

THE REV. KNOW-IT-ALL
ON THE
STATE OF
CATHOLIC EDUCATION

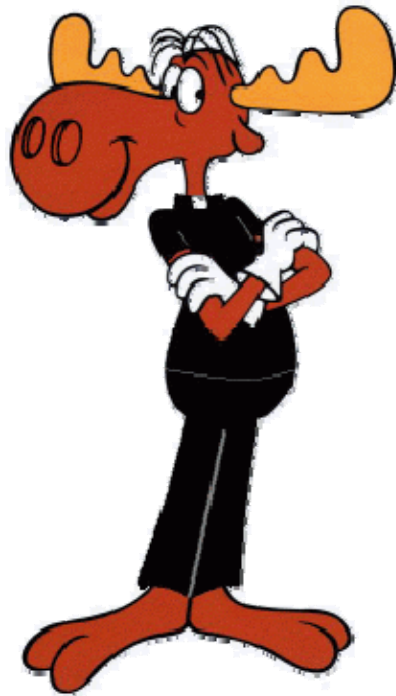


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Dear Rev. Know-it-all,

I am concerned. There are nothing but gray heads, not counting the bald, in my church. No young people. We have tried everything. In the years I have been in the parish we have had all the evangelistic campaigns; Christ Rebukes His People, Refresh, the Carelessmatic Renewal, the Paleo-Catechetical Movement, the Matrimonial Encumber Movement. Everything. We hired the best youth director we could find, as well as a grievance minister, parish nurses, liturgists, choir directors. We have gotten the consulting services of design coordinators and a *feng shui* expert. We have hired a full-time media ministry director. We have administrators, coordinators, and I think we even have marriage terminators who guide people through divorce and annulment. Their office is right next to the office where weddings are arranged. We have changed the flavor of our incense 8 times and the location of the tabernacle 12 times. Nothing seems to work.

For each new program or director that was going to solve all our problems, we built a new office in which each one quickly became ensconced. We naturally gave them all the pay raises and benefits that the diocesan ministry office said we had to, and to cover the expense we started off with a second collection. We decided it would be better to have a pledge drive for the parish ministries, so we hired a fund-raising director, and you guessed it, we built him an office and instituted another pledge drive to pay for the fund-raising ministry.

The pledge drive was so successful that we have continued the pledge drive and re-introduced all the second collections. Now we have hired a new director of Evangelism who has a degree from Bathsheba Bible College. She says that people in the downtown office say we have to do a program called "Come Dance in the Forest." It is a program that tries to evangelize young people through interpretive dance. The new director must have an office and in addition, a dance studio. The liturgy committee and the evangelism sub-committee are suggesting a second collection. Believe it or not, all the second collection and pledge drives actually do very well. The parish is in the black! Still there are grayer and grayer heads and fewer new heads in church. Nothing seems to be working. Do you have any suggestions?

Sincerely,

Frieda Begue

Response Part 1

Dear Frieda,

Your letter brings to mind a great Chinese evangelist and Martyr, [Watchman Nee](#). He was a very interesting thinker/theologian who was killed by the Marxist government of China in 1972. I have heard that he was not very fond of us Catholics, but much of what he wrote is useful, and one comment comes to mind as I read your letter. "Isn't it interesting what a helpful tool for discernment money is?" People say, "Oh, if only we had more money, we could do great things for God." The truth is really quite the opposite. If we are doing things that are inspired, that is "God-breathed," it has been my experience that there is more than enough money to go around. If God is in the thing, there will be money for it. People sense it, they are excited about it and they contribute to it. If there is a careful listening to the Holy Spirit, and if we get God right, the project is a success. If we substitute our good intentions and wishful thinking for the plan of God, the whole thing will crash and burn.

I remember a great evangelistic event that we had here in the diocese of Frostbite Falls about 30 years ago. It was going to re-vitalize the diocese. There were small groups and large groups and we were to hold a Large Group Event, as mandated by the planning book. There would be choirs and publicity and banners and speakers. The great day came. We opened the doors. In streamed the Large Group for the Large Group Event. The Large Group Event had a name. It was Wilhelmina Ruckenhau. (I am not making this up.) Forty people, choirs, speakers, liturgical dancers, soloists etc., all gathered to inspire WILHELMINA RUCKENHAUS. Wilhelmina was a sweet 90-year old lady who had lived in the parish since forever. I think when she was young she had briefly dated Methuselah. If the church was open, she was in it. She did the daily readings at Mass, except once when we had two feet of snow. She asked if I could read because she was tired from shoveling her walk. This is all true. Wilhelmina was about as saved as a person could be, at least in my opinion. On that grand afternoon, Wilhelmina was the only person who showed up. Most people had better things to do with their Saturday afternoons. Well, the show must go on, and if the Refresh Project Manual said we were to have a Large Group Event, we would have a Large Group

Event. An hour and half later the songs were sung, the sermons preached, the liturgist dancers had cavorted and the soloist had gushed. We quietly dispersed and went on with our lives quite unchanged, though I imagine Wilhelmina was mightily inspired.

In that same parish, which was down by the harbor district of Frostbite Falls, a very dangerous neighborhood plagued by Patagonian alpaca smuggling gangs, another group that couldn't plan a two-car funeral had an annual event: the Youth Rally, or as the Patagonian teenagers called it, the Youf Rally. It had no budget, it had no real schedule, it didn't even have a clue, but the 18-year old Patagonian who suggested it said that it was what God wanted. The other Patagonian Youths (or if you prefer "youfs") prayed about it, said OK and they were off. For years thereafter, the rallies fed, entertained, evangelized and prayed with as many as 1,000, that's 1,000, surly "youfs." The smaller rallies were only 500 kids. It was always moving to see some young thug weeping for his sins and some of them actually did repent. No money, no budget, the loosest of schedules and a roaring success. One event was conducted according to the strictest fiscal and professional criteria. It bombed like the London blitz. The other event was run more like a clown car. It worked.

Speaking of clown cars, I was privileged back at St. Dymphna's to be the constitutional monarch of a wonderful parish. Like Queen Elizabeth, I got all the credit and did none of the work. It was grand. It was a tiny church that maintained a school for poor children, a clothing room, a soup kitchen and a food pantry. We gave away food bags, meals and clothes anywhere between two and four thousand times a month. Our collections totaled about \$75,000 a year. Our bills were around \$1,200,000 a year (that's One Million Two). "How did you do it," I was often asked. The trick is that I didn't. I did write a lot of letters to little old blue-haired ladies and ate in a lot of expensive restaurants with well-dressed business persons. Tough work, but someone had to do it. (Between their prayers and their generosity little old blue-haired ladies are, by the way, the powerhouse of Christianity. Don't take them for granted.)

One other strategy that worked: I would also take larger bills into church and inform the Lord that He had just received a large bill and ask Him how He planned to pay it. I would physically, literally do this. Usually by the time I got back to the rectory a check

had arrived in the mail. I'm not kidding. We lived on miracles. I remember the miraculous multiplication of the turkeys. We had a full-time volunteer named Rhonda. She was a saint. Perhaps you have heard the old poem "To live with saints in heaven, you'll find, is grace and glory. To live with saints on earth is quite another story." She was in charge of the ministry of chaos. I have no doubt that God loved her to bits. Hers was a life lived by faith. Mine, not so much. Well the great day of the Thanksgiving meal arrived. Someone had failed to order Turkeys. The Soup Kitchen director and Rhonda were in calm and pious conversation about the situation in which there was no panic at all (that part I am making up) when, at about 10 in the morning Thanksgiving Day, the door bell rang and somebody said they had 25 cooked Turkeys and could we use them? We said that we were sure they could be of some use. This really happened. In fact it happened all the time. It was an amazing twenty years.

I am not saying that organization and responsible financial practices are bad things. On the contrary! What am saying is that they are the second thing. To hear God clearly is the first thing. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all else will be given." (Matt 6:33). This may be an irritating and pious platitude, but it is a pious platitude given us by Jesus Christ, whom some of us still consider our *only* Lord and Savior. (Dig at Jamie Foxx intended.)

Let me tell you about "the Kingdom." In English "kingdom" is a place or a system of government. In Greek, though it can include these things, it is a much wider concept. The word is "*basileia*" and it is first a quality of the person. It means "kingliness." It can be conferred or inherited. Any horse-faced cretin with bad dental work can be a king or queen, provided his or her parents were king and queen. There is not a big resume required, though there are not a lot of job openings these days. We "have the kingdom" because the Father who adopted us and the Brother who is our Lord are Kings. We are royal by adoption. We have "kingliness. You cannot build the Kingdom. You can preach Kingdom, you can advance Kingdom, you can even augment or build up Kingdom, but you can't build it. I cringe when I hear someone say they are building the kingdom of God. Jesus said "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) to which we respond, "Don't bother Lord. We are

building one of our own and if You sit quietly over there and mind Your own business we'll be finished soon and we'll get back to You. Amen." If someone says they are building the kingdom it usually means they are hoping for a corner office down at the pastoral center and you can bet fund raising will be involved. Every time I hear that maudlin song "Let us build the city of God" I think of the book of Revelation in which one reads, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband." "Lord, we're sure yours is nice, but we prefer the one we are building." And then there's that lovely but heretical song that is all about inclusivity "Let us build a house where love can dwell..." I think of St. Peter talking about a spiritual temple built by God "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men." (Acts 7:28) If modern religious lyricists would read the Bible occasionally, their hymns would not be half so bad. Where was I? Oh Yes....

