

Embrace the Spirit

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The Alberta Teachers' Association



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A Note from the Editor



Much has changed since the Spring 2015 issue of *Embrace the Spirit*. Provincially, Tory blue Alberta has gone NDP orange. A decade of Conservative federal government is over, and for the first time in Canadian history a son has followed his father into the office of prime minister. Justin Trudeau ran on a platform of change. By the time this issue hits your mailbox, we may have more of a sense of whether he is delivering on his promises.

In the midst of all this change, some things stay constant—the most important being the loving God who sustains all creation. My understanding of this was greatly clarified by the book that I review in this

issue—*The One Thing Is Three: How the Most Holy Trinity Explains Everything*, by Father Michael Gaitley.

The Holy Father Pope Francis continues to preach the same message: the mercy of God is available to all who want to receive it. The Jubilee Year of Mercy commenced on December 8, 2015, and will continue until November 20, 2016. Ed Jean, secondary religious education consultant with Edmonton Catholic Schools, shares how the district will engage with this jubilee year. Two other favourite themes of this pope are the family and the need to go out to the periphery. Janice Stefancik, elementary religious education consultant with Edmonton Catholic Schools, has graciously shared two short pieces with those themes that are circulating in the district.

Tomás Rochford offers another instalment of his series *Fides et Ratio*—this one discussing the natural law.

Highlights of the 2015 annual conference of the Religious and Moral Education Council (RMEC) and this year's award winners round out this issue.

Until next time!

Dorothy Burns



From the President



As I reflect on RMEC's annual conference, held last October, I am reminded of the dichotomy many people perceive between faith and science. As our keynote speaker Karlo Broussard suggested, too often people of science want to comment on religion. Of course, this can go the other way, too. People of faith make comments about science using Scripture as the source of their argument. This problem isn't new, and it was addressed by Saint Augustine many centuries ago.

Saint Augustine (2006), writing in the fourth and fifth centuries, cautions Christians against entering into dialogue about aspects of science of which they may have

limited or inaccurate knowledge. He emphasizes that non-Christians, while not necessarily possessing a fundamental knowledge of the faith, may have a substantial understanding about the material world. He states, "It is disgraceful and disastrous, something to be on guard against at all costs, that they should ever hear Christians spouting what they claim our Christian literature has to say on these topics" (p 186).

If a non-Christian hears a Christian speak inaccurately on science, using Scripture as his foundation for belief, how is the non-Christian "going to trust those books on the resurrection of the dead and the hope of eternal life and the kingdom of heaven, when they suppose they include any number of mistakes and fallacies on matters which they themselves have been able to master either by experiment or by the surest of calculations?" (p 187). Before people of faith make assertions about science that are based on Scripture, they must be certain that they understand, adequately, both science and Scripture.

On the issue of science, the Church is content to allow science to pursue things that science can know. Pope John Paul II, in his address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,¹ stated that "truth cannot contradict truth," as it pertains to evolution and the origin of man. Jesus Christ is "the truth" (John 14:6), and if what is discovered through science is true, then there is no contradiction. It is not something that the Church is threatened by.

Note

1. John Paul II, "Truth Cannot Contradict Truth," address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, October 26, 1996, www.newadvent.org/library/docs_jp02tc.htm (accessed October 26, 2015).

Reference

Augustine. 2006. *On Genesis*. Trans E Hill. New York: New City Press.

Carl Fakeley



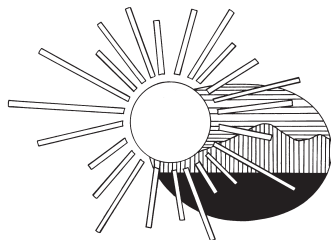
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Dean Schneider, Assistant Editor, Clear Water Academy, Calgary

Sandy Talarico, Newman Theological College and Edmonton Catholic Schools, Edmonton

Embrace the Spirit is in need of new editorial board members to help us find good stories by being our eyes and ears around the province. Being on the editorial board is not a huge time commitment, and you will not have to write articles (though articles are always welcome). The main task of an editorial board member is to help us plan for and find content for *Embrace the Spirit*. If you are interested, please contact Dorothy Burns (dburns@redeemer.ab.ca) for more details.



Religious and Moral Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association

Mission Statement

The Religious and Moral Education Council exists to inspire and foster learning communities by providing professional development for teachers to help them nurture the moral, ethical and spiritual lives of students.

Vision Statement

The Religious and Moral Education Council will, in search of peace and the common good, be a principal resource for Alberta teachers.

Values

We are committed to serving teachers of all traditions and cultures, through the values of faith, dignity, respect and collaboration.



The Intelligent Partnership of Science and Faith: A Review of the 2015 RMEC Annual Conference

Dean Schneider

Dean Schneider is a husband and a father of six who lives and works in Calgary. Now in his 16th year of teaching, he is currently a religion specialist at Clear Water Academy, part of Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools.

