



Fra Angelico, "Virgin and Child with Sts. Dominic and Thomas Aquinas," c. 1427

BLOGS

Resolved for New Year 2020: Teach the Faith

Let us resolve in 2020 to teach the truth of God and his creation to a world suffering from ignorance.

By Patrick Reilly – Posted 12/27/19 at 3:59 PM

I love the six days between Christmas and New Year's Day. The Son of God is with us! Now we get a short time to rev up our engines for the new year's work of evangelization, as Christ commanded.

I propose three resolutions for the Year 2020, under a single theme of education. Why education? The confusion, irreverence, dissent, scandal and blasphemy that we find within the Church today—and the extraordinary challenges of secularism and sexual perversion in our culture—exhibit widespread embrace of falsehood. More than 2,000 years since Christ was born, too few people know the truth of God and his creation.

To help remedy this appalling situation, I pray that in 2020 the Church might finally break free of the dangerously limited notion of Catholic education as a particular system of schools accessed by a dwindling portion of young Catholics. Don't get me wrong, I am a big fan of truly Catholic schools! But they are one *means* of Catholic education—a favored means during the last two centuries, yet never the only means. The need for educating Catholics in truth and devotion is what takes precedence. Some schools, sadly, have even forgotten essential aspects of their mission, while increasingly Catholics are turning to print, broadcast and online resources as well as lay-run schools, homeschooling and innovative hybrid school-and-home options.

Catholic education is the task of formation in faith, truth and reason, and it is the Church's primary method of evangelization. It is for all of us! Learning is growth, and teaching is key to three of the [Spiritual Works of Mercy](#): instructing the ignorant, counseling the sorrowful and admonishing the sinner. All three works are desperately needed today.

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Register. We have new and renewed colleges that provide faithful online and in-person instruction grounded in authentic theology.

For children, Catholic education is a solemn duty of every Catholic parent. If a child cannot be taught in a faithful Catholic school or homeschool, then the parent must find other ways of forming the child in the truths of the faith—not only doctrine, but reverent prayer and sacrament. And not only religion, but the great insights of our faith into every other branch of knowledge, including history, science and literature. And not only knowledge, but the skills of reasoning and communication—those uniquely human abilities that resemble God’s wisdom and loving Word.

If a school or CCD program fails to do the job adequately or a secular school is the only option, then a parent must find or create other means of Catholic education. It is as essential as providing food and shelter.

So for 2020, let us resolve to teach the truth of God and his creation to a world suffering from ignorance.

Resolution 1: Teach the Holy Eucharist

The [Pew Research study](#) released in 2019 found that only 31% of self-professed U.S. Catholics—26% under the age of 40—believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. A more recent [EWTN-RealClear poll](#) found that 49% of Catholics who are registered to vote believe in the Real Presence. Both results are devastating!

If the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, then clearly a top priority must be Catholic education for both young people and adults, by teaching sound doctrine and forming Catholics in reverent liturgy and adoration.

This begins with parents and educators. Catholic homeschoolers have demonstrated a notable commitment to both daily and Sunday Mass, preparation for Mass through frequent confession, and Eucharistic adoration. But this should not set them apart—surely [Catholic schools and colleges](#) could be encouraging the same, yet most regard the sacraments as personal obligations that are extraneous to the job of education. Catholic schools and colleges should consider adding more frequent Masses, including at least some in the Extraordinary Form, with sacred music. They should provide opportunities for Eucharistic adoration and confession. They should teach students about the Eucharistic miracles.

Parents with children in secular schools need to make an extra effort to work liturgy and prayer into their daily schedule, as well as instruction in Catholic doctrine. But if these are high priorities, then they can be done.

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the truth. We must find ways to integrate contemplation of the Eucharist into our daily lives and into group activities.

Through catechesis and exposing fellow Catholics to beautiful and reverent liturgy, we can return Catholic education to its roots and renew faith. We have seen the tragic results of watered-down instruction and lackluster worship. Now we must aim for something better.

Resolution 2: Teach chastity

As our culture keeps going further off the rails, it is all the more important that Catholics uphold virtue and teach and practice chastity. Our witness to chastity can, I hope, bring about a renewal of the culture. It will certainly help preserve us and our young Catholics from grave sin.

Even in Catholic high schools and colleges, the hook-up culture is well-documented and the rates of sexual activity and assault are alarming. These are associated with the mortal sins of contraception, sterilization and abortion, as well as an epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases. Even before high school and throughout adolescence and adulthood, Catholics are faced with the temptation of online pornography and explicit sexuality and violence in movies and television shows.

Teaching chastity in a culture that is downstream from the Sexual Revolution is not easy, but it begins with simple practices and precautions within our Catholic homes, schools and colleges. Make an effort in 2020 to frequently speak the words “near occasion of sin,” an essential point of Christian ethics that seems to have been forgotten or even rejected by many Catholics today. Avoidance of temptation is the reason Catholics once chaperoned activities, dressed modestly, and associated dating with the seriousness of marriage—let’s do it again.

Some practical steps can be taken to build a home or school culture that projects an assumption of chastity. Members of the opposite sex should not be entertained in bedrooms or in any room with a closed door, and Catholic colleges could help [set the example](#) by restoring appropriate campus dorm policies. Monitor internet usage and filter pornography from Wi-Fi networks; again, some Catholic colleges are [already leading](#) the way.

Resolution 3: Put truth back into education

One factor in the decline of faith over recent decades is the declining respect for truth. When was the last time you heard someone state a proposition—an opinion or claim of some sort—and back it up with sound evidence and reasoning? It is rare, and I suspect that most people today are afraid to try.

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difficult theological concepts as taught by Augustine and Aquinas. Today, schools tend to emphasize facts and figures, but young people often lack the wit and wisdom of their grandparents.

Moreover, most Catholics have had a secular education—many never setting foot in a Catholic school or college, others attending Catholic institutions that provided a rather secular program. Not only were they not well-formed in doctrine, prayer and sacrament, but they never gained the insights of our faith into every other study.

If a young Catholic is not formed in truth, then we have failed to educate. Providing a truly Catholic education and fostering skills of reasoning are difficult outside of a Catholic program, but they can be done with great effort by the parents. Immediately, however, we need lukewarm Catholic schools and colleges to step up and show the way—to present the ideal so others can follow. Everything that a Catholic school or college does should reflect its Catholic identity, from its [hiring practices](#) and [human sexuality policies](#) to its [curriculum](#) and [library book choices](#).

In 2020, Catholics should resolve to no longer accept mediocre education. Together we should demand truly faithful education with classical approaches to learning and formation. Simply resolving to make truthful education a top priority, whatever our state in life, would help turn our gaze to God and his magnificent creation. It would refocus our lives to the perfection that God wills for us, by his grace and mercy.

Please pray throughout the next year for the intercession of St. John Henry Newman, himself a great educator and advocate for faithful Catholic education. His desire was that the Catholic laity would seek truth with vigor and hold to truth with devotion. May God grant such wisdom in us, and bless us all throughout the year.

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