

Educating Today and Tomorrow- a Renewing Passion

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The Heart of the Church: Educating in Christian Virtue

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I. Introduction

The Holy Father has called the world to a year of mercy. The works of mercy are several, but the one which particularly behooves us educators to exercise is of course to ‘Instruct the Ignorant.’” As we look about us, beyond our centers of education, we can see enormous suffering due to lack of knowledge. And in this respect it is my conviction that the greatest lack in this century is the lack of learning and understanding the Christian Virtues and..... especially...how to apply them in daily life.

As educators we must respond generously to those in need of education of every kind, but today I would like to focus on this particular area, which is, as my title suggests, the Heart of the Church. Education in Christian virtue must certainly strike us as inordinately important, because health, wealth and opportunity without these avail a person nothing toward happiness or salvation.¹

In this year that the Congregation for Catholic Education is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the importance of the Church’s commitment to education has been repeatedly invoked as a part of the New Evangelization. With ‘globalization’ and a new connectedness in the world, there are new opportunities for facing today’s obvious, and often critical, “educational emergency”. Now is the time to put in

¹ An excellent analysis of this process can be seen in Jeynes, W.H.; Robinson, D. (2010). 'Character Education in Christian Higher Education: A Historical Analysis and Contemporary Challenge (Part I)', *Christian Higher Education*, 9 (no. 4), p. 295-315.; Robinson, D.; Jeynes, W.H. *Ibid.* 'Character Education in Christian Higher Education: A Historical Analysis and Contemporary Challenge (Part II)', p. 316-335.

practice new methods of *education for living*, and of openness to others, with a view to the *common good*.

II. The problem

The well-known problems of marital and family breakdown, young people with no clear idea of marriage or family as part of their future, and the poverty arising from single motherhood are undermining to a horrifying degree the attainment of happiness and perhaps sometimes even of salvation in our modern cities. Studies concerning the incidence of these weak points in our culture point more and more clearly to the distancing of our culture from what have been known as universal values, or Judeo-Christian virtues. Justice and solidarity are perhaps the most obviously absent. But the fabric of society requires others that are also undermined by the current tendency to materialism, egotism and relativism. These new tendencies have weakened not only the fabric of society, leading to growing statistics of juvenile crime and drug use, but are destabilizing human relations and particularly marriage, causing a vicious cycle of behaviours contrary to human thriving.

The Church, Pope Benedict, the Pontifical Council for Family and most recently the Synod on the Family, have demanded better preparation for marriage, and in particular new methods of “remote preparation.” This remote preparation for marriage, or indeed preparation for life in any capacity, requires learning to live the Christian virtues, particularly loyalty, generosity, patience, perseverance, justice, understanding, solidarity, and commitment.²

The 20th century has seen great upheavals, including two horrific World Wars, a great financial disturbance, the cultural revolution of the 1960s and the ensuing sexual revolution.³ The traditional transmission of virtues and values has been interrupted.⁴ In fact, many parents today

² To understand these virtues and how to teach them today, cfr. Pieper, J. (1991), *A brief reader on the virtues of the human heart*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco; Lickona, T. (2004), *Character matters: how to help our children develop good judgment, integrity, and other essential virtues*, Simon & Schuster, New York

³ See Lickona, T. (2007). 'Educating for Character in the Sexual Domain ', *Second International Congress on Education in Love, Sex, and Life Manila, Philippines November 20,*

⁴ Cfr. Hunter, J. D. (2000), *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good or Evil*, Basic Books, New York; Smagorinsky, P. and Taxel, J. (2005), *The discourse of character education: culture wars in the classroom*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, N.J..

are themselves children of the “60’s generation” and were educated to believe that intention is all that counts and that the very notion of virtue was unacceptably judgmental. University campuses gave impulse to this idea to the point that today many parents in the West feel quite lost as to whether or not to give their children guidance of any kind. Sadly, it must be admitted that Christian virtue has ceased to be the ideal and norm of law and the accepted culture as it was for 12 centuries. Christians are often bewildered and feel very alone.