As a Catholic schoolteacher for 15 years, I had heard and read about, but not yet encountered the reality of, the so-called war between science and religion. (Occasionally, I'd seen a squabble, but never a war.)

However, one day the fateful moment arrived on Facebook (of course). A friend had posted a humble faith statement only to be berated by someone for her perceived ignorance. The online conversation that followed was eye-opening, for sure. The challenger postured with declarations of faith's irrelevance and science's superiority. I naively jumped in to challenge his views, not realizing how truly unprepared I was. What unfolded was a flurry of words, resulting in the thread's being deleted and my having to apologize

to its creator for opening that can of worms on her Facebook page. That was when I learned the sheer stupidity of entering into such a debate on social media. Last fall, the RMEC annual conference equipped me to approach that sort of dialogue differently.

RMEC held its annual fall conference October 16 and 17 at the Rimrock Resort Hotel in Banff, nestled in the heart of the Canadian Rockies. More an intellectual retreat than a mere conference, it was promoted as offering spectacular scenery, a world-class location and a world-class speaker. The speaker, Karlo Broussard, is now a full-time apologetics speaker for Catholic Answers, but he came to us then as director of the Magis Center's Speakers Bureau. His extensive speaking experience was evident as he led delegates through four dynamic sessions on intellectual evangelization.

Using contemporary science (including cosmology, quantum physics and relativity), math, logic and philosophy, he showed teachers how science contributes positively to the God question. He

shared evidence that the universe had an absolute beginning (whether single, oscillating or multiverse) and evidence of the universe's fine tuning. He skilfully refuted atheistic objections (including those of David Hume and Lawrence Krauss) and revealed the absurdity of the philosophy of materialism (the belief that we are nothing more than physical matter).

The following are a couple of other takeaways from Broussard's sessions:

- *The limits of science.* As invaluable as science is, it will always be limited to observable physical reality. If our physical reality had a beginning, then the cause of that beginning exists outside of that physical reality. God — however you grasp him — will never be proved or disproved by science because it's impossible for science to do so by its very methodology. Metaphysical concepts (concepts beyond the physical) — including God, angels and the immaterial soul — transcend science. It's like someone saying, "I can't detect plastic cups with my metal

detector, so plastic cups must not exist." Science's inability to detect God does not prove God's existence to be false.

- *The fallacy of scientism.* What I didn't know at the time is that my aforementioned jousting partner on Facebook had been a proponent of both materialism and scientism—a believer that science (empirical evidence) is the only way to know what's real and true. Of course, that statement itself (that science is the only way to know what's

real and true) is one that cannot be proven by science. It's a self-refuting statement that reveals itself to be not fact but, rather, philosophy, and it is a belief that undermines the very practice of science. Science will continue to be of immense value to us, but we must recognize its limitations.

The feedback from the conference attendees was overwhelmingly positive. Several teachers have even sent word that they brought the content into their

classrooms the first week back. I'm still finding new insights as I chew on the discussions. Even if those two days didn't convince someone of God's existence, the level of intellect shared and the array of brilliant, credible, theistic scientists exhibited there would have shown even the hardest of atheists that accepting faith in God is far from unreasonable. In fact, it just might be the smartest thing to do.

I can't wait to see what the next RMEC annual conference has to offer. Hope you can join us.



Karlo Broussard

RMEC Award Winners 2015

Dr Peter Craigie Award

Ron Baier, Elk Island Catholic Schools

Since joining RMEC, Ron Baier has worked tirelessly as vice-president in his first year and then as conference director and codirector. In addition to his leadership in RMEC, he has been active in Elk Island Catholic Schools as a former teacher and principal and now as a member of the board of trustees.

Ron (as well as his lovely wife) has been a great contributor to the life of our council, and he has done everything he can to expand its membership and its reach. He is a worthy recipient of this award because he is committed to public education and the work of RMEC in serving the teachers of Alberta.

He has always said that RMEC is “the best-kept secret in the Alberta Teachers’ Association,” and he took it upon himself to uncover that secret and get the word out about RMEC.

Award of Merit

Mark DeJong, Notre Dame Collegiate

Mark DeJong teaches at Notre Dame Collegiate in High River. He is an excellent classroom teacher and loves to challenge his students about their faith. As a NET (New Evangelization Team) alumnus, he understands the importance of relationship ministry.

Mark has taken a leadership role in his school and school district in the areas of religious curriculum and faith formation. His priority is making sure that teachers have access to practical resources to help them be effective religion teachers. He has also contributed articles to *Embrace the Spirit*.

Paul Dunphy, principal at Notre Dame Collegiate, said, “Because of Mr DeJong’s wealth of knowledge in Catholic teachings, philosophy and history, he is able to provide instruction in the Catholic faith that is accessible and digestible for the various spectrums of age, interest and background that exist in his various classes.”

