

## THE RESTORATION OF CHRISTIAN CULTURE

### » CHAPTER ONE «

# The Restoration of Christian Culture

**M**YSTICAL ROSE, TOWER OF DAVID, TOWER OF IVORY, HOUSE of Gold, Ark of the Covenant, Gate of Heaven, Morning Star . . . Why is the Blessed Virgin called these marvelous, mysterious things? Richard of St. Victor, a spiritual master of the middle ages, says in a cryptic Latin phrase, *Ubi amor ibi oculus*—“wherever love is, there the eye is also,” which means that the lover is the only one who really sees the truth about the person or the thing he loves. It is the perfect complement to *amor cæcus est*, another more famous phrase, that “love is blind”—blind to all this lying world because love sees only truth. When a young man loves a girl, we ask, “What does he see in her?” But Our Lord said, “Let him who has eyes see.” If you love, you will understand. *Ubi amor ibi oculus*. The Litany of Loreto is written in the language of an incomparable love song—St. Bernard called it “the Holy Ghost’s masterpiece”:

My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are a paradise of pomegranates with the fruit of the orchard. Cypress with spikenard, spikenard and saffron . . . I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse; I have eaten of the honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O my friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved. I sleep, and my heart watcheth; the voice of my beloved knocking . . .

This is the language the Blessed Virgin Mary understands; it is the language of the love of God, the only one she understands.

I believe, and it is the theme and thesis of this book, that true devotion to Mary is now our only recourse. Like many Catholics, I have been troubled and confused in the years since this Dark Night of the Church set in. “I sleep and my heart watcheth.” As an old-fashioned schoolmaster with the inflated title of professor, I am not an expert in theology; the point of view throughout is of an amateur—a lover of religion and not very religious. It is with a certain reserve that, like a janitor holding the door, I have urged others into rooms I have never myself entered; or like someone who has studied maps and read directions and diaries by travelers to a far country reporting such marvels as to make the place seem a *terra aliena*, I have awakened to some deep ancestral memory of my native country and its King.

*Qui vitam sine termino  
Nobis donet in Patria.*

It is because they have destroyed this love and longing that the experts fail to see the truth. Anything in motion takes its meaning from the end; we are creatures in motion and defined by our desires; what we long for is truth. Aimless action self-destructs. It is the story of the Church and Christian culture in our time.

Theology, and its ancillary discipline philosophy, are sciences which study ends, and some of the best minds of the last generation have mistakenly thought that they could be the means of restoration. But sciences abstract from experience; though thought considered in itself has no environment, and truth considered in itself is no respecter of persons, or times or places—still, it is a particular person who actually thinks in a particular time and place about what he really knows. As Chesterton said, insanity is not losing your reason, but losing everything else except your reason. The restoration of reason presupposes the restoration of love, and we can only love what we know because we have first touched, tasted, smelled, heard and seen. From that encounter with exterior reality, interior responses naturally arise, movements motivating, urging, releasing energies, infinitely greater than atoms, of intelligence and will. Without these motives, thought and action are aimless, sometimes random, more frequently mechanical, having an order but a tyrannical order, that is, an order imposed from without. Christian culture is the natural environment of truth,

assisted by art, ordered intrinsically—that is, from within—to the praise, reverence and service of God Our Lord. To restore it, we must learn its language.

The Blessed Virgin said of her Bridegroom at the instant of the Incarnation, “He brought me into the cellar of wine.” The saints who comment on this passage tell us that each of our souls, like hers, must descend with him into that cellar where he will say, “Eat, O my friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.” The saints refer to this as a definite, necessary stage in the spiritual life. Without it, there is no progress toward the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the only goal of the Catholic life, whose only language is music—the etymological root of which means “silence,” as in “mute” and “mystery.” Music is the voice of silence, and so it follows that to enter with Our Beloved Lord into that prayer of quiet and to pray to Our Blessed Lady that He might lead us there, we must learn to speak that language too, that is, we must know music and especially the music of words which is poetry. No matter what our expertise, no matter what we are by vocation or trade, we are all lovers; and while only experts in each field must know mathematics and the sciences and other arts, everyone must be a poet in the ordinary way of salvation. As the proper ways of the Catholic life are in the province of priests, the ordinary is the province of schoolmasters like myself who from their low vantage, while in the high and palmy ways of science and theology they know little to nothing, know the things that everybody must do first. Oliver Goldsmith says that the Village Schoolmaster,

In arguing too, the parson owned his skill,  
For even though vanquished, he could argue still;  
While words of learned length, and thundering sound,  
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;  
And still they gazed and still the wonder grew,  
That one small head could carry all he knew!