Children and adolescents are suffering the consequences of all of this in tragic numbers. Not only through family breakdown, but also because they are neither understanding the Christian virtues nor how to live them.⁵ These are no longer the accepted code of behavior. And so we see increasing numbers in the West of young people dropping out of school, taking drugs, cohabitating and opting to have their children out of wedlock. The toll is great, and growing. Simply in terms of sexually transmitted diseases, infertility and low birth rates the news is very sad.

III. Researching a method

Living in Latin America, where these problems and their effect on societal breakdown are more evident than in Europe, it was our goal to find an effective way to put these tendencies into reverse. Ambitious as it may seem, this goal is not impossible because new generations of children are constantly being born. Children tend naturally to wanting to know what is right and to learning to do it. The difficulty for these new generations of children is that they are given inadequate models of behaviour; and virtues, which all people recognize instinctively, are not taught in a coherent way. The in-born desire for transcendence⁶ is smothered by the policies of uniformity. The media, the advertising industry and others overwhelm children and young people with encouragement to become materialistic, egotistic and immoral. We have, however, discovered that when exposed young enough and accompanied by a succession of consistent and coherent reinforcements, the logic of virtue appeals to children and adolescents as the way they would like to live. All children and adolescents, regardless of their surroundings, wish to “be somebody” and to be respected and recognized for who they are in their uniqueness.

⁵ Cfr. Kilpatrick, W. (1992), *Why Johnny can't tell right from wrong*, Simon & Schuster, New York

⁶ Cfr. Frankl, V. E. (1991), *Man's search for meaning. An introduction to logotherapy*, Hodder and Stoughton, London

We sensed an enormous need to offer a holistic formation to all those involved in the various sectors of education, but especially in primary and secondary, when the formation of young minds is the most effective.

In essence, as we teach how to live the universal values and virtues, we can, at the same time as forming the individual, create an environment of *mutual appreciation* as part of an understanding of the dignity of every human person as the student comes to see the workings of these virtues in him or herself as well as in others. Our goal was to delineate and make real in the minds of the students the respect and appreciation due to each and all in their uniqueness, irrespective of cultural differences. This required a firm basis in Christian and universal anthropology.

The first labor of our interdisciplinary and international team was to diagnose and list the values or virtues most evidently lacking where social and family weakness is present, as well as analyzing those which are present in strong communities, families and tribes.

In view of the increasing social chaos, success in life has become a major area of social studies recently and in fact the work of Martin Seligman and Angela Duckworth at Pennsylvania University have borne out our analysis. Today a new turn in psychology, as in these representatives of positive psychology, is returning to a recognition of a concept of virtue and strengths, regarding principally the importance for success in life, greater than IQ, of such virtues as gratitude, generosity, self-discipline and hope.⁷ In another study researchers at the University of Michigan and West Point showed that perseverance and a zeal for long range goals was a more important factor in success than academic prowess.⁸ Another interesting contribution in this direction, regarding a return to the notion of the importance of virtue, or at least character building, is Walter Mischel and his famous experiment with the marshmallows.⁹

Our team's challenge was to devise a method of making virtue understandable, attractive and therefore practicable in today's complicated world. Our method is called *Alive to the World*, a

⁷ Cfr. Duckworth, A.L. and Seligman, M.E.P. (2005), 'Self-discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance', *Psychological Science*, Volume 16-Number 12.

⁸ Cfr. Duckworth, A.L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M.D. and Kelly, D.R. (2007) 'Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 92, No. 6, 1087–1101

⁹ Cfr. Kurti, A.N. (2015). 'Hot thoughts, cold thoughts, and harnessing self-control: Walter Mischel's the marshmallow test and the other half of the equation', *American Journal of Psychology*, (no. 3), p. 414.

