SOCIETY for CLASSICAL LEARNING

THE JOURNAL

A conversation on education in the classical tradition

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Our Mission

Conference Edition

ROBERT INGRAM, SCL CHAIRMAN

While I was working as the Vice-President of Ligonier Ministries back in the 1980s, RC Sproul would continually ask the management team, "What's the big idea?"

RC didn't like little ideas; he didn't like medium sized ideas. Rather, ideas had to be big, bold, and audacious. And precisely because ideas have consequences, RC wanted us to think and create big ideas that would have huge consequences for the cause of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. As you can imagine, it was a great environment in which to work, and 25 years later I still see and hear from folks the beneficial "consequences" (fruit) of our labor.

Christian classical education is a big idea. In fact, Dr. Sproul was one of the nine of us who began The Geneva School in 1993 in order to join the next big idea in American education. Revitalizing the curriculum and pedagogy foundational to the Western narrative captured his imagination. We could all foresee a return to those educational philosophies that had begun in antiquity, been promulgated by Augustine, led to the medieval world synthesis, accounted for the rise of the great European universities, and inspired the cause of liberty among our Founding Fathers.

This issue of the Journal focuses upon the mission and purpose of the Society for Classical Learning and the Christian classical movement in general. It is a return to the sources, so to speak, in an effort to make certain that we are heading on the intended trajectory. A year in the school trenches can cause us to lose our way at times, and so it is imperative that we ask again, "What's the big idea?"

The same benefit, only on a much larger scale, is afforded all of us at the national conference this summer in Baltimore. Reading the bios of the keynote speakers on the SCL website will convince you that these folks know the big picture of what has been, is, and yet might be. We're an "ideas rich" Society, and you'll want to be there with us to benefit from it.

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ABOUT THE SOCIETY

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Learning to Love What Must Be Done

by Christopher Perrin, M.Div., Ph.D.

I am sure that most of you, like me, have fought hard to overcome a perpetual desire to relax and procrastinate when important tasks loomed. Those of you who have never battled with procrastination--well, your problems are obviously of another sort. In college, I recall several who transformed the practice of putting things off into art. Do you remember the guy in your dorm hall who wouldn't begin his term paper till the night before it was due--and somehow still got an A? These types make it tempting for all of us.

The etymology of procrastination is worth examining: the word comes from the Latin *pro* (forward, on behalf of) and *cras* (tomorrow). Therefore, at its root, the word means pro-tomorrow. Remember the maxim of the slacker: Why do today what you can put off until tomorrow? In contrast, we find encouragement of a different sort from the German poet Goethe: Cease endlessly striving for what you would like to do and learn to love what must be done.

I can sure do with a little more Goethe; and I am forced to reason that my children must need his advice, too. Many voices call for our attention--and not all of them bad. Sure, there are the typical scoundrels calling for us: hours of mindless TV programs, on-line surfing and chit-chat and other forms of "entertainment" that do little to exalt our minds or souls (no wonder Christopher Wren called TV "chewing gum" for the eyes). There are some good TV programs available too--some unusually good programs on the History Channel (but also some weird ones). We must admit, too, that amidst the ocean of drivel on the internet there are some exceptionally good sites and resources. Rejecting good things for what is best can be sorely difficult--should the family stay home tonight or take off for a church service or activity?

Finding a routine helps--for the routine answers the questions before they come up. Yes, we are going for a walk this afternoon--we always do. Yes, we will start homework after dinner--that is our routine. Crafting the routine, of course, is not necessarily easy. I know many families have great, thoughtful, tested, and re-tooled routines (could you send me a copy?). Some families with younger children (or maybe only one young child) are probably still working on crafting a family rhythm and pattern. Establishing a routine that works well is an ongoing enterprise that keeps answering the question of what must go, stay, or be added.

Once we have created a workable routine, another challenge becomes clear. How do we maintain momentum, energy, stability, and peace? At least part of the answer comes from Goethe: We should love those things we must do. Once our daily tasks become beloved tasks, the routine becomes less routine. This, I believe, is something we can pass on to our children, like an attitude, for Goethe is encouraging a mindset not an activity. If they see some measure of joy as we cook, clean, mow, and repair, they are apt to find it easier to love (in a manner of speaking) clearing their plates, bathing, and doing homework. Strange as it is, they usually grow up to be like us.

Education, after all, is largely a matter of routine. Nothing is mastered without regular visitation, review, and study. And education never stops. If we can, we should cast the work our students do as a labor of love, a life-long love, and we should love what they do, too. Education will have its high moments, its epiphanies, breakthroughs, and moments of joy--much like a marriage. But the larger tranquility of a good education comes from the

regular labor of worksheets, translations, and reading assignments, in the same way a good marriage grows on preparing a meal, raking the lawn, and taking a walk.

Once we have created a routine and learned to love it, we can also find yet even further comfort in knowing that a regular part of our routine must be to break from it. We call these breaks of routine by various names, such as "dinner out," "weekends," and "vacations." These can be holy days in their own right, those special routines that are special largely because they are not daily, and because they are a ritual of celebration. And we celebrate with the most poignant joy when our work is done (the hay is in the barn, the homework is all done--let's go to dinner). Put another way, when we work well, we rest well.

Christopher Perrin is the publisher with Classical Academic Press and the Director of the Classical School Round Table, part of the Institute for Classical Schools.

