

Teaching After d'Alzon:

Essays on

Education Today

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Contents

A Word from the Office for

Mission.....

Fr. Dennis Gallagher, A.A. , Vice President for Mission, Assumption College

Foreword.....

.....

Francesco Cesareo, Ph.D., President of Assumption College

Introduction.....

.....

Fr. John Franck, A.A.

Chapter One: Confessions of a

Teacher.....

Fr. Roger Corriveau, A.A., '69, Chair of the Department of Theology,
Assumption College

Chapter Two: D'Alzon

Philosopher?.....

Christian Göbel, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Assumption
College

Chapter Three: Assumption's

Cachet.....

Marc LePain, Ph.D., '65, Professor of Theology, Assumption College

Chapter Four: Truth and Student Learning in the Augustinian-

Assumptionist Tradition

Andrew Salzmann

Chapter Five: Teachable Readings: Notes on an Educational Vocation.....

Barry C. Knowlton, Ph.D., '84, Visiting Assistant Professor of History, Stonehill College

Chapter Six: Living Tradition: Alumni Educators.....

Assumption College Alumni Educators

Chapter Seven: D'Alzon Deployed: Students as Teachers.....

Assumption College Spring 2010 Student Teachers

Chapter Eight: Stranger in the Classroom.....

Cathleen K. Stutz, Ed.D., Assistant Professor of Education, Assumption College

This collection is dedicated to

and in honor of

Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon, A.A.

1810-1880

the founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption

on the occasion of his 200th birthday

A Word from the Office for Mission

*Fr. Dennis Gallagher, A.A.
Vice President for Mission, Assumption College*

How is it that Emmanuel d'Alzon's convictions regarding the importance of education in the building up of God's kingdom and in the transformation of society continue to have relevance in our day? That was the guiding question behind assembling this volume of essays, written during the Bicentennial of d'Alzon's birth. We Assumptionists are grateful that the insights of the founder, whose intellectual and spiritual journey was lived out in a time and place distant from our own, still help to shape the lives of educators and students here at the College and at those schools in which our alumni/ae have lived out their teaching profession.

Quick, captivating, decisive—d'Alzon was “blessed with a Mediterranean temperament”; but his penchant for action did not truncate his “grand and broad vision” to transform society at its very heart with a love “as vast as the world.”¹ D'Alzon's attention to developments in current thought and interest in the advances of human knowledge made him better able than most of his contemporaries to take the measure of the crisis of his own time. Since the roots of our own intellectual and spiritual crisis are linked to the forces with which d'Alzon himself contended, is it possible that he might have something to us as well? As President Cesareo has noted, taking the measure

of that crisis meant for d'Alzon according a central place to an education that aimed at restoring God's place in society by forming Him in the heart of each individual.

As director of the Office for Mission at Assumption College, from which the various initiatives of the Bicentennial year have been coordinated, I am especially grateful to all who have contributed to this little book. Taken together, these essays give evidence of the enduring force of an education inspired by d'Alzon's noble spirit to transform society by transforming the lives of those who give themselves generously to it.

A special word of thanks is extended to President Cesareo and to Fr. John Franck, A.A., for so thoughtfully placing these essays in their proper context, to Dean Eloise Knowlton for her extraordinary patience in seeing this project to completion, and to Andrew Salzmann, summer intern in the Mission Office and author of one of the essays, for his editorial assistance. My hope is that this volume will not only serve as a tribute to the founder of the Assumptionists, but also help to confirm and to fortify the educational mission of Assumption College.

¹ John Franck, A.A., "Emanuel d'Alzon: Consumed by a Dream," *The Assumption Way in Education*, Dennis Gallagher, A.A., ed. (Worcester, MA: Assumption College) 22-23.

Foreword

*Francesco C. Cesareo, Ph.D.
President, Assumption College*

“By this great and magnificent work of education, we refashion the being of our students...” These words of Fr. Emmanuel d’Alzon, founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption, spoken during a Conference to the Religious Sisters of the Assumption in 1871, capture the essence of his vision of education. In many ways a lofty goal, this ideal has guided Assumptionist education from its origins in 19th-century Nîmes to present-day Assumptionist schools scattered throughout the world. This ideal has endured not only in the animating spirit that permeates the educational institutions sponsored by the Assumptionists, but more importantly in the individuals associated with those institutions. Many men and women, religious and lay, who have taught in and led these schools, have understood the formative nature of their vocation as teachers, vocations which have touched the lives of countless numbers of students. Those students who entered the field of education and who were themselves fashioned by this ideal have passed on the educational legacy of Fr. d’Alzon to a new generation of students, both within and outside the network

of Assumptionist schools. How did Fr. d'Alzon's vision come to life and why has it endured for almost two centuries?

Living in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Fr. d'Alzon came to see that education was the means by which the society of his day could hope to be transformed. Writing to the Assumptionists of Nîmes, Fr. d'Alzon reminded his brothers, "It is crucial that you be convinced of the truth that the world, even in a decadent state, is governed by ideas. [Those] who are sowers of ideas, provided they be true and fruitful ideas, will be the true reformers of society."¹ From the founding of its first educational institution in France in 1844 to the founding of Assumption College 107 years ago as the fulfillment of d'Alzon's dream to establish a Catholic university, these schools have lived out the vision of Fr. d'Alzon, who understood that education should be concerned with the formation of one's whole being that rests on "the truth one acquires through learning." Fr. d'Alzon repeatedly spoke of forming "people of character" recognizing that there was "an urgent need to form men and women of character, whose intellect was enlightened by faith, and who were able to assume leadership roles at all levels. By means of teaching, he hoped to educate young people, that is to say, to have them acquire knowledge, convictions and good judgment, and to have them act according to Christian principles."² For d'Alzon, education should transform students and the society

in which they live. This understanding of education was not unique to d'Alzon: he received his inspiration from the writings of St. Augustine, who saw education as the building of character,³ which would in turn affect the way we live our lives and ultimately shape the society in which we live out our lives.⁴ However, for many today, higher education has become simply a means to an end, the avenue by which one attains a set of skills that will lead to a particular job and a desired socio-economic level. Higher education has become more vocational and less interested in the engagement of ideas and the cultivation of moral and spiritual values that will truly form and transform the essence of the human heart.

What is especially compelling about the vision of Fr. d'Alzon and the mission of Assumptionist schools is that they stand in contrast to the career-oriented, value-free approach that has penetrated the landscape of contemporary education. Fr. d'Alzon, writing in his *Revue de L'Enseignement Chretien*, gives us pause as we reflect on the purpose of education today: "...education is not only a way to acquire certain skills necessary for someone preparing for a career; we need to give teaching a higher goal, moral formation based on firm principles, helped by those great truths that rest on religious truth, by which the great truths can ennoble us by teaching us about our relationship with God and everyone like us under the watchful eye of God."⁵ In

this way, education focuses on the formation of who we are, who we want to become, and how we live that out on a daily basis. This formation can only occur when education seeks to form the whole person by tapping into the full potential of students' minds and hearts. Every aspect of education—study, research, extra-curricular activities—strives for the total development of the student, which was Fr. d'Alzon's ultimate aim.

The commemoration of the bicentennial of the birth of Fr. d'Alzon has provided the entire Assumptionist world the opportunity to reflect on the importance and legacy of this great spiritual figure in the history of the Church and in the history of Catholic education. As an institution of higher education, Assumption College has used this anniversary to deepen its own understanding of how our Assumptionist identity provides us with a unique approach to our educational mission. This festschrift is one of the results of that reflection. The essays in this collection, written by faculty members, students, and alumni, give flesh to Fr. d'Alzon's vision of education. Professor Christian Göbel's essay situates Fr. d'Alzon's educational ideals within the Western philosophical tradition as he offers a portrait of d'Alzon as philosopher. Andrew Salzmann continues this theme in his essay by focusing on d'Alzon's understanding of education as the pursuit of truth, exploring how this aspect of Fr. d'Alzon's educational philosophy poses challenges and opportunities

within contemporary higher education. As both a product of an Assumptionist education and as a faculty member at Assumption College, Fr. Roger Corriveau's contribution examines the formative nature of d'Alzon's educational ideal as it relates to the experience and thought of St. Augustine. Professor Marc LePain, also a product and practitioner of an Assumption education, focuses on how d'Alzon's efforts as an educator are to be understood as both reform and restoration of the human person as the image of God. Alumnus Barry Knowlton explores how his own vocation as an educator is shaped by the classical heritage which was so important to Fr. d'Alzon himself. The essays by current students preparing to enter the field of education and by alumni who are elementary and secondary school teachers present reflections on how Fr. d'Alzon's vision informs their teaching. Finally, Professor Cathleen Stutz's essay examines the role of the teacher in contemporary education based on her interviews of teachers who graduated from Assumption College to determine what difference their Assumptionist education has made in their understanding and approach to teaching.

These essays, individually and collectively, illustrate the enduring legacy of a man who responded to the intellectual and institutional crisis of his day by offering an education that sought to harmonize faith and reason, while permeating society with Christian values. Fr. d'Alzon sought to form young

men and women in light of the Gospel message so that they might come to know Jesus Christ. This was, in the end, the reason Fr. d'Alzon entrusted education to his fledgling congregation as its primary mission. Assumption College's motto, "...until Christ be formed in you," speaks to that desire, namely to help students to become more fully human by becoming more Christ-like as we, in the words of Assumption College's Mission Statement, "form graduates known for critical intelligence, thoughtful citizenship and compassionate service." As both these essays and my own interaction with Assumption College students and alumni attest, Fr. d'Alzon's educational ideal continues to inflame the hearts and minds of those formed in and associated with the schools inspired by his vision.

¹ Emmanuel d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, trans. Richard Lamoureux, A.A., 2nd ed. (New London: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009) 68.

² Jean-Michel Brochec, A.A., *Teaching and Education in the Spirit of Assumption* (Strasbourg 2008) 5

³ Cf. *De Trinitate*, 10:17

⁴ Cf. *Sermo*, 267,4

⁵ D'Alzon 92

Introduction

“Penetrating the world with a Christian idea”

Fr. John L. Franck, A.A.

*Member of the General Council of the Augustinians of the Assumptions
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This past year, 2010, Assumption College, together with Assumptionist communities and other Assumptionist institutions throughout the world, marked the bicentennial of the birth of Emmanuel d’Alzon (1810-1880), the founder of the Assumptionists (Augustinians of the Assumption). How appropriate that the last event of this celebration should be the publication of a *festschrift* in his honor entitled “Teaching after d’Alzon: Essays on Education Today,” since education was his all-consuming passion. Shortly after his ordination in Rome in 1834, barely 24 years of age, d’Alzon wrote to his best friend at the time, Alphonse de Vignamont, “Dear friend, the most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs to be penetrated through and through with a Christian idea; otherwise, it will fall apart.... We need to teach it and to do so in words it can understand.”¹

As part of its slate of events commemorating the bicentennial, the College sponsored a pilgrimage in the footsteps of Fr. d’Alzon, which took

participants from Paris, the site of his early high school and college studies, to Nîmes, where he served as vicar general for over 40 years and where he founded the Assumptionists and established the first Assumption College, and finally to Rome, not only the site of his theological studies but also the focus of many subsequent visits. But, perhaps, the most unforgettable stop on this whirlwind visit was the chateau of Lavagnac where the d'Alzon family moved for good in 1816 when d'Alzon was six years old. Throughout his life d'Alzon would return here again and again to enjoy warm moments with his family, tranquil periods of rest, and extended stays to recuperate from bouts of illness. Here at this splendid estate, we received a thorough and memorable tour from the former caretaker of the chateau, who himself had been born on the premises and labored there for many years, as did many generations of his family before him. To gain some insight into Fr. d'Alzon one must appreciate the estate of Lavagnac and everything associated with it. As Monsieur Bals explained to us, Lavagnac was the most charming chateau in all of southern France, renowned for its stunning beauty and the vastness of its lands, which earned it the name "the Versailles of Languedoc" (see <http://www.domainedelavagnac.com>). Standing on the sweeping terrace of the chateau overlooking sculpted gardens, wherever one looked, to the east, the south, the north, the west, all these lands, without another property in sight

belonged to the d'Alzon's: over 3,000 acres, with its vast stretches of vineyards and orange groves, stands of majestic plane and chestnut trees, spacious stables and gardens, fountains and a quaint chapel, wildlife of all kinds, a large variety of fowl that the young Emmanuel would hunt, and the Hérault River which flowed by the estate. Life at the chateau suited the nobility of the d'Alzon family: the private tutors, the prestigious visitors, the ample corps of servants, his father's extensive library, and all the opportunities which their wealth could afford. As the only son of this noble family (d'Alzon had two sisters), Emmanuel stood to inherit Lavagnac and the rest of the family's substantial estate. His parents had groomed him for a career either as a politician like his father (a deputy in the national parliament), a diplomat like his brother-in-law, Count Anatole de Puységur, or a judge like some of his distinguished ancestors.

It was to their chagrin that on reaching the age when he was to attend college, d'Alzon expressed his desire to enter St. Cyr, the French counterpart of West Point, so that in good aristocratic fashion he could fight to restore the good name of his beloved country. His parents, however, persuaded him to enter law school at the Sorbonne, instead. Although he acceded to their wishes for a time, he soon found these studies boring and wearisome, not to say, soul-destroying. His life would change when he decided to join several literary and

social circles popular with young people of his class at the time. There he would meet a man whose thought and conviction would ultimately change the direction of his life, Félicité de Lamennais. Between 1817 and 1824, this French cleric and philosophical and political thinker published the several volumes of his great work, *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, which would establish his reputation throughout Europe. The result was immediate: Lamennais was greeted in many circles as a new “Father of the Church.” One of his disciples and eventual colleagues, Henri Lacordaire, who was to re-found the Dominicans in France, said of him, “he is a humble priest with all the authority once enjoyed by Bossuet.” Lamennais gathered around him many of the future leaders of the Church of France in the 19th century; in addition to Lacordaire, there were Philippe Gerbet, Antoine de Salinis, Charles de Montalembert, René-François Rohrbacher, Théodore Combalot, Maurice de Guérin, and Emmanuel d’Alzon. What was it about Lamennais that attracted such a remarkable circle of followers? To quote Dr. Gaston Bordet, professor of history at the Université de Franche-Comté in Besançon, “Lammenais gained an unimagined prestige. Here at last was a priest, the first in decades, who, with an intellectual skill and brilliance equal to those of the Enlightenment philosophers, dared to openly defend the Church of Rome against 18th-century thinkers and the political minds of the French

Revolution... He had the extraordinary capacity to enroll many in his crusade in defense of Catholicism, which rested on his profound grasp of religious and secular knowledge” (*my translation*).² Although d’Alzon, not unlike many of his contemporaries, rejected most of Lamennais’ political positions, he relied on him as a trusted spiritual guide even when Lamennais was officially sanctioned by the Vatican. Lamennais introduced d’Alzon to the burning issues of the day and led him, after long and thoughtful reflection, to abandon not only a military career but his claim to a future of wealth, worldly fame, and certain influence as well. He chose to renew society, in his words, not as a soldier nor as a government official but as a priest, the path that he considered most worthy of the sacrifice of his life. Ultimately, d’Alzon was convinced that only by defending the rights of God, only by restoring God’s sovereignty in society and in the soul of each human being could society be radically transformed. This strategy was the driving force that explains everything he undertook and the undying passion with which he undertook it. In 1861, he wrote, “We live in a century that makes gods of men and denies the rights of God...To proclaim these rights is my mission” (*my translation*).³

In a series of conferences that he first gave to the Religious of the Assumption, the congregation founded by his close friend and spiritual director Mother Marie-Eugénie de Jésus, and subsequently to his own religious,

d'Alzon speaks about what is essential to both congregations, namely, the implications of the motto that each chose, *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* (Thy Kingdom Come). He explains that, above all else, Assumptionist institutions should be concerned about “the proclamation of the universal rights of God.” He writes, “These rights are more than ever unknown by those enthralled with the errors of our day, i.e. atheism and determinism. These errors abound today. They seek to drive God out of every corner.” Later in the conference, he adds, “The denial of the first commandment, i.e. the denial of the universal rights of God, is the major reason for all the social problems of our day. Re-establishing these rights is such a worthwhile enterprise that it could fill a lifetime.”⁴ And fill a lifetime it would for d'Alzon.

For d'Alzon the French Revolution was a symptom, perhaps the climax, of a much more profound rebellion in human beings. In one of the most comprehensive presentations of his thought, “The Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,” d'Alzon writes, “If ever the struggle between good and evil, truth and error, Jerusalem and Babylon, heaven and hell, the Church and the Revolution, has been made manifest, it is certainly today. Listen to man repeat after Satan, ‘*Non serviam*. I will not serve’ (Is 14:14).”⁵ Again, in a conference he gave on December 11, 1871, we read, “We are up against an implacable foe.... It is the Revolution, which can be summarized in one word

alone, ‘*Non serviam*,’ a word already spoken before the creation of man. This word is... the banner of every revolt.”⁶ On December 27, 2010, Fr. Barry Bercier, A.A., professor of Theology here at Assumption, inaugurated a blog he named *Crosswinds*. In the third installment of the series, December 30, 2010, entitled, “Fr. d’Alzon and Education,” Fr. Bercier compares the reactions of two 19th-century thinkers to the French Revolution, Alexis de Tocqueville and Emmanuel d’Alzon. In speaking of the Revolution, he writes,

“...as d’Alzon would see it, it was nothing less than the image of God in Man that was under mortal threat. The salvation of souls and the life of the Kingdom of God raise the stakes considerably beyond the already high stakes of revolution regarded more narrowly as a political event. D’Alzon’s theological viewpoint opened his mind and his sensibility more readily to the transcendent greatness of man.... His response to them (Enlightenment thinkers) was to seek out a form of education which would, in the face of the revolt, defend and clarify the image of God in Man. One always senses in d’Alzon an apocalyptic fire that burns in his soul.”⁷

If, “in its essence, the Revolution was the radical denial of the rights of God” and “fostered a perpetual revolt of man against God,” d’Alzon concludes, “Today’s society does not want the truth to serve as is bedrock.... It is our

strict duty to re-introduce the notion of truth within a society that wants no part of it.”⁸

At the end of his life, Fr. d’Alzon edited a lengthy collection of meditations as a kind of testament to his followers. Over the years he had maintained notes on various topics of importance, and in 1878, two years before his death, he developed them into these meditations. In the Nineteenth Meditation, entitled “Teaching,” he writes, “What is it that we must teach? Before all else, Catholic truth in all its entirety—with all its majesty, with its breadth, if I may dare to say, with its infinite horizons, with its powerful affirmation of the rights of Almighty God—expanding narrow minds.”⁹ What this “Catholic truth” is he had explained in a series of conferences he gave to the students of the original Collège de l’Assomption, gathered into a small book, *Les Instructions du Samedi* (Saturday Instructions).¹⁰ The second part of the book is entitled, “On Christian Education,” in which he treats everything from the goal of education to the qualities of a good teacher. In these instructions d’Alzon lays out some elements of a Christian education:

- i. that truth is possible because we are made in the image and likeness of God who is Truth itself and that this truth is the source of all human dignity¹¹;

- ii. that true happiness can come only from knowing the truth about God and ourselves, namely, that our origin is from God and our destiny is to be with God for all eternity¹²;
- iii. that education is fundamentally the process of discovering who we are and what part we are called to play in God's Kingdom, of learning to see things as God sees them¹³;
- iv. that an education is meant not only to give us the skills to further the Kingdom in this world but the desire to enter it ourselves for all eternity.¹⁴

Therefore, one can understand why teachers, in d'Alzon's mind, are more than purveyors of skills; they are God's instruments who open their students to the truth about God, themselves, and the world. Addressing the faculty of the Collège in Nîmes, at its very beginning in the 1840's, he could write, "Christian truth is not only to be systematized and reflected on. It is specially something to be loved. When the person who searches for truth and longs for it, when he finds it, it become his consuming passion. Where will we find this truth except in God himself, by delving into the very depth of God, by assimilating that true life which is the life of God.... If we ourselves love the truth, we will spare no efforts in teaching our students to love it too.... We will

lead them up to the heights of truth. Truth will become their friend and the whole purpose of their lives.”¹⁵

Emmanuel d’Alzon found this truth in the person of Jesus Christ, who became his friend. To share this truth, to share this happiness became the whole purpose of his life. It is the legacy that he has left to this College.

¹ Emmanuel d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, trans. Richard Lamoureux, A.A., 2nd ed. (New London: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009) 74.

² Gaston Bordet, “Emmanuel d’Alzon et la crise mennaisienne 1828-1835,” *Emmanuel d’Alzon dans la Société et l’Église du XIXe siècle*, (Paris: Le Centurion, 1982) 37-82; here, 42-43.

³ Emmanuel d’Alzon, *Écrits spirituels*, ed. Athanase Sage, A.A. (Rome: Maison Générale, 1956) 952.

⁴ *idem*, 659ff. See also “Third Letter to the Master of Novices,” *Foundational Documents*, trans. Richard Richards, A.A. (Milton, MA) 108-109.

⁵ *op.cit.* “Closing Address to the General Chapter of 1868,” *Foundational Documents*, 83.

⁶ *op. cit.* *Écrits spirituels*, 1030.

⁷ Barry Bercier, A.A., “Fr. d’Alzon and Education,” *Crosswinds*, December 2010, 4 Aug. 2011. <<http://www.assumption.us/news/blogs/crosswinds/363-father-dalzon-and-education>>

⁸ *op. cit.*, *Écrits spirituels*, 226

⁹ *ibid.*, 475

¹⁰ Emmanuel d’Alzon, *Les Instructions du Samedi* (Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1932).

¹¹ *ibid.*, 76, 81, 92-93.

¹² *ibid.*, 75, 87, 93-95.

¹³ *ibid.*, 75, 83.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 82, 119.

¹⁵ *op. cit.* “The Meaning of Christian Education: An Address to the Faculty of Assumption College, Nîmes, February 1, 1846,” *To Educators at Assumption*, 94.

Chapter One

Confessions of a Teacher

*Fr. Roger Corriveau, A.A.
Assumption College Class of 1969
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The heart of an Assumption College education beats by the energy its Assumptionist founders channeled from St. Augustine's experience of himself as lover and beloved. Unlike Narcissus, who fell in love with that fetching reflection of himself in the pool, St. Augustine identified what he came to understand about himself, not as the image of his self, but as one, singular representation of any human person. The purpose of an Assumption education is to turn teachers and students alike in the requisite direction for finding that unrepeatable person for the rest of their lives.

Beneath the surface of his renown, Aurelius Augustinus was simply the bishop of an insignificant seaside town, Hippo Regius, in the Roman Province of Numidia in North Africa. Long before the founding of Europe's great universities, the only professorial chair he ever occupied was his *cathedra*¹ in the town's Catholic basilica. Yet he became one of the fundamental teachers of the West, whose books, letters and recorded sermons established the heart of Europe's important libraries during the Middle Ages and initiated a redounding

dialogue, ever expanding and eliciting many more books in our libraries today. Augustine has been acclaimed a Father of the Church by the East as well, perhaps because he so tenaciously held that his calling as bishop was to be the teacher of the congregation that gathered in his church. What was he teaching? What he had learned about himself and God's relationship to him.

Augustine came to understand himself through the introspective composition of his *Confessions* at the beginning of his episcopacy. The shock of his life had struck when he was pulled away from the happy life of philosophic leisure with his friends in Thagaste and thrust into the demands of Catholic ministry in Hippo in 391(*Sermon 355,2*). His literary career had been falling apart under the frustrating weight of writer's block and was not regained until his second conversion in 397,² which made sense of his life and engendered his *Confessions*. They reviewed his past in the light of his recent experience as a reader of St. Paul, the only seminary training vouchsafed him before undertaking priestly ministry so unexpectedly. They also represented his re-integration of the Platonic tradition to which he had been previously introduced but had subsequently held under suspicion. Too, they marked the loss of his privacy and launched him into a bold episcopal ministry that came to characterize him as one of the foundation stones of Western Civilization.

The *Confessions* served as an inaugural address of sorts to his friends, to his parishioners, and even to his detractors. They reveal to us an Augustine who has discovered that teaching is above all a matter of love. “Being in love” was the serpentine road that had successively wound around sex, women, friends; that coiled around being in love with loving; that twisted around learning for the sake of knowing; that wended its way into loving God, loving himself as God’s beloved, discovering others as God’s beloved ones also, and ultimately into foregoing the life he loved out of love for them.

Augustine’s account of his inward journey, on which he found both himself and love, resonates with students today who are undergoing their own transformation crises, so pulled by the vexing need to be successful in the world that they can easily become inured to living merely on the surface of their lives. Students need the encouragement of their teachers to fathom and enjoy the deeper, almost infinite, dimensions of themselves where they can also find themselves as the beloved of God.

Augustine started off in life with a “restless heart” (*Conf.* 1:1,1).³ His training encouraged him to feel and to make others feel.⁴ Even as a boy he was schooled to become a speech-maker whose pleasing facility with words and lively locution were supposed to charm others into siding with whatever position he or his patron advocated (5:6,11). He was learning the rhetor’s

profession of eliciting feelings with little concern for the truth of the matter he was advocating. Suspending his studies until his father could scrape up enough money to send him back to school, Augustine spent his sixteenth year at home in Thagaste, suddenly freed from the pressures of studies and overtaken by his hitherto repressed fascination with sex (2:3,6-7). A year later, student life in the city, Carthage,⁵ away from anxious maternal supervision, turned him randily loose to luxuriate in his emotions. Not yet really in love, he was in love with loving, experiencing its itching sweetness so long as it went unfulfilled (3:1,1). His love-life seemed much like the experience of many college students today: needing to love and be loved, the more so if he could also enjoy a lover's body, he was inevitably afflicted with distress and scourged by jealousy, suspicion, fear, anger and quarreling (3:1,1; cf. Galatians 5:20). Not unlike students today, glued to "Secret Life of the American Teenager," he discovered in the popular shows of his time a world fueling the fires of his longing (3:2,2). All this was to change within the following year. His father Patrick died and his mother Monica took over the worried responsibility of seeing her talented son complete his schooling. By the time he was nineteen he had stanchd his sensuality while satisfying his need for sex. He had settled into a common-law marriage with an unnamed woman, by whom he "accidentally" fathered a son, Adeodatus (4:2,2). He was to remain faithful to her for the next fourteen years,

and he was to love his son dearly, awed by his intelligence and deeply affected over his untimely death (9:6,14).

We would judge today that Augustine was bereft of a liberal education.⁶ He was training professionally to be a rhetorician, learning how to massage the feelings of his audience, beguiling them into taking the medium for the message. Then something unexpected happened. He thought he was just satisfying the requirements of the curriculum when he picked up one of its stipulated texts, Cicero's *Hortensius*, prized in the schools for its style, but usually disregarded for its content (3:4,7). With compellingly crafted diction, Cicero had demonstrated that real happiness depends ultimately upon the pursuit of wisdom and the assurance of immortality. He had melded happiness and wisdom into the one goal of the philosophic life. Augustine's fascination with that ideal radically changed the course and intensity of his desires (4:4,7). Destabilized by philosophic unrest (cf. 1:1,1), his aspirations for a political career in public speaking were losing their appeal.

Augustine's quest for love, however, became all the more urgent. Having returned as a graduate from Carthage back to Thagaste, this time as a teacher of rhetoric, he developed a fondness, sweeter than any previous experience, for an old school chum of his. The like-mindedness they now shared endeared them inseparably to each other. Augustine's grief over his

friend's unexpected death nearly drove him to despair (4:4,9). Beyond the death of his beloved, there was only the searing memory of bygone days. His friend, even dead, was more real to him than the God he could only imagine. What Augustine had not seen at the time is that the friend he loved so much, even when he lived, was no less a figment of his imagination than was God (cf. 7:14,20). He had invested his life in him as though he were immortal, bigger than life, more divine than human (4:7,12). The grief he wallowed in over the loss of his friend had become as gratifying as his presence had been (4:6,11). His love for his friend, flourishing in terms of his personal preferences and attractions, was in fact his own self-love (4:4,7), for they were like two bodies within one soul (4:6,11).

Augustine was discovering that everything he had been longing for and staking his happiness on was bound to end. Despite his moral ambiguities and hesitations, he knew he had to be in love with something which by definition could not be time-bound. His introspection revealed that love is itself an "intimation of immortality" by virtue of its wanting to possess forever the object it longs for. Cicero was right. Augustine hitherto had been running away from himself and from love as well.

Cicero taught Augustine that philosophy is the love of wisdom (3:4,8). Augustine was less interested in weighing one philosophical school against

another to hit upon the best one. Since such discernment could only be made on the basis of wisdom itself, he could be satisfied with nothing less than wisdom. To be in love with wisdom, however, does not afford living proof that it can actually be realized. For centuries wisdom had been personified as consoling and purifying its devotees in return for their self-sacrifice and moral conversion. The philosopher, as wise man, was to transcend his bodily, temporal existence and dwell within his rational soul, wedded to his beloved wisdom.⁷ But was he just a moonstruck lover? Augustine had always been driven by love. Thus far his life seemed to offer only a one-way relationship to wisdom, still too ethereal to be felt.

Augustine was off on a long lover's quest that wended its way through Manichaeism (3:5,9-12,21; 5:3,3-7,13; 9,16-10,18), skepticism (5:10,19) and even astrology (7:6,8). Only when he was appointed to a professorship of rhetoric in Milan did he come to find himself and God—and love besides. But there were a number of unforeseen bends in the road. He had not expected to be compelled, by the overweening concern of his mother for his career, to dismiss the woman he loved dearly for the sake of pursuing a proper marriage befitting his high station and political ambitions (6:15,25). So much for love: he immolated marriage and family to his career. Even though his heartbreak was turning to cold despondency, he could not give up sex. He took up with

another woman to see him through the two years he would have to wait before his betrothed would come of age (*Ibid.*).

Then by a very different turn of circumstances, Augustine was introduced to a Milanese circle of Platonists (7:9,13-14) and through them discovered Plato's characteristic distinction between the objects of sense-perception and those of intellectual apprehension. He had always known that the world he perceived with his senses existed outside his mind. The Neoplatonist works he was reading in Milan showed him the way of "inwardness."⁸ Porphyry, following the lead of his teacher Plotinus, held that spiritual reality is "within" us and insisted on the utter dissimilarity between material substance, the parts of which are external to one another, and intelligible, spiritual substance, the parts of which are mutually within one another. Augustine came to understand that he could perceive the intelligible "world" only because it was immediately present within his mind and not mediated by the senses of the body. He was about to discover love of a different order than the one by which he chafed. What he wanted to possess was already within him. Augustine's reading captivated him and compelled him to "return" to himself (7:10,16), hoping to find there the personal presence of the wisdom he wanted to love and be loved by.

Was Augustine only beguiling himself? Of those few who have a mind subtle enough to contemplate wisdom's beauty, still fewer have the leisure to refine it to do so. There is a vast chasm between the "few" and the "many." This esoteric tradition of the philosophers was based in part upon their estimation of the restrictive possibility of real love in the lives of most humans. So elusive was wisdom proving to be, that the love of it seemed to Augustine to be "presumption" on the part of the philosopher (7:20,26). Identified as "Logos" and "Son of God" by the Platonists, Wisdom seemed to soar too high above the lot of humanity. Augustine understood that the philosopher's presumption could dissolve only in the lover's recognition of himself as standing also among the "many," where Wisdom, not needing to be found by them, would find them instead, not by any effort or for any merit of theirs but rather out of gratuitous love for them. Augustine had not experienced Wisdom's love for him, and until he did, he could not distinguish his love from the presumption of those philosophers who were perhaps misled by their conviction that they could get to Wisdom's heavenly "Homeland" within themselves on their own.⁹

Simplicianus was a priest serving as catechist for the church of Milan. He had been the friend of the most celebrated orator in Rome at the time, Marius Victorinus (8:2,3-5), and more recently had been Ambrose's Christian

mentor who prepared him for Baptism after his brusque election to the episcopacy of Milan while only a catechumen. Still serving as catechist for that church, Simplicianus drew Augustine away from the ethereal, remote Logos of the Neoplatonists (8:1,1). He introduced him to the Christ of the Gospels. Although the notion of Christ as God's Logos and Wisdom is heresy when it excludes Christ's humanity, Simplicianus knew that the Neoplatonic works Augustine had been reading could be assimilated to the orthodox, Catholic notion of Christ (8:2,3). The Prologue to John's Gospel declares that God's Logos is as much God as God is (John 1:1). It reveals that this very Logos entered human history as a human being (John 1:14). The remote Logos had dwelt among us, sharing our lot, subject to suffering and death like any other human (7:9,13-14).

