

Conserving the Liberal Arts for Salvation – Saint Benedict Center and Intellectual Formation

Saint Benedict Center Conference 2013 – Sister Maria Philomena, M.I.C.M.

Quotes in the talk:

“When men are trained vocationally we have every right to expect better products (potatoes, chairs, medical services, or efficient machines), but we have no right to expect better men unless somewhere in our educational plans and activities we aim at the proper perfections of a man. You are as likely to produce a well-constructed bridge by accident and without aiming at it, as you are to produce a well-educated man by a scheme of training thoroughly directed to other ends. It should go without saying and as part of nature’s justice, that in a society where leaders receive specialized vocational training without liberal education, no sound norms can rightly be expected and no human values are secure. When the present trend towards vocational training finally succeeds in overwhelming and washing away the last vestiges of liberal education, we can expect to live in a world of good things and bad men. We shall have, to give one good example, unintelligent and confused leaders, on the one hand, and excellent atomic bombs, on the other!

“What are, then, those human perfections which constitute the end of liberal education? Plato’s answer to this question is in a way the major theme of all his writings. If one dares put it briefly and succinctly in one sentence, this is what it would be: man’s proper perfection consists in the knowledge of the absolute good, and in response to beauty. The absolute good is the good-in-itself and the source of the goodness [in] all other things.” – Brother Francis, *Plato and Liberal Education*, From the Housetops, 1946

“That perfection of the Intellect, which is the result of Education, [...] to be imparted to individuals in their respective measures, is the clear, calm, accurate vision and comprehension of all things, as far as the finite mind can embrace them, each in its place, and with its own characteristics upon it. It is almost prophetic from its knowledge of history; it is almost heart-searching from its knowledge of human nature; it has almost supernatural charity from its freedom from littleness and prejudice; it has almost the repose of faith, because nothing can startle it; it has almost the beauty and harmony of heavenly contemplation, so intimate is it with the eternal order of things and the music of the spheres.”(Bl.) John Henry Newman; *The Idea of a University*, Discourse VI, part 6.

“America can be converted; but someone has to labor for the achievement of this great objective. And, indeed, it is an objective so great that no one individual can reasonably undertake it alone, and no group can do it without order, patience, sacrifice, discipline, and education for the job. This is, in brief, the purpose of the Saint Augustine Institute of Catholic Studies.' Brother Francis, SAI Circular Letter #1, December 21. 1977.

“St. Benedict Center at the present time is deliberately a small school. Its faculty, however, is an eminent one, and its library excellent. Its aim is to give a thorough education in Liberal Arts, modelled on the classic traditions of the best universities of Europe, at which its faculty, with the exception of three or four, have studied. St. Benedict Center is interested in close cooperation between faculty and students, and for that purpose the teachers mutually attend each other’s classes, and are at the call of the students for special instruction or query at almost any time of the school day. The teachers thereby see exactly, what instruction is being given the student in every subject, and this contributes enormously to that most difficult of all educational problems, personal guidance.” Sister Catherine Goddard Clark, *The Loyolas and The Cabots*, Chapter 9 – Statement of Aims in the catalog of St. Benedict Center School

“The vineyard of Our Lord, and especially that part of it which is our own county, is in need of laborers – men and women in every walk of life – lay apostles, who are willing to work for the spreading and growth of the Holy Faith, first in their own selves, and then in others. It would be a sin against faith not to admit the necessity of this effort; it would be a sin against hope not to know that by the grace of God it is attainable; and it would be a sin against the theological virtue of charity, to refuse to answer the call. Men once faced with this challenge will be haunted the rest of their lives, unless they respond generously by joining the common effort and persevering loyally to the very end.” Brother Francis, SAI Circular #4, June 1979

Additional quotes:

“[A]ny occupation, art, or science, which makes the body or soul or mind of the freeman less fit for the practice or exercise of virtue, is vulgar . . .” Aristotle, *Politics*, Part II, Book Eight

"Every systematic science, the humblest and the noblest alike, seems to admit of two distinct kinds of proficiency; one of which may be properly called scientific knowledge of the subject, while the other is a kind of educational acquaintance with it. For an educated man should be able to form a fair off-hand judgement as to the goodness or badness of the method used by a professor in his exposition. To be educated is in fact to be able to do this; and even the man of universal education we deem to be such in virtue of his having this ability. It will, however, of course, be understood that we only ascribe universal education to one who in his own individual person is thus critical in all or nearly all branches of knowledge, and not to one who has a like ability merely in some special subject. For it is possible for a man to have this competence in some one branch of knowledge without having it in all." Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, I.I.

