



Seton Home Study School

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The Nativity

The Feast of the Nativity encourages all of us home schooling parents to reflect again on the innocence of the Christ Child.

For us and our children to approximate the innocence of Jesus is an important way to understand the goal of our home schooling.

The Child Jesus is both true God and true man. Because He is a true man Who is also God, Jesus was completely free from disordered thoughts and sinful actions. Jesus will give us such freedom from sin in heaven. Heaven will be a time when we will be truly and fully human, living in complete freedom from evil inclinations, like Jesus did on earth.

Yet even the innocent Jesus on earth had to suffer the effects of a fallen world, such as the misunderstandings and violence of his enemies. The devil still tried to tempt Him, directly and indirectly in His earthly life.

In the Nativity icons of the churches of the Byzantine Catholic Rite, the Blessed Mother is portrayed lying down and blocking the black cave representing hell and the evil of the devil. In the lower corner of the icon, we see two women washing the newborn Baby.

The icon artist wants us to realize that both Jesus and His mother are determined to keep us from Hell.

However, we still must face the fallen world as Jesus did. We still need to be washed, and even more so than Jesus since, unlike Him, we do suffer from the disordered thoughts and external influences that cause us to sin in word and deed.

Home schooling is the way for children to keep the innocence of Jesus, or the way to return to it. Home schooling is the way to purify the disordered thoughts and diminish harmful external influences so that virtue can flourish.

Home schooling gives us the challenge and opportunity to maintain that newborn innocence for our children. Explaining the Nativity, and the True Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament where He is Present to us each day, reinforces for our children the culture of Life, Life in Jesus Christ. Like the Blessed Mother in the icon, our home schooling helps us to block the doorway to hell, so that the evils of hell cannot attack our children.

Blessed Virgin Mary, grant us your help and protection in our home schooling. You understand our trials and our desires to keep our children innocent and free from the secular culture which is sweeping across our beloved land. You know more than we how so many schools are being used to inculcate the next generation with false ideas and corrupt practices. Help our

little home schooling domestic church be free of intimidation and thus free to pursue our Catholic Faith.

Blessed Mother, you know the anxieties, doubts, and turmoil which come because many of our friends and relatives who do not understand our vocation. During this Holy Season of the Nativity, give us the grace to trust in your most sweet and precious Infant Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Tender Mother of the Infant Babe, do not allow us to lose that special love and tenderness which we experienced the first time we held our precious babies in our arms. Give us the determination and perseverance not to give our children up to others to train and educate in the ways of the world.

Blessed Mother, give us the strength to never forget that our little sweethearts are only seedlings who need our warmth and love to grow strong during these formative years. Sweetest Mother, give our sweet children your warmth and love which you showered on your Precious Babe. With confidence, we know that during this season of the Nativity, our requests will be granted.

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Questions We Are Asked

*by Dr. Mary Kay Clark
Director, Seton Home Study School*

I feel discouraged because my husband is not home to help very much and I don't have a support group in my area.

Focus on what you are accomplishing. As long as the children are progressing (though perhaps not at the speed you would like), you don't need to worry about it. If your children are younger, focus on the essential subjects: the religion, the language arts, and the math. Do the less important assignments less often.

Get your older children involved in helping to run the household. Older children can be of tremendous help in managing household duties, taking care of the little ones, and helping in "tutoring" the younger children.

Discouragement is a tool of the devil to convince you that you cannot continue doing the home schooling. Do your best to go to Mass every day

and receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. When you cannot go, try to tune in to the Mass on EWTN and make a spiritual Communion.

Keep up a daily routine of family prayer. Pray with your children in the morning before breakfast, pray with them as you start the schooling, pray with them in the late morning, pray with them before lunch, pray with them after lunch, pray with them at the end of the school day in the afternoon, pray with them before dinner, pray with them after dinner, pray with them before bedtime.

