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A Catholic critique of a current notion of courtship

by Kathleen van Schaijik

When I was a freshman I went to a talk on dating, given on campus as part of a "Christian Formation" series. One of the things the speaker said was "Feelings don't really matter. Feelings come and go. What matters is compatibility." I've heard the same idea expressed many other times this way: "Love is not a feeling; it's a *decision*."

The de-emphasis on "feelings" was a fundamental aspect of a general philosophy of dating promoted on campus (though certainly not shared by all) at the time. Dating was (and still is) regarded by many as "a process of marriage preparation." Singles who truly wanted to "give their love life to God," were taught that they ought not to be dating at all until they were ready to get married, and that then it should be kept to the minimum necessary for finding an appropriate potential spouse and rationally discerning compatibility for marriage. A great deal of stress was put on the need to avoid sexual sin and occasions of sin, as well as on the danger of "going by your emotions." Young men and women were told they *should* not kiss until they were engaged, and were "challenged" to wait until they were married. ("If you're not going to start the car, why put the key in the ignition?") Older couples were encouraged to "get married as soon as possible" in order to avoid sin. The mystery of love was given very short shrift.

This way of thinking about courtship and dating seems to be on the rise in Christian circles. There are a number of Protestant ministers and teachers

There are a number of Protestant ministers and teachers today promulgating what they call (very misleadingly, I think) "the biblical approach" to marriage, which they term "courtship" in explicit opposition to the dating scene of the world.

today promulgating what they call (very misleadingly, I think) "the biblical approach" to marriage, which they term "courtship" in explicit opposition to the dating scene of the world.¹ Dating, they say, with its pattern of emotional attachments ending in breakups is "preparation for divorce." In

courtship, by contrast, "the decision to marry is entered into rationally," without the interference of the emotions and with the express permission and guidance of the parents. The emotions come later, during the betrothal period. "The betrothal period [is] given to allow the emotions to catch up with the decision. The emotions are supposed to follow reason, not lead it."² (No distinction is made here between critically different types of emotions, such as between arbitrary sensations and deep spiritual responses.)

I have heard prominent Catholics expound similar ideas recently, including the notion of parental permission to begin courting, no kissing until the wedding day, and the idea that feelings should follow the rational decision to court, not vice versa.³

This method of courting has a strong appeal among young Christians, for two main reasons. The first is that it has a very large kernel of truth in

it. The dating scene of the world is a disastrous mess. It is almost completely focussed on pleasure and self-gratification. Sexual promiscuity and emotional anguish abound. More and more couples are living together unmarried, more and more marriages are ending in divorce, more hearts are being broken, more lives are being ruined. Serious young



short takes

Inner life of society determines value of economic systems

I found Thomas Stork's contribution on distributism enlightening. My thanks to him for the helpful distinctions between it and capitalism. If that's what distributism is, then I think I like it. My reflection is upon which system works better in a fallen world. Consider two progressions. First, one that moves away from secular, unchristian capitalism, to a completely Christian inner form, where every economic decision is made with individual human dignity as a priority. At this point would we not have essentially the same economic environment that Mr. Stork describes under the name distributism? Second, consider a progression away from Christian distributism to a completely secular form of the same, where governments and other power-wielding entities control and regulate land-ownership and jobs are assigned to meet geographical quotas. With God forgotten, and decisions guided by self-serving motives, would not public outcry soon be for reform and freedom, with the end result being the equivalent of a looser and freer-exchanging capitalism?

What I suggest is that distributism is impossible without the spiritual conversion of nations. It can not be legislated, or it ends up looking and feeling like communism. In other words, to change the economic system, let us spend our efforts changing men's hearts. The economic system will then follow suit, and I wouldn't be surprised if it looks a lot like distributism.

Daniel Ellis
FUS class of '88

The God gap in the workplaces of the world

One year ago, I wrote in and stated that Franciscan University must prepare its students for the work force by encouraging classes with a vocational slant to them. Classes in computer education, business and professional writing courses, and practical internships are important, and need to be given priority if our graduates are to compete in the global economy and—more impor-

tantly—to spread the gospel using the tools of the time. (St. Maximilian Kolbe is a wonderful example in the way he used state of the art machinery and instruments to spread his work on Our Lady.)

