

11/8/98

Education more than a ticket to a good job

Most people who know me would think of me as a well-educated person. I attended Catholic schools my whole life, from kindergarten through law school. I'm a "book person." I have always been a reader. I look and act like I'm smart.

The truth is that, although my formal Catholic education was a blessing in many ways, the learning process for me didn't really begin until I was 40 years old. What happened?

To put it into just a few words, for most of my life I thought wisdom was something that we humans created. My teachers, in general, presented their own unique insights into specific subjects. Like them, I began to develop my own slant on various issues, and I took particular pride in my own intellectualism. Since this is how most of us function, I seemed to get along pretty well.

At age 40, without any conscious act on my part, I discovered that my intellectual accomplishments were a sham, that I had been living in most respects a false life. The insights that I valued so highly were an illusion. There was one reality, and this one reality we did not create. He always was. As He said to Moses, "I am who am."

I discovered what I had never really accepted before, that God was real, that His interest in my life and the lives of others was dynamic. If I prayed, He answered. If I looked for Him, He appeared. If I asked Him to make up for what I was lacking, He did so, through His Holy Spirit. I began to watch and listen for God, every moment



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of every day, and in the ordinary circumstances of life I began to see His fingerprints.

I realized that my own earthly father had never fallen for the false wisdom of the world, and I drew closer to him. God sent me an elderly man who, in the year before his death, instructed me in the workings of the Holy Spirit, the kind of instruction you could never get in books. God sent me to the wisest group of people I had ever met, the poor and the homeless, who knew the reality of God better than any theology professor.

If I had to identify any one shortcoming in the formal educational process, it would be the notion which pervades most of education that truth is subjective, personal and that we create it ourselves. On the contrary, truth is discovered. Wisdom is discovered. It comes from God. It is God.

In so much of what I see in schools today, education is regarded as simply a ticket that has to be punched to get a good job. Kids appear to learn. They receive academic awards, but you

can tell by their faces there has been little joy in the process.

When we create our own wisdom, we might become a valedictorian and even have high self-esteem. But when we have dug deeper and deeper for the objective truth, as if we were seeking buried treasure, and we find it, we find Him, our faces light up with true joy.

At one Catholic high school that I know of, the administration has informed parents that the school is not accredited and does not intend to become accredited. Citing the fact that states are mandating more and more material that is objectionable to Catholics, the school believes that parents and the Church have the right to direct the education of children according to divine and natural law. Since the state does not even acknowledge the existence of the whole object of education, which is union with God, why should a Catholic school be influenced by state accreditation standards?

A priest at this school was once explaining the philosophy of the place to an interested parent. The priest said, "The students really shouldn't be graded." When the parents asked the priest how you would know whether the child was learning without a grading system, the priest responded, "By looking into his eyes." When any person of any age discovers the One we are all seeking and the truth that radiates from Him, his eyes will reflect his joy.

Our closing verse is from Ecclesiastes: "A wise man's wisdom will light up his face."