The philosopher may be a deceived lover of wisdom, but the Christian philosopher, specifically, should not be. The appropriateness of loving wisdom would be in the experience of wisdom's love returned for its lover's. Simplicianus led Augustine to a re-reading of the Neoplatonists (8:2,3). Augustine was discovering wisdom not only within the ideas of his mind, but outside of his body, embodied in another man who had shared and was changing human history. Augustine's love of wisdom, his philosophy, could be

more concrete because Wisdom is personal and has taken on the reality of human existence in Jesus Christ (7:9,13-14).

One of the searing questions put to Christians, even today, surfaced for Augustine. Did he know himself as loved by Christ only by arriving at the disengaged conclusion of a syllogism? The syllogism would be: Christ loves humans to the point of giving up his life for them; Augustine is human; therefore Christ loves Augustine and surrendered his life for him as well. In that case, Augustine may have been redeemed by Christ, but he could have remained insignificant to him, loved not individually but generically, like a drop in the ocean of redeemed humanity. This is what most Christians, students as well as their teachers, when pushed by this ultimate question, would woefully conclude concerning Christ's love for them. It is an answer that Augustine, in his longing for love, could not settle for.

Simplicianus had helped Augustine understand who Christ was for him individually by getting him to understand who Christ is universally. The eternal Logos of God was "enfleshed" as Jesus living within a specific time and space. Like all human relationships, his with his contemporaries were individual, unique and unrepeatable. Augustine, and the rest of us living in a different time and place than did Jesus, seemed excluded from a relationship with him. Jesus Christ, however, is also the eternal Word of God, the

Revelation of God's divine nature. This means that Jesus' particularized expression of God is the revelation of God's individual love for every human being. The Gospel account of his friendships is also the declaration of who he is for every human person. Augustine came to understand God's omnipotence precisely as his infinite capacity to love each as though that one were the only one who existed, and to love all alike with the same tender care he shows to each (3:11,19).

But the right understanding of Christ's relationship to him could not be sufficient for Augustine. As much as Simplicianus could help Augustine know intellectually that Christ loved him individually, Augustine needed to know it experientially. Any student today knows that love, to be fulfilling, must be felt. Did Augustine actually experience Christ loving him? Had he not known himself as loved individually and singularly, Augustine, like any of us, may just as well have thought of himself as having ultimately lost out on love. Until such time as Augustine would actually experience Christ loving him, he was hopelessly fettered by his compulsion for sex. A new will for continence had been growing within him, but he was now caught in a war of opposing wills—flesh and spirit—from which he could not free himself and emerge victorious over his “fleshly” addiction (8:5,10-12).

Augustine's *Confessions* demonstrate how he read biblical narratives as allegories of human experience. There are four garden scenes in Books Eight and Nine¹⁰ which describe events in Augustine's life, but also serve as literary allusions to the primeval garden story of Genesis (2:4b-3:24). The second scene narrates the climax of Augustine's first conversion, in the garden of the house in Milan (8:8.19-12,29). We will never know what factually happened there. Was Augustine in the garden or was the garden within Augustine?¹¹ The answer may lie only in Augustine's later reappraisal of the Neoplatonists when he was composing the *Confessions*.

Having taken leave of Alypius, his friend, who was with him in the garden, Augustine found a solitary spot where weeping could do its work of assuaging the storm of indecision raging within him. He happened to be under a fig tree (8:12,28), replete with biblical meaning. The Man and Woman had covered the nakedness of their shame with the leaves of such a tree (Gen. 3:7). Jesus, having seen Nathanael seated under a fig tree, had called him thence to discipleship (John 1:47-48). Jesus had cursed a fruitless fig tree (Matt. 21:19).¹² The three fig trees are really one tree, swaying over the original sin of Adam and Eve individualized within Augustine. Christ entered the inward garden of Augustine's life where he was sitting under the fig tree. When Augustine complied with the *tolle, lege*—"Take and read"—that he heard

coming from a neighborhood house,¹³ he was hearing it as coming from Christ present in the world inside of himself. And when he silently read Paul's exhortation—intended for everyone generally—to have done with a fleshly life and to put on Jesus Christ instead (Romans 13:13-14), he read it as addressed to himself specifically. In the previous Garden scene with Ponticianus (8:6,14-15), Augustine and Alypius had heard about Antony's conversion and its effect upon Ponticianus and his friends. So now Augustine's random reading of Paul's chapter was an echo of Antony's chance entry into a church and hearing Matthew 19:21 being read to the assembly as though it were addressed to himself in particular. In the case of both Antony and Augustine, the Scriptures, the Word of God, addressed externally to all, exhorted each internally and effected an individual experience of conversion. The movement from the external into the internal world was the movement from the intellectual knowledge of God and his Word, that Augustine had garnered from his conversations with Simplicianus, into his actual experience of Christ's presence within him. So long as Augustine's knowledge of God had been external, he remained vexed by the two wills he knew within himself: one by which his body obeyed his will, the other by which his will could not obey itself (8:9,20-21). The self-contradictory will he had experienced over the thirteen years of his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*, and his present reading of

Romans 13, suddenly loosened its wonted hold on him. He was henceforth ardently attracted to Jesus Christ.

Augustine's conversion was by way of introversion, a journey along which he discovered Christ internally present and which consequently effected a radical change in his life. Augustine experienced the Incarnation of the Word within himself, not only through the words of Christ in that sing-song *tolle, lege*, and in Paul's exhortation, but through the action of Christ, decisively redeeming and saving him. Christ was the Way, the Truth, the Life, Wisdom itself, and the Word and Light of God within Augustine as he sat in the garden that both surrounded him without and occupied the "space" of his soul within himself.¹⁴

The garden scene in Milan became Augustine's vision of Eden, his own personal Paradise. The Genesis garden had been the place from which humanity's direct vision of God's presence was obfuscated through Adam and Eve's activation of their will for God's creature rather than for God himself.¹⁵ When the Word of God entered within time, without ever leaving eternity, and took to himself a human nature and became a man, without ceasing to be God, he became Christ Jesus, the New Adam, the "Way" back into Paradise, humanity's "Homeland." Augustine had experienced Christ: the condescension

of the Word in his own behalf worked the beginning of his ascension back to God. Henceforth, Augustine knew himself as individually loved by Christ.

Augustine was embarking on a new phase of his life. Victorious in his search for love by surrendering to Love's search for him, he had decided to retreat from public life and to retire back home to live the philosophic life with his friends. Once again there was a garden, without and within. Staying in Ostia while waiting to board ship for Africa, both mother and son were one day conversing before an open window that gave upon the interior garden of the hostel where they were staying (9:10,23). As they were conversing about what everlasting life would be like, they were drawn up to a higher level of understanding that dissolved conventional dependence on words and signs.¹⁶ As they fixed their gaze on things beyond life in this world, they left behind the past of their bodily lives, which had distinguished them as mother and son, as learned and unlettered, to recover a state of mind, forgotten since Eden, where they were united as spiritual siblings. They were drinking reality at the fountain of everlasting life. The words of their conversation built the steps of their ascent beyond all physical things. They moved inward and upward. They entered their minds mutually only to transcend them. They came into a "region" of unending abundance, a place where God nourishes his beloved on truth and where life is the Wisdom in which all things come to be, a place

transcending time, abiding forever in the present (9:10,24). They moved from their own words, through the words of Scripture, into the silence of the single Word.

They could hear each other speaking human words, physical sounds that have a beginning and an end, in contrast to the ageless and ever-renewed Word of God speaking in eternally present Silence (9:10,25). They had been led beyond the temporal experience of their senses to a place within themselves beyond their mental capacities. They had reached a region of “temporally eternal experience,”¹⁷ an experience which, were it to go on forever, would be indistinguishable from the joys of heaven (10:40,65). Augustine had personally experienced the Word deigning to dwell within his own “memory” (10:25,36).

In this fourth garden scene, Augustine experienced his ascension within the Word, an ascent that was a matter of grace rather than of Neoplatonic intellectual effort (7:7,11-9,14).¹⁸ Augustine felt Christ loving him; in turn he knew that his own reciprocal love for Christ was not the presumption of the philosopher (7:20,26). He experienced what would be one of the hallmarks of his doctrine: the simultaneous existence of two parallel worlds, the material and the spiritual, the external and the internal, the temporal and the eternal. He knew that love is experienced differently in those two places, one of which is

not really a place. In the exterior world, love is ever restless and is ultimately heart-wrenching. In the interior world of the soul, Christ himself is both the Way and the distant Homeland.¹⁹ In that interior world, that exists nowhere but in the human soul, love is always fulfilling because it is eternally and infinitely greater than the beloved human person.

Augustine had related the Platonists' books he and Simplicianus once discussed to his garden experiences of Christ's love for him. In reminiscing some ten years later in his *Confessions*, he marveled at a God who could be so interested in him as to go out in search of him, of a God who loved him so much that he menaced him to make sure that he loved him in return (1:5,5). Why would God be interested in him, Augustine? Why would God be interested in anyone for that matter? Why would God be interested in today's student? The answer, an assurance rather than a proof, lies in the fact of one's existence: to have been created by the eternal Creator is to be loved and cherished forever. Later as bishop and teacher sitting on his *cathedra*, Augustine never tired of trying to convince his congregation that the love of God that was actual for him was actual for each of them as well (*Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 2,13). The eternal Word of God was begotten of God to create us, and born of a woman to re-create us. The astounding love he showed us in saving us is no greater than the love by which we exist. The former

follows from the latter. Because so many of the world's lovers are blind to the fact that their existence follows from God's infinite love for them, his Son became their brother within their worldly reality, to make visible what seems incredible by its otherwise invisibility. God's love even unto the death of his Word made Flesh is no mean demonstration of love for them. They must be of considerable worth for God to render them immortal by being born mortal himself (*Ibid.* 2,15).

Augustine understood that the material universe, including the bodies of all the men and women he met in the course of any day, constituted an outward world. Everything he perceived as spiritual, as existing nowhere, he perceived as being within an inward world, within his mind. He came to understand that God, his Word, and their unifying Love are spiritual things, unbounded by and beyond all space and time, existing nowhere. God is the most internal of everything, because all things exist in him. And yet he is the most external, because he is beyond everything (3:6,11). God is nowhere; everything that exists somewhere is held by God; and yet God, who draws Augustine toward himself in the infinite embrace of Love that he is, is within Augustine (1:1,1-3,3).

By reappraising his experience and thinking through his *Confessions*, Augustine sired his idea of human spirit, not as a static "interiority,"²⁰ but as a

dynamic “inwardness,” summarized in the noted sentence of his *Confessions* that resonates everywhere within them: *Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*; “You were more within me than my inmost self and higher beyond my highest self (3:6,11).” The Latin comparative adjective *interior* usually loses its comparative aspect and assumes a neutral, positive meaning, as in “inner man.” But when accompanied by an object of comparison—rarely in Latin usage—it produces an image that tests the imagination: “more within than....” And then when the object is itself in the superlative degree, the consequent “image” defies the imagination that was already struggling with the comparative degree of “within”: “more within than my inmost self.” Augustine described and formulated the consciousness of his personal identity in terms of his awareness of God’s presence within him. Astonishingly, he found himself in finding God first. God was more present to him than he was to himself.

“You were more within me than my inmost self and more beyond me than my highest self” discloses simultaneously God’s immanence and his transcendence.²¹ The first half of Augustine’s formulation, *interior intimo meo*, means first of all that divine immanence is the presence of a *Deus internus* within each human being. In a rhyming parallel with the first half, the second part, *superior summo meo*, specifies that God’s transcendence to Augustine’s

heart, where God is more intimately present than Augustine is to himself, is actually God's transcendence of his own immanence. Usually God's transcendence and immanence are correlated to the created universe and more specifically to humanity. But with Augustine's linguistic virtuosity, they are correlated to each other within the concept of God's presence to Augustine.²²

Interior intimo meo and *superior summo meo* constitute a single metaphor signifying a single drive, but along two trajectories perpendicular to each other, toward the same goal.²³ Augustine's spirituality is an "inwardness" whereby he entered within himself to find the only God there is, *Deus internus*. The second half of Augustine's formulation implies that going inward is simultaneously going upward. Inwardness is coordinated with upwardness. Thereby Augustine's spirituality comprises a constant inward overtaking of oneself. It is this dynamism that characterizes it, precisely, as spirituality rather than *stasis*. Created in the image of God, one is exhorted to transcend oneself, in imitation of the God within oneself transcending his immanence. The two metaphors in Augustine's formulation merge into a single one to signify the tension that constitutes the relationship between the human spirit and God as well as the transcendence that characterizes the resolution of that tension within its "rest in God" (1:1,1).

Experience had taught Augustine that love without God is the cruelest of human ambiguities. A love that wants to possess the beloved must reject the love of another. At the heart of human love, though, can burn a desire for a beloved who can be loved the more passionately and possessively the more he can be shared, without partition or diminution, with all his lovers. Love is just such a heavenly paradox for Augustine. Because God is infinite Love, Love can individuate itself in an infinite number of tender relationships (3:11,19, *ut supra*). This love can elicit no jealousy, because it is infinitely specific and as unique as is every human person that will ever have existed. After all, God is the “ground of being” of every “thing” that exists (cf. 7:11,17). And the Word of God does not cease being God for becoming human (*Homilies on the Gospel of John* 8,3 and 14,12).

We can note the geometric model by which Augustine came to understand and describe his own experience of conversion, the migration of his love within a gravitational pull that brings the heart to rest in changeless stability. He perceived a polarity between the love of something greater than himself and the love of something beneath himself. The choice of either one fuels the momentum of the heart either upward toward rest within God or restlessly downward toward disintegration in non-being. Augustine also visualized the ascent to God as a simultaneous entry within oneself and,

symmetrically, aversion from God as an exit from oneself. Human love, then, is the vehicle that conveys the heart above or beneath itself and within or outside itself. Because of the primal sin of Adam and Eve, humanity is locked into a perpendicular trajectory down from God and away from itself. The reversal of that trajectory, conversion in the opposite direction upward toward God and inward within oneself, can be effected only through God's loving condescension. Divine love secures the ability of human love to carry the heart within and above itself.

It was this divine condescending Love that Augustine experienced, drawing him within himself in the garden scene in Milan and into an ascension beyond himself into God in the garden scene at Ostia. These two narratives each represent a fusion of remembered events with their subsequent re-vision, which correspond to a second conversion which Augustine confessed by his *Confessions* and from which he preached thereafter to his congregation. The *Confessions* express the relationship between present and past, within which they each effect a meaning on the other which neither would have had were it considered outside that relationship.

Augustine also combined the dynamism of his spirituality with his prevailing idea of God as being of a triple nature, summed up in *Confessions* 7:10,16: "eternal truth, true love and beloved eternity." God is a trinity

expressed within a verbal circle, without beginning or end. Love, the Holy Spirit within God, who is the relationship between the Father and his Word, is as much God as the two it unifies in one God. It is this same Bond of Love that draws divine nature and human nature together within the Person of God's Word²⁴ and that maintains them forever united as Jesus Christ. It is this same Holy Spirit that binds Jesus Christ to his Church to form forever the unity of the "Whole Christ,"²⁵ the Second Adam dwelling forever with God in the cool of "Paradise regained." This same infinite Love radiates from God to all of humanity and invites every man and woman to let go of the self-imposed boundaries they have willfully placed around their "existence" and to let themselves be drawn into a love-affair that will "divinize" them so radically that the only difference between them and God will be the difference between Creator and creature, between eternity and immortality, between natural Son and adopted children (*Homilies on the Gospel of John* 2,13).

We moderns do not easily countenance Augustine's transport of love, because, like him before he met the Neoplatonists in Milan, we conceive of reality in physical and material terms and, unlike him after he met Simplicianus, we do not think of God in spiritual and, more precisely, in personal terms. God is involved not only in the existence of the individual human person, but in the restoration of that person to the status of God's

image. Augustine reasoned that if the immortal God is the ground of a person's being, then by the same token the return to him already in this life is a matter of an everlasting personal relationship, which is grace fundamentally and which when acknowledged and responded to is love.

St. Augustine confessed himself and God's love for him because he was convinced that his experience was no greater than anyone else's could be. He taught himself and God's love for him because he considered himself as only one among a multitude of siblings, all children of the same condescendingly loving God. It was as a brother to all students that he was a teacher, one of the greatest professors ever by virtue of teaching his students through his experience and of inspiring them to reach for human sublimity beyond themselves through reflection on their own experiences.

Perhaps we can now better understand why Emmanuel d'Alzon, founder of the Assumptionists, bequeathed to them his love for St. Augustine²⁶ and why those who founded Assumption College heard in St. Paul's affectionate concern for his Galatians a resounding summary of the pastoral ministry of the bishop of Hippo, by which posterity made him out to be one of the greatest teachers of the West: "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ be formed in you, I wish I were present to you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you" (Gal. 4:19-

20). Assumption College's motto, "...until Christ be formed in you" (cf. 7:10,16) represents the goal of Augustine's constant preoccupation for his students, the sisters and brothers who congregated in his basilica, for each of his correspondents, and for all those whom he addressed in his books, whether or not they agreed with him.²⁷

St. Augustine's "inward-upward" odyssey, leading him through himself to beyond himself, defined his aspirations for a similar transformation of all those who would frequent the school of human experience. It also provides us with the profoundest interpretation of the concluding sentence of Assumption College's mission statement, "Enlivened by the Catholic affirmation of the harmony of faith and reason, we aim, by the pursuit of the truth, to transform the minds and hearts of students." At any university founded on the inspiration of St. Augustine, faith and reason cannot be antithetical. Augustine had harmonized them into a hermeneutic circle: with the same breath with which he said *credo ut intellegam* he also said *intellego ut credam*. He connected "I need to believe in order to come to understand" with "I need to understand in order to come to believe." This hermeneutic circle makes sense, however, only within his "inward-upward" trajectory, where his ascension is aligned with the Word's descent toward him.²⁸ Any notion of blind faith is a contradiction of Augustine's concept of human life as trajectory. Christian infancy is marked

by faith; Christian adulthood is characterized by the fulfillment of that faith in understanding. The former is the means to the latter.²⁹

An education in the Augustinian tradition implies that everyone is supposed to grow from childhood in the faith to adulthood, from believing to understanding.³⁰ The Word of God, Wisdom, by which the whole universe was made, became flesh (John 1:14) by which to be milk (1 Cor. 3:2) for the infants in the faith (7:18,24), milk for them to drink that they may grow up to be able to nourish themselves on the Bread of angels, the immutable and eternal Word, Son of God.³¹ Augustine heard Christ claiming to be food for adults, calling him and all his students, his sisters and brothers, to grow up that they too may eat, not to digest Christ into themselves but to be transformed into Christ himself (7:10,16).

Even before kindergarten I wanted to know stuff. I was especially fascinated with China, a world far away from my favorite kitchen corner where I daily consulted my “Little Golden Books.” Later I was enthralled with steam locomotives, then with diesel engines, then with fighter planes, then with geography and history. By seventh grade I was enraptured with stories that became part of my own experience; and in high school I was beguiled by what

the words within a poem could do inside me. Now, having sat in the school of St. Augustine for quite some time, I have come to understand that everything that I know, I know only insofar as it is within my mind, having been transformed into my own experience. There is an almost infinite world outside of me, but all that I can know of it is what I have internalized within myself. I can know the universe “out there” only to the extent that it has migrated “into here” through sense perception. I can know about the macrocosm in the measure that it has dematerialized into the microcosm of my memory. I can know what is good, true, and beautiful, because the Good, the True, and the Beautiful are innately within my mind, by which to judge through intellectual perception all that is outside of me. I can know a thing only because I can know myself as knowing it. St. Augustine has taught me the noetic importance of human experience. There is no other way of knowing anything.

God is the totally Other, infinitely beyond the time and space of the universe. In terms of God’s infinity, “nowhere” and “never” are the obverse side of “everywhere” and “always.” This same God, never having begun to be and being nowhere, is ever and only within me. The more I experience God, the more I experience myself; the more I know myself by reflecting on my experience, the more I am contemplating God at the heart of my inmost self.

I have learned to take myself seriously, not out of self-centeredness, but out of the strong belief that my experience is the only place where I can find God. No! Rather let me phrase that in the manner of St. Augustine's *Confessions*: my experience is the only place where God can find me. As a teacher I have grown in the undaunted conviction that the only way I can teach my students is to inspire and embolden them to be attentive to themselves and their experiences, those that happened to them as well as those they chose to have. A professional education today is vitally important for students, who will have to face a world becoming ever more overwhelmingly complex, where flourishing is dauntingly complicated. But students, like anybody else, run the risk of becoming so concerned about being successful, that they could lose sight of themselves and stop learning from their experience.

The purpose of a liberal education, in the Augustinian and Assumptionist tradition, is learning to learn for the rest of your life, evermore expanding and deepening your inward life. That kind of learning happens through your attentiveness to yourself as well as through your appropriation of others' experience. And that happens in reading literature when you are attentive to the way you react to and identify with the characters you read about. It happens in poetry when you heed the emotions it elicits within you. It happens in mathematics when you notice how the mind proceeds from one step

to the next, constructing a nexus of relationships that exist nowhere else. It happens in history when you acquire perspective through the individual, social and political decisions and actions of others. It happens in art when you see the relationships among line, form, color and texture, and whence you will always notice so much more than what you used to see. It happens in music when you perceive the relationship between sound and silence and the harmonies among tones and timbres, and thence hear what you never heard before. It happens in the sciences when you are awestruck by the explosive grandeur and startling, almost ageless, processes by which the universe evolves, or amazed at the infinitesimal minuteness of the energies and structures that undergird it all. It happens in philosophy when you begin to think about yourself, life, and the world with thoughts you had never entertained before. Your appropriation of others' experiences happens also in theology when you come to know that God is beyond all that exists and yet is so within it all that each of us is the manger from which his Word becomes flesh in this world of ours. My list of letters, arts, and sciences is hardly complete. Were I to think it so, I would have inadvertently shown my ignorance of what many of you know so much better than I and in so many ways diverse from my own.

Now you have read the confessions of a teacher at Assumption College. I am awed by the almost infinite possibilities for personal growth and

enrichment found in a liberal education. I shall always be among the last, however, to deny the practical importance of professional training for our students. But I shall also be among the first to affirm that alone it cannot help them, as a liberal education can, to become ever more themselves and to discover within themselves the God calling them, until “Christ be formed in them,” to be his presence to all the sisters and brothers around them. We often speak of education as transformative. At Assumption you can have it in its most radical and extensive dimension.

¹ A *cathedra* was a Roman chair that had arms and a back. The word often referred to a professor’s chair from which he taught. By Christian appropriation it came also to refer to the bishop’s seat which was centrally located in the apse of his church and from which he preached. Today a cathedral church is the church where the bishop’s seat is situated and from where he shepherds his diocese.

² Cf. James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) xli-xlvii.

³ Henceforth all unspecified citations will refer to the *Confessions*.

⁴ Cf. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 23-34.

⁵ 3:1,1: *Carthago* coordinated with *sartago*.

⁶ It was exclusively literary, overlooking philosophy, science and history. See Brown 24. Brown bases his claim on Henri-Irenée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 4^{ième} éd. (Paris: Boccard, 1983), esp. 1-104; and *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’Antiquité* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1948). See also Aimé Solignac, “L’éducation à l’époque d’Augustin,” *Œuvres de saint Augustin: Les Confessions, Bibliothèque Augustinienne*, vol. 13 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962) 659-61.

⁷ Cf. Cicero, *Hortensius* (fgt. 97), cited by Augustine in *Trinity* 14:26.

⁸ Cf. Goulven Madec, *Saint Augustin et la philosophie: notes critiques* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1996) 37-44.

⁹ Cf. Goulven Madec, *La patrie et la voie: le Christ dans la pensée de saint Augustin* (Paris: Desclée, 1989) 39-46.

¹⁰ Ponticianus’s conversion had unfolded in a garden (8:6,14-15); Augustine’s conversion reached its climax in the garden of his rented house (8:8,19-12,30); the villa at Cassiciacum provided a similar setting for the Dialogues (9:3,5); and the “vision” at Ostia, shared by mother and son, overlooked the interior garden of the house where they were lodged (9:10,23).

¹¹ Cf. Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de saint Augustin* (Paris: Boccard, 1950) 188-202.

¹² *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1997) 206, n107. O'Donnell, *Augustine: "Confessions"*, 3, 57-8, lists a number of Augustine's works, but especially *Exposition on the Psalms* 31,2.9 and *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 7,21-22, as offering essential interpretations of this passage. He also found parallel interpretations in Ambrose.

¹³ 8:12,29; Georges Tavad, *Les jardins de saint Augustin* (Montréal: Édition Bellarmin, 1988) 52, notes that the house "nearby" could also have been a "divine" house: most mss. account for *uicina domo*, but the oldest has *diuina domo*.

¹⁴ Cf. O'Donnell 1, xxxvi-vii.

¹⁵ Cf. *On Genesis: A Refutation against the Manichees* 2:5-6.

¹⁶ Cf. Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditations, Self-Knowledge, and Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1996) 116-21.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 119.

¹⁸ Cf. Andrew Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 137-141; and Solignac 198-200.

¹⁹ Cf. Madec, *La patrie et la voie*, esp. 23-82.

²⁰ Cf. Goulven Madec, *Petites études augustiniennes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1994) 154-7. Madec notes (154) that the word *interioritas* is Late Latin and does not appear in Augustine's vocabulary. Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens*, does not even cite it.

²¹ Solignac 383 n 2.

²² Madec, in *Petites études augustiniennes*, 155 n 22, cites other formulations analogous to *interior intimo meo, superior summo meo*: *True Religion* 20,38; *Conf.* 8:3,8; *Trinity.* 8:9,13; 12:3,3; and Letter 101,3.

²³ Madec, in *Petites études augustiniennes*, 155f, states that this was well known during the Middle Ages and cites examples from Hugh of St.-Victor and Bonaventure.

²⁴ Cf. *Sermons* 130.30; 186.1; 293.7; 294.9; *Enchiridion* 35; and *Trinity* 1.14.

²⁵ Cf. Marie Comeau, "Le 'Christ total' ou l'Église," *Saint Augustin exégète du quatrième évangile* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1930) 339-369.

²⁶ "Saint Augustine, our patriarch, will be our principal guide" ("Closing Address to the General Chapter [September 17, 1868], *Foundational Documents*, trans. Richard Richards, [Milton, MA: no date] 87). "The City of God is for us like a second revelation, and the more we study it, the more we may find in it by analogy the secret of the future" (*ibid.*, 89). A twenty year old d'Alzon had written to his friend, Luglien de Jouenne d'Estrigny, "The beautiful book of the *Confessions*! What a beautiful soul this man had!"

²⁷ Although the Assumptionists were not intended by Emmanuel d'Alzon to be a Marian congregation, he nevertheless proposed Mary as the Assumptionist birthing model for pastoral ministry: "Cannot Mary, the Mother of Jesus, also be a model for us in the mystery of the Incarnation? Yes, there again, she will be a model for us by the ardor with which she inspires us and by the desire to give birth to souls for Jesus Christ and to give birth to Jesus Christ in souls: 'My children! I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you' (Galatians 4:19)" ("Closing Address to the General Chapter," *ibid.*, 82).

²⁸ Cf. Ragnar Holte, *Béatitude et sagesse: saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Worcester, MA: Augustinian Studies, Assumption College, 1962) esp. 304-320; Goulven Madec, "Notes sur l'intelligence augustinienne de la foi," *Revue des études augustiniennes* vol. 17 (1971): 120-142; "Croire pour comprendre," *Œuvres de saint Augustin: Dialogues philosophiques, Bibliothèque Augustinienne*, vol. 6, 3^{ième} éd. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1976) 549-551.

²⁹ At the beginning of his episcopal ministry, Augustine was going to base his manual on interpreting and preaching the Scriptures on the distinction between *uti* and *frui* (*On Teaching Christianity* 1:3,3 -5,5), a principle of discernment for the scheme of his thinking on language, on the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture, on action and contemplation and on faith and understanding.

³⁰ *The Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life* 35,80.

³¹ Tarsicius van Bavel, "L'humanité du Christ comme lac parvulorum et comme via dans la spiritualité de saint Augustin," *Augustinana* 7 (1957): 245-81; and Madec, *La patrie et la voie*, 155-92.

Chapter Two

D'Alzon Philosopher?

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In May 2010, as part of the bicentennial festivities, a group of students, staff and friends of Assumption College as well as members of the management team of Bayard Press USA went on a pilgrimage “in the footsteps of Emmanuel d’Alzon” and visited a number of places of import in his life: Paris, Nîmes, and Rome. The present article symbolically follows this itinerary in order to illustrate some key elements of Fr. d’Alzon’s life and thought (each of these places representing a key aspect of his work). Thus it commemorates the founder of the Augustinians of the Assumption, the religious sponsors of Assumption College, his legacy and noteworthy contributions to various fields, such as Catholic education, a spiritual renewal of society, ecumenism, the Eastern European missions, as well as Catholic journalism and publications. His vision of contemplation and action, of a congregation which, in close contact with lay communities, transforms society from a Christian perspective is of lasting significance.

Unable to offer a comprehensive historic and systematic account of d'Alzon's life and work, I will simply present a short overview focusing on their "philosophical" dimensions.¹ D'Alzon is a "philosopher" not just in the sense of the word that Augustine sometimes has in mind: philosophy as "love of wisdom," identical with a Christianity which is love of God or wisdom incarnate (in Christ), so that true philosophy = true religion = Christianity (cf. *De vera religione* 5,8). D'Alzon (as well as Augustine) recognizes, within the horizon of an intrinsic harmony of faith and reason, a certain autonomy of philosophy,² and he even adopts philosophical ideas: he accepts, for instance, philosophical authorities such as Plato, Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz and has a certain interest in contemporary thinkers as well. What makes him a true philosopher, however, is, above all, his concern for *education*. This might come as a surprise to a modern reader, but originally philosophy was not as abstract and theoretical (even in its "practical" disciplines, such as ethics) as it often nowadays seems. D'Alzon's example inspires us to reflect on the ever-relevant task of Christian mission and education. Moreover, we shall see that d'Alzon is surprisingly close not only to ancient philosophers but also to modern, even allegedly a- or anti-Catholic thinkers such as Kant and Nietzsche.

1. D'Alzon's Youth in France: A Christian Transformation of Society

Emmanuel d'Alzon was born at Le Vigan in southern France on August 30, 1810 and spent decisive years at the beautiful Lavagnac chateau, dubbed the "Versailles of Languedoc." The family resided there from 1816 to 1823 before they moved to Paris upon his father's election as a deputy in parliament. In Paris, Emmanuel attended high school and university.

