Back to School Primer for Parents

Catholic Answers

Want Catholic Children? Teach Them the Natural Law!

By Leila Miller

Ask a child the following questions:

What would happen if your mom tried to sew buttons onto your shirt using a fork instead of a needle?

What if you tried to write a letter with a spaghetti noodle?

How far would your dad's car get if he filled the gas tank with water?

Would eating sand keep your body healthy and well-nourished?

You and the child can have a lot of fun with those types of questions. Even a young kid can understand the silliness, the futility—and even the harm—of using something against its nature or purpose. And just as we humans create and design things with a certain purpose and end in mind, God did the same thing when he created and designed mankind.

"What is the nature of a thing?" and "What is the nature of a human being?"—these questions are the basis for understanding the natural law.

Natural law (not to be confused with the laws of nature) is simply another term for the *universal moral law*, which is inscribed on the heart of every human. Natural law applies to all people and in all eras without exception. In other words, the natural law is not merely "morality for Catholics" or a "religious thing"—it is universal. The *Catechism* puts it like this: "The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie" (1954).

Unlike truths we know through divine revelation (such as the nature of the Trinity or the sacraments), natural law can be accessed by the light of human reason alone. That is why atheists and believers alike can understand that things like murder, rape, stealing, lying, disrespecting one's parents, and even cutting someone in line are unjust or immoral acts.

Now, that doesn't ensure that individual humans will actually obey the moral law, nor that sin or bad formation will not obscure it, but natural law is knowable nonetheless. Pope Leo XIII describes the natural law:

The natural law is written and engraved in the soul of each and every man, because it is human reason ordaining him to do good and forbidding him to sin. . . . But this command of human reason would not have the force of law if it were not the voice and interpreter of a higher reason to which our spirit and our freedom must be submitted (*Libertas Praestantissimum*).

As anyone can see from the silly questions at the beginning of this article, if we use a thing against its nature or design, things don't go so well. But if we use a thing according to its nature or design, there is flourishing. The same goes for human beings: when we act according to our nature and design, we see human flourishing, which means we see virtue, strong families, and thriving societies. When we act against our nature and design, we get confusion, disorder, and sin.

All around us today, we see that people are adrift and disoriented. “Progressivism,” specifically sexual progressivism, is redefining morality so rapidly that we can’t be sure that what is acceptable today will still be acceptable tomorrow. When we institute relativism as the norm for morality, nothing is fixed, everything is shifting beneath our feet. Because of that, we must bring back a way of teaching that will give people, especially our children, a sure footing.

To accomplish this as Catholics, we should look to our patrimony. St. Paul talks about the natural law explicitly (it’s not a new idea):

When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them (Rom. 2:14-15).

As Americans, we can look to our founding fathers, who based our nation’s laws on the natural law (the Declaration of Independence references the “Laws of Nature’s God”), and to the writings of Abraham Lincoln.

And in 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. said in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*:
How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.

In just a few decades, we have lost our immemorial acceptance of the natural law and replaced it with the idea that whatever feels right to the individual is morally correct. And because we now live in a culture that eschews reality and actual facts—denying even biology and basic science—the teaching of natural law will be more, not less, effective than in previous generations, in the same way that a light shines brighter in the darkness.

So let’s look at some other “silly” questions but with a focus on our human nature:

- Is it good to purposely cause a healthy bodily system to malfunction?
- Can a man become a woman simply by having his private parts mutilated or destroyed?
- Is it the nature of the reproductive system to be used within another person’s digestive tract?
- Are we ever permitted to target and kill a defenseless and innocent human being?

These questions, like the silly questions at the beginning, are fundamentally understandable. We are hardwired to “get it,” since the soul was created to recognize truth.

Unfortunately, even some Catholics now argue that modern souls cannot possibly understand or accept natural law arguments and that they “won’t work” with this generation.

I say baloney. If anything, this era of moral relativism and even complete detachment from material reality makes natural law more attractive than ever. The only thing keeping it from forming and enlightening our children is the fact that we no longer teach it. It’s up to all of us to change that.

In Defense of Indoctrination

By Trent Horn

I've recently finished a new book with Leila Miller, a Catholic author and mom of eight children, that will help the countless parents who have sought our advice here at Catholic Answers how to explain issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and pornography to their children.

Our book discusses ways to communicate these teachings to children of any age. This includes little ones who may be prematurely exposed to these issues through influences like classmates or the media and need a sensitive response.

Many parents will welcome such a book. Some others, I have no doubt, will accuse us of "brainwashing" or "indoctrinating" children rather than letting them learn things for themselves.

Here's our response to them: "So what? What's wrong with indoctrinating children?"

Education or indoctrination?

