



**OFFICE OF
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

Mission Statement

"Our mission is to be and form disciples of Jesus under the guidance of the Holy Spirit by sharing the Father's transforming love through Christ centered instruction, whereby, both the faculty and students can encounter the living Word of God, discern a vocation that reveals eternal happiness, and grow in virtue and academic excellence cultivating Catholic environments where holiness is evident."

Philosophy Statement

Education is only truth in a state of transmission; and how can we pass on truth if it has never come into our hand?

G.K. Chesterton

Throughout history, humanity has searched for the truth, which is eternal by its very nature. It was the attempt of each culture to pass on what it had discovered of the truth to future generations that gave rise to the notion of education. Today, all schools, whether public or private, share in this same mission of passing on the culture's knowledge of truth to all that culture's children. The Catholic school is no exception. Its mission is to teach students in all areas of knowledge: mathematics, literature, science, history, etc.

However, by its very nature knowledge is always of the past, rooted as it is in memory and in our experience of something. And like all things relating to the past, knowledge is interpreted and translated in its transmission. This is to say that some value system is always behind our treatment of knowledge necessarily framing and orienting the direction and trajectory of our knowledge – whether it is an ideology, philosophy, or worldview. Again, the Catholic school is not immune to this reality. The necessary question becomes, then, what informs the Catholic school's interpretation and transmission of knowledge?

A Case Study: Quid est veritas?

How would you answer the following multiple choice question: The Sacred Scriptures are concerned with...

- a) scientific truth
- b) religious truth
- c) historical truth

Most textbooks on the subject will say that (b) is the correct answer. These books will teach that Scripture is concerned primarily with relating the truths about God and our salvation rather than relating scientific or historic facts. So what's the problem with this?

First, the question presupposes that there are distinct kinds of truth. Scientific truth is not religious truth is not historical truth. Of course, if this is true, then we must naturally ask what relationship exists between different species of truth. Is one truth more valuable than the others? Is there a hierarchy of truths?

The answers to each of these questions will be determined in large part by the dominant worldview, or mindset, of the person providing the answers. It is important to note that a worldview is not reducible to culture. Rather our worldview forms the lenses through which we see and process life and reality. Certainly, the general culture we live in plays an important role in the development of our worldview, but so do our educations and our upbringings.

Most of us have multiple worldviews, or sets of glasses, that we use. However, one of these worldviews is normally dominant. It is this worldview that is the default mindset that we use to process our perceptions when perhaps conflicting worldviews are in play. For example, for many Catholics (and Americans), political ideologies seem to hold the place of the dominant

worldview. This means that, consciously or not, one's conservatism or liberalism politically is the lens through which the person experiences and evaluates his or her Catholicism and not vice versa.

So how might someone operating from a dominant worldview of modernity, or post-modernity, answer the questions about the division of truth and a hierarchy of truths?

In terms of the division of truth into categories, the modern mindset is quite comfortable. Compartmentalization and specialization are hallmarks of the post-Enlightenment Western mind. For this mindset, there are certainly different categories of truth.

However, this mindset has difficulty addressing the interrelatedness of these truths given as it is to specialization. One discipline cannot dare speak about the "truth" that would be material for another discipline. Furthermore, since relativism also characterizes this mindset, it is sometimes challenging for a person with this worldview to talk about objective truth as existing even within a given subject area (this is a reality especially in the universities where one commonly encounters the subjective view that there are only "truths" but no "truth.")

As to the question about a hierarchy of truths, the Western mind since the Enlightenment has progressively understood the natural order of being as world, humanity, and then God. This means that scientific truth would occupy the top place in any hierarchy. Scientific truth becomes the standard of all truth so any assertion of truth that contradicts scientific truth would be discarded as false. Historical truth would come next in this hierarchy followed by religious truth.

To the person viewing reality from this mindset, such a question about Scripture might very well communicate that Scripture is virtually irrelevant since it is concerned with the lowest order of truth and cannot necessarily be substantiated by either scientific or historic facts.

Now let's consider these same two questions from a Catholic worldview. While a Catholic worldview can appreciate the existence of different types of truths, it understands that each particular truth is related to the Truth – who is a person, Jesus Christ. For the Catholic mindset, Jesus then becomes the criteria for discerning all truth. To put it simply, if something is true, to the extent that it is true, it must participate or be in harmony with the Word of God (Scripture, Tradition, and magisterial teaching.) From the Catholic worldview, Pontius Pilate's infamous question to Jesus, "Quid est veritas?" (What is truth?) must necessarily be transformed into the "Quis est veritas?" (Who is truth?)

In a similar way, the Catholic worldview differs sharply from the modern mindset in terms of a hierarchy of truths. From the Catholic perspective, the natural order of being is the exact inverse of the modern perspective: God, humanity, and then the world. Consequently, religious truth would occupy the top spot in the hierarchy of truths and, in fact, other types of truths would be ordered to it.