Now, southern France and Paris first of all stand for d'Alzon's remarkable family background: born into a wealthy, aristocratic, and intensely Catholic family, for generations dedicated to public service, d'Alzon early developed a keen interest in public affairs and social questions, and he perfected this concern over the years, deeply caring for his fellow citizens. This public interest became the driving force behind his social efforts, which took forms different than those his parents expected. D'Alzon participated in various literary and social circles in Paris and met some of the most eminent Catholic thinkers of the time, thinkers who sought ways of reshaping the role of Christianity, sometimes rather progressively, in an increasingly democratic society. Most important among these was F. de Lamennais (1782-1835), who became d'Alzon's spiritual mentor. When the young nobleman—who initially had designs on a military career—began his studies of law in 1828 he seemed to fulfill his family's expectations of their eldest son. Only two years later,

however, he decided (against initial resistance from his parents) to respond to the social obligations whose call he deeply felt within himself not as a soldier, politician or civil servant, but as a priest. This choice was, for d'Alzon, not a flight or retreat from society but, on the contrary, a political act, a service to "the world." He wrote,

"The most intimate thought of my soul is that the world needs to be penetrated through and through with a Christian idea; otherwise it will fall apart. And the world will not receive this idea but from individuals who will be taken up with it above all else in order to proclaim it in every form it might assume. Some say the world is evil. It is true that passion turns it away from what is good. But I believe most of all that the world is ignorant. Therefore, we need to teach it and to do so in words it can understand."³

The young seminarian felt a vocation "to consecrate myself to the defense of religion."⁴

Based on this concern for the future of his society I see a (perhaps surprising) intellectual kinship between d'Alzon and his younger contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who was not only the self-proclaimed "Anti-Christ" but maybe a "secret God-seeker" (E. Biser) as well and who actually appreciated what Christian monks had done over the centuries to preserve

Western culture—a fact rarely commented upon but clearly discernible in some of his letters. It was with pleasure that Nietzsche had read a book by one of the members of Lamennais' circle: *Les Moines d'Occident* by Charles de Montalembert.⁵ What they really have in common, though, is their concern about the social upheavals of the 19th century. D'Alzon grieved over the socialist revolutions (1789, 1830, 1848, 1871) which went hand in hand with an increasing secularization of society, while Nietzsche was devastated when the 1870 war between Germany and France broke out, for he saw it as a great danger for European culture. Of course, d'Alzon sought to heal society by re-Christianizing it while Nietzsche dreamed of overcoming the crisis by founding a new philosophy and a purely this-worldly "religion."⁶ Yet, the strategies they envisioned were similar: d'Alzon's ideal was the "penetration of society with a Christian idea," a purpose for which he founded his congregation and emphasized the role and responsibility of lay people (akin to today's own "lay-religious alliance"); Nietzsche cried for "new monasteries," seeing himself and his friends as their "first *fratres*" (KSB 3, 130). Contents were different but common was the idea to reform and transform society through the charism of spiritual communities dedicated to the pursuit of truth and wisdom and working in the midst of the people, educating the masses. Nietzsche never realized his dream; d'Alzon did. The Assumptionists were to

be—in the words of the first (1855) *Constitutions* of the congregation—“men of the world.” Moreover, he founded and supported a number of charitable institutions in order to foster the Christian influence in society, aiming at an “outpouring of the spirit in the people”.⁷ For the same purpose, d’Alzon used another instrument: the “apostolate of the press” as well as appropriate, Catholic publications, a field in which the Assumptionists have been pioneers and leaders since the foundation of *Bayard Presse* (*Bonne Presse*, 1873), now one of the largest Catholic publishing houses worldwide, and of the daily newspaper *La Croix* (1880).

The most crucial aspect of the missionary charisma of d’Alzon’s efforts at spiritual renewal, however, is *teaching* in the broadest sense of the word (i.e. not merely religious education or school education). The birthplace and, for years, center of Assumptionist education is Nîmes. Before we come to that (in chap. 3), though, we’ll have a quick look at another aspect which is essential in understanding d’Alzon and his goals – geographically (and as a chapter in his life) linked to Rome, the center and heart of the Church.

2. Studies at Rome: Rome-centrism and Ecumenism

During the political upheaval of 1830 the d’Alzon family returned to Lavagnac where Emmanuel’s desire to become a priest was made firm. In

1832, he entered the nearby major seminary at Montpellier but was soon disappointed by the quality of the education provided there and by his fellow seminarians' lack of scholarly commitment; he decided to pursue his studies in Rome (1833). Rome remained important for d'Alzon. He would return to Rome several times, partly because of Pius IX's interest in his congregation and its missionary activities, especially in Eastern Europe.⁸ Besides, d'Alzon served as an advisor to and deputy of his bishop, Henri Plantier, during the First Vatican Council (he served on the commission that prepared the dogma of papal infallibility) and as organizer of the International Press Bureau.

Rome—for d'Alzon and for anyone—offers the rich experience of the universality of the Church. D'Alzon's strict orientation towards Rome and the Pope, however, also entails some elements that may be a slightly irritating to the modern reader.⁹ His vision of ecumenism, motivated by the encounter with the Huguenots of southern France, often aimed at mere conversion, getting people to return to the bosom of the Roman Church. The papal office was the only umbrella under which d'Alzon could envision his goal, the restoration of the unity of the Church. On the other hand, there are some passages of truly ecumenical openness and respect “for the opinions of others” in his writings: in an address to Protestants in Nîmes, he goes as far to say, “we want full liberty for all, we will remain Catholics, you will remain Protestants.” Here, he sees

the Christian confessions united in their fight against unfaith, for the purpose of a “certain social transformation” (TEA, 149f).

This goal, however, brings us to another problem: not only the relationship between the various Christian confessions, but also that between Church and State entails a dangerous potential for political tension. D’Alzon saw himself in a battle, fighting for “the rights of God” and the Church (TEA, 62), as opposed to the rights of the State and its citizens. The strict Rome-centric, ultramontanist, and antimodernist attitude which d’Alzon soon unconditionally embraced as the only way out of the crisis polarized Church and society in a way that too easily overlooked the presence of God in the “secular” world. D’Alzon used the martial language of 19th century *kulturkampf*: he planned a counterattack against “secular society” (TEA, 106) for the re-evangelization of the world spearheaded by the Pope, whom he compared to “a general of a huge army” (TEA, 77). This language has, of course, to be understood within the context of its time. In post-revolutionary France, it was first of all a *reaction* to the open attacks on the church; Christians must have felt threatened in their very existence by a “war” they had not started (cf. TEA, 106). The “Pentecostal” boldness which d’Alzon repeatedly invoked, the desire to fight for one’s faith and defend the Church would always remain an important and praiseworthy feature of a Christian

existence; it is for this fighting spirit that d'Alzon has been called a "soldier of Christ and true knight of the Holy Church."¹⁰ Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of modern theology, the language he employed as outdated as some of his ideas themselves. His successors are keenly aware of this; well known are the important and truly ecumenical efforts of 20th century Assumptionists, such as George Tavard. As Jean-Michel Brochec, A.A., writes, the Church has now accepted "democracy and the independence of the State... autonomy of culture... dialogue with non-Christian religions, liturgical renewal... and a realistic but benevolent view of the world. To advance the coming of the Kingdom of God [the motto of all Assumptionist Congregations, C.G.] no longer means just getting people to enter the bosom of the Church."¹¹ It *was* wrong, even in the 19th century, to condemn allegedly secular thinkers without really trying to understand them, such as Kant,¹² and d'Alzon *was* too timid when he designated some popular books that failed to mention "God, Our Lord, the Virgin, or the Saints... immoral literature" and "poisonous filth," when he reviled Voltaire, when he wanted to "destroy the [State] University" for the benefit of Catholic education (TEA, 101). Christians need to be more confident about the status of being itself as a divine creation and to realize, therefore, that all the sciences, academic disciplines and forms of knowledge,

indeed all the forms in which the human spirit manifests itself, are divine gifts that want to be used.

A number of passages in d'Alzon's writings, however, demonstrate his awareness of this reality: when he insists that the principles of the French Revolution—freedom, fraternity, equality—are actually gospel principles (TEA, 150), or his open-mindedness with regard to an education which must be nourished by a “respect for truth” and so can recognize the “theological” value of all the academic disciplines (TEA, 136). We may add—with St. Ignatius and numerous early modern scientists such as William Paley and Isaac Newton—that even the natural sciences can be theo-logy, even though today they are often, erroneously, seen as antagonistic to theology. If God is the creator of all, then He can be found anywhere and everywhere; thus, science too is an investigation of God's creation and contributes “to the greater glory of the Lord.”¹³ D'Alzon himself uses this idea in the 1855 *Constitutions* of his congregation;¹⁴ moreover, he insists that *philosophy* be taught at his schools, for “we need understanding” (TEA, 93). Unfortunately, though, he uses the famous scholastic metaphor describing philosophy as merely a “handmaiden of theology” (TEA, 134). Kant's version is more fitting: philosophy may be *ancilla theologiae* but a handmaiden that “bears the torch and shines the way,” providing rational enlightenment for theological reflection.¹⁵ Pope John Paul II

endorsed this version in *Fides et Ratio* (§76): philosophy is instrumental but not subservient, it remains fully autonomous. For, as the opening statement of the encyclical puts it, “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth”.

3. Nîmes: “Teaching understood in the most absolute sense of the word.”

On December 26, 1834, in Cardinal Odescalchi’s private chapel in Rome, d’Alzon was ordained to the priesthood for the diocese of Nîmes, where an uncle of his was a canon. For more than forty years, serving four bishops, he was to be (titular) vicar general in Nîmes. It was here that, in 1844, he founded both his first school (taking over the “Collège de l’Assomption” which had just been opened) and, to support this educational work, the congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption. This is not to say the Collège was solely a clerical endeavor: from the beginning, it was important for him to employ lay men as teachers as well. D’Alzon himself directed the school for 12 years, and he lived in Nîmes until his death on November 21, 1880.

D’Alzon did not only initiate and support numerous works of charity, but he also saw education itself as a “work of charity”; in the *Constitutions*, it is mentioned as the first of the “works through which we shall seek to extend

the reign of our Lord.” Teaching, “understood in the most absolute sense of the word,” is thus a social and “missionary” task (TEA, 29). The close kinship between the Assumptionists and several other congregations, especially 19th century foundations, whose main ministry is education, is worth noting; a similar spirit inspires the chivalrous orders of the Church, the lay congregations, not to mention the more recent “secular institutes” whose “apostolate is the world.”¹⁶

D’Alzon’s commitment to education takes different forms:

- Schools (he originally envisioned traditional schools for the social ‘elite’ but soon he started to care for the less privileged);
- The so-called “alumnates” (These were minor seminaries where boys without means interested in the priesthood could get an affordable education without ever being pressured into joining the Assumptionists. This liberty was widely recognized since many alumni actually entered other orders or became secular priests; it was said that d’Alzon had educated “the French Church.”¹⁷);
- Forms of adult education, especially for the lower classes, for workers and soldiers (e.g. the establishment of libraries, low cost publications, and reach-out activities like door-to-door book selling which was done by his students).

In all this, d'Alzon was inspired by Augustine's idea that "charity is the living expression of faith and hope" (TEA, 114) and that "love proves itself by deeds" (TEA, 87). This inherent correlation of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love was really brought to life by d'Alzon, a fact which gained for him the respect of his contemporaries, who said that he "showed his faith by his work." From his early youth, this young nobleman renounced the advantages of wealth and class privilege, "chastising himself before the Lord, fighting against pride," and giving to the poor.¹⁸ He captivated the masses with "his consuming passion" and "unbound energy"; because of his apostolic zeal he was dubbed the "St. Paul of Southern France" and was soon offered a bishopric.¹⁹ Yet, modesty prevailed; d'Alzon did not only give substantial private assets for his works but repeatedly refused ecclesiastical rank and honors as well.²⁰ In private vows taken first in 1844 at Turin's Shrine of the Consolata and then in 1845 at Notre Dame des Victoires at Paris, he reaffirmed this decision for evangelical simplicity.

D'Alzon's educational efforts are based on principles that are highly inspiring—and truly *philosophical*. For, philosophy is not an abstract, speculative academic discipline but, from its beginnings in Antiquity, from the Pre-Socratics to the Hellenistic schools, something practical and existential, an integrative way of developing the human potential and living an "examined

life” (Socrates): by discipline, responsibility, and reason; by maintaining a balance between sapiential contemplation and ascetic-ethical practice; by a creative and meaningful life; by seeking tranquility of the soul and true, human happiness. Socrates and his disciples were inspired by the Delphic-Pythian mottos “Know thyself,” “Become what you (truly) are,” and “Nothing in excess.” They tirelessly emphasized the integral part of education in the process of “becoming human,” as did many later philosophers within and without the Catholic tradition, from Kant and Nietzsche to numerous modern pedagogues.²¹ The Greeks lived this ideal in their school communities, dedicated to truth and wisdom, a form of existence continued Christian monks in a new context, so that, for Augustine and Benedict, the monastery is like a “*schola Christi*” (*Regula Benedicti*, Prologue). This approach is still at work in present-day monastic schools and, in particular, at Catholic liberal arts colleges—with their academic communities, comprising faculty, students, and staff, oftentimes including religious—such as Assumption College in Worcester, whose 1904 foundation finally fulfilled Fr. d’Alzon’s desire of establishing a “free,” Catholic university.

In the following pages, I would like to highlight some of d’Alzon’s pedagogical principles.²² His main idea and *leitmotiv* is that education is not just information but a transformation of minds which affects the entire person

(body, soul, intellect), a “building of character.”²³ D’Alzon uses the Platonic image of the teacher as a sculptor who *forms* his pupils, not in a ‘hegemonic act’ of molding but rather by revealing the hitherto hidden potential within the other; for d’Alzon, such teaching-sculpting is a subsidiary aid in one’s discovery of self (cf. *Politeia* 377a/b). To this d’Alzon adds biblical dimension: teaching is a (co-)creative act (TEA, 84). While present-day higher education at schools and colleges is often focused on a job market where employees are seen as “human resources” and even key qualifications like social skills (which can only be taught extracurricularly) are primarily valued for increasing one’s chances of success in a future career, d’Alzon vigorously defends his conviction that education cannot be reduced to such utilitarian goals. It should not be inspired by a “calculating mentality” (TEA, 98). It is “not only a way to acquire certain skills necessary for someone preparing for a career; we need to give teaching a higher goal, moral formation based on firm principles,” resting “on a religious truth” that “ennobles us” (TEA, 100). “We will find ourselves urging our young people towards God, delivering them from what is false, raising them to the level of truth, transforming them into vessels of truth, convincing them that nothing but truth is real or good” (TEA, 94). D’Alzon aims at imparting a comprehensive knowledge that leads to wisdom and, thus, becomes practical-ethical. Accordingly, one of the

educational goals of Assumption College is to form students “known for compassionate service and thoughtful citizenship,” in short, to form responsible human beings. D’Alzon always encouraged his students to participate in charitable activities, such as the “Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul” and other charitable institutions. Today, students at Assumption College (and other Assumptionist institutions around the world) engage in hundreds of hours of community service every year.

The goal of comprehensive education with a certain emphasis on moral education and the “building of character” is an essential part of any *philosophical theory of education* from Antiquity to the beginning of pedagogy as an academic discipline of its own in the 18th century, which has recently been rediscovered in its theological and religious dimensions as well. What d’Alzon said in 1871 still rings true: “we have tragically downgraded the sublime mission of teaching in the name of tolerance; with the pretext of making allowances for a variety of beliefs, all beliefs have been set aside” (TEA, 100). Nowadays, education has often been emptied of its religious content and foundations. It has been forgotten that man is, by nature, *homo religiosus*; the metaphysical dimension of being itself no longer plays an important part in many educational systems. Thus, human education is in danger of losing its ground, horizon, orientation, and true center. This problem,

however, has meanwhile been recognized,²⁴ and, among the “niches” that preserve a holistic education, the Christian intellectual tradition and Catholic liberal arts colleges with their humanistic “core curriculum” play an important part.

Now, however, a holistic-humanistic, educational *transformation* of minds is not possible without *information*, i.e. a sound foundation of learning, of dedicated and disciplined study. “Teaching *is* the first instrument of forming students” says d’Alzon,²⁵ in full accordance with Socrates: for, a Socratic dialogue is not just an exchange of uninformed opinions, *just* ‘discussion’ *instead* of learning. Socrates, whose method is often seen as *the* model of an open educational dialogue (almost resembling Habermas’ ideal of a discourse free from domination and hegemony), insists that the first requirement of learning and teaching is *knowledge* (*Alcibiades I* 107) and that it is not possible without a clear structure and *psychagogy* (“guidance of the soul”: *Phaedrus* 271c).

The present discussion about the intellectual identity of Catholic institutions of higher education—a worldwide endeavor of uttermost importance which has often become sadly politicized, with the result that conservative and liberal forces within and without the Church seem to be opposing each other with only a slight chance of reconciliation—does not only

address concerns about (alleged) limitations of academic freedom; there is also a deep misunderstanding of what “liberal arts education” actually means. It is sometimes being reduced to “liberal education” in accordance with a certain political agenda, meaning a total, non-structured freedom of choosing courses without any kind of prescription; but this forgets that students can only develop a “critical mind”—the common educational goal shared by all participants in the discussion—if they have a solid foundation of knowledge which the prescriptive requirements of a Core could guarantee. At the same time, advocates of a fashionable pluralism, rightly aiming to promote intercultural tolerance, too easily neglect and dismiss our own Western tradition and its rich intellectual-spiritual heritage and forget that a “liberal arts education” has its origins in the ancient and medieval idea of *artes liberales*. The *artes liberales*, first studied and taught in the philosophical schools of ancient Greece and Rome, are those academic disciplines worthy of free human beings and allow for a transformation of minds within the horizon of “the true, the good, and the beautiful.”²⁶ This Platonic idea clearly inspired d’Alzon and the foundational task of his school (cf. TEA, 90).

Moreover, true Catholicism cannot have anything to do with narrow-mindedness and obstacles to academic freedom: that would be a perversion of the word and idea of “Catholicism.” Christian creation and salvation theology

as well as any missionary work in fulfillment of Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19 aim at fearlessly universal and truly ecumenical openness towards any school of thought that seeks wisdom and truth. In this same spirit, d'Alzon emphasized the need for "critical thinking" and identified the "strengthening of the intellectual capacity" of his students as one of his main academic goals.²⁷ It is, therefore, an essential part of the "missionary" charism of Catholic education that students develop a sense of appreciation for the Catholic intellectual tradition as well as its intrinsic critical (and socio-critical) potential. They need to discover, as St. Augustine did when he heard St. Ambrose preach in Milan, that "the Catholic faith is, in fact, intellectually respectable" (*Confessions* V 24). To promote this awareness is an indispensable—as well as promising—task for any Catholic educator, especially in present-day America, in an academic landscape which is so much characterized by religious pluralism.

It is, in any case, remarkable how the perception of academic freedom changes over time: d'Alzon had to fight for educational freedom for Catholic schools against the post-revolutionary French government which had created a new climate of absolutism even though, originally, the state had purported to guarantee (as it does today again) free, non-doctrinal education. The Church can only become an opponent in such a context where it is perceived (as it was

during the French Revolution) as an ally of traditionalistic-oppressive forces, not where she offers true, Christian, and humanistic education. Still, d'Alzon's commitment to education was recognized by the State: he was appointed as a member of the Superior Council for Public Education, the national commission for State education, in 1850 (he left it some years later, however, in an argument about the freedom of publication for teachers), and even in 1880, respect for d'Alzon and the influence of his friends, at least in Nîmes, were great enough to stave off the government's attack on the "Collège" until after his death. And that, despite the rising secular tendencies that ultimately culminated in the absolute and permanent separation between State and Church in 1905 known as "laicism": even before d'Alzon's death, police had begun to close religious schools and houses all over France—including the Assumptionist house in Paris. D'Alzon himself, however, repeatedly emphasized that he aimed at imposing nothing, no specific doctrines or dogmas, on his students—except for instilling the love of God and truth in them; his protestation is confirmed by what one of his students said: that d'Alzon had formed a "Congregation of *original* people."²⁸ D'Alzon always focused his attention on the promotion of "broadmindedness," of "tolerance" or "respect," and the formation of strong individuals.²⁹

Nevertheless, a special effort is required to recover, as d'Alzon says, one's own dignity. This recovery is also an aspect of the philosophical theories of education which are theologized by d'Alzon, who relates it to the idea of man's sinfulness while, at the same time, referring to the biblical motif of self-knowledge and knowledge of God within the self (cf. II Cor. 13:5). Education, he says, is a way of "cooperating in the salvation of mankind"; "humans are created in the image of God, but sin disfigured its traits."³⁰ Students should "learn to appreciate the spiritual resources God offers you; abandon your weakness, discard it; restore your dignity" (TEA, 92). Human persons, he believed, had dignity both because they were created in God's image (Gen. 1:26) and because they have reason (this is the purely philosophical ground of human dignity, an idea shared by d'Alzon as well.³¹ But human's don't just *have* dignity; they also need to prove that they are *worthy of this dignity* and recover it by seriously pursuing the truth and by acting accordingly. This idea that the human being is unfinished and that human dignity implies rights and duties, what Eugene Biser calls a "modal anthropology," is an underlying assumption of numerous systems of philosophical (and theological) ethics from Aristotle to Kant. To speak in Aristotelian terms: it is a "potency" that has—and wants—to be developed, practiced, and habitually exercised, and thereby

to be actualized and realized or lived. It is a potential which education helps to develop.³²

Another remarkable feature of d'Alzon's pedagogical practice is his ideal of a good educator. In the advice he gives to the teachers at his school in Nîmes he emphasizes, among other things, the necessity of originality, of continuing self-education, competence, and passion for the educational *charism*, of a thorough-going "intellectual culture." Education can only be successful if teachers really have a vocation for their job. It cannot be something done for just money, as "hirelings" or "mercenaries."³³ In full accordance with examples in both the philosophical and biblical-Christian tradition, d'Alzon emphasizes that teaching (and especially moral education) needs to be done *by example* (TEA, 114f). This reflects the proverbial "practice what you preach" of which any candidate for Holy Orders in the Catholic Church is reminded during the liturgy of his ordination to the diaconate: "*Believe* what you read, *teach* what you believe, and *practice* what you teach." D'Alzon summarizes, "Education is not a theory; before all else, it's a way of doing things on a daily basis and at every moment" (TEA, 83).

Teachers need to have confidence in their students and to be inspired by a "love for" them (TEA, 106). D'Alzon, however, realistically acknowledges how difficult this can be: even the best-meaning professors can

labor in vain. Though often ignored by pedagogues, intelligence, diligence, receptiveness and enthusiasm, not to mention willingness *on the part of the instructed* to get an education are vital conditions for successful teaching and learning as well; their absence can only partly be compensated by the authority and motivational skills of gifted teachers. This realism, which counterbalances d'Alzon's pedagogical idealism, seems to be inspired by personal experiences: he speaks of the strength necessary "to fight the multiple obstacles we come across in our students" and—in moments of obvious desperation—"their obstinacy, evil, and every influence of the power of darkness" (TEA, 93). This concept of pedagogical *love* is another *philosophical* idea; it goes back to Socrates and Plato and is usually interpreted as the famous Platonic *eros*. It seems to me, however, that teaching is, rather than being "erotic," an example of Christian *caritas*, an *unconditional* concern and willingness to share something (knowledge) with others without expecting anything in return. So, the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student *proves* actually—against skeptics like John Rawls³⁴—that humans really have the potential to practice and live unconditioned, non-reciprocal (i.e. biblical) love (*caritas* or *agape*).

I will conclude with the aim of all Christian education which according to d'Alzon can be summarized in the words "Until Christ be formed

in you,” taken from St. Paul (Gal. 4:19) as the motto of Assumption College. When I first saw the inscription above the altar in our chapel it reminded me of Master Eckhart’s idea of the “birth of Christ in the believer’s soul.” A closer look at this medieval mystic, theologian and philosopher (1260-1327) might offer us a hermeneutical key to the pedagogical meaning of St. Paul’s words, which go even beyond the obvious ideal of seeking to live a Christ-like life. Eckhart’s “birth of Christ in man’s soul”—an idea used by d’Alzon as well³⁵—does, of course, describe a mystical experience (“mystical incarnation”), but it is more than that: it is a statement of existential depth extending to a wide range of philosophical disciplines (epistemology, anthropology, ethics...) which ultimately demands *action*. It certainly aims at (1) ethical self-perfection, modeled after Christ, the example incarnate of highest humanity; but it is also (2) an expression of man’s consciousness of his rational being and of the willingness to live accordingly. Christ is *logos* incarnate, word of God and rational principle of the universe: *logos*, reason, understanding. This idea, therefore, also implies an exhortation to develop and to use one’s ability to reason, transforming oneself (or letting oneself be transformed) into what d’Alzon calls a “vessel of truth.” For, the idea “that God is truth, that truth is divine,” truly is, as Nietzsche says, something that ancient philosophy and Christianity share (*The Gay Science*, 344). This identification of God and truth

might seem problematic in the light of philosophical truth theories, but we are talking here about a certain, personified, and inspired truth, the highest truth, God,³⁶ which, in turn, can be inspirational in one's life again—especially if this life is dedicated to education, wisdom, God, and thus helps to transform society, “penetrating it,” to quote d’Alzon again, “with a Christian idea” or the spirit of truth.

¹ An excellent resource for more detailed biographical and bibliographical information is the website of the French province of the Assumptionists (www.assomption.org) edited by Fr. Jean-Paul Périer-Muzet, the congregation's archivist. For a very helpful volume of writings by d’Alzon on education, also see:

Emmanuel d’Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, trans. Richard Lamoureux, A.A., 2nd ed. (New London: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009).

² Cf. Christian Göbel, “Fides und Ratio bei Augustinus und Anselm,” in *Augustinus: Spuren und Spiegelungen seines Denkens*, ed. Norbert Fischer (Hamburg: Meiner, 2009) 37-69.

³ Emmanuel d’Alzon, *Lettres du P. Emmanuel d’Alzon*, vol. XIV (Rome [des Assomptionistes], 2004) 64.

⁴ Cited in Richard Richards, A.A., *D’Alzon – Fighter for God* (New York: Assumptionist Provincial House, 1981) 6.

⁵ F. Nietzsche, *Letters* (Kritische Studienausgabe = KSB) 8, 28.

⁶ On Nietzsche, cf. Christian Göbel, “Nietzsche e la storia della filosofia. Alcune considerazioni,” *Per la Filosofia* 19 (2002), 47-61.

⁷ E.g. the “Dames de la Miséricorde” (a club of wealthy women who assisted the poor), the communities of St. Aloysius and St. Stanislas (united in 1847 as “youth apostolate”), a girls’ shelter (1836), an orphanage for boys (1840), youth and social clubs, public libraries and institutions of adult education, particularly for workers, domestics, and soldiers.

⁸ Roman acquaintances turned d’Alzon’s attention to Orthodox Europe (instead of the Middle East); to support the missionary work, the Oblates of the Assumption were founded in 1865; and Assumptionists remained in those countries even during the Communist era; three of them died as martyrs in Bulgaria in 1952, to be declared blessed by Pope John Paul II in 2002.

⁹ D’Alzon’s decision to take the side of the Pope without fuss or quibble also meant personal sacrifice: under pressure from the Vatican authorities, he had to dissociate himself from Lamennais by signing Gregory XVI’s encyclical *Singulari nos* as a precondition for his ordination in 1834.

¹⁰ Cited in Richards 51. D'Alzon himself uses similar words, cf. d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption* 100; the theme (d'Alzon the knight) has also been used in various biographies, e.g. that by Marie-Paul Sève, A.A., and Therese-Marie Foy, O.A.

¹¹ Jean-Michel Brochec, A.A., *Teaching and Education in the Spirit of Assumption* (Strasbourg 2008) 18.

¹² On the relationship between the Catholic Church and Kant, cf. Christian Göbel, "Kants Gift. Wie die Kritik der reinen Vernunft auf den Index librorum prohibitorum kam," in *Kant und der Katholizismus. Stationen einer wechselhaften Geschichte*, ed. Norber Fischer (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 91-137.

¹³ This is, of course, nothing but an *indirect* "contribution"; natural theology should not be misunderstood as providing direct evidence for "intelligent design" (as in the pseudo-scientific forms of *creationism* which have become quite popular in recent years).

¹⁴ Cf. d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 27 and Brochec 10 (on the harmony of faith and reason in d'Alzon's educational program).

¹⁵ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Werke* (Akademie-Ausgabe) 7, 28 and 8, 369.

¹⁶ Cf., for instance, *Rule of the German Order* (OT), No. 1.

¹⁷ Cf. Polyeucte Guissard, A.A., "Un siècle d'apostolat – Le Centenaire des religieux de l'Assomption," *Bulletin de la Société historique franco-américaine* (1950), 52.

¹⁸ Cf. Richards 8.

¹⁹ Cf. John Franck, A.A., "A Dalzonian Sketch" (talk given at Assumption College, November 30, 2009).

²⁰ Cf. Richards 18 and 24.

²¹ Cf. Christian Göbel, *Griechische Selbsterkenntnis. Platon - Parmenides - Stoa - Aristipp* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2002).

²² This, again, cannot be more than a short sketch; a bibliography on the topic of d'Alzon and education can be found in d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 167.

²³ Cf. Brochec 7.

²⁴ Cf., e.g., John Paul II, encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, §5, 101, 106.

²⁵ Cf. d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 111ff.

²⁶ Cf. Pietro Paolo Vergerio's *On Liberal Studies*, cited in President Francesco Cesareo's inauguration address at Assumption College on October 12, 2007 (online at <http://www1.assumption.edu/inauguration/cesareo-address.html>).

²⁷ Emmanuel d'Alzon, [des Augustins de l'Assomption], 1956) 475.

²⁸ Emmanuel d'Alzon, *Notes et Documents* (Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1910) III, 165.

²⁹ Cf. Brochec 6ff.

³⁰ Brochec 16.

³¹ Cf. d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 123.

³² For a more detailed discussion of this, cf. Christian Göbel, "Werde, was Du bist. Sein-Sollen und Sollen-Sein des Menschen: Praktisch-interkulturelle Überlegungen zu Moral und Bildung," *Sein und Sollen des Menschen. Vom göttlich-freien Konzept des Menschen*, ed. ttigheimer, Norbert Fischer, Manfred Gerwing (Münster: Aschendorff, 2008)

109-129.

³³ D'Alzon, *Écrits Spirituels*, 239; cf. d'Alzon, *To Educators at Assumption*, 117; Brochec 16.

³⁴ Cf. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) 495.

³⁵ Cf. d'Alzon, *Lettres* VII, 197 and *Écrits Spirituels* 906.

³⁶ Cf., e.g., *Fides et Ratio* §2 (referring to Jn 14:6). The idea that “ultimately, truth is a person: Jesus Christ” is very prominent in Pope Benedict XVI’s teachings as well (cf. Holy Thursday homily 2010, talk at St. Joseph’s Seminary, New York, 2008, etc.).

Chapter Three

Assumption's Cachet

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The Assumption began in a school. Emmanuel d'Alzon and his collaborators developed a variety of works, notably in journalism and ecumenism, but d'Alzon's first preoccupation was always with education. In fact, the Augustinians of the Assumption owe their name to the school where they were founded in 1850, the Collège de l'Assomption at Nîmes in France.

Much has been written about what d'Alzon did as an educator and about the importance he attached to education in the new democratic society that emerged in the wake of the French Revolution. D'Alzon, as it is often remarked, was not a systematic thinker. He was a man of action and by temperament given less to composing treatises than to sketching programs of action and initiating novel works. Yet his own writings on education show that d'Alzon was an imaginative educator who recognized the importance of ideas in shaping the lives of people and of society.¹

In one particular instance d'Alzon elaborated his thinking on the subject of education through a series of talks given on successive Saturdays to

the students of the *collège* at Nîmes. Since these talks deal with the foundations of his educational philosophy and were addressed to an audience of students themselves, they merit greater attention than they have yet received in accounts of d'Alzon's pedagogy.²

D'Alzon himself recognized the significance of these talks. Writing under the guise of an anonymous alumnus of the "old Assumption," he said, "they say that the Assumption has its own special cachet. It owes this cachet especially to the Saturday instructions." He goes on to explain the origin of these Saturday talks in Fr. d'Alzon's wish to institute at Nîmes the practice he recalled from his days as a student at Collège Stanislas in Paris.

The ten Saturday instructions on education begin with an account of the ideal to be attained, go on to speak of the reform that Christian education seeks to effect, and conclude with the figure of Jesus Christ as the model of the educated Christian.

In the opening talk on the end or goal of education, d'Alzon takes his bearings from the biblical affirmation in Genesis (1:26) that man is created in the image, after the likeness, of God. The task of education is the reform of that image in accord with its restoration accomplished by Jesus Christ.

D'Alzon conceives the program of Christian education as the fulfillment of

Christ's final injunction to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and ... teach all nations" (Matt. 28.18-19).³

In the following three talks, d'Alzon develops more precisely what constitutes the human being created and reformed in the image of God. Here d'Alzon draws on Augustine's extended discussion, in his work *On the Trinity*, of the human in relation to the three divine Persons of the Trinity. In the later parts of that treatise, Augustine elaborates how the human mind is constituted of memory, intelligence, and will, in the image of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively. At the start of his own treatment of the reform of the mind, d'Alzon quotes Augustine's concise summary statement: "Behold, the mind remembers itself, understands itself, loves itself" (14.3,11).

D'Alzon is careful to point out that by memory is meant more than the act of memorizing. It is rather the deep awareness of what one is at the source of one's being. It means attaining to true and just ideas in the quest to overcome ignorance and laziness. The three together, memory along with understanding and love, constitute human self-consciousness, but at the same time attain to more than oneself; this d'Alzon points out, citing Augustine's corrective to a limited conception of the mind: "This trinity of the mind is not the image of God because it remembers and understands and loves itself, but

because it is able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made” (14.4,15).