Have you ever heard someone say, "You shouldn't teach children!" or "Don't impose your views on children through education!" Surely not.
People think it's wonderful to "teach" or "educate" children but that it's wrong to "indoctrinate" children—even though *teaching, educating, and indoctrinating all have the same root meaning.*

Of course, a word's meaning can change over time (something linguists call a "semantic shift"). For example, the word *awful* used to mean "awe-inspiring," not "bad" or "terrible" like it means today. Similarly, *indoctrination* now has a pejorative meaning on par with "brainwashing," or the coercive imposition of knowledge or opinion.

If someone ever claims that you are "indoctrinating" your child when you impart Catholic teaching, ask the person to explain what he means by "indoctrination."

For example, atheist J.D. Brucker says:

Indoctrination means to heavily influence someone into believing a particular set of ideas, whether they are political, cultural, or religious. Most often, this is done when the individual is particularly young, when he or she lacks the ability to reasonably conclude whether or not a statement is true.

Likely, though, you will be able to show that such definition leads to contradictions. For example, under this definition, atheists who teach their children that "marriage is just the union of two adults who love each other" (and so same-sex marriage is good) would be practicing indoctrination. They are heavily imposing a cultural idea onto young children who can't critically examine what they are learning (such as by comparing it to the case for natural marriage).

An atheistic parent might give reasons for why two men or two women can marry ("because marriage is for people who love each other") but a religious parent could also give reasons for why marriage is a union between one man and one woman. Moreover, if atheists are justified in teaching

their children the value of reason over faith, then Christians are justified in teaching their children the value of faith working in harmony with reason.

Bruckner complains that children who are indoctrinated "had no choice in the matter" but that's true for any child's education. Atheist parents teach their children what they believe is true, and religious parents should have the right to do this too.

Rhetorical sleight of hand

To say that religious parents practice "indoctrination" whereas non-religious parents only "educate" is nothing more than anti-religious bigotry. Speaking of which, Richard Dawkins, the author of *The God Delusion*, asks in that book, *"Isn't it always a form of child abuse to label children as possessors of beliefs that they are too young to have thought about?"* Dawkins then essentially claims that since we would never say that a four-year-old was a "Republican" or a "Democrat" we should not say a certain child is a "Christian child" or a child of any religion.

The only thing being abused here, though, is common sense—when Dawkins equates a common cultural label with physical or emotional violence. Furthermore, labels like "Christian" or "Jewish" are closer in kind to labels of nationality rather than political party. We might say a child is "American" or "British" because he is a citizen of one of those countries and because the child is being raised with specifically American or British values. Likewise, an infant can be said to be a "Christian" because through baptism something has objectively changed in the child's soul and he is now a citizen of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and is being raised with heavenly values.

This also rebuts the claim that children should not be taught the virtues of religion because that is something they should be able to decide for themselves when they are adults. I agree that once a child becomes an adult he should be free to renounce either his religion or his citizenship. But until that time, parents should be free to teach their child what they believe to be true and necessary for the child's development. Just as we wouldn't withhold medical treatment from a child until he was old enough to decide if he approved of Western medicine, we shouldn't withhold faith from a child just because he isn't old enough to make an adult choice about what he believes.

Indoctrination and religion

Some atheists claim that indoctrination is necessary for religion to exist and that all children would naturally reject it if given the chance. A.C. Grayling claims, *"We are all born atheists… and it takes a certain amount of work on the part of the adults in our community to persuade [children] differently."*

This is a bad argument for a couple of reasons. First, atheism involves the denial of God's existence or at least the claim there are no good reasons to believe God exists. My colleague Jimmy Akin says in his book *A Daily Defense* that babies are not atheists but "alogists" (from the Greek *a-logia*, meaning "without concept"). They can't even *understand* the concept of God, much less reject it. In addition, recent research has shown that, contra Grayling, children are naturally predisposed to believing in God (which makes given that religion is a universal human quality).

According to Justin Barrett in *New Scientist* magazine,

Drawing upon research in developmental psychology, cognitive anthropology and particularly the cognitive science of religion, I argue that religion comes nearly as naturally to us as language. The vast majority of humans are "born believers," naturally inclined to find religious claims and explanations attractive.

The real issue

A recent visitor to my Facebook page said that children are *"born atheists until they're old enough to be indoctrinated."* I replied, *"That's like saying everyone is born an amoral anarchist until they are 'indoctrinated' to follow rules. Such an observation neither makes atheism look good nor indoctrination look bad."*

He then responded, *"Not all indoctrination is created equally. Some forms are necessary for becoming a functional member of society. Others are more, shall we say, optional."*

And that's the issue: indoctrination itself is not wrong, because children have to be taught something in order to grow up to be functional members of society.

The question is, *what should they be taught*?