Tomás Rochford, Holy Cross Collegiate

Tomás Rochford teaches at Holy Cross Collegiate, a Grades 7–12 school in Strathmore, where he is an excellent faith role model. He is passionate about sharing the truths of our faith with students, staff and parishioners, and he has the ability to make students think more deeply about their faith by asking deep, meaningful questions. As a faith leader in the school, he helps organize prayer (including adoration and liturgies), good works projects and staff faith formation.

Tomás has written *Embrace the Spirit*’s Fides et Ratio column for the past three years. Two years ago, he was instrumental in establishing the St Justin Martyr Scholarship Essay Contest for Grade 12 students in Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools.

“I have observed Mr Rochford teach, and one of my most memorable observations was watching him use Socratic methods while leading his students in an engaging dialogue about an ethical issue,” said Scott Morrison, superintendent of Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools.

Jubilee Year of Mercy

Ed Jean

Ed Jean is a secondary religious education consultant with Edmonton Catholic Schools.

Pope Francis has declared this year the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The jubilee year commenced on the feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 2015) and runs through to the solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ (November 20, 2016). This is quite an extraordinary undertaking by our spiritual leader, as jubilee years usually occur only every 25 years and the next one was not expected until 2025.

The following is an excerpt from the pope's proclamation:

Here is the truly modern sense of the Jubilee Year It is not an escape, not an avoidance of reality and of one's problems, it is the answer that comes from the Gospel: love as a force of purification, of integrity, a force of renewal of social relationships, a force of planning for a different economy, which places the person, work and family at the centre rather than money and profit.¹

One practice that flows from a year of mercy is to make pilgrimage to one of the Holy Doors. There are seven Holy Doors throughout the world, with the newest one in Quebec City. To focus on the door is to recall the responsibility of every believer in crossing its threshold. To pass through the door means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and to renew and strengthen our faith in him in order to live the new life he has given us. It is a decision that presumes freedom to choose, to leave the old behind, in the joy of knowing that what is gained is divine life (see Matthew 13:44–46).

These Holy Doors mark an entrance into an oasis of mercy. Our sins have been forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is no end to God's mercy. Passing through a sacred door during this Jubilee Year of Mercy means accepting God's mercy with an open heart and reflecting on how we can be merciful to others as God has been merciful to us. How can we model both the acceptance of mercy and the granting of it to others with an open heart? What merciful acts do we need from others to feel

welcomed and nourished in love? And what merciful acts do others need from us?

We are encouraged by our local spiritual leader, Archbishop Smith, to create Holy Doors and oases of mercy at all of our Catholic schools and buildings. We are to be reminded every time we enter one of our buildings that we are children of our loving and merciful God. We can take a further step on this pilgrimage and create Holy Doors in our homes. Why not ask the parish priest to visit and celebrate in blessing the entrance doorways to our classrooms, schools and homes?

This Jubilee Year of Mercy is going to be amazing for all of us! For more information about this wonderful event, please visit www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va.

Note

1. Francis, "Proclamation of the Celestine Jubilee Year," Piazza della Cattedrale Isernia, July 5, 2014, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/july/documents/papa-francesco_20140705_molise-indizione-anno-celestiniano.html (accessed January 13, 2016).

Inspiration from Pope Francis on Faith in the Family

Janice Stefancik

Janice Stefancik is an elementary religious education consultant with Edmonton Catholic Schools.

Since becoming pope in 2013, Pope Francis has stressed that we need to look to Jesus as our model of love, joy and mercy. In September, he attended the World Meeting of Families, in Philadelphia, to participate in a celebration of family support and love, and he concluded the event's Festival of Families by celebrating Mass.

Your family is a gift of love from God; God has entrusted your family members to one another. With excerpts from Pope Francis's address at the Pilgrimage of Families,¹ here are some practical ways we can build faith and grow in love within our families. Let's try to commit to at least one this year!

Love

Life can be hard for families, but Jesus gives us rest.

Life is often wearisome

Work is tiring Certain silences are oppressive, even at times within families. . . .

Jesus wants our joy to be complete! He said this to the apostles and today he says it to us. Here . . . is a saying of Jesus: Come to me, families from around the world—Jesus says—and I will give you rest, so that your joy may be complete. Take

home this Word of Jesus, carry it in your hearts, share it with the family.

—Pope Francis

- Read the Bible with your children. With younger children, use a picture Bible, and with older kids, read passages from the Bible. Whatever their age, ponder the message of God's love together.
- Pray together every day and talk to Jesus as your best friend. You can pray the Our Father, the prayer that Jesus gave us, or you can make up prayers together. Your prayer habits will stay with your kids forever.
- Be spontaneous with prayer. Pray in the car, at the park, after a fall off the bike—anywhere, every day!
- At the end of each day, thank God by sharing a moment of kindness or something you are grateful for.

Joy

The love of Jesus makes our joy complete.

The life of a family is filled with beautiful moments: rest, meals together, walks in the park or the countryside, visits to grandparents or to a sick person. . . . Jesus always gives us love: he is its endless source. In the sacrament he gives us his word and he gives us the bread of life, so that our joy may be complete.