Avoiding Mission Drift

by John Heaton

I received a notice in the mail recently from the 100-year old Episcopal boarding school down the street announcing the appointment of a new headmaster. It took my breath away when I looked to the bottom of the letter to read the school's mission statement, which for a century has been the verse from St. Paul to the Ephesians, "…until we all come to the full measure of the stature of Christ." This statement is written in Greek in the stained glass of the campus chapel. The statement at the bottom of stationery, however, proclaimed boldly: "until we all come to full stature." The "of Christ" part was neatly deleted with a simple keystroke, so I presume the students are just growing up with no particular end in mind. Well now, might we be just a wee bit embarrassed about Jesus? Clearly, mission drift has been going on in that school for a long time.

The hard work of sustaining fidelity to a clear mission challenges the most august and established institutions. The last twenty-five years has been a founding generation of classical schools in large part because the mission of providing classical education was dropped by schools that once espoused it. Since the publication of Wilson's *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*, there has been a renaissance of schools rising to the effort called for in that and subsequent books. There is a palpable energy felt in the hallways of these schools, freshness in the spirit of teachers in the classroom, an enthusiasm unmatched in any sector of private education. Once the first flush of success dims, however, mission drift can be a great enemy.

The mission of a school is obviously the stewardship of the "owners," the board of directors. Boards, however, can only affect a relatively small handful of factors that keep the school on course, and most of those are systemic - hire the right head of school, enact policies that are on mission, etc. They cannot - and should not - interfere in the daily discharge of the school's work. Thus, mission drift is most successfully attenuated when there is buy-in to the mission from top to bottom. Board members must be appropriately profiled and selected, but so must faculty members and students themselves.

School heads are in the single strongest position to guard the mission because they work directly both with boards and with staff. That doesn't mean that teachers and other administrators don't play a role. Here are a few suggestions that headmasters and faculty members might try:

Read your school's mission statement out loud routinely. It sounds cheesy but lead teachers, deans, or heads of schools should consider beginning formal faculty meetings with a unison recitation of the mission statement. I've done this for more than ten years, and my faculty agenda template includes the mission statement and the collect of the day (ours is an Anglican school). Every meeting begins with these, and I have often found that even some *minor* detail on the agenda links directly with something *major* in the mission statement. Moreover, as time passes, this practice helps newer faculty members obtain a sense of what is important to you. Use those first moments of a meeting to "catechize" new members of the faculty in the big picture in a conversational and uncontrived way. Over time, they will come to understand that the mission is who you are. If you find that reading your mission statement this way is awkward, ask yourself if that feeling is because the mission statement sounds disconnected from what you're *actually* doing. If the answer is yes, you're already in mission drift.

Print your mission statement everywhere. If you're sending out printed information, include the mission statement appropriately on every print piece. Will this avoid mission drift? Of course not; but it's a simple thing, that, over time contributes to establishing the main thing in everyone's minds. Don't overlook it.

Consciously justify programming in terms of the mission. Every program a school starts, changes, or eliminates, should be done because there is a missional purpose. If a school has an athletic program, it should be because it comports with the stated mission of the school. A perceptive leader will quickly realize that this drives other less visible policies. If a school's sports program, for example, is driven by its mission, does it make sense to restrict students from playing sports because of poor grades? Maybe; maybe not. Would a student be withdrawn from, say, Latin, because he had a 74% average? Why then should a student be pulled from athletics if it was within the stated mission to develop students with team sports? One could substitute any number of other curricular inclusions in this example, but the point is to think through the mission and consider how it should drive policy.

Eliminate programs and practices that are not on mission. Before a school starts a new program, leadership should ask the basic question: Are we starting this because of a felt need, a temporary circumstance or because it's within our mission? If a school's stated mission is to educate traditional learners, it makes little sense to make significant and costly accommodations for the inevitable minority of students who present learning disabilities. I am not suggesting that a school should or shouldn't, but before going out on that limb, the board needs to determine if it is part of the mission. A teacher in the classroom can be guided in the same way, albeit at a more granular level. If it's the school's stated mission to develop students who think and reason critically, one would expect that faculty and sectional team meetings would buzz with strategies to incarnate those skills in science, history, or Latin class pedagogies.

Talk openly with students about the kind of school they attend. Teachers should not take for granted that youngsters "get" the first principles of the school. They may know the buzz words, but they might not have a clue as to what *Trivium, liberal arts*, or *dialectic* actually mean for them. Take time to make the student self-consciously aware not only of what he's learning, but of the larger commitments the school maintains. In short, provide the larger context of his efforts and the principles that are guiding that process.

Summarily, the mission of the school should not simply be a statement written down on the first page of the school's by-laws. Every member of the school's board, administration, faculty, and student body should be conversant in the school's first principles that give identity and direction to their efforts. In that way everyone gets stewardship of the mission. As these constituencies gel over time, they will give unified voice to the school's fundamental purpose, and the school's reputation will successfully express its mission.

For thirteen years, the Rev'd John Heaton has served as the Headmaster of New Covenant Schools in Lynchburg, VA, a K-12 classical, Christian school with 355 students. He is a past board member of the Society for Classical Learning and served two terms as the board chair. He holds the M.A. in theology and is a candidate for the Master of Liberal Studies.

Christian Classical Education and *Rigor*

by Thomas Mann

Adapted from a talk to parents.

