



Seton Home

Study School

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◆ “Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church” ◆

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In the Cave

When we think of the mystery of the nativity of Our Lord our thoughts are of the glow of candles, the white of snow and the image of a young mother holding her new born Son protected by a stalwart husband - in a cave! We do not often dwell upon the fact that they were in the cave, because “there was no room in the inn.” When St. Joseph was directed to the cave it was to a less crowded and congested area where there was a modicum of privacy and the warmth of the animals to take the edge off the winter chill.

There is less and less room in the “inn” of American culture for serious Catholics. Contemporary American culture reminds one of the inside of a hospital for the mentally deranged. Preborn babies are murdered by the millions while seals and whales seem to elicit more of a caring response than do small, completely helpless human beings. There is no room in the inn. So let us find a cave. Of course a cave is a metaphor. It is a natural shelter offering protection from the elements. For us home schoolers, home schooling is our cave. Homeschooling offers us the possibility of bringing the Christ Child to birth in the hearts of our children free from the throngs of intrusive secular minded people who in their very lifestyles seem to diffuse a poison, a winter chill that sinks into the heart by osmosis.

Television is a vicious and immoral intruder into our homes displaying vulgar language, immodest clothing, obsession with shameless sexuality, and shockingly egocentric attitudes. Magazines of every kind and type purvey a completely Godless lifestyle. Public sinners ostentatiously receive the sacraments in ostensibly Catholic churches and ecclesiastical authorities make excuses for not doing their duties. So let us find a cave. A cave where we can teach our children right and wrong and the pervasive miracle of divine grace; the integral Catholic faith uncontaminated by modern agnosticisms and paganisms; sacramental practices that do not blaspheme the good God but produce saints. A cave is a natural shelter, a hole in the ground surface, but it is not a human construction. The family likewise is the natural, God-given shelter of the young child. It is the social unit that gives him his ground of identity, thought, and action for the rest of his life. The customs, convictions, and rhythms of his family are the swaddling clothes of every child, giving him a sense of his place in the cosmos and his personal security which are the basis for his character development.

It is time to regroup so that we can provide our children with a sane and sacred atmosphere in which to grow and mature in holiness without the constant input of intrusive anti-values. Let us then make our spiritual

journey to Bethlehem to find Him Who is born King of the Jews. Let us realize that when we recognize this newborn Babe as our King, the Kingdom of God has indeed come among us. With this realization, let us rejoice in our blessings and seek to build our lives on this solid rock: lives that will withstand the wind and the rain of the opposition of this wicked generation to our faith, our hope, and our charity. Let us in the privacy of our homes and our families construct a way of life that places the priorities on the eternal, a life of the commandments, of participation in the sacraments as often as possible, in an atmosphere of reverence and love permeated by prayer and a pursuit of everything that is good, true, and beautiful.

All of this can best be done in our modern caves of Bethlehem: the truly Christian home. Let us seriously begin to lay the foundation for the culture of life, the culture of love over which rises the triumphant cross of the risen Lord, Who was born in a cave, a cave in Bethlehem. May our home schooling “caves” be the seeds of the next triumph of the cross.

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Ninth Grade (Revisited)

by *Dr. Mary Kay Clark*
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So many parents ask questions about grade 9 that we thought we would discuss it again this month. Grade 9 is our fastest growing grade level because so many families have put up with problems in the elementary schools and realize they cannot continue into the high school with the sex education, the violence, the peer pressure, the low level of academics, and the general overall bad environment.

Number of Courses

Some parents ask why we recommend only five courses for 9th grade. Our experience over the past several years has been that new students, especially students who have not been home schooling, find it difficult to do the work for six courses in nine months.

However, five courses is not a hard and fast rule. Sometimes parents want to take advantage of special circumstances. When a relative or a neighbor who speaks a foreign language is available during this particular year, or if a sibling is taking a foreign language during this year, parents may want to enroll their ninth grader in a foreign language course. Because a foreign language helps to develop and strengthen language arts skills, if a student is taking a foreign language course, a ninth grader may drop the Grammar 9 half-credit course.

The language arts subjects are second in importance only to Religion. Without sufficient language arts skills, all other high school courses are difficult to master. Obviously, survival skills and leadership skills also depend on good language arts skills.

The Composition 9 course is an extremely important course. No one can write too much! Writing skills are essential. They are essential for college, for leadership, or for vocational training. Writing skills are essential for what-

ever comes along in life. Most importantly, writing skills develop thinking skills.

An alternative course, which may be taken in place of Grammar 9 if a foreign language is being taken, or which may be taken in other high school grade levels, is Vocabulary for the College Bound. This course is excellent not only for understanding the definitions of words, but also for understanding how words are structured, and how they are built from roots.