In the revelations at Fatima, Our Lady said more souls are lost to heaven through impurity than any other sin. There are over a million registered murders of unborn children every year in the United States, while a sophisticated pharmacy performs ten million more unregistered ones and calls it contraception, which it is not because the pills

contain abortifacients which dry up the life-supports of tiny children in the first four days of their existence.

Though, so far as I know, it is not a *de fide* dogma of the Church, according to St. Thomas, who cites it as “according to the Fathers,” the souls of unbaptized infants inhabit a “place” of perfect natural happiness, eternally deprived of the Beatific Vision, called the Limbo of Children, “for these children have no hope of the blessed life.” Of course, he is speaking here of our ordinary presumption in the case; no one knows with certainty the state of any soul except those of the canonized saints; no one knows the unrevealed and extraordinary ways the mercy of God might find. But our moral choices depend here and now on what we know with moral certainty of the ordinary rules, not on what might occur extraordinarily or as exceptions. I think the presumption must therefore be that these pills are instruments of a crime worse than murder because they cut the child off not only from life, but from the ordinary means of Salvation.

St. Thomas also says we shall rise on the Last Day at the perfect age of thirty-three. He cites Ephesians iv:13, “Until we meet . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ.” When they walk through the shadow of that valley on that day, one might imagine how parents who have used the “pill” will feel, face to face with their fully grown children—who will say, “Hello, Mom, hello Dad”—lost to Heaven through impurity. We used to think that meant the sinners themselves, which it does; but it is worse than that and far more sad.

But I need not document the crisis in the nation and in the Church. This is to be a positive book, a program for The Restoration of Christian Culture, not an obituary of its death. Indeed I believe it is imprudent to document the disaster quite so much as some of us have. By publishing his achievements you give the Devil more than his due. The question is what can be done—what can and what must be done, because there isn’t any choice.

Whatever we do in the political and social order, the indispensable foundation is prayer, the heart of which is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the perfect prayer of Christ Himself, Priest and Victim, recreating in an unbloody manner the bloody, selfsame Sacrifice of Calvary.

What is Christian Culture? It is essentially the Mass. That is not my or anyone's opinion or theory or wish but the central fact of two thousand years of history. Christendom, what secularists call Western Civilization, is the Mass and the paraphernalia which protect and facilitate it. All architecture, art, political and social forms, economics, the way people live and feel and think, music, literature—all these things when they are right, are ways of fostering and protecting the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. To enact a sacrifice, there must be an altar, an altar has to have a roof over it in case it rains; to reserve the Blessed Sacrament, we build a little House of God and over it a Tower of Ivory with a bell and a garden round about it with roses and lilies of purity, emblems of the Virgin Mary—*Rosa Mystica, Turris Davidica, Turris Eburnea, Domus Aurea*, who carried His Body and His Blood in her womb, Body of her body, Blood of her blood. And around the church and garden, where we bury the faithful dead, the caretakers live, the priests and religious whose work is prayer, who keep the Mystery of Faith in its tabernacle of music and words in the Office of the Church; and around them, the faithful who gather to worship and divide the other work that must be done in order to make the perpetuation of the Sacrifice possible—to raise food and make the clothes and build and keep the peace so that generations to come may live for Him, so that the Sacrifice goes on even unto the consummation of the world.

We must inscribe this first law of Christian economics on our hearts: the purpose of work is not profit but prayer, and the first law of Christian ethics: that we live for Him and not for ourselves. And life in Him is love. If you keep the Commandments, you will stay out of Hell; if you love God, and neighbor as yourself, you will fulfill the law of justice; but the Catholic life is not just staying out of Hell—though that is, to say exactly the least, essential. But the life itself is the Kingdom of Heaven which is to love Him and one another as He loves us. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, that ignorant theologian, *scienter nescia*, pointed out that at the first Mass, after Our Lord had distributed His Body and Blood to his first Catholics, He went beyond not only the law of justice but the law of charity. He said to us, “Don't love each other only as yourselves. It is a mystical thing. Love each other as I have first loved you.” If we die having kept the law of justice and the law

of charity but not this charity itself, we shall spend as much time in Purgatory as it takes to learn it, in terrible pain, such, St. Thomas says, that all the natural pain in the world together is less than an instant of it. I fear sometimes that conservatives, not just liberals, are like the Pharisees – Catholics, but with a strong, unloving determination to be right; whereas the *Camino Real* of Christ is a chivalric way, romantic, full of fire and passion, riding on the pure, high-spirited horses of the self with their glad, high-stepping knees and flaring nostrils, and us with jingling spurs and the cry “*Mon joie!*” – the battle cry of Roland and Olivier. Our Church is the Church of the Passion. Listen to the Holy Ghost Himself, listen to the language in which He speaks to His Beloved Virgin, the Bride, in the Song of Songs, and to our soul:

I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my aromatical spices; I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.

