



To Know God: First Concerns of a Teacher

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?¹

*This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.²*



The Denial of Saint Peter by Caravaggio

We maintain that education has a noble purpose - the cultivation of a mature woman, a mature man. For at least twenty-five hundred years, such a position has had its naysayers, those who would reduce education to the mere equipping of students with the data and skills necessary for productive employment.³ While we must not undervalue productivity, for every mature man and mature woman will be productive, sloth being a mark of immaturity; neither can we assume that alone the skills necessary to be productive in the marketplace will lead to a full and free life. There are countless stories of top graduates from the best universities, who, though blessed with every opportunity, have made train-wrecks out of their lives.

While there are many aspects to maturity, there is none as important as the nature of one's relationship with God. It is

a truism that we are creatures who desire and worship and that we become like the things we desire and worship. We are always in the process of being conformed to the image of our gods. More than this, if the universal testimony of great saints is true, our hearts are made for God and our soul will never be at rest, until it rests in Him.⁴ The heart of man and woman cries for more than the humdrum of daily existence. We are made for the infinite and find no true fulfillment apart from it.

Crowned kings have thrown up dominion because they want that which is greater than kingdoms. Profound scholars fret under the limitations which keep them playing upon the margin of the unsounded ocean of knowledge. No great love can satisfy itself in loving. There is no satisfaction for the Soul of a man, save one, because the things about him are finite, measurable, incomplete; and his reach is beyond his grasp; he has an urgent, incessant, irrepressible need of the infinite.

Even we lesser people, who are not kings or poets or scholars, are eager and content enough in pursuit; but we know well that when we have attained, be it place or power, love or wealth, the old insatiable hunger will be upon us: we shall still want—we know not what!

St Augustine knew, when he said that the Soul of man was made for God, and could never be satisfied until it found Him. But our religious thought has become so poor and commonplace, so self-concerned, that we interpret this saying of the sainted man to mean, we shall not be satisfied till we find all the good we include in the name, 'salvation'. We belie and belittle ourselves by this thought, 'it is not anything for ourselves we want'; and the sops that we throw to our souls, in the way of one success after another, fail to keep us quiet.

'I want, am made for, and must have a God.'

We have within us an infinite capacity for love, loyalty, and service; but we are deterred, checked on every hand, by limitations in the objects of our love and service. It is only to our God that we can give the whole, and only from Him can we get the love we exact; a love which is like the air, an element to live in, out of which we gasp and perish. Where, but in our God, the Maker of heaven and earth, shall we find the key to all knowledge? Where, but in Him, whose is the power, the secret of dominion? And, our search and demand for goodness and beauty baffled here, disappointed there—it is only in our God we find the whole. The Soul is for God, and God is for the Soul, as light is for the eye, and the eye is for light. And, seeing that the Soul of the poorest and most ignorant has capacity for God, and can find no way of content without Him, is it wholly true to say that man is a finite being? But words are baffling; we cannot tell what we mean by finite and infinite.

We say there is no royal road to learning; but this highest attainment of man is for the simple and needy; it is reached by the road in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err. In this fact, also, we get a glimpse of the infinite for which we hunger. How strange it is to our finite notions that ALL should be offered to the grasp of the simplest and the least!⁵

¹ Gospel of Mark 8:36

² Gospel of John, 17:3

³ Consider the debate between Socrates and the sophists in Plato's Republic

⁴ Augustine, Confessions, Book 1, Chapter 1

⁵ Charlotte Mason, *Ourselves*, pp. 175-176