The reform of the mind’s second aspect, the intelligence, entails the cultivation of true ideas. Here, d’Alzon places a premium on the need for study and attention to rigorous discourse and reasoning in seeking truth. He delineates four vices that students are prey to and need to overcome: laziness, thoughtlessness, bad faith, and fear. Regarding the last, he encourages students to a link between their understanding and their action citing the warning of the Psalmist: “He did not want to understand so that he would act well” (Ps. 36.3).

For d’Alzon, the reform of the will has everything to do with the liberty that one naturally desires to attain. Since only God is perfectly free of all limitation, including sin, human fulfillment lies in a godlike liberty. That liberty constitutes the happy life. The purpose of education is to develop the human desire to be happy. As Augustine put it at the beginning of his *Confessions*: “You have us for Yourself, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rest in You” (1.1.1). With the pursuit of perfection comes liberty, the gift of “the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

Recognizing that a human being is more than a mind, d’Alzon next speaks of the reform of the passions, with reference to the four principal passions of joy, sadness, fear, and hope. The passions are difficult to master on

account of original sin, and d'Alzon proposes vigilance, prayer, and discipline as ways by which students can develop their passions in proper measure.

D'Alzon turns next to the reform of the character. He explains how character is the combination of what arises from within us and from outside influences that stamps all our actions. He acknowledges the great differences that are to be found in different people's characters. But rather than analyze these, he focuses on the perfect character, Jesus Christ.

D'Alzon links character formation to Christ by citing the opening verses of the Letter to the Hebrews, where the Greek word used to speak of Christ who "bears the very stamp of God's nature" is "character" (Heb. 1:3). By virtue of the character or stamp of Baptism, the Christian is reformed in the image of the Trinity's power, wisdom, and love according to the model of Jesus Christ.

Christian character development also entails growth in the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, the subject of d'Alzon's seventh talk. "No one has seen God," as the prologue of John's gospel asserts, but faith centers on Jesus Christ, "who has made him known" (John 1:18). Just as one develops the mind in the study of literature and mathematics according to the principles of those disciplines, so it is with faith about which one can reason, but with the difference that faith rests on a principle beyond human reason.

The person of faith follows in the footsteps of Abraham, “who walked before God and was blameless” (Gen. 17:1).

Hope is for d’Alzon the most important virtue in the life of young people, who need to live in the light of a goal that reaches beyond the legitimate goals of their career plans: the goal of eternal life. Freedom of conscience should not mean freedom to live without conscience, but to develop one’s character in a life freely ordered toward a clear goal.

Faith allows one to see the truth, hope to attain the goal, and charity to act in the spirit of God. “God is love,” the First Letter of John affirms, “and we believe the love God has for us” that overcomes selfishness and enables one to “love because he first loved us” (I John 4:16 and 19). In that light, people are worth loving, d’Alzon insists, whatever others may say. Charity transforms a person into a new creation.

The reform of the image of God is accomplished through the imitation of Jesus Christ, the model for young Christians who said to his disciples, “I have given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Recalling Christ’s assertion that “my food is to do the will of him who sent me” (John 4:34), d’Alzon urges each individual to seek the will of God and to place it above the will of man. As for just what one ought to do first, d’Alzon’s advice is to begin by studying the model *par excellence*, “who

grew and became strong... and increased in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:40 and 52).

D’Alzon devotes a separate talk to Jesus Christ in relation to *désintéressement* or selflessness. He critiques the slogan of the French bourgeois mentality, “everyone to himself, everyone for himself,” as well as the cold preoccupation with oneself of the Jansenist spirit. He appeals by contrast to the generosity of the people of Clovis, Charlemagne, and St. Louis to challenge students to raise their sights toward a higher goal than themselves in the service of others.

Augustine, d’Alzon recalls, speaks of four objects of love in *On Christian Teaching*: one that is beneath us, one that is like us, one that is ourselves, and one that is above us (cf. 1, 23). The first three of these can induce baseness, vanity, and selfishness, respectively. Only the last can elevate us. Selfishness, the universal wound that affects a whole society, is overcome by the greatness of a selfless soul.

D’Alzon devotes his final talk to the subject of purity, returning at great length to Christ’s beatitude, “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). He sees impurity at the root of the widespread contemporary disgust for God. He contrasts this with a vision of life as a journey toward God, as does the psalmist: “Blessed are the blameless who walk in the way of

the Lord” (Ps. 119:1). Such lives of joy are marked by the pursuit of peace that Augustine in *The City of God* defines as the “tranquility of order” (19:13).

D’Alzon counsels humility to curb presumption, along with prayer and the discipline of work to overcome contemporary selfishness. After speaking of the privileges and conditions of purity, he brings the entire series of his talks on education with the Psalmist’s prayer that God “create in me a pure heart” (Ps. 51:12).

As much as his ten Saturday instructions on education may seem to be a complete program, d’Alzon did not bequeath to his followers anything like a *ratio studiorum*. Instead, d’Alzon’s legacy comes in the form of a challenge. Living on the threshold of a new kind of society and steeped in the best of the Christian tradition, d’Alzon urged his heirs to be founders anew in the work of education. As he wrote on one occasion:

“If you want to do the work of the Assumption, you have to study... Keep in mind that ‘the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old’ [Matt. 13:52]... With your mind always on the goal, you must seek the teaching that meets the needs of our time.”⁴

¹ English readers will find pertinent texts on education by d’Alzon himself and two recent expositions of his thinking in *Emmanuel d’Alzon: To Educators at Assumption*, ed. Richard

Lamoureux, A.A., rev. ed. (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009). The present paper will not reiterate what is already available in this fine collection.

² D'Alzon's manuscripts text, supplemented by auditors' notes and with occasional lacunae, together with d'Alzon's pseudonymous account as an introduction, has been published as *Les Instructions de Samedi* (Paris, 1932). There are a total of 40 talks in three series. The ten dealing with education, delivered in academic year 1876-1877, appear on pages 73 to 138. The only treatment of these talks known to me is by Aubain Colette, A.A., "L'Idéal pédagogique de Père d'Alzon," *Mélanges Emmanuel d'Alzon* (Saint-Gérard, 1952) 225-250.

³ All translations of passages d'Alzon cites from the Bible and from the works of Augustine are my own, from the Latin that d'Alzon cites in every instance of quoting.

⁴ Emmanuel d'Alzon, [des Augustins de l'Assomption], 1956) 1036.

Chapter Four

Truth and Student Learning in the Augustinian-Assumptionist Tradition

Andrew Salzmann

“I must make the truth known, I must study it,” Emmanuel d’Alzon wrote, “and I will love the truth whose principle is Jesus Christ, the eternal word of God...”¹ D’Alzon’s vision, for himself and for his fledgling religious community, the Augustinians of the Assumption, was to become apostles of truth through the promotion of education. This vision continues to inspire the Assumptionist family and the many schools that family sponsors; however, it is a vision which comes with challenges. Most fundamentally, how is “truth” known? Can an institute of higher learning, in a modern or post-modern world which is sensitive to the subjectivity of knowledge, even speak of a “truth” that is “true” across the many different contexts from which its students hail? Granting that, how does an institution attempt to share that truth to students familiar with a skeptical world, particularly without denigrating the convictions and the freedom—d’Alzon cherished freedom!²—of its faculty?

I. Truth: Are Persons An Obstacle?

Emmanuel d'Alzon lived, as we do today, in a post-Kantian world. He realized, as we do today, that it can be difficult, impossible, to separate what we experience and know of the world from the human subject which experiences and knows. "You know," he observed to a friend, "that it's extremely difficult to separate neatly reality from imagination? I try to do it each day, though I don't claim to have succeeded."³ Emmanuel d'Alzon was aware that objective knowledge of "the facts," that a completely "true" grasp of the world untouched by our own subjectivity, was impossible. One of the central marks of modern thought has been the realization that our personhood or subjectivity always colors our perception of the facts. The still-influential study of student development by Harvard educational psychologist William G. Perry, Jr., places Kant's realization that our subjectivity raises serious doubts about the objectivity of our knowledge at the very center of its presentation of the stages of intellectual and ethical development. In the initial stages of development, "a person modifies an absolutistic right-wrong outlook to make room, in some minimal way for... simple pluralism." In the next stages, "a person accords the diversity of the human outlook in its full problematic stature" and in light of the coloring of our knowledge by our outlook embraces contextual Relativism. In the final stages, a person "comes to foresee the necessity of personal Commitment in a relativistic world"—she or he

acknowledges that no particular intellectual or ethical position can be known absolutely enough to be true, but she or he embraces one nonetheless. Even this limited embrace, however, is always *provisional*.⁴ To cling to the objectivity of black-and-white facts is a mark of psychological immaturity. A healthy internalization of the limits of reason and the contingency of knowledge is the proper end product of a liberal education. The university, having thrown its students from the Eden of objectivism, “compactly representing through a ‘liberal education’ the diversity of the modern world and the contingency of modern knowledge, is revealed as Serpent. The students have eaten.”⁵ Education divests students of the desire for absolute truth, inculcating an awareness that the objectivity of the facts it seeks to teach them is always compromised by the subjectivity of the researchers, the teachers, and the learners.

Yet Emmanuel d’Alzon offered harsh words to educators who saw their task as the simple conveyance of information. He dismissed them as “education merchants.”⁶ He lamented students and parents who attempt “a sort of precise reckoning of the amount of instruction that is ‘required’ for success, a calculating mentality that tries to figure out just how much knowledge can be crammed into a young person’s head” in order to achieve maximum fiscal benefit.⁷ Interest in other fields suffers: “Generally elsewhere,” he wrote,

“Greek, Latin, mathematics, and even gymnastics are taught in more or less large doses... they are given without affection and received in the same way.”⁸

D’Alzon felt that information banking could be done at many institutions; it was not a sufficient justification for students should pay him or his schools tuition.⁹ He certainly believed that a liberal arts education should be practical, and admonished his priests to see to it that “you are working in view of studies that will be useful.”¹⁰ But an Assumptionist education could not be simply the practical conveyance of facts useful in the pursuit of worldly success. “The secret of our influence,” he continued, “is that we love our students, that they feel loved by us. That’s hardly the case elsewhere.” Emmanuel d’Alzon wanted to teach more than what we might call “just the facts, as well as we can know them.” Emmanuel d’Alzon desired to teach truth.

Was it fair of this priest, who appears to have “known better,” to assert that an education in the liberal arts could be an education in truth? Assumption College, a school inspired by Emmanuel d’Alzon and in the Augustinian-Assumptionist tradition, has staked a great deal on the claim that it is possible. “Enlivened by the Catholic affirmation of the harmony of faith and reason,” reads the statement of its mission, “we aim, by the pursuit of the truth, to transform the minds and hearts of students.”¹¹ But in a modern and post-modern age, truth is, after all, an endangered category.

Here we must be careful to avoid a quick-and-easy confusion, mistaking facts for truth. Precisely here, in fact, the Catholic intellectual tradition must take exception. That tradition must insist on the possibility of truth—not despite people and their subjectivity or personhood, but the possibility of truth that is ultimately *about* our subjectivity and personhood.

One easily finds Evangelicals and conservative Catholics who are made uncomfortable by relativism and who assert that Christians cannot be relativists: “Truth is objective—and its name is Jesus Christ!” In many ways, this sentiment is in line with what has been written here: Christians believe in a truth higher than our fumbling grasp on the sum of all available facts and data. But isn’t it strange to call the person who is Jesus Christ “objective”? Am I objective? Is any person? The value of the human person or subject is precisely that they are personal and subjective. As persons and as human subjects, they can have relationships. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) not because Jesus was a Hebrew male, or lived in first century Judea, but because of the relationships Jesus Christ enables them to have with God and with others—relationships which are, in a word, “true.” This is not to deny that Jesus Christ is “the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8), but rather to emphasize that saving truth is not simply fact to be memorized but relation and way of relating to be lived.

While modern thinkers understandably question the objectivity of facts, contemporary theologians also insist on the relational, rather than propositional, nature of truth; they insist that truth is about our subjectivity and how to live in communion, in loving relation, with others. One school of theological thought which emphasized this insight was Thomistic Personalism, whose best-known proponent was Karol Wojtyła—the future Pope John Paul II. In his doctoral dissertation, Wojtyła insisted that we cannot “objectivize” our knowledge about God, precisely because—in the words of his biographer—“we do not come to know God as we come to know an object,” but rather “as we come to know another person, through mutual self-giving.”¹² Wojtyła’s dissertation director was a well-known conservative Dominican, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and it is part of Dominican lore that Garrigou-Lagrange was frustrated by Wojtyła’s refusal to refer to God as the “Divine Object.” Wojtyła’s position on the relational nature of our knowledge of God was shared by Karl Rahner, perhaps the most influential Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, and reflected by the Second Vatican Council’s understanding of divine revelation.¹³ The truth of Jesus Christ is not a truth that is impossibly challenged by our subjectivity: it is a truth about our subjectivity, about how we relate to others and to God. It is, in the words of John Paul II’s encyclical on faith and reason, a “about human life.”¹⁴

Emmanuel d'Alzon was himself close to the understanding of truth as personalistic which these 20th century figures expounded. In the first constitutions of the Assumptionists, he wrote that although truth was “manifested in the deposit of religious dogmas” which the Church taught and defended, these dogmas themselves were only propositional *manifestations* of the truth: it was Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who alone was “Eternal Truth.”¹⁵

II. The Liberality of the Arts: On Not Learning “Just the Facts”

Commenting on the times in which he lived, d'Alzon wrote: “Some say the world is evil. No doubt there is much that turns it away from what is good. But I believe that the world is oblivious, ignorant of the truth. Therefore, we need to teach it and to do so in words that it can understand.”¹⁶ In turning to education as a way to teach students the truth—an often uncomfortable truth—about themselves and the world in which they lived, d'Alzon was turning to the tradition of education which, in the United States, we call “the liberal arts.”¹⁷

What are these “liberal arts”? A 12th-century disciple of St. Augustine explained it well. In his famous *Didascalium*, Hugh of St.-Victor listed all the arts and sciences of his day, noting that among them all, “the ancients, in their

studies, especially selected seven to be mastered by those who were to be educated,” seven which “they considered so to excel all the rest in usefulness that anyone who had been thoroughly schooled in them might afterward come to a knowledge of the others by his own inquiry and effort rather than by listening to a teacher.”¹⁸ The liberal arts are the basic categories of knowledge and patterns of thinking that enable students to become “lifelong learners,” in the parlance of Assumption College. Hugh explains that there are seven. The first three are called the *trivium* or “three-fold path,” and these three teach us how to think clearly (grammar), how to speak persuasively (rhetoric), and how to reason effectively (logic). The next group, the *quadrivium* or “four-fold path,” was the study of four areas understood to describe the fundamentals of how the world worked (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).

Hugh continues his description of medieval Augustinian education: “These arts are ‘the best tools,’ the fittest entrance through which the way to philosophic truth is opened to our minds.” And, in fact, for centuries students would study philosophy after this grammar schooling in the *trivium* and secondary education in the *quadrivium*; after studying the liberal arts and philosophy, students’ minds would also be “free” enough to specialize in whichever area of professional study they wished (theology, law, or medicine).

New England's Bronson Alcott, transcendentalist, educational theorist, and father of *Little Women* author Louise May Alcott had as one of his principles of teaching that one should never teach students what they could learn on their own. Assumption College itself professes the desire to create "life-long learners," students able of continuing to teach themselves, and in this way Assumption follows in the liberal arts tradition of teaching students how, not what, to think. This is the twofold liberality of the liberal arts. On the one hand, by teaching the necessary skills to think and reason (*trivium*) and understand one's surrounding world (*quadrivium*), they liberate, they free, the mind to teach itself the facts that a "technical college" or a technical education busies itself with teaching its students. In an age when libraries and books, whether digital or in print, offer almost any piece of information to almost every person in an instant for far less than the cost of tuition, we can appreciate that it does not take a college education to bank facts into our head; a pedagogy which focuses on how best to memorize information falls short of the practical needs of most students and short of the liberality or freedom which a more classical education in thinking and learning can offer. On the other hand, however, the liberal arts free their students from more than just an education in current facts, theories, and practices, from more than an education with an expiration date; the liberal arts also free the minds of their students for the

pursuit, not only of information, but of “truth”—the truth, we said before, about the person.

Classical rhetoric was applied to many ends by the ancient speakers and philosophers studied by Hugh, Augustine, and d’Alzon: one use, by no means its most common but still important, was *psychagogy*—“soul leading.” The particular task of psychagogy is the revealing of unpopular, yet essential, truths about the human condition or the human person, but in a sympathetic fashion which stands to win a hearing from its listeners. Thus, psychagogues would “‘expose human sins by words’ in a manner that overcomes the audience members’ natural resistance, so that they actually become receptive to hearing the truth about themselves.”¹⁹ Psychagogy was not simply about sharing information for the sake of information;²⁰ it aimed at “[i]nternalizing this mental conversion to such a degree that it actually reshapes daily activities...,” that it reshaped the way life was lived.²¹ Such reshaping of the individual, as demonstrated by Homer’s Telemachos, introduced a new identity, from which followed—or could be coaxed—a new purpose, and, with that purpose, a sense of agency for achieving it.²² And so, Mentès’s revelation to Telemachos of his true identity as the son of Odysseus emboldened him to drive his mother’s suitors from consuming the goods of her household, in the manner that Odysseus himself would have done.

In psychagogy, the ancient Greeks and Romans discovered the power of persuasive speech to mold the soul “as it ably substitutes one belief for another” in its hearers.²³ Psychagogy was properly employed against the confused, irrational concupiscence which it was believed so marred human life. Plato’s *Phaedrus* presents Socrates as the model psychagogue. The “bewitching art” of psychagogy “guides the soul toward truth by enchanting them,” and thus has two parts: knowing the truth about the subject of the speech, and knowing the various kinds of souls and how to convey that knowledge to each kind successfully.²⁴ In the *Laches*, “Nicias reports that whoever begins a conversation with Socrates ‘must necessarily, even if he began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man’s arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto.’”²⁵ Psychagogy sought to remake the person through a reasoned discourse that effectively prodded its audience to re-think their assumptions about their nature and their place in the world.

Classically, the teaching method of a liberal arts college tends to be dialectical and Socratic, emphasizing the exchange of ideas through questioning between opposing viewpoints as a way to stimulate critical thinking. To this day, liberal arts colleges offer smaller classes with a greater

teacher-to-student ratio precisely to facilitate this sort of careful engagement between students and an instructor pushing them to study their material carefully, and to study it in a way that emphasizes a pursuit of what is really true, what will prove enduring, not only about business studies or psychology but about themselves and the human condition, as well. But what is this truth that a Catholic liberal arts education—especially one in the Augustinian-Assumptionist tradition—seeks to propose?

III. From Truth through Love to Communion: *Veritas, Caritas, Unitas*

Addressing the faculty of the school which he founded to form students in truth, d'Alzon exhorted: "Let charity be our rule, and charity be our duty, a charity which strengthens rather than relaxes the bond between us... Amid the diversity of our various situations, charity will draw us together and make us one."²⁶ In speaking about a community founded for the pursuit of the truth about the role of love in making their community one, d'Alzon adumbrated the Augustinian pattern of "*veritas, caritas, unitas*" (truth, love, communion)—concepts which another university in the Augustinian tradition, Villanova University, presents as its own *raison d'être*. An academic community guided by "the truth-seeking vision of St. Augustine," a search which "may take many forms," Villanova sees love as "essential to the community" because, as the

personalism at the center of Catholic social teaching insists, “the human person possess a dignity which must not be violated or denied in the name of any collective good,” a dignity which is eminently loveable.²⁷ A community built on the love that proceeds from the “empowering truth of the Creator” lives in a communion or unity which promotes the flourishing and the common good of all: this Augustinian vision is very much in harmony with the values of Assumption College.

Veritas

“But alas,” d’Alzon lamented, reflecting on the human condition, “our vision is obscured... We need to know ourselves and the contradictions of our heart, as well as the world and its true value. We need to dispossess ourselves of a will so weak that it does what is evil even though it knows what is good... Stripped of pride, of lies, and of illusions, we will at last be disposed to welcome truth”—the difficult truth about the human condition and its place in the world.²⁸ Following in the Augustinian tradition, the Christian truth about the human condition which d’Alzon longed to share with his students was twofold. In the first place, we seem to be turned in upon ourselves, more attentive to our own needs and desires than to the goodness and beauty of our neighbor, of creation, and of their Creator. St. Augustine of Hippo, the fifth-century bishop who so inspired d’Alzon, called this condition “pride” and

considered it the origin of all sin. In the second place, human beings were called to a deep communion of love with those same neighbors, creation, and God. The Christian truth about humanity is that each person is called to love God and neighbor.

D’Alzon also repeats often that Jesus Christ is “the truth” (John 14:16). Through his death on the Cross—what Augustine calls Christ’s humility (*humilitas*)²⁹ and what Paul calls Christ’s “pouring out” (*kénōsis*, Phil. 2:7)—Christ demonstrates that the twofold love of God and neighbor requires overcoming every human impulse towards selfishness or even self-preservation for the sake of his friends (cf. John 15:13). Christ reveals to his followers that through this death, new life can be found. This is why d’Alzon quotes so approvingly, “To me, ‘life’ means Christ; hence dying is so much gain” (Phil. 1:21),³⁰ and why he can write that “Christian and religious education is summed up in these words of St. Paul to the Galatians: ‘My dear children, once again, just like a mother in childbirth, I feel the same kind of pain for you until Christ is formed in you’ (Gal. 4:19).”³¹ The truth about humanity has a definitively “Christic” shape because of the radical “pouring out” of the self which it demands.

Caritas

“The human soul,” d’Alzon observed, “was created ‘to the image and likeness of God’ (Gen. 1:27). So how can we possibly fail to love fellow human-beings?”³² Humans have an innate ability to love, even if we tend to do so poorly and inadequately. Here we arrive at the second part of Jesus’ message: that with the death on the Cross also comes the promise of new life, of grace. In the words of Augustine’s most-cited Scriptural verse, “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom 5:5).³³ Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Augustine believed, we receive the ability to love beyond our own rather meager resources. Poured out and crucified with Jesus, we share in the Holy Spirit, the bond of love between the Father and the Son.³⁴ “Disciples of Christ need to enlarge their hearts more than ever,” concurred d’Alzon. “If we do not love, who will warm this poor human race that has become frozen under the chill of egoism? Unfortunately, no one wants to have a love as vast as the world... But by losing ourselves in the immensity of God, we could grow amazingly greater.”³⁵

Caritas, in turn, leads to *unitas*—to communion. For Augustine and for d’Alzon, true communion rooted in true love was the very medicine by which the soul is healed.³⁶ This communal dimension to love is precisely the way that Augustine interpreted a traditional theological phrase, “outside the Church there is no salvation.” Through the self-transcending unity of kenotic love, the

inward-turned soul is healed and saved. Arguing intensely against a group of Christian separatists, Augustine insisted that transcending ourselves by means of an expansive and God-given love, living in communion with those who are similar to and who are completely different than ourselves, never consciously putting oneself above or apart from the community, is the only way to overcome the wound of sin. Echoing this Augustinian theme, Emmanuel d’Alzon remarked, “I know of nothing that can put to death self-interest and narrow-mindedness better than the acceptance of all that is catholic, that is to say, all that is good, that transcends pettiness and self-centeredness.”³⁷

The ancient Christian hymn *Ubi Caritas*—sung each Holy Thursday—expresses this theme of truth, love, and unity in a beautiful, classic way:

*Where charity and love are found, there is God.
The love of Christ has gathered us into one.
Let us rejoice and be glad in him.
Let us fear and love the living God.
And love each other from the depths of our heart.*³⁸

Or, to return to the words of d’Alzon, “God is love, and because he who lives in love lives in God, we shall continually ask the Spirit of love, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, to unite us indissolubly to God, to Jesus Christ, to his Church, to our brothers and to those entrusted to us.”³⁹

IV. Truth in a Catholic, Liberal Arts Education

We have already pointed out that the truth of which Christians are convinced is a *personalistic* truth—our call to be in communion with each other and with God (what d’Alzon called “the rights of God”) coupled with our natural slowness to respond to that call. In that sense, the fact that humans are subjects and cannot know any fact with complete objectivity does not compete with or invalidate the possibility of knowing a truth about the nature of our subjectivity. And, if the Socratic method used in psychagogy and in a liberal arts education is geared toward the discovery of the truth about human nature and our place in the world, then the liberal arts do seem like a natural fit for Catholic education. But how does this pursuit of a personalistic truth about human nature relate to the continuing search for ever more adequate understandings of the world around us? Does faith in this Christian truth have a relation to the things which human reason tries to learn about the world, or does it simply hover above the work of the sciences?

The liberal arts come down to us today through the work of the Benedictine monks of the early Middle Ages who preserved them in the monasteries and cathedral schools that eventually became the first universities in the Western world. These monks preserved the liberal arts largely thanks to the vision of Augustine. Why, many Christians in Augustine’s time wondered, should we continue to learn the arts and sciences developed by non-Christians,

when the Scriptures contain all the truth that a Christian needs to know? It was an attitude found even among leading Christians of the time. St. Jerome, who produced the most famous translation of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, also had a great love of rhetoric and therefore of Cicero; but Jerome described a nightmare in which he was whisked before a supernal Judge, to whom Jerome identified himself as a Christian. “‘You lie!’ said [the Judge]. ‘You are a Ciceronian, not a Christian!’”⁴⁰ Jerome cried out, repeatedly, “Have mercy on me, Lord, have mercy!” He awoke; he never again read “worldly books” and discouraged others from doing so. But Augustine had a different vision for the intellectual life of Christians, a different vision of how a liberal arts education related to Christian truth, and this is the vision that the Benedictines, the first Christian universities, and the Assumptionists (among many others!) have followed.

Augustine agreed with Jerome and others that Christians were called to contemplate God always, indeed to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17). But for Augustine, this did not mean thinking the “same thought” repeatedly, thinking about God the same way, over and over again. On the one hand, Augustine insisted that the all essentials of Christian belief were stated clearly somewhere in the forest of the Scriptures.⁴¹ In that sense, erudite elucidation on the Bible is unnecessary. On the other hand, the majority of Scripture was not so clear

and was not meant to be so clear—since, after all, such clarity and simplicity would only inspire boredom and resentment among the more intellectually-inclined. For that reason, the Scriptures contain “many and varied obscurities and ambiguities” which easily deceive anyone who reads its pages casually. “This is all due, I have no doubt,” Augustine opined, “to divine providence in order to break in pride with hard labor, and to save the intelligence from boredom, since it readily forms a low opinion of things that are too easy to work out.”⁴² After all, Augustine explains, if he were to preach each week that the heart of the Christian life was “twofold love of God and neighbor,” his congregation would bore and even hold his message in contempt; and so God has supplied the whole of the Scriptures to contemplate: each passage ultimately speaks that same fundamentally Christian message, but does so in its own way. One passage may require knowledge of Greek, another knowledge of geography or biology, yet another of the different types of literary or rhetorical genres.⁴³ In this way, engaging the forest of Scriptural material is both an educational program that requires the study of the many liberal arts and the sciences which Jerome might have dismissed as “pagan” (2.41), and it is a spiritual program that cleanses our hearts from pride (the opposite of that kenotic *humilitas* which is essential to Christians), engages our

minds, and helps us to contemplate the Christian twofold message of love in ever new and interesting ways.⁴⁴

An education is learning how to think critically and how to ask and answer questions about human nature, about the world, about justice and injustice. But, as the example from Augustine shows, an education is not indifferent to “the facts,” even if its ultimate lesson requires us to go beyond them. Augustine was very attentive to “the facts,” to the details of the particular Scriptural passage he was reading or the importance of learning about the world around him; but he also proceeded to think about the larger significance of these Biblical details or worldly facts for his identity as a human person, as a Christian, as someone charged with the task of the twofold love.

The process of transcending from fact to truth, from incidental particular to interpersonal relationship, from literal textual account to moral and ethical life, is the very story of Augustine’s thought. At one point in his life, when Augustine felt he engaged the world on the rather superficial level of those things which he could sense and observe, he had been a skeptic about the possibility of knowing actual truth; the senses could always deceive. One of the turning points of Augustine’s life was his discovery of what is commonly called “the ascent”: his realization that when he judged the facts of

life to be true or good or beautiful, whether they be a piece of information or a statue or a piece of music, his mind was judging these potentially-deceitful sensations (*phantasmata*) according to higher and unchanging principles within our minds.⁴⁵ Augustine was so committed to this “ascent” that he preached it to pagan farmers in a small town in Africa, in the only recorded sermon which we have that he gave to non-Christians. He told them that they failed to see God because they failed to use their sensual experience and factual knowledge about the world as the stepping-stone in the ascent toward recognizing the unchanging principles within their personhood—and the God who was present within them through those unchanging principles.⁴⁶ They were “fleshly-minded,” idolizing the world they could see and touch. Rather, they ought to use their experience and knowledge as a springboard to contemplate the unchanging and triune God of love whom they could discover by turning their attention upward. Augustine read the Bible through this ascent, being delighted in how each aspect of the Scriptures had a spiritual sense which delivered the message of twofold love in a new and penetrating way; this is also how he pursued all his studies, believing that the study of music, or science, or mathematics could be similarly transparent to the presence of the God of love.

Today, liberal arts colleges retain a breadth of coursework that reflects the breadth of the original seven liberal arts but which also goes beyond them. The “father” of modern management and organizational studies, Peter Drucker, wrote that management could, even should, be considered “liberal” precisely because it “deals with the fundamentals of knowledge, self-knowledge, wisdom, and leadership” in a manner that transcends simple memorization or information-banking, and should be considered an “art” insofar as it is concerned with the “practice and application” of this knowledge in a wide and changing variety of circumstances.⁴⁷ To study a liberal art is not so much a question of studying one of seven ancient subjects as it is the study of many subjects “liberally,” attentive to the truths that study reveals about ourselves, our relation to the world, and our relation to God.

V. Effective Pedagogy and an Education to Communion

Emmanuel d’Alzon welcomed collaboration with laypeople as necessary to the success of the work of his priestly congregation; in a somewhat similar way, Assumption College emphatically and ecumenically “welcomes all those who share its goals,” as its mission statement explains.⁴⁸

In recent years, the appreciation of and opportunities for service—long a staple of Catholic higher education—have increased at many colleges with

no religious affiliation; administration and staff at these institutions have noted empirical evidence which suggests service improves students' well-being, or promote service as a way to build one's resume, or are responding to a more spontaneous desire to serve arising among students who feel that service to others is valuable. Catholic colleges are frequently more successful at grounding service to others in a rationale and logic that makes it core to their very identity; while many people recognize its value, Catholic institutions can articulate a particularly Catholic understanding of service's value in a way that allows (even compels) them to promote service with special urgency, though many other people and institutions also appreciate its value.

The preceding pages have spoken about a specifically Christian truth that belongs to the core values of Assumption College, a truth about the nature of the human person as really challenged to live a life of difficult and Christ-like love for God and neighbor. The love to which this Christian truth leads—a love which is so intense that it is beyond our own meager psychological resources, which is “poured into our hearts” from above—ends in unity. And for this reason, an Assumption education, an Assumption formation, an Assumption pedagogy is ultimately an education “to communion,” to loving unity with others. An “education to communion” is a goal whose value can be appreciated by those who may not share the vigorously Catholic justification of

service and of education with a communal spirit presented here. Service and communal readily appear as attractive goals. Who could read Augustine's own description of his community of friends and their shared pursuit of education and of truth without being moved or even inspired:

To talk and laugh and do kindness to one another; to read well-written books together; to make jokes together and then to talk seriously together; sometimes to disagree, but without any ill feelings, just as one may disagree with oneself, and to find these disagreements make our general agreement all the more pleasant; to be sometimes teaching and sometimes learning; to long impatiently for the absent and to welcome them when they return to us. (*Conf.* IV.x.13)

One does not need to share the principles which lead Augustine to this vision of the communal pursuit of truth to appreciate its beauty. And, in fact, an education to communion—rather like service to others—also proves to be a very effective pedagogy by sociological standards.

About ten years ago, Richard Light—a statistician and administrator at Harvard University—compiled a thorough and award-winning study of how students make the most of their college experience. A classic example of American pragmatism, Light offers little theory behind these practices, relying on sociological research and interviews with sixteen hundred Harvard

undergraduates as his gauge for effectiveness. He offers nine general findings: that the most effective learning takes place in residential settings; that students prefer classes with many assignments so as to receive more feedback on their work; that students learn more when homework is done collaboratively; that students value mentoring relationships with faculty more than coursework with faculty; that honest diversity strengthens learning; that the happiest students are engaged in serious and substantial academic toil; that they hunger to improve their writing and to learn through writing; that they need structure in their studying; that the instructive power of courses in language and literature are highly valued by students and alumni.⁴⁹ Of course, Light acknowledges that these findings may differ from campus to campus.