Just because some parents might teach their children false or harmful ideas does not mean that the majority of competent parents should lose the right to raise their children according to their own values. I think atheism and Islam, for example, are false, but I believe that Muslim and atheist parents should have the right to raise their children according to those belief systems, provided that none of the particular beliefs they teach violate the child's rights (e.g. imposing child marriage or female genital mutilation).

Atheists might object, *"Children have the right to not be taught what isn't true!"* but this could be used against atheists who teach the lie that God is as fictional as Santa Claus (or parents who teach small children that Santa Claus exists), as well as parents who teach that homosexual behavior and transgender identity are normal. Rather than having imposed on them a single standard for what they can teach and what they can't, parents should have freedom to teach their children beliefs upon which there is *reasonable* disagreement in our society.
This means that Catholics and other Christians should have the right teach their children about God and his moral law without being unfairly labeled as practitioners of "indoctrination."

How to Explain Abortion to Little Kids

By Leila Miller

After her children had gone to sleep one night, pro-life author Jean Garton was finishing work on a presentation on abortion that included a picture of a baby aborted at ten weeks. She narrates what happened next:

Suddenly I heard, rather than saw, another person near me. At the sound of a sharp intake of breath, I turned to find that my youngest son, then a sleepy, rumpled three-year-old, had unexpectedly and silently entered the room. His small voice was filled with great sadness as he asked, "Who broke the baby?"

Explaining abortion to a young child is an awful, horrifying thing to do. In our home, this explanation is necessary because of our involvement with crisis pregnancy centers and diocesan pro-life activities. Our kids start to hear the word *abortion* at a fairly young age, and so at a certain point I must tell them, gently, the meaning of the word.

It's dreadfully surreal when a *mother* first exposes the concept of abortion to her child. I usually take a deep breath and say, *"Sometimes mommies or daddies don't want their babies, and they pay a doctor to take the baby out too soon."* Obviously, this is simplistic and not the full range of scenarios, but it leads to the next question: *"But what happens to the baby?"* Your honest answer: *"It's very sad, honey, but the baby dies."*

So far, each of my children has had the same reaction: disbelief, confusion, denial, and alarm. *"How could anyone do that?"* they ask, recoiling. *"Who forces a mommy to do that?" "Why would a doctor do that to a little baby?"*

Children are naturally pro-life, and they really get the horror of it.

You don't have to paint a picture or get graphic. The idea of someone deliberately killing a baby in his mother's womb is so foreign to small children as to be absurd, nonsensical, insane. Their little minds sense the disorder and evil immediately, and they reject it.
After our little ones experience that initial shock, we must be sure to remind them about God's mercy and about our duty love both the babies and their mothers. You might say something like this:

I know! It's so sad that someone would do this. Some mommies think they can't take care of the baby and others don't even think it is *a baby, because people have lied to them about that. But lots of mommies feel terrible later, because deep down they know that what they did was wrong. But God loves us and he always wants to help us, even if we do something really bad. So let's pray for the mommies, daddies, and doctors who do this, because God and those little babies want to see all of them in heaven one day.*

Sometimes children learn of the value of human life when their mother has a miscarriage. When I miscarried our seventh child, our children were heartbroken. They had anticipated and already loved this little one as their sibling! We allowed them to mourn, to write poems, and to draw pictures for the child we lost. We have those memorials to this day, tucked away. None of them, even those in adulthood now, have forgotten that sibling. They hope in an eternal meeting one day. What a beautiful lesson for children about the inherent worth of each and every human life!

When we explain abortion to children, it can feel like we're taking away their innocence. After all, once they understand that our nation not only allows but celebrates the murder of children nestled in their mothers' wombs, just as they or their siblings had been nestled so recently, how could they not be affected to their core? But it's important to balance the darkness of abortion with the light of God's truth. Here are three concepts that refute the pro-abortion mindset (and many other evils), which you can and should instill in even your smallest children:

The Beauty of Human Life: This is the easiest (and most fun) way to teach your children to be pro-life. There are lots of great videos on the internet that show human development in the womb through 4D ultrasound, computer graphics, and even high definition videos shot from inside the uterus with a tiny camera. Another fun thing is to borrow a fetal model display from a pro-life organization and let your children hold and love these tiny model babies. And here is a "guessing game" that will delight your children and stick with them forever: pull out the children's Bible and have them tell you how many people were at the Visitation (Luke 1:39-44). They may guess two at first, but then they will see that there were four: Mary, Elizabeth, Jesus, and John!

The Equal Dignity of Human Beings: I remember reading a pro-life author who described what happened when his seven-year-old saw a double amputee. She whispered to her father that the man had no legs, but then she said to him, drawing on the lessons he taught her, "But he is still just as valuable as everyone else!" Teach your children early that our dignity and value as human beings is *the same* no matter how smart, strong, or old we are—or aren't. And of course, as they say in that children's classic, *Horton Hears a Who*: "A person's a person, no matter how small."