It is not enough to keep the Commandments, though we must; it is not enough to love one another as ourselves, though we must. The one thing needful, the *unum necessarium* of the Kingdom, is to love as He loves us, which is the love of joy in suffering and sacrifice, like Roland and Olivier charging into battle to their death defending those they love as they cry “*Mon joie!*”; that is the music of Christian Culture. These devils in the nation and in the Church who murder children and disgrace the Bride of Christ can only be driven out by prayer and fasting. Impurity results in breaking the Commandments, but in essence it is a misdirection of love. We shall never drive it out – all attempts to solve the crisis in the Church are vain – unless we consecrate our hearts to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which means not just the recitation of the words on a printed card, any more than fasting just means eating less, but a commitment to her interior life. We must descend for a certain time each day into the cellar of wine – if He will draw us there – where, alone with Him, we are inebriated by His love.

*Ubi amor ibi oculus.* How shall we see without the eye of love? But how shall we learn to love without love’s language? And to learn that language, what is the school? Well, listen to the greatest English schoolmaster:

If music be the food of love, play on.

Is it difficult to follow the meaning of that? The question is a schoolmaster's to his children, not an expert's to his peers. For lovers, though it might be difficult—in fact impossible—to make a translation into scientific formula, the meaning is clear and strong as good wine. “If music be the food of love . . .” Reflect a moment on that famous opening line of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*—twelfth night of Christmas, written as *ordinary* entertainment for everyone, not for scholars, on the Feast of the Epiphany three hundred and fifty years ago. As the Old Law forbade the eating of all meat animals save ruminants, we should forbid all criticism—which thrives by tearing the flesh of texts into footnotes and appendices—in favor of an appreciative, ruminating savor of the most ordinary, obvious verse. The best commentary is a similar passage from the same or a similar author. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, the King of Music, Oberon, makes something like a commentary on the Duke's opening speech in *Twelfth Night*:

My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou remember'st  
Since once I sat upon a promontory  
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back  
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath  
That the rude sea grew civil at her song,  
And certain stars shot wildly from their spheres  
To hear the sea-maid's music.

And Puck replies,

I remember!

Note carefully what this great master of our culture says about the power of music: that the “rude sea grew civil at her song.” “Music is the food of love,” ultimately the love of Christ, which gentles the rebellious, rude, savage, sinful heart. You see what it means—that civilization is the work of music. Shakespeare says this again and again. In *The Merchant of Venice* the young lovers step into a garden as a musician plays. It is night; above them, the moon and stars. Lorenzo says,

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank.  
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music  
Creep into our ears; soft stillness and the night

Become the touches of sweet harmony.  
 Sit, Jessica, look how the floor of heaven  
 Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:  
 There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st  
     But in his motion like an angel sings,  
 Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins.  
     Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
 But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
 Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

This is a reference to the famous theme that all creation sings, that the heavens declare the glory of God, that stars in their courses make a music of the spheres which sounds in harmony with angels singing *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus* about the throne of God – and that the souls of men have such a music in them too, but in this “muddy vesture of decay,” that is this worldly exterior life we lead, drawn to the struggles for survival and success, we neither listen nor can hear. The musicians come out into the garden and Lorenzo cries,

    Come ho! and wake Diana with a hymn,  
 With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear  
     and draw her home with music.

In the Song of Songs the Bride cries out, so beautifully in St. Jerome's Latin, “*Trahe me*” – “Draw me!” And Jessica replies,

    I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

A strange response, perhaps. But then it is true, isn't it. Music is deeper than having fun; there is something sad even about the merriest music. Everyone has noted how, for example, in the lightest songs of Mozart, in the comic operas or in his marvelously bright pieces like the Clarinet Concerto, there is an almost unbearable weight, a sadness impossible to hear without tears. Perhaps the most famous example in Mozart is his own use of a lovely love song – *Dove sono* – from his ridiculous comic opera *The Marriage of Figaro*, for the melody of the *Agnus Dei* in his Coronation Mass, which would be thought blasphemous if it were not for the precedent in the duplication of the melodies for the Nuptial and Requiem Masses in the traditional Gregorian Chant.