In the Bible -- that big book on the coffee table -- you will read, "Unless the Lord build the house, in vain do the builders labor." (Psalm 127:1) I am not opposed to organization in principle, and Lord knows I am not opposed to special collections. I am, after all, a Catholic priest. Collections are very biblical. Just look at St. Paul, a *schmooze* if ever there was one. I quote: "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem." (Romans 15:26) I suspect that Paul was trying to guilt the Romans into out-giving the Greeks! A shameless fund raising technique, which I have often used. Have all the collections campaigns and special programs you want, but don't expect them to succeed unless the Lord is in them. If they fail, I suspect it was because the Holy Spirit didn't attend the meeting, nor did He get the memo. When a project dies, one should quietly bury it, apologize to God for ignoring Him and move on. One should not give it an office, a staff and a budget.

The problem is not the second collections. The problem is that we have forgotten the meaning of the Eucharist. That's why we are broke and why we in the business of religion must think of ever more clever ways to squeeze a bit more blood out of the turnip.

(This letter will go on interminably. Let me give you a simple outline of what I intend to

do. Next week I will go on to a peculiar disquisition about the meaning of the word “Eucharist” and how we are currently clueless about the nature of the Mass. Then I will move on to the four last things, Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell, and their relation to fund-raising, just in time for the end of the Joyous Season of Hanna-Krisma-Kwanza-Dan, and then the grand finale, a concrete plan to save Catholic schools and restore our financial stability, a plan which will not work because we will never have the nerve, the single mindedness nor the will to do it.)

Response Part 2

Continued from last week....

Last time I wrote, Dear Frieda, I said I would address the central problem as I see it: the Eucharist, or as most of us old people call it, going to Mass on Sunday. We are propping up a system of religious education that was designed for a culture that is as dead as a plate of pickled herring, a system that the progressive wing of the Catholic Church helped kill. Speaking of pickled, I must admit that I was a committed member of that progressive wing in my youth. I formally quit the “movement” in my junior year of college when the peace committee broke up in a big fight during peace week. Even though my official membership in the silliness of the 60's was not long, it took me decades to find the moral courage to become as wildly politically incorrect as I now am. When I accuse a certain segment of the Church and the society of killing the culture and weakening the faith; I am talking about me. Enough of breast beating. I will return to chest thumping.

For one thousand years and more, the culture of the West had been nourished philosophically, artistically and esthetically by the Roman liturgy. Even the weak gender identity of the male of the species had been propped up by the Liturgy and the notion of a holy and sacrificial priestly caste. (You mean clericalism? Yes. I do. We need it. Women come by holiness and maturity a lot more easily than men. Women used to be grown-ups. Men have never been grown-ups unless you give them an important responsibility, like fatherhood or ordination. Just think about male hobbies like Ice Fishing and belching contests.) Where was I before the last digression? Oh, yes. The liturgy. The Roman liturgy, the sacrifice of the Mass produced the great visual art, the great music, the great architecture and the philosophical coherence of the culture. It was obscure in its secrecy and strange in its language. The celebrant mumbled in a language that only smart people knew. If you wanted to understand it and participate you had to actually learn something. You had to stretch yourself intellectually and if you couldn't, you had to trust those who could. The very obscurity and art of the liturgy gave people a window into a world that otherwise would have been denied them.

Then over night, Palestrina was replaced with polka music; Zurburan and El Greco were replaced with Burlap Banners and Corita Kent. The great soaring Cathedrals, the palaces of the poor in which any beggar was welcome, where the poorest of the poor could taste art and music, and probably get a meal afterwards in the convent soup kitchen, these were replaced by space ships from the Planet Ugly. Why did it happen? I have written elsewhere that the wars resulting from the reformation break up of Christendom started the car rolling down the cliff, but the sixties were definitely the point the car went into the ravine.

What did it? Democracy. Democracy had defeated Hitler. America was a democracy. America was good. The stuffy monarchies of the past were bad. Tyranny must go! The papacy was a monarchy. Thank God for the Council! (At least the shallow interpretation of the Council presented in most institutions of learning.) Now we would vote on the truth just like our American Protestant neighbors, the Congregationalists. We were living in an illusion. America was not and is not a democracy. A very small group of very wealthy secularists tells us what to think, what to wear, whom to love and how to vote. They do so by means of the television that sits in every room of our house. The country used to be ruled by a small group of wealthy secularists. The country is now ruled by a small group of wealthy secularists who have control of the media. I call them the Mediocracy (accent third syllable.)

The guiding lights of liturgical renewal in the noble pursuit of heroic democracy and freedom of conscience decided that the moral thing to do was to play to the lowest common denominator, hence the liturgy of the New Church which we are busy singing into being. (Cf. Do a web search for "[Liturgical Abuse: Puppets \(WCCTA 2008\)](#)" - Please, I implore



you to look at this. You'll totally *platz*. I am not making this stuff up.) The liturgy was the lifeblood of the culture. It was hijacked and became the plaything of artistic wannabe's in the sixties. In the above mentioned video, with its liturgical dances and giant papier

mache puppets celebrating Mass, you see the quintessential stupidity of the whole project. Everyone's an artist, everyone's a celebrant, and everyone's entertained. Democracy. Christ the King becomes Christ the Sub-committee Chairperson. The only thing the perpetrators in the video clip were afraid to do was have a priestess as the main celebrant. The old fellow with the chasuble wanders around in the video like some lost child, while liturgical dancers female, and possibly male, cavort about sprinkling holy water on the assembled young liberals most of whom seen to be in their 70's. It is very entertaining if you were in college in the sixties. It is as boring as mud if you are young in 2012.

All that new liturgical music is 50 years old. It is as about as current as disco music. It might be delightful nostalgia, but it isn't the eternal Sacrifice of Calvary. "But," the young octogenarian liberals respond, "the Church used to be so dreary, so morbid, all that thinking about death." We abandoned the black vestments and the *Dies Irae*, and replaced them with more upbeat things like white vestments and happy hymns like "On Beagles Wings" and "Be Not A Noodge." "*Dies Irae*" was "Be Afraid, Be very Afraid!!"

Maybe we shouldn't be afraid. Maybe the Bible, the big book on the coffee table, is wrong when it says that "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord." (Proverbs 9:10) Well, we may longer be afraid, but we are also not entertained. There are a lot better things to do on a Sunday morning than watch a bunch of aging ex-nuns dancing around in giant *papier maché* masks sprinkling Holy Water on aging liberals by means of small pieces of shrubbery.

The liturgy was scary with its smoke and candles and strange gestures and solemn chanting in a strange language. God was scary. Life was scary. God and Mass are no longer scary, but life on Planet Earth gets scarier and scarier. At the Mass, we no longer propose reasonable answers to the difficult questions. We propose a kind of spiritual entertainment, a sort of community gathering, salvation by a positive mental attitude. There really is no reason to go to Mass on Sunday, unless there is nothing better to do. And believe me, there is always something better to do. That something is high school sports.

High school sports are one of the greatest enemies of Catholicism and of Catholic schools. I have elsewhere said that the sign of successful Catholic educational system is an adolescent who goes to church on Sunday by himself in July when his parents are out of town. This happens with about .0001 percent of Catholic adolescents. (I made that statistic up, but I bet the real figure is not much different. Somebody, please prove me wrong.) Most parents give themselves and their children a dispensation from church if there is a BIG GAME. Or a medium game. Or just an optional practice. The big, medium or optional sporting event is far more interesting than a bunch of old liberals cavorting about in what passes for liturgical dance. In fact the liturgical dance just gets downright embarrassing to a normal adolescent male when a 50-year-old, overweight, balding man dances around him clad in ill-fitting white pants sprinkling him with heaven knows what.(Cf. Afore mentioned video.) Better to be on a practice field throwing some kind of ball around. We old people who find this stuff meaningful have no idea how boring it is to our tech-savvy, media-addicted grandchildren. The liturgy which acknowledges and answers the great questions about death, judgment, heaven and hell has meaning. The liturgy as we now perceive it answers these great questions with coffee and doughnuts and bad art.

To be Catholic is to go to Mass. It is the sacrifice by which we acknowledge our real condition as sinners who will die. At Mass, we commit ourselves to God's offer of forgiveness and eternal life. This is true of the Mass in all its valid forms, Tridentine, Novus Ordo and all. Mass as entertainment has no power to move men's souls. It merely moves their emotions. A good Bears-Packers game is much better at moving the emotions. So why bother to go to Mass? After all, all dogs go to heaven, that is, if there is a heaven. God is too nice to send even the chihuahuas to hell.

The first Christians believed the Mass was the Messianic sacrifice. The Hebrew sages believed that the messiah would do away with all the sacrifices of the Law, except for the "*Todah*" sacrifice, the Thanksgiving Sacrifice, that is. The Thanksgiving Sacrifice was offered when a person had been delivered from death and danger, not when a person wanted to be mildly entertained. Thanksgiving is *Todah* in Hebrew. It is Eucharist in Greek. The reason that the first Christians celebrated the Eucharist was

that they had been delivered from certain death. Sometimes it seems the modern liturgist wants to distract the believer from the prospect of mortality. The messianic Thanksgiving sacrifice was about life and death. The liberal liturgy is about political correctness and good times. It is irrelevant to modern people who can find more efficient ways to distract themselves.