Hopefully, we can see that the interpretation of the answer to the opening question takes on a completely different significance when considered from a Catholic mindset. That Scripture is primarily concerned with religious truth is to say that it is of the utmost importance to humanity with scientific and historical truth playing an important, but secondary role. St. Augustine captured the spirit of this aspect of the Catholic mindset when he wrote, "Ama Deum et fac quod

vis” (Love God and do what you wish). In other words, to paraphrase St. Paul, if you have scientific facts, but you do not have love, you are a clanging petri dish.

The question illustrates the stakes for education understood as the passing on a culture’s knowledge of truth to all its children. The answer to the aforementioned question from a Catholic perspective can lead one to a deeper appreciation of the source of all truth who is God; to a deeper understanding that science rests on the foundation that the world is intelligible because it was created by Wisdom itself; and to a deeper insight into history, its direction, and one’s place in it for God sanctified history and gave it direction by entering into it. On the other hand, the same answer to the same question from a “modern” perspective can, perhaps unwittingly, lead one to dismiss Scripture as irrelevant and unimportant and to satisfy oneself with partial truths at the expense of the fullness of truth.

Fides quaerens intellectum (Faith seeking understanding)

So what does any of this have to do with the place of faith in the standards that follow?

The Catechism lists faith as one of the three theological virtues (hope and charity are the other two). The theological virtues are gifts that are freely given to us out of love by God. Their purpose is to adapt our faculties for participation in the divine nature. They dispose us to live in relationship with the Holy Trinity, i.e. they dispose us for the communion for which we are destined.

Specifically, the theological virtue of faith is the virtue by which we believe in God, in all he has said and revealed, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, as he is truth itself. In other words, it is the virtue by which we can know and recognize the Truth, who is a Person, Jesus Christ.

This is why faith must come first in all aspects of the Catholic school – for if the Truth, who is a Person, Jesus Christ, is not the standard (the place where we stand), how can the school hope to pass on to our students that which is true? This, of course, implies that we must have knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Truth, if we are to entertain the hope of our passing this knowledge to our children. In other words, if faith does not come first in the lives of the administrators, faculty, staff, and parents, how can the school be true to its nature as a community that participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church?

The Catholic school is charged with not only teaching the culture’s knowledge, but also with giving order to human culture in light of Christ’s message of salvation. In other words, the Catholic school has the pastoral mission of mediating faith and culture. It does this by *both* celebrating and passing on what is good and true in the culture *and* by working for the purification/transformation of those aspects of culture that are opposed to the good and true as known through the lens of faith (i.e. by reference to Scripture, Tradition, and the teachings of the Magisterium.)

The full living out of this mission by Catholic school teachers and administrators is crucial for the students who are daily inundated with some of the more destructive and dominant cultural mindsets besetting our country. For example, the Catholic school, because it brings faith in God to bear on every academic subject, can help protect students from the ever-present danger of a

reductionism so prevalent in the sciences and philosophy that seeks to cut off any sense of the transcendent.

Similarly, because the Catholic school is oriented to God as both the source and destiny of humanity, it can help students resist the traps of materialism and secularism that seek to convince them that this world is all that there is. At the same time, the Catholic school can help students avoid the temptation to escape from the world and its struggles into some false spiritual world or into some chemically induced state. By exploring the mystery of suffering and giving it meaning, the Catholic school, rooted in the mysteries of the Catholic faith, can form students capable of dealing constructively with the realities of life.

In addition, the Catholic school is perhaps better equipped than other schools to conduct the search for and to celebrate the truth of all the culture's knowledge while guarding against the evils of a relativism that denies any absolute truth. Again, the Catholic school knows better and proclaims the Truth, who is a Person, Jesus Christ.

In short, our lived Catholic faith positions the Catholic school to deal most effectively with our reality as human beings. We too live in a tension between living in this world and our yearning for something beyond. The secret is how to walk in this tension without gravitating to the extremes. The Catholic school is naturally suited to form individuals capable of doing just this.

Again, the importance and role of faith in Catholic education is a dimension that all too often is lost or minimized by many of us, both Catholic and non-Catholic, because we do not see Catholic schools through the eyes of faith. We see only what Catholic schools share in common with other schools, private and public, and we determine their value based on how they perform relative to these other schools. However, when viewed through the eyes of faith, Catholic schools can be infinitely different from other schools and make an infinite difference in the lives of our students.

In summary, the standards we propose in this document flow from the conviction that education fundamentally is the "truth in a state of transmission" as so aptly expressed by Chesterton at the beginning of this brief introduction. As the truth in a state of transmission, education necessarily demands our intentional striving toward perfection in the art of discerning the truth. Perfection in the art of discerning the truth ultimately requires a standard of Truth. For the Catholic school, this standard of Truth is Jesus Christ. As such, the theological virtue of faith must be at the core of any set of standards since it alone allows us to encounter the Word of God as revealed in Scripture, Tradition, and the teachings of the Church and to recognize it precisely as the one, true standard.