Jessica says,

    I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

And Lorenzo, the philosopher, explains why:

The reason is, your spirits are attentive:  
For do but note a wild and wanton herd,  
Or race of youthful and unhandled colts,  
Fetching mad bounds, bellowing and neighing loud,  
Which is the hot condition of their blood;  
If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,  
Or any air of music touch their ears,  
You shall perceive them make mutual stand,  
Their savage eyes turned to a modest gaze  
By the sweet power of music: therefore the poet  
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones and floods;  
Since nought so stockish, hard and full of rage  
But music for the time doth change his nature.  
The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not moved with the concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils,  
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,  
And his affections dark as Erebus:  
Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.

Our Lord explains in the Parable of the Sower that the seed of His love will only grow in a certain soil—and that is the soil of Christian Culture, which is the work of music in the wide sense, including as well as tunes that are sung, art, literature, games, architecture—all so many instruments in the orchestra which plays day and night the music of lovers; and if it is disordered, then the love of Christ will not grow. It is an obvious matter of fact that here in the United States now, the Devil has seized these instruments to play a *danse macabre*, a dance of death, especially through what we call the “media,” the film, television, radio, record, book, magazine and newspaper industries. The restoration of culture, spiritually, morally, physically, demands the cultivation of the soil in which the love of Christ can grow, and that means we must, as they say, rethink priorities.

What I suggest, not as the answer to all our problems, but as the condition of the answer, is something at once simple and difficult: to put “the touches of sweet harmony” into the home so that boys and girls will grow up better than we did, with songs in their hearts; so that, singing the old songs all their lives, they may one day hear Him sing the Song of Songs:

Arise, make haste, my love, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree hath put forth her green figs; the vines in flower yield their sweet smell. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come.

I fear no girl will ever hear that song again from some young man in the spring of her life whom she might marry, or boy or girl, in the autumn, from Christ.

First, negatively, smash the television set. The Catholic Church is not opposed to violence; only to unjust violence; so smash the television set. And, positively, put the time and money you now spend on such entertainment into a piano so that music is restored to your home, common, ordinary Christian music, much of which is very simple to play. Anybody can learn the songs of Stephen Foster, Robert Burns, the Irish and Italian airs, after even a few hours of instruction and practice. And then families will be together at home of an evening and love will grow again without thinking about it, because they are moving in harmony together. There is nothing more disintegrating of love than artificial attempts to foster it in encounter groups and the like: Love only grows; it cannot be manufactured or forced; and it grows on the sweet sounds of music.

The most important kind of music in the wide sense, meaning all the cultural faculties, is, of course, the music of the words—that is, poetry and literature. Music in the strict sense of song and instruments plays an enormous part in shaping the sensibilities, so does art; but what you read enters directly into the intelligence and has therefore an even stronger effect. We must put our greatest effort into restoring reading in the home, first and foremost reading aloud around the fireplace of a winter's evening or on the porch of a summer's afternoon; and for the older children and adults, silent reading, each by himself as they all sit together in the living room, reading, not the hundred great books which are for analytic study and mostly for experts, but reading what I shall call *the thousand good books*,<sup>1</sup> not everyman's but everychild's library, the ordinary stories and poems we all should know from Mother Goose to Willie Shakespeare, as she affectionately calls

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1. See the Appendix to *The Death of Christian Culture*.—Ed.

her best friend, *the thousand good books* for children in the nursery to the youth at college, which we read and reread all the rest of our lives.