—Pope Francis

- Make dates for family time, including time with grandparents, and honour those times.
- Consider replacing one after-school activity with family time.
- Always end family time with a prayer of thanks.
- Commit to going to church. Even though it may be a struggle to get the whole family to church on time, see it as a way to spend just one hour "going over to God's house."
- Give the gift of the sacraments: sign your children up for First Communion, reconciliation and confirmation.
- Visit this website for loads of ideas: www.loyolapress.com/catholic-family.htm.

Mercy

Forgiveness in families is a must.

And they need Jesus' help to walk beside one another in trust, to accept one another each day, and daily to forgive one another. And this is important! To know how to forgive one another in families because we all make mistakes, all of us! Sometimes we do things which are not good and which harm others. It is important to have the courage to ask for forgiveness when we are at fault in the family. . . . Don't ever let the sun set without reconciling.

—Pope Francis

- Be honest with each other. Tell your kids why you're upset with them. Listen to their apology

with an open heart. Follow through on their misbehaviour with the consequences.

- When you've been impatient or you have not fulfilled a promise, ask your kids for forgiveness.
- Teach your children that God always loves them no matter what; sin hurts but he still loves us.

- Rather than focusing on self, help others. One sure way to grow in appreciation of each other is to reach out to others in need. Together as a family you can participate in social justice activities or acts of kindness as simple as raking an elderly neighbour's leaves.

Note

1. Francis, "Address of Pope Francis to the Participants in the Pilgrimage of Families During the Year of Faith," Saint Peter's Square, October 26, 2013, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/october/documents/papa-francesco_20131026_pellegrinaggio-famiglie.html (accessed January 13, 2016).

Social Justice

Janice Stefancik

Janice Stefancik is an elementary religious education consultant with Edmonton Catholic Schools.

God calls us to live a life of love and justice. Jesus Christ is our model for how to live justly. Catholic social teaching is an essential element of our faith; it is founded on the words, actions and life of Jesus Christ. For more information, visit www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/.

	Catholic social teaching	Our faith in action
Life and dignity of the human person	All human life is a gift from God; life is sacred.	How do we respect, protect and promote life?
Participation in family life and community	God created us for relationships in families, communities and the world.	How do we keep our families strong? How do our families model loving communities?
Rights and responsibilities of the human person	Every human person has basic human rights—to live; to work; and to have access to food, clean water, housing and education.	How do we work to ensure that everyone's basic human rights are respected?
Preferential option for the poor	Jesus was especially concerned about the poor and the most vulnerable. When we love the least of our sisters and brothers, we love God.	How do we recognize and respond to the cries of the poor in our midst and around the world?
Dignity of work and the rights of workers	Our work has dignity because it is our participation in God's work. All people have a right to just wages and safe workplaces.	How do we see our work as an opportunity to use our God-given gifts? How can we promote justice in the workplace?
Human solidarity	As members of one global family, we are committed to the common good and are responsible to one another.	How can we overcome the barriers and divisions within the human family? How can we be loving brothers or sisters to others we may never know or meet?
Stewardship of God's creation	We are called to be stewards of the world's resources and to care for the environment.	How do we care for water, land and air in our neighbourhoods? At work? In our nation? Around the world?



From Confusion to Clarity: A Case for Natural Law

Tomás Rochford

Tomás Rochford teaches at Holy Cross Collegiate in Strathmore. He lives with his family on an acreage near Mossleigh and is pursuing an online MA in moral theology from Christendom College.

At this year's RMEC annual conference, we were fortunate to hear Karlo Broussard, of the Magis Center, discuss two of the preambles we have already investigated in this series—the existence of God and the existence of an immaterial soul. His presentation and the work of the Magis Center (whose mission is to explore the relationship between reason and faith) demonstrate how timely and essential the elucidation of the rational preambles are for engaging contemporary secular culture.¹ We cannot begin a discussion with our “nones” (those not affiliated with any religion), nor can we hope to evangelize them, if we do not start by helping them discover by reason the solid rational foundation that undergirds the faith. If we as teachers and catechists can help our students see the truth of the preambles, the soil will be far

better prepared for the seeds of the gospel.

Surveying the previous articles in this series, one can see that by discussing the preambles, we have tried to put into place the basic ontological picture upon which the Christian faith is built: we live in a universe created by an infinite God wherein there is more to reality than just the physical universe, and we are rational, immortal beings, not merely trousered apes. With this ontological structure in place, we can now address the final two preambles, which involve God's relationship with humanity—specifically, the moral law built into our human nature and the possibility of divine revelation via Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. It is the first of these—the natural law—that we will explore here.