Good Ends Don't Justify Evil Means: The most basic principle of the natural law and Christian morality is, "Do good, avoid evil." Unfortunately, some people think that it's okay to do "what is necessary" to achieve a good end, even if the means of getting there are evil.
Always remind your children that, if they have a problem, they must never do something wrong—even a little wrong—in order to solve it. For example, a kid can't cheat "just a little" on a test, in order to get a good grade and make Dad proud, just as Dad can't secretly skip out on his work behind his boss's back to spend time with his family.

Finally, explain to your children that many people *have* changed their hearts on the issue of abortion, including women and men who have procured them and even abortionists themselves! Some of them even fight against abortion similar to the way that St. Paul, who used to murder Christians, went on to become one of the greatest Christians of all time. Let them know that even though the world can be an unfair and even scary place, God is bigger than the world because he created it. Jesus said, *"In the world you will have trouble; but don't be afraid, I have overcome the world!"* (John 16:33).

On the Indoctrination of Children

By Jon Sorensen

Most of my friends are atheists and agnostics. Many of them are of a variety quite different from the "new atheists," in that they are content in their disbelief, not feeling a need to berate those of us who believe in God.

But I do have several friends who are antagonistic to religious belief.
One topic that comes up regularly in conversations with them is raising children. My atheist friends often tell me that they teach their children to think for themselves. Christians, in their opinion, are indoctrinating their children by teaching them the Faith. Even when I was an atheist, this double-standard seemed obvious to me.

Indoctrination or Education?

Indoctrination, in the classic religious understanding of the word, means to pass on doctrine in an authoritative way. The difference between education and the modern understanding of indoctrination is that the indoctrinated are not encouraged to critically examine the things they have been taught.

I was indoctrinated in the Catholic Faith through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) in my late twenties. My instructors did not refer to it as indoctrination though, probably due to the negative connotations the word invokes in the minds of modern people. However, I was encouraged to ask questions and think critically about what I was being taught.

Every parent educates their children. It's one of the primary functions of parents. Part of that education includes teaching them the difference between right and wrong, truth and falsehood.

There may be a fair number of Christian parents who raise their children without encouraging them to think critically about their beliefs. But I'm also sure that many atheist parents poison the well when they talk to their children about God.

In a sense, one can rightfully respond to the charge of indoctrination by turning the argument back on the atheist. If a child is raised in a household where religious belief is mocked and ridiculed, the likelihood of the child approaching the topic with an open mind is significantly reduced, if not eliminated altogether.

A Different End Game

I'm certainly no expert when it comes to parenting, but my limited experience has been successful so far. I attribute this to the fact that my wife and I *did* encourage our daughter to think critically about the things we were teaching her. We encouraged her to ask questions and we did our best to provide the answers. She's now a college student and as strong in her faith as we had hoped.

Granted, we approached the topic with a bias, but what parent doesn't?

Like atheist parents, our belief in what is true is important to us. But unlike atheist parents, the end game is more than knowledge or the commendable hope that our children grow up to be good people. It's about the fate of their eternal souls.

Proverbs 27:17 says "*Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."* This is more than just an awesome sounding metaphor. When ideas are exchanged, one can benefit by becoming more alert in their thinking.
This is the reason my wife and I always welcomed inquiry from our daughter. Not only has it sharpened her knowledge of the Faith, it has sharpened our own.

Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid. **–G.K. Chesterton**

Three Steps to Keeping Your Kids Catholic

By Patrick Madrid

Do you know the early warning signs of a young Catholic losing his faith? I do. I've seen them countless times in many young people over my nearly thirty-year career in Catholic apologetics and evangelization.

They include:

- Apathy
- Uncertainty and doubt
- Giving in to difficult moral challenges and temptations
- Feeling unloved or unaccepted by fellow Catholics

No doubt you've seen these warning signs in people you know. And maybe you've noticed these red flags with your own children. If so, don't worry; I'm not here to judge you! In fact, I can help.

Here are three stps you can take to help your children:

Family prayer

I strongly encourage praying the family rosary. It may be a challenge at times to gather the whole family together, but the spiritual benefits of praying the rosary as a family are enormous, especially if each child is allowed to take part in reciting this beautiful prayer.

Other acts of piety such as prayer before and after meals (every meal), night prayers with devotions like the act of contrition, the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel, etc., can strengthen young people in their faith.

Lead by example

Faith must inform the daily routine and decisions in your home. Children must see their parents as truly prayerful. Not in a showy way, but in a way they can see. Look to almighty God trustingly throughout the day and don't be too proud to ask for help from above.