The prayers won't be monotonous if you gear them to the saints for the day and the seasons of the year. Spread the decades of the rosary out over the day if necessary. Incorporate activities or sacramentals, or helpful traditional items the children can make, such as an Advent Wreath.

Include your husband and his work in your family daily prayers, so that Dad is constantly present in the minds and prayers of the children. Daily prayer by the children will help your husband to not only realize his responsibilities to being home with his family, but also can work miracles, such as helping him to find a job whereby he can be home more.

If you cannot find a support group, try to interest one or two other

mothers to try Catholic home schooling. Many mothers want to try it but are afraid to try unless they can find another family doing it. You might offer to help them with your support and encouragement. Even if only two or three of you are sharing ideas, that may be enough support for all of you.

There is too much writing in the Seton program. Why is there so much writing?

There is a crisis in the lack of writing skills in this country. Colleges and businesses around the country are complaining about the lack of writing skills of high school graduates.

Writing is actually an exercise in thinking, in putting ideas together in a logical presentation. So, to be serious about thinking we must be serious about writing.

Anyone who reads the Letters to the Editor in the newspaper knows that the average citizen in this country has an extremely difficult time expressing a cogent argument on any topic. Compare this to the letters written in past times, many of which (such as letters of Jane Austen or J. R. R. Tolkien) are collected and published as literature.

We believe that to be serious about education we must be serious about writing. Indeed, if we cannot clearly write about a given topic, how can we say that we know the topic? Sitting down and writing is a way to crystallize our own thoughts and beliefs. Sometimes we find that our beliefs are very strong, and other times we may

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find that our beliefs are entirely lacking in logical support. When we write, we must tell others what we think about a topic, not just how we feel.

Reading, thinking, and writing go together. The more a person reads, the more the brain sees patterns of thinking and writing in sentences with structure. Writing develops creative and logical thinking, inductive reasoning, and critical analysis. Writing is actually an exercise in thinking, in putting ideas together in a logical presentation. So, to be serious about thinking we must be serious about writing.

Often students, when reading a novel, short story, poem, or essay do not gain much from the work because they have no direction or encouragement to reflect on the work.

We see the lack of writing skills manifested in many of our new students. Many new students in the upper grades and high school do not capitalize the first word in a sentence. Their writing shows an almost total lack of punctuation, the poor spelling makes reading the material unintelligible, sentences lack verbs, and answers are so brief as to make answers incomplete. They may know the answers, but their lack of writing skills mean that they cannot share their knowledge.

Writing need not be a burdensome chore. When children complain about having to write essays, book reports, or research reports, they often simply don't know how to begin.

It is not the writing to which they object, but the thinking before the writing. To help your child, you might ask him or her to make an outline of the important points. Or, you could ask your children questions about the topic, and have them write down the answers. The outline or the answers to the questions can become the main points in the composition.

One way to make writing much easier is to invest in a computer. Writing on a computer means that compositions do not have to be written and re-written to make changes. Also, typing on the keyboard is usually easier for small hands than writing with a pencil or pen. Plus, the spelling and grammar checkers on computers can be good teaching tools, as long as the student takes the time to learn what they did incorrectly.

Why do you use readers and not complete original works?

It is wonderful when students have the time to read the complete original works, such as novels and short stories, essays and poetry. However, most students cannot take the time to read complete original works of very many authors. The advantage of a reader is that it gives the student a taste of the work and the author. From those, the student is encouraged to read more whenever possible.

The advantage of a reader is that it introduces so many works and authors, which we think is important. In one year, many works and authors are able to be studied, at least briefly.

Another advantage of a reader is that it includes discussion questions which

encourage students to think about the details of the content and the message it means to convey. Often students, when reading a novel, short story, poem, or essay do not gain much from the work because they have no direction or encouragement to reflect on the work. For a busy Catholic home schooling family, mothers and fathers often cannot discuss each selection being read by the student, though we encourage parents to be involved in these discussions as much as possible.