To begin our look at the third rational preamble, it seems best to look briefly at the contemporary moral landscape—the reality we face as catechists and evangelizers. An anecdote from the classroom serves as a helpful starting point. I had begun introducing students to the ideology of relativism during

the previous class, defining the viewpoint and suggesting some of its dangers, especially its lack of moral absolutes. I had thought that my preliminary activity in the next class would be to show students a current event so morally abhorrent that they could not fail to see that such actions were objectively evil. To this end, I showed the class a particularly disturbing current event involving pedophilic pornography in Alberta.² The hope was that this extreme evil would serve as a moral baseline, something that we all could agree was wrong, and that we might then begin a discussion of what good and evil are, by reflecting on the foundations of right and wrong (that is, How do we know that some things are absolutely evil?).

Unfortunately, the discussion did not go as planned. I had not realized how deep the loss of moral foundations has become. When asked if the pedophilic acts were evil, two-thirds of the students, thankfully, stated that such activity was wrong no matter what, yet a third of the students said that they were personally opposed to such acts but could not

judge them wrong for all people, because they might be right in the opinions of the perpetrators. Because of the possibility of differing opinions, these students reasoned, we could not offer any shared objective judgment of such acts.

Sadly, this manifestation of moral relativism is not isolated; it has been repeated every year since I started doing this kind of “shock and awe” activity, and contemporary research seems to show its malevolent spread in Catholic schools around North America.³ Especially concerning is that this lack of proper judgment in moral matters is not limited to controverted issues of lesser gravity, such as the piracy of music on the Internet; it also applies to egregious moral wrongs, such as pedophilia, child pornography and forcible mutilation. Simply put, too many students, even after attending Christian schools, are incapable of declaring any action to be objectively morally wrong.

To be frank, this is an educational crisis on the level of illiteracy and innumeracy. Students who cannot make judgments about right and wrong have not been readied to take their place in society as contributing citizens, let alone play a role in Christ’s church as pilgrims on the road to sanctification. Unfortunately, the fact that this crisis exists is not a new discovery. Almost 30 years ago, Allan Bloom (1987) wrote the following in the introduction to his famous book *The Closing of the American Mind*: “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative” (p 25).

As discussed in earlier columns, the grounds for this irrational view

of morality lie in centuries of philosophical error, which have led modernity and postmodernity to a dangerous dead end. Based on my classroom anecdote and the data found in books by thinkers such as Ryan Topping (2015) and Christian Smith (2005), we are forced to confront the fact that the moral reasoning and assumptions of our contemporary students are in great need of correction. Put simply, the children and young adults sitting in our classrooms are confused about the first principles of moral reasoning as the result of ineffective, and often mistaken, moral formation. They have been well catechized by social and mainstream media, a toxic peer culture and other influences to think that moral decision making means following either one’s feelings (emotivism) or societal trends, with little rational analysis and with an inability to ever discover objective good and evil. As Christian teachers, we have a serious professional, moral and religious obligation to fight this educational crisis head on. We must also be realistic; we “contend daily with the Goliaths who rule the media” (Topping 2015, 32), and we have only the limited means that schooling offers in affecting the moral lives of students. As teachers and catechists, our special role in combatting moral confusion involves engaging students’ minds in order to root out the intellectual maladies that have helped cause this moral crisis.⁴

The rational preamble of faith that directly confronts the moral confusion of our students is the natural law. Just as our material body is governed by physical laws (such as gravity and thermodynamics), our reason and will are governed by a natural moral law that gives us spontaneous and

quasi-instinctual judgments of reason that direct us to act in some ways and restrain us from acting in others. These basic inclinations are everywhere and are always the same because they are grounded in the nature of the human person, the unchanging truth of our being (Cunningham 2010, 227)—that is, we are made in the image and likeness of God as ensouled rational animals who have an intellect and will, and we are gifted with knowledge, freedom and love.

If it is true that we all participate in the natural law, how can we know exactly what it commands or prohibits? The answer: the natural law is knowable by all people, regardless of culture, religion or historical period, because it is grounded in human anthropology adequately considered. If we reflect carefully about what we are as human persons, we discover that we all share five basic principles of moral action, regardless of our differences. They are as follows (Cunningham 2010, 228–9, with modifications and additions):

- In all voluntary human activity, we must do, pursue and love the good, and avoid evil. We must always seek the perfection of our being, especially our highest good, knowledge and contemplation of God.⁵ (This is traditionally considered a self-evident principle, as certain as the statement that a whole is greater than its parts.)
- Human beings have a natural inclination to do good in accordance with the nature we share with all other beings, seeking especially to preserve ourselves in being. Hence, self-preservation and the avoidance of death and injury are elements of the natural law.
- Human beings also share natural inclinations that are proper to

our lives because we share much with other animals. Therefore, such things as uniting in marriage, procreation, and the nurturing and education of offspring are elements of the natural law.

- Human persons also possess distinctly rational inclinations that are grounded in our nature. Thus, we have a desire to use our intellect to seek out and know truth about reality, and to make free choices for the good.
- Human persons, as social beings by nature, also have the rational inclination to live in harmonious community with others—learning, communicating, loving and so on.