Beyond the externals of prayer and piety in the home, children need to see that Mom and Dad are imbued with the results. They need to see you live out the gifts of faith, mercy, and forgiveness.

Prepare them to face challenges

I believe very much in the practice of "inoculation." Prepare your kids now for what they will face later. I explain to my kids what atheists believe, what skepticism and relativism are, and I seek to give them the answers to these and similar challenges. I also tell them about the errors of Protestants and how to answer their challenges right from the Bible.

Your kids may not understand the importance of everything you tell them at the time, but when they do encounter these challenges (and they will), your efforts to prepare them ahead of time will have a

good effect. They will feel confident in coming to you about other important matters, because they see you as credible and reliable, someone with knowledge and wisdom.

So, become familiar with solid Catholic resources such as Catholic Answers, EWTN, Catholics Come Home, and New Advent. There's also the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the shortened *Compendium*, which, in addition to your Bible, should be standard "tools of the trade" to lead your children toward heaven. Share this information with your kids.

The bottom line is this: Parenthood is a great and awesome responsibility given to us by God the Father. What greater joy could you have than to pass on the riches of the Catholic Faith as a permanent, priceless inheritance to your children? If they have their Catholic Faith and a true love for God, then they have everything.

Explaining Transgender to Kids—Without Puppets

By Leila Miller

A Canadian education foundation recently created a gender-questioning puppet character to teach little kids positive lessons about gender fluidity. Leila Miller offers a different approach to helping our children grasp this issue.

Transgender Identity Advice for Little Kids

One day, I took some of the younger boys to get haircuts (yes, another lesson at the salon), and the stylist who took the boys' names was clearly attempting to "transition" between the two sexes. This person was friendly and gave a great haircut. We did not say a word of judgment or derision, nor did we exchange glances that might have made this stylist uncomfortable, but simply went about our business as usual.

When we got in the car, a discussion ensued. "Was that a boy or a girl?" "I couldn't tell at all!" "The name could've been for a boy or a girl."

It can be unsettling not to recognize an adult person's sex, because that identification is so primordial in our psyches. Writer Anthony Esolen once noted to me that a person's sex is the first thing we notice and the last thing we remember. Think about it: you may not remember the name or hair color of the clerk that helped you at the mall, but you will remember if that person was a man or a woman.

We reinforced to the children that this stylist was a child of God with inherent dignity, and how confused and troubled a person must be to want to change or reject one's very nature. As we do when we encounter anyone in grave confusion or sin (including ourselves!), we reminded the children to pray for that person, and we reiterated what we have taught from the start—and what you must teach: we cannot change objective truth, including the good and right way that God made his world.

I cannot stress enough that parents must form a child in objective truth from the youngest years. We don't get to determine what is true based on our feelings; rather, truth exists outside of ourselves (God's created order), and our job is to seek truth, to find it, and to conform our lives and our wills to it.

Teach your children that God made each of us a boy or a girl—and that's something so beautiful, so *purposeful*, that it's written into our physical being: "From before you were born, and even when you were just a microscopic embryo, science could already tell that you were a boy! God is such a thoughtful, masterful Creator!"

When *National Geographic* produced its "Gender Revolution" special issue in 2017, the boy on the cover (proclaimed a "girl") was decked out in pink "girl" clothing and had long, pink hair. The "look" was stereotypical, cultural, superficial, and definitely not inherently representative of the female nature. Just like when Bruce Jenner donned long hair, nails, and a sexy lingerie teddy—stereotypical sex kitten attire—for his 2015 *Vanity Fair* shoot, it seemed more fetish than "female."

What can you tell your children about these displays?

Well, if your household is like mine, it's easy to show that "nontraditional" roles and activities and colors and dress have nothing to do with being a boy or a girl.

In our house, for example, Daddy is the main cook. He also cleans, organizes, and occasionally dons pink dress shirts. Mommy often takes the reins when it's time to assemble a cabinet, struggles in high heels, and loves football. These deviations from strict "gender roles" don't change our essence as male or female. Dean is 100-percent man, and I love being a woman!

A young boy desiring painted nails or pink clothes "like a girl," or a grown man donning a teddy, does not change him into a female. My six boys, when little, ranged from "all boy" to "Mom, I need more glitter, and watch me dance!" All of them are boys (or men now), and if they were tempted to think otherwise (as some little boys will be, *especially* given the messed-up cultural cues today), Dean and I gently reminded them, repeatedly if necessary, that they are male.

It's never been a problem to redirect and even be firm at times, which is why it shatters my heart when some parents, in the name of "compassion," *encourage* a delusion in their "feminine" sons or tomboy daughters. Some even seek out doctors to give their children puberty-blocking hormones, which could pave the way to "sex-change" operations later in life.