I have used the word "rigor" because that's the word often used in the present-day Christian Classical movement. We often hear the word applied to the subjects we teach, to how deeply and thoroughly we teach them, and to the time commitment on the part of those involved in a Christian Classical education. "It's rigorous," we say to one another. And it is, compared to many other things.

But I'm intrigued by the use of a somewhat more forceful word by our Lord in Matthew 11. In context, Jesus has been talking of John the Baptist who is now imprisoned. "From the days of John the Baptist until now," he says, "the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force."

Now I must confess that I'm not exactly sure what this verse means. But I favor seventeenth century Puritan pastor, Thomas Watson's take on the passage in a little book called *Heaven Taken by Storm.* Watson and his Puritan brothers speak not of "rigor" (applied to spiritual things) but of "holy violence." Heaven must be taken by force, by storm. Watson observes that John the Baptizer came hewing and cutting down men's sins, and afterwards preached Christ to them. First, he poured in the vinegar of the law, then the wine of the gospel.…John did not so much preach to please as to profit; he chose rather to discover men's sins than to show his own eloquence. The best mirror is not that which is most gilded, but that which shows the truest face. So what does this have to do with education?

Well, first, we are, as you know, a Christian school. Our families are Christian families. That is, we, as Christians, have concluded that no manner of rigor exercised in our own strength will yield the solution(s) for which we yearn. Our problems are much too great to fix by ourselves; therefore, we place our trust in a Redeemer. We also recognize the paradoxical reality of the verse above, affirming that the kingdom of heaven will either be taken by force – rigor in our context – or it won't be taken at all.

But secondly, we are a classical school. We understand that the wisdom of Scripture and of the ages serve as the mirror "which shows the truest face." We humble ourselves before the stark image in the mirror and plead with the ancient broken peoples to help us avoid their mistakes. We turn and see in Scripture the image of perfect Humanity (Jesus Christ), and we flee the curse of a thousand generations to find our true salvation in Him.

As a Christian School, we affirm and teach that God's word book (The Bible) is inerrant. As a Classical School, we likewise affirm and teach that God's world book (Nature) is inerrant (Ps. 19:1). That is, we believe that all truth is God's truth, and we seek not to be afraid of that truth wherever it is found, when carefully studied through the lens of God's revelation. This enterprise is not for the lazy or the faint of heart.

Rigor serves as a watchword in our discipline polices as well. Discipline at our school is tricky because we do believe in order and structure, but we also believe in grace. We believe in students doing what they're told. We believe that disrespect in any situation is unacceptable. From a pastor friend, I've borrowed two metaphors which have helped me greatly on this subject. The metaphor centers around two words: climate and tool. Grace is the climate in which we live. Law is the tool we sometimes use. Grace is the climate; law is the tool.

How tempting it is to get these reversed—for law to become the climate and grace to become only the rarely used tool.

At our school, we have thought long and hard about the balances of life. Your students need high expectations set before them — standing on tip-toe (intellectually) helps youngsters grow upward. But your family also needs time as a family. You don't need to be constantly hounded by the next homework deadline. Your children need fresh air, lots of sunshine, and lots of sleep. This we acknowledge, while also confessing that God's promises throughout Scripture are not to the lazy. Proverbs 20:4 says, "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore, shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing." We often translate this as "The lazy teen will not study because he doesn't feel like it; therefore, shall he cry at test time, and get an F." Wisdom is urgently needed to create the balance and to hand it off to those who follow in our footsteps.

I am convinced that our children will best develop this proper balance between rigor and rest when they see it modeled in us. Some of us are, frankly, too busy. But here's my challenge to all of us. In our zeal to undo what this culture has done to us (leading us to define ourselves by what we do and how much of it we do), let's not go too far the other way and lop off that which is truly good. And what is that? The careful, disciplined training of the mind – minds of young men and women who will soon go forth and do what Jesus said in this very strange metaphor… "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force." In the sense of this text, I don't mind ending by saying that here at FCS our discipline, our curriculum, our rigor, and our parental partnership are conjoined in an effort to train the present generation to take the kingdom of Heaven by force.

Only through the strength of the One who has exerted the greatest force, conquered death, and taken Heaven can this power be found. And, paradoxically, it is in resting upon the righteousness and power of Jesus Christ that we find ourselves set free to labor with ever-increasing rigor to the glory of God.

Thomas Mann is the Head of Middle and Upper School at Faith Christian School, Roanoke, VA.

"Though the Battlefield May Constitute the Stuff of Legends ..."

by U.S. Army First Lieutenant Brett Jones

From a chapel talk at Faith Christian School, Roanoke, VA.

What a pleasure it is to be here today. It is a great honor to be invited to talk at an institution I cherish so much and esteem so highly. Though I never had the chance to walk the halls of this building as a student, the spirit of the school has not changed and it is ever so refreshing to be back among you again.

And being among you as I am and being fresh home from Iraq, I have some words that God has placed heavily on my heart to share with you today. To the students especially, but to the faculty as well, and to anyone else who may be here, this is meant for everyone when I say: this endeavor in which you are engaged is no different than the military one in which I have participated for these past months; and in my eyes, in fact, it is infinitely more important. In these classrooms and amongst these fellows, you are laying within yourselves the foundations of character and gaining an intimacy with those principles of moral and civic virtue that give rise to the culture uniquely suited to support and defend liberty in America.