The vocabulary course is like phonics. Once the student learns the sounds of the letters, he can apply the phonics rules to pronounce any word he comes across, whether or not he has ever seen it before. In the same way, the vocabulary course helps a student through the meaning of roots toward an understanding of words which he may have never encountered before.

The vocabulary course is excellent preparation for the SAT, the test which high school students take before entering college. With students reading less and learning less vocabulary from reading, a vocabulary course is becoming more important.

English 9

The English 9 course is challenging. Recently, based on parental requests, we have changed our policy to allow the words from the vocabulary list to be used as spelling words. This cuts down on the number of words students need to know.

We have spent a couple of months going over the English 9 course, upgrading it to make it easier to use, and making directions clearer. We also have repeated directions so students will not forget the assignments as they move along.

Sometimes students do not fully appreciate the depth of the books they read for this English 9 course, especially *The Lilies of the Field* and *Where the Red Fern Grows*. It is true they are "easy reading," but our discussion questions make students think more deeply, to read between the lines, to analyze relationships, such as between Homer and Mother, between the boy and God, between the boy and his parents. For the *The Merchant of Venice*, students are to analyze the difference between the two towns, the difference between the couples, the different attitudes about money and about friendship.

We hope that coming to understand the meaning of Faith in *Lilies*, the family relationships and reliance upon God in *Red Fern*, and the meaning of money and friendship in *Merchant* help the student to reflect on these topics in his own life and in relation to his Catholic Faith.

The English 9 course does cover further grammar and composition lessons but we believe a double dose is necessary in an age in which schools and society are ignoring basic communication skills. When this happens, citizens lose their ability to influence others in the society, which can be particularly dangerous for Christians.

Religion 9

Since we advanced the Religion 9 course from the Baltimore Catechism 2 to the Baltimore Catechism 3, parents and students have been much happier not to have the same book they had in the previous grade. This particular book is just at the right level, we believe, for clear explanation. The Baltimore Catechism 4 is excellent also, but perhaps a little advanced for the average ninth grade student.

Sometimes students neglect to study the content material contained in the lesson plans. It is not unusual for Seton lesson plans to contain content as well as directions. The content found in the Religion 9 lesson plans appears in the quarterly tests.

Algebra I

Algebra I has been pretty stable over the years. Some parents have asked for the answer keys for the tests that are sent to Seton. To maintain the security of the tests, we believe we should not send out the answers to the tests sent to Seton for grading.

However, we have come up with a solution for parents who want to know immediately how their children are doing on the tests. We are now sending the answers for half the tests to parents, with the other half of the tests sent to Seton for scoring. As parents send the Algebra I tests in, they will be receiving the new answer keys with an explanation.

Science

One of the comments that parents have made about the science courses in the 8th, 9th, and 10th grades is that the tests ask for too many details. We are in the process of standardizing the tests for the science courses, making the number of questions standard, analyzing the questions to make sure they do not demand unnecessarily-detailed information, compiling tests for each chapter rather than for two or three chapters at a time, and so on.

We encourage parents to look over the chapter or quarterly tests and help the student to prepare for the tests. For instance, if 50 vocabulary words are listed at the end of the chapter, but only 25 are included in the test, parents should, like a classroom teacher, guide the student in preparing for the test. The exact questions should not be given to the student, but guidelines can be given. For instance, "Be sure you know the difference between fission and fusion."

Another comment we hear is that the science books are from non-Catholic publishers. The problem is that there are no Catholic publishers of Catholic textbooks. Large publishers, such as Ginn or Silver Burdett, once had "Catholic School Divisions" which published Catholic textbooks. However, with state funding, diocesan schools stopped purchasing religious textbooks.

Seton has a dilemma with these books. We purchase either Christian textbooks by publishers who do not acknowledge the pope but live a Christian Biblical lifestyle, or we purchase secular textbooks by publishers who are thoroughly secular and un-Christian or anti-Christian in their outlook, and who may even send donations to Planned Parenthood. We find the Christian materials much more acceptable because acknowledgment is given to God as the Creator, and references are made to the Bible or the Christian perspective. When we use these Protestant books, we make sure to give the Catholic perspective in the lesson plans.

We believe that the Christian science books we use are on a higher academic level than secular books used in the public schools. While our program may not offer as much in the labs and activities (although many are optional), it certainly offers substantial content. If students want more labs and activities, it is often possible to enroll in classes locally, such as at a community college.

Difficulties?