That has this to do with our attempts to put Catholic parishes and Catholic schools on a sound economic footing? Simply this: If one does not go to Mass, one is not a Catholic ([Catechism of the Catholic Church #2042](#) and [Canon Law # 1247](#)) Mass defines the Catholic. We have schools that present no real reason to go to Mass except that there is a tuition discount. Done with school, done with Mass seems to be the motto of the Catholic school graduate of today. In the current muddle we have schools that simply don't produce Catholics, *et ergo*, they are not Catholic schools. We are bleeding money to pay for private schools that produce secular humanists at reasonable rates. I know people who would open up their mattresses in a minute to have Catholic schools. They aren't quite as interested in what we have going now.

I believe in Catholic schools. I wish there were more of them.

Next week: More about the modern Catholic and modern ejukashun.

Response Part 3

Continued from last week.....

Perhaps, dear Frieda, you will recall that I proposed as evidence for a successful Catholic school or religious education program, the example of an adolescent attending church in July when his (or her) parents were unable to do so. Were that child to go to an un-air-conditioned Church, it might be evidence of exceptional sanctity. I digress. Perhaps one might say that a good and moral life would be as good or preferable as evidence for successful Catholic education. I remind you that I am talking about Catholic religious education. We may be doing a good and noble thing to create a moral citizenry, but we cannot call it Catholic education. Catholic education exists to produce Catholics, I would presume. Still, let me momentarily concede the point for the sake of amicable discussion. In that spirit, let us look at the product of modern education, both Catholic and in general.

In 2007, 20.7% of young adults ages 18-25 had in the past year had been addicted to, or abused illicit drugs or alcohol. About half of college students who drink, also binge-drink. The study states that 599,000 students are injured while under the influence of alcohol and 1,825 of them die. Another 690,000 students are assaulted by another student who has been drinking. To date, 97,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.

Twenty five percent of college students report academic consequences as a result of drinking such as missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall. Approximately 150,000 students develop an alcohol-related health problem and between 1.2 and 1.5 percent of students indicate that they tried to commit suicide within the past year due to drinking or drug use. Also, 2.8 million college students reported driving under the influence of alcohol. In short, about one in four college students is drunk, disorderly and dangerous. I cannot find a similar accumulation of statistics for Catholic schools, but being a graduate of a Catholic University, Krayola University here in Frostbite Falls, and having been a teacher at said university for 25 years, I suspect the figures above are low ball for us Catholics and

another survey in 2010 done by Mississippi State University seems to agree with me.

Let's talk about sex. Why not? Everyone else does. As mentioned above, the MSU study in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion indicated that women at Catholic colleges engage more frequently in sex than those at secular or evangelical colleges. Researchers suspect that more tolerant Catholic attitudes to drinking may be to blame. I wonder how much money was spent to find out that drunken adolescents tend to behave in an excessively amorous fashion. Also of interest, on the Cardinal Newman Society Blog "Campus Notes" I found a reference to a helpful list from TFP Student Action that claims "52 percent of Catholic colleges in the U.S. sponsor some form of 'pro-homosexual' student club. The Cardinal Newman Society has documented the damage that activist and social groups can do, such as drag shows being held on Catholic campuses."

I personally remember a correspondence I had a few years back with the then President of one of the largest Catholic Universities in the known galaxy, DePeters University here in Frostbite Falls, home of the much loved basketball team, the Azure Devils. In the Library there was a shrine to St. Harvey Milk, a pioneering homosexual politician who was shot by an angry fellow committee man in San Francisco in 1978. I am not sure that it is still there as of this writing. It was a simple dignified shrine, an icon of the martyred Harvey Milk, holding a candle, wearing the pink triangle, head surrounded by a halo and, on either side, in Greek, the words "St. Harvey." A student organization at the same university a few years back conducted a beauty contest for those young men who find the wearing of women's clothing more expressive, and a week celebrating amorous diversity and different life style choices in the tolerant and enlightened spirit of our age. The whole glorious event was capped off by a dance for these daring young progressives in one of the university's dorms. When I questioned the University President about the event, he pointed out that his hands were tied by academic freedom. Freedom indeed.....

So if the good and moral life provides evidence for the success of Catholic schools, I rest my case once again. Promiscuity, drunkenness and abortion cannot be made to look like moral victories, and remember we are not doing those things at the same rate

as the pagans. We are surpassing the pagans in vice! And all of this paid for by you, Mummy and Daddy, who have taken out a second mortgage and cosigned a fortune in college loans to complete the Catholic Education of the apples of your eye, your beloved children, in the hope that you will one day have grandchildren whose First Communion and Confirmation you will attend. Don't hold your breath. Maybe you should have sent them to trade school instead of the University of Sodom and Gomorrah. There they might have kept their faith and their morals and learned a marketable skill that could have found them employment in these hard economic times. But you opted for the much vaunted and increasingly worthless college degree, and from a good Catholic college to boot. Rather than choose dirty finger nails for our little dears, we have chosen filthy souls. The children of Catholic homes abort and contracept at the same rate as pagans. They go to church only rarely and seem to drink more than the heathens and fornicate like rabbits. And you are paying for the party. *Mazel Tov.*

How did this all happen? I'll tell you how. Sports. You heard me: SPORTS. The first time you missed Mass because of the big game you told your children that Mass and God and all that stuff, while important, were not nearly as important as the BIG GAME. Their obligations to the God who made them, who loved them with His life, the God who can rescue them from death, and before whom they will stand on the day of judgment, their obligation to Him doesn't really matter, because it doesn't really matter to you. Why shouldn't they drink and sleep around? Self control is just one more pious myth, one more tedious practice, like religion. Every Catholic school that allows a practice or a game on Sunday should immediately be closed down or at least taken over by a Catholic faculty.

Thank God I'm not a bishop. I would be a very unpopular one.

Response Part 4

Continued from last week.....

I ended my last harangue talking about the episcopacy. I have always thought it a singular sign of God's mercy and favor that I am not a bishop. It is a rather thankless task. Ill-tempered pundits like me can tell everyone what's wrong and how to fix it. It is left to the bishops to actually do things. They must shepherd the sheep which in our times more closely resembles the herding of cats. That said, I continue my harangue.

You may think that I want to see the end of Catholic schools. On the contrary! I believe in Catholic schools and Catholic education. For twenty years, I worked very hard to maintain a Catholic school that educated young refugees at reduced rates. I would do just about anything to keep it all going. Once I spent a holiday cleaning up mouse droppings so the health inspectors would not close the lunchroom and with it the school. If cleaning up after rodents is not supporting Catholic education, I don't know what is. I am simply trying to say that pouring money into a sinking ship without trying to fix the leaks is foolish. I don't want the ship to sink. I want to fix the leaks.

If you think it is inflammatory or irresponsible to question the morals of Catholic school graduates, you are fooling yourself. I am reminded of my bright college days and the happy afternoon hours when my friends and I were still sober enough to enjoy the happy afternoons. At one particular gathering, when we were trying to medicate away the day's difficulties, one of my classmates started mercilessly beating a classmate of whom he was not particularly fond with a broom. Most of us thought, considering the political tensions of the sixties, and our state of inebriation, that it was bound to come to this. What we had not noticed was that the victim's hair had somehow caught fire. He had a foot thick Afro hair style. Even he didn't know that he had ignited, and probably thought he was one more victim of racism. With our classmate successfully extinguished, we resumed our pursuit of higher learning, and I do mean higher. Once again, it was the sixties. Civility and discretion are of limited value on a sinking ship or in a burning building, or a burning hairdo for that matter.

Before we rescue Catholic schools one more time, let us ask what we are rescuing. What is the goal of Catholic education? I would venture that the goal of Catholic education is Catholic Education. I can hear bemused silence. Catholic schools are, at least in my neck of the woods, a very fine education, much better than government education. The teachers are fine teachers. The parents are generally very committed to the well being of their children. The “education” part of the equation is fine. It is the “Catholic” part that is the problem.

I have tried to point out that, though we do produce some Catholics, we still produce quite a few sex-crazed, sports-addicted pagans. I have heard colleagues say that “They come back when they get married and start having kids of their own.” I read a recent article titled “A Nation of Singles” by Jonathan Last. It seems that 23.8 percent of men and 19 percent of women, between the ages of 35 and 44 have never been married. Add to that the people between 20 and 34, the years when people generally start families, and the percentage of never married reaches a whopping 67 percent of men and 57 percent of women. That means a huge number of Americans no longer marry. Marriages are way down. Ask any priest in any parish. People don’t get married much anymore. So if they come back when they get married and have kids of their own, they’re not coming back. Not now, not never, no how.