But, with that being said, I can see very clearly why a good wholesome liberal arts program is needed as the proverbial backbone for our students. Take the following examples as a indicator of what a total professional-courses-only approach might have.

In a business course I took at a junior college, the issue of medical ethics was addressed. One student and I argued about the function of the hospital. I stated that it existed to save lives. This lady shook her head and said its function was to make money, and if someone died, oh well. Our teacher gave no support for either argument. This same teacher, in training future business managers and administrators, discussed a case where a train car was robbed over the Thanksgiving holiday, because the workers were on a holiday with family and friends. His view was that the manager should have paid the time and a half for the workers to get the car

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Idol worship of the “A” and the student/professor relationship

by Ronda Chervin

Many years ago a student of mine at a university on the West Coast approached me with this offer: “When I was in High School my Dad gave me \$100 every time I got an “A” in a course. Now that I am in college, there is 50% waiting for you if you give me an “A.”

Shortly after this an older woman student asked me if she could talk to me in her automobile in the parking lot. As she was chatting with me about problems at home I noticed a hand-gun sitting in the bin that usually holds hair-brushes, coca colas, etc. Looking down at the gun she started telling me how important it was to her to get an “A” in my class.

Walking through the halls of another college I noticed a young woman sitting on the floor in the corridor, tears rolling down her cheeks. “Bad news from home? A death in the family, I asked, as I put my arms around her?” “No,” she wailed. “I only got a B+ on my theology exam!”

Such examples might seem too bizarre for me to tell about. I have included them here because they are an extreme of more common, less dramatic, but also distressing attitudes of some students. One might wonder what the need to get “A’s” indicates about the student. Is the desire to get the “A” a positive sign of wanting to learn a great deal in each class? Does it indicate insecurity about one’s intelligence with a need for tangible proof of success in each and every class? Is it related to the high cost of college education such that only a superior performance could justify the debt the parents incur or the student will be saddled with for many years after graduation? Perhaps all three factors come together in the efforts some students make to achieve the goal of “A” grades. Or, is a fourth, perhaps even more crucial: the widespread sense in our culture that our worth is exclusively dependent on the opinion of others, an index of which are grades?

For a professor, the knowledge that many students will feel like failures if they don’t get an “A” in the class poses some problems. One wonders how the emphasis on grades affects the relationship between teacher and student. Consider the traditional model of the professor as sage and the student as disciple. Throughout history, we have beautiful examples of the relationship between mentoring sages and their student disciples: Plato and his brilliant disciple and critic, Aristotle; Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas...Thomas More and his followers; Gandhi and Nehru; Garrigou-Lagrance and the



Maritains, Dietrich Von Hildebrand and his disciple Alice Jourdain, later to become his wife. Surely loving respect and praise were part of these relationships, but it would be hard to imagine any of the above mentioned disciples begging for a perfect grade.

Over the years, I have questioned whether the fixation on grades so prevalent in our times might have to do with a paradigm shift. Perhaps the ideal of the sage or expert instructing the receptive student/apprentice has been replaced subtly by a new model: the paid coach and his/her trainees. In the latter relationship, the older coach is hired to make sure that the younger competitor brings home “the medals.” By analogy, it becomes the job of the professor to make sure that the students bring home the “A’s.” Being winner, as indicated by the “A,” is a compensation for the student’s high tuition fees. The “A’s” are viewed also, sometimes, as a hint of the high salaries to come which are, in turn, material symbols of a successful life. In a certain way, then, the trainee-student’s failure to earn an “A” in the class is laid partly to the failure of the coach-teacher to have designed a training program that guarantees competitive success.

A degeneration of the educational process from a noble endeavor calling forth the best efforts of teacher

and student for the sake of wisdom and knowledge to a mercenary exchange certainly causes dismay in anyone of an idealistic bent. Those of us whose academic vision includes religious goals should be even more troubled by such a paradigm shift.