Let me assure you that though the battlefield may constitute the stuff of legends, the seeds of victory were sown first in the classroom. For this is where knowledge and experience are synthesized and explored in the lessons of history, where wisdom is cultivated from study and integrity is forged through rigor. Lest you think, that what you are a part of is merely middle or high school, let me remind you that this—all of this we see before us—is the validation of a great sacrifice and the continued hope of a 235 year endeavor for the sake of liberty. Now you might struggle to see the link between the preservation of freedom and third period Algebra. I know I did. So if I may, let me paint a clearer picture.

The character of a country or its national identity is often summed up in grandiose generalizations that get thrown about in all sorts of ways. Words like *liberty* are oft repeated in different situations to different audiences, and they are used to define a broad spectrum of generally related but not necessarily congruent ideas. So when I say *liberty* or *freedom*, let me be clear: I mean to describe the situation which uniquely exists within this country, in which, a person may exist in the absence of a tyrannical force. Freedom in the United States is not, contrary to popular opinion, the ability to do whatever you want, for we do have laws. But it is the assurance that when and where governing rules are necessary, they will be made in accordance to the consent of the governed.

The "absence of tyranny" and the "consent of the governed"— these are statements that broadly describe the political ideology of the United States, an ideology that is the direct product of a unique culture which fosters its creation. While the typical explanation may stop there, permit me to extend it further in order to explore, to its fullest depth, the nature of liberty within our country. The danger here

is that liberty might become, like so many concepts, a subjective mess of personal opinion changing over time. Politics often enjoys the ambiguous uses of words creating different meanings in different settings. Yet here, in this place, it is taught that liberty holds a permanent meaning that relies on the only source of absolute truth this world has ever known. This teaching has given liberty its lasting meaning and its permanent definition in the heritage of our nation. For though man might love liberty, man is fickle, and the long term benefits of liberty take on a dull sheen when compared to the mesmerizing glitter of power. Without Christ as the foundation, liberty is just a hopeful flash in the darkness; and, though reason may be an able guardian, it is finally defeated by the forgetfulness of time. Manifested in those who face the apparent horrors of future darkness without the hope of Christ's promises, liberty is quickly downplayed, quickly redefined, quickly discarded for the naïveté of man's self-assured desire to control his destiny.

And with that statement, we meet head-on with the crux: the link between your education and the preservation of liberty. These classrooms where a boy and a girl might first learn the tradition of *Fides, Veritas,* and *Ministerium* are the proving grounds of the most responsible member of society, the common citizen. Responsibility derives from the implications embodied in: "consent of the governed." Consent implies involvement in the governing of the nation. Out of the people come the leaders who must, at their very core understand that the nature of this responsibility is built upon the ideals of personal sacrifice and service. Year-after-year, generation-after-generation, the common citizens are responsible for the protection of the heritage of liberty through the development of a society that encourages the growth of servant leaders. Each successive generation learning from those preceding it—first of the moral principles that stand as its foundation and then of the knowledge that stands as its defense—carries on a tradition that one generation, long ago, lived, fought, and died for.

Here, students, you are engaged in the endeavor of holding together the great defense of liberty against the tremendous onslaught of forces—both without and, more importantly, within—that conspire every day to overrun its great bulwarks. Liberty rests on this precarious balance held up by a culture that understands the foundations of liberty are laid in Christ and the defense of liberty is laid in the traditions of Western society. On all sides are enemies, foreign and domestic, persons and causes, immorality, and foolishness. Christ Jesus, through the Bible, provides the perspective through which reason can be applied effectively and thus gives, in the words of John Adams, "the only system that ever did or ever will preserve a republic in this world."

Coming home from a war, you might think I would want to speak of external enemies. We have faced quite a few and continue to face them today. When it comes to sheer force, the American Revolution provides an excellent picture of a war in which we faced an overwhelming enemy and overcame insurmountable odds. Communism was an insidious complication to the hopes of American liberty and an ideological attack designed specifically to bring our country to its knees. Today, radical Islam and its followers pose an overwhelmingly significant threat that few people fully appreciate and that our nation is struggling to confront. And while all these foes give cause for concern, they pale in comparison to the task in which you are now engaged. Although these foes caused great concern in their time and continue to do so

today, the cause for liberty at home is the primary concern and the great cause of the American people for all time. Enemies will always lurk on the horizon, and we will need to deal with them. But as the old proverb says—to know your enemy, you must first know yourself.

As early as 1630, John Winthrop noted, "We shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." And with the world watching, we the people have taken a great risk and embarked on a great experiment, to see if the citizens of a country might be capable of governing themselves. Tyranny, while unfamiliar to us today, is always as near as one man's ambition for power is to overwhelming the construct that we the people have erected against it: The Constitution. Against those who would abuse power, who would distort liberty for their own purposes, and who would pay it only lip service in an effort to gain influence, we are defended by our Constitution: a construct of laws which relies on a foundation of culture to preserve it against the steady erosion of ambition's rising tides. That culture, a very particular one as I noted before, defends by doing just what you do here: endeavoring to learn, disciplining your mind, and building your character to be one who cries out at the very mention of tyranny or injustice, "NEVER!"