These five principles can be known by all people because they are both universal (that is, based on our nature) and general. In teaching the precepts, I have found that students are very receptive as they begin to understand that the basics of the natural law are not something new that I am adding to their knowledge from without but, rather, something they already know and live but can now reflect upon more deeply.

In addition to these basic principles, which serve as a baseline for all moral judgment, we must add the four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. These virtues are also universal, as they are based in our very nature, perfecting it and assisting us in becoming excellent human persons who can better know and love by enhancing our natural potencies. Prudence perfects our intellect's practical reasoning, while temperance (self-control) and fortitude (courage) perfect our passions and emotions. Finally, justice is the excellence of our wills, directing us to maintain proper relations with others.⁶

Again, I have found that explicitly teaching these cardinal virtues helps students recognize that the virtues are part of what they already know about what it means to be a moral agent; we are merely helping them better understand themselves so that they may become the best version of themselves.

Returning to the question of how we can know the basics of the natural law, I hope that it has become a little bit clearer how the moral law is based in the human nature that all human beings share. However, a number of important questions remain:

- How is the natural law a law?
- If human beings can all share this moral knowledge, why is it that there is so much disagreement over moral issues between cultures and throughout history, let alone the moral confusion found among our students?
- If one denies the existence of the natural law, can one avoid its consequences?

To answer the first question, it is essential to provide a good definition of *law*. Using Saint Thomas Aquinas's definition of *law*—"a command of reason for the common good, made by those who have authority and care of the community, and taught to the people"—we can see that the natural law definitely fulfills this definition.⁷ The natural law is rational and beneficial for the common good of the human race; it was given to us by our Creator, who has divine authority and concern for the human community; and it has been promulgated to all people by being ingrained in our rational nature.

To answer the second question, we must make an important distinction between the basic principles of the natural law affirmed above and more specific

conclusions that may arise from these principles in different cultural and historical contexts. While the basic principles are universal in scope and authority, people are often mistaken in their reasoning from the principles to more specific conclusions. (For example, while we are naturally directed toward marriage and family, does this mean that polygamy is morally acceptable? If murder is always and everywhere wrong, can one kill in self-defence?) Such limitations are real, yet they do not undermine the necessity and solidity of the natural law but, rather, demonstrate the necessity of the moral teaching of divine revelation (that is, Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition) and the magisterium of Christ's church.⁸ These authorities build upon the natural law to give us the complete picture of Christian moral living, providing more complete and specific answers to the moral quandaries that affect us.

Finally, in answering the third question, it is important first to distinguish between the natural law and physical laws. The laws of material reality must be followed by those physical entities that they govern (for example, a rock will always fall toward the centre of Earth's mass when dropped from a height of two metres). On the other hand, human beings, because of the freedom of our will, are able to follow or reject the commands of the natural law. However, if these commands are rejected or ignored, there will be consequences. Some examples may help to elucidate this point:

- At a very basic level, if we contradict the principle that teaches us that our intellects are for seeking and knowing truth, and instead tell lies and falsehoods, the consequences will be distrust,

confusion and the breakdown of community.

- In rejecting the command to enter the communal bond of matrimony and to be open to procreation, people often feel the effects of the natural law, sadly evident in the excessive divorce rates found among those who cohabitate before marriage and those who practise contraception.⁹
- In partaking in an activity that attacks the existence and basic dignity of fellow human persons, the perpetrators also experience their consciences recoiling against the evil. For example, the rampant drug and alcohol abuse, depression and other psychological disorders found among those who are involved in the evil industry of abortion (Budziszewski 2011, 141–59) are evidence of the reality and universal knowledge of the natural law.

In summary, although we may be free to act against the rational moral law grounded in our nature, we are not able to avoid its consequences.¹⁰ Similarly, if we decide that we can fly and then jump off a seven-storey building, our freedom to act contrary to physical laws does not change the fact that gravity will have its revenge.

With the basics of the natural law in place, it is now time to look at how teaching about the moral law and the cardinal virtues has a place in our efforts as teachers and catechists to till the soil for the New Evangelization. Not to overemphasize the point, but the natural law serves as the foundation upon which the edifice of the Christian moral life is built. As Saint Paul tells us in his epistle to the Romans (Romans 1:17–32), the natural law is a gift from the Creator that enables us to have

knowledge of the fundamentals of moral living, based on our very nature as beings created by a loving God. (Sadly, he also illustrates how easily we can forget and reject the natural law as the result of original sin and actual sin.) Saint Thomas puts it in another, complementary way: the natural law is human beings' rational participation in the eternal law of God, a law of creative love. As it is the foundation of the Christian moral life, it serves as the hard baseline, or absolute moral minimum, upon which the life of the Beatitudes, the theological virtues, and the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are built. To illustrate, we would never say that a person who merely refrains from murder is, therefore, a good Christian; rather, he or she is one who demonstrates the virtues and counsels necessary to live the law of the gospel in its totality. On the other hand, one who commits wilful murder is, by that act against the natural law, unable to be called a good Christian unless he or she repents. Thus, the natural law is a necessary baseline or minimum that cannot be broken, but certainly not the whole edifice of the Christian moral life.