Forty years ago the optimists said, “They’ll all be back when they get married.” Some of them got married. But most didn’t come back. Now they aren’t even coming back for their funerals. Their kids, what few kids they had don’t bother with marriage and tend to keep mom and dad’s ashes on the mantle next to the football trophies. Why should they bother with marriage? For forty years we winked at the promiscuous ways of our children and now what can we expect from our grandchildren? I remember old Father Hertz, one of my Latin teachers at Krayola University here in Frostbite Falls. He was so old that he used to reminisce about the Spanish American War. I am not exaggerating one little bit. Because he had reached an impossibly old age, the University decided to name a shiny new 19-story residence hall after him. He was as pleased as could be, until he found out what went on in the building. The behavior of the progressive young Catholic residents of the building could have made a sailor blush. Fr. Hertz asked to

have his name removed from the building. The University refused. This was in 1972. The rutting adolescents who made Fr. Hertz regret allowing his name to be tacked to that 19-story bordello are now 60 years old. Their grandchildren are approaching their 20's and they are the third generation for whose return we so optimistically wait. Ain't gonna happen, at least not in the numbers sufficient to recreate the good old church we once knew.

We are at a historic moment. Ethnic Catholicism is dead. One can no longer be Catholic simply because one is Irish or Polish or Mexican. I remember a battle royal I had in a former parish with a young Irish American colleen who stood up at the open microphone during the progressive Mass and invited everyone to join her in a march to protect a woman's right to abortion. That's the point at which I folded the progressive Mass down. Enough, at that point was enough. She was furious with me. She said that I had no right to tell her what it meant to be Catholic. She was born Catholic! I reminded her she was not born Catholic. She was baptized Catholic. No one is born Catholic. She hated everything that the Catholic Church stood for, but she could not conceive of being ethnically Irish and not Catholic. She would have no reason to drink green beer on St. Patrick's Day or march in the parade. So the Catholic Church would just have to change to suit her. That was 25 years ago. It is much easier now to be Irish and not Catholic.

The Americans who think of themselves as Irish have rediscovered pseudo-Druidism which allows them to kill their babies and still be Irish. I imagine that some author will soon make the case that St. Patrick was a Druid anyway who the Catholic Church co-opted, just like St. Bridget was actually a Celtic goddess. Neo-paganism is wondrously wacky and flexible. The point is this. One cannot be Catholic because one is Irish, or Polish or Mexican or anything. In the dawning age of neo-paganism, one can be Catholic only because Catholicism is the truth. Catholicism is a coherent way of life. We Catholics believe that the Catholic way of life is the best and surest way to heaven. It is not just an inconvenient organization that my ethnicity or cultural associations force me to be part of. For the first time in a very long time one is completely free to not be Catholic, and the Catholic education system has yet to wake up to that reality. It is a mistake to take anyone's Catholic identity for granted and yet we assume that if a child

is in a Catholic school, that child is probably Catholic, no questions asked. We're glad for the tuition and one must keep enrollment up. We need not teach them Catholicism. They are already Catholic. They should learn their prayers and it would be nice if they went to church and they should get their sacraments, because, well, they are Catholic.

What I am trying to say is that many, perhaps most, aren't Catholic by any reasonable definition. The Catholic school system should exist to teach Catholicism to a world that is, in fact not Catholic. One goes to medical school to become a doctor. The reason one goes to dental school is to become a dentist. The reason one goes to a cosmetology school is to become a cosmetician/cosmetologist.... whatever. Perhaps it would make sense for someone to go to a Catholic school to become a Catholic, or perhaps a better Catholic. American Catholic schools were created in the 19th century to protect Catholic children from the Protestant culture and the government schools that taught it. Now there are precious few Catholic children to protect. There are lot of people who have Baptismal certificates and who would like to have a swell Confirmation party, but they aren't Catholic in any practical sense. Catholic education will succeed only if it's clear that it teaches one how to be Catholic, how to live the Catholic life. One should only go to such a school if one wants to be a Catholic, or if one wants his children to be Catholic, not because they want their children to have a good education which is currently not available in many urban government schools.

So the question to ask before we can even begin to construct a form of Catholic education that deals with the new reality is; what does it mean to be Catholic?

Response Part 5

Letter to Frieda Begue continued)

About 30 years ago, I was confronted by a young feminist who had just announced from my pulpit that she was taking a group downtown to march in favor of a woman's right to abortion. Perhaps I have shared that story with you. I was the new pastor and was not welcome to celebrate the main Sunday Mass. They had their own priest, one who never used the words "father" or "lord" or "pope." They were all activists and in the words of my former superior, "Some of them had even been to Nicaragua!" I was very limited in what I could do, but when the call to defend abortion went out from the pulpit for which I was responsible, enough became enough! Go ahead and appoint me chaplain to retired Franciscan nuns in the Arctic Circle. I couldn't endure any more! I started saying that Mass despite the intentions of my immediate superior and I alone would make the announcements. No more open microphone at Mass, even for people who had been to Nicaragua.

The young woman in question railed at my intolerance and I explained to her that Catholics believed abortion is a mortal sin and that people who knowingly have one will go to hell unless they repent and confess their sins. She had a meltdown. She shouted "YOU can't tell me how to be a Catholic! I was born a Catholic!" I returned, "You weren't born a Catholic. You were baptized a Catholic."

No one is born a Christian or a Catholic. It is a gift conferred by baptism that each of us must accept or reject. The young activists in my former parish could not conceive of being Irish and not Catholic. Or perhaps Grandma would cut them out of the will. They certainly weren't Catholic in the sense that they accepted what the Church taught and believed. They didn't believe in the Trinity, in the divinity of Christ, in the sacrifice of Calvary, in a real Resurrection, in the Real Presence, in papal infallibility or in any of that stuff. They did however believe in folk music, a woman's right to abortion and coffee and doughnuts in the hall after whatever it was they did up in church.

No matter how hard you try, you can't dry off the waters of baptism, but you can cut yourself off from membership in the Church. It's called excommunication. There are other simpler, more practical ways to leave the fellowship of the Church. Many of them involve nothing more complicated than sitting on your couch on Sunday mornings for a few years. This is not exactly excommunication. Let's call it non-communication. It's easy to resolve being in a state of non-communication. Just ask the Lord's forgiveness, make a good confession, and come to Mass and Communion next Sunday, if not sooner. I must admit, there is a little more to it than that. You have to start living the Catholic life.

"The Catholic life?" you ask, "What is the Catholic life?" Simple, I believe it is the best way to be a Christian, and you may well ask, "What is a Christian?" A Christian is a follower of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. (Christ is the Greek word for Messiah, the anointed one. Hence the name Christian, by which we have been known for almost 2000 years.) The Christian is one who trusts and obeys Jesus, the Christ.

Most Christians define their faith by the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed, which say that Jesus was the heart, the visible image, of the God who made all things. In other words, if you want to get to know the Creator of the Universe, get to know a Jewish Carpenter who was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. He taught that God is a relationship, God is Love itself, and that He, Jesus is the heart of that relationship come to earth. He invites us to join that divine relationship. He is as a Son to a Father, and He invites us to become what He always has been. God's Holy Spirit can remake us in Jesus' perfect image, just as Jesus is the perfect image of the Father of all things. We do this not by magic or by membership in a club, but by trusting Him. Trusting Him means living the way of life that He teaches. That is the Catholic life.

What is the difference between Catholic and Christian? None, really. The Christian is the follower of the Christ and "Catholic" is a Greek word that means "universal." There are lots of varieties of Christianity that have popped up over the ages, but the Universal Faith is the one that the great majority of Christians has always accepted and still does. It is the most ancient and fullest unfolding of what Jesus teaches. Catholicism is a

shared way of life. It is to know love and serve God in this world and be happy with Him forever.

So here it is! This is how a Catholic is so supposed to live in the world.

We obey 10 commandments:

1. Love God above all things and worship only Him. This means you don't worship yourself. Pretty tough.
2. Don't take His name in vain. This isn't just about swearing. It means don't call yourself a Christian and act like a pagan.
3. Honor the Lord's Day. Every day is the Lord's. You have to have a life of prayer and study and above all you must go to Mass on Sunday.
4. Honor your parents. Don't just obey them. Honor them. This means if you are a parent you must live an honorable life.
5. Don't commit murder. This includes abortion and all abortion causing drugs.
6. Don't commit adultery. This is the tough one for our over-sexed society. This means one man, one woman, one faithful permanent marriage that is open to God's gift of life. No sleeping around. No recreational sex. No "interesting" alternative life styles. Tough religion, no?
7. Don't steal. This is tougher than you think. It means a day's work for a day's pay and a day's pay for a day's work. It prohibits slavery. Most of the clothes you have on are made by Chinese or Indian slaves. If you are a politician it means you can't tax the brains out of your constituents making it impossible for them to maintain two-parent homes where children are raised by their mother, if the mother so chooses. (He writes in an act of cowardice.)
8. You shall not lie.
9. You shall not envy peoples' relationships
10. or possessions.

Wait, there's more.

We obey 5 precepts of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2041)

1. You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and rest from work.
2. You shall confess your sins at least once a year.
3. You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.

4. You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.
5. You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church each according to his own ability. (This last one doesn't just refer to organizations and buildings. It implies service in the family of the Church and service to the family of the Church. That means you have to help the poor and get involved in the ministry of the Church.) Hold on! There's still more!

We practice 14 works of mercy,

7 corporal (physical):

1. Feed the hungry.
2. Give drink to the thirsty.
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the homeless.
5. Care for the sick.
6. Ransom the captive.
7. Bury the dead.

and 7 spiritual:

1. Instruct the ignorant.
2. Counsel the doubtful.
3. Admonish sinners.
4. Bear wrongs patiently.
5. Forgive offenses willingly.
6. Comfort the afflicted.
7. Pray for the living and the dead.