"Eloquence, after all, has its own place among the supreme virtues . . . having acquired all-embracing knowledge, it unfolds the thoughts and counsels of the mind in words, in such a way that it can drive the audience in whatever direction it has applied its weight. And the greater this power is, the more necessary it is to join it to integrity and the highest measure of good sense. For if we put the full resources of speech at the disposal of those who lack these virtues, we will certainly not make orators of them, but will put weapons into the hands of madmen." Cicero, *De Oratore*, Crassus, III.55

"Among all the departments of knowledge the ancients assigned seven to be studied by beginners, because they found in them a higher value than in the others, so that whoever has thoroughly mastered them can afterwards master the rest rather by research and practice than by the teacher's oral instruction. They are, as it were, the best tools, the fittest entrance through which the way to philosophic truth is opened to our intellect. Hence the names *trivium* and *quadrivium*, because here the robust mind progresses as if upon roads or paths to the secrets of wisdom. It is for this reason that there were among the ancients, who followed this path, so many wise men. Our schoolmen [*scholastici*] are disinclined, or do not know while studying, how to adhere to the appropriate method, whence it is that there are many who labour earnestly [*studentes*], but few wise men" Hugh (*Hugo* in Latin) of St. Victor (d.1141), *Didascalicon*, III, 3. [768A]

"You do not improve or advance a high school curriculum by running trial heats of college courses over it. High school teachers filch the college reading lists in the hope of preparing their students for college courses when the right preparation is to cover prerequisite material. In an age so concerned with civil rights, we should not overlook the rights of childhood.

"It is true that there are high school courses taught in college that should be moved back. But the meaning of "advanced placement" must not be stretched to cover what is really a problem in curriculum. We have grades —steps —necessary to the development of the student and to the structure of the subject. If you want to study philosophy, you must begin with logic; and if you want to make a young man into a philosopher, you must get him into the habit of being logical by drill in its disciplines. Some will go faster than others and that is why we have that other kind of "grade" from "A" to "F". But logic cannot be skipped nor can any test be substituted for it. Again, a smart boy can bone up on the rules of logic, but he will not have assimilated the terms or acquired the permanent disposition. A Chinese once criticized American education by saying, "You are always pulling on the flower to make it grow faster." We need rather, in the words of T. S. Eliot, a "life of significant soil." If a student has a greater capacity to learn, all the more reason for him to complete the full four years of his high school life and the full four years of his college life so that he actually realizes his potential. Slow him down. At Princeton, under Dean Root, the students in the four-year college normally took five courses per year; the exceptionally bright ones were permitted to take four, on the grounds that for them it was really worthwhile to go slow. *An education is not an annoying impediment to research or business, but a good in itself, indispensable to the development of the qualified person.*" Dr. John Senior, *Reflections on Education*, http://www.edocere.org/articles/reflections_on_education.htm

"It is necessary to possess [art, science, philosophy, etc.] before pretending to put it at the service of God. We are told that it is faith which constructed the cathedrals of the middle ages. Without doubt, but faith would have constructed nothing at all if there had not also been architects; and if it is true that the façade of Notre Dame of Paris is a yearning of the soul toward God, that does not prevent its being also a geometrical work. It is necessary to know geometry in order to construct a façade which may be an act of love." *Intelligence in Service of Christ* – Etienne Gilson – A Gilson Reader, edited by Anton C. Pegis, Image Books, 1957, 1962, page 40

"Education, in the best sense of the word, is the formation of habits. The formation of good habits is good education. The formation of bad habits is bad education. Education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge . . . [Mere

erudition] is only a small part of education. It pertains to the faculty of memory. Now, the memory must be trained, but not only the memory. All the powers of the child must be brought out to the highest perfection possible. Its intellect must be trained to perceive the truth. Its senses, internal and external, must be trained to perceive what is beautiful. And, above all, the will must be trained to do what is good. Moreover, since the soul, while in this life depends on the body for its due operation, the body also must be so trained as to keep in a healthy condition. “A sound mind in a sound body” is an axiom as old as the hills. A training in the fundamental laws of hygiene, therefore, is ministrant to the training of the child’s intellectual, esthetical, and moral faculties.