Two other fundamental links between the natural law and the Christian life need to be addressed briefly. First, how is the natural law evangelical by nature? Knowledge of the moral law built into our nature is helpful for the New Evangelization because it provides a shared point of reference for ethical truths, based on reason, that is accessible to all, regardless of culture or religion. Just as the two previous preambles of faith—the existence of God and the existence of the immaterial soul—provide a shared foundation on which to build the supernaturally

revealed truths of the faith, so too does the natural law. Without this shared, objective basis of morality grounded in human nature, Christian ethics would be in serious danger of appearing to be arbitrary or voluntaristic—the product of some historico-cultural era or of a wilful God (that is, a voluntaristic God whose commandments are not rational but, rather, merely the whims of the most powerful being). Instead, because of its congruence with and perfection of the natural law, the law of the gospel (or the evangelical law) can be seen for what it truly is—a supernatural perfection offered to humanity.

The second link between this fundamental moral law and the Christian life can be found in the fact that the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) is a restatement of the first principles of natural law (Budziszewski 2011, 237–40). Thus, the witness of our natures, created by a loving God, is in complete agreement with the truths that he reveals in Sacred Scripture.

Before concluding, it is important to take some time to mention a few of the common objections that come up when discussing the natural law. The most prevalent objection teachers hear is the one I have already mentioned: relativism. Relativism is an ethical error that denies all moral absolutes and makes ethics merely a cultural or individual construct. It is prevalent today, as evidenced by constant calls for nonjudgmentalism and the denial of any shared or binding ethical norms. Because of the obvious fact of moral disagreement, relativists will claim that there is no moral truth or even any shared human nature.¹¹ This objection to the natural law must be directly engaged and countered, as it is a serious malady of the

intellect. I recommend helping students to see two major problems with relativism: (1) that it is self-contradictory in its denial of absolute truths and (2) that it leads to frightening moral consequences if lived consistently. Some excellent resources for assisting with this are Beckwith and Koukl's (2009) *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*, Kreeft's (1999) *A Refutation of Moral Relativism* and Oderberg's (2003) satirical article "Why I Am a Relativist."

A second objection to the natural law involves the claim that it commits a basic logical fallacy, called the naturalistic fallacy. This fallacy states that you cannot derive an *ought* from statements that describe what *is*. In other words, one cannot arrive at normative conclusions from descriptive premises. This objection, originally grounded in the mistaken metaphysics of David Hume, is often used to counter the natural law's claim that human beings have a certain nature and, therefore, should act in certain ways that perfect said nature. (In other words, like a set of manufacturer's instructions built into our very nature as "rational animals" so that we can discover by reason how we should act, we have certain natural inclinations that are guided by natural law. Therefore, to act contrary to these inclinations is to act contrary to our nature—to be less than human.) The problem with this objection is that it is based on a faulty metaphysics that assumes that our natures are not teleologically ordered to certain objective goods (food, clothing, shelter, friendship, marriage, procreation, education, society, God). With the deeper understanding of reality that a scholastic or realist metaphysics offers, along the line of thought that we have

relied on throughout this series of articles, we can see that teleology is unavoidably built into our human nature. The famous 20th-century Thomist Josef Pieper (1989, 111) illustrates this point perfectly:

All [moral] obligation is based on being. Reality is the foundation of ethics. The good is that which is in accord with reality. He who wishes to know and to do the good must turn his gaze upon the objective world of being. Not upon his own "ideas," not upon his "conscience," not upon "values," not upon arbitrarily established "ideals" and "models." He must turn away from his own act and fix his eyes upon reality.

As we survey our classrooms at the beginning of the 21st century, we find that ethical confusion is rampant. To offer our students the best education possible—one that is Christian in its emphasis on character formation and intellectual formation—we must give students the tools to think properly about moral questions. We must not shy away from the educational crisis of relativism; the stakes are high, and failure to overcome this crisis will seriously harm our students and society at large. When we consider what success looks like, we must ask ourselves some important questions. Will our graduates be incapable of grounding moral insights in reason and feel forced to follow the herd because media or majoritarian social pressure demands it? Will they be able to give a rational reason for their abhorrence of abortion, euthanasia, abuse, bullying and other evils? Will they have the moral resources to stand up to injustice in the world? These are essential questions, and their answers have eternal consequences. Let us hope that knowledge of the

preambles of faith, especially the natural law, will help in evangelizing our students, as well as in creating a just society oriented to the common good.¹²

Recommended Readings

- Edward Feser's (2009) *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide*
- Charles Rice's (1999) *50 Questions on the Natural Law: What It Is and Why We Need It*
- The first two books in Father Robert Spitzer's four-part apologetics series: *Finding True Happiness: Satisfying Our Restless Hearts* (2015a) and *The Soul's Upward Yearning: Clues to Our Transcendent Nature from Experience and Reason* (2015b)