So, we live to know, love and serve the Lord. We pray. We study. We obey. We serve. We have 10 Commandments, 5 precepts, 14 works of mercy. That should keep us busy! It's a full and rewarding way of life. If you want your kids to go to a Catholic school, you want them to value their relationship with Jesus Christ more than they value money or sex or even sports! You want them believe and do these things.

Are you doing them yourself?

Response Part 6

(Letter to Frieda Begue, continued)

In my last thrilling installment I said that the Catholic life involves 10 commandments, 5 precepts, 14 works of mercy. There are a lot of other things, like the Bible, the Catechism, the Rosary, Sacraments and a lot of other interesting things like the Communion of Saints and the Queen and Mother of the Saints. Mary the Blessed Mother of our Lord and our Mother. These are not to be thought of as requirements. They are, in a sense exercise, spiritual exercise that St. Paul talks about in his first letter to St. Timothy, the 4th chapter the 8th verse (1Tim.4:8) He calls it godliness, or piety and contrasts it with bodily exercise. If you want six pack abs you are going to have to do some crunches. (I myself am quite content with the complete keg look) If you want to look like Jesus, it's going to take 10 commandments, 5 precepts, 14 works of mercy and a few other things. You can't earn heaven. It's a gift of grace, but if you refuse to allow grace to conform you to Christ's image, well good luck!

It all seems quite a lot of restrictive nonsense, this Catholic way of life. If it were just a philosophy, or a club that one could join, fine, but precepts and rosaries and the Sacrifice of the Mass? It seems like quite a commitment. Why should one even bother with it in the first place?

Simple. You are going to die. There is simply no way around it at the present time. It is inevitable that the body you *schlepp* to the health club is going to be six feet under sooner than most of us anticipate. All the stuff you have accumulated will end up in a yard sale because your ingrate grandchildren are uninterested in the finer things of life. Then the little philistines will divvy up your stock portfolio and certificates of deposit and spend your hard earned cash on good times with their pierced and painted neo-pagan friends from that horrible biker bar they frequent and that little gold digger your grandson married in a druidic, neo-pagan ceremony on some flea bitten, mosquito infested beach that you attended just to be "supportive." She will waste your bequest on heaven knows what. You never could stomach her or her low-life relatives. Now they are going to be your heirs and there isn't a darn thing you can do about it because you are as dead as

leftover meatloaf. I suppose you could try to haunt them, but I'm not sure it's that easy to haunt someone. If it's possible, I bet it's unpleasant. You're going to die. I'm going to die. That is unless Jesus is who He claimed to be.....

Death is inevitable, but there may be a loophole. We know more about the experience of death than any other generation of history. I'm talking about those beyond and back things. They're getting so common they have TV shows about them. I've met perhaps a hundred or so people who claim to have had the experience. I remember a priest who I met on retreat. We were talking about the topic. He said, "That happened to me."

He was visiting his doctor for a routine physical when he had heart attack right on the examining table. The doctor, who was from India, sent the nurse running for the things needed to resuscitate the priest and between resuscitation attempts, the doctor prayed over the priest. When they got the old priest revived and in the hospital, the doctor went to see him. The priest said that he didn't know the religion of the man but nonetheless was grateful to him for praying over him while he was dead. The doctor was amazed.

He said "How did you know I was praying for you? You weren't unconscious, you were dead!"

The old priest said, "No, I was standing over in the corner waiting to see what would happen."

I have heard enough of these kinds of stories to suspect that at the moment of death something really does happen that allows us to see and know things we have no right to see or know. I will never forget the first man I met who had this experience. I'd read a book about these experiences by a sociologist named John Moody. The book was a collection of case studies of people who had been "beyond and back." I was newly ordained and having read the book I decided I was an expert. I had a talk to give at a women's group the next day, and desperate for a sermon, I decided to talk about these experiences and what they might mean in relation to our belief in the survival of death.

After the talk, a tall, thin man came up to me and extended his hand. As he shook my hand he said, "It's all true. I know because I died."

I took a step back. His wife, a woman about half his size looked up at me and said “It’s true, Father. He’s not crazy. He dropped dead of a heart attack at home and they didn’t get him breathing again ‘til they got his body to the hospital.”

He told me the most amazing story. He said that he found himself floating on the ceiling. His wife was hysterical and his kids were calling the emergency number. He thought, “Why is everyone so upset? I feel fine!” He said that then he felt himself drawn into a long dark tunnel, but it wasn’t frightening. He felt perfectly safe. It reminded him of the 23rd Psalm, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil...” He came out onto a city of light. It was a city, but it wasn’t a city. It was light but it wasn’t light. There was really no way to describe it. There, in front of the city was the Lord, whom he had known and loved for years. It was Jesus, a person of perfect light and love. He said that he could hear all our prayers rise to heaven and become like one prayer before God. He said, “Not only did our prayers rise to heaven but that when we prayed from the heart, “in the Spirit” were his exact words, our very spirits stood before God and became like one spirit.” He said the only thing that bothered him about the whole experience was that there was a kind of judgment in which he knew the answers before he was asked the questions. I wonder if that isn’t what it must be to experience timelessness. Here we live in time. There we have no time. We, like God are eternal, timeless.

In the midst of all that beauty, he heard one prayer that bothered him. It was his wife praying, “Lord, you have to send him back!”

He was only in his early fifties, and the Lord turned to him and said, “Your work in the world isn’t done yet. You have to go back.

He passed back through the same tunnel. He woke up on a gurney in the emergency room of the local hospital; and when he had enough air in his lungs he yelled, “Why didn’t you leave me there?”

He was so angry about being alive that he wouldn’t talk to his wife for the next three days! There she stood nodding her head as he spoke. After a day or so he got on with the business of living. I’ve told that story innumerable times, and have heard many

stories just like it. Some however are not so pleasant. I'll get to those later. But there is something beyond this life and, as St. Paul said "If we have believed for this life alone, we are the sorriest of men." (1 Cor. 15:19)

To live as if this world were the only reality is a prescription for eternal unhappiness. There is more to live for than what we can get our hands on. There is more to live for than our pleasures and desires. There is more to life than even life.

So, the first reason to live the Catholic life? Hope. Christ offers real hope, hope in the face of inevitable death.

Response Part 7

(Letter to Frieda Begue continued interminably)

The question at hand is why bother to have Catholic schools, if not to live the Catholic life? And why bother to live the Catholic life? The first good answer is that Christ offers real hope in the face of death. It is fascinating to think that the hope Christ offers is so great that practically all those who knew Him fearlessly died violent deaths simply for insisting that Jesus was who he claimed to be, when simply by renouncing Him they could have lived to a peaceful old age. It is yet more amazing that this willingness to die rather than to deny Christ has persisted throughout the history of Christianity. Untold thousands, even millions, have found the Catholic way of life, the Gospel way of life preferable to life itself. I told you the story of the first person I met who claimed to have had the experience of clinical death. He was only the first person I met to claim such things. I have told that story repeatedly and often people tell me about their own similar experience. I have to admit that not all of these experiences are pleasant. There is a second reason to follow Christ by living the Catholic way of life. It seems there really is a hell.

Years back, a couple of kids asked about heaven. I told them the story that I told you just last week, the light and the tunnel and all that. Their uncle, an old friend of mine, was listening. He said that it was all a load of!

He said, "When you die, you're dead. I know. I died." Later he told me, "What I said a while ago isn't true. I was in hell."

I had known him since he was a child, and believe me, he was a difficult child. He got involved in theft and then selling drugs, and then worse. Finally his liver was almost severed in a knife fight. They lost him on the table, but they were able to patch him back together and revive him. He didn't want to go into the particulars of hell, but I have heard a similar from others. I particularly remember a young man who had died of an overdose. He had lived a violent and self absorbed life. He said that when he died, he found himself sinking into a dark alone-ness and he knew he was going to be there for a

very long time. He saw Jesus in a distant light, the Christ whom his family loved and served, but who he had rejected. He cried out to the Lord as he fell into the blackness and begged for another chance. He woke up on the emergency room table of the local hospital. True to his word, he turned his life around and is alive to this day.

If there really is a hell and if God is so good and so loving, how can he send anyone there? The answer is very simple. He doesn't send us to hell. He finds us there. Think about it. When we are born into this world we are completely self-absorbed. We live in a world of one. If a baby wakes up in the middle of the night and wants a bottle, a change of clothes or mommy's warm embrace, the whole house is up. It doesn't matter that you have to be up before the dawn. A baby has a cry that can penetrate brick, and he wants what he wants. I know people who are 60 or 70 years old, who, if they want a bottle, a change of clothes and mommy's warm embrace....