We hear more and more cases of parents who help their children "transition," even before the traditional age of reason, and even before the child can tie his own shoes. One famous case involves Thomas Lobel, an eleven-year-old boy who identifies as a girl named Tammy. His adoptive lesbian parents claim that Thomas has identified as a girl ever since he was three, and say they worried about suicide risks if he didn't use hormone blockers to stave off puberty.

There should be protective alarm bells instinctively going off in our brains when we hear any adult say such novel and outrageous things!

These adults ignore the real mental health risks involved in trying to change a child's sex. Johns Hopkins University professor Paul McHugh points to a thirty-year study in transgender-friendly Sweden that found that, ten years after having reassignment surgery, the mortality rate of transgender people was twenty-fold higher than the non-transgender population. (Walt Heyer is one example of sex-change regret, and he has made it his mission to reach out to others who regret their operations, and to educate the public about the harm of such surgeries.)

McHugh also noted that in a tracking study of children who "reported transgender feelings" but received no medical intervention, between seventy and eighty percent of them lost those feelings. This debunks the idea that kids who show "gender-nonconforming" traits, or who imagine themselves as being the opposite sex, must be psychologically and medically steered toward being their "true self."

Imagine how devastating it would be for a little boy or girl to have a growing, healthy body disrupted with hormones and eventually permanently mutilated (along with mind and spirit) because of the expression of a not-uncommon childish thought. Little kids who are still putting pencils up their noses and can't decide what to have for breakfast should never be given the

“freedom” to let a fantasy dictate what biology clearly contradicts. In what other area do we allow tiny children to create their own reality and dictate it to adults?

Also, so what if a young boy is more feminine in his play, fashion sense, or affect? So what if a girl wants short hair, no girly clothes, and likes to eat bugs and fight? None of those things affect the truth of one’s maleness or femaleness, as even “progressives” have been saying for decades (but who now seem to have amnesia!).

Many of us know little kids who believe they are cats or dogs—some for a very long time. As one mom said to me, “If we encouraged them to believe they were ponies, they would believe it.” The idea that a parent would feed this or any childish whimsy (like claims to be the opposite sex) is ludicrous. I’m with the Church and science on this, and I’d go so far as to say that to mess with a child’s mind, body, and spirit by pushing a denial of the child’s very nature constitutes child abuse.

Instead of fueling fantasy, let’s teach truth through fables. One of the most effective tools for teaching children, one which we must bring back to popular use, is the telling and retelling of classic morality tales. In a world of “transgender” conditioning, I strongly encourage every parent to read and reread *The Emperor’s New Clothes* to their little ones, until it is known by heart. Unlike any other, this story uncannily reflects—and exposes as folly—our current acceptance of the “transgender” culture.

In the fable, the whole empire repeats and believes an obvious lie. Even the “smartest” adults, due to the power of suggestion and peer pressure, succumb to the madness. Ultimately, it’s a little child who is still innocent and clear-thinking enough to speak the plain-to-see truth. Your children will delight in the story while you inoculate them against the illogical thinking of our day.

Innocence and Scandal in Catholic Schools

By Trent Horn

When I was young, my mom tried to enroll me in a Catholic elementary school, but I was turned away because my dad was Jewish and my mom was a fallen-away Catholic. The nuns said, "How can we raise your son to be a good Catholic when you'll just undermine everything we're teaching him?"

It's rare to hear such a question from a Catholic school today, and that's a shame. Catholic schools should not have to work against a student's parents when it comes to teaching students the Faith.

I thought of this childhood incident recently when I read about a Catholic elementary school in Kansas that recently refused to admit a student whose parents are in a "same-sex marriage." According to local news reports, supporters of the parents are petitioning the Archdiocese of Kansas City to reverse the decision, and have gathered over 1,000 signatures in an online petition.

This is not the first story of its kind. In 2010, Archbishop Chaput commented on a similar decision in his own archdiocese, saying:

Our schools are meant to be "partners in faith" with parents. If parents don't respect the beliefs of the Church, or live in a manner that openly rejects those beliefs, then partnering with those parents becomes very difficult, if not impossible. It also places unfair stress on the children, who find themselves caught in the middle, and on their teachers, who have an obligation to teach the authentic faith of the Church.

Some people might object that the child did nothing wrong, so he or she shouldn't be deprived of a Catholic education. But we must remember that it's not the *school* depriving the child of a fully Catholic education: it is the child's *parents,* who reject key elements of the Catholic faith. Their actions determine how their child will be educated.

Moreover, involving these parents in the life of a Catholic school would deprive *other* children of an authentic Catholic education. Archbishop Chaput continues:

Most parents who send their children to Catholic schools want an environment where the Catholic faith is fully taught and practiced. That simply can't be done if teachers need to worry about wounding the feelings of their students or about alienating students from their parents. That isn't fair to anyone—including the wider school community. Persons who have an understanding of marriage and family life sharply different from Catholic belief are often people of sincerity and good will. They have other, excellent options for education and should see in them the better course for their children.

