"Wonder is the beginning of knowledge," said Professor John Senior, "the reverent fear that beauty strikes within us."

Professor Senior built his life around wonder – he reveled in the mysteries of this universe, and in the Mystery – that of God himself – to which our world points. Professor Senior believed that if each of us took the opportunity to really look at the world around us – to marvel at nature, at humanity, at our own creation, and at God, we would be filled with curiosity, with delight, and with an eagerness to learn, to understand, and to know the world that the Lord has created. "Each creature is a mirror of its Maker," he said, "we need only look!"

Professor Senior was one of my teachers at the University of Kansas. He co-directed the Integrated Humanities Program (IHP), in which I was a student in the 1970s. And because Professor Senior, and his colleagues, believed that all mysteries would point to the mystery of God, their classes eventually pointed me to the Catholic faith.

Through the "witness" of my professors at a secular university, I came to know truth, to know Jesus Christ, and to know the beauty and goodness of the Catholic Church.

The schools of the Diocese of Lincoln will begin this week and next. And my prayer is that through them, our students will come to know and to love and to serve Jesus Christ. That prayer depends on grace – but it also depends on each of us.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, the enlightenment philosopher whose views shape our contemporary view of education, reflected accurately that formation must respect the whole person if it is to be effective. In "Emile," his work on education, he noted that by schooling "we have made an active and thinking being." However, he said, "It remains for us, in order to complete the man, only to make a loving and feeling being – that is to say, to perfect reason by sentiment."

Rousseau was correct – education must include formation in love, in intuition, and in empathy. But Christians know that reason cannot really be perfected by sentiment. Reason must be perfected by grace. This was the great failure of
Rousseau's understanding of education.

*Education* is derived from the Latin words *ex ducere*, which means: "to draw from" or "to lead out." This is precisely what education is – drawing from students their potential, their innate sense of the world's order, and, ultimately drawing forth from students their destiny – which is eternity in heaven with God.

Every student is made for holiness, made to become a saint. Our schools must lead and draw out from students a sense of their own call to holiness, and a sense of the grace that renews their minds. Our schools must draw from baptized students the potential of their baptism: the potential to love as God himself loves. Our educational mission goes far beyond conveying factual knowledge of history, science, literature, or even of the faith. Our schools are not information delivery systems. Our educational mission begins and ends with our potential for holiness.

For teachers, principals, pastors, and administrators, this means that our schools must be focused always on salvation. They must work to instill wonder. It isn't enough for our schools to teach facts about Catholicism – instead our schools must be authentically Catholic places.

I'm proud that in the schools of the Diocese of Lincoln, all subjects are taught from the perspective of faith. Science, history, literature, music and mathematics can all point to God. They can all be cornerstones of Catholic intellectual life and Catholic culture.

I'm proud too, of our parents. Parents are the primary educators of children, the first teachers of their children. They entrust some components of education to our schools, with whom they are partners. But if schools are authentically Catholic places, it is because the homes of our students are places of prayer, of open conversation, and of lives lived in discipleship to Jesus Christ.

Schools have the ability to transform lives, and cultures. My life was transformed through my studies at the University of Kansas. When Socrates set up a school in a Greek marketplace, he transformed Western culture forever. Our schools, too, can transform lives, and culture. I pray that all of us – parents, teachers, and students – will work together so that salvation in Jesus Christ is the lasting lesson we teach.

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The Most Rev. James D. Conley served as the auxiliary Bishop for the Denver Archdiocese from April of 2008 until November of 2012, and during this time also served as Apostolic Administrator for Denver from September 2011 until July 2012. Bishop Conley is currently the Bishop of the Lincoln diocese.

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