But first, you cannot be serious about the restoration of the Church and the nation if you lack the common sense to smash the television set. You often hear it said that television is neither good nor bad; it is an instrument like a gun, morally dependent on the motive for using it, not as the moralists say *per se* evil but only accidentally so, which is true; but concrete situations are *per se* accidental! There is a mean between *per se* and accidental called the determinant, which means what happens so many times and/or so intensely as to determine an outcome. It is usually the general, as opposed to the universal on the one hand and the particular on the other, which determines; but sometimes the determinant factor is a minority or even, though very rarely, a single case. Television is both generally and determinantly evil—not just accidentally so. It is not a matter of selecting the best programs, influencing producers and advertisers or starting your own network. Its two principal defects are its radical passivity, physical and imaginative, and its distortion of reality. Watching it, we fail to exercise the eye, selecting and focusing on detail—what poets call “noticing” things; neither do we exercise imagination as you must in reading metaphor where you actively leap to the “third thing” in juxtaposed images, picking out similarities and differences, a skill which Aristotle says is a chief sign of intelligence. So television is intrinsically evil, though it is obviously extrinsically so as well. There is nothing on the television which is not filtered through the secular establishment. “How wonderful to see the Pope!” But you didn’t see the Pope. You saw commentators interpreting the Pope through their media, not only by commentary but by selection and angle of the shots. A theologian once said to me when I complained about the distribution of Communion by laymen, “I’d receive Communion from the Devil if that’s the only way I could get it!” I think he was wrong. I’d hold with Newman who said of a similar situation that he “would wait for better days.” If I want to see the Pope, I’ll go four thousand miles to Rome, but I shall not receive him from the hands of CBS. The whole of television is misdirected because its managers are not just non-Christians but anti-Christians. It is not just the obviously bad

programs but the deceptively “educational” ones which are managed with the same end in mind—which is nothing less than the extirpation of Christ from culture by excision and distortion. Even if a particular sequence or shot, a sports event or vaudeville act, for example, isn’t in itself so bad, the context is, and the context determines. Worse, as I said, because more insidious is the unreality. “My football game!” the old man cries. But here you touch not only on television but on the professionalization of sports where the armchair quarterback puffing his gut on insipid American beer and potato chips, gapes like Nero at the gladiators hacking each other up, while his neglected children take up punk rock on their car cassettes. If you really like football, get out on Saturdays and play it with the boys.

I realize how like ranting this must seem—too much, too fast and against the grain. But stereo and hi-fi sets substitute for sense, imagination and reality as well. And don’t be fooled by high-class record collections of all the arty best from Gregorian Chant to Aaron Copeland. Gregorian Chant is solemn prayer and must never be treated as music for one’s “listening pleasure,” as they say; and Copeland is kitsch. It is not just the worst of the drug stuff and the pornography, but the high-class, ritzy culture of the New York Philharmonic and the multi-microphoned Met, which mixes modernistic interpretations of the classics in electronic blenders where it is interspersed with sophisticated disharmonies intrinsically designed for the self-destruction of music and the ruination of all normal habits of tonal differentiation—I mean the best of disordered genius like Stravinsky’s and Mahler’s, not to mention self-promoted frauds like Schoenberg. And though it would take too long to digress, electronic devices are not only evil in their misdirection of the end, but in the very means themselves they are destructive, as television is, of imagination and sensibility. Electronic reconstitutions of disintegrated sounds are not real sounds any more than reconstituted, sterilized lactates are milk. The greatest pianist of the last generation, Joseph Hoffman, refused to make records because he said it horrified him to think someone could clone a single performance, iterating it over and over; whereas in concerts he struck each note fresh as if for the first time. As extreme and fanatical as it may sound, I risk the charge and repeat as quietly and seriously as I

can, that, negatively, we must rid our homes of these mechanical and electronic devices, and positively, restore real, live, simple, homely, Christian music and literature to the living room in their rightful place. I know it is unpleasant to be chided; it is always more cheery to hear the prophet when he denounces the other Philistines across the street; as Cardinal Newman says, the preacher goes too far when he carries things home to ourselves! Well, it is simply so. Catholics have accepted some of the worst distortions of their Faith in the order of music, art, and literature without a shiver of discontent because they never really heard the “*Tantum Ergo*” or the “*Ave Maris Stella*”—not for lack of faith, but because there had never been ordinary music in the home to have created the habit of good sound and sense.

And as for reading in the home; it isn’t done at all. The Great Books movement of the last generation didn’t so much fail as fizzle, and not because of any defect in the books; they are the “best that has been thought and said,” in Matthew Arnold’s famous phrase; but like champagne in cracked bottles, the books went flat in minds which lacked the habit of reading. To change the figure, the seeds grew but the cultural soil had been depleted; the seminal ideas of Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, only properly grow in an imaginative ground saturated with fables, fairy tales, stories, rhymes, romances, adventures—the thousand good books of Grimm, Andersen, Stevenson, Dickens, Scott, Dumas and the rest. Western tradition, taking all that was the best of the Greco-Roman world into itself, has given us a culture in which the Faith properly grows; and since the conversion of Constantine that culture has become Christian. It is the seedbed of intelligence and will, the ground for all studies in the arts and sciences, including theology, without which they are inhumane and destructive. The brutal athlete and the aesthetic fop suffer vices opposed to the virtues of what Newman called the “gentleman.” Anyone working in any art or science, whether “pure” or “practical,” will discover he has made a quantum leap when he gets even a small amount of cultural ground under him; he will grow like an undernourished plant suddenly fertilized and watered.