Yet I don't want to be too hasty in fixing on the sage/disciple model as always the best one. If one looks at the shadow side of the traditional sage/disciple model we might wonder about the opportunities for arrogance on the side of the professor and slavish sometimes mindless devotion on the part of the student. In the case of a mentor whose ideas are false or even demonic, this paradigm is particularly ominous. On the other hand, regarding the trainee/coach image, on the positive side, are we not pleased when student evaluations are allowed to influence the administration of a college to dethrone a professor who might be totally inept or irresponsible in the teaching role? If the most intelligent and diligent students cannot achieve an "A" in the class because, say, the professor refused to explain things clearly, isn't that a fault of the professor rather than of the students? Would the stress experienced by these students at getting "B's" or "C's" in the class be a sign of

neurotic insecurity or a legitimate objection to an unjust state of affairs?

Baffled by the intricacies of these questions I sometimes dream of gradeless free college education. Then I recall some experiences of teaching community education classes without grades and with a nominal fee. No tension, but often almost no willingness on the part of the student to read the books suggested by the admired professor or even to come regularly or on time to the classes.

I have written this article in the hope that readers of *the University Concourse*, interested as they are in dialogue and growth, will provide insights in this area so important for all Christus Magister teachers, students and administrators. ■

Dr. Chervin is a nationally known author and speaker, and professor of philosophy at Our Lady of Corpus Christi Institute in Texas—a new Catholic college affiliated with Franciscan University through Christus Magister. She is a member of the Society of Our Lady of the Trinity. She taught philosophy at FUS from 1994-5.



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unloaded. The training was completely centered on money and doing what had to be done in order to get more. Ethics were relative. Family life was seen as less important than making money. My vocational-only training was full of "what's in it for me."

Liberally educated individuals will recognize the reason why people work. While it is true that the liberally educated manager must make a profit to keep in business, the focus will also be on the dignity of the person. If the person is given such dignity, greater dignity would be accorded for God. Living a life of worship and prayer, keeping God's commandments and those of the Church, and acknowledging that God is the Ultimate Authority in matters of ethics and faith will be present.

Our university community must promote liberal education in order to bring about God's Kingdom on earth. We have lost God in the work place. Actually, I doubt He was ever there. Now we must bring Him in, to restore our businesses to an ethical and faith-filled place where the simple values of faith, family, and friends are given priority.

Peter Cole

Masters in Education Program



The good of distributism: a reply to critics

by Thomas Storck

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the replies to my article, "What is Distributism?" which appeared in the January issue of the *Concourse*. I will reply to Mr. Harold first. I welcome his comments on the evils of consumerism and the dangers inherent in the notion that property rights are absolute. He very rightly notes that it is necessary that individual and social attitudes toward these must change. "Structures are a function of attitudes, and it is capitalist attitudes which must be changed before capitalist structures can change." However, he and I differ, apparently, when it comes to the question of whether the state can have any positive role in bringing about such changes. Mr. Harold writes, "This is all very different, however, from any type of government coercion or political action to change structures, which is the approach of Marxism, and which seems to me the prime danger of distributism as explicated by Mr. Storck. It is one approach to try to conform our own attitudes and actions to the truth, and another to imagine that this strenuous task can be bypassed by blunt political action."

I have never advocated that state action should attempt to bypass conversion of heart, but I do not think there is any necessary opposition between these two modes of acting either. Just as the state can have a tremendous influence on opinion via bad laws—*Roe v. Wade* is a prime example—so by promoting good laws the state can influence opinion to the better. The 1931 encyclical of Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, in which the Pontiff called for a thorough renewal of society upon the basis of Christian morality, advocated *both* conversion of heart and legal action on behalf of social justice. Such sentiments have been echoed by numerous popes, as in these words of Pius XII:

And, while the State in the nineteenth century, through excessive exaltation of liberty, considered as its exclusive scope the safeguarding of liberty by the law, Leo XIII admonished it that it had also the duty to interest itself in social welfare, taking care of the entire people and of all its members,

especially the weak and the dispossessed, through a generous social programme and the creation of a labor code. (Address to Italian workers on the Feast of Pentecost, June 1, 1941)

Since, as St. Thomas taught, man is by nature a social and political being, we cannot ignore the role of the state in promoting a just society. It is true, as Mr. Harold states, that governmental action will accomplish little in the absence of a true conversion of

hearts, but the point is that both are needed. One of Satan's biggest successes in the modern world has been to divide Catholics, and indeed many others, into two groups: those who look to the state for obtaining everything, and those who look only to individual or private activity or charity. But in fact neither of these two groups is correct.