The discussion questions themselves are valuable. They were written by Catholic English teachers, who were concerned about the Catholic perspective. One of the selections in the American Literature reader is the poem "To A Dandelion" by James Russell Lowell. He compares the gold of the dandelion to various riches, and throughout refers to God and heaven and uses Biblical references. The discussion questions ask "In what way can the dandelion teach the sanctity of the human heart? Explain the way in which each man reflects a gleam of Heaven. Would Lowell's interpretation of this reflection differ from that of a person who believed in the Mystical Body?"

Seton Teen Yearbook

My friend and I are trying to start a yearbook for Seton teens, from 6th to 12th grades. Without your response, we will not be able to accomplish this goal. If anyone is interested, please e mail us at Casurf3@aol.com; or Navystr@aol.com. If you do not have net access, then please write us at Emily M., 155 River Lake Court, Roswell, GA 30075; or Jill P., 460 Laurian View Ct., Roswell, GA 30075. Please respond ASAP. Thank you and God bless. Jill and Emily

Parish Program for Fathers

Rev. Robert L. Ruskamp

St. John Bosco parish in Woodstock, VA, has been holding weekly spiritual formation meetings for men throughout this year of 1999, a year which has been dedicated by Pope John Paul II to a greater knowledge and love of our Heavenly Father.

We have been meeting on Friday evenings from 7 to 8 in the church. The meetings consist of a talk given by Fr. Ruskamp, the pastor, and discussion by the men. We end the hour by chanting the Salve Regina, and then singing the Divine Mercy chaplet. Some of the men's wives have been meeting in a separate room during the hour, during which time they pray for the men of the parish. The wives join us for the singing of the Divine Mercy chaplet.

The purpose of these weekly formational meetings have been twofold: first, to come to a deeper love for and confidence in our Heavenly Father, and secondly to develop ourselves as men and fathers after the image of God our Father. The topic of our discussions each week has been taken from various recent books on the subject of spiritual formation for men. Some of the books used by Fr. Ruskamp have been *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings: Masculine Spirituality and the Bible*, by Patrick Arnold; *For Men Only: Strategies for Living Catholic*, by Mitch Finley; *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity*, by Leon Podles; *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.; *How a Man Prepares His Daughters for Life*, by Michael Farris; and *Wounds that Heal*, by Keith Fournier. Of course, we have also looked at the image of masculinity in the Bible, as the expression of God's Self-revelation, and at the men who show forth what it is to be in the image and likeness of God.

The purpose of masculinity is to provide for the safe environment in which a family can grow in the holiness God intends for each member. Man finds himself reaching his full potential of being in God's likeness only when he

gives of himself so that others may live and grow in a safe and holy setting. When God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18), He meant that the man would never reach his true reality of being in God's image and likeness unless he learned to give himself to another in a lifelong covenant of love for the good of the other. This role of men has been portrayed as being essentially "heroic": It is the hero who gives his life for the good of others. So to be a true Christian, a man has to be a hero, or in another word, a saint!

The society in which we live enables men to be cowardly by turning away from their familial duty when it becomes difficult, boring, or no longer "fulfilling." Society permits this through the relaxing of laws against divorce and by permitting the abortion of unborn children, which is all too often done so that the father of the child may escape his responsibility. There are many broken families today consisting of a single mother raising her children after her husband has divorced her and taken up with another woman, sometimes beginning yet another family. The sons of these broken homes grow up learning that what a man does is to look for his own interests first, and that a man will leave his wife and children when his own interests dictate it. The daughters of such fathers grow up thinking that men are

not capable of stable commitments, and that women must conform to the behavior of men in order to survive.

The culture of hero worship which surrounds men today encourages them to strive for three manifestations of what it means to be a "real man": 1. athleticism and perpetual youth; 2. wealth; and 3. sexual conquests. Professional athletes, politicians, and movie stars are the epitome of these "masculine" ideals and are therefore the "heroes" of our day.