I want to remind you of the genuine wonder that is our country because, as Abraham Lincoln so eloquently predicted to another school-age crowd in 1838, "what the invading foeman could never do, the silent artillery of time has done." Liberty, which once stood as, "the last best hope of earth," now rolls off the tongue with an ease that belies the troubling indifference of familiarity's creation. The concept of liberty once held such a lofty position as to compel the founders—who within their group controlled a significant portion of the power existing within the country at the time—to impose and enforce upon themselves the restrictions of law, thus preventing tyranny and ensuring liberty to all their countrymen. This is not the commonplace; this is the stuff of legends. It was the classroom that created the culture which brought these men to the forefront. It was the principles instilled in the years of youth that ensured that they would choose the harder right over the easier wrong.

So I say to you, Press On! Press ON! Never wonder whether what you are doing matters. On those long nights and interminable days, do not forget: you are not merely students but fellows with wily Odysseus and Pallas Athena in the epic of our time.

Brett Jones graduated from Faith Christian School, Roanoke, VA, in 2004 and from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2008, where he received a B.S. degree with honors in Political Science and a minor in Nuclear Engineering. His honors thesis at West Point won the most outstanding thesis prize in the Political Science department in 2008. He is now a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Transportation Corps. He finished his combat deployment to Iraq in March 2011 and is now on stateside duty at Fort Carson, CO.

Education for the Great Dance

by Linda Dey

Classical education is first and foremost the education which flows from a certain understanding of reality. There is the modern way of understanding reality and there is the pre-modern way and they are radically different from one another. Classical education is education based on the pre-modern way of viewing the nature of man and the nature of the universe. The first pre-requisite to teaching in a classical school is not learning a certain set of methods or adopting a certain curriculum; it is becoming well acquainted with the difference between these two mindsets and immersing oneself in the thinking and imagery of the pre-modern mindset.

Thomas Howard calls the two opposing views "the old myth and the new myth" and describes them in the opening to his book *Chance or the Dance?*

> There were some ages in Western history that have occasionally been called Dark. They were dark, it is said, because in them learning declined, and progress paused, and men labored under the pall of *belief*…Men believed in things like the Last Judgment and fiery torment…They believed that they had souls, and that what they did in this life had some bearing on the way in which they would finally experience reality… And they believed that God was in heaven and Beelzebub in hell and that the Holy Ghost had impregnated the Virgin Mary and that the earth and sky were full of angelic and demonic conflict. Altogether, life was very weighty, and there was no telling what might lie behind things. The ages were, as I say, dark.
>
> Then the light came. It was the light that has lighted us men into a new age. Charms, angels, devils, plagues, and parthenogenesis have fled from the glare into the crannies of memory. In their place have come coal mining and E=mc2 and plastic and group dynamics and napalm and urban renewal and rapid transit. Men were freed from the fear of the Last Judgment; it was felt to be more bracing to face Nothing than to face the Tribunal. They were freed from worry about getting their souls into God's heaven by the discovery that they had no souls and that God had no heaven… Altogether life became much more livable since it was clear that in fact nothing lay behind things. The age was called enlightened.
>
> The myth sovereign in the old age was that everything means everything. The myth sovereign in the new is that nothing *means* anything.

Either everything has meaning or there is no meaning and "nothing means anything" which is the same as saying that we can assign any meaning we want to things since meaning is just a figment of our imaginations.

Howard's title *Chance or the Dance?* suggests an image which can help us understand what we are doing in classical education; we are equipping children for participation in the Great Dance. What is the Great Dance? It is an old image or metaphor, conceived sometime during the Middle Ages, for reality, for the nature of the universe. It is a view of reality that extends beyond this world and encompasses "all things visible and invisible." It was universally understood and accepted by those living in Latin Christendom: God was the Cosmic

Choreographer; Christ was the Lord of the Dance; and each person was created to play a unique part in a cosmic ballet. And so Howard is asking in his title, What explains reality? Is it an accident of chance, or is it a planned and intricate unfolding of events?

What's involved in this image of reality? How is the universe like a dance? First of all, reality is choreographed just like a dance; there is a pattern into which all things fit and each individual thing or person plays a part in something much bigger than itself or himself. All things have meaning and find their meaning as unique parts of the whole. "All things are made for the Dance." There is meant to be a *harmony* among all things. And it is harmony; not all things are the same. There is unity and diversity within reality, not sameness and uniformity. It is a dance, not a march; one leads, another follows; one lifts, the other is lifted. The whole is harmonious, but everyone is not doing exactly the same thing. Inequality, not equality is at the heart of things, in the universe as in the dance.

The Great Dance is a good image for the nature of things because dance involves the union of form and freedom. Understanding reality involves understanding that form and freedom are two important aspects of reality. On the form side, we see order and patterns, predictability and laws. There are rules and limitations we must observe; we learn early that we can't fly off our beds by jumping and flapping our arms. On the freedom side, we see uniqueness, unpredictability, creativity, spontaneity, even mystery, in reality. No two people are exactly alike, and their actions are not predictable.

In dance we see the perfect marriage of form and freedom. Steps must be learned, practiced and mastered--the form. Only then is one free to move in perfect harmony with one's partner and the music. Here is the true meaning of freedom as opposed to the modern view of doing whatever one pleases without regard for anyone or anything else. Howard says in *Chance or the Dance?*: "Your freedom in the Dance is to be able to execute your steps with power and grace, not to decide what you feel like doing."