And the right point of view is that of the amateur, the ordinary person who enjoys what he reads, not expert in critical, historical or

textual techniques which destroy what they analyze and are as inimical to culture as sex clinics to marriage or scientific agriculture to farming. Whatever you do, don't poison the wells and salt the fields with dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases, study-guides, critical editions, notes, biographical and historical appendices—all of that is the science of literature; it is a misapplication of scientific method to a subject matter outside its competence. We want what Robert Louis Stevenson called “a child's garden,” something simple, direct, enjoyable, unreflective, uncritical, spontaneous, free, romantic, if you will, with the full understanding that such experience is not sufficient for salvation, as the Romantic School thought, nor sufficient for science and philosophy, but indispensable as the cultural soil of moral, intellectual and spiritual growth. And so instead of an argument, I propose a reading of the thousand good books.

Because sight is the first of the senses and especially powerful in the earliest years, it is important to secure editions illustrated by artists working in the cultural tradition we are restoring, both as introduction to art and as part of the imaginative experience of the book. This is not to disparage all contemporary artists any more than tradition itself denies experiment; quite the contrary, one of the fruits of such reading should be the encouragement of good writing and drawing by the reader. A standard is not a strait jacket but a teacher of norms and a model for imitation. Book illustration reached its classical perfection in the hundred years before World War I in the work of “Phiz,” Gordon Browne, the Brock brothers, Beatrix Potter, Sir John Tenniel, Arthur Rackham, Howard Pyle, N. C. Wyeth, Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, George Cruickshank, Leslie Brooke and many others. The rule of thumb is to find an old edition in a secondhand shop or at least facsimiles which though not as sharp in line or true in color are available at more moderate prices.

For English-speaking Catholics there is a difficulty which would take a whole treatise to deal with adequately: English literature is substantially Protestant. It is all well and good to quote St. Paul that “whatever is true is from the Holy Ghost” and argue that this literature, whether Protestant, Jewish or Infidel, so long as it is true, is Catholic despite the persuasion of its authors. All well and good provided that

literature were abstract science; a matter of two and two are four. But literature by definition is that paradoxical thing, the “concrete universal,” imitating men in action in their actual affective and moral and spiritual struggles. And so Catholics have to live with a difficulty. The thousand good books which are the indispensable soil of the understanding of the Catholic Faith and indirectly requisite to the Kingdom of Heaven, are not Catholic but Protestant.

The recognition of this has led some well-meaning Catholic teachers to the recommendation of texts and reading lists of strictly Catholic authors, which can only be done by supplying large amounts of Latin, French, Italian and other foreign authors in translation along with those very few Englishmen who happened to be Catholic and alas, though by no means bad, are all second-rate. No matter how you do it, the attempt is hopeless. First, we are English-speaking people. Our language is English and if we are to learn it, we must absorb its own peculiar genius. If we are to have English Catholic authors or even readers, they must be schooled in the English language as it is, and not in even the best work of translators, who are not men of genius, no matter how great the works they are translating. Dorothy Sayers, for example, is a fine Christian lady, I am told, and the Italian Catholic Dante is one of only three candidates for the title of greatest poet who ever lived; but Dorothy Sayers’ translation of the *Divine Comedy* is something of a comedy in another sense and not even remotely in a class of excellence with the Puritan Latin Secretary to the arch-heretic and murderer of Catholic Ireland, John Milton, or even with the atheist Irish sympathizer Shelley, whom Miss Sayers imitates in attempting—disastrously—Dante’s *terza rima*. English literature is not an option; it is a fact. And it is Protestant; we are at once blest and stuck with it—blest because it is the finest literature in the world, and stuck because it cannot ever be done again.

Catholic parents and teachers must read and re-read Cardinal Newman’s long, balanced, incomparable essay on the whole subject, “Catholic Literature in the English Tongue,” in his book, *Idea of a University*.