Not everyone agrees. The editors of the *National Catholic Reporter,* for instance, have rushed to the critics' defense. Echoing the authors of the petition, they claim that this decision does not reflect Jesus' mercy and compassion, or his command to "let the children come to [him]" (Matt 19:14).

Jesus *did* care a great deal about the young and innocent, which is why he also condemned scandalous situations that could hurt them:

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for

temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes! (Matt. 18:6-7).

Sometimes, people will respond to this argument by pointing out that we are *all* sinners who tempt each other—so it's unfair to single out one group (like those involved in same-sex unions) that we should avoid. The editors at the *Reporter* pointedly ask:

Do [archdiocesan officials] inquire, since the fascination seems to be with sexual orientation (and no equivalence is intended here between sexual orientation and moral failure) and sexual ethics, of a couple's use of artificial birth control? Pills? IUDs? Condoms? Tubal ligations? Vasectomies? Do they require a sworn affidavit about marital fidelity?

It's true that we're all grave sinners, but not all grave sins give scandal because they aren't all equally public. It's not obvious, for instance, when you look at the parents dropping off their youngsters or assemble at school gatherings, that Jake's dad got a vasectomy or that Suzie's mom is having an affair.

But in cases where serious sins are public, like when Jake's dad publicly advocates on television for Planned Parenthood or Suzie shows up with her two moms, then a Catholic school is right to take steps to protect children's innocence and to avoid giving scandal.

The *Reporter* editors try to head off this argument, too, by offering what they think are parallel cases:

[O]ne must ask if the school might prohibit the children of the Muslim mother who wears a hijab or the Orthodox Jewish father who wears a yarmulke, symbols of fervent religious belief that would not permit of consistency with Catholic teaching. Wouldn't their children and others in the school be terribly confused? Or when it becomes widely known that a parent is a non-believer, maybe an ardent atheist, is his or her child sent packing?

Well, if an "ardent atheist" refuses to be a "partner in faith" because he ridicules the very idea of faith, then maybe godless government schools would be a better fit for him. In any case, a Catholic school should not be forced to welcome such an influence to its community.

When it comes to non-Christian students: it is one thing for a child to be exposed to Jewish classmates to whom "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29) or Muslims who acknowledge "one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day" (CCC 841). But it is quite another to expose children to people who unapologetically engage in "acts of grave depravity" that are "contrary to the natural law" to which, "tradition has always declared intrinsically disordered" (CCC 2357).

Ironically, the idea of keeping grave evil hidden for the sake of common decency is found in a letter of the Bible that the critics cite in their own petition.

They ask us to remember Ephesians 4:2-3, which says, *"With all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* However, in the next chapter Paul says, *"Immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named*

among you, as is fitting among saints" (5:3) and*, "It is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret"* (5:11-12).
Catholic education is not mainly about wearing uniforms and learning fun Bible stories. It's about being formed and strengthened to be a witness of Christ to the world. This involves not just being raised to avoid sins that lead to eternal damnation but being equipped to evangelize a world shrouded in darkness.

Admittedly, that's heavy stuff, which is why very young children who can't even commit a mortal sin (like the kindergarteners at the center of this news story) should not have to worry about these kinds of sins. That's why the Pontifical Council for the Family teaches, "Homosexuality *should not be discussed before adolescence unless a specific serious problem has arisen in a particular situation."*

Simply put: Kindergartners should not even know about sexual disorders or have these explained to them—or be put in a position, such as in a school that welcomes same-sex parents, where it must be explained to them. Of course we should pray for and try to help any child being raised in an environment that normalizes grave evil, but that does not justify introducing that environment into the lives of children who are just beginning their journey of faith.

Catholic Teachers Have a Job To Do

By Trent Horn

It's summer, which means it's time for teacher contract renewals and for the media's obligatory outrage over a Catholic school firing a teacher who publicly engages in behavior that violates Catholic teaching.

This time it's the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, where Archbishop Charles Thompson ordered Cathedral High School and Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School to sever their relationships with teachers in so-called same-sex marriages. Cathedral complied (though it seemed to do so out of fear of losing diocesan support more than out of agreement with Catholic teaching). Since Brebeuf's financial connections through the Jesuits don't require the diocese's approval, the school refused, which led to it being stripped of its Catholic credentials.

I want to share an approach to this issue that should be helpful in answering arguments put forward by those who, like Fr. James Martin, claim that if Catholic schools fire teachers for publicly violating the Church's teaching on marriage, then they would have to fire everyone who works for them, including people "who are not loving, not forgiving and not merciful, for these represent the teachings of Jesus, the most fundamental of all church teachings." The implicit assumption is that because they don't fire these teachers, the ones in so-called same-sex marriages should be allowed to stay.