What a man fails to realize until it is too late, is that all three of these are false promises of happiness, only to be lost to the younger, stronger generation as he approaches his own decline. The only true and lasting happiness for the man is to know that he will have his wife and children with him at the end of life and in eternity, and this because he remained faithful to his promises, and to his own God-given manhood.

Father Ruskamp is pastor of St. John Bosco Church in Woodstock, Virginia.

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Literature is useful--and may help save your soul, too!
 by Patrick H. Keats, PhD

In Seton's July Newsletter, my friend and colleague from Christendom College, Dr. Robert Rice, addressed the question of "Why Study Literature." More precisely, he posed--and then proceeded to answer--a series of questions related to the important role literature plays in the life of a Catholic homeschooler and his/her family.

Dr. Rice's answers were so thorough that I would advise you, first of all, to revisit your July Newsletter. Do this especially if you yourself should be having doubts about the value of good reading and the essential role that literature plays in a well-rounded Catholic education.

Those who downplay the importance of Literature in the curriculum--or in life, for that matter--tend to fall into two main categories. First, there are those who basically say, "But what use is it, anyway?" That is, what use is it for job, making money, buying a house, and all the practical necessities that seem to govern our lives? Or, to put it more concretely: "If Johnny plans to be an engineer, or Susie wants to be an architect, why should they read Dickens . . . or Jane Austen . . . or Tolkien?"

Secondly, there are those who challenge its "usefulness" in a very different area: that of saving our souls. Those in this category may recognize the importance of reading the Bible, or the Lives of the Saints, or devotional works. They might even concede the value of an occasional Catholic story or novel, provided it is written by a Catholic writer and deals with "Catholic" themes. They will often look with suspicion at any readings that fall outside of these areas, seeing them as largely a waste of time, or possibly worse.

A major objection to this second attitude, surprisingly, is the fact that it is so fundamentally "un-Catholic." From the very beginning, the great saints and Church Fathers have stressed the importance of Catholics developing a

rich culture and appreciating the truths expressed in the great literary classics of Greece and Rome. Of course, a sense of selectivity was required then, just as it is now, in avoiding those works which are doctrinally harmful or occasions of sin. But allow me to emphasize here that the key word is indeed "selectivity," not total "avoidance." If you doubt the Catholicity of this statement, read St. Basil's letter "On the Reading of Pagan Literature."

Moreover, think of all the great Catholic and Christian apologists, during the last century or so, who were also great men/women of letters. Cardinal Newman, Hilaire Belloc, and G.K. Chesterton were all novelists as well as poets. They were also extraordinarily well-read in all areas--especially great Literature. Chesterton and Belloc, for instance, wrote books on such writers as Milton, Dickens, Browning, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

The great Catholic Thomistic philosophers, Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, wrote frequently on the subjects of Literature and Art. Monsignor Ronald Knox, translator of the Bible and writer of many books of Catholic Apologetics, was also a highly-regarded writer of mystery novels and an early member of the "Detection Club" in England! And C.S. Lewis, author of the beloved *Narnia Chronicles* and *The Screwtape Letters*, is regarded as one of the great literary scholars of this century.

I agree with Chesterton when he says that all men like and even "need" stories--to inspire us, to fill our imaginations and encourage our aspirations, to provide vivid examples of human conduct. Without a love of reading and a development of culture, we run the risk of becoming narrow, insular, and bureaucratic. A friend of mine refers to this type of person, who does his job well but allows no time for culture, as the "competent barbarian."

As a college teacher since 1985, I would argue that the single most important determinant of success in college, is effective reading comprehension and a love of good reading. This position of mine is not a controversial one. I have heard many college professors, in all of the disciplines, say virtually the same thing. Furthermore, when I have taught writing courses, *invariably* those who are the best writers are also those who read the most.

Even in business, more and more executives are recognizing the importance of hiring people who are well-read, write well, and have a degree of culture. As one businessman basically told me, "We can teach them to do the job when they come here. But we can't teach them to be intelligent, interesting, and cultured people." That was also the attitude of the father of one student I taught at Catholic University. The vice-president of a major corporation, he encouraged his daughter to major not in business, not in computers, but in . . . English!