And so in life, we find the freedom only when we submit to the form of what is, when we conform to the universe as it is--not in the narrow understanding of the modern materialists, but we conform to the universe in its true and largest sense. Howard explains:

> For it is in these limitations that the old myth found the definition of freedom. Whatever freedom was, it was to be found, ironically, via the strait gate. It was thought of not as a matter of self-determination but rather as a matter of the capacity to experience one's own perfection as joy. The question for Adam and Eve was not that they enjoy a realm in which no strictures existed: it was, rather, that they learn to will what was, in fact, the case--what they couldn't escape anyway...they had two possible types of freedom open to them: either assert their autonomy, live in illusion, and find out in the end that it was no autonomy; or to assent to the way things, alas, were, and see if the matter of freedom weren't something vastly different from what they might have supposed it to be.

This vision of reality stands in stark contrast to the modern vision, the "joyless cosmology." Autonomous man is central; there is nothing bigger for him to submit to. There is no structure, no pattern, no moral order to which he must conform. Autonomous man finds truth and meaning within himself. Lewis calls this view "subjectivism" and explains that if we deny that there are any objective qualities in the world outside of ourselves, there is no reason to assume that the judgments we make and the minds with which we make them are any different from everything else. In his essay "The Poison of Subjectivism" he says:

> At the outset, the universe appears packed with will, intelligence, life and positive qualities; every tree is a nymph and every planet a god. Man himself is akin to the gods. The advance of knowledge gradually empties this rich and genial universe; first of its gods, then of its colors, smells, sounds and tastes, finally of solidity itself as solidity was originally imagined. As these items are taken from the world, they are transferred to the subjective side of the account; classified as our sensations, thoughts, images or emotions… While we were reducing the world to almost nothing we deceived ourselves with the fancy that all its lost qualities were being kept safe... as 'things in our own mind'. Apparently we had no mind of the sort required. The Subject is as empty as the Object. Almost nobody has been making linguistic mistakes about almost nothing.

When modern man makes himself "the measure of all things", the possibility of objective truth is gone, the possibility of separating subject from object is gone. All becomes subject and there's no basis for knowing whether the subjective is real or significant. We call this view reductionism. While the pre-modern view sees reality as encompassing invisible realities (angels and demons, truth, goodness, and beauty) as well as visible material reality, the modern view has reduced reality to that which can be seen and touched, dissected or measured.

One more mark of the modern myth is that egalitarianism has replaced the understanding of a hierarchical reality such as that pictured by the Great Dance. Modern thinking has turned the political idea of democracy into a false doctrine that goes beyond equality under the law to declare that all men are equal. Anything that smacks of superiority or hierarchy must be cut down. In an essay called "Equality" Lewis says that people have a "craving for inequality"; they want to look up to someone. Monarchy for the medievals reflected something about the nature of the universe.

> Monarchy can easily be debunked; but watch the faces, mark well the accents of the debunkers. These are men whose tap-root in Eden has been cut; whom no rumor of the polyphony, the dance can reach --men to whom pebbles laid in a row are more beautiful than an arch. Yet even if they desire mere equality they cannot reach it. Where men are forbidden to honor a king, they honor millionaires, athletes, or film-stars instead; even famous prostitutes or gangsters. For spiritual nature, like bodily nature, will be served; deny it food and it will gobble poison.

Once again we see that anything less than a vision of reality as the Great Dance is soul-deadening; the view is too small and goes against who we are made to be. It is, in fact, a view that Lewis argues leads to the "abolition of man".

So what kind of education equips one for participation in the Great Dance? First of all, it must be an education that takes into account what we were made for. We are not primarily economic animals or social animals, and thus education is not primarily about being equipped to be a wage earner or being prepared for fitting into society. We must be aware of the danger of confusing means with ends, and we must keep our eyes on the end of education.

Education in the old view is not mainly instructional, but formative; it has as its end the ennoblement of embodied spirits; it is about nourishing minds and souls and equipping students to be what they were made to be--reasoning, choosing, creating beings who can think about what is true, choose what is good, and create what is beautiful. It is involved in imparting knowledge that leads to virtue. This is education according to the old view.

A proper understanding of form and freedom as seen in the image of the Great Dance helps one to carry this out. As one writer on education put it: "We must insist that our educational framework produce neither automatons nor hellions. The individual must be free to choose, yet must be provided with the framework of values within which meaningful, civilized choice takes place. Our quest is for 'structured freedom'." We want neither automatons, learning all the rules and patterns and performing by rote, nor hellions, practicing self-expression with no limits; rather, we want our students to be individuals capable of creative thinking and choosing within the limits and structure of what is.

Good education then is like dancing lessons; it is primarily about form, hence the term "formal education." Form precedes freedom; the form--the rules, the vocabulary, the scales, the steps (the grammar as classical education calls it)--must be learned before freedom to read, to communicate clearly, to play Mozart, to solve a complex problem is possible. Yet it is not form for form's sake; form is not the end of the matter. Participation in the Dance is the end. Grammar, phonics, times tables are not ends in themselves; they are just the tools we need to use our minds and make sense of the world. We must not lose sight of the fact that we are equipping children to be free thinking and choosing adults able to discern the truth amidst all the false claims. We want our students to become adults with the right kind of independence. For this they must learn something about self-discipline, hard work and perseverance, delayed gratification, and submission to authority without becoming automatons. They must also be helped and inspired to be imaginative and creative, inventive and original, rhetoricians of the right kind, without becoming hellions. To do this we who teach them need above all a clear vision of this pre-modern understanding of reality.

