

Brother Bonaventure Thomas, former President of Manhattan College, New York, is Secretary for Education of the New York Province. Master of Arts of Columbia University and Doctor of Philosophy of Niagara University, Brother Thomas was also awarded honorary doctorates by St. John's University, St. Mary's College of California, Niagara University, Fordham University and Iona College.



Partners with Parents

This article is the official address delivered by Brother Bonaventure Thomas at the recent Dedication of Christian Brothers Academy, Lincroft, New Jersey.

by Brother Bonaventure Thomas, Ph.D.

This address is intended as a statement in non-technical language of some of the salient principles of the Catholic philosophy in education.

It also proposes to interpret these principles for Parents of our (Brothers') High School students. The application of such principles in the Lasallian spirit and tradition is then indicated.

Finally, parental cooperation ("partnership") is invited to assure the beneficial aims and objectives.

* * *

Four years hence, in June 1963, God Willing, when the present student body of the Academy will be graduating from high school, the speaker at the Commencement Exercises will be addressing his words of counsel to the graduates. This afternoon I wish to address my remarks at these, original "Commencement Exercises," chiefly to you, the

parents of our students; who with high hopes and great expectations have entrusted the high school education of your sons, during this important and vitally significant period of their lives, to the Brothers of St. John Baptist de La Salle, at Christian Brothers Academy.

Today's sacred function is a fitting sequel to the auspicious opening of classes here on September 14 in this magnificent setting. We all were thrilled on that day to see 140 of your sons (capacity numbers for the present Freshman classes) begin their high school education with the Brothers. Thus was inaugurated, under the patronage of His Excellency, Most Rev. George W. Ahr, Bishop of Trenton, a glorious and glowing chapter in the intellectual, moral and religious lives of many thousands of present and future members of this and surrounding communities in the State of New Jersey.

The invaluable benefits to be derived from the Catholic educational opportunities which the Brothers will offer the sons of present and future parents, though evidently well known to all of you, will, as we hope, become even better known and realized as the months and years pass, and as generations of youth follow one another, in the fruitful years of C. B. A.'s promising future.

Trusting in Divine Providence and your past and future generous benefactions, the Brothers not only hope and pray for the success of their mission in your midst, in the present and future facilities of the Academy, but they daily renew the dedication and consecration of their lives and professional talents to guarantee that the kind of formal education you have decided upon for your sons will indeed be made available to them. I refer, of course to Catholic education which you, as exemplary parents, have already so carefully provided for them in your Christian homes. Yes, the Brothers fully realize and would be among the first to admit, not only the desirability, but the absolute necessity of that foundation of Christian living and the elements of religious up-bringing which you provide in your homes and which the Catholic educator endeavors

to cooperate with you in providing professionally in the school.

This idea of partnership with parents in the educational process is far from being original with us. The great Pope Pius XI, thirty years ago, reformulated this well-known Christian concept in education advocated over the centuries, when he proclaimed in his historic Encyclical on "The Christian Education of Youth" that parents are the *first* and *natural teachers* of their children and that schools are established to supplement their work of education for the obvious reason that limitations of time and talent, even though the latter may be considerable on the part of parents, require the cooperative efforts of professional teachers to augment the initial work of the Catholic home and Holy Mother Church, for the temporal and eternal welfare of your sons.

Their Christian education, begun in your homes, has been confirmed by the grace of the Holy Sacraments of Mother Church and will be continued, please God, in the same pattern in this school, selected by you, because you know, this same religious pattern will here prevail. Here they will be assured that your invaluable intellectual and moral lessons, so carefully inculcated from childhood, will surely not be negated and replaced by

the false and evil influences of either pernicious teaching or bad example.

For in spite of the academic excellence of Public Education and the good influence exercised by a great many good men and women as teachers, in these schools, the *principle* of non-religious, non-Christian and Godless education is bound to have a most unfortunate influence, on the impressionable minds and souls of youth in their critical, adolescent years.