You can make an argument about the need to discipline public sin in a way that doesn't apply to private sins as I do in this post, in which I respond to Fr. Martin's claim that the Church should celebrate funerals for Catholics who persist in public, grave sin such as same-sex unions. However, I think it's more productive to turn the tables and ask these people: so, when *should* Catholic schools fire their teachers?

A few reasons are obvious. Abusing students, stealing money, or breaking any other similar civil law should be grounds for termination. But people are also fired all the time for behavior that's not illegal. Showing up to work drunk or even being chronically late are enough to justify firing someone, but why? It's because these behaviors hinder a person's ability to do his job. So now we have a new principle: Catholic school teachers should be fired if they do anything that hinders their ability to carry out their job.

What is the job of a Catholic schoolteacher or faculty member?

It's not to merely teach a subject at a Catholic school, as if religious instruction were only the responsibility of the theology department. Every employee of a Catholic school has a responsibility to ensure that students are formed to fully embrace and live out their Catholic faith. This includes strengthening the faith of Catholic students and evangelizing non-Catholic students.

The National Directory for Catechesis published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states, "All teachers in Catholic schools share in the catechetical ministry." Even teachers of secular subjects such as math share in catechesis through the examples they set in word and deed. They talk about news and current events before official classroom instruction begins. They form friendships with students who come to learn about their personal lives and look up to them as role

models. That's why, if these teachers are bad Catholic role models, they should be let go. For example:
In 2018, a Maryland teacher was fired after the school learned he anonymously wrote for the white-supremacist National Policy Organization.
In 2003. the Diocese of Wilmington fired a teacher for signing her name to an advertisement defending abortion in the local newspaper.

It didn't matter that these employees didn't commit a crime, nor did it matter if they were non-Catholics. They engaged in behavior that students should never imitate and so, because of their free choices, they were let go. Why wouldn't this same logic apply to employees that contract so-called same-sex marriages? Can you imagine Fr. Martin offering his typical logic in these cases? "If you fire someone for being racist you have to fire every teacher who's unloving or uses birth control. This is discrimination!"

Me neither. Perhaps that's why Fr. Martin's favorite example of employees who are not expected to live under the Church's teachings are non-Catholic faculty and teachers. He writes on Twitter, "The Archdiocese has said that an employee's professional and private life must 'convey and be supportive of Catholic Church teaching.' But this would mean all Jews, Protestants, agnostics, and atheists would be fired as well."

I know this will be controversial, but it needs to be said: perhaps Catholic schools shouldn't hire non-Catholics in the first place. Catholic school administrators shouldn't fire someone because of the religion they practiced when they were hired, but if employees are ministers (as the *Hosanna v. Tabor* case affirmed back in 2012), then you can hire based on religion.

Moreover, you can let someone go if they act in a way that is contrary to being a minister of the gospel. This includes publicly repudiating the Catholic faith by converting to another religion or publicly repudiating the Church's teaching on marriage by contracting a so-called same-sex marriage.

The Church's *Code of Canon Law* says, *"Formation and education in a Catholic school must be based on the principles of Catholic doctrine, and the teachers must be outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life"* (CIC 803.2). *The National Directory for Catechesis* advises Catholic school leaders to *"recruit teachers who are practicing Catholics, who can understand and accept the teachings of the Catholic Church and the moral demands of the gospel and who can contribute to the achievement of the school's Catholic identity and apostolic goals."*

The *Directory* does acknowledge that although *"some situations might entail compelling reasons for members of another faith tradition to teach in a Catholic school, as much as possible, all teachers in a Catholic school should be practicing Catholics."* For example, if there are no applications from Catholic math teachers, then you may hire a Protestant who is willing to promote the Catholic faith and in no way publicly oppose its teachings.

But given that less than one percent of civil unions involve same-sex couples, it shouldn't be difficult to find an applicant who at least satisfies *that aspect* of Catholic teaching. Moreover, hiring a non-Catholic teacher doesn't affirm a fundamental error in society about something as important as the

institution of marriage. Employing a teacher in a so-called same-sex marriage is not like hiring a Presbyterian; it's like hiring a polygamist.

So, when you come across people who lament these kinds of decisions, seek agreement about school administrators' right to fire teachers who can't carry out their job. Then, narrow the discussion down to the question, "What is a Catholic school teacher's fundamental job?"

The answer: to form students' minds and hearts so that they might well serve God and man in this life and be with God forever in the next. If a teacher has publicly rejected the Church's wisdom in its most basic teachings, then what proof remains that he can effectively perform his job?