What is so striking about this list of findings is the important role which they indicate that relationships play in education. The relational and communal dimension of effective education is all the more clear in Light's discovery that always studying alone is frequently a sign of trouble ahead: "Students point out that those who always study alone are isolating themselves from a key benefit of college—the opportunity to learn from fellow students."⁵⁰ Indeed, perhaps the primary theme running throughout Light's study of effective college education is the call to collegiality.⁵¹

Students hope for classes that are transformative: “the most common hope students express is that each class, by its end, will help them to become a slightly different person in some way”—a hope which “transcends the subject matter of the class.”⁵² And students ranked those classes which encouraged collaborative and collegial learning as the most transformative and effective.

One student narrates a typical attitude towards studying: “I would have chosen to work alone on any project, wherever possible... Do it when I want. How I want....”⁵³ After experience in a more communal learning environment, however, the student confessed: “I would give the opposite answer. The wisdom and the amount of work and the arguments that developed in our small group taught me a whole new way of getting a job done. And the biggest message I want to share is that teamwork ultimately depends almost entirely on human connections... I had to learn how to criticize constructively... to argue constructively... to say I disagree with someone’s [sic] else’s idea constructively... We actually began to feel like a small community. It was wonderful.”⁵⁴

Light notes that while students are expected to study three hours for each hour spent in class, professors put 90% of their effort exclusively into planning the class time; yet, his studies show that *how* students study and do their homework assignments outside of the classroom is a primary predictor of

their success in the course.⁵⁵ “Specifically,” he writes, “those students who study outside of class in small groups of four to six, even just once a week, benefit enormously.”⁵⁶ The discussions, the added motivation to prepare, the human connections transform their learning experience—and, indeed, transform themselves. (The students he studied were strongly opposed to being evaluated in groups—they simply asserted that collaborative learning was significantly more effective.)

Light did not begin his study with the intent to promote any particular style of instruction or study; he consistently repeats his surprise at the results. Yet communal learning proved one of the most effective styles of learning in a wide variety of coursework. In writing-intensive courses, the sharing of drafts among students was called “the most valuable” experience of students’ college education.⁵⁷ Similar things are said for the study of foreign languages. Small groups “appear to be even more important” for the hard sciences: “Whether or not students work together in small study groups outside of class is the single best predictor of how many classes in science they will take.”⁵⁸ Admittedly, small group discussions “add only marginally” to the facts students learn, but they accomplish “something else... they build collegial spirit, in a collegial community.”⁵⁹ Statistical research, in other words, has demonstrated the significance of an education *to community* in the pursuit of knowledge.

VI. The Pursuit of this Truth Across the Disciplines

Emmanuel d'Alzon spoke to the teachers at the school he founded about the two modes of promoting the Christian truth which he believed it their duty to promote: direct and indirect, explicit and implicit. In his study, statistician Richard Light recounts the complaint of one scientist against students who viewed the hard sciences as cold or insufficiently uplifting: “But physics and chemistry and biology are beautiful and rich and deep too—just in a different way.”⁶⁰ And, yes, the chemist or the mathematics professor might take a moment to remark on the transcendental beauty of her field, or the business instructor might emphasize workers’ dignity; but, d’Alzon continues, “We cannot turn every class into a religion class.”⁶¹ Still, Christian truth can nonetheless be consistently “taught” in these classes in the indirect manner. He explains,

What we can and ought to do, no matter what subject we are teaching, is to take Christianity into account. This is the spirit in which we ought to teach... Show students how important it is to repent [of mistakes], to make allowances where allowances are due, to render service to everyone as St. Paul demands.⁶²

And, he says elsewhere, going the extra yard to interest students or realizing that excellence in teaching is less about whether a teacher considers herself witty or intelligent⁶³ and more about her almost parental instinct to foster her students' well-being.⁶⁴ In all the ways that instructors act out of love for God and neighbor, using the content of their various disciplines to offer a living example of love for God and neighbor, their subject also become ways of contemplating the truth and forming students in the truth which lies at the core of the mission of Assumption College.

¹ Quoted by Gaétan Bernoville, *Emmanuel D'Alzon (1810-1880): A Champion of the XIXth Century Catholic Renaissance in France*, trans. Claire Quintal and Alexis Babineau (Montrouge, France: Bayard, 2003) 108.

² "Beyond that, we should allow them a certain freedom in their development and not crush them by trying to force them into a uniform mold."

Emmanuel d'Alzon, *Emmanuel d'Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, ed. Richard E. Lamoureux, A.A. (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2009) 87.

³ D'Alzon, *Emmanuel d'Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 4.

⁴ William G. Perry, Jr., *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970) 57.

⁵ *ibid.* 176.

⁶ D'Alzon, *Emmanuel d'Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 103.

⁷ *ibid.* 98.

⁸ *ibid.* 106-107.

⁹ "Let it be understood from the outset that the students entrusted to our care are not perfect. If they were, why would anyone entrust them to us? To teach them a smattering of Latin, Greek, history or physics? Hired professors who teach for nothing else but money would suffice in that case." *ibid.* 85.

¹⁰ *ibid.* 76.

¹¹ Assumption College, "Mission Statement," 27 Aug. 2010

<<http://www.assumption.edu/about/mission.aspx>>

¹² George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2005) 86.

Elsewhere, Wojtyła wrote, “Revelation enables us to understand God’s work of redemption and sanctification, from which it is most apparent that God relates to man as a person to a person, that his attitude to man is one of ‘love.’ Thus, the ‘personalistic norm’ may be said to have its fullest justification and its ultimate origin in the relationship between God and man.” Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993) 245-6.

¹³ “The knowledge of God is, nevertheless, a *transcendental* knowledge because man’s basic and original orientation towards absolute mystery, which constitutes his fundamental experience of God is a permanent existential of man as a spiritual subject. This means that the explicit, conceptual, and thematic knowledge, which we usually think of when we speak of the knowledge of God or of proofs of God’s existence, is a reflection upon man’s transcendental orientation towards mystery, and some degree of reflection is always necessary.” Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William Dych (New York: Crossroad, 2002) 52. It is worth noting that the mystery towards which humankind is oriented is fundamentally personal in nature.

Similarly, the Second Vatican Council departed from the Neo-Scholastic custom of describing revelation as the sum of propositional statements in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, asserting instead that it is “Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6).”

Vatican Council II. Constitution. *Dei Verbum*. August 27, 2010.

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html>

¹⁴ John Paul II. Encyclical. *Fides et Ratio*. §2.

¹⁵ D’Alzon, *Emmanuel d’Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 26.

¹⁶ Dennis Gallagher, A.A., ed. *The Assumption Way in Education* (Worcester, MA: Assumption College, 2001) 22.

¹⁷ About the formation of his priests, d’Alzon said: “I have spoken of the need to revive Christian moral attitudes with the help of the great principles of faith. Therefore, we need saints, but saints enlightened by Catholic learning. Consequently, after novitiate, who have already completed their classical studies, we require many years of study of Sacred Scripture, of philosophy and theology, with frequent examinations.” *Emmanuel d’Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 55-56.

¹⁸ Hugh of Saint-Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of Saint Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 86-7.

¹⁹ Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010) 23; quoting Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 33.13.

²⁰ In this sense, Ernest Fortin’s otherwise helpful article “Augustine and the Problem of Christian Rhetoric” (*Augustinian Studies* 5 [1974] 85-100) seems to overstate the uniqueness of Augustine’s sermonic intent, believing that only the Christian, and not the philosopher, was interested in conveying a “beatifying or saving truth, which presupposes a decision on the part of the knower and which can be said to have been fully appropriated only when it issues in those deeds to which it points as its fulfillment” (93). Certainly, Augustine did this—but so did pagan philosophers. From this, he inexplicably draws the conclusion, “The philosopher poses a

threat to religion and society” because, by “questioning all things, he undermines the consensus on which both religion and society depend for their well-being” (95). Fortin seems to be importing many contemporary biases on religion, philosophy, and society into the work of an Augustine who believed that religion, true religion, enacted a true philosophy, and who opposed, not philosophy as such, but cynicism and skepticism.

²¹ Kolbet 24

²² Cf. Kolbet 25

²³ *ibid.* 27

²⁴ *ibid.* 31

²⁵ Kolbet 35, quoting Plato, *Lac.* 187a-188a.

²⁶ D’Alzon, *Emmanuel d’Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 122.

²⁷ *Guide for Faculty Search Committees.* (Radnor, PA: Villanova University) 3-4

²⁸ D’Alzon, *Emmanuel d’Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 93.

²⁹ By the crucifixion, Christ persuades us of “how much God loves us, and what sort of people he loves... [those] made weak through being humbled by the same faith,” so that, “once weakened, [they] might be perfected.”

Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991) §4.2.

³⁰ D’Alzon, *Emmanuel d’Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 83.

³¹ *ibid.* 82.

³² *ibid.* 135.

³³ Unless otherwise indicated, biblical verses are taken from: *New American Bible.* August 27, 2010. <<http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.shtml>>.

³⁴ Cf. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991) §14.4.

³⁵ Quoted by John Franck, A.A., “Emmanuel d’Alzon: Consumed by a Dream.” *The Assumption Way in Education: A Resource for our Faculty*, ed. Dennis Gallagher, A.A. (Worcester, MA: Assumption College) 23.

³⁶ Augustine. “On Baptism, Against the Donatists.” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.* First Series, Vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. R. King and C. Hartranft (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004) §1.7-9.

³⁷ *ibid.* 21.

³⁸ *Daily Roman Missal*, ed. James Socias (Chicago, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 1998) 335.

³⁹ D’Alzon, *Emmanuel d’Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 28-29.

⁴⁰ Jerome. “Letter 22.” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.* Second Series, Vol. 6, trans. W. H. Fremantle *et al.*, eds., Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004) §30. (*Wording modernized.*)

⁴¹ Cf. Augustine, *Teaching Christianity: De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996) §2.6.8.

⁴² *ibid.* §2.6.7.

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.* §2.15.22, §2.16.23.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* §2.8.11.

⁴⁵ Book six of Augustine’s *De Musica* is just one of the earlier places in which Augustine recounts and applies his theory of the ascent; book seven of his *Confessiones* is perhaps the most famous telling of this ascent. In the *Confessions*, Augustine describes asking: “why [do] I approve of the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or terrestrial, and what justification [have] I

for giving unqualified judgments on mutable things,” I, who am mutable? He concludes that there must be an unchanging principle within his mind that judges the changing world around him. From this discovery of the transcendent principle of reasoning already in his mind, “I ascended to the power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging... This power, which in myself I found to be mutable, raised Itself to the level of Its own intelligence, and led my thinking out of the ruts of habit.” At that moment, Augustine encountered the Eternal Word which was “Light of my heart... the power which begets life in my mind and in the innermost recesses of my thinking.” Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) §7.17.23 and §1.13.21.

⁴⁶ Cf. Augustine, “Sermon 360b,” *Sermons: III/11 – Newly Discovered Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997) §4-7.

⁴⁷ Peter Drucker. “Management as Social Function and Liberal Art.” *The Essential Drucker*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001) 12-13.

⁴⁸ Assumption College, “Mission Statement,” 27 Aug. 2010.

<<http://www.assumption.edu/about/mission.aspx>>

Speaking to his congregation, d’Alzon insisted on open collaboration: “I know some people who are so convinced of the perfection of their own way of doing things that they condemn everything that does not conform with it. This is a kind of modern Puritanism which, by a process of exclusion, will become egocentric, like a clique. As for us, we should attract rather than become small by our lack of trust. May trust be one of our principal means of bringing about the victory of truth. We are not owners of truth, only its servants. Isn’t the cause of truth God’s cause?” *Emmanuel d’Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 56.

⁴⁹ Richard J. Light. *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 8-10.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 40.

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.* 100.

⁵² *ibid.* 47.

⁵³ *ibid.* 50. There is a similarity here to Augustine’s own experience. His famous autobiography—the *Confessions*—describes a disjointed education. Augustine, an excellent student, read and studied alone, seemingly learning nothing from his teachers. Ultimately, this self-chosen program of study led him to a Christian separatist group. After an encounter with Platonic philosophy, Augustine refocused a previously shallow life on the pursuit of beauty, and re-engaged a "communitarian" version of Catholic Christianity as a remedy for the pride and isolation of his earlier life.

⁵⁴ Light 50.

⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.* 51.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* 52.

⁵⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 62, 64.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* 74.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 76.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* 75.

⁶¹ D’Alzon, *Emmanuel d’Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 115.

⁶² *ibid.* 115.

⁶³ D’Alzon insisted this was essential: it was a necessity for the teacher to “teach something original,” to “avoid using hackneyed expressions,” to “shed a new light, and give a new

perspective... For heaven's sake, [to] use your imagination and say something fresh!"

Emmanuel d'Alzon to the Educators at Assumption, 129-130.

⁶⁴ "Is it ourselves we are admiring while we teach, rather than concentrating on our students? 'I speak eloquently. I've got a sharp wit. I rattle off quotations, one after another. In other words, I'm a great teacher.'" No, d'Alzon insists, a teacher "is the father of a family, with a big heart, concerned for the good of his children." *Emmanuel d'Alzon to the Educators at Assumption*, 122.

Chapter Five

Teachable Readings: Notes on an Educational Vocation

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While I was a student at Assumption College, and for a couple of years following my graduation, I seriously considered joining the Assumptionists. One of the things that helped make it clear to me that I did not have a religious vocation was my being already sure that I had an educational vocation. Of course, the two vocations often go together; but even when they do, they are still distinct. Many Assumptionists are obviously called also to be learners and teachers; but Assumptionist educational endeavors have, from the days of Fr. d'Alzon, always involved lay people who are equally called and committed to teaching and learning. I went on from Assumption to earn graduate degrees in English, Classics, and History; and I have taught these subjects at both the secondary and undergraduate levels. My interdisciplinary interests and pedagogical flexibility have always been an integral part of my educational vocation. My response to this calling has always been animated by a love of the language that makes us human and by a critical resistance to what impedes and undermines literate cultivation and historical understanding.

What distinguishes humans from other animals is the ability to use language. It follows, then, that whatever we do to cultivate our literate abilities enhances our humanity. In all of the literature and history I have taught to high school and college students, I have taught them, or tried to teach them, to read and write. This is not to say that I had found them to be illiterate; but early in my teaching career, before I had heard anyone else use it, I hit upon the term *aliterate* to describe the disposition of many of my students toward the literate life and the world in which it is lived. Most of them could read and write well enough to pass their courses if they did their work, but for many of them reading and writing, especially in English and History courses, was something they did only because they had to, and only until they didn't have to any more. And yet such students, it seemed to me, never did, and never would, learn to read and write as well as they might have and so will have missed their best opportunity to enhance their humanity by a literate and critical engagement with the most significant literary and historical texts of the Western tradition. But not all of my students have been, or have remained, aliterate. For all that now impedes and undermines the historically literate life, it is still possible to teach English and History and to read and write about the texts of the tradition so as to cultivate critical faculties and humanistic sensibilities.

Wherever and whatever I have taught, I have written about the texts I was teaching, and written what reflects my own learning. For every course I have taught, I have kept a notebook; I now have several dozen of them. In writing about the texts I have taught, I have been working out what I call a teachable reading. I have had to learn the texts myself, so that I could teach them to my students. When I have taught a text more than once, I have written out re-readings and alternative teachings. These educational notebooks have helped me maintain my educational vocation; and so I have thought that my contribution to a collection celebrating the educational legacy of Fr. D'Alzon should be a set of excerpts from them that represent what I have done since I graduated from Assumption.

Textbooks vs. Booktexts

History textbooks are notoriously boring. Most people who don't like History tell of a textbook that turned them off. They typically imply that if only their teachers had assigned some more interesting history, they would have liked it better. I have some sympathy for them; but I have taught History without the safety net of a textbook and have found that when faced with some interesting history they want only to know what facts will be on the tests. A good way to combine these two educational considerations is to do an

interesting reading of a History textbook. In the following excerpt, from a notebook I kept for a course I taught at an independent secondary school, I try to work out such a reading:

Our separate English and History courses are being made into team-taught Humane Letters, which will be taught in the first year to our freshmen class. The course is based upon the Headmaster's proposed syllabus for the first of four such courses. It is arranged around certain themes, but is made up of selected texts of the tradition. I am always inclined to teach such texts, because I think it is very important for students to read them. I had not anticipated reading, or teaching, a textbook; but the Headmaster has selected An Introduction to the Ancient World, and we will begin the course with it. It is not bad for a textbook, and we will read only three chapters of it before moving on to Genesis and Gilgamesh. And to have our students read it is to give us a chance to teach reading, which is always worth doing.

Why, then, are we reading this textbook, and how? Well, it is supposed to be intended to present some historical background for our other texts. What background, and how much? As a student would say, "What do I have to know?" Not everything, certainly. But what in the historical background should stand out, and who says? To speak of a textbook as background to what I might call "booktexts" is possibly to overlook the fact that a textbook is a

text, and is to be read. It may not seem the most interesting reading, but there is no reason why we can't try to do an interesting reading of it, which will then be useful to us. Students need to read, more than anything else.

The first chapter of An Introduction to the Ancient World is titled "The Origins of the Civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia." We should pay attention to the chapter titles for clues as to what the chapters contain and claim. The first sentence of the chapter reads, "On the banks of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris in Mesopotamia... and the Nile in Egypt emerged civilizations that were to have a profound influence on the history of the eastern half of the Mediterranean."¹ Here the two civilizations are named, and two synonyms for "origin" appear. We learn that the civilizations originated along rivers, and that they influenced Greece, Rome, and the Holy Land. Civilization is identified with cities, states, and writing; its origins traced to the "Neolithic Revolution." This reading is now all the way through the first paragraph; but it may well take a whole class meeting to reenact and unpack it. Yet even amid the textual complexities there are some straightforward indications of how the account is proceeding. Civilization is characterized by three things; its origins traced to three ages. The revolution brought about two kinds of agriculture, one kind yielding a further distinction. A history textbook should be read for the historical developments rather than for the accumulated

details. Thus the agricultural revolution led to urbanization, and urbanization to the use of writing. But writing was used only by temple and palace scribes, while the distinction between city and country was less significant than that between the sedentary and the nomadic. The civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia having originated, the authors of our textbook point out some differences between them which will be significant as we read on. The Nile provided natural and regular irrigation; canals had to be built to carry water from the Tigris and Euphrates. Egypt's geography made it more isolated than Mesopotamia, and so "the history of Egypt is fairly stable and static," while "that of Mesopotamia is characterized by constant invasions" (8).

The second chapter of our Ancient World textbook continues the narrative of Egyptian and Mesopotamian history, focusing on Egypt's Old Kingdom and distinguishing, among the Mesopotamians, between Sumerians and Akkadians. But first a rather subtle distinction is made about Egyptian chronology. "The history of ancient Egypt is divided into periods in two different ways, namely on the basis of 'dynasties' and on the basis of 'kingdoms'" (10). The dynasties were devised by a historian writing in the 3rd century B.C.; the kingdoms by modern scholars. There are 30 dynasties, and/or 3 kingdoms. The kingdoms are defined as "periods in which Egypt enjoyed great prosperity and unity" (10), and are divided by intermediate

periods in which it did not. The Early Dynastic period precedes the Old Kingdom, and a Late Period follows the New Kingdom. It was in the Early Dynastic period that Egyptian scribes started hieroglyphic writing, and in the Old Kingdom that kings commissioned the pyramids. The Old Kingdom ended when the kings' central authority eroded, and when the Nile no longer flooded as it used to. These are two causes, and two kinds of cause.

For all the dynasties, kingdoms, and intermediate periods, Egypt was a single civilization; as was that of Mesopotamia, despite the differences between the Sumerians and Akkadians. The Sumerians, we are told, were the more important of the two peoples; and their importance is associated with their use of writing. We hear of their contributions to a number of arts and sciences. "And yet the Sumerians never really showed any imperialistic tendencies; they never aspired to gain control over large parts of the Levant" (12). The Akkadians, on the other hand, "built a large and powerful empire" even as they "borrowed much from the Sumerians, including their script, their religious imagery, scientific principles and literary styles" (13-14). This is one of many examples in ancient and modern history of a stronger nation – one with a more powerful army – taking over a weaker one, and taking on its more advanced culture. This narrative goes on to describe the end of the Akkadian empire in revolts and invasions, and following it, a "Sumerian Renaissance"

which was in its turn overtaken by the Amorites. The Sumerians, however, left this renaissance in writing, while the Amorite nation and language eventually disappeared. The wedge is mightier than the sword.

[Homeric Topics]

*The Iliad and The Odyssey are often referred to as the textbooks of the ancient Greeks, but they are for us literarily complicated and historically implicated texts. When they are taught in an ancient literature or history course, there is usually a paper to be written about them; but it will usually be up to the teacher and students to come up with paper topics. In the following excerpt I begin to think about possible topics for a paper on *The Iliad* for 9th graders.*

*The first topic that arises in a reading of *The Iliad* is of course the Rage of Achilles, which we should follow precisely as the will of Zeus moves toward its end.² *The rage of Achilles is aroused by Agamemnon's dishonoring him. Achilles knows that he will die young but with honor. But now he is without honor. He appeals to Thetis: "Mother! / You gave me life, short as that life will be, / so at least Olympian Zeus, thundering up on high, / should give me honor" (1.416-19). Thetis interceded with Zeus: "honor my son Achilles! --**

/doomed to the shortest life of any man on earth” (1.602-3). Zeus answers: “I will see to this. I will bring it all to pass” (1.625). And yet Achilles rages on.

The next topic that occurs to me is one that I refer to as the Madness of Agamemnon. That is what causes the rage of Achilles. Both men have their women, each awarded one from those captured in the sack of their city. The distribution of the booty is according to custom. But so is the offer, and acceptance, of ransom for one captured. Accordingly, Chryses, a priest of Apollo and the father of Chryseis, the woman awarded to Agamemnon, approaches the Greek chief, “bringing a priceless ransom” (1.14). The rest of the Greeks urged Agamemnon, “‘Respect the priest, accept the shining ransom!’” (1.26). In other words, Agamemnon is appealed to on the grounds of custom and religion. But he rejected the ransom and threatened the priest—and that is the beginning of his madness.

I refer to the madness of Agamemnon in part because of its colloquial connection to rage—his own as well as Achilles’. But because the epic is primarily about the rage of Achilles, and since I want to come up with a variety of topics of the same sort and form, it now occurs to me that the madness of Agamemnon can be connected to the Rule of Agamemnon. All the Greek chiefs are kings of their cities, but Agamemnon is the most powerful of them, and so is the leader of this expedition. He at first resists giving up

Chryseis because he wants to keep his prize, just as Achilles wants to keep his. But when he realizes that his refusal to accept the ransom offered by her father has brought a plague upon them, he expresses a willingness to give her up, “if that is best for all” (1.136). Of course, a king should do what is best for all. But, being king, Agamemnon can do what he wants; though when he enrages Achilles he causes the best fighter he has to stop fighting.

The Role of Odysseus is another obvious topic, since he is the hero of the other Homeric epic. The first mention of him in The Iliad has some interesting alternative implications, however. When Agamemnon is enraged at having to give up his prize, he says to Achilles, “I will take a prize myself – your own, or Ajax’ / or Odysseus’ prize” (1.162-3). What if Agamemnon had taken Odysseus’ prize – how would The Iliad have gone from there? What then would have happened if Achilles had decided to go home – what sort of Odyssey would follow?

Herodotus Seen Sideways

The Histories of Herodotus is something like an ancient history textbook. It is the historical background for 5th-century Greece. It is full of interesting history, but it doesn't use sidebars and bullet points to bring out

what we might want to get out of it. I have for several semesters used *The Histories* in an undergraduate intro-to-history course, and in the following excerpt from one of those notebooks I am essaying a question already put to my students: what does Herodotus have to say about the early history of Athens and Sparta as he narrates the history of Lydia and Persia?

As recounted in The Histories of Herodotus, King Croesus of Lydia had been told by the oracle at Delphi that if he intended to attack the Persian Empire, he should make an alliance with the most powerful Greek states (1.53)³. His own inquiries determined that the most powerful Greek states were Athens and Sparta. Herodotus takes this opportunity to display some of his own inquiries about them. He points out that the Spartans are of Dorian and the Athenians of Ionian Greek stock. The Ionians, he says, are indigenous, whereas the Dorians were more migratory. He also speaks of their languages, though he believes that “the Greek peoples have always spoken the same language” (1.58). These historical details may help explain both the independence and the contentiousness the Greeks exhibited among themselves in the years before the Persian Wars, as well as the national solidarity with which they met the Persian invasion when it came.

Herodotus then tells how the tyranny of Peisistratos was established in Athens. This episode shows the factional contentiousness of Athenian politics,

and also its uneasiness with tyranny. Peisistratos has to try three times before his tyrannical rule is secure, though even then his rule is constitutional. The Spartan constitution had been established by Lykourgos, and gave Sparta good government where it had had a bad one. It then set about conquering and dominating the rest of the Peloponnese, and had pretty much succeeded by the time Croesus made his inquiries into what were the most powerful cities in Greece.

The Oracle had advised Croesus to ally himself with the most powerful Hellenes (1.53.1); his own inquiries showed him who these were. They were Athens and Sparta; and they had been the most powerful Hellenes in the past. That would seem not to be very historical, inasmuch as one would expect inquiry to find that cities which were powerful at one time would not be at another (1.5.4). But Herodotus' inquiries do seem more historical than mythical. The Spartans were Dorian Greeks, and the Athenians Ionian. Athenians had always occupied Attica; the Dorians had wandered about before coming to Sparta. But the Ionians' ancestry was Pelasgian, and the Pelasgians, though autochthonous, were also barbarous. The Dorians, wherever they wandered, always spoke Greek.

[Thucydides, More Straightforwardly]

I have taught all of Herodotus to college students, and excerpts from Thucydides to high school students. The history of Athens and Sparta is only one of many topics my college students might have chosen to essay; I set my high school students a more particular topic. In the following excerpt, I preview a Thucydidean topic:

Pericles' Funeral Oration is probably the most famous part of Thucydides' History.⁴ We will read it in anticipation of an essay on the greatness of Athens. According to Pericles, the greatness of Athens begins with its ancestors. Athens has always been there, but ancient Athenians made it a free city. More recent ancestors added an empire. Pericles will have much to say, then, about the Athenian constitution and spirit.

The Athenian constitution is democratic: "power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people" (2.37). Those with ability hold political office; in other matters "everyone is equal before the law" (2. 37). Athenians are free and open both in public and private, and obey both written and unwritten laws. The Athenian spirit is renewed by means of its leisure.

Pericles compares Athens and Sparta. Where Athens is an open city, Sparta is an armed camp. Spartans undergo military training from childhood, but Athenians are just as prepared to meet any military threat. The Athenians' courage comes naturally. Sparta is known only for its military culture and

accomplishments. When they are not fighting a war, the Spartans can only prepare for the next one. The Athenians are ready for war when it comes, and ready for it to be over when it is. “When our work is over,” says Pericles, “we are in a position to enjoy all kinds of recreation for our spirits” (2.38). Athens is known mostly for its artistic and intellectual culture and accomplishments; but, says Pericles, “our love for what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love of the things of the mind does not make us soft” (2.40).

The contrast between an aesthetic Athens and a spartan Sparta is similar to the one made at the time of the Persian Wars between the opulent orient and the strenuous west. Then, the wealth of the Persian Empire was a source of weakness, and the poverty of the Greek city-states was a source of their strength. Pericles takes a more nuanced view of wealth and poverty—at least where Athens is concerned. Wealth is not something a city has or lacks, but something that a city uses well or ill. Poverty is not something to be either proud of or ashamed of; but the poor should be both willing to admit it and determined to escape it.

The most telling contrast between the empire of Persia and the independent poleis of Greece is especially evident in the case of Athens. The subjects of the Persian king are his slaves; the citizens of Athens govern themselves. And the wisdom and civility with which they govern themselves

govern their relations with others. In this way Athens "is an education to Greece" (2.40).

[The Character of Caesar]

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* can be read for its ancient history or its modern drama; it can be a good way to bridge the gap between the ancient and modern, when a course, or this essay, has to. Julius Caesar is both an historical figure and a dramatic character, and the interest of this play has a lot to do with what Shakespeare is doing with his Plutarch. In the following passage I essay a bit of the complexity of the character of Caesar for the high school students I was teaching to read it.

Shakespeare's Julius Caesar begins with the plebeians celebrating the triumph of Caesar over the sons of Pompey⁵. His defeat of their father in the recent civil war had made Caesar the leading man in Rome. Caesar had always been popular, and so the plebeians' celebration is to be expected. But it is also telling that the tribunes object. The tribunes represent the interests of the plebeians; but they are officers of the Republic. They oppose the plebeians here because the triumph of Caesar represents a threat to the Republic. Having driven the revelers from the streets, the tribunes take down Caesar's trophies, to keep Caesar himself from mounting too high.

The tribunes had told the plebeians that it was not a holiday; but it was in fact the feast of Lupercal. The next scene begins as a traditional Lupercalian observance, a foot race, is about to begin. The scene, however, is dominated by Caesar. When he addresses his wife Calphurnia, everyone else falls silent. What he has to tell her is that she must stand along the course of the race, to be touched by one of the runners. She has not borne Caesar any children, and this, according to tradition, would make her fertile. Now it may be that she is unable to bear children; but it may also be that he is unable to beget them. This consideration, alongside several others, indicates the weakness of Caesar alongside his greatness.

The greatness and the weakness of Caesar is, I think, the best way to get a handle on his character. In the early scenes of the play, Caesar acts, and is treated, like a king; but is, at least implicitly, sterile, deaf, and epileptic. The tribunes want to moderate his greatness (1.1.77-8), and Cassius evidently resents it (1.2.218-20). Caesar would fear Cassius, if he were not Caesar (221-2); but he wants to hear more about Cassius from Antony, who must speak into his right ear, for his left ear is deaf (223-4). At this point we have already heard Cassius sound out Brutus about Caesar, and here we see that Cassius especially resents Caesar's becoming greater than everyone else, when he really isn't, and may even be a lesser man. Cassius asserts that "I had as life

not be as live to be / In awe of such a thing as I myself” (1.2.102-3). He goes on to relate a tale about Caesar’s being the weaker swimmer, and needing Cassius to carry him, tired, from the Tiber (107-122). “And this man / Is now become a god, and Cassius is / A wretched creature who must bend his body / If Caesar carelessly but nod on him” (122-5). Cassius then relates another tale about the weakness of Caesar in the midst of an illness (126-135). “You gods,” he concludes, “it doth amaze me / A man of such a feeble temper should / So get the start of the majestic world / And bear the palm alone” (135-8).

The greatness and the weakness of Caesar are also evident in what Caesar himself says and does, being Caesar. “For always I am Caesar,” he says, explaining why he does not fear Cassius’s “lean and hungry look” (1.2.222). And indeed we can see both greatness and weakness in Caesar’s having no fear of death. “What can be avoided,” he asks his wife, “Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?” (2.2.27-8). And yet he has ordered his augurers to see whether he should go to the Senate, only to go against the auguries. He has also disregarded the soothsayer who bid him beware the Ides of March (1.2.21), and the signs and portents that have been seen in Rome. Is Caesar, then, “superstitious grown,” as Cassius thinks? (2.1.212). Cassius is not sure Caesar will come forth to be killed. If he were still guided by “the main opinion he held once” (213) of signs and portents, he would; and this

would seem like Caesar. But if he is superstitious, he might not; and this would seem like weakness. Calphurnia seems more superstitious than Caesar, but Caesar is, as Decius says, susceptible to flattery and able to be swayed; and this may be a more telling weakness. Caesar does go forth; and just before he is killed he is as constant as he claims to be. His likening himself to the North Star anticipates his deification. The greatness and weakness of Caesar is most evident in his being killed, and becoming a god.

Writers Read, and Readers Write

One of the ways in which I have tried to encourage students to become people who read is to show them other people's readings. To juxtapose one text to another is also a good way to generate writing. This teachable reading of *King Lear* took place in an AP English Literature course.

On sitting down to teach King Lear again, I decided to assign an in-class essay on Keats' sonnet. The question is, How has Keats read King Lear, and why is he reading it again. Before sitting down to read my students' essays, I thought I'd write about the question myself.

