



The Armor of Faith

Topic Summary: The Battle for Our Children ***Part V: High School and University Education Systems***



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Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Helen is a lay-Dominican, which is also known as the Order of Preachers, and she, along with her husband Dan, are engaged in youth catechesis and music ministry at Saint Philip Benizi Catholic Mission in Cedaredge, Colorado. Sharon is our token cradle Catholic, and, as everyone by now knows, I am simply here to ask questions, kinda like a pitcher in baseball. Of course, our panelists have the bats with which to return the answers, so welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Discussion:

During our last discussion, we reviewed sources through which our children learn about news and current events, source biases, possible perceptions and reactions of our children, the role of parents in navigating all the different subjects and views, how to help children evaluate sources,

how to help children with critical thinking and analysis, and how to help our children engage others about the news.

On the surface, this seems to be like hooking up to the fire hose in trying to figure out how to help our children to navigate all the potential mine fields, but we should also keep in mind that this is an ongoing activity and is not accomplished in just one sitting. We should also keep in mind that it is a good practice to periodically assess how we are going about the task. Our effectiveness will increase as we gain experience with information tools and we receive feedback from our children.

As we engage our children, we must also consider our own emotions and biases. The most important question we must ask ourselves as we engage and help our children is whether we understand what God asks of us? Again, the more we know about our faith, the harder we make the job of the one who tries to take it away from us. As we help our children know and understand our faith, we help them to put on the armor of God which will not only enable them to protect their soul, but will also enable them to do what is right and just as they engage the world about them. What we do or what we fail to do in this regard will not only impact the future of our children, but also those who cross their path and potentially generations to follow.

Today, we are going to look at the impact of the education system on our teens. Perhaps the most challenging years to the faith of our children are those of high school and post high school education. These are the years where our children are on the precipice of entry into adulthood. As our children continue to mature and develop their value system and critical thinking skills, they are also testing out increasing levels of responsibility and independence, but it is not a time to simply toss them off the cliff and hope they fly.

While our children begin to test their independence as they experience the world without our direct observation, they still need our emotional support, our feedback, our guidance, and most importantly, our love.

Because they are exposed to so much which bypasses us, the value system we instilled in them as children is their first shield against a confusing and tempting world. We must also recognize that while they are capable of critical thinking and analysis, their learning to date has been largely reinforced through regurgitation rather than application. If a teacher says it, it must be true. Indeed, the grades our children receive are often dependent upon the child's ability to reflect the political beliefs of the teacher and the learning objectives of the establishment curriculum rather than critical thinking and analysis as we see it through the lens of what God asks of us.

One of the challenges of our public school system, is that all sides understand that schools are not only a ground for educating our children, but they are also a fertile ground for values grooming and political indoctrination. Additionally, we must be wary of the extremes of both the left and the right. As we have mentioned before, for Catholics, it is not about whether Progressives or Conservatives are right or wrong, it is about whether we understand what God asks of us.

(Question 1: The question before public system educators is that pesky thing called truth. Because of our religion, culture, and political ideologies, we have differing views as to exactly what should be taught. What are some of the challenges school boards and education officials face when they review and select age appropriate curriculum? Through what lens should they present the world to our children?)

- What political ideologies?
- Whose economics?
- Whose science?
- Whose social values?
- Whose sexuality?
- Whose religion? (there is no such thing as “no” religious belief)
- Whose History?
- Whose truth? (Truth in history is elusive, even for those who were there)

(Question 2: As we trust our children to the education system, we must recognize that there are many forces in play working to shape the minds of our youth; some with good intentions, some with political agendas, but even those with good intentions can present materiel which may be in conflict with the value system of our faith. What are some of the concerns we might have concerning to what our children are exposed in the education system. Is it just teachers?)

- Secular Values (especially concerning life, sexuality, and the family)
- Political Bias (ideological agendas, especially anti-Catholic agendas)
- Government agendas (see political bias and secular values)
- Teacher agendas (personal, professional, political, ideological belief systems)
- Peer Groups (values influence, peer pressure, bullying)
- Extra curricular or outside sociopolitical agendas

One statistic which should cause grave concern for every Catholic is that studies reveal that approximately 50% of our youth will leave the church, many by the age of 23. (Vogt) While the reasons given are varied, one area of concern raised was that “Catholicism is incompatible with what they are learning in high school or at the university level.” (Gray)

(Question 3: As we reflect upon this statistic, it reveals an inconsistency between our education system and our faith. What are some of the likely areas where our children will experience inconsistencies of what is taught in a largely secular system in comparison to our faith? Is this because they are truly inconsistent or being presented as such?)

- Science (evolution vs creation or intelligent design)
- Sexuality (gender issues, contraception, birth control)
- History (focus on negatives of Catholicism in history, science and culture)
- Civics (secular values vs what we believe God asks of us)

(Question 4: One of the areas of concern is what is written in our text books. What is the nature of the text book culture war and over what is being fought?)