Sometimes we hear that the curriculum is "overwhelming." When we pin it down, it is usually the English 9 class, though some have problems with Algebra. Like anything in this life, whenever something seems overwhelming, it needs to be broken down into smaller pieces.

Perhaps mother or father, an older sibling, a grandparent or aunt, can work through a few weeks with a student day by day, in the problem area, taking one step at a time. While a whole course may seem overwhelming, a steady progression through lessons each day may not be.

Part of the difficulty that students have with English 9, we believe, is that we are teaching some concepts which have fallen into disfavor in public schools. This is especially true of diagramming. However, we believe diagramming is a very important skill, because it allows the most comprehensive understanding of the relationship of words in a sentence.

Another possibility is for a student to work on only two courses at a time. This can help students need to feel successful quickly. Simply seeing 180 days of assignments for five courses is perceived as just too much of a long uphill climb. We recommend that such students take the two easiest, or least difficult courses; they may work on one all morning and the other all afternoon. A student may be able to finish up two courses in only two months, have two credits, and feel more ready to tackle the next two.

The advantage to this method of two courses for two months is more intense focus on the material at hand, a shorter time period necessary to retain or memorize information, and a feeling of personal satisfaction for quick success. This last item is very important for students who have failed courses, or who feel that they have become failures.

The Spiritual Dimension

A good spiritual life must be the foundation for successful home schooling. For a ninth grade student who is experiencing new emotions, new physical changes, young adult awakenings in thinking and evaluation skills, the spiritual life is essential. Seton encourages daily Mass and Communion, as well as monthly confession for our ninth grade students who need all the spiritual support they can get.

The reality is that none of us can be successful in our daily work without graces from the sacraments and from sacramentals, such as the rosary and Stations of the Cross. Young adult students are in special need of these graces, and we cannot overemphasize the importance of the sacramental life for a successful ninth grade home schooling year.



In Control

In quite an extraordinary development in the nation's capital, the D.C. Control Board, which was empowered by Congress to get Washington D.C.'s government running properly, is set to fire the school superintendent and take over running the D.C. schools. The Control Board is expected to replace Superintendent Franklin Smith with retired Army Lt. Gen. Julius Becton. They are to set up a board of trustees which would run the schools, with the elected school board acting merely as an advisory panel.

The Control Board has produced a report detailing the incredible mismanagement of the D.C. Schools. For example, the D.C. school system has one of the highest administrator to teacher ratios in the country at 1 to 16. The national average is 1 administrator for every 42 teachers.

The District also has a very large number of attacks or threats of attack against teachers. In the past year, 26% of teachers have been attacked or threatened in DC schools. This compares with 14% of public schools teachers nationwide. And yet, while discipline is a major problem, DC schools have one of the lowest rates of suspension in the country. DC schools had a suspension rate of 24 per 1000 students, compared to the national average of 117.

Test scores in the District aren't much better. The average SAT score for District high schoolers is 717, compared to 910 as the national average. This is despite the fact that DC spends an estimated \$7,655 per student (the number is estimated because the schools don't keep very good enrollment records). That is way above the national average of about \$6,000.

If the control board does take over the school system, as seems likely, it certainly can't do a worse job. But the basic problems will still remain. And foremost among those problems is that the customers in the DC schools—parents and students—are the ones with the least influence in the system. Until the

customers of the schools have a real choice in education, one wonders what good a change of management could do. An immediate and widespread experiment in vouchers would likely do more good than any change in management faces.

Parents as Babysitters

No defeat for real family values should truly be surprising, considering



the powerful groups and moneyed interests arrayed against the family in today's society. But if one were to be surprised at anything, the recent overwhelming rejection of parental rights by the voters of Colorado might do the trick.

Colorado voters were asked to decide whether or not parents would have a recognized right "to direct and control the upbringing, education, values, and discipline of their children." The voters said no. Since *someone* must have the right to do this, we must assume, by extension, that voters of Colorado have recognized that the state has the primary right to raise children.

The push for the amendment was largely led by the group Of the People, based in Arlington, Virginia. The opposition to the amendment was led by teachers, social workers, and other government employees. Public opinion polls showed that during most of the campaign, the amendment seemed to be

popular. But opponents apparently scared the voters by saying that the measure would let parents bring government and school operations to a standstill.

Very informative is a comment by Fofi Mendez, who headed the coalition against the amendment. She is quoted in Education Week (Nov. 13, 1996) as saying, "It would have caused ideological battle fronts in schools, with individual parents pushing for their child's individual needs." Oh my, on the public school assembly line, we certainly can't allow anyone to be concerned about individual children!

It makes you think that the proper response to the person who asks the question, "Why are you home schooling?" is "Why aren't you?"