Catch my drift? Many of us never leave the place of fundamental isolation and narcissism into which we are born. We Catholics call this original sin. I suspect that when we die, all that happens is that time stops, and to paraphrase God's words to Moses, "we are who we are." And we will be that forever. If we reject God's offer of grace and refuse to live for anyone but ourselves, then we will live in that absolute alone-ness eternally. Jesus compared heaven to a wedding banquet but He called hell the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We want God to guarantee the pleasures of heaven, but we fail to understand that heaven is not so much a place as a relationship. If we refuse the relationship, we refuse heaven. More than heaven awaits us. God's plan is to adopt us, to make us part of that relationship which is God. Remember that God is love, sacrificial love. If I cling to myself, I cannot cling to Him. If God is "*agape*," sacrificial love, and I reject sacrifice, I have rejected God. God will not force anyone to go to heaven. He makes us free to reject Him or to accept Him. C.S. Lewis puts it this way: In the end there are only two types of people, those who will say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God will say, "No, Thy will be done." If we want only what we want, than we have made our choice.

We Americans love to think that we are free. We may once have been, but are no longer. We are a nation of slaves: slaves to our possessions; slaves to our desires; to our sexual needs; to all the things we see on TV. We are enslaved to the cruelest master, our own desires.

Jesus once said you cannot serve both God and possessions. Things, self-centered passions, an insistence on what we have decided are our “rights” and the inflated sense of our own importance are dragging us down to hell. We talk about freedom of choice. We don’t have and have never had freedom of choice. I may want to be eight feet tall and have a billion dollars. Neither is possible. I may not be able to have them, but I can want them. I can want them with a passion that excludes all other loves.

Freedom of choice is a myth. All we really have is freedom of will. I can will my own desires, or I can say to God, “Not my will but Thy will be done. Into your hands I commend my life.” The possibility of hell is also the possibility of freedom. We want a God who gives us our every desire, and if He does not obey us, then He is not a good and loving God. Perhaps He doesn’t even exist. Most people love, not God, but what they think He can give, and when He does not give, He is no God at all.

Perhaps you’ve heard me tell the story of the young starlet who is about to marry the rich old billionaire who has one foot in the grave and one foot on a banana peel. She is interviewed by the paparazzi and we all get a laugh out of her protestation that she is marrying for love. “I’d marry him if he was the poorest man in the world. I love him,” she protests! Then, in a few months when he finally dies and leaves his fortune to her and her two chihuahuas, the battle is joined between the lawyers of the first, second and third wives and the lawyers of the starlet, over who gets the money.

The young beauty wasn’t able to love him. She was so self-absorbed and he was so rich. She knew he was an old fool. We knew he was an old fool. The reporters knew he was an old fool. The only one who didn’t know he was an old fool was the old fool. I assure you that God is not an old fool. He can tell the difference between true love and manipulation.

To love God is not to desire Him for what He can provide, but to desire Him for who He

is. He allows suffering and difficulty in order to give us the one prerequisite of love -- freedom. The possibility of eternal damnation is also the opportunity for eternal freedom.

So why live the Catholic life? To live the Catholic life, with all its self-denial and sacrifice is to live in real freedom and to have the ability to truly love God who is Love itself.

Response Part 8

(Letter to Frieda Begue continued to the point of tedium)

Why be the follower of Jesus Christ by living the Catholic life? Because Death is inevitable and hell is possible. In the face of death, Christ offers the possibility of eternal life and in the face of hell, Christ offers true freedom, not just the addictions we mistake for freedom.

There is still another reason to live the Catholic life. The Bible calls it judgment; I suspect that judgment is the same thing that we Catholics call purgatory. In the Bible we read that judgment isn't just a sort of up or down thing, not just "guilty" or "not guilty." In addition to the "guilty" or "not guilty" verdict, the judges of ancient Israel dispensed wisdom and settled disputes. According to the Book of Deuteronomy, in his final instruction, Moses says to the judges he has appointed "Listen to the complaints of your kinsmen administer true justice to both parties." Justice is as much bringing into right relationship as rendering what is due.

Remember when I mentioned the first man I met who had died and lived to talk about it? He said the only thing that bothered him about the whole experience was that there was a kind of judgment in which he knew the answers before he was asked the questions. There was a kind of judgment.....

Other people whom I have met who have had this experience of judgment say that they experience all the pain they caused others during their lives. Ouch! I've caused a lot of pain willingly and unwillingly, to friends, parents, co-workers. I've gossiped, I've lied, I've taken advantage of others. St. Paul says that "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1Cor.13:1) I will see myself as I really am, not as I tell myself I am. I am not the kind, devout, generous person I pretend to be. I will see the self-absorbed, dishonest, gossipy, couch potato for whom God gave his only begotten Son. It's the real me that God loves, not the me I pretend to be.

Have you ever taken a good hard look at yourself in a mirror? I mean a mirror that doesn't see make up and jewelry and clothing and hair dye? And for men a mirror that doesn't reflect the 17-year-old flexing his scrawny muscles, but the mirror that sees the 60-year-old sucking in his paunch. It is a matter of great humor and some sadness to see some aging beauty wearing the same size that was a little tight when she was in her twenties or to see some middle aged Casanova on the beach wearing some little swimsuit that makes one want to call the proper authorities. (By this I mean animal control. Some of these post- adolescent Adonises are so hirsute that one suspects the stories about Bigfoot are true.) Looking at our outer selves in a mirror by the unkind glow of an early morning florescent light can be shocking for most of us, but God Almighty is the perfect mirror of our souls. If you think you've let yourself go in this world, just wait till you see yourself in the Perfect Mirror of the Eternal. Just wait until you "know as you are known." Your secrets will be made public as you stand on a stage before all 106 billion people who have ever lived, worse than that, you will see yourself as your Creator sees you and you experience the pain that you have caused Him who loved you to the last drop of His blood. Make sure you eat breakfast that day and have a second cup of coffee. You're going to need it.

I can hear you saying "But I'm saved! I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior at bible camp when I was twelve! I'm a church member. My sins were washed clean by the Blood of the Lamb!!!" Where do you get that nonsense? Not from Good and Gentle Jesus who said "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' " (Matt. 7:21-23)

Just read Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the

King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

I quote this at length for two reasons, first for the "faith alone" crowd. To accept someone as Lord is to obey that person. He says, "Feed the poor," and I say, "I don't have to, I'm saved." If you take that attitude I suspect you are in for a surprise. That's why I say one must live the Catholic life. It used to be just the Christian life, but then that German priest, Luther came along and invented couch potato Christianity where all you had to do was show up. I wish he were right, but I suspect he was very wrong, dangerously wrong if you listen to what Jesus had to say. I quote the whole thing for a second reason. Not only do people I met who have died and lived to tell about it say this sort of thing happen, but good and gentle Jesus said it, If you think He never had a cross word to say and accepts everyone with unconditional "Luv," you too are in for a shock.

Now for some good news. We have reason to hope that God makes the offer of His Love and eternal life to all people. "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?"

declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" (Ezekiel 18:23) and St. Paul writes "(God) wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."(1Timothy 2:4) We Catholics believe that judgment, though painful, can be a good thing for those who have not rejected God's offer of love. Read what the catechism says about purgatory:

Paragraph # 1030 "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification.

(1031) Purgatory (is) this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned."

In this school of life here on Planet Earth, very few of us finish all of our homework. God completes the process as we enter into eternal life. The Christians have always called this "purgatory," that is until the "new and improved" brand of Christianity Lite invented by Calvin, Luther, and that crowd 500 years ago. Real Christianity believes that we are not simply in or out, but that we are adopted by God as His children, and thus that we must be transformed into his image before we enjoy the fullness of life. Most of us barely begin this process here on Earth, but, thank God, if we die in the Lord, we continue to grow until we reach the full stature of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)

St John says, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1John 3:2) That means we will stand before the God who is Light from Light and the brightness of that Light will burn away all that is darkness. Remember a few paragraphs ago when I quoted the Catechism as saying Purgatory.... "is entirely different from the punishment of the damned." Perhaps that means Purgatory's cleansing fire is simply the fire of love.

Response Part 9

Letter to Frieda Begue continued ad nauseam)

There are four last things, things that are more important than the color of your hair, your tummy tuck or your face lift. No matter how much rice bran and organic moose drool you eat, no matter how many times a week you go to the gym, there are four things that matter: Death, Judgment, Hell and finally, Heaven.

Forget everything you ever learned in Sunday school about heaven. In the first place the word "heaven" in the text is simply the Greek word "*ouranos*" or "sky" in English. Think about it "The kingdom of the sky," or "when I go to the sky." "Jesus is in the sky." "Grammy and Grampy aren't dead, Junior. They are with Jesus in the sky."

I love it when people argue about whether or not heaven is a place. "The sky is a place!" or "there is no such place as the sky!" The text uses the word sky in a metaphorical sense. The sky is simply the biggest and most mysterious place that the ancients could perceive. That fact remains true to this day. There is no way to describe it, just as there is no way to describe the dimension that it denotes, the dimension that we call heaven for want of a better word. Heaven is not just a continuation of life on earth. To compare our life now to Life Eternal is to compare the nine months in the womb to life in the sunlight. To compare this world to heaven is like comparing the light of a match to a thousand suns and more.

St. Paul says that, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12) and again "It is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."(1Corinthians 2:9) As I mentioned before, St John goes even further. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1John3:2)

What does all that mean? First it means that there is no way to describe heaven. That is

certainly what people I know who have been there tell me. We always think of mansions on streets of gold. The streets of gold are just poetic description, but the word “mansion” is a downright mistranslation. Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:2) The word “*monai*” in the Greek text of scripture used to be translated mansion, but it doesn’t really mean that, it means a place to stay permanently, a place to remain, a place for coming home. I’ve been in a lot of mansions and some of them are very lonely places.