Keats definitely does not read Lear as a Romance, though Romance is what Keats seems to have been reading most recently. Now he banishes Romance. It is a "wintry day," which may have something to do with it. He "must" read

King Lear once again; or, as he puts it, he must “burn through” it. He refers to King Lear as “the fierce dispute / Betwixt damnation and impassion’d clay.” To read it is on the one hand to “burn through” it, but on the other is to “humbly assay” it. Its “fierce dispute” makes it “bitter-sweet.” King Lear is both the fruit of Shakespeare’s genius and the precipitate of Albion’s atmosphere. This image clearly points to this play, but Keats, on previous readings, has seen in the play a “deep eternal theme.” This reading will be a going “through the old oak forest”; burning through it, he will be consumed. On finishing this reading, he may find himself, like Lear, “wander[ing] in a barren dream,” by which he may mean that a reading may be despairing. But, in the last couplet, he resorts to the metaphor of the phoenix.

The Poetry and the Scholarly

Not every reader is a Keats. Among others who have read Shakespeare plays are Shakespeare scholars; and when we come to write about Shakespeare we need to know how to incorporate their scholarship into our reading. That, after all, would help us to read the Keats.

I have not read Macbeth for many years, and have never taught it. I must now reread it, write up a teachable reading. For every text I teach, and especially for Shakespeare, I collect introductions and other critical writings.

They inform my reading, and so my teaching. I am inclined to introduce this play by way of A. C. Bradley's essay on "The Atmosphere of Macbeth."⁶ All of Shakespeare's tragedies, Bradley writes, have atmospheres of their own. The atmosphere of Macbeth is especially dense and oppressive. It is dark and desolate, and the darkness is often actually black, though there are a few flashes of color and light – usually blood and fire. The atmosphere is also stormy; but such natural atmospheric are associated with the supernatural elements of the play. The apparitions and antics of the witches are the most obvious manifestations of the supernatural, and the trappings of witchcraft furnish further ingredients for the atmospheric brew. Among and within the human characters, there are sleep and dreams, or sleeplessness and hallucination, somnambulism and madness. Finally, says Bradley, there is irony, which imparts a charge to the dramatic action, and maintains the tension between motivation and fate.

[From Tragedy to History, Rhetorically]

The atmosphere of a Shakespearean tragedy is, at ground level, rhetorical. Bradley's critical analysis is of the poetical elements of *Macbeth*. In this bit of Shakespearean history, the rhetoric is more literal, which is to say that it is persuasive; and this helps make the historical past more dramatic.



Shakespeare's Henry V dramatizes that English king's historic campaigns in France, culminating in his victory in the Battle of Agincourt and his marriage to the daughter of the king of France. The play begins with a choral prologue which brings together the history and the drama – or, rather, the history and the theater. And then there enter the Bishops of Canterbury and Ely, who are discussing a bill in Parliament which, if passed, would deprive the Church of much of its wealth. They must resist and prevent this: they think the king may support them, but have decided to distract him—and, presumably, Parliament—by urging a campaign against France.

It would appear that King Henry has some claim to the throne of France, which Canterbury lays out. The claim rests on Henry's descent from Isabella, daughter of Philip IV of France and wife of Edward II of England. To this claim the French have objected that the Salic Law prohibits succession to the throne through a woman. Canterbury counters that the Salic Law does not apply to France, and that, despite their appeal to it, the French have often determined the succession through a woman. But Henry can also be said to have a claim on the throne of France through his descent from Edward III of England, who established the claim through right of conquest. What, then, is Henry's claim to the throne of France? And what are his reasons for going to war with France? I have put these two questions to my students, because the

answers may not entirely coincide. On the one hand, Henry wants to be convinced of his legal claim. On the other hand, he is convinced to undertake the campaign for more martial reasons. Canterbury, after a long legal argument, urges the king to “stand for your own,” which sounds legal; “unwind your bloody flag,” which sounds martial; and “look back into your mighty ancestors,” which could be either or both (1.2.106-7). Once he is convinced, he says to the French messenger, “tell you the Dauphin I am coming on, / To venge me as I may [which is martial] and to put forth / My rightful hand in a well-hallowed cause [which is legal]” (1.2.304-6).

Teaching One’s Research

The most complex text I have ever taught has been Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, which proved suitable for an upper-level undergraduate seminar in European History. Here my teaching and my research came together. Foucault’s text is one of the most significant contributions to the late-20th century’s intellectual history of early modernity. It is, in part, a history of the philosophy of language, as I tried to articulate to my students.

By the time Foucault comes in The Order of Things to “General Grammar,” language has turned to discourse, so to speak; or, to be more (dis)consistent with Foucault, there is not language, there is now discourse.⁷ It is not that language no longer exists; it is that the mode of existence of

language has changed. Language is no longer a brute fact but a refined function: and as such it is discourse. "For discourse is merely representation itself represented by verbal signs" (81). But representation itself is not always represented by verbal signs; there are other kinds of signs that represent as well. But they do not analyze – or synthesize – representation. So Foucault asks, "What is the peculiar property possessed by language and not by any other system of signs?" (81); his answer begins with Hobbes and Locke. Hobbes says that language is a system of signs that people choose to use (which makes it arbitrary) and that they use among themselves (which makes it collective). Once in use, language is used in a representational way; although the system of signs is collective, "the meaning of the words does not pertain, in any case, to anything but each individual's representation, and even though it may be accepted by everyone it has no other existence than in the thought of individuals taken separately" (82). That is what Locke says. Foucault then says that "what distinguishes language from all other signs and enables it to play a decisive role in representation is, therefore, not so much that it is individual or collective, natural or arbitrary, but that it analyzes representation according to a necessarily successive order" (82). So a sign is the representation of an individual, and is an individual representation. How does this follow, though? Apparently it does; and evidently Condillac and

Destutt de Tracy say so, though in different ways. An individual representation comes all at once, but many of them must come one after the other. "It is here," says Foucault, "that the peculiar property of language resides"; and, "It is in this strict sense that language is an analysis of thought" (82, 83). Language as represented in discourse is representation in a certain discursive order, and the analysis of that discursive order is general grammar. "General grammar," says Foucault in italics, "is the study of verbal order in its relation to the simultaneity that it is its task to represent" (83).

But verbal order varies from language to language, while the simultaneity it represents is not supposed to. These differing orders of discourse, more than the different words, make translation between languages difficult. And in relation to the order it represents, any one language both represents and reflects. "In fact, it is the concrete link between representation and reflection" (83). Discursive representation, as distinct from representation itself, is already an analysis of representation; and this analysis evidently lends itself to reflection. Philosophical reflection in the classical age was generally grammatical, because general grammar reflects the way language represents knowledge.

[Introducing the Pickwickians]



My interest in language informs my teaching not only when I am teaching the history and philosophy of it but also when I am teaching literature; and not only when I am teaching a complex and difficult text but also when I am teaching one that is entertaining but still needs to be made teachable.

Last year my students had a hard time getting a handle on the narrative conceit that gets The Pickwick Papers underway.⁸ This year I explained it at the outset, and so these students got it. Of course, Dickens seems to have realized by the end of the first chapter that such an overly and intrusively editorial presentation of the papers was much too clunky; and so he abandoned it. And last year, once we got through that first chapter, the Dickensian diction and syntax didn't present a problem for my students. This year, however, it has been a bit of a struggle, though they have not given up. We have had to plod through the plot a bit more this year, and read more episodes aloud, which has enhanced both our understanding and enjoyment of the novel. They have also gotten a handle on the characters. We have seen that Mr. Pickwick is a sort of philosopher, Mr. Tupman a lover, Mr. Snodgrass a poet, and Mr. Winkle a sportsman, though we thought that those characterizations were a bit too conventional and pretentious to count on. Indeed, before the journeys and investigations of the Pickwick Club have even begun, Mr. Pickwick has had his leg pulled and his nose punched by a

coachman whose character and manners he had attempted to observe. This was the cue for the entrance of Mr. Jingle, who, we observed, very quickly picked up and played upon the pretensions of the Pickwickians. "Philosopher, sir?" he asks Mr. Pickwick; "Poet, sir?" to Snodgrass, "Sportsman, sir?" to Winkle, and, finally, "Fine girl, sir," to Tupman (79-81). Jingle is at once, or by turns, a philosopher, poet, sportsman, and lover. He turns out, of course, to be an actor by training and a confidence trickster by trade. He shows us that the roles of the Pickwickians are easily put on, and that the Pickwickians themselves are as well.

Teachable Readings and Readable Teachings

I have taught many texts I never read as a student, and my teachable readings of texts I read as a student have been quite different from those original readings. I have, after all, read many other things in the meantime. As Heraclitus says, one can't step into the same stream twice. But it is often a good idea to re-imagine the reading a student would do, even as one teaches another.

And so we come again, in Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra, to the eternal return of the same.⁹ This time around however I suggested that one way to try to understand it is as a philosophy of history (we spoke of

philosophies of history in connection with Marx). I explained that philosophies of history came in two basic shapes: circular and linear. The ancient Greeks – Herodotus in particular – thought of history as the rise and fall of civilizations. The Judeo-Christian tradition, however, saw history as having a beginning and heading toward an end. History was the progress of Providence. In modern times the linear view of history has been secularized, especially in Marx. Nietzsche, of course, was as radical an unbeliever, and even more a critic of the tradition. Breaking from Hegel in a way that Marx didn't, Nietzsche returned to a circular view of history.

But the eternal return is not simply a philosophy of history; it is also a metaphysical intuition. It has to do not just with what happens but more with the way things are. The best way to try to understand this is to consider that if time is infinite, and what happens is finite, then what happens must happen an infinite number of times—it must all recur eternally. But apart from these considerations, what do we think the doctrine of the eternal return is meant to explain? Or perhaps this is not apart from historical or philosophical considerations, if we consider that not only historians and philosophers think about what happens, why, and what that means for the way things are. Was Nietzsche a philosopher at 19? At that time, Heidegger tells us, Nietzsche wrote a biographical sketch which, beginning with the details of his life and

proceeding to reflections upon human being in general, ends with the question: “And where is the ring that ultimately encircles him? Is it the world? Is it God?” According to Heidegger, “Nietzsche answers the question concerning the ring that encircles and embraces beings as a whole some two decades later – with his doctrine of the eternal return of the same” (II.11). In other words, the eternal return is the answer to a question a thoughtful 19-year-old might ask about the significance of his life and his situation in the world.

Intertextuality as Interreadability

I had, for instance, not yet read *The Brothers Karamazov* when I first read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. That meant, though, that I first read Dostoyevsky’s famous work *after* having read this one from Nietzsche. One of the reasons that one teaches a student to read a great text, and one of the things that the student realizes once he or she reads another, is that these readings enrich each other.

The “Grand Inquisitor” episode in The Brothers Karamazov has some Nietzschean elements, though it would be more correct to call them anti-Nietzschean.¹⁰ According to the Inquisitor, Jesus Christ held too high an opinion of human beings: his teachings were too hard for too many of them to accept. He might attract tens of thousands of followers, but that would leave tens of millions in need of someone to take care of them. This is what the

Church has done. This Christianity for the masses looks like what Nietzsche saw, but he did not distinguish between the religious institution that catered to the weakness of the many and the religious teaching that appealed to the strength of the few. The idea of a Christianity for the few and the strong is an interesting one; the Inquisitor himself was, at one time, such a Christian. Now he is a follower of the Devil, but he is still one of the few who are strong enough to govern the Church. We might compare the Inquisitor to the Saint who appears early in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The Saint recognizes Zarathustra, and tries to dissuade him from going under. Zarathustra loves man; the saint loves God rather than man. The Inquisitor loves man rather than God. Both the Saint and the Inquisitor see the work of the Church as bearing for the people what they are too weak to bear for themselves. We might also compare this to the view of the Elder Zosima: "Whoever has no faith in God will have no faith in God's people, either. But whoever acquires faith in God's people will also behold his holiness, even though previously he has had no faith at all" (338).

Literate History

I decided to do my doctorate in History rather than English not because I had become less interested in literature but because a literate engagement with the historical past seemed the best way to teach more of what young

people ought to learn. I have found that to teach the history of the World Wars by way of Winston Churchill's memoirs is a good way to instigate a literate and critical engagement with what most people nowadays see on TV.

Histories of the First World War always begin with an account of the years leading up to it. Histories of most things are concerned with their origins, of course, but this is especially the case with the First World War. And that historiography has been especially concerned with the question of German responsibility for the war. Winston Churchill writes in the first chapter of The World Crisis that "one rises from the study of the causes of the Great War with a prevailing sense of the defective control of individuals upon world fortunes"; and these individuals are French, Russian, and British as well.¹¹ But "Germany clanked obstinately, recklessly, awkwardly towards the crater and dragged us all in with her" (6). Churchill's history of Germany begins with the proclamation of the German Empire in 1871; and he goes on to describe Bismarck's European Order, a complex set of alliances that stayed in order as long as he stayed in power. When the young Emperor Wilhelm II dismissed the old Chancellor, order began to give way to anarchy. Germany began to cause trouble for France, Russia, and Britain. Churchill, naturally, focuses on relations between Britain and Germany. There were many, and even intimate ones at the end of the 19th century. But in the years leading up to

the war, he says, German diplomatic machinations “produced very definite sensations of estrangement in the minds of the rising generation at the British Foreign Office” (9). He touches upon Britain’s traditional place in the European Balance of Power, and the way in which that place was maintained by its splendid isolation and naval supremacy. And he focuses, historically, on the threat to that naval supremacy posed by Germany’s determination to upgrade its navy. This was, in Churchill’s words, “an event of the first magnitude in world affairs” (10). It involved Britain in the lining up of alliances leading up to the war.

The World Crisis ended with the end of the World War. Churchill asks, “Is this the end? Is it to be merely a chapter in a cruel and senseless story? (841). He begins his Memoirs of the Second World War with the period just after the end of the First one, when “there was a deep conviction and almost universal hope that peace would reign in the world.”¹² But he had written about the “World Crisis” as one that had brought old ways of life to an end and that threatened civilization itself. It is possible to discern two trajectories in the historiography: one that sees World War leading to peace and progress; and one that sees it leaving death and destruction. Churchill, among others, sees the end of the First war leading to the beginning of the Second. And

toward the end of the chapter he says that it was not the First World War but the Second one that in a sense brought down Western Civilization.

In the End

I ended up in History rather than English because, in the end, the literate life is historical. The ability to use language comes naturally to humans, but what makes them read and write, or not, has to do with historical forces. And over the course of my educational formation, I became convinced that historical understanding was necessary to maintain literate cultivation. If young people now are *aliterate* because the world in which they are formed is *postliterate*, then such an educational vocation, like a traditionally religious one, must be in the world but not of it. Teachers should not be purveyors of educational commodities, and students should not be educational customers. A literate engagement with the world must be informed by *criticism* rather than consumerism. It must be learned, and so must be taught. I have learned to teach by writing about my reading, in response to my calling.



¹ Lukas De Blois R. J. van der Spek, *An Introduction to the Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 4.

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- ² Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1990)
- ³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt and John Marincola (New York: Penguin, 1996)
- ⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1972)
- ⁵ *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: Viking, 1969)
- ⁶ Edmund K. Chambers, *Shakespeare: A Survey* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1925)
- ⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1994)
- ⁸ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (New York: Penguin, 1972)
- ⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*. ed. and trans. Walter Kauffman (New York: Penguin, 1954)
- ¹⁰ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David McDuff (New York: Penguin, 1993)
- ¹¹ Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis: 1911-1918* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1931) 6.
- ¹² Winston Churchill, *Memoirs of the Second World War*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959) 3.

Chapter Six

Living Tradition: Teaching Alumni

Assumption College Alumni Educators

In its century and more of teaching and learning, Assumption College has prepared its graduates for lives in business, media, human service, law, and medicine, and all have experienced teaching in the Assumptionist tradition. But it has also formed generations of teachers who, in a more particular way, can be seen to sustain and put into continuing action a way of education that is particularly Assumptionist. We asked some of those currently practicing educators—some hardy veterans of decades of teaching, some new to the profession—to contemplate how their teaching has been influenced by their Assumption educations.

Paul Dowling, Class of 1962, has taught in the English Department at Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y., since 1970.

I was worried as I began my first graduate seminar at Indiana University. After all, my fellow students had BAs from Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, and other prestigious universities. How was someone from Assumption to compete? Very well, as it turned out. The seminar readings

included Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*, and Thomas Browne's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Not bedtime reading, these. Most students complained about the difficulties of Renaissance syntax and the philosophical ideas. It puzzled the seminar professor why I felt so comfortable with the assignments, since the only other student doing well was a Brandeis graduate trained in Talmud. I told him my Assumption "Great Books" education prepared me for such readings.

A few years later, as I wrote my dissertation on John Milton's prose, my director asked if I found the reading difficult. I had to admit I did, but I also found it witty and rewarding. Once one got the hang of his prose, there appeared all sorts of ironies and intentional blunders hiding in the interstices of the syntax. In fact, I became so fascinated by Milton after graduate school I spent more years than I care to admit writing a commentary on one of his prose works, *Areopagitica*.

Thus my dissertation and my first book grew out of Assumption's Great Books curriculum. A by-word around Assumption in those days—picked up from University of Chicago and St. John's College—was "texts, not textbooks." Indeed, I don't believe I used a textbook during my years in Worcester. We Philosophy majors bought the Modern Library edition of Aristotle's works in our sophomore year and used it through our senior year.

And we bought other difficult books by Nietzsche, Rousseau, Lessing, and others. As for the four years of Theology, one could almost get along with the Bible and Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*.

That amounts to a lot, but not to all, of the great books. In my senior year, I naïvely complained to my teacher, Fr. Ernest Fortin A.A., that I had so many more great books yet to read, I would never finish my education. And a good thing it was, he replied; after all, I could look forward to a lifetime of very long, never easy, but always pleasant work. This, he added, was what the philosophers meant by education: the continued conversation with the greatest minds.

So it has been. In my forty of teaching, I have re-read (more carefully, I hope, than as an undergrad) books I first read at Assumption. This fall semester, for instance, I will teach a version of Fr. Ernest's "Philosophy of Art" seminar with the same debates I was taught in that seminar in the fall of 1960: Aristotle vs. Nietzsche on tragedy, Rousseau vs. Moliere on comedy, and Plato vs. Aristophanes on the quarrel of philosophy and poetry. While I know I have not fully understood these authors, I also know that seminar and other courses I took at Assumption made me the teacher I am.

Thus, although I left 500 Salisbury Street in 1962, the College never left me.

Paul Jourcin, Class of 1969, has been seeking to unravel the mysteries of teaching French at St. John's High School of Shrewsbury, Mass., since 1969.

“Nothing is left to chance with the Lord.” As I begin my fourth decade as an educator, I marvel at the simplicity of these words, yet seek to discern the complexity of their meaning as I give thanks for the gift of teaching. I came to St. John's in the spring of 1969 looking for a job, only to discover with the wisdom of age that teaching is a vocation, an adventure that enriches and transforms lives, my students' and my own. For more than forty years, I have had the awesome privilege of sharing my journey with more than five thousand students who have allowed me to share my passion for my French heritage and its language. Their curiosity and enthusiasm make each day an awesome adventure and a memorable experience.

Throughout this journey, I have come to understand and appreciate more fully the value of an Assumption education where enduring relationships, spiritual discoveries, academic challenges, artistic creativity, and Christian witness have challenged me to give as gift the gift I received at Assumption College. “We stand on the shoulders of giants.” And giants there were during my stay on the Assumption campus from the mid-sixties to the early seventies. The tradition of Fr. d'Alzon inspired Fr. Paul, Fr. Donat, and Br. Armand to

provide the conflicted class of '69 the foundations of traditional religious and moral values that continue to help me challenge my twenty-first century students. It was the passion and scholarship of Maurice Plasse, Claire Quintal, Fr. Denys, Georges Aubin, Mike True, John Burke and Mike O'Shea who taught us to reason, to analyze, to critique, and to create. It was their commitment to excellence and learning as a lifelong virtue that provides me the patience to help form and transform the minds of my Francophiles as they discern the power of their education in a future of untold promise.

Constantly seeking to enliven and enliven the original mandate of d'Alzon and Ryken (founder of the Xaverian Brothers) is the mandate that I am compelled to impart so that my students remember, live, and share that story. For long after the dust settles on their diplomas, long after hairlines have receded and French verb conjugations have blurred, what transforms the lives of the disciples of Ryken and d'Alzon are the bonds formed, the friendships forged, the ideas debated, the faith lived, and the enduring reverence shown for scholarship. The words of Carl Jung seem to capture the essence of teaching after d'Alzon: "One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing

plant and for the soul of the child.” To those who walk in the light of Emmanuel d’Alzon, “*Ad multos anos!*”

Robert F. Peloquin, Class of 1975, has been a member of the Modern Language and Classics Departments of Boston College High School since 1975. He has served as Department Chair, is a consultant for the College Board and a reader for the Advanced Placement examination in French.

An Assumption College education is a gift for which I will be forever grateful. My years at Assumption have been the beacon which has guided me through my thirty-five years as a teacher. If I were to choose among the many lessons learned or gifts received at Assumption, the one which has influenced my career the most would be how Assumption College taught me the value of the individual. The adult community of Assumption—from the Director of Admissions, to my professors, to the Assumptionists whom I met over the years—saw in me potential and qualities that I never saw in myself. I was encouraged to do well and supported beyond the imaginable. During my senior year I had the idea of teaching an undergraduate Introduction to Latin course. I should have realized that such a proposition would be out of the question to the administration, but in my enthusiasm I approached my Latin professor and

advisor, Dr. Joe Sheerin, who defended the proposal before the Faculty Senate.

The following semester I was teaching Introduction to Latin.

At Assumption, it was not uncommon to have a rapport not only with the professors, but with admissions, the registrar, the lunch ladies, and the Buildings and Grounds crew. Friendships were formed, character and scholarship were valued. These are the lessons that I take with me to my classes every day. Quite often there are days when I will recall a moment in class, an event on campus, or an exchange with students and upon reflection I'll realize the way in which I conducted myself was, for the most part, a mélange of Fr. Gerard Messier, Joe Sheerin, Mike O'Shea or Maurice Plasse. That is the extent to which these people and others like them have influenced my career and my life.

Today "Smart Boards" have replaced chalkboards; we "conversations" rather than meetings, and it seems like every committee is now divided into a dozen sub-committees. The years have passed all too quickly, yet I remain energized by the potential and possibility for greatness that each student brings to my class. It is a privilege to bring out these qualities so that our students will truly be the "Men for Others" which is the cornerstone of our school's mission. Whatever influence I may have had or will have in the lives of my students is owed in no small part to my Assumption College education. May we always be

guided by the mission of the college and by the values of Fr. D'Alzon:

“adveniat regnum tuum.”

Stephen F. Knott, Class of 1979, has taught at the United States Air Force Academy and the University of Virginia. He is currently an Associate Professor at the United States Naval War College.

My Assumption education challenged me to examine some deeply ingrained notions acquired from a comfortable suburban upbringing in 20th-century America. This challenge came from a number of directions, including from former Politics professors Chris Wolfe, Patrick Powers, and Jack Crutcher. Fr. Richard Richards, A.A., taught me to appreciate the fine arts, while Angela Dorenkamp, George Doyle, John Burke, and Ken Moynihan opened new horizons for me from a variety of scholarly angles. All of these professors challenged a number of preconceived notions I held about the best way to live one's life, forever altering the way I viewed the world and my place in it.

Assumption College taught me how to think critically in the truest sense of the word, and not in the way that term is bandied about by many of today's educators. My professors took a somewhat sheltered young man under their wing and got him to step outside of his comfortable world, which is what

a liberal arts education should do. We sometimes hear educators today claim that education should be “relevant” and prepare a student for a job—and while Assumption did prepare me to be an engaged and productive citizen, it did so in a way that would be foreign to many educators today. My professors taught me that the principles and practices of hundreds of years of western civilization had consequences for the way we live our lives, although we may not always take notice. More importantly, I learned that there were certain truths that were not defined by time or place, or public opinion.

These are the lessons I try to convey to today’s students, who are somewhat blind to the world they live in, due in part to our obsession with technology and consumerism. Some of these students seem more at home in the pseudo-cyber world created by technology. Many of today’s undergraduates are unable to write, some have never read a book, and many lack a basic understanding of grammar. Too many students are taken in by the various media outlets that celebrate a crass and superficial view of the world, a world in which the glib gibberish of texting passes for communication and in which recourse to Wikipedia serves as a substitute for reading a book. The challenge to education in the 21st century will be to reject this crass and superficial view and to keep alive the traditional vision of a liberal arts education. It will be a difficult struggle, and the outcome is by no means

certain. But Fr. d'Alzon faced significant challenges in his day, and his example and the example of all of those who continue to carry the torch at Assumption College offers hope for the future.

Sarah Thomas Tracy, Class of 1980, is a faculty member in the Religious Studies Department at the Prout High School in Wakefield, R.I. She previously served as a Youth Minister in the Diocese of El Paso, Tex., and Providence, R.I., and worked for 18 years at FleetBoston Financial Group as a Human Resources manager. She received an M.A. in Pastoral Ministry from Boston College and holds a Certificate in Spiritual Direction.

If, as a teacher, my mission is to educate the whole person, then I have to bring my whole being to this pursuit. How can such an objective be reached when my students and I are distracted by our technologically-paced environment? The context of the challenge may differ from that of Fr. d'Alzon, but the challenge itself remains.

Early in my career as a youth minister and a high school Religious Studies teacher, I viewed my responsibility of passing on the Catholic faith as “providing the students with as much factual knowledge as possible.” Experience has transformed my view to “showing the students how to live our

faith in all arenas of life.” My ministry as a teacher has grown from purely an intellectual pursuit to a lived lesson.

Of his mission, Fr. d’Alzon stated, “We do not intend to make them men of the cloister but men of the world, men who act in such a way as to have their faith loved and respected, and who hold deeply to the cause of God! Jesus Christ, after having triumphed in the intimacy of souls remade in his image, will triumph publicly in a society regenerated by his grace and by the work of Christian teachers.” The greatest of all teachers, Jesus Christ, “triumphed in the intimacy of souls,” not in the formality of intellects.

My desire in teaching such subjects as Scripture and Creating a Christian Lifestyle to high school juniors and seniors is to make God’s word come alive so that they recognize how it is connected to all areas of their lives. What God has spoken through the person of Jesus Christ we are to speak through our lives in the classroom, within our homes, in social settings, on the playing fields. My undertaking is to enable students to embrace their baptismal commitment now and to carry those promises forward as adults into their workplaces, communities, and families.

The Christian message, proclaimed through one’s life, has always been countercultural. Fr. d’Alzon attests to this fact. The Council Fathers not only recognized the difficulties encountered in living our faith in the modern world,

but clearly stated the responsibilities of the laity: “Since in this age of ours, new problems are arising and extremely serious errors are gaining currency which tend to undermine the foundations of religion, the moral order, and human society itself, this sacred Synod earnestly exhorts laymen, each according to his natural gifts and learning, to be more diligent in doing their part according to the mind of the Church, to explain and defend Christian principles, and to apply them rightly to the problems of our era” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, §6). Some 45 years later, these words from Vatican II speak to today’s generation.

What does it mean to be a Religious Studies teacher in a rapidly changing world? More specifically, what does it mean to be such a teacher educated within the Assumption tradition and, hence, influenced by Fr. d’Alzon? It means that through word and action I must be that prophetic voice that speaks words of truth. It means to inspire and recognize the longing within a student to embrace those words. Our youth are the prophetic voices of the future. To prepare my students to be such prophets I need to teach through word and example in order that they may see and understand how to live the Word.

Stephen P. Clifford, Class of 1984, is Professor of English at Cerritos College, Norwalk, Calif. After completing his doctoral work at the University of Washington and serving as a visiting professor, as well as a consultant to educational technology companies, he has been teaching developmental and advanced composition and English and American literature since 2003.

On March 5, 1984, I stumbled upon the passion Fr. d'Alzon brought to Assumption College, and I became a teacher. A senior, I was an English major who loved the work of literary analysis, and just about any kind of writing, but who really did not know what he would do with it in two months when it was time to enter the workforce. I chose my major based on the romance of a kind of Horatio Alger story: local boy leaves his provincial community and rises to the rarefied ranks of academia, to study Literature. I had no idea how that achievement would define my future, only that parents, counselors, and high school teachers had all assured me, "you can do anything you want," providing scant details about how my choice might help govern my adult life.

But many also assumed that as an English major, I had one future: "So, you want to teach." Suddenly "you can do anything you want" sounded an awful lot like "you have no choice; your future has been decided." I quickly rebelled against that limitation with denials, with internships in advertising and journalism, with anything but teaching, which I claimed was not for me. This,

despite the passion brought to the classroom by the Assumption English faculty, whom I often idolized while never imagining that, like them, I might be worthy of graduate school, never mind teaching at the college level.

And then came Irish poet Seamus Heaney. I had never heard of him, unfailingly mispronounced his name when reading the English department's announcement of his visit to campus, and was not much for poetry, preferring the novels of Mr. Puchalsky's comparative literature classes, Dr. Burke's film studies, or Dr. O'Shea's Irish drama over verse. But both Drs. True and O'Shea—whom I recall as the organizers of the event—urged me to attend what they assured would be a memorable March 5th visit.

Heaney—well before his canonization as the national poet of Ireland and as Nobel laureate—read to a full upstairs room in the newly-completed student center. I was bowled over, and not merely by the poet's sonorous voice and transcendent verse. Literature—formerly the stuff of class texts and discussions that were engaging but which seemed isolated from the world outside the classroom—was suddenly brought to life for me as I watched the English faculty chat with Heaney and as I summoned up the courage to approach him after the reading, mumbling something incoherent about his poetry and offering a copy of his collected poems to sign. He welcomed me,

grinning at my awkwardness, and signed the text that I have sitting beside me as I write this.

That evening, I had encountered the power of literature as a living, relevant voice in our lives today, a lesson my Assumption professors had been working to instill in me for nearly four years. And as I understood the power of that presence, I knew that I was not about to leave it behind in two months to work in a newspaper office or an ad agency cubicle. The passion that Fr. d'Alzon brought to the college had finally ignited a spark in me that continues to be the guiding light of my career in teaching.

It has since become a passion that illuminates my mission in the classroom: to help college students discover for themselves the relevance and power of literature in their own lives and to realize they, too, can craft their own powerful voices as writers and creative thinkers, as men and women who can embrace the responsibility of crafting their own identities and lives.

I am grateful to have seen this passion in students repeatedly as a college professor, when, for example, an earnest young college freshman in Milwaukee became speechless before Allen Ginsberg. Or when two young women entered my class on Monday unable to contain themselves, having returned from a weekend poetry reading in Minneapolis by Gwendolyn Brooks, who chatted with them, paying them kind attention. Or when a group

of struggling students in a developmental writing class in southern California, most of them first-generation college students of immigrant families with little prior hope of a college education, were greeted warmly with hugs and broad smiles by memoirist Victor Villaseñor, whose *Burro Genius* they had just finished reading. They all emerged from these encounters changed, not merely star-struck but recognizing in the voices of the writers their own potential to speak and write themselves, to discover their own passionate voices in their writing and their lives, precisely what I discovered in myself, unexpectedly, on a spring evening at Assumption College.

Joseph E. Bonin, Class of 1984, Professor of Mathematics at the George Washington University, is a research mathematician. He won the George Washington University Oscar and Shoshana Trachtenberg Teaching Award in 2009.

At Assumption, I gained much from professors who were committed to helping students realize their full potential. Several of my teachers not only agreed to guide me in independent studies (both formal and informal) in central areas of mathematics, but they proposed these independent studies, volunteering their time and effort. With the assistance of such dedicated teachers and spurred on by their encouragement, I graduated from Assumption

with a solid foundation that served me well in graduate school. My work with undergraduate and graduate students, colleagues in my department and in the research community, and people in the broader community continues the tradition of teaching beyond the classroom from which I have derived so much benefit.

Teaching (and learning) in the classroom is, unquestionably, extremely important, but university professors also have a broad array of possibilities for teaching beyond the classroom. In tribute to the “outside” assistance I received at Assumption, the brief remarks below hint at just a few of the many teaching opportunities that can complement or enhance our work in the classroom.

For undergraduates, we can organize help sessions outside of class, with guidance and group work on carefully-selected problems. These opportunities can have a profound impact on students who struggle to master challenging topics. Advanced undergraduates can gain a fuller picture of the discipline and have their interest significantly deepened when we direct them in senior research projects or independent studies.