This influence will at least be powerfully present by negation. For if his high school education is experienced without official reference to God and religion and moral principles, only appended, at best, by an hour a week of Religion instruction, on release time, what idea will the youth gather about the importance of these religious and moral concepts? Surely, at best, it will be the secularist idea of indifference towards God and religion. For admittedly this indifference cannot be more certainly exemplified than in non-religious-sponsored education which says, in effect — "we guarantee that your son will be graduated from high school with best possible intellectual development. But sorry, we have had no time for the religious element in his intellectual education, no time nor any place in the

curriculum for formal instruction in religion in the successive years of his course, commensurate with his intellectual development."

In fact, as the Harvard University Report on "*General Education in a Free Society*," issued some years ago, rightly asserts, it is practically impossible to include religion as a subject in the curriculum of public schools because of the irreconcilable conflicts which occur among various religious sects. Likewise, the White House Conference on Education, to which I was a delegate, in the year 1955, declared, it would be impossible at that time to promote the idea of religious training or even moral guidance, in a formal manner in Public Schools because of the same conflicts and, I only presume (from the prevailing atmosphere at this White House Conference) because of the desire to avoid unpleasant results from those who do not recognize the religious element at all, as a function of public education.

The entire philosophy of such education is based on the concept that it is only the *materialistic values* of life that really matter, that *goodness* is identical with social welfare, with *morality* determined largely, by the so-called democratic *rule of the majority*, whose standards may well change (and usually do), with the shifting sands of public opinion.

Contrasted with such views of education and fluctuating moral standards is the Catholic Education idea, so well known to all of you, whether or not you have read that highly enlightening Papal exposition of Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical on the "Christian Education of Youth."

In this historic document, he states the ideal of true education and shows that by following Catholic principles and Christian Doctrine as taught in Catholic schools, true social and civil welfare would be achieved, while promoting a salutary respect for the individual person as a human being. This same theme is developed by the great French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, who takes pains to show, in his collection of Essays, "Education at the Crossroads," that true education is a very human process, the education of man — the "whole man" — man who is nothing, if not a creature of God composed of body and soul and made in the image and likeness of his Creator. Hence his education is not to be identified merely with physical training or even with mental gymnastics: to exercise his intellectual reflexes, so he can become merely a highly efficient and skillful robot or machine.

Now let it be well understood Catholic Education sponsors Science and Technology without res-

ervation; but asserts that skills and techniques are not enough for true education for they are *means* and not *ends*. After skills and techniques have been mastered, of what use are they, if not employed for the true welfare of man—both temporal and eternal. We know of some frightful objectives of science and technology which seem to fit into, and even *help to create* the present precarious situation in the world today, threatening not only armies but entire populations with agonizing destruction.

How truly prophetic was the pronouncement of Pope Pius, in the Encyclical referred to, when he wrote that ". . . unless the principles of the Church and the education of the Christian schools prevail, education is doomed to fail in its purpose and to become instead an agent of destruction."

Certainly, "he who runs can (readily) read" the all too striking fulfillment of this prophecy in the devastating catastrophes of recent wars; in our domestic, social and industrial crises; in the fearful rise in crime, not confined to juvenile delinquency alone; yes, and in our failure these past several decades to bring true peace to a woeful world. Instead we have threats of even more inhuman wars. And in spite of these threats of impending disaster, man



Mum — Brother — Dad

does not yet seem to realize that with the advent of the Atomic Age, it is evident that physics without faith can be supreme and terminal folly — the foreshadowing of "closing time" for the human family. While if faith in God—even in His natural law—enlightens and actuates us, we will see "God waiting beyond every new door that science opens" as Pope Pius XII, of happy memory, so aptly expressed it. Surely education based on Catholic principles of faith in God and respect for the true nature of man will best promote this salutary result.

I need not labor the point that you are confident of the wisdom of your choice in selecting such Catholic Education for your sons, at C.B.A. It is reflected from your countenances today as it was also unmistakably written on their faces when we had the pleasure of seeing them on the first day they came to the Academy last month, to begin their high school course.

We know that your choice was the result of careful deliberation, and in many cases, at the cost of sacrifices cheerfully made for their greater good.