13-level curriculum (K-12) to not only teach values and ‘turn them into virtues’¹⁰, but to form right reasoning in the boys, girls and adolescents, utilizing the windows of opportunity that occur naturally as the child’s brain develops.¹¹

Our Lord taught by parables, as have done other great teachers, before and since His time. And this was the pedagogical method that we chose for *Alive to the World*. The principles of St. John Paul’s anthropology of love¹² have been used as the basis for this continuous story of a group of children as they grow from age 5 to 18. This attractive story,¹³ written in 13 successive age-appropriate books to be used in schools, follows a pedagogy of the development of the personality through virtue¹⁴, and takes into consideration sound psychology, and the latest knowledge of brain development.¹⁵ It is proving very effective in 14 countries and is in 5 languages so far.

In developing *Alive to the World*, our team developed what came to be called the Pedagogy of the Integration of the Human Person (PIHP)¹⁶. This pedagogy is the theoretical framework of a general pedagogical view which justifies a process of teaching/learning which gives equal attention to, and integrates, the corporal, affective and spiritual dimensions, and which proposes a path toward the *integrum*, fostering that interior balance which we know as integration.¹⁷

Integration is the need to harmonize the various dynamisms or levels of action which make up the human person. When the spiritual level, with its intelligence and will, the affective level,

¹⁰ Cfr. Salls, H. S. (2007), *Character education: transforming values into virtue*, University Press of America, Lanham; Sandin, R. (1992), *The rehabilitation of virtue: foundations of moral education*, Praeger Publishers, New York; Character Education Partnership, (2012). 'CEP's Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education' Character Education Partnership, http://info.character.org/Portals/139743/docs/ElevenPrinciples_new2010.pdf (accessed 08/21, 2012).

¹¹ Cfr. Isaacs, D. (2001), *Character building. A guide for parents and teachers*, Four Courts, Dublin.

¹² Cfr. Wojtyla, K. (1981), *Love and responsibility*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco.

¹³ For the application of Story Telling in moral education, see Leming, J.S. (2000). 'Tell Me a Story: An Evaluation of a Literature-Based Character Education Programme', *Journal of Moral Education*, 29 (no. 4), p. 413-427; Kilpatrick, W. (1992) 'Moral Character: Story-Telling and Virtue', In: McLean, G.F. y Knowles, R.T. (eds.) *Psychological Foundations of Moral Education and Character Development, an Integrated Theory of Moral Development*, Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, Washington DC, pp. 170-183

¹⁴ Cfr. Murphy, M.M. (2001) 'Three Essential Components of Character Development', In Naval Durán, C. y Urpí Guercia, C. (eds.), *Una Voz Diferente En La Educación Moral*, Eunsa, Pamplona, pp. 111-129

¹⁵ Cfr. Siegel, D. J. (1999), *The developing mind*, Guilford Press, New York; Schore, A. N. (1994), *Affect regulation and the origin of the self: the neurobiology of emotional development*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, N.J.

¹⁶ Cfr. Beltramo, C. (2013), *La Pedagogía de la Integración de la Persona Humana*, Tesis doctoral, Pamplona

¹⁷ Cfr. Wojtyla *Love and responsibility*, Ignatius Press, California.

with its competing emotions and sentiments, are integrated with the corporal effectivity of consciously-taken actions, the individual is living as a cohesive whole. Maturity and felicity will be the result. This integration is certainly one of the ends of education, and is not only a desired result, but becomes useful as a guiding element in evaluating the progress of our students.¹⁸ To be able to say that a student is integrated, or is advancing well in that direction, allows us to better evaluate our own pedagogical efforts. All our teaching efforts are reinforced and enhanced when we have this definite and coherent goal and parameters by which to evaluate it.

So, we can say that integration of the personality permeates the entire educative process: the various transversal axis of education should collaborate in this goal, contributing to the internal coherence which allows the student to grow and flourish through the harmonization of his or her inner world. An integrated person is better able to accept diversity, globalization, and legitimate differences between persons, institutions, things and ideas because she or he understands and accepts her or his own identity. In the integrated person, diversity and plurality do not cause insecurity nor doubt, but lead to understanding her or his own complementarity and dynamic role in the larger community.

