all that is involved in being created in God's image and likeness, and, since the call in baptism, to follow Christ.

2. Founded on a Christian anthropology: Catholics have clear teachings of who the human person is and meant to become; what enslaves and what liberates life; and why all human life is sacred. Thus, in the Archbishop's words, education can never be reduced to "a commodity" or even a "skill."

3. Animated by communion and community: Christian communion and community in general, and that of the Catholic school in particular, are never sociological categories; they are theological concepts, for it is in the communion and community of a Catholic school that students must situate their personal and communal pilgrimage in time. And everything from social outreach to teamwork, and all other forms of school cooperation and service build this communion and community.

4. Imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout the curriculum: all that is learned and the diversity of the curriculum is all in service of Christ's call to follow Him. The Catholicity of the curriculum is never isolated to religious instruction alone. Truth and wisdom are found in all forms of knowing, from the laboratory to the sports field, and from drama to the celebration of the Sacraments. All are essential to a Catholic worldview.

5. Sustained by Gospel witness: the witness of all those who work in a Catholic school gives flesh and bones to what the Church refers to as the synthesis between faith and culture and faith and life. Through the "transparent witness of their lives" Catholic teachers defeat the relativism and a "soft indifferentism" that is the hallmark of society when it comes to the place, role, and purpose of faith and religious belief in the public square.

Jesus did not come to establish Catholic schools. He came to save us from the never-ending, imprisoning, and destructive cycle of sin and death. However, once so saved, everything changes, for we are, in the words of St. Paul, "a new creation," and how we live our lives, all we do, seek, yearn for and strive for is in response to being so saved. Catholic education is the indispensable secondary reflection as to what it means to be saved by Christ in the living of one's life: the choices made, and the decisions carried out. In the school this reflection concerns how the young—according to their stages of mental and moral growth—are to be introduced to the diversity of encountering God's creation in so many different ways and expressions: from theology to music; from the common good to literature; from mathematics to history; and from sports to serving others. Human beings and the created order are transformed because of the gift and mystery of the Incarnation. I suspect that when we each stand before the throne of God, we will be asked how much we have loved. In this world, we have to learn to love the right things, for which knowledge and learning are essential. Catholic education helps us order what we should love and to know why.

In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas says, "...the love of God is better than the knowledge of God; but on the contrary, the knowledge of corporeal [material, concrete] things is better than the love thereof." Now consider if we were to place this besides the stock exchange figures of the world's financial markets. What would the response be? More alarmingly, would the world's financial experts know the distinction that St. Thomas is making?