The upshot of the difficulty is that the heart, indeed, the very delicate viscera, the physical constitution and emotional dispositions as

well as the imaginations, of children will be formed by authors who are off the Catholic center and some very far off; and yet, not to read them is not to develop these essential aptitudes and faculties.

Having stated the facts first as a difficulty, I hasten to add that it is a difficulty we can live with and flourish under. First of all, insofar as the literature is Protestant, it is Biblical and Christian; the existence of God, the Divinity of Christ, the necessity of prayer and obedience to the commandments is its very strong stuff for the most part and there is little anywhere in direct violation of the Catholic Faith, though there is some overt, sometimes crude, sometimes true, accusation. Since Protestantism stands in between its Catholic and Jewish antecedents in a link of Hebraic Christianity, at least in its Calvinist tendencies, its popular literature has been both anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish. Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, one of the best boys' books, is filled with outrageous lies about the Jesuits; and both Shakespeare and Dickens, with Shylock and Fagin, have exploited and exaggerated the avarice of the Jews. But what Chesterton said of *Westward Ho!*—"It's a lie, but a healthy one"—could be said of *A Merchant of Venice* and *Oliver Twist*. It is the unhealthy pharisaical Catholic and Jew who resent the caricatures of themselves. The health and excellence of caricature always consists in its accidental prevarication of essential truths. The fact is that Jesuits have sometimes been a scandal, despite the glorious company of their saints; and Jews have been conspicuous usurers, pornographers and Communists, despite their large courage in the face of unjust persecution and the smaller number of converted saints. Good Catholics and Jews can laugh and weep at once at the truth in these cartoons, just as a temperate Irishman—if you can find one—would laugh and weep at the stage Irish drunk, or an honest Italian at *The Godfather*.

One of the most famous and best of geniuses in the list of classical children's books is not an English Protestant but some kind of French Catholic. By the time you finish *The Three Musketeers* it is clear enough that sin is punished. Aramis, who had played his part in satirizing religious vocations early on in the novel, actually becomes a monk at last—albeit in a sequel not a very good one! There is one lurid scene in which D'Artagnan, the golden boy and best of heroes, commits

explicit and rather preposterous adultery under sensational conditions with the most fatal *femme fatale* in literature; but both participants suffer the consequences, she a horrid death and he a harrowing education. Perhaps *The Three Musketeers* is best reserved for the older end of the adolescent spectrum, around sixteen; but taken all in all, it is an adolescent book and the paradigm of dashing derring-do, and it is good—I mean morally good. Like it or not, the kind of adventure you get in Alexandre Dumas is there in literature as the Rocky Mountains are there in geography. You might get to California quicker if they weren't, but getting there was “half the fun” in the one case; and the chivalry, intrigue and romance is all the fun in the other.

The worst failure in English classical literature is indirect, that is its omissions—the conspicuous absence of Our Blessed Mother and the Blessed Sacrament and, following from the loss of these principal mysteries, all the rich accidentals of Catholic life, the veneration of saints and relics, the use of medals, scapulars, holy water, rosaries. When these are present, which is rare, it is usually, alas, to disparage them as superstition—though not always; for example there is the tender scene in *Little Women* where the French servant explains the Rosary to the incredulous but amazed and edified little Amy. But no doubt about it, the omissions are a great disappointment and must be compensated for by daily use of these instruments and by a rich, Catholic and especially Latin liturgical life. From the cultural point of view, which I must insist is not a minor or accidental thing but indispensable to the ordinary means of salvation, and prescinding from all the complex canonical and theological disputes about its validity and liceity—whatever defense can be made of it on pastoral and other grounds—from the cultural point of view, the new Catholic Mass established in the United States has been a disaster; and I must give public witness to my private petitions, with all due respect to the authorities, that its great predecessor—the most refined and brilliant work of art in the history of the world, the heart and soul and most powerful determinant factor in Western Civilization, seedbed of saints—be restored. Catholic children brought up on the best English literature must at the same time be immersed in the traditional Catholic practices like Rosaries, Benediction, Stations of the Cross. And when there is explicit disparagement

of anything Catholic in the literature, the parent and teacher must censor it—not with the scissors, which is impossible because these things are too intimately connected with the context—but by explanations. For younger children the parent or sister who reads the stories aloud can correct misunderstandings tastefully in quiet conversation, using the errors themselves as occasions to teach the truth—sometimes the truth that Catholics have not always lived up to their Faith. For the school child, teachers can use distortions and caricatures as a stimulus for further reading; Kingsley’s violence to the Jesuits, for example, can be an occasion for a child to read the lives of St. Isaac Jogues and his companions and other missionary saints. For the adolescent and youth, his own strength in the Faith should be sufficient; anti-Catholic texts should provide a kind of test for his understanding, and teachers can conduct colloquia to bring the questions out.