“Further, since man is destined to an eternal life and must attain that eternal life through a life of the spirit in this world, all his natural powers must be made ministrant to this spiritual life. His bodily health, his habits of memory, feeling, taste, intellect, and will must be so trained and directed as to bring forth the best possible fruits in the spiritual life. The supernatural is that which is built on the natural, not that which is built up in mid-air above – separated from the natural. The two merge, one into the other, in such a way that the natural becomes supernaturalized . . .” Rev. Thomas J. Gerrard, *Marriage and Parenthood – The Catholic Ideal*, Joseph F. Wagner, NY, 1911, Chapter 12, pg 152ff

“Science can describe, Philosophy can explain, but only Religion can motivate.” --Brother Francis

“1) The clarity, certainty, confidence, [and] challenge of the Faith renewed men, overcame the powerful passions, made for heroic achievement, built a new kind of civilization. The hesitant, skeptical, wavering teaching of Liberalism is impotent . . . 2) At best, Liberalism is sentimentality in religion and human respect. It leads to the destruction of divine respect.” – Brother Francis (*Thoughts for Tuesday, May 25, 1982*)

“1) The Crusade of Saint Benedict Center is something positive, constructive, benevolent, charitable; but it is also a challenge to the modern world. 2) We aim to convert America to defend the Depositum Fidei, to establish the foundations of a new Catholic civilization. The Dogma is the bottom of our container, not the container itself, and certainly not the content. 3) The Dogma is not only an issue, but [it] is the issue of orthodoxy at all times, but certainly in our age. Whatever any heresy – or schism of the past – held, they all thought that they could be saved outside the church. In our age, the Dogma offers maximum opposition to all the trends characteristic of modern times. 4) To be honest, the modern attack on the Dogma is really an attack on tradition, authority, Scripture, and the whole supernatural order. 64) Liberalism: Man is free to choose among many ways which lead to salvation.” – Brother Francis (from *Points for [a] Course on [the] Dogma of Faith*)

Some further references

<http://store.catholicism.org/saint-augustine-institute/>

http://catholicism.org/downloads/March_2010_SAI_flier_%28Brother_Francis%29.pdf (a list of all of Brother's available lectures)

<http://sai.catholicism.org/>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01760a.htm> The Catholic Encyclopedia, *The Seven Liberal Arts*