Thus integration overcomes artificial divisions and categories and allows a vision of the person as a holistic entity, where nothing needs to be hidden or suppressed. Integration is also the affirmation of the personality which implies and leads to action and is reflected in the phenomenology of this person because it is only in the harmonization of the different levels of action of the person that he or she finds her or his full splendor.

Virtue itself is essentially this plenitude of the whole person, acting in sovereign freedom according to the coordinated dictates of emotion, knowledge and will, guided by what is known to be right.¹⁹

This is real freedom and very different from a simple conditioning of behavior in accord with paradigms which have been determined by the environment as convenient or correct.²⁰

¹⁸ Cfr. Bernal, A.; Beltramo, C. (2010). 'La educación emocional entre las ciencias positivas y la filosofía', *Comunicación Presentada en el 12º Congreso International Network of Philosophers of Education (INPE), Bogotá, Colombia.*

¹⁹ Cfr. Pinckaers, S. (1964), *Le renouveau de la morale. Etudes pour the morale fidèle à ses sources et à mission présente*, Casterman, Paris

IV. The method

It is with these things in mind that were composed each student text, consisting of 35 chapters, or lessons, per year, or one hour per week. As the children progress through the story, understanding the different facets of the situations which are universal to all children, a healthy cohesion, born of understanding, appears in the classroom. After the first two books where they explore identity, the person inserted within nature, a family and a greater neighborhood, they reach a level where they can read about the mechanics of teamwork, the rewards of effort and the process of understanding the need for accepting others as persons as worthy as themselves.²¹ Book 3, for the 7-8 year-old, centers on sports and the virtues learned through them, mainly team work and the adherence to rules with perseverance and the rewards of success.²² The following year, girls and boys learn the various facets of solidarity, generosity, care of possessions...their own and those of others...and service to others.²³ The 5th book, for the 9-10 year-olds leads them to understand the beautiful diversity and complementarity of talents and tastes which make the world so rich a place. Important in this text is learning to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of oneself and others, while these neither diminish nor increase the dignity of each, but that working to become better is the positive attitude.²⁴ The following text is dedicated to the facets of friendships of different kinds and is, in the opinion of the authors, an important part of the base for future marriage.²⁵

The following text, for the 12-13 year-olds, examines the changes of attitudes and feelings which are common at puberty, or adolescence. These are lived by the characters in the story in a normal variety of ways which help the readers to place themselves and their companions in a

²⁰ Cfr. Altarejos, F. (2004). 'Autorregulación e integración: dos propuestas en la educación de la afectividad (D. Goleman y Tomás de Aquino)', *Estudios Sobre Educación*, 007, p. 62.

²¹ Cfr. de Marcellus de Vollmer, C. et al. (2006), *Empiezo a conocerme (Aprendiendo a Querer, Libro 1)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima; de Marcellus de Vollmer, C. et al. (2006), *Estoy creciendo feliz (Aprendiendo a Querer, Libro 2)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima

²² Cfr. de Marcellus de Vollmer, C. and Beltramo, C. (2006), *Somos un gran equipo (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 3)*, ALAFA Ediciones - UCSC, Concepción (Chile)

²³ Cfr. de Marcellus de Vollmer, C., Saunders, J. and Beltramo, C. (2006), *Qué bueno es compartir (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 4)*, ALAFA Ediciones - Biocolor, Buenos Aires

²⁴ Cfr. de Marcellus de Vollmer, C., Saunders, J. and Beltramo, C. (2006), *Diferentes y Complementarios (Aprendiendo a Querer, Libro 5)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima

²⁵ Cfr. de Marcellus de Vollmer, C., Saunders, J. and Beltramo, C. (2006), *¡Amigos! (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 6)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima; de Marcellus de Vollmer, C., Saunders, J. and Beltramo, C. (2006), *Vamos hacia la madurez (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 7)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima

comprehensible light, and to see their parents' points of view.²⁶ Following this, the remaining texts include different situations of attraction, of infatuation, love and loyalty which are lived through the story without forgetting the virtues learned in earlier friendships. Negotiation and decision-taking, with considerations of talents and interests as well as contributions to the common good, make the high school texts very fascinating to boys and girls alike.²⁷ Service to the community, even in elected office, is explored in the final texts of this series of books for students. *Service learning* as an outgrowth and application of the understanding that the ego is not the center of all interest, but that the common good is the where happiness and self-realization can be attained, is gradually inserted in several different manifestations which are practicable anywhere.