Strange Case File

And now for some interesting personnel cases at schools around the country...

A school district in Nyack, New York, has been ordered by a court to rehire and give back pay to a janitor "who resigned after admitting that he threw a lighted cigar into a trash can and started a fire in a school gymnasium." The janitor was later convicted of reckless endangerment and criminal mischief. Lawyers for the man say that he was under physical and emotional duress when he resigned. Now that he will be rehired by the school, perhaps he will next burn down the cafeteria or the audio/visual room.

And how about this one? In Somerset County, Maryland, the school board has agreed to name a school after a superintendent who was fired a few years earlier. After his firing, H. DeWayne Whittington filed a federal lawsuit claiming that he was fired for racial reasons. In the trial, the jury awarded him \$1 million. The school district offered to name a school after him if he would agree to a settlement of only \$835,000. Apparently, he did agree and they will.

Flawed Expectations II

Flawed Expectations is the name of the new powerful book by Msgr. Michael Wrenn and Kenneth Whitehead. As you recall from last month's article, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was produced because of the years of misinterpretation of the Second Vatican Council. Several Vatican guidelines had been produced over the years to correct the catechisms being published by the religious education establishment, but they were ignored.

The Vatican decided finally that the only way to solve the problem of catechisms which are not in line with Church teachings was to produce a catechism for the whole Catholic Church. However, the dissenters have been active and in position for more than thirty years. They have been using all the money and techniques at their command to undermine the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

In the last article, we explained how the professional religious education establishment produced articles in journals, as well as lesson plans, videos, and commentaries supposedly all "explaining" the new *Catechism*, but in reality undermining the *Catechism*. One of the most widely used commentaries which was produced in massive quantities and distributed via all types of media throughout the dioceses of America is *The Catechism: Highlights and Commentary* by Dr. Brennan Hill and Dr. William Madges of the theology department at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. Msgr. Wrenn and Kenneth Whitehead quote extensively from this *Commentary* to point out the doctrinal differences that the "expert" but dissident religious educators and theologians want taught to the children in the Catholic schools and CCD programs of America.

First, unlike the *Catechism*, the *Commentary* uses inclusive language consistently. The Holy See specifically has rejected inclusive language for the English translation of the *Catechism*.

Secondly, Msgr. Wrenn writes that "The authors [of the *Commentary*] openly state that one of their primary intentions is

'to place the teachings of the Catechism into dialogue with other trends in contemporary theology.'" It is clear over and over again from the writings in this *Commentary* and other "expert" commentaries and explanations that the new *Catechism* is to be looked at as simply "one" theology book to be compared with other theologies by other theologians. It is not to be regarded as an official doctrinal catechism of the Catholic Church.

In comparing the theology of the new *Catechism* with other theological views, often by well-known dissenters from Catholic teaching, the authors of the *Commentary* "as often as not, modify, undermine, and even nullify what the Catechism itself says. The whole point of the exercise seems to be not to 'comment' on the text so much as to let religious educators know what they should REALLY think about what the Catechism says." [p. 173]

The *Commentary* directly contradicts the teaching of the *Catechism* that God is our Father by saying that the Catechism "deems both feminine and masculine images as acceptable ways to describe God's love. Interfaith dialogue, liberation theology, process thought, and feminist theology have suggested many alternative possibilities for imaging God beyond those mentioned in the Catechism." Msgr. Wrenn concludes that "explanations of this muddled type hopelessly distort the basic meaning and thrust of the *Catechism*. ... [The *Commentary*] is using the *Catechism* as a peg on which to hang some of the authors' own favorite ideas and ideologies. And it is these same ideas and ideologies, NOT what the Church herself has issued, that the religious educator seeking to understand the Catechism through a book such as this is going to get." [p. 178] And of course it is our children attending the schools and CCD programs in which these religious educators teach who are "going to get" these anti-Catholic ideas and ideologies.

Msgr. Wrenn and Mr. Whitehead remind us of the unchanging traditional teaching of the doctrine of Original Sin, as explained in the new *Catechism*. They

quote from this *Commentary*: "Twentieth-century biblical exegesis has offered valuable insights on the sources and original meaning of the creation stories in the Book of Genesis. From this perspective, the ancient myths symbolized in Adam and Eve..." Msgr. Wrenn writes that through this *Commentary*, "the religious educator is thereby more easily brought to have a different view of the Fall and Original Sin than the Church clearly states in the Catechism." [p. 180]

"The [*Commentary*] actually asserts that in the *Catechism*'s treatment of baptism, 'there is not the former emphasis on removal of Original Sin.' [p. 182] This is absolutely contrary to what the Catechism teaches."