Moreover, distributism, unlike socialism, does not look to the state to accomplish everything, but primarily works for the establishment of groups—modern "guilds"—which are not organs of the state and which are to play the most important role in ensuring that property serves its true end, namely, the promotion of human welfare.

Mr. Zoric and Mr. Welker, however, unlike Mr. Harold, do not seem to understand that the mere celebration of material riches hardly comports well with the gospel message. Yes, capitalism is certainly responsible for the creation of mounds of material goods. Mr. Zoric and Mr. Welker celebrate the ubiquity of telephones and electricity, cars, VCRs, microwaves, air conditioning, cable TV, washers and dryers.

While I would not dispute that many of the inventions of the industrial revolution have done good, one wonders, however, if the indiscriminate production of all the above products really has brought men closer to our Lord, has helped to create a Christian society, has increased charity and justice in our hearts. Perhaps a few quotes would put the matter into perspective.

If abundance of riches were the ultimate end [of life], an economist would be ruler of the people...The purpose [finis] of the

One of Satan's biggest successes in the modern world has been to divide Catholics...into two groups: those who look to the state for obtaining everything, and those who look only to individual or private activity or charity. But in fact neither of these two groups is correct.

people having come together however seems to be to live according to virtue. For to this men come together, that they may live well together, which each one living by himself is not able to obtain; the good life however is according to virtue; the virtuous life therefore is the end [finis] of human society. (St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum*, I, 14)

John Paul II, speaking of the attempt by non-communist nations to rival communism in the years after World War II, wrote,

Another kind of response, practical in nature, is represented by the affluent society or the consumer society. It seeks to defeat Marxism on the level of pure materialism by showing how a free-market society can achieve a greater satisfaction of material human needs than Communism, while equally excluding spiritual values. In reality, while on the one hand it is true that this social model shows the failure of Marxism to contribute to a humane and better society, on the other hand, insofar as it denies an autonomous existence and value to morality, law, culture and religion, it agrees with Marxism, in the sense that it totally reduces man to the sphere of economics and the satisfaction of material needs. (Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, no. 19)

And from the same encyclical,

It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards "having" rather than "being," and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself. (Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, no. 36)

And lastly, from one of our separated brethren, John Wesley: "I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion.... But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches." (Quoted by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.)

After their praise of the material products of capitalism, Mr. Zoric and Mr. Welker deal with some of the specifics of my article. They argue, for example, that

my account of the stock market is incorrect. But the notion of a real connection between the investor/owner and the company is largely a capitalist fairy tale. If, as they argue, most investors hold stocks on a long-term basis, why do thousands of shares change hands every day, and why is the minute by minute rise and fall in stocks so eagerly watched by both traders and investors? In fact, there is little similarity between private property as the popes have championed it and private property as it exists via shares of stock.

I also stated the following: "If my business supports myself and my family, then what right do I have to expand that business so as to deprive others of the means of supporting themselves and their families?" Mr. Zoric and Mr. Welker argue that "business expansion does not deprive others of the means of supporting themselves; rather, it offers additional opportunities for those seeking such means." But do Mr. Zoric and Mr. Welker really believe that Wal-marts have never put any small shops out of business? That chain stores have never caused mom and pop stores to close? Economists must look at the real facts of the economy, not simply at deductions from their econometric model of what is supposed to happen.

Moreover, distributism is not the enemy of technological development as Mr. Zoric and Mr. Welker seem to think it is, though perhaps it would slow such development down a bit and give us a means of looking more closely at alleged improvements. After all, does mankind really need a new release of Windows every year—often with very little improvement over the old system, but with lots of money for Bill Gates? Does all the money spent on continual computer "upgrades" really represent a wise use of the resources God has given us?