We can engage beginning graduate students more thoroughly and expand their horizons by organizing and overseeing problem-solving seminars in which students have the leading role; these seminars (along with research

seminars) can also help students find dissertation topics. Advanced graduate students benefit when we not only supervise their thesis work but also provide extensive feedback on successive drafts of their research papers, promote their development as teachers by observing their teaching and making suggestions, coach them as they prepare and practice seminar and conference talks, and advise them on job hunting.

Mentoring new colleagues can give them valuable support as they learn to be effective teachers, to balance teaching and research, and to function within the university structure. Novice researchers stand to gain when we provide detailed, constructive referee reports on the articles they submit to research journals. Junior collaborators can learn much from how we approach joint research projects, including the types of questions we pose, the way we pursue answers, and the effort we make to ensure that the exposition is clear and illuminating.

University professors commonly receive a variety of requests and invitations through which we can reach out to the public. For instance, early in my career a colleague and I were invited to organize a mathematics appreciation course for the Smithsonian Institution's Resident Associate Program; the audience's enthusiastic response to the course was very rewarding.

In addition to their immediate effects, such activities generate additional teaching opportunities since they convey a level of interest that makes students and colleagues feel welcome to seek advice on future occasions.

Christopher Keavy, Class of 1990, is the founding Head of School of Pope John Paul II High School, Cape Cod's first Catholic high school. He lives in Yarmouthport, Mass., with his wife, Debra, and children, Shannon, 12, and Billy, 10.

As a work-study student, I finagled a spot working in the library, then located in the rear of *La Maison Francaise*. It was here that Fr. d'Alzon's motto, "Until Christ Be Formed In You," first entered my consciousness, albeit slowly. That Fr. d'Alzon's words were visible from the circulation desk where I sat certainly helped, but I did not immediately get it. Sure, my underclassman brain could process the words, but the phenomenological and spiritual reality they represented was dim to me. I mean, "Until Christ Be Formed In You"? What?

With the benefit of hindsight, I see my visual confrontation with these words as an important signpost in my true education and my journey to God. I am a little further down that road now, after studying philosophy, working as a

full-time volunteer, teaching high school Catholic theology, serving as principal of a large Catholic high school in Cleveland, Ohio, and now as founding principal of Cape Cod's first Catholic high school. I understand my own life better, and also have had the benefit of relationships with students, families, and teachers who struggle to know themselves and to know God. Fr. d'Alzon's six-word motto opens up two truths I have experienced in education, truths that, for me, characterize Assumptionist education.

Until Christ Be Formed In You. *Until*. We often speak of the need to be "lifelong learners," usually as a reminder to stay current and develop ourselves to our fullest potential. But Fr. d'Alzon's "Until" suggests something different: God's time and our time are not the same. True education does not happen on a schedule, even though the school administrator in me wants to proceed as though it does. Each person needs to remain open, questing, prayerful, and connected to others "until Christ be formed in you." At Assumption, I first realized Christ formed in me. True life-long learning recognizes the creative energy of God and the confounding way He works.

Until Christ Be Formed In You. *In You*. Philosophers call it the "subjective turn," this modern centering of Truth itself in the individual and individual experience. While my Assumption education taught me that God and Truth are in fact objective, there is something comfortingly personal in Fr.

d'Alzon's words that Christ would be formed in me. This vision unifies objective Truth, Jesus Christ, and subjective life, in us. Educational ministry then means helping people find and know that their subjective "best lives" are lived when Christ is formed in them. The message is less "Hey, be different" and more "Hey, be who you really are when Christ is formed in you." Fr. d'Alzon's vision makes the subjective and objective not so far apart after all.

In my mind's eye, I see Fr. d'Alzon's words up on the wall while I sit idling away hours at the old Library's circulation desk. Then, "Until Christ Be Formed In You" was foreign and perhaps quaint; now, with the benefit of this little assignment, it has become something substantially more meaningful and truthful. Sometimes, it just takes a little while.

Melissa Lalli, Class of 2006, has been teaching writing courses at the university level since 2006 and high school British Literature and Sociology since 2008 in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

The assignment is simple: write a journal entry in any format that incorporates as many of the fifteen new vocabulary words as possible. Instantly, Kim has a smile on her face, and I know whatever she is working on will have an unexpected twist in the last line. Whispers pass as one student asks Amy, our resident thesaurus, for a better word to use in her story, and

Kate hands out advice with meter and rhyming for another student's poem. Silently, Julie works in the corner. Although she is reserved around her classmates, when I ask for volunteers, her classmates will beg Julie to share. Her writing is filled with an innocence that both charms and captivates her audience.

As educators, we talk about educating the "whole person," but many have lost sight of what that actually means. Too often at the high school level, this education consists of saturating a curriculum with books, dates, and formulas in a desperate attempt to prepare students to pass standardized tests. Our students are left with little more than a cursory knowledge of subjects and without a passion for learning or a sense of how they contribute to the world around them. My experiences at Assumption College infused my educational pedagogy with the teachings of the Catholic Church and taught me to challenge and expand my views on what it means to educate the "whole person."

The key to education can best be found in 1 Corinthians 12, when Paul teaches about the diverse but equally important spiritual gifts bestowed on each member of the Church. As teachers, we must recognize and appreciate that each student has his or her own God-given talents, strengths, and gifts to share. By recognizing that all students learn, react, and respond in different ways and

by tailoring both how we present material and how we assess the outcomes, the classroom becomes a place of self-discovery. To educate the whole student is to help each student recognize what makes her unique and how her way of thinking benefits the whole class. When a student realizes that her individual gift is crucial to the functioning of the whole class, she will become more confident and more passionate about learning and about improving herself. It is only education helps our students to learn about themselves that we have begun to educate the whole.

Paul's teaching is not only that every member has a function, but that all members realize they are equally important. Our education system has created autonomous students competing against one another for positions, ranks, and jobs when the ultimate goal of education should be preparing our students for the tasks and obstacles they will face in life. Educating the whole student means teaching and modeling compassion, understanding, and compromise, all of them crucial to every relationship that the students will develop throughout their lives. This modeling creates an accepting, tolerant atmosphere in a classroom, one where students encourage each other to embrace their passions instead of being embarrassed or reluctant to show enthusiasm.

When I announce that it is time to share, Meg jumps in with a rap that leaves the class laughing while simultaneously reinforcing the new vocabulary words. Then the class turns to Julie, who softly reads a short story while her classmates listen mesmerized. Neither of these young women will have the highest grade on the upcoming literature exam or formal paper, but their classmates recognize and value the strengths that they possess. My goal is for my students to leave my classroom and see how the talents and gifts they have been developing can be used in the bigger context of a work environment, a community, and a family. Educating the “whole student” becomes apparent when students are prepared with the skills, understanding, and confidence to approach any problem or task when faced with the opportunity. Education is a lifelong process that begins in the classroom, but continues in the world.

Stephanie Camerlengo, Class of 2009, teaches 6th grade math and science with Teach for America in Charlotte, N.C., and plans to pursue her teaching career in the Boston area.

Participating in AmeriCorps’ Teach for America program, I’ve found the past year to be the most challenging experience in my career. However, because of my education at Assumption College, I came more prepared than most. Teach for America takes highly qualified students and professionals of

all fields and places them in inner city classrooms to work with underprivileged students for two years. Teach for America and all the stewards of the program fight educational inequality throughout the United States and try to find a balance between the rich suburban neighborhoods and inner city school. As challenging as it can be, I credit Assumption College for my being here in the first place: Assumption College taught me the importance of giving back to the community and caring about people in all walks of life. This focus was the driving force behind my decision to participate in an AmeriCorps program.

While at Assumption College, my professors in my general education classes and those within my major showed me what it takes to be a good teacher. Many believe it is to enrich the mind, but at Assumption College, I learned that the mind is only of part of who someone is; the secret is to teach the whole child. By engaging a student's soul, curiosity, and body while teaching, the student retains much more than when the mind alone is the focal point. To engage the whole student, I practice movement through games to get the children active and moving. Not only do my students enjoy the information they are learning, but they also are more likely to retain it.

Another crucial tool that I learned at Assumption College is teaching for inquiry. Presently, some of my students can be more than two grade levels

behind in their reading and math scores. These students do not quite grasp the importance of education, and, at times, it is a long process to get them to listen. On the days when I am able to break that barrier and engage their curiosity, however, I let their questions guide the lesson. Nothing compares to seeing the excitement on a student's face when a question he or she has had is answered in the classroom.

Most importantly, I strive for all my students to be active participants in their education. Sitting back and allowing someone to fill your mind with information is simple enough, but to really learn you have to have the desire to do so. The child who questions and engages through discussion and involvement is the one that has truly become a student; they have learned the secret to the powers that education can bring. Assumption College taught me this important lesson, one I hope that all my students will learn from me in turn.

Chapter Seven

D'Alzon Deployed: Students as Teachers

Assumption College Spring 2010 Student Teachers

A teaching formation reaches a critical moment when a young person moves from one side of the desk to the other. That sometimes-terrifying moment when theory meets practice is rich and intense and exhausting. The very pressure of being a student teacher can make for revelation. In the spring of 2010, we asked our student teachers to reflect on their current teaching experience, sending out prompts every other week throughout the semester and asking them to respond. Here is what they said.

The qualities of frankness, generosity, cordiality, trust, and simplicity are highly valued by Assumptionists. Tell one story from your current experience where you've seen one of these qualities in action. Who showed it, and with what result?

All these qualities are highly valued at Flagg Street Elementary School. Students are expected to obey the Golden Rule and learn about respect,

honesty and trust. Unfortunately, students in my second grade class have not upheld these qualities in the classroom. Students have been disrespectful to one another through their words and actions. This past week, my teacher instilled a “friendship” intervention: students were lectured on the concept of friendship and generosity, and then, after much discussion, they were expected to demonstrate kindness to one another. Through the past few days, the students displayed cordiality to one another by writing a friendly letter to a specific student in the class. Each letter contained a compliment for that student and corresponding example from that student’s behavior. These letters were simplistic but effective. Students received a boost of self-confidence, which in return lifted atmosphere of the classroom as a whole. *Caitlin Larkin*

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Everyone’s first notion about the profession of teaching is that the teachers instill knowledge, values, and essentially teach the students. I have recently discovered, however, that teachers never stop learning from their students. I had just completed teaching a lesson to a class of second graders, when a student gazed up from her desk, looked at me with tired eyes and said, “That lesson was too long.” I looked at her with a slight grin, at first surprised, but as I processed her words I said “thank you.” I told her that her feedback was greatly appreciated and that next time I would find a way to condense the

lesson. This student's honesty was something that I will never forget. Her bluntness was innocent and has altered my outlook on teaching. Appreciating and valuing feedback, even from a seven-year-old, goes a long way in helping educators to evolve, becoming stronger teachers. The students whom you believe you are teaching often are actually teaching you. *Mary Hancock*

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On a daily basis I am blessed to see people exchanging random acts of kindness and generosity. Recently, I have witnessed yet another reason why I love and enjoy working with students and being in the classroom. One afternoon during snack time, a student sat quietly at her desk glancing around the room at all of the other students eating their snacks. She had none and clearly felt left out. Before I had the chance to reach out to her and offer her some of mine, one of my students walked over to her desk and said kindly, "Here is some of my snack. Please take some and eat it." At that moment the student's face light up and thanked her classmate for her generosity. It is always a great reminder to see the *other* things students while studying the facts in the classroom: generosity, sharing, giving. The result of being generous to others leaves a smile on the face and a warm feeling in the heart.

Jessica Craven

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One quality that has stood out to me while student teaching is generosity. I work in a classroom where there are a couple lower-level students. One time, the classroom teacher had to go to a meeting during school but wanted all the students to continue their work. One boy, a higher-level student, raised his hand and told the teacher that he would help out anyone who needed it. The boy could have gone along finishing his own work so he could go on the computer afterwards and play games; instead, he chose to help his classmates so they did not fall behind. Not only were the students thankful to have his help, the teacher was grateful that she didn't have to feel like she was abandoning her students. This simple act of generosity lessened stress for many. *Kristin Quinn*

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I have seen so much generosity throughout the school during my first week of student teaching. The school community has come together to raise money for Haiti, which was recently devastated by an earthquake. Even during tough economic times, many students brought money to help people worse off than themselves. Even though they are young, these students still know how to be generous. The example that stands out the most to me is a little boy who brought in a bag of change from his bank at home. He obviously realized how much help the people of Haiti need. This is an amazing example of generosity

and a reminder that even the littlest donation can help others. *Colleen*

Callahan

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I have seen several great qualities while student teaching at Assumption. One that sticks out the most in my mind is the recent earthquake in Haiti. This devastation has caused many people to be left with nothing at all. With this thought, a second grader at Dawson Elementary School in Holden, Mass., came up with a remarkable idea: while she was home one night she typed up a note with her mother, a high school teacher in the area. The note explained to her class what had happened in Haiti and how the smallest amount of change could allow powdered soap to be sent over seas, leading to clean water. Not only did this little girl come up with a great idea, but the school began raising money for Haiti. As soon as she read her note, all of the second graders checked to see if they had any change in their pockets or bags. One boy had eleven dollars, which he had planned on using to buy a toy later that afternoon; he donated it all—until he realized he needed a dollar back to get something for lunch. This second grade class is a hard group to deal with due to disorders; however, all of their little hearts are in the right place! *Kelly*

Walsh

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In light of the recent tragedy in Haiti, the students of Roosevelt Elementary School took it upon themselves to make a difference. Most children come from families who cannot even afford to pay for their child's school lunch, yet in the first week of the collection my classroom alone collected over 100 dollars for the cause. The quality of generosity shown by the whole school was reflected by one child in particular. We asked for donations every morning while collecting homework and getting settled; this child came to my desk with a single dollar and some change, so I thanked her and put it in the bucket. Later, at lunchtime, I saw her sitting at lunch with nothing to eat and realized that she had given up what little she had for food to share with people who needed that money more than she did. *Kayla Parker*

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I was thinking about what topic I wanted to do for my unit plan. After a discussion with my supervising teacher, I decided to do a unit on Antarctica and penguins. The next day, one of the other teachers gave me a binder full of things which she had used for similar units in previous years. I was amazed by her generosity and could not believe that she had taken the time to go through her materials to help me, even though she had only known me for a couple weeks. In the days that followed, other first grade teachers also found materials

and gave me tips on what might work and ideas on some lessons. I am so thankful for their generosity. *Colleen Fish*

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Cordiality is often forgotten. I have heard the saying “chivalry is dead,” and I have started to believe it is true. I cannot tell you how refreshing it was to meet a student in my fourth grade class with impeccable manners. I first noticed it with a simple but genuine “Excuse me” to a classmate as he walked to his desk. Next I noticed a “Thank you,” then an “I’m sorry, excuse me” after sneezing. This ten-year-old boy was a normal student who loved playing basketball and didn’t care much for math homework, but his cordiality was exceptional. It made me want to be around him, because it reminded me that children *can* be considerate and respectful *without* being asked. *Elizabeth Burt*

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One experience that I've had with trust occurred the very first week I was student teaching this semester. My supervising teacher had a meeting and therefore needed to be out of the room for an extended period of time in the morning. Although there was a paraprofessional in the room during the time, she left the morning to me, to teach and to monitor the classroom. This experience, although initially nerve wracking, showed me that my teacher

trusted my abilities in the classroom and that gave me a lot of confidence in myself. *Courtney Stratton*

Teachers are community-builders, and this was a role Fr. d'Alzon, in the tradition of St. Augustine, affirmed. Describe one way you build community at your school. What do you see as the strongest threat to your school's sense of community?

Students in my second grade classroom have a lack of respect and trust in one another. In order to rebuild this classroom community, I took action by writing a letter to each student in which I wrote at least one compliment. These letters acted as a way to encourage positive self-esteem and self-respect. If students feel good about themselves, they will be kind to others. The strongest threat to the school's sense of community is a lack of respect. A community can only be built and thrive on the kind treatment towards others. *Caitlin Larkin*

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Bullying is one of the biggest concerns at the high school level right now. Last spring, I brought the Rachel's Challenge Program to Wachusett High School, so that all students can see that bullying is unacceptable. Students

who accept Rachel's challenge create a chain reaction within the community aimed at stomping out bullying. Now, Wachusett has an actual Rachel's Challenge Team which has established monthly programs, a first-year mentor program, a lunch swap, and activities to keep Rachel's Challenge alive. Not only have the students learned from this challenge, but also it has created a community at Wachusett that is strong and bully free. *Ryan Donaher*

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When I think of community building at my school I think of relationships between teachers and students. Students need to feel a sense of belonging; they need to be connected to others' ideas, values, and traditions. When I asked one of my second graders if her mom was coming to the music concert later that day, she told me her mother was unable to make it because she had to go to the doctor's. She was upset. She doesn't know her mother is sick with cancer. I told her I would watch her. It brightened her day and made both of us smile. Knowing I pleased one of my students and was able to connect with her was a great feeling. *Kelly Walsh*

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A teacher's duty extends far beyond the classroom. The majority of my students are of Hispanic descent, and English is not their primary language. This language barrier is a challenge that we must overcome every day in the

classroom. Many of my students have extended family members throughout the school, and most if not all of them have Spanish-speaking friends throughout the school. Every student has at least one friend within the school community who speaks better English than their guardians do at home. I knew these students could help some of my English Language Learning students, so I asked them to help them with their homework. This collaboration is one positive way to build up the Hispanic community and give them a sense of belonging. *Amanda Sheehan*

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Community is built at my school by the students participating in many school-wide events, like a coin drive for the recent earthquake in Haiti. My supervising teacher and I were responsible for creating the “Help Us, Help Haiti” fliers and delivering them to classrooms throughout the school. The community and school were able to put together over \$1,000 in donations for the American Red Cross relief fund. When the announcement was made over the loud speaker, the students were extremely happy that they could come together in making a difference in other people’s lives at a time of need.

Maegan Cook

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Building a sense of community in a school can be difficult. Schools are like miniature communities where the students, teachers, and staff must feel welcome and comfortable. Roosevelt Elementary brings each student and faculty member closer together by sharing the common goal of school-wide positive behavior support. This system encourages good behavior and rewards it by giving the children what they call “Teddy Bucks,” named for Theodore Roosevelt. These “Teddy Bucks” act as money in a small community and encourage positive behavior from all. *Kayla Parker*

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The MORE assembly at my school builds community through the sharing of excellent writing. Once a month, a student who has produced an outstanding piece of writing is invited to share it with the school. This is a very enjoyable moment which gives students the chance to come together to honor their peers, and to build a positive learning community. *Jessica Craven*

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At my school, teachers participate in an integrated program working with the arts block teachers. Every teacher collaborates with the arts staff to prepare for a winter and spring concert. All year, every teacher in the building focuses on connecting their curriculum with the arts to enhance academic performance and to prepare for the seasonal shows. The shows are open to the

public and offer great insight into what the students have been studying. This show, and the effort and collaboration put into it, presents the tightknit community that my school builds. *Mary Hancock*

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We held a “School Olympics” where all grades competed in academic challenges for medals. The week culminated in an assembly, when each class marched in as a different country. We played the Olympic theme and awarded medals. It was inspiring to see the whole school coming together as a community of learners, learning about the Olympics and all the countries involved in the Olympics. We were even able to pass a “torch” between each grade, which further instilled the importance of solidarity and community building. I thought it was amazing that the whole school was behind this project. The strongest threat to my school's sense of community is seeing a decline of projects like this one. The emphasis on test scores often takes precedent and can prevent teachers from working together. Creating more school-wide projects in which various grade levels of students and teachers are able to work together builds community for the whole school. Projects like this are also an excellent way to involve parents and other community members.

Liz Burt

Fr. d'Alzon lived in a time of swift and at times radical political, social, and religious upheaval. Select one change that you see unfolding in your school, and briefly discuss what a creative, thoughtful teacher's response might be.

One change I see unfolding in my school is political upheaval. Schools are being forced to address state standardized testing as a much more serious issue than they once did. Students from low-income families are not provided with the same materials and experiences. They are being asked to perform as well as those brought up in a suburban community. This sense of upheaval causes much stress on the teachers to make sure that their students' highest ability is adequate. It also causes much stress on the students. The students have so much pressure on them to do well because if they don't their school will be in danger. *Kristin Quinn*

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One change I see unfolding in my school is the growing pressure for students to do well on tests. The third grade has started a new program and every two weeks the children switch classes and work on a different subject with a different teacher for one hour each day. They rotate between three teachers. One teaches writing, one teaches science, and one teaches social studies. This hour is supposed to be intense MCAS preparation time for the children. I have witnessed the mixed emotions that the teachers and the

students have had towards this change. If I had to respond to this change I think I would try to stay positive. I know I would be frustrated that every two weeks I would be dealing with a new group of students for one hour a day. However, I would try to remember that I am influencing their lives; therefore, if I stay positive, then the outcome will be positive. The school feels that this change will benefit the children so it would only be fair for me, as a teacher, to give it a chance. *Colleen Callahan*

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A new writing technique called the “6 + 1 traits” was implemented at my school at the beginning of the year. The writing traits are: (1) main ideas, (2) conventions, (3) voice, (4) sentence fluency, (5) organization, (6) word choice, and (+1) presentation. This change raised a lot of questions among teachers: “Will I have time to add this into the day?” “How will I be able to teach all these traits?” Although this change may seem tedious, yet another thing the teachers are required to bring to the classroom, it is a positive change for both teachers and students. Students are given the opportunity to discover, practice, and excel in different elements of writing. Writing is a key element in learning, and as a student teacher I feel it is beneficial for the students to be given enthusiasm and support throughout each and every aspect of their

learning. It is important to try new things and to figure out how to make them work in the classroom. *Jessica Craven*

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At this point in my student teaching experience, I can say with confidence that change is a good thing. As a teacher, I think it is our job to constantly make changes as they are needed. A lesson can change its course at the drop of a hat, and we must be able to change our thinking and planning along with it. I have learned that nothing ever goes exactly as planned, so I must be flexible and willing to let my students' ideas and creativity flourish. Sometimes the little "teachable moments" that were not planned can be the best part of a lesson. *Elizabeth Burt*

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Teachers at my school have met almost every Monday after school to discuss a change in grading open response writing pieces. Before the transition, each teacher from first to sixth grade was given the opportunity and freedom to grade their students' open response writing in accordance to their own rubric. However, the school administration is trying to encourage all teachers to grade under one rubric for all grade levels. This new idea has led to numerous

reactions, both positive and negative. Fortunately, my cooperative teacher takes change in strides. She is willing to accept the change, make the change happen, and evaluate the change. She views change as a chance to improve something. Without making the change occur, no one will ever know if the change is actually better. I thought the way this particular teacher handled change reflected the type of teacher she is. This teacher shows through her actions and response that she is open to change and creativity. *Caitlin Larkin*

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I feel as though social change is the biggest element of change in an elementary school. From our parent's generation to our own there were huge changes, and even from my generation to our students' there have been changes. I have particularly noticed the freedom and maturity of my students: children are forced to grow up earlier than we were. Their parents let them do more, if their parents care about what they do at all. So many students are beyond their age in maturity and "street smarts," something that has changed dramatically from the time that I was a child. *Kayla Parker*

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My goal in teaching adolescent literature is for the students to connect their personal lives with the text. Though this sounds easy, at times it is very difficult, because students are afraid of sharing information. They fear the

response they will get from their peers. I work to make my classroom a safe environment and to push kids to break out of their shell. I want my students to feel welcome regardless of where they come from, and I want them to know that it is okay to be different. Even though there are many difficulties in education today, teachers need to support their students and to show them that change is good. *Ryan Donaher*

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One change taking place at Dawson Elementary is the Writer's Workshop, a writing technique that builds students' fluency in writing through repeated exposure to the writing process. Students are introduced to different writing elements over time, and these strategies can be implemented in whole or small groups, depending on the class's levels. The teachers teach elements or strategies to help the students' writing and have them write as much as possible. Some examples of the topics teachers chose to focus on are similes, "show don't tell," and dialogue. This change is something I will always remember, and one I hope to implement myself in the future. *Kelly Walsh*

One of Fr. d'Alzon's former students wrote, "Father was an original character," by which he seems to have meant that d'Alzon was comfortable

being himself and never sought to conform to an external norm. What original characteristic do you think you have and how do you use it in your teaching?

As I enter the classroom every day, I ask myself one question: “Who should I be?” The answer is myself. Why would I provide a false character to my students when my original character shines? The characteristic I share with my students is my sense of humor. Learning can be tedious and a struggle for some students. It is always nice to crack a student’s smile or get a laugh out of them to lighten the moment and relieve some stress. I use my imagination to create funny yet meaningful journal entries, math problems, etc. Humor used at the right time and in the right situation can be beneficial to a student; it may even get them to laugh at themselves and their own mistakes. As I try to bring out the best in my students, I allow my sense of humor to show, so students are not only learning, but enjoying themselves. *Jessica Craven*

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When it comes to being an original character and being comfortable in front of my students, I am like Fr. d’Alzon. I am up front with my students, and I do not put on a mask. The teacher they see inside the classroom is the same teacher that they see out in the hallway, or even around town. My students know and can see on a daily basis that I am passionate about the work

I do and that I am a serious and dedicated teacher. My students are not afraid to ask questions or to approach me for help related to the material we are studying or to an issue going on outside of class. If your students confide in you with issues that they are facing in life, it shows the students trust you. I will continue to be the educator that I am today, portraying the same demeanor—comfortable and original. *Ryan Donaher*

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I strongly believe that every teacher approaches his or her classroom in very different ways. While this may seem overwhelming, I think it is one of the best attributes of being a teacher: the power of creativity. My strong background in athletics and physical fitness is an advantage and unique characteristic I integrate into the classroom. I am completely comfortable in my own “athletic shoes,” and I am very willing and eager to integrate my knowledge and love of sports and activities into my teaching. I try my best to bring my love for sports into my teaching, so I can give students a different outlook on learning, one that will hopefully help them learn and remember material. The more the students are active and involved in their learning, the more they will take from the experience. Not every teacher has the ability to take their background of athletics into the classroom, and this is something I take great pride in being able to do. *Amanda Sheehy*

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Being an elementary school teacher takes a certain person, I have been told. I guess I am that person. I know that teaching young children takes patience, but even more, it takes being a personable and fun-loving person. Elementary school teachers are in a setting where being too serious makes for an uptight teacher who students do not want to be around. There is a time for being serious and a time for being fun and accepting. I feel as though I am fun-loving, but use this to my advantage. It is important not to let students think that you only want to joke around. But they have to see both sides of your personality: to respect you as a professional and enjoy being around you as a person. *Kayla Parker*

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One unique quality I have that I have brought to my student teaching is my ability to be a team player. Being an athlete has made it easy for me to adapt to a classroom setting where everyone needs to work together to achieve a common goal of successful learning. A sense of “team” is useful when it comes to encouragement. I have always been a natural at encouraging people and guiding them to succeed beyond their abilities. *Maegan Cook*

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When I am in the classroom, I have to be myself. I am standing in front of twenty-five children who expect me to give them my all every day. This causes me to continuously stay positive, and I think this is an original characteristic. The only way I can truly give them my best is if I am in a great mood. Sometimes life gets hard, but I find comfort in the classroom with my students. They distract me from other hardships that are involved in everyday life and make it possible for me to keep an upbeat attitude. Not many people have a positive attitude, and this makes it one of my original characteristics.

Colleen Calahan

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My friends and family have always viewed me as laid-back. I tend to take things in stride. Whether it is an important exam in a college course or an interview for a job, I remain calm and focused. In my teaching, I use my laid-back manner to present a comfortable and stress-free learning environment to my students. School should feel like a safe haven. To create such an environment, I like to put students at ease with my demeanor. I think students will benefit academically and socially from a teacher who sets high expectations but who does not create a classroom full of stress and tension.

Caitlin Larkin

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I enjoy thinking outside the box. When I am teaching, I always try to think of creative ways to engage my students. I believe that thinking outside the box allows me to connect with more students because I am open to many different ideas and ways of thinking. Breaking out of the mold and trying something new and original can produce amazing results. As a teacher, I use my own original gifts to teach the value of being true to yourself. It is important for me to encourage my students to be themselves and embrace their originality. *Elisabeth Burt*

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I am patient. This is extremely important, because there are always students who require extra guidance. Students are going to try and test your patience, but you have to maintain your integrity and skill as an instructor to mentor, coach, and give positive reinforcement to your students. I keep a positive attitude; to be a successful teacher you need to know the difference between working at the children's level and trying to get to the children's level. You have to be easy to talk to and knowledgeable, but also professional. *Kelly Walsh*

This collection is in honor of a teacher, whose influence is still felt. What do you hope your students will say of you in later years?

When my student teaching experience comes to an end, I only hope that my influence and impact on the students will still be felt and acknowledged. Perhaps, five or maybe even ten years down the road, students will still remember the simple yet important things I taught them, and maybe even pass them on to others. Second grade is a crucial time for reading, writing, and all the basic fundamentals of learning. I have put forth my best effort to push many students to reach the next level, raise the bar, and get them to be where they are today in their learning. I hope my students will remember me for the lessons I taught them, the help I provided when in need or when struggling, for the laughs I gave them, for the creativity I put into lessons, and for the relationship we made. I would like to be remembered for having a positive impact not only on their learning, but on their life as a whole. *Jessica Craven*

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I have had to overcome many tough obstacles throughout my life which have taught me to be patient, never to give up, and always to believe. One obstacle that influenced me was when I was diagnosed with a rare, life-threatening heart condition and was forced to give up many activities that I had worked hard at and cared about. My doctor told me, "Life has the incomprehensible ability to throw us off our feet, to give us various trials,

disappointments, and suffering, and suffering is no respecter of age.” Dealing with struggles at such a young age has been hard. But through most difficult times, we grow and become stronger. After going through my experiences, I understand what really matters, and I turn away from the triviality of the gripes around us. I started to desire bigger and more meaningful things. If my students open themselves up to this lesson, they will start to desire an exceptional life and nothing less. I would like them to say I taught them this.

Kelly Walsh

Chapter Eight

Stranger in the Classroom

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During the 1990's, Mike Rose, a professor at UCLA, spent four years traveling across the country to spend time in schools as far away from each other as Calexico, California to Baltimore, Maryland. In *Possible Lives* (1996), he writes about the schools and the teachers in each, detailing what those teachers do to instruct students. They display inventiveness, tenacity, and grace, yet they would not consider their teaching “extraordinary,” but just their ordinary work. Rose argued that much of the criticism of teachers and schooling misses just that: the actual, daily work of teachers. His research renewed his faith in education through his observation of the “common, everyday detail of classrooms, [and] the words and gestures of a good teacher” (Rose, 2006). Over the past nine months, I have had the opportunity to watch new teachers, to interview them, and to see as Mike Rose did the everyday detail of their work. For something as broad and as all-encompassing as teaching, when its very ordinariness often precluded paying attention to details, watching teachers teaching has prompted me to think both about individual

teachers and their work, as well as the status of teaching today. Teaching has a complicated past and present; the goals of teaching are often conflated by the exigencies imposed by external sources, and teachers work within schools that can both promote and curtail learning. I've watched how these new teachers negotiate local meanings in school while they practice and develop their craft. I've seen how they experience uncertainty at confusing policies and customs, but how they persist. As much as I'm heartened by watching individual teachers, I'm much less sanguine about the contexts and conditions under which they teach.

During the 2009-10 academic year I was on sabbatical, studying how new English teachers develop their pedagogical content knowledge of writing. The research is a multi-year, qualitative research study, done in collaboration with Lynn Leschke and Susanne Rubenstein of the Wachusett Regional School District. This article emerges as part of that larger qualitative study. The teachers portrayed in the scenes below are teaching throughout Massachusetts in urban, rural, and suburban public school districts. All teachers' names are pseudonyms.

1. Effortless Intentions

No bells ring. Mr. Parker walks to the front of the room and calls out,

“Ok, ladies and gentlemen—this is what we’re going to do today.” They’re 7th graders, so they’re squirming. They shift, turn around to check what a classmate is doing. Two boys in the front—T.J. and Robert—slip their backpacks off and the weight of their packs thud to the floor. Two girls in a far corner giggle. But they’re listening. Through the buzz of commenting, twisting around, poking their heads up from their bags, they produce a sheet or two of paper. That’s the homework from last night, not a fill-in-the-blank worksheet, but two or three pages of scrawled handwriting. Within two minutes Mr. Parker checks everyone’s homework, praising those with full pages and correcting those trying to bluff. He looks down at one boy’s paper: “This was the web we started in class, my friend. You’re trying to pull a fast one on me.” The boy looks up, apparently surprised his ruse didn’t work. After Mr. Parker’s circuit, he compliments the class as a whole for their writing, telling them that part of writing is sharing one’s pieces aloud. For that reason, he would like several students to read excerpts of their writing.