I don’t want a mansion. I want a home. I remember my room when I was little. Ours was a house full of people, full of noise, full of love, not perfect by any means, but still a place of safety and belonging. The aromas that came up from the kitchen, the sound of my father’s voice my seven brothers and sisters, the arrival of guests. We had so many wonderful gatherings of family and friends. So many people had keys to the front door, which were seldom used because the front door was seldom locked. Home was where I was safe. Home was where you were welcome. Not everyone had that kind of home. I realize that I was very blessed. Though not everyone had that kind of home, everyone can have that kind of home. We call it heaven. The fond memories of my childhood home are only hints of the joy and safety of the heavenly home offered by Christ. You can keep your mansion on its street of gold that you heard about in Sunday school. I would rather return to my Father’s house. (Luke 15:18)

Am I saying that heaven is not a place? No. Heaven is more than a place. It is what places hint at. Now we live in space and time. Remember that St. John tells us we will be like God, and remember that for God all time is now and every place is here. God is not in the skies. The skies are in Him. He holds the skies in the palm of His hand, and we will be like Him. “But,” you may counter, “Didn’t Jesus say “Today you will be with me in paradise”?” (Luke 23:24) There are other mentions of paradise in the Bible. “I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.” (2 Cor.12:4) Doesn’t the Book of Revelation talk about paradise? (Rev.2:7)

Surely paradise is a place. Not necessarily. Paradise is a relationship! Notice that St.

Paul when he was taken up to paradise doesn't talk about what he saw. He talks about what he heard. Paradise was a fairly common word beyond its religious use. There were lots of "paradises." Paradise was originally an Iranian word that meant a walled enclosure. It came to mean the garden in which a king could walk with his friends without the formality of the court in which his every word was law. It was a place of friendship, of intimate conversation. In the Bible it came to mean the Garden of Eden where God walked in friendship with Adam and Eve. Paradise is about the relationship, not the real estate. In effect, Jesus said to St. Dismas, the good thief, "Today you will walk with me in my royal enclosure as my friend." So many people worry that they will not know their loved ones in heaven. Nonsense! We will know them perfectly for we will know as we are known. What passes for knowledge here is nothing compared to the perfect and personal intimacy of heaven. You will know your loved ones there far better than you know them here.

We Christians hope for more than heaven when we die, at least more than the heaven that most people are expecting. God promises to adopt us as His children. As Jesus is His only begotten, we will be His adopted, no less His children than Jesus. If you have ever adopted a child, you know that child is your real child, not your make believe child. I had a dear friend who had two begotten children and one adopted. He was a very peaceable man, but when some talked about his two real children he was always sore pressed not to strike them. He contented himself by reminding them that had three real children. So, too, we shall be the real children of God, but as St. John says above, we are called His children but "child" is only the dim shadow of the wonderful truth which cannot be adequately described in our limited languages. We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

When I was a little boy, the nuns would tell us about the "beatific vision." We would spend eternity looking at God. I could think of nothing more boring. It sounded like an eternity in church. I would rather have spent eternity watching Bugs Bunny cartoons. Then I grew up and realized that there is such a thing as falling in love. When a young man marries a young woman, and if perhaps he wakes up in the middle of the night, and if perhaps the moonlight streaming through the curtains allows him to see her soft

breathing gently rising and falling as she sleeps, he wishes that the moment would last forever. It can and it will, if we have loved the Lord. To behold the Beloved! Heaven is to fall in love forever. What this sorry world calls falling in love is just the hint of that infinite well of love into which we will someday fall if we have truly, sacrificially loved in this brief life.

And yet heaven is more than to behold the beloved. The most amazing thing is that we are to become part of God who is Love. By being adopted into that family which is God. God is perfect relationship, perfect family, as the Blessed Pope John Paul II called Him. We are to be “divinized,” to be made part of the God who is love, sacrificial love, not simply selfish emotion, but real sacrificial love. If we are to become part of that relationship with God who is true love, we will not simply love and be loved, we will become Love. We will become Love. Think about it. We will become Love. Is there another religion that makes such a promise? Our mortal longings and affections are barely the slightest hint, not only of what we will experience, but of what we will actually be, when our sin and selfishness have been burned away. To become Love! Is there a more wonderful destiny?

So, why be a Catholic, a follower of Christ in the most ancient and, I believe, the most authentic form? In the face of death the Lord offers hope. In the face of judgment, the Lord offers mercy. In the face of hell, the Lord offers freedom and Heaven’s freedom offers true Love, Eternal Love, the Love for which you and I were created, the Love which is God.

Response Part 10

(Letter to Frieda Begue, continued yet again. Will this guy never shut up?)

So let me recap, in case you have lost the thread of my argument.

1) No matter how many programs we initiate and no matter what we do to fund them, it seems that many, though certainly not all, parishes are failing to draw and keep young people. The conclusion can be drawn simply by looking at the absence of young people in many churches after they have received the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. In addition, it seems that the behavior of Catholic college students is even more embarrassing than that of non-Catholics, and as adults, Catholics in this country have abortions, practice artificial birth control, get divorced and sleep in on Sundays pretty much at the same rate as pagans. (I made that last one up, but I bet it's not far from the truth.) Religious education whether in Catholic schools for kindergarten to college is not working very well the way we are doing it now.

2) The case can be made that many people send their children to religious education classes of the "Sunday School" variety because they want their children to "get the sacraments" as rites of passage, not because they want them to live the Catholic life. They themselves don't live the Catholic life, as evidenced by multiple marriages and refusal to participate in the liturgy. The hemorrhaging of resources and energy is particularly distressing in urban Catholic schools. Though many people sacrifice to provide a good Catholic education for their children, they are sometimes outnumbered by the non-practicing Catholics who in fact don't care one way or the other whether or not their children live the Catholic life. They want a relatively inexpensive private school education provided by Catholic parishes. They will put up with a little religion if they must, but they have no intention of observing the Commandments and precepts that we Catholics believe define our service to God and our fellow human beings. This is particularly true in urban areas where public schools are educationally deficient and physically dangerous.

3) To be Catholic is to believe as St. Paul says, “If we have believed in Christ for this life only, we are the sorriest of all people.” (1Cor.15:19) There are four last things that await us; death, judgment, heaven and hell. If you believe the Catholic life is optional, then you cannot sustain Catholic parishes, Catholic religious education and certainly not Catholic schools. There is not enough fire in the belly to find the millions of dollars necessary for the project where there is no passion or faith in the heart.

Two stories: A fellow pastor told me about a woman, a former Catholic who now went to an evangelical Protestant church. She wanted her child to be enrolled in the parish school, not just at the already reduced rate given non-Catholics, (about \$5,000), but at the Catholic rate (about \$4,000). The cost to the parish per child was at least \$6,000, of which the parents only provide part. The pastor suggested that she ask her evangelical Protestant pastor to provide a \$2,000 scholarship, rather than expecting it from a parish she had abandoned. She expected a church in which she no longer believed to provide for her children. She had no worries that they would return to the faith she had rejected. The religion curriculum, at least at that time, was fairly generic and very bland. Her child would be exposed to no undue fanaticism. The same pastor said that about 1/3 of all parish revenues went into the operating costs of the school. It would be like bringing a wheel barrow into the church for three months every year and just wheeling it over to the school. This rather bold woman is really not different from a great many parents who want their children cared by a religion with which they wanted nothing to do. She was just a bit more honest about it.

A second story: In the never ending struggle to keep enrollment and thus revenues up, a neighboring parish sent a member of his school board over here to St. Dymphna's of Frostbite Falls. He spoke at all the Masses inviting parents to enroll their children in the local Catholic school. The speaker pointed out that it was a great school, which it is. He let people know that it was a safe environment, with good computer courses, small class sizes and an excellent record of high school and college success. (Long pause)..... Nothing mentioned about the fact that the school was Catholic, or that it was a matter of the eternal salvation of the souls of those most dear to parents, their own children. That's because despite all the lip service we pay to our Catholic faith and

to Catholic “values,” it just isn’t very important and deep down, we don’t think it’s true. Remember that this was a school board member who failed to point out the one thing that matters about Catholic education, namely that it is CATHOLIC!!!

I am as tired of saying it as you are of hearing it. It is idiotic of us to drag down those people who want to live the Catholic life and who want their children to live the Catholic life, by wasting, yes wasting, our resources providing private schools and rites of passage for people who find our faith unimportant.

Comment #1 “Who are you, you self-righteous curmudgeon to judge what is important to whom?” To which I respond that I have been in this business for 43 years. I have been involved with three schools and five religious education programs. I was the pastor responsible for one of those schools for 20 years. It doesn’t take a microscope to notice a train wreck.

Comment #2 “Schools are our biggest means of evangelization! The church will die without them!” Haven’t you been paying attention? More often than not churches are dying because of them. I have watched parish after parish close because the school could not be sustained and the school, having absorbed the resources of the parish for years, was the only thing the parish had going for it. If the schools, as they exist now, were a successful use of resources for the purpose of evangelization, we would be overflowing with fervent Catholics. How many thousands, even millions of children have passed through our doors and have received “their sacraments?” Now tell me this. How many thousands, even millions of empty seats are there in Catholic churches every Sunday?