As I indicated above, although Catholicism has always condemned the classical liberal notion that the state and state action are to be reduced to the smallest role possible, nevertheless distributism is not a statist system. It is not a form of socialism nor does it owe anything at all to the Marxist tradition. Rather, this social philosophy would seek to restore to individuals the actual possibility of owning productive property, so that the system of private ownership would work for the common good. Then we would see that it is not for the mere piling up of consumer goods that the economy exists, but for supplying our necessary material needs so that we can turn our minds to things much more important. For after all, "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). ■

Mr. Storck lives in Greenbelt, Maryland

Education is not primarily about preparing to evangelize in the workplace

by Ben Brown

I would like to thank Mr. Kelly for his contribution to the ongoing discussion of the place and importance of a liberal arts education and the interrelations between it and professional training, but at the risk of irritating *Concourse* readers by my commenting once again on this issue, I would like to make a few brief observations and ask Mr. Kelly a few questions, which I hope he and others might address in future issues.

First, Mr. Kelly says in his concluding paragraph that the liberal arts and professional training “cannot be separated.” In fact, he says that “one cannot survive without the other.” This seems to me plainly false, for there have existed for centuries and still do exist numerous liberal arts colleges, schools which neither give nor attempt to give any such professional training. These schools are straightforward counter-examples of a liberal arts education surviving, and even flourishing, without any professional training. I suspect, however, that this is not exactly what Mr. Kelly meant when he said the above; I think that he probably meant something more like that if we are to “sufficiently arm our students in order to fulfil the Great Commission” we must have both liberal arts education and professional training, which brings me to my second point.

Mr. Kelly, and many others with him, seem to think that the one and only purpose of FUS is to prepare its students to go out and convert the world, especially in the workplace. This, too, seems to me plainly false. If it were true, then FUS would require all of its students to at least take catechetics 101 and apologetics 101, and certainly more than just two theology classes. And if evangelization was the only real purpose of FUS, then why can a student graduate without having had one professional training class but cannot graduate without having met the humanities core requirements (sparse as they are)?

Thirdly, and connected to the last point, the only reason Mr. Kelly gives as to why a liberal arts education is good and necessary is because it is needed “to fulfill the Great Commission.” What about the perfection of the intellect? Would Mr. Kelly say that the only

reason to pray is to beseech God for His help in spreading the gospel, or the only reason for mortification to gain graces for the heathens, or the only reason for practicing virtue to set a good example? What about the goods of deepening one’s relationship with God, subjecting one’s appetites to one’s reason and will, and perfecting oneself morally? Aren’t these in fact primary, and the goods which result for others, even if primary in one’s intention in certain circumstances, secondary in themselves? Similarly, despite the fact that a liberal arts education may be important for evangelizing well and/or doing one’s job well, the primary end of such an education is the perfection of the person intellectually, just as the primary end of practicing moral virtue is the perfection of the person morally.

Fourthly, even if it were true that the real end of FUS was to arm students to bring Christ to the world, what would they need a liberal arts education for? Sure, it might help, but why in the world would the liberal arts be so essential to bringing Christ into the workplace that they cannot be separated from professional training? Why would not catechetics, apologetics, theology and maybe a little philosophy suffice? Why would history, literature, music, math, physics, etc. be essential to the evangelizing businessman’s meeting his challenge?

Or is Mr. Kelly confused about just what a liberal arts education is? Too often around here I get the impression that people think that a liberal arts education is little more than theology, or at least theology is often seen as the only really important part of the liberal arts. One major reason, I think, why so many people see it like that is because they see the end of education at FUS as simply preparation for doing their part to convert the world; given that, of course all one really needs is theology and professional training, but are you really willing to give up the fuller and more complete picture which sees education and theology as something better and more noble than the purely utilitarian?