Their assignment was to have picked any age and write a description of a person of that age. One girl reads about a 75-year old woman; another reads about a teenage girl dressing up for her quinceanara. Mr. Parker beams. “Great job! That’s the kind of showing detail we’re talking about. Sophia let us know the age of the character by referencing the quinceanara, and showed

us a little of the character's heritage without saying she is of Latina background." The students have either glanced over to Sophia or are watching Mr. Parker. "Ok, Kevin," Mr. Parker calls to a boy sitting on the opposite side of the room from Sophia, "Finish us up."

Mr. Parker controls the pacing of the class the way a pianist controls the tempo of his music, playing quickly, up-tempo, at the beginning and during class reviews, occasionally slowing down all the way to an adagio, when students write independently. For this lesson, Mr. Parker uses several characterization sheets he had developed for the class. Together, they look at one about naming a character, and Mr. Parker allows them to pair up to discuss fitting names for each short description. The students attack the descriptions: "Oh, one of those Walmart greeters... She'd have to have a really old name... Like Doris." "Or Judy. --Judy's an old lady's name, too." While the students name their way through ten characters, Mr. Parker keeps moving, checking in with one pair, looking over to another. The review and warm up exercises build up to students' own extended writing. By the end of the class, they are drafting character sketches of their own, a character of their choice, pulled from the exercises and short pieces that they have in their writing folder. The classroom is still, or as still as a classroom of 7th graders could ever be while writing. Mr. Parker still moves, but now more slowly, and

at greater distance from the students, almost as if he's taking an aerial view of the classroom. When it's nearing time to wrap up, he moves closer again, and when several students start to flag, he rallies them, reading aloud snippets or lines—just enough to get the gist and capture attention from other students. He says to one, “Now, when we come back as a class—will you read that to everyone?” Jose cracks a smile, shrugs and says, “Yeah.” When Mr. Parker walks away, Jose looks at the two other boys in his cluster and nods his head, as if to say, “not bad.” Mr. Parker says similar things to other students. And so the class goes. By its end, the students are prepped for their homework that night: to extend their character sketch and to bring their drafts in to read. And Mr. Parker stands by the door, talking to each student as he or she leaves, encouraging them for the writing task ahead.

Watching Mr. Parker's classes are lively experiences for me. Each time I visit him, I watch the interplay between him and his students, the way his enthusiasm for the lesson, whether it's a choral reading of “The Raven,” or the students' own texts, infuses the classroom, and how he uses both encouragement and direction to propel his students to read and to write. When I see his 7th or 8th graders, they're *doing*. They're swimming in words, playing with words, talking about words, and delighting in words. What better way to get young students literate than for full and total immersion? The teachers in

Possible Lives were as readily able to work with the system, through the system, and around the system as they were able to teach imaginatively and purposefully. They deeply understood the local culture as well as the prevailing norms of larger society. All of them had the rich, reflective experience necessary to survive and thrive in their school contexts. The teachers I have been observing are at the beginning. As promising as they are now, it will take several more years before they will be fluent in the local school culture and have the tacit teaching knowledge that one can only develop over time. Their work is hard. Many of the doubts or questions they have are as much about their teaching identity and the status of teachers within their own school districts as they are about their understanding of content and pedagogy. Their experiences and thoughts about those conflicts reveal their voices and their mettle as teachers.

Young people attracted to teaching usually cite the social utility of teaching. They identify the contributions teachers make to the common good, the importance of contributing to the lives of children, and their belief in the power of education to improve society. Some, like Danielle Evans, know they want to teach from a young age. She spoke of the influence several teachers had upon her, and how she wanted to be that kind of influence for her own students. For Elizabeth Messina deciding to teach was more of a gradual

decision. She did well in both the sciences and the humanities, but discovered she enjoyed English more, and that she “liked working with young people.” Those reasons gradually drew her toward teaching. When I asked Kelly Thompson why she decided to teach, she talked about wanting to “do something that [she] felt was actively helping and making somewhat of a difference.” That desire, coupled with her love of reading and literature, made teaching “a pretty easy choice.” Education, she believes, “is one of the best things America has. I believe in the idea of an education and a good education. If our schools are good, that’s how everyone gets a chance.” It follows, then, that these new teachers well might expect that teachers would occupy a specific place within society, one that recognizes the contributions teachers make, and one that assumes a level of autonomy and imagination from those who occupy the role of teacher. If they do hold such expectations, their first years of teaching confound them.

The third grade teacher should bring her pupils up to an average of 26 correct combinations in addition per minute. The fourth grade teacher has the task, during the year that the same pupils are under her care, of increasing their addition speed from an average of 26 combinations per minute to an average of 34 combinations per minute. If she does not bring them up to the standard 34, she has failed to perform her

duty in proportion to the deficit; and there is no responsibility beyond the standard.

--Franklin Bobbitt, professor of educational
administration,

University of Chicago, 1912.

The role of teacher has never held a particularly lofty place in American society. That is not to say that teaching and teachers were not appreciated by others, but in terms of status or respect, teachers as a group have just as readily been praised for their neatness or their good manners as they have been for their actual teaching practice. During the late 1800s, teachers were contractually obligated to behave decorously, demonstrating that through avoiding “loitering in ice cream parlors” or not “bobbing their hair,” as one 19th century guide put it. Throughout American history, those in authority, whether they were school boards, policy experts, or even education “czars,” have doubted the ability and effectiveness of teachers, primarily women, to teach. During the early part of the 20th century, the influence of Frederick Taylor’s theory of scientific management spread beyond its original scope of business and inundated public education. Awash with criticism about schooling, public school superintendents flocked to hear Franklin Bobbitt’s application of scientific management to schools. He promised that by

following his principles, schools would be transformed into efficient institutions that would make large returns on public expenditures. To do that, Bobbitt cautioned that teachers would need to be carefully selected, trained, and monitored. In the same way that deciding the best procedures for manufacturing steel would be too difficult for workers to grasp, Bobbitt wrote that "...finding the best methods is too large and too complicated to be laid on the shoulders of teachers" (Bobbitt in Callahan, 1963, p. 87). Therefore, Bobbitt proposed that teachers "must be kept supplied with detailed instructions as to the work to be done, the standards to be reached, the methods to be employed and the appliances to be used" (Bobbitt in Callahan, 1963, p. 89). Such "[D]efiniteness of Instructions" would prevent teachers from any "caprice in method" (Bobbitt in Callahan, 1963, p. 89). Doubt about teachers did not abate as the century progressed.

In 1960, *Time* magazine heralded "teaching machines." Described as almost as much of an educational breakthrough as "filmstrips," teaching machines would "apply to learning what manufacturers applied long ago to industry in developing the mass-production assembly line." Information would be broken down into its "smallest components and simplest parts," and the student would learn "by putting the information together again in quick, easy steps." (*Time*, November 7, 1960). Automated teaching would do what actual

teachers couldn't, and students would be spared the inefficiency of a teacher standing at the blackboard and explaining. Nor were teaching machines the only advancement. Textbook publishers created "teacher proof curriculum," for everything from reading to science, and teachers could use those kits, complete with precisely worded questions and lessons so extensively scripted, that any teacher, perhaps *anyone* for that matter, could teach pupils successfully. "Teacher proof curricula" became as common a term then, as the term "assessment" is now. Even today, some curricular programs use words like "scripted instruction," rather than "teacher proof curriculum," but the promise is the same: that by careful prescription, divorced from an individual teacher's interpretation, intention, or action, we can be assured that students will learn.

Now, local school districts report on all kinds of school and student data for public consumption and examination. The multi-billion dollar federal competitive grant, called the "Race to the Top," stipulates that any state application must certify that no legal or regulatory barriers exist to prevent linking data on student achievement to teacher and principal evaluations. A number of states are considering linking teachers' salaries to their pupils' test scores. So questions about teachers, who they are, what they teach, and how they teach are and will be more pronounced than ever. Many reason that

teaching and learning *are* so important, that we, as a community and as a society, have to discuss who teaches, what they teach, and how they teach. Ignoring those questions would be nothing less than irresponsible. That is true. But the conditions and climate within which those discussions occur suggest that external, quantitative measures can fully represent what teachers do, and that climate is the very space new teachers enter.

Interviewer: *On the whole are you satisfied with being a teacher?*

Second-year teacher: *Yes. Absolutely. Yes.*

Interviewer: *Is this what you thought it would be like?*

Second-year teacher: *Nope! (laughing) Nope! (long pause) I don't really know how thought it would be different but I just... I don't want to say idealistic—but I don't know... I probably shouldn't be saying this... but I have no... I have complete autonomy. Like if I wanted to, I could just say, 'write an essay.' And nobody would ever know that's all I said in terms of my instruction. There's nobody around...*

(voice trails off).

Each of the teachers I have interviewed recounted feeling that despite their best preparation, they often feel unfamiliar and uncertain of what really is going on around them. Starting to teach can feel like a dream, where everyone is speaking in one's native language—but in a dialect one has never heard. Most teachers will need to teach at least three years before they will begin to possess the ease and fluency of a practiced teacher. Both states and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) require three years of full-time teaching before a teacher can apply for the final, or permanent, teaching license or for national board certification. New teachers, understandably, spend most of their time figuring out *how* to teach specific concepts or skills to particular students; they invest significant time developing curricular units, and making adjustments when their students stall. Discretionary time to spend on learning about the macro-level of a school system is scarce, and because schools *are* so familiar, in general, new teachers may well believe that their school and the larger system is comprehensible. When I talk with teachers, their greatest difficulties lie not in the demanding work of teaching, but in understanding and negotiating the unfamiliar and inscrutable dimensions of their school.

In her *Teacher as Stranger* (1973), Maxine Greene argues that for

teachers to be fully authentic, they must take a “stranger’s vantage point” on the everyday reality of schools to reinterpret and inquire what all the taken-for-granted patterns mean. She suggests that teachers ought to “struggle against unthinking submergence in the social reality that prevails” (p. 269). New teachers already have that “stranger’s vantage point” and their struggle isn’t about an “unthinking submergence” into school culture, but in understanding the tacit assumptions, policies that seem to constrain learning, and confounding practices. And as new teachers, they inhabit a tenuous, uncertain position, not knowing if a misgiving is well-grounded or ill-informed, and not always having the confidence or security to ask.

Schools generally provide “new teacher orientation,” but they often focus more on the procedures, rarely, if ever, on the school context. To the uninitiated, the easiest gaffe to make is to believe that since one is familiar with schools, that one is familiar with a particular school, or that one can use the archetype of “school” as a translation guide for what’s going on in any school setting. That would be akin to substituting Hamlet for Holden Caulfield. New teachers have to discover on their own about the recent history and back story of the school and the unspoken rules that govern how teachers interact with themselves and the administration. If they don’t, making a mistake in that area has far greater implications than a mistake in filling out a referral form.

Several months into Tim Parker's first year of teaching, he attended a department meeting for middle and high school teachers. On the agenda was a discussion about student writing assessment across the middle and high school grades, and during the meeting, teachers started talking about how much time they had to spend on prepping for state testing. Their comments touched upon a question Tim had had, so he joined in the discussion. He said that he "didn't understand what was going on" with respect to the amount of time spent on test prep and that he was "concerned about losing so much instructional time" to the battery of practice tests issued every four to six weeks. According to Tim, he didn't say anything that other teachers weren't already voicing, adding, "I know I can get feisty, but I also know when to shut up."

Speaking up at that meeting, though, triggered a reaction that left Tim stunned and demoralized. A day or so later, the curriculum coordinator came by during his lunch period and asked to speak with him. She told him that he was inappropriate during the meeting. The episode, she told him, wouldn't "go anywhere," but that she wanted to give him a heads up. Tim believes that that same person told a number of other teachers, as well as the principal, about the meeting. That's when things got even worse for him. He had an observation conference scheduled with his principal later that week. At the end of the conference, the principal mentioned that they [referring to the administration]

heard there was an incident at the curriculum meeting. Then, according to Tim, the principal told him: “what you should do as a new teacher is just take a back seat and don’t say anything at meetings.” For several days, Tim said he was shaken up, not knowing if his job was in jeopardy and bewildered that he had been warned for saying what other, senior, teachers had said, as well. Such was his blunt introduction to teacher socialization in that school.

Most difficult for Tim was that he believed that such frequent test prepping did, indeed, disrupt students’ learning. Every four to six weeks, he would have to end whatever students were doing, so that they could spend three to five days on practice tests. So, raising that concern seemed the right thing to do. His only other experience of faculty meetings was at his student teaching site. At that school, Tim recalled, teachers vigorously debated and questioned curricular policies, so he thought when the teachers questioned the test prep at this school, he could certainly join in. He spoke as a “stranger,” unaware of the social, political, and cultural web of meanings resonating in a discussion about testing. And although at the heart, his concerns were rooted in his perceptions about student learning, raising his questions explicitly crossed a tacit boundary of behavior within that school. He walked away from the experience, convinced that the administration only wanted the teachers “to be quiet and not ask questions.”

Not all new teachers have such stark experiences of being a “stranger,” or an outsider. Yet, even in schools where new teachers felt supported by the administration, understanding and interpreting school practices and policies complicates teachers’ actions. In public schools, states typically mandate curricular goals, generally explicating the content and skills students should know or be able to do by given grades. How those goals are accomplished is generally left up to individual schools, so they can decide how to teach students reading, writing, or math. What appears as if it would be straightforward to new teachers—teaching students the curriculum—is not always. Teachers work within a bureaucracy in which resources are scarce and schooling practices, often evolving because of the scarcity of resources, can push against students’ individual learning. The teachers’ beliefs—that they are there to teach, to foster student achievement, to help students develop good habits, to promote lifelong learning, and to assist individual social mobility—conflict with what they observe, contributing to misgivings about what they think is right, but what they see occurring day by day.

2. Technology?

The class had proceeded through its usual warm up: individual practice, reviewing parts of speech, and reminders from Ms. Evans about their

upcoming assignments. “Remember, the next section of your draft is due tomorrow. Everyone should have the quotes and the guide to help you along. If you absolutely need to sign out a book, come see me.”

*Now, the 7th graders sat in pairs, reviewing vocabulary words printed on 2 x4 inch grey cardstock. A word was on one side, its part of speech and definition on the other. Ms. Evans had given them instructions two minutes earlier for how they should review. First, one student would read the word and the definition, and the other would repeat it; after a few moments, she would indicate that they should switch. When she gave them the directions, she reminded them that they would see all of the words again in the upcoming chapters of *The Giver*, the young adult dystopian novel the class was reading. The students then read—some softly, others haltingly, their voices both blurring together and distinguishable as they read aloud words like “permeate,” “exasperate,” and “luminous.” One boy looked at his word and said, “I can’t pronounce that.” His partner peered across the desk and read “wretch-ed,” emphasizing its two syllables. Ms. Evans paused next to Taylor and Jon while Taylor read aloud the word and definition for “wince.” Jon repeated the definition, then scrunched his face for good effect. He looked up at Ms. Evans. “Did you make these?” he said, pointing to the cards. “Mrs. Keating and I did,” Ms. Evans replied, referring to her aide at the opposite*

side of the room. “When did you make them?” Ms. Evans smiled at him and circled her finger in the universally understood motion of “turn around and get back to work.” He did and she moved on. After four minutes, Ms. Evans collected the mini-cards and asked the students to recap what had happened in the last chapters of The Giver. She deposited the mini flash cards in a file cabinet, then walked to the back of the room and picked up books stacked in a bookshelf.

As the students pieced together plot details, Ms. Evans helped them bridge connections between one event and another, focusing on how the community’s rulers controlled people, through their restriction of human memory and emotions. She circled the classroom and slipped a book off her pile onto each student’s desk. She asked them about how the main character, Jonas, reacted as he discovered how the rulers deceived the community residents, even euthanizing those who were old or frail, yet euphemistically calling it a “releasing.” The students recounted key events and paraphrased what characters like Jonas and the Giver said. Ms. Evans also asked students about Rosemary, a character mentioned vaguely. With every question she asked, several students answered at once, but because of the small class size, she was able to acknowledge and weave together their responses. She ended that segment of the lesson with “Ok, you’ll need to pay attention to Rosemary.

We'll find out today why the Giver found Rosemary's release too painful to watch. So, now, everyone turn today to page 153, chapter 20." She moved back to her desk and stood in front of her desktop computer. "Ok, everyone ready? Everyone there?" Students nodded.

Ms. Evans checked on Tom, who was still riffling through the book, then clicked her mouse. An audio recording of The Giver started, and students read along and listened to the actor reading. Ms. Evans stood, too, and read along in her book. For the next fifteen minutes, they read and listened. The only sounds, other than the recording, were the occasional shifting of a student and the regular turning of pages. Some students sat back, their legs splayed in front of them as they read; others leaned on one hand and read; still others turned sideways, curling themselves over the book. Soft music cued the last lines of the chapter: "I had a daughter. Her name was Rosemary," the Giver said." Students looked up at Ms. Evans and she hummed the familiar notes of Beethoven's 5th to emphasize chapter's suspense. A boy echoed her tune and smiled back at her.

"So why is Rosemary so important?" Ms. Evans asked. Again, Ms. Evans asked several questions to check students' comprehension, prompting each student to add to the previous student's response. Students recalled the plot, but the implications of the main character's plan to escape left several

students confused. Because Jonas had been receiving all of the collective memories of that community's past, once he escaped, those memories of joy, happiness, pain and suffering, would be released back to all members of the community. Ms. Evans continued questioning until students understood that idea. Gradually, students talked about how the community would be better when it was no longer "perfect," and they were able to remember and experience emotions again. They talked about how humans need to experience pain, not just "perfection," and how that community's life wasn't really "perfect" at all. They also were able to identify the courage of both the Giver and Jonas for planning such a dangerous venture. After Ms. Evans checked that all of her students understood that point, she asked students to get out their journals. She asked them to think about the novel's plot and then to write about something that they wished they had the power to change and why. Students did the usual shuffling and reordering of their notebooks and books, pulled out their journals, and soon got to writing. As they settled in to write, Ms. Evans circulated throughout the room, collected each of the novels and put them back on the shelves.

We often read about the promises of technology for schools: things like how interactive whiteboard programs will advance student learning or how wikis and blogs will encourage student writing. Those promises are built upon

the assumption that the basic materials any class needs actually exist. Yet, each of the teachers whom I interviewed, talked about how they adjust their teaching because they lack sufficient instructional materials, namely books. In Danielle Evans' class, she plans her lessons based upon how many books she has and how much reading she can get students to do within a class period. She explained that she doesn't "have enough books for them to take home," and "[t]he ones [she has] are falling apart." She has just enough, about 17, for one class of the five she teaches, so that was why she distributed and collected the novels during the lesson. She has students read the book during class and write down notes and quotes so that they can refer to them at home or when they write. When I asked Danielle if she thought her situation was unique, she did not think so. She said that her mentor teacher has bought additional copies of each novel she teaches so that she would have complete class sets and could then allow each student to take a book home to read. Building that class library, though, took several years for that teacher, all at her own expense. Although Ms. Evans hadn't yet bought books, she had bought about \$400.00 worth of classroom supplies by mid-year. During Elizabeth Messina's first year of teaching, she had several large classes where almost thirty-percent of the students were English language learners, and she didn't have enough instructional materials for them. Her colleagues recommended that she buy

supplementary skills books at Barnes & Noble or Borders, and she did.

Purchasing classroom materials is a regular occurrence for most teachers. In a 2007 Edutopia poll conducted among classroom teachers, the average amount teachers spent was \$500.00 per year, but thirty-percent of the teachers spent more than \$1,000.00 annually (<http://www.edutopia.org/amount-spent-classroom-supplies-2007>).

Those actions are laudatory instances of teachers' generosity. But praising teachers for purchasing classroom materials sidesteps the more important issue. Once teachers are praised for their generosity, then the actual need is glossed over. Collectively, the school district or the community is spared dealing with how they *will* provide enough materials for all of the students. The lack of materials becomes just another everyday fact in the day to day running of the school, so it becomes like wall paper—visible but ignored most of the time. Teachers adjust their instruction because not having enough books becomes part of their regular school day. And even more fundamental, insufficient materials lead to other practices and policies that counter, rather than advance, student learning. For new teachers, those policies and practices are inscrutable, adding another layer of “strangeness” to all they must interpret as new teachers.

Assigning homework to students has always been a regular part of a

teacher's instruction. It is clear that students cannot develop new skills without practice or read all that they need to within the limitations of a school day.

Homework serves purposes for student learning, and all of them are essential.

Yet, most of the teachers I have interviewed have described schools where homework is either minimal or absent. In some schools, the intention may not be to omit homework; however, when teachers don't have enough books for each student, then assigning homework becomes well-nigh impossible, especially in a literature class. In other schools, a no-homework policy is explicit. For Danielle Evans, she follows the principal's policy not to assign homework to middle school students. According to Danielle, this policy stems from the lack of books and the students' tendency not to complete homework; so, omitting homework could prevent students from falling behind in class—at least in the principal's view. That, in turn, could prevent students from dropping out of school, a concern within the school district.

As Danielle spoke about the policy, she also acknowledged the flaws within it. Students become accustomed to minimal expectations for their academic work, and Danielle noted that sometimes students will even resist doing independent work in class. It is one of the challenges she occasionally has within her own classes, so she devotes much of her planning imagining what activities will entice students to do their work. She notes, ruefully, that

some students could achieve more, but that they work inconsistently. The no-homework policy has a ripple effect. Danielle mentioned that high school teachers complain about the students' work ethic. Without any consistent homework policy, Danielle explained, "...they get to high school and they're expected to do homework. But they haven't gotten it in middle school, so they're not used to it, and then they *really* just don't do it." Each of the teachers who talked about insufficient materials was troubled by how that affected student learning. Each of the teachers believed that if the school had more materials, school policies would not undercut student learning.

Teachers receive a barrage of messages contrary to student learning. Lack of educational opportunity isn't always presented in boldface. It happens when academic departments accept that students "just won't read" and that acceptance slowly shapes prevailing teaching practices. It happens when schools don't have enough books, so to avoid student conflict, schools carve back on demands for studying. It happens when the "realities" of that school district, whatever they are, muddy the school's purpose. New teachers may well see the contradictory implications of school policy, yet few will feel secure enough to challenge one. When they do, similar to Tim Parker, they will second-guess themselves, knowing that they asked the right question yet unnerved by what may happen to them. Getting a reputation as a "rabble

rouser” isn’t the path to success as a teacher. New teachers soon learn that.

3. Testing

“Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else.”

—Thomas Gradgrind,

Hard Times

No other topic came up more frequently in my interviews with teachers than the omnipresence of state testing. These teachers have begun teaching in an age where quantitative measures mean almost everything, and the reporting of individual schools’ test scores are published nationally, locally, and on-line, so that with the click of a mouse, anyone can locate a school district’s or an individual school’s aggregated and disaggregated scores state test scores. With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, federal law mandated that all public schools would test pupils annually in reading and math, and that each school district would be accountable for adequate yearly progress, or AYP, according to benchmarks set by each state. It has had the largest impact on public K-12 education and the most far-reaching impact since the original Elementary and Secondary Act was passed in 1965. Schools that do not make

the AYP benchmarks the first year are first put on notice as “schools in need of improvement,” and each year a school does not meet AYP, it must meet increasingly stringent measures established to improve or restructure the school. Ultimately, by the fifth year a school misses AYP benchmarks, the school would have to restructure completely, which means that it could convert to a charter school; replace its principal and faculty; turn over to private management; or turn over to the state.

The premise of the law—that schools should work diligently and effectively to promote student achievement and to shrink the achievement gap between different groups of students, namely minority and low-income students from white and middle or high income students—is one that no one involved in education would oppose. However, the use of state-mandated tests and the sanctions imposed are the sticking points for many educators and researchers. Rather than improving education for all students, scholars have argued that NCLB is ineffective, narrowing the curriculum and undermining public education, at a time when the country can ill-afford weakening its school system (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Perlstein, 2007; Ravitch, 2010; Rose, 2009).

For these teachers’ day-to-day teaching, the test looms large. Several have dedicated MCAS classes, strictly designed to prep students for the

MCAS, where they practice reading comprehension questions or practice grammar and usage points. For others, their schools' English Language Arts departments integrate MCAS prep into the curriculum, and that usually means taking one day a week to do "MCAS prep work." One works in a school where district-wide assessments are given every four to six weeks to track how students are progressing on each of the standards measured by MCAS. Only one of the teachers I've been observing is given the flexibility to address MCAS standards how she sees fit. During Tim Parker's first year of teaching, other teachers told him that from January on, "it's just MCAS, MCAS, MCAS." For Danielle Evans class, she ordered past practice books from the state, but she also tries "to do creative things with them, too, because it's so boring." Part of the vocabulary and usage practice she designs for her classes specifically ties into what they are reading. Many of Danielle Evans' students are doubtful if school has any connection to their lives. That's of particular concern for her because sizeable numbers of students in the district drop out of high school.

Elizabeth Messina explained that in her school, "the English curriculum is very geared toward test prep." Her high school sophomores are "required to complete seven MCAS response questions" during the first term. She has "a

writing folder checklist that says, ‘how many MCAS open responses have you done? How many long responses have you done?’” Elizabeth submits that periodically to her department chair, not for feedback, but to document that she has assigned those prompts. None of the teachers believe that such explicit test prepping was meaningful for student learning. In Elizabeth’s case, the school promoted a specific model for student writing, one that each teacher is expected to use for the students. Since they practice this one particular formula over and over, “They [the students] get used to writing with a formula and it raises the test scores so everyone’s... happy.” There lies the irony. Students become so practiced in formulaic writing, that once the testing is over and they are given different, more open-ended writing assignments, the students are flummoxed. Conscientious students continue to write in the formulaic way, logically assuming that what is being rewarded on MCAS will be rewarded for non-MCAS writing. Less motivated students become more resistant to write at any length because they seem to believe, according to the teachers, that the only school work that “counts” is what they do for the MCAS. For all of the teachers, they remarked that excessive test prepping drains time away from students’ genuine writing and study of literature. Test prepping becomes the albatross around each teacher’s neck, as he or she complies with district expectations or requirements for teachers, and their ambivalence is palpable.

Elizabeth was stark about the impact prepping has had upon her work: “I don’t see myself as a teacher who ever just teaches to a test. I think if it ever came down to that, I don’t know if this would be the profession I wanted to be in.”

It would be easy to let the conditions under which these teachers work suppress hopes for them as teachers. They have joined a profession in which the public often question their merits and their intentions; they’ve joined schools where they often feel adrift, trying to make sense of how particular schools function, and they may teach in places where policies overturn their expectations of how teachers ought to teach pupils. Without minimizing any of those ongoing and pervasive pressures, I have hope for these teachers. That hope resides largely in who these people are. They persist. They act, guided by their belief and understanding of what their students should learn and how they believe they ought to be as teachers. These teachers, testing their voices, still uncertain of their role within the school or the security of their position, labor each day to interpret what’s going on around them. That work is hard. Yet, teaching always has been hard for those committed to it. And these teachers, despite their occasional doubts, are.

As much as their teaching responsibilities may be molded into predetermined forms, these teachers resist those boundaries, and their actions

demonstrate the moral and intellectual agency that characterizes good teachers. One way they do that is to hold the confounding policies in abeyance, and practice what they believe will best teach their students. To do that, they close their classroom door and teach. Elizabeth Messina continues to have misgivings about her school's prescriptive writing curriculum and its emphasis on test prepping. She continues to worry about her status at the school as well as the unyielding measures for teacher accountability. But she's resisting. That resistance helps Elizabeth from narrowing the curriculum into perfunctory exercises and formula writing. Reading literature, for Elizabeth, should provide students invitations to imagine and to understand others. Whenever she talks about teaching, Elizabeth expresses her desire to engage students in literature and language. Because of her insistence that students should have chances to imagine and experience the aesthetic, Elizabeth creates literature units that call for students' imagination, rather than only their skill in following directions. When she taught a Shakespearean play, she led the students in close critical reading, as is customary. Then, to pull students even further into *Macbeth*, she developed a Promptbook assignment for them, and it is the antithesis of a prescriptive assignment. Its purpose is for students to visualize a scene in detail, and plan how it would be performed. It is a holistic assignment, including everything from stage directions, to set and costume design, to

character analysis. When students worked on their promptbook, they also had time to talk with each other and to Elizabeth, so they, as a group, could talk about major and minor characters and their motivations for their actions. By annotating the script, offering directions for how certain lines should be said and what characters should do, the students delved far deeper into characters' intentions than they would have by completing conventional study questions. For another assignment, to help students explore *The Secret Life of Bees*, Elizabeth created a project in which students traced the animal imagery throughout the novel. At first, Elizabeth hesitated with assigning the project because it called for a "different kind of writing" than that the MCAS tests. Yet, she pushed forward with it, and resisted the easier choice to fold her teaching into the MCAS mold. She said, "[t]hat's not what's on the MCAS....which is the issue. But I know that what I'm teaching is more....than that."

The teachers I've seen have learned the importance of shutting their door and teaching. It gives them the space—both physically and figuratively—to retain some autonomy over their teaching, pursuing their best goals for student learning. Kelly Thompson, like other teachers, had problems finding enough reading materials for her students. She wanted her students to

read an Edgar Allen Poe short story, but she didn't have enough copies of the book for her class. Without the story, the goals she had for her unit would have been thwarted, yet she was reluctant to have students read the story in class because she thought that would "be a waste of class time." When she mentioned that problem to a colleague, that teacher told her that she might be able to find the story on Project Gutenberg, a website that offers free electronic books. She did. Kelly asked her class how many students had access to a computer at home, and for those who did, she provided them with the website address and the story title. For those who didn't, she signed out individual books to them. So, all of her students, whether they read the story online at home or read the story from a borrowed book, were able to read the story for homework. In one of Kelly's conversations with me, she mentioned that the principal had told her that she sometimes expects too much of what her students can do. If she had followed the principal's reasoning, she would not have assigned the Poe story, omitting the homework reading or perhaps selecting an available but less challenging text. When I asked her what she thought about the principal's comment, she quietly replied, "I respectfully disagree."

Each of the teachers I've observed point to what their students can do, or what they believe the students can do *next*, if they, the teachers, are able to design engaging activities within their classroom. Their classroom becomes a haven for students to dive into language and literature. When I last visited Danielle Evans, her students were writing drafts of their memoirs. Some were hunkered down in front of computer monitors, typing in what they had drafted on paper. Others were sitting in pairs, reading each other's drafts. Danielle was orchestrating it all, ensuring that the pairs were keeping their conversation related to the writing and pausing to talk with one boy who seemed completely stuck at one point in his draft. On the classroom walls, Danielle had posted some of the previous class's finished papers, mounted on brightly colored construction paper. She kept working with the boy who was stuck, until he said the next sentence that might fit in his draft. "See, that's it. You just needed to talk it out. Now you've got it," she smiled. As she walked away from him, she said, "next week, we'll have your paper up there," and she pointed to the display wall. Danielle, like the other teachers I've been observing, underscore a "tenacious humility" (Hansen, 2001) about work with students. They keep their focus on what their students are doing; they keep their attention on how they are doing it, and they keep working to design engaging activities or ways to help their students push beyond what they already know or can do. That

kind of intense, involved teaching helps them pursue what is best in teaching, and to shrug off, at least temporarily, external, tangential pressures.

In *Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching* (2001), David Hansen writes of the significance of the individual teacher to all of education. He claims that no other factor “has greater weight in influencing the intellectual and moral quality of the instruction children, youth, and adults receive during their years of classroom experience” (p. 20). Hansen expresses a conception of teaching wedded to a long tradition, one in which the person who teaches is more important than the practical and temporal concerns of politics, budgets, or perceptions. The further attention moves from the teacher and students to larger, cloudier contexts, the more the teachers themselves will need to be tenacious. That may mean resisting poorly grounded policies or acknowledging their own uncertainties as they teach in ways that best help students read, write, imagine and understand. Teaching is a human endeavor. Each of the teachers I’ve observed will continue to judge what’s good, what’s true and integral to their work as teachers and to their own identity as teachers. As good teachers, they may always stand a little bit outside, looking in at what’s happening in schools. Rather than seeing that as some phase to be gotten through, I hope that these teachers, with all the promise they show, hold

fast to that vantage point. It well may be that being “a stranger” will be the best way for them to connect with students and to foster the goals of education they wish for all their students.

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