Thomas Howard explains how the Great Dance gives us a true picture of the form and freedom built into reality:

> What is the glory of the sun and moon and stars? Is it not at least partly that they exhibit a solemn and mathematical precision in their courses, a great astronomical sarabande or minuet?...Whatever their glory is...it does not involve either self-determination or randomness. Similarly, what is the freedom of the athlete? His excellence is a matter of power--the power to do the thing beautifully. The perfection of the jump stands at the far end of a program of renunciation, in which his inclinations were subordinated to the demands of that very perfection…And the sonnet: here words dance in their highest dignity and beauty; here is language at its most excellent--but it is language dragooned and hedged and crowded and thwarted by rules. But, ironically, at the far end of those awful rules there emerges perfection...
>
> The old myth would have seen all these phenomena as images--images of some paradox that lay at the heart of things: that freedom for a thing is that state in which it appears at its highest performance (its perfection, in other words), and that this is a state that lies on the farther side of rigor and austerity. And it would have seen all these images as suggesting not a moral servility for that unique creature man, but rather the brilliant display, under a thousand forms, of the Dance, which goes on aeon after aeon, and which waits all breathless with hope for the Man to recognize the pattern, see his place, assent to it, and join.

Classical schools informed by this view of reality are equipping students for participation in the Great Dance.

Linda Dey is the principal of the Imago School in Maynard, MA.

Book Review of *Generation Me*[1] and of *The Narcissism Epidemic*[2]

Review by Peter H. Vande Brake M.Div., Ph.D.

Conventional wisdom would seem to support the proposition that if you raise a child's self-esteem, then she will get better grades, she will be more likely to treat others with kindness and respect, and she will not be so prone to surrender to common adolescent peer pressures that lead to engagement in premarital sex, binge drinking, and use of illicit drugs. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking is dead wrong. As Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell prove by their painstaking research, the preoccupation with raising children's self-esteem has helped young people feel really good about themselves and their accomplishments (regardless of the quality of those accomplishments), but it has no direct correlation to any kind of improvement in academic performance, relationships, or moral fortitude.

Instead, the focus on raising self-esteem has achieved a marked increase in the level of narcissism in our society. "Narcissism is one of the few personality traits that psychologists agree is almost completely negative" (Twenge 68).

The attempt to improve our children by raising their self-esteem has not only produced full-blown narcissists, but it has led to a much higher level of narcissistic behaviors and attitudes in young people than at any point in our history. Instead of trying to instill the virtues of tenacity, perseverance, and a strong work ethic that will naturally bring about a healthy, earned sense of self-esteem, there has been a concerted attempt to preserve a false self-esteem at all costs by eliminating competition (trophies for everyone), offering unconditional validation, and endorsing the unrealistic sense of the "special" nature of each individual.

The full title of Twenge's first book is *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before.* Twenge's moniker of "GenMe" is descriptive of this generation of young people in two ways. It gives a nod to the Microsoft Millennium Edition (Me) operating system that came out in 2000 (when many in this generation were coming of age and flooding college campuses), and it refers to the inordinate self-absorption that this segment of the population exhibits. If it seems like this generation of young people is more selfish, entitled, and demanding than past generations, it is because they really are. They didn't get this way all by themselves.

Societal forces, educational curricula, and parents have continually drilled the GenMe population with the mantra that each one of them is "special." "Teacher training courses often emphasize that a child's self-esteem must be preserved above all else" and that "creating a positive atmosphere is more important than correcting mistakes" (Twenge, 57, 61-62). Competitive games have been outlawed on school playgrounds during recess; city recreation programs have done away with keeping score in children's games; and bestowing academic awards has ceased because adults fear that a child's self-

[1]*Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2006) by Jean Twenge ($14.95)

[2]*The Narcissism Epidemic* (New York: Free Press, 2009) by Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell ($15.99).

esteem may be damaged if he or she experiences a loss. The fact that a child feels good about himself has generally been deemed to be more important than a good performance (Twenge 56-57). The number of students reporting an "A" average has jumped to 48% in 2004 as compared with 18% in 1968, even though SAT scores have declined over this same period and students report spending less time studying (Twenge, 62-63).

The ripple effect of all of these self-esteem preserving practices has had a plethora of far-reaching consequences. Many young people have an inflated self-opinion that goes unchallenged until they try to get into a selective college or they attempt to get a job in a competitive work force. These attempts often result in what Twenge has termed "Adulthood Shock" (Twenge, 7). Young people relate to the world on their own terms and feel that the world should conform to them instead of having to conform to it. Self-expression and personal opinion are greatly valued by this generation, and this often finds physical manifestation in an assortment of tattoos and body piercings. Relationships among this group have also been significantly affected. Marriage is something that happens later in life if at all. "Hooking up" has replaced the archaic practice of "dating," and sex has become a recreational activity rather than a creational act. They meet, chat, and promote themselves on Facebook and YouTube. The internet has provided the perfect platform to accelerate narcissistic tendencies. Twenge and Campbell's book, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, devotes a chapter to the influence of the internet and social networking that Twenge had only touched on in her first book. Social networking was barely in its infancy when her first book was published in 2006.