Here is the point of Today’s installment:

IT’S TIME TO STOP KIDDING OURSELVES. WHAT WE ARE DOING ISN’T WORKING AND WE HAVE TO HAVE A COMPLETELY NEW PARADIGM FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, IN SCHOOLS AND RELIGION CLASSES, THIS INCLUDES COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES,

Which I, your friend, the Rev. Know-it-all, will helpfully provide in the coming weeks.

Response Part 11

Letter to Frieda Begue, concluded!

So what now? The first step is to admit that the changes in the world are more sweeping than anyone would have imagined. Peter Kreeft said very simply at a recent lecture "...the sexual revolution is the greatest revolution in 2000 years." We are living in the midst of the most sweeping redefinition of human life since the time of Christ. At the same time, we are witnessing a technological revolution that may be still more profound than the sexual revolution. It simply has no precedent. To continue to "stay the course" when that course has already demonstrated its inadequacy goes beyond foolish. It borders on insanity. The aging progressives who have dominated the life of the Church for the past 50 years had no idea of the whirlwind that they were unleashing. They cling to business as usual in the midst of the earthquake. The structures of the past 50 years are not sufficient for the future. I am so tired of hearing that the schools are our best means of evangelization. They are not. They could however become the best means of catechesis. It is time to end the parish school.

Archbishop ListECKI and Dr. Lichter as principal are doing something creative at All Saints Catholic School in Kenosha Wisconsin. It is a regional model for Catholic education. The ten parishes of the area have decided to quit fighting one another in the desperate quest for students. They are combining their resources. In order to keep the numbers up and make a school viable, parishes struggle to enroll students. The thought of limiting the student body to those who genuinely want Catholic, and not simply private education, means that numbers would sink so low and tuition would fall off so badly that the school would cease to be viable. This is happening anyway despite our efforts to "be inclusive" and to "reach out." In fact, the schools may be dying because of our efforts to "reach out." We dilute the effectiveness of our message in an effort to keep the numbers up, and all the while poor Catholics who could never afford to send their children to a Catholic school get the crumbs that fall from counting table. This is not what the Lord told us to do.

If a person is committed to the Catholic life, the Catholic community should do its

absolute best to give them a genuine, and forgive me if I use an offensive word, “authentic” Catholic education. There. I’ve done it. I’ve uttered an obscenity “Authentic!” This word is offensive because it implies that there are “real.”

There are Catholics and then there are Catholics who are just “part time” not quite as “gung-ho” about the faith. Grow up. This is the fact. If a person does not assist at Mass, they are not living the Catholic life. There is more to the Catholic life, but Mass is the cornerstone of the Catholic life. If a person does not participate at least minimally in the Catholic life, why should we design our Catechesis around them, why should we try to teach them about a God and a Church in which they have no real interest.

Evangelism means bringing people into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, not just a historical knowledge, not just a theological knowledge and certainly not a nodding acquaintance, but a saving knowledge. Those who want a private education, but not necessarily a Catholic one are candidates for evangelization, not for Catechesis.

You cannot catechize the unevangelized. You cannot teach about Christ to those who have never met Him. We are like that boring neighbor whom all of us dread. Perhaps we find ourselves on a bus or train seated next to him. He takes out pictures of his two year old and goes into endless discussion of the child’s merits and above average intelligence. We haven’t ever met the child and wish we hadn’t met the parent. Perhaps if we knew the little darling, or still more loved him, we would want to know all there is to know about him. We don’t. We are merely being polite because for some reason or other, we have to put up with this tedious neighbor on what has turned out to be a very long train ride.

So it is with Catholic schools for those who just want a good private school education. This even applies to religious education classes for those who are just there to “get their sacraments” so their children can have a church wedding and Grandma won’t cut them out of the will. They are so happy when it’s over. They bid their troublesome neighbor goodbye and resolve to avoid him in the future. Let us introduce them to the Lord first and then perhaps they will want to hear our stories.

I am not saying that we should exclude anyone from our schools. We should just be realistic. The schools should teach the Catholic life to those who wish to live it. If, for some reason, a person wants to send his child to a Catholic school, but has no intention of living the Catholic life, fine. It's just that the real cost of educating your little dear in a safe and moral school will be about \$12,000 a year -- twelve thousand dollars a year! Who will be able to afford it?

An integral part of this scheme is that it is a regional school and will be supported by the local Catholic community. It will not be part of, nor attached to any parish. Parents and children will have to remain faithful to the parish in which they are participating to maintain their status as practicing Catholics. It will be the apostolate of the Catholics in a given area. If a person is living the Catholic life and participating in the real and daily life of a church community, that child should be in a Catholic school, and my hunch is that the little old ladies who see Johnny and his ten brothers and sisters in church every Sunday, may not mind helping Johnny and his siblings go to school. They are part of the family that is the parish.

I know this works. I did this for twenty years. Every kid in the inner city school of my former parish was on "scholarship." The sweet grandmothers of the North Shore forked over the shekels by the bushel because they believed in that school. Retired geniuses and business moguls came down to a very dangerous neighborhood to volunteer to teach reading and math to the kids. They developed relationships that were part of being Catholic. The education of those poor immigrant children became the apostolate of three or four parishes. Some kids who were born into the most desperate poverty ultimately got scholarships to Harvard and Yale, all because the school was a collaboration of many, and it taught the Catholic life to both child and volunteer. It works.

Well, how will you know if the child who wants in to your narrow-minded exclusive Catholic school is living your so called" Catholic life?" Easy. The pastors. A child would have to be recommended by his pastor. In the Kenosha experiment the 10 local pastors sit on the board. As pastor, I have to pay a certain amount of money for the education of

my parish children in the local Catholic school. When I hear that a child whom I see every Sunday in the 5th pew from the front, whose name and whose parents I know, is enrolled in the local Catholic school I am delighted. I am happy to fork over the money to help subsidize his education.

But every September I get a few families who suddenly want to register in the parish. I have never seen them and will never see them again. They need to register, because if they do, they will get a discount at the local Catholic school. They are using me. They are using the school. They are using the name Catholic, and I resent it.

When I talk about the Catholic life, I am not talking about registered Catholics, or people who say they will start participating in the church. I am talking about providing education for those who are already genuinely part of the family, those who have faithfully done their best to raise their children in the faith. I am talking about the mother of four who, every Sunday, struggles with her squirming babies in the pew over on the side. When it comes time, she finds they can't afford to put their children in a Catholic school because, having obeyed the teaching of the Church regarding openness to life, they haven't two extra nickels to rub together. They couldn't possibly afford to educate their growing brood in a decent school, because we have given their place to people who have never even entertained the thought of obeying the teaching of the Church regarding artificial birth control.

Our schools are failing for the precise reason that our congregations are dying. We have paid lip service to our faith but we simply haven't believed it in our heart. We are maintaining institutions instead of making disciples. It is time for radical change, because the world around us is changing more radically than we can imagine. I have not addressed the problems of home schooling and non-school religious education programs. Religious education programs exist largely because so many we can't afford our schools. If we have a collaborative effort that genuinely produces active Catholic adults, money will cease to be a problem.

Home schoolers exist because of the disaster of secular education. In a government

school the chances that a child will be sexually abused by staff or other students are so huge as to be commonplace. Children in public schools are sexualized at a very early age not only by abuse but by design. The curriculum of the government schools has come under the control of the sexual revolutionaries whom Peter Kreeft mentioned.

I recently heard a horror story of a grade school in a large urban area in which the children were encouraged to make posters that showed both male/female couples and same sex couples holding hands. The posters bore the motto “This is traditional marriage.” Ten-year-olds learning the proper use of condoms is standard practice in government schools. Thus home schooling for those who can’t afford Catholic schools and don’t want their children subjected to the brutalization that passes for socialization in the government schools.

More horror stories. A priest friend of mine who also attended Krayola University on the shores of Lake Wobegon, a Catholic school, told me that he had a teacher for philosophy of God who was an atheist. Students of that era and of such teachers are now in charge of educating our children even in Catholic schools. Sometime home schoolers are avoiding Catholic schools as well as public schools and have reason to do so. The same classmate told me a story about a teacher in his Catholic parish school. The children wear uniforms but the teacher comes in with blue jeans that she painted on just that morning. It is not a government school, but the eighth grade boys are getting more of an education than their parents are paying for. Some teachers in Catholic schools are saints. My mother was one of them, but for some, a minority to be sure, it’s a job and in my experience of perhaps 10 Catholic schools, the religious instruction is sometimes un-enthused and indifferent.

An addendum to my regional school suggestion: The teachers in the regional school should not be there for the sake of a job, but for, the sake of a calling as Catechists of the Catholic faith, and we should pay them a decent wage, defraying costs by as much volunteer work as possible.

If we have schools that are accessible and authentically Catholic (there’s that nasty

word again) the Catholic home school movement and religious education will be much less necessary than we now find them. And money? Increasing the number of collections is not the way to increase church revenues. The only way to increase church funds is to increase the congregation. That will not happen until we teach the faith effectively. I recently heard a school board representative invite members of a congregation to send their children to his Catholic school. He bragged about high test scores, small classes and good computer labs. He didn't mention Christ. We will fail until Christ is the clear purpose of Catholic education.

Here endeth the lesson.

Rev. Know-it-all