Notes

1. For more information, see www.magiscenter.com/four-pillars-of-intellectual-evangelization/. The Magis Center addresses the preambles from an empirical angle, whereas my series of articles takes more of a philosophical approach. These are not mutually exclusive but, rather, complementary approaches.
2. For the details, see Wood (2015).
3. For a brief but informative discussion of the seriousness of this crisis, with qualitative and quantitative data, see Topping (2015, 23–37).
4. While moral and virtue formation, charitable service and other activities are essential because of the nature of ethics—doing rather than merely thinking—we are rational beings whose intellects must also be formed properly. Accordingly, the primary end of schooling is intellectual formation and, therefore, that will be the emphasis of this article. See Smith (1960, 33–38) for a thorough discussion of the relationship between moral and intellectual formation in Catholic schools.
5. Note here that we do not say "love of God," as this is a theological truth not open to reason alone.

6. Jaroszynski and Anderson (2013) do an excellent job of explicating the virtues and the natural law for a high school audience.

7. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q 90, a 4.

8. The Church's magisterium claims authority not only in questions of theological morality but also in being the authentic interpreter of the natural law for all humanity. See especially the International Theological Commission's (2009) *In Search of a Universal Ethic*, "The Magisterium of the Church and Natural Law," www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20090520_legge-naturale_en.html#1.6_The_Magisterium_of_the_Church_and_natural_law (accessed January 15, 2016).

9. See www.lifeissues.net/writers/wils/wils_01naturalfamilyplanning2.html (accessed January 15, 2016).

10. An especially sickening but illustrative example of the natural consequences of the natural law can be found in the effects (that is, "psychological burden" and so on) that murdering innocent Jews in Eastern Europe had on the soldiers of the SS Einsatzgruppen beginning in 1941. See www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005130 (accessed January 15, 2016).

11. This is sadly illustrated by the current moral confusion of some educational leaders in Catholic schools in Edmonton, especially in relation

to philosophical and theological anthropology.

12. See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "The Natural Moral Law," #1954–60, www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s1c3a1.htm (accessed January 15, 2016).

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The One Thing Is Three: How the Most Holy Trinity Explains Everything

by Michael E Gaitley
Marian Press, 2013

Reviewed by Dorothy Burns

Scientists since Albert Einstein have been trying to discover “a theory of everything.” Well, on a metaphysical level, we already have one, and it is very competently articulated in Father Michael Gaitley’s book *The One Thing Is Three: How the Most Holy Trinity Explains Everything*. This book is one of the most enjoyable reads I have had in a long time. It is simple yet profound. The super-concept of communion is the basis of this theory of everything.

Father Michael systematically and thoroughly develops the three points of communion—communion with the Holy Trinity, transforming communion with Christ and the mission of communion—using great stories, metaphors and allegories. The book is liberally sprinkled with apt quotations from Church documents and Scripture that illuminate the main points of each chapter. His style makes you feel like you are having a great conversation with a personable and knowledgeable man.

In Appendix 1, “The Great Oyster,” he supplies an incredible reading list to further his points, organized according to the main sections of the book with a POW (Pearls of Wisdom) rating system—

one pearl for a reading that offers one or few pearls of wisdom, and five pearls for one that is brimful of wisdom. He also rates each book according to its level of difficulty on a scale of 1 to 10.

Appendix 2 is called “Divine Mercy 101,” a topic near and dear to Father Michael’s heart, as he lives and works on Eden Hill in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, the home of the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy.

In his endorsement of the book, Peter Kreeft states, “It covers just about everything, yet slowly and clearly. If you wonder what God is doing in the Church today to convert and convince the modern world, read this book.” I second that endorsement.

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Guidelines

The RMEC newsjournal *Embrace the Spirit* is published to

- promote professional development of educators in the areas of religious and moral education and
- provide a forum for contributors to share ideas related to religious and moral education.

Submissions are requested that will provide material for personal reflection, theoretical consideration and practical application. Where appropriate, graphics and photographs are welcome.

The following areas will be addressed in the newsjournal:

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- Upcoming events
- Book reviews
- Reflections
- Feature articles and interviews
- Humour in religion
- Liturgies

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, in Microsoft Word format. The manuscript should include a title page that states the author's name, professional position, address and phone number(s). Submissions should be typed and double-spaced and may be any length to a maximum of 5,000 words. References must appear in full in a list at the end of the article.

Send contributions or enquiries to the editor: Dorothy Burns, 1 McRae Street, Box 1318, Okotoks, AB T1S 1B3; phone 403-938-6051 (res) or 403-938-4265 (bus); fax 403-938-4575; e-mail dburns@redeemer.ab.ca.

The editorial board, which reserves the right to edit for clarity and space, reviews all submissions.