By this choice I may say you have not only enriched the lives of your sons, by the scholarship and religious devotion of the Brothers of the faculty, but you have likewise enabled them and by extension, yourselves, to enjoy the wholesome heritage of Catholic education and the wealth of the Brothers' tradition, reaching back to the erudition and devotion, the spirit of profound faith and burning zeal for the Christian Education of youth, which our Holy Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle personified.

It was he who inspired the early Brothers, and has since inspired their successors, these nearly 300 years, to imitate him by devoting their lives and dedicating their teaching vocation to

the sole benefit of their students. Our Founder's life-work is a fascinating and inspiring story of total dedication to Christian education, in which he was continually pioneering.

He first inaugurated a special kind of religious vocation—not that of the Holy Priesthood and not that of the lay-Brothers' in the sense that lay-Brothers are admitted to some Congregations of Religious priests in order to perform the tasks to which the clerical vocation is not ordered.

Instead, the Saint organized the "Vocation of the Teaching Brother" and thus he took pains to provide not only for his time but also for the future generations of Christian parents and their sons, by firmly establishing our Institute.

He first secured ecclesiastical approval of his growing Religious Family from the local Bishops. Then finally, because of his well-established organization and the deeply religious spirit of his disciples, it was given solemn, Pontifical approbation in a Papal decree, by Pope Benedict XIII, in 1725. Thereby the Brothers of the Christian Schools were granted the *authentic commission* to perform a *directly apostolic mission in the Church*, as Brother Charles Lawrence, F.S.C., Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, Manhattan College, ex-

plains so well in his article: "Vocation of the Teaching Brother" in the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, July 1958.* This mission St. La Salle began chiefly for the sons of artisans or working classes as they were then designated.

His intention in that day was so revolutionary that even those who applauded his efforts were inclined to think he was going too far in implementing his laudable ambition. For in that pedantic day and age, he had to sacrifice the prestige of his clerical dignity, as a Canon of the Cathedral of Rheims, and expend his personal patrimony to attain his objective.

Though he started, as I said, with the modest intention of educating only in the elementary grades those who were practically destitute of educational opportunities, before his death, 40 years later, he had initiated and firmly established all kinds of schools, including normal schools for the training of the early Brothers and other teachers, and technical schools in order to meet the demands of his time.

Another example of his willingness to make exceptions to his original educational aims, comes to light in the historic episode, in which St. La Salle and his Broth-

*Reproduced in *Lasallian Digest*, Vol 1. No. 1, Fall, 1958, pp. 50-62.

ers did not hesitate to establish a special Academy for the sons of Irish noblemen who came to France with King James II, the deposed monarch of England, just prior to 1700. Answering the King's appeal for a suitable education for these Irish boys, St. La Salle started a school on the secondary level for them—an academy, comparable in that day, to this one at Lincroft. (Though here, as you know, being sons of Irish noblemen is *not* a necessary prerequisite for admission!)

As partners in this great venture in Christian education with Saint La Salle's Brothers, I foresee it will be one of your pleasant tasks to become better informed about his life and work—by reading one of his interesting biographies, if you will—but more especially by observing the Brothers' work with your sons and cooperating with these exemplary followers of our Holy Founder. Saving their presence, I do not hesitate to designate them as exemplars among Catholic educators.

You, like them, I am sure, are animated by the conviction that Christian Education is of paramount importance in the world today, because you view things with the eyes of faith and are not deceived by specious words or outward ornament. This mental attitude is what is called in our

Institute the spirit of faith: the habitual outlook which led St. La Salle, and induces his followers over the centuries, to evaluate all earthly things and all activities, whether educational, social, industrial or political, in terms of eternity.

And it is this same spirit which induces you and the Brothers, as partners in the education of your sons, to combat any forces which brutalize youth by building up in them an image of themselves as mere animals, divine neither in origin nor in destiny, bound by no morality not imposed by force, knowing no values spiritual or otherwise any higher than the selfish and prodigal consumption of their leisure time and their sensual gratification. You and we consider Christian Education as the best method of combating such depravity by preventing it if possible and by imbuing the student with the necessity of moral and spiritual values to take the place of those just mentioned.