"Self-esteem is an outcome, not a cause," Twenge ultimately professes, "In other words, it doesn't do much good to encourage a child to feel good about himself just to feel good; this doesn't mean anything" (Twenge, 67). What we really should have been aiming at to get the desired outcomes was what Twenge terms "self-control" which she defines as "the ability to persevere and keep going" (Twenge, 68). "Children high in self-control make better grades and finish more years of education, and they're less likely to use drugs or have a teenage pregnancy. Self-control predicts all of those things researchers had hoped self-esteem would, but hasn't" (Twenge, 67). In fact, Twenge and Campbell found that the ethnic group with the lowest measured self-esteem, Asian-Americans, is the group with the highest level of academic performance and highest level of employment.

Both of these books provide copious information on the characteristics and tendencies of Generation Me. They roundly condemn the methods that have been used to raise self-esteem as wrong-headed and even detrimental. "The self-esteem movement . . . is popular because it is sweetly addictive: teachers don't have to criticize, kids don't have to be criticized, and everyone goes home feeling happy. The problem is they also go home ignorant and uneducated" (Twenge, 67).

If you are a teacher, a parent, or an administrator, you already know this generation well because you live with them every day. Twenge and Campbell will help you to understand them better. They don't merely identify the disease brought on by the self-esteem movement and the inevitable narcissism that results; they also offer some ways to cure the illness. Most of them boil down to loving our children in a healthy way. This means telling our children that we love them rather than telling them that they are "special," and it means allowing our children to fall down so that they learn to get up and try again.

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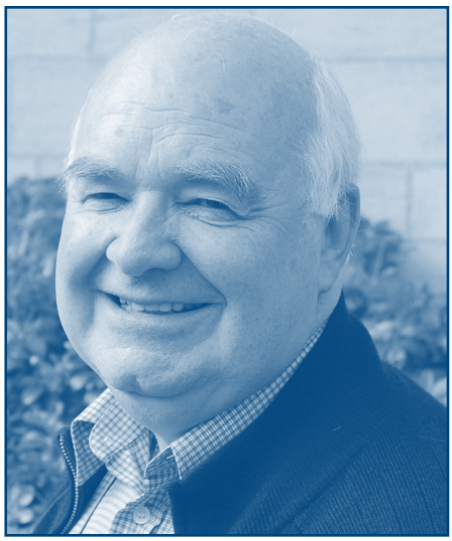
ken Myers

Ken Myers is the host and producer of the *Mars Hill Audio Journal,* a bimonthly audio magazine that explores the significance of major cultural trends for Christians who are striving to be in the world but not of it. He was formerly editor of *The World: A Journal of Religion and Public Life*, a quarterly journal whose editor-in-chief was Richard John Neuhaus and of *Eternity*, the Evangelical monthly magazine. For eight year, Mr. Myers was a producer and editor for National Public Radio, working much of that time as arts and humanities editor for the two news programs, Morning Edition and All Things Considered. A graduate of the University of Maryland and of Westminster Theological Seminary, Mr. Myers serves as a contributing editor for *Christianity Today* and has served on the Arts on Radio and Television Panel for the National Endowment for the Arts. Learn more about Mr. Myers at www.marshill.org.

bradley j. Birzer

Bradley J. Birzer is Russell Amos Kirk Chair in American Studies and Professor in History, Hillsdale College, Michigan. Author of *American Cicero: The Life of Charles Carroll* (2010), *Sanctifying the World: The Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson* (2007), and *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth* (2003), Birzer is Chairman of the Board of Academic Advisors for the Center for the American Idea, a Senior Scholar with the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and a Fellow with the Mitch McConnell Center. Biographer Joseph Pearce named Birzer's biography of Christopher Dawson the best book of 2008, and Luke Nichter of CSPAN recently labeled Birzer as one of the 25 best living scholars of American history. Birzer's latest book examines the western liberal arts tradition in the work of cultural and literary critic Russell Kirk. He and his wife live in Hillsdale and are expecting their seventh child.



johnLennox

John Lennox is Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, Fellow in Mathematics and the Philosophy of Science, and Pastoral Advisor at Green Templeton College, Oxford. He is an adjunct Lecturer at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, and at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. He is also a Senior Fellow of the Trinity Forum.

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Dr. Lennox worked for many years in the Mathematics Institute at the University of Wales in Cardiff, which awarded him a D.Sc. for his research. He also holds a D.Phil. from Oxford University and an M.A. in Bioethics from the University of Surrey. He was a Senior Alexander Von Humboldt Fellow at the Universities of Würzburg and Freiburg in Germany.
In addition to over seventy published mathematical papers he is the co-author of two research level texts in algebra in the Oxford Mathematical Monographs series. His most recent book, on the interface between science, philosophy, and theology, is *God's Undertaker—Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion-Hudson, 2009). He has lectured extensively in North America and Eastern and Western Europe on mathematics, the philosophy of science, and the intellectual defense of Christianity. He debated Richard Dawkins on "The God Delusion" and "Has Science buried God?" He has also debated Christopher Hitchens on the New Atheism and on the question: "Is God Great?" John and his wife Sally have three grown children and four grandchildren and live near Oxford, England.

johnSeel

Dr. John Seel is a cultural renewal entrepreneur and educational reformer. He is the president of nCore Media, a visual supercomputing company providing high performance computing solutions to the entertainment industry for special effects and computer generated images. He is a founding board member of the Counsel on Educational Standards & Accountability and former board member of the Society for Classical Learning. He and his wife, Kathryn, now live in Cohasset, Massachusetts, but are soon moving to Los Angeles, California.

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