But I have belabored the point too long. In the hundreds of thousands of pages of the thousand good books, the number of passages calling for such correction are very few. The chief difficulty, as it is of modern culture in general, is the lack of those ordinary Catholic accidentals determinant to the Faith; and these must be restored in the Church and at home. Actually, since we are English-speaking people, living in a non-Catholic subculture, it is good for a Catholic child to grow up with an imaginative grasp of the hostile environment—short of course of anything pornographic, ironic and sly, and there is none of that in the classic children’s literature; all in a common sense way are “good,” artistically, morally and spiritually, though they are not complete.

Perhaps there is a need for just one further caution on adolescent reading: Here you are dealing with a time of life which is by definition dangerous. “Adolescent” comes from a Latin word meaning “to burn,” and it is certainly a burning age. The literature of adolescence, say Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, sometimes overheats an excitable imagination; those star-crossed lovers fall desperately and hotly in love, and it may well be that the reading of certain of its best passages could lead young people into sin, like the wretched souls in Dante’s *Inferno* who blame their eternal damnation on the reading of Arthurian romance. “A *galeotto* was that book,” Francesca says—*galeotto* is an

Italian word for pimp. There is no question that adolescent reading must be accompanied by strict, serious, complete dogmatic and moral teaching and by a strong, active, vigorous, rigorous, gymnastics program. But a severe warning is in order for Catholic parents who, the more conservative they are in their Faith, tend toward a Jansenism in their discipline of children. When a child hits twelve, he is ready for the adolescent experience, and that means the explosion of physical aptitudes and the emotional responses to them—the call to dangerous adventure and to experiment in romance. There is a certain kind of parent who wants to bind a child's soul the way the Chinese are said to have bound their little girls' feet to keep them dainty. There are Catholic families who proudly send their eighteen-year-olds up to college carefully bound and wrapped at the emotional and spiritual age of twelve—good little boys and girls in cute dresses and pantywaists who never get into trouble or into knowledge and love. The Kingdom of Heaven is the knowledge and love of God, and we learn to bear the living flames of that love only through suffering the paler heats of human desire; and adolescence is as necessary to the normal development of the body and soul as the Faith itself. Grace presupposes nature and cannot be efficacious in its atrophy. There is little point in keeping children out of Hell if you don't afford them the means of getting to Heaven.

So give them solid catechetics, strong preaching, good example, healthy exercise, supervision in a general and determinant way but not in each particular and by all means permitting them the freedom of the good, dangerous books as well as dangerous games such as football or mountain climbing. Given the state of man, some will break their necks and sin; but in good Catholic families with common sense, the falls should be few and the bodies and souls recoverable. The positive power of the literature and the games is so good and great that we must thank God English literature and sport have been so richly blessed, though we sometimes, as we shouldn't, grudge the genius of those marvelously gifted Protestants, some of them even terrible Protestants like John Milton!

Fortunately, for the most part, the majority of the authors are sympathetic to the Faith and some, like Shakespeare, may even have

been *in pectore* Catholic. Dickens had a visionary dream he took very seriously of the Virgin Mary who instructed him to write more warmly of Catholics, which he did in one of his greatest novels, *Barnaby Rudge*. Despite the revisionist historians, the past is past and cannot be changed. If you dispense with the classics, you lose the culture—and whatever the culture is, it is ours, still in its roots and in its truth, goodness and beauty, Catholic.

To conclude not so much with a proof of anything as an exhortation to experiment: Read, preferably aloud, the good English books from Mother Goose to the works of Jane Austen. There really is no need for reading lists; the surest sign of a classic is that everyone knows its name. And sing some songs from the golden treasury around the piano every night. Music really is the food of love, and music in the wide sense is a specific sign of the civilized human species. Steeped in the ordinary pot of the Christian imagination, we shall have learned to listen to that language by absorption, that mysterious language the Bridegroom speaks; and we shall begin to love one another as He loves us; we shall see at last the Star of Hope which “flames in the forehead of the morning sky” at the end of this dark night. We shall see, because we love—*Ubi amor ibi oculus*—though not without her help: *Rosa Mystica, Turris Davidica, Domus Aurea, Stella Matutina . . .* Morning Star.