Among the transversal values throughout this curriculum, the virtuous cycle of humility is applied to different themes as is the vicious cycle of pride. And a constant, although not obvious, theme is the Golden Rule of doing to others as one would be done by.

Each student text of *Alive to the World* is accompanied by a complete teacher guide, facilitating its use by the teacher, with explanation of the objectives for each chapter and suggested activities and discussion points.

V. Results since inception in 2000

The results of this innovative and scientific approach to teaching virtue, values, relationships, a sense of community and equal dignity has been altogether surprising. What was originally hoped to be a better preparation for sexuality and marriage, has turned out to be as well an extraordinary tool for restoring a sense of worth and an understanding of virtue in students, with an ambition to be a positive influence in their world.

²⁶ Cfr. de Marcellus de Vollmer, C. and Beltramo, C. (2000), *Construyendo mi personalidad (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 8)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima; de Marcellus de Vollmer, C. and Beltramo, C. (2000), *Construyendo mi futuro (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 9)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima

²⁷ Cfr. de Marcellus de Vollmer, C. and Beltramo, C. (2000), *Hechos para amar (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 10)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima; de Marcellus de Vollmer, C. and Beltramo, C. (2000), *Mi futuro es importante hoy (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 11)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima; de Marcellus de Vollmer, C., Beltramo, C. and Ballón, M. (2000), *Frente a las grandes decisiones (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 12)*, ALAFA Ediciones, Lima; Saunders, J., de Marcellus de Vollmer, C. and Beltramo, C. (2014), *Listos para el futuro (Aprendiendo a Querer Libro 13)*, Learnex de México, México, DF

The most satisfying results have been in areas of extreme social and family breakdown, where hope has all but disappeared. In these situations it is extraordinary to see the joy in the students who discover inside themselves their God-given identity as marked for the good and their enthusiasm to see that they also are called to be a positive contributor to the world and an object and subject of reliable love.

With over a million children and adolescents having been part of this experiment, we can say with confidence that it is considered effective in the Latin American countries, including Cuba. Several have opted to publish, such as Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico and Brazil (as *Caminhos de Vida*), as well as recently non-Latin nations such as the UK, Korea, Poland, Hungary, Germany and France. An African version is due to be published shortly in Kenya, while in Latvia, Croatia, Rumania and the Czech Republic groups are organizing in order to translate and publish these texts as a healthy national substitute for programs teaching Gender Ideology and birth limitation. The simple language used avoids overtly religious terminology, making this product acceptable to governments seeking courses in ‘sex education’ which do not offend families. These reasons, as well as the need for Remote Preparation for Marriage, have also guided the decision of a group in Trinidad and Tobago and the Diocese of Arecibo in Puerto Rico.

As requested by this important World Congress, “we must also offer a holistic formation, developing a whole range of skills that enrich human beings: their imagination; their capacity to assume responsibility and to love the world; their capacity to promote justice and compassion; and their capacity to design goals that can change the future. Within such a rapidly changing society, the idea of a holistic education means reflecting continuously on how to renew this society, making it ever richer in quality, humanity and mercy.”

It is my hope that the Association for Family Policy and Law will find in this 26 volume material and the Teacher Training Course which accompanies it, an academic and practical instrument to propose to governments who desire to form the next generations as strong, happy individuals ready to form strong, happy families to produce succeeding generations of Europeans and renew this continent after the terrible effects of the bloody 20th Century.

Thank you.

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