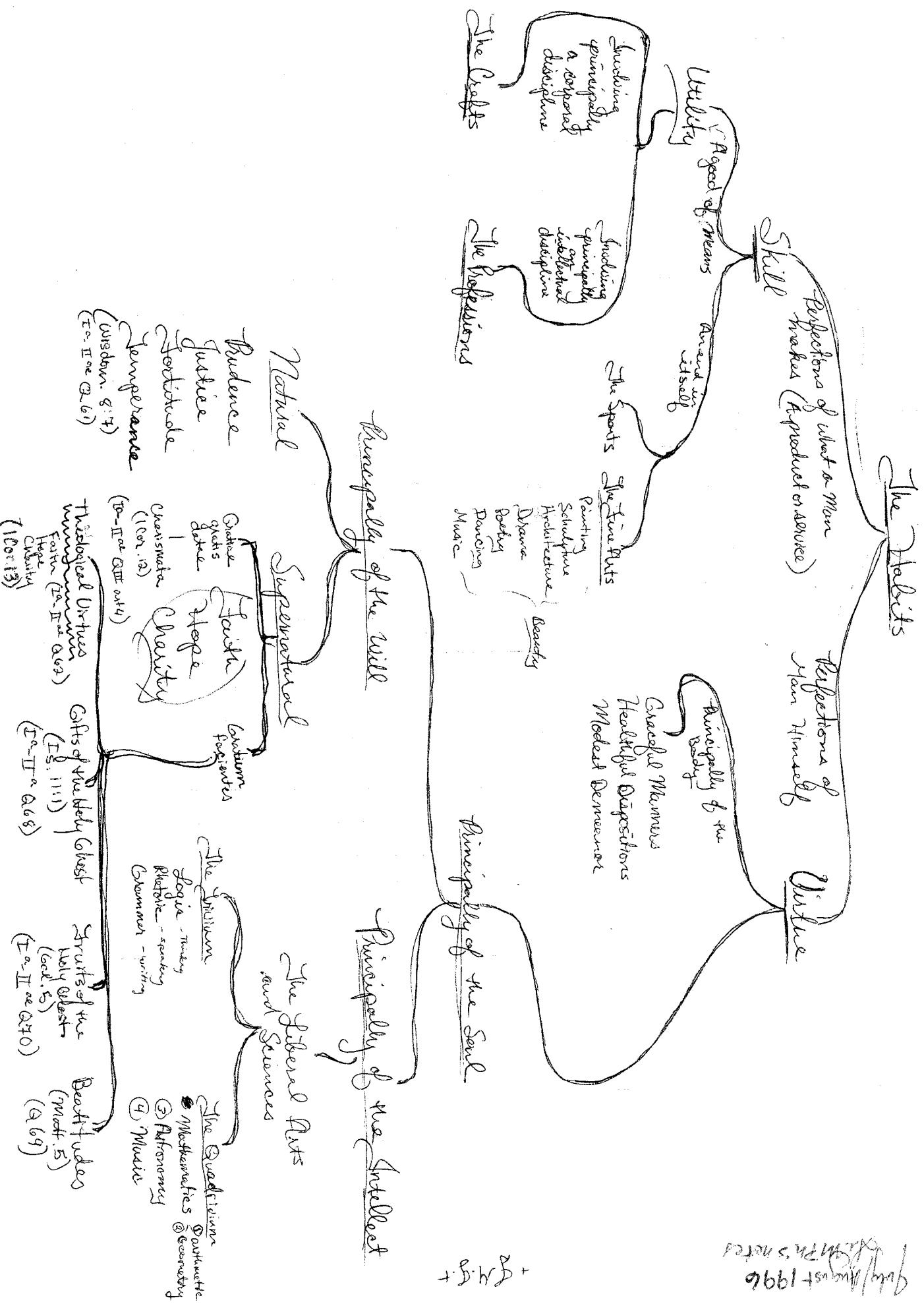
<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.8.eight.html> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book Eight (350 B.C.)

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Prima Secundae Partis, Questions 49ff.

Kimball, Bruce A.; *Interpreting the Liberal Arts: Four Lectures on the History and Historiography of the Liberal Arts*; Westmont College, 2003.

Leclercq, Jean, OSB.; *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God – A Study of Monastic Culture*; Fordham University Press, 1961-1982.

Br. Francis' diagram on: Perfections of Human Nature acquired thru Discipline



*Summa
Theologica*

HABITS IN GENERAL

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1. Powers.—See Part I, Q. 77.	
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HABITS IN PARTICULAR

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2. In Particular	
1. Matters Connected with Virtues	

Ch. 2 Introducing Logic

Logic is the science and art of correct reasoning. It is also one of the Seven Liberal Arts. Let me present it first as one of ^{the} liberal arts:-

The Trivium

Grammar

Logic

Rhetoric

The Quadrivium

Arithmetic

Geometry

Music

Astronomy

The Seven Liberal Arts, (divided into the three disciplines of the Trivium and the four disciplines of the Quadrivium), form part of the traditional wisdom which came to us from the ages of Faith, together with the scholastic philosophy. We intend to present under the name of Philosophia Perennis. Liberal education is contrasted with specialized or professional education which prepares a man ~~for a service~~ for a craft or profession, whereby a man may render a service to society and thus earn a living. So without diminishing the nobility of service, from the Catholic point of view, there is implied in the attribute liberal, another great value, namely the elevation of man as a free person, as a value in himself and for his own perfection and happiness.