So what about my point, in the title, of how reading Literature "may help save your soul, too"? Well, that wasn't just a teaser; I really mean it and believe it. The great writers raise our imaginations and intellects and appeal to that which is best within us. Who can read Dickens and not be inspired by the nobility of a Sydney Carton, in laying down his life for his friend. Who can read Jane Austen and not be charmed by her depiction of good-hearted, generous spirits like Lizzie Bennet and Elinor Dashwood?

Moreover, there are few family activities more rewarding than reading to and with your children. Like family prayer and get-togethers, reading together promotes closeness, healthy creativity, and life-long bonds.

For all these reasons, I heartily agree with Dr. Rice in his conclusion that the reading and study of literature is, indeed, "worth the effort."

Dr. Patrick Keats is a professor of Literature at Christendom College in Front Royal, VA.



Conferences

Information about Seton conferences is sent by mail to home schooling families on our mailing list in the state, and usually to surrounding states as well. Conferences include talks as well as the sale of Seton textbooks and supplemental books. Half-day conferences also available. Costs are borne by Seton. If your support group is interested in having a conference in your area, please call Mary Lou Warren at Seton. We schedule conferences in the months of January through early July.

Non-Seton Conferences

Many state and local groups are now sponsoring their own conferences, inviting various Catholic vendors and curriculum providers. Seton is happy to participate at these conferences as a vendor. Dr. Mary Kay Clark is often available to speak at local conferences.

Seton is happy to help with local conferences by providing speakers, such as those on our regular program or others, especially priests and home schooling fathers. Ginny Seuffert, mother of twelve children and home schooler for many years, is a favorite speaker who offers her home schooling tips with fun and humor.

This past year, Seton sent information to everyone on the Seton mailing list to families within 100 miles of the non-Seton conferences at which Dr. Clark was a speaker. These conferences showed a dramatic increase in attendance.

Upcoming Conferences

Wausau, WI – December 11, 1999: Sponsored by Institute of Christ the King. Dr. Mary Kay Clark speaking.

Front Royal, VA – March 4, 2000: Seton Conference at Christendom College.

Rochester, NY – March 23, 2000: Seton Conference with Rochester Catholic Home Schooling Support Group.

Harrisburg, PA – April 8, 2000: Catholic Homeschoolers of PA. Dr. Mary Kay Clark speaking.

Rockford, IL – May 19-20, 2000: Latin Mass Society. Dr. Mary Kay Clark speaking.

Accounts Overdue

Seton has been compelled to charge late fees to those overdue in their monthly payments. We cannot continue to provide services for students who are two months or more overdue.

The Seton apostolate relies on timely payments by parents in order to meet our own financial obligations to our employees and creditors. If you are on the payment plan, please make payments on time. Thank you.

California Office

Seton has opened a California Office in the Los Angeles area. Student records for California students will be kept on file. Pre-packaged grade level curriculums for grades K through 8. Materials for purchase separately. Mark Gallagher is available to visit support group curriculum fairs. Contact Mark at Seton Home Study California, 44751 Date Street, Suite 8, Lancaster, CA 93534. Phone: 661-948-8881; e-mail at setonca@networkone.net; Fax: 661-948-7006.

Donations

We want to thank all those who have made generous donations to Seton Home Study School.

Seton is doing vital work for the church. Our home schooling program is allowing families to be Catholic, working together, learning together, strengthening the Catholic family life. Ultimately, Seton home schooling graduates with their religious knowledge, Catholic life style, and academic skills, will produce important changes in our society.

If you are able to make a donation to Seton Home Study School, you can be sure that your money is being spent wisely on producing good Catholic textbooks for high quality Catholic education. Our new full-color religious art book is sent to donors of \$100 or more.

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Merry Christmas



Adoration of the Magi (detail) by Fra Angelico, 15th Century

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