This priority of moral and spiritual values in Christian Education does not militate in the least against the instruction your sons will receive in the Academic subjects of the high school curriculum, which will be pursued with all the professional skill which any school in this State or in fact in the country can provide.

This also was the subject of an

injunction of St. La Salle to his spiritual sons, when he enjoined us not to permit the students of our schools to suffer any loss of *emphasis on excellence* in their *general academic* education, when they have come to our schools to be assured of their *religious and moral* training. In other words, that the education for the salvation of their souls was not to *retard* but rather to advance their academic education.

Thus to assure this high quality of teaching from the beginning, Saint La Salle pioneered in teacher education for the early Brothers, being given credit even in secular histories of education as the first to establish and develop teacher-training or pedagogy in so-called normal schools. These normal schools were the forerunners of our present professional education courses which our Brothers master, besides securing their graduate university degrees, in the subjects they specialize in teaching. This graduate University study for the Brothers follows the earning of their baccalaureate or under-graduate degree at Catholic University of America. So we see how well and thoroughly the intellectual and professional preparation of your sons' teachers is accomplished.

At this point some of you may modestly ask, how you can best

be partners with such professional educators as the Brothers and thus continue to share in the educational process. There are several ways which I am confident will present themselves to you. Among them, deep interest in your son's academic work and in his record of progress, may well be given high priority. This interest will strongly motivate you to cooperate and participate (when fitting) in all activities involved in his regular and extra-curricular programs — being guided in this by suggestions of the Director and Faculty of the Academy.

Further, there are four ways in the cherished traditions of our Institute by which the Brothers exercise and develop their spirit of zeal for the Christian education of youth. And I know they welcome your active participation in these practices to supplement their own efforts and to give you the satisfaction of assisting.

These ways and means consist of *prayer* for our students' welfare, thorough *instruction*, *vigilance* over their behaviour and activities and *good example* on all occasions.

In your capacity as first and natural teachers of your sons you have anticipated the Brothers in the exercise of these effective activities for their intellectual and moral benefit. Thus, as already

remarked, you are cooperating splendidly with the Brothers' zealous efforts in their vocation of Catholic Education. So I am sure their only appeal is for a continuation of these time-tested practices — to the extent that circumstances permit.

By a happy coincidence the Dedication of this Academy is taking place in the month of Our Blessed Mother's Rosary, and on the feast of her Divine Maternity. *Each day before classes* the Brothers and their students throughout the world — in the 70 countries where our schools and colleges are established — appeal to Our Blessed Lady for her guidance and protection by the *reci-*

tation of Her Holy Rosary — offering that "*Mystical Crown*" to her, as our present Holy Father phrased it, in his recent inspiring Encyclical on the Rosary, as a tribute of devotion, and a fervent prayer for her maternal assistance.

I am sure the Brothers appeal to all to join them in this daily devotion, to implore Our Blessed Mother's powerful help, which you and they need, in the exacting task, and tremendous responsibility, of instructing and guiding those sacred and sublime members of the Mystical Body of Christ whom God, in His loving Providence, has confided to your care—your cherished sons."

THE BOOK OF THE GOSPELS

You know its contents, but you must never weary of its perusal. You will always find in it something new. It treats of a subject that never grows old. We cannot hear enough of Him, the Meek One, walking among men and doing good wherever He went. Open the book reverently and lovingly, and let the light of His blessed Face shine out upon you from its inspired pages. Sweetly and simply it traces His footsteps; in loving accents it recounts the words He spoke, the deeds He did, the miracles He wrought. It reveals the God-Man. It tells of His sufferings from the manger in Bethlehem to the cross on Calvary. It tells of His patience and forbearance, of His humility and modesty, of His compassion for sinners and His hatred of hypocrisy. His words are as balm to the bruised, rest to the weary, peace to the restless, joy to the sorrowing, and light to those groping in the dark. They penetrate all hearts because they flow from a Heart loving man with an infinite love.

BROTHER AZARIAS
"Culture of the Spiritual Sense"