"The *Catechism*," writes Msgr. Wrenn, "says that confession of sins to a priest 'is an essential part of the Sacrament of Penance.' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1456) [The *Commentary*], however, informs the reader, who in all likelihood is a religious educator trying to become properly grounded in the *Catechism*, that 'some scholars continue to maintain that the actual confession of sins is not integral to the sacrament.'" [p. 183]

Msgr. Wrenn quotes the *Catechism*'s teaching that children must receive the Sacrament of Penance before receiving First Holy Communion. Then he quotes the *Commentary* which teaches the religious educator that "young children do not have sufficient moral awareness or responsibility to commit serious sins, and are thus not obliged to confess their sins before receiving communion."

A current attempt is being made by religious educators to push bishops into requiring children being schooled at home to attend CCD classes or programs in order to receive the sacraments. It is an obligation on our part as parents to understand that there is a movement by many religious educators to teach a new religion which is not in agreement with the traditional, official teachings of the Church, as expounded in the *Catechism*.

Flawed Expectations, and the previous book *Catechisms and Controversies*, may be purchased from Seton for \$17 each.



Conferences

Note: For Seton conferences, information is sent by mail to those in the state, and usually to surrounding states as well.

Conferences include talks and the sale of Seton textbooks.

Seattle, WA: January 18, 1997. Seton Conference and Textbook Sale. Speakers: Rev. Pablo Straub on *The Sacraments*, Rev. Joseph Stanichar on *Church Teachings on Home Schooling*, Dr. Mary Kay Clark on *How to Avoid Burnout*, Dr. William Marra on *Restoring Catholic Faith and Culture Through Home Schooling*, Mrs. Ginny Seuffert on *Home Schooling in the Large Family*.

Long Island, NY: March 1, 1997. Seton Conference and Textbook Sale,

in Huntington at St. Anthony's High School Auditorium. Speakers: Rev. Pablo Straub, Rev. Robert Hermley on *Church Teachings on Home Education*, Dr. Mary Kay Clark, Dr. William Marra, Mrs. Ginny Seuffert, Mr. Ed Gudan on *The Father's Role in Home Schooling*.

Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN: March 15, 1997. Seton Conference and Textbook Sale at St. Agnes Church. Speakers: Rev. Pablo Straub, Rev. Robert Hermley, Dr. Mary Kay Clark, Dr. William Marra, Mrs. Ginny Seuffert, Mr. Ed Gudan.

Pittsburgh, PA: April 19, 1997. Seton Conference and Textbook Sale at Holy Ghost Church in McKees Rock. Speakers: Rev. Robert Hermley, Dr. Mary Kay Clark, Dr. William Marra, Mrs. Ginny Seuffert, another speaker TBA.

Boston, MA: tentative in the spring.

New Orleans, LA: tentative in the spring.

Quick Notes

The Czech Republic. We have recently received several requests for help from families in the Czech Republic. Home schooling is apparently illegal in this country, so please pray that the laws will be changed.

News from the Special Services Department. Cathy Gould and her family wish to thank you for your prayers. Her third son, Aidan Christopher, was born on November 3, 8 lb, 11 oz, 21 in.

Cathy will be available for consultation from her home on Wednesdays from 10 AM to 4 PM, and in the evenings on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from 9 PM to 11 PM Eastern standard time, at 540-364-3981.

Pat Walker will be in the office at Seton Mondays through Thursdays from 9 to 3. Call her at 540-636-9990.

The Round Table. Representing states from Florida to Wisconsin, and from Massachusetts to California, Catholic home school leaders met in Chicago on November 8, 9, and 10th to discuss mutual interests and concerns.

The main topic of concern are the number of dioceses, now about 20, which have implemented specific regulations on home school parents in order for their children to receive the Sacraments. Regulations are often not according to the new Code of Canon Law nor are they according to the documents issued by the popes even in recent times.

We need to remind parents that pastors [or their designated substitute] have the right to question their children to make sure they are sufficiently prepared to receive the sacraments of Penance, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. However, no pastor, DRE, or anyone else has the right to force parents to use a particular catechism [assuming it is Catholic] or to attend CCD classes or to use certain "approved" texts.

As for Penance and First Holy Communion, children do not need documentation for these sacraments. Confirmation documentation is requested when a couple is about to be married, and papers are sent back to the church of Baptism. Many home schooling families are traveling back to home towns or home churches for Confirmation. Many other options are being sought. Also, the Byzantine Rite confirms children usually as infants at the time of Baptism. Local and state support group leaders are encouraged to be alert to possible options for families in their area.

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Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his
star in the east, and are come to adore him.



A Blessed Christmas

from the Seton family to your family