- Whose facts and theories will be taught?
- Whose social values?
- Whose version of history?
- Whose view of science?
- Whose political ideology?
- What diversity and tone of view?

The Washington Post article, “Proposed Texas Textbooks Are Inaccurate, Biased and Politicized, New Report Finds,” which was written by Valerie Strauss, provides one view of the war in progress over what is contained in our text books. As the author recounts the questions raised, what is clear is that any discussion of the matter will have a biased view. While we look through the “what God reveals and asks of us” lens, others look through varying degrees of Progressive, Conservative, and non-Catholic religious lenses. Some look through multiple lenses, depending on their particular combination of religion, ideology and social causes.

(Question 5: Clearly, textbooks are a powerful tool towards shaping the minds of our youth with subsequent impacts upon future social forces and power structures. What should our interest be in the textbook and curriculum culture wars and how might we be a positive force within the discussion?)

- Advocate accuracy in representation of the Catholic faith and values
- Listen and research opposing views
- Assess and converse with potential allies (Do not assume all Catholics are allies)
- Ground ourselves in relevant facts and sources
 - ➔ What is the inaccuracy or issue?
 - ➔ What is more accurate? (recommended change)
 - ➔ What are the supporting sources? (citations and quotes)
 - ➔ Use scripture only to correct understanding of scripture
- Avoid emotionalism
- Dismiss emotionalism against Catholic view (note, but move to facts)
- Remain polite (avoid rude comments and name calling) → 1 Peter 3:15-16

(1 Peter 3:15b-16)

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame.

- Follow-up with our children → walk through the facts, sources, and logic

(Question 6: Ultimately, our objective is that our children increase in their knowledge and understanding of the world as they also learn their faith. **How should we engage our children as they encounter the education system?)**

- Listen
- Ask what they think
- Ask about the information and sources influencing their understanding
- Don't argue, but encourage discussion
- Use questions to enable analysis, belief/values formation, and problem solving
- Learn about and discuss their passions → what is their vision for themselves?
- Engage them in elements of their faith (prayer, ministry, adoration)
- Remain alert for conversation opportunities, but avoid overwhelming
- Point out, recognize, and encourage success
- Assess the example we set
 - ➔ What do our children see us do?
 - ➔ What do our children hear as we converse?
 - ➔ What commitment do we present?
 - ➔ What love do we present?

Quotes:

In you young people there is hope, for you belong to the future, as the future belongs to you. To you belongs responsibility for what will one day become reality together with yourselves. In this regard, the first and principal wish of the Church is that you should “always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.

– *Saint Pope John Paul II (To the Youth of the World, 31 May 1985)*

I desire therefore to entrust to all of you, the young people to whom this Letter is addressed, this marvelous task which is linked with the discovery before God of each one's life vocation. This is an exciting task. It is a fascinating interior undertaking. In this undertaking your humanity develops and grows, while your young personality acquires ever greater inner maturity. You become rooted in that which each of you is, in order to become that which you must become: for yourself-for other people-for God.

– *Saint Pope John Paul II (To the Youth of the World, 31 May 1985)*

The work which characterizes the period of youth is, above all, a preparation for the work of adulthood, and so is linked to the school... Education is one of the fundamental benefits of human civilization. It is especially important for the young. Upon it also depends to a great extent the future of the whole of society.

– *Saint Pope John Paul II (To the Youth of the World, 31 May 1985)*

Final Thoughts:

We may not be able to stop the tide of politics overwhelming our education system, but we can help our children understand and navigate the social paths which are in conflict with our faith.

The reality is, as our children begin to step into the adult world, especially when they enter into post-high school education where our contact with them is diminished, they must be capable of putting on their own armor, not only for the defense of their faith, but for their very soul and perhaps the generations to follow. We must also recognize that in the process, we will set the example by which they will evaluate how they will raise their children, if that becomes their vocation. Let us pray the Holy Spirit will guide us to be a positive example in how we engage the world.

While the temptation may be to get angry as we battle the system, we must also remember that how we react will be evaluated by everyone, including our children. As we engage, we must realize that Catholics are only one faction in the culture wars over our education system. We must also understand that those we might think are our allies may not always be. Both the left and the right have biases towards the Catholic faith.

We must not remain silent, else we will become increasingly marginalized within our society by the dominant political factions. Still, we must be wary, respectful, and responsible in how we choose to engage the system. The rules of generalization dictate that as other factions learn we are Catholic, then, everything we present is considered to represent our faith.

As we engage, we must also remember that many, if not most, of our public educators simply want to educate our children and will work with us. We must not over generalize our concerns, but reach out in the spirit of 1 Peter 3:15-16. To defend both our children and our faith, we may need to be persistent and patient, but most importantly, we must endeavor to engage in a manner worthy of our Christian values.

Wrap Up: Well, our time has come to an end. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we pick up our discussion to social relationships.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: The Battle for Our Children – Part VI: Social Relationships

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