Fifthly, I would like to ask Mr. Kelly what exactly he considers a “strong” and “extensive” liberal arts education to be, which he thinks that the students of FUS are getting. The core requirements here at FUS, quite

Mr. Kelly, and many others with him, seem to think that the one and only purpose of FUS is to prepare its students to go out and convert the world, especially in the workplace. This, too, seems to me plainly false.

frankly, are a joke compared to any serious liberal arts institution, and academically FUS has a fairly poor reputation among those who have even heard of it at other universities. One philosophy, one literature, and one history class hardly counts as a strong and extensive liberal arts education, no matter how much theology one gets.

To conclude, let me make one final comment. The reaction of many to what I have said above may very well be: "So be it. It is better for FUS to be a thoroughly orthodox preparation ground for bringing Christ to the world than your extreme, elitist vision of intellectual formation. Evangelization is far more important than book-learning and there is far greater need for the former than the latter in this day and age. And besides that, let the person who wants a full-fledged liberal arts education go to one of those liberal arts colleges that you mentioned above." Unfortunately, I cannot even begin to explain the deep, subtle, and sinister problems with such an outlook; what I have already said above and in past articles will

have to suffice. I want here only to say two things. First, if that is what FUS is and wants to be (thankfully, despite the desire and influence of some, I don't think FUS has yet reached such a stage), then we should stop claiming to be a university and a liberal arts institution, because arming people for the Great Commission is not what a university is about. And secondly, we need to think a little more carefully about how well the Catholic vision gels with a vision which sees intellectual culture as relatively unimportant. Who was it, after all, but the monks who kept intellectual culture alive during the "dark ages", and where did universities spring from but out of a Catholic world with a Catholic vision? The truly Catholic vision sees an intimate bond between faith and reason and is not so ready to throw liberal arts education out the window or relegate it to a utilitarian position. ■

Ben Brown is a senior math/computer science/theology major at FUS and a contributing editor of the Concourse.

Read the *Concourse* and
get kissed **50%**
more often



Well, OK, maybe not—but you should read it anyway.

Courtship

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Christians are looking desperately for something better and purer—a godly way to get married. And this method promises to provide it.

The second reason for its appeal, I think, is that it so greatly *simplifies* things for singles. It makes the pre-marriage period *manageable*. It gives a safe formula for getting through an extremely complex, confusing and peril-fraught time of life. By putting things on a clear, up-front, rational basis, much of the uncertainty and vulnerability that inevitably accompany "affairs of the heart" is eliminated.

The problem with it is that it is drastically lacking the fullness of truth about the mysteries of love and sexuality. And the lack here is not a mere incompleteness—so that if a few additions or adjustments were made, we'd have it in full. Rather, it is the kind of lack that entails a reduction and distortion of reality. And any distortion on the philosophical level is bound to work its way into the practical realm, doing damage in human lives in proportion with the seriousness of the error. (I could give many sorrowful examples here if put to it.)

Love and discernment

Perhaps the prime way it distorts reality is in the way it denigrates the role of love in courtship. In some cases, love is treated as irrelevant or worse, since "emotions" can cloud our judgement.⁴ More often, though,

the “feelings” that go with courtship are seen to be good and valid, but still *incidental* to the “discernment process.” I can remember very distinctly thinking this way as a freshman and sophomore at FUS—being taught to think this way. If the choice of a spouse was sound, the feelings would click in eventually.

Just last night, reading George Weigel’s biography of John Paul II, I was struck by this line: “Love, for Karol Wojtyla, was the truth at the very core of the human condition...” (p.101) Similarly, he saw it as the core of authentic courtship. In the experience of falling in love, Wojtyla shows, the meaning of the universe is mysteriously revealed, and with it the lover’s personal vocation: *to give myself in love to this other, and to receive the gift of his love for me.*⁵

This theme is also stressed repeatedly in the writings of the great Catholic philosopher, Dietrich von Hildebrand.⁶ True love between a man and a woman, so far from being a matter of bodily urges or appetites, or of sub-rational, superficial “feelings” needing to be dominated by reason, is a profoundly, a *pre-eminently spiritual* reality—one that shakes us to the very depths of our being. It is, further, decisively an *affective* reality, centered in the *heart*, not the intellect or the will (though it is of course intimately related to both.) Jacob did not labor fourteen years for Rachel’s hand because he had “discerned a compatibility” with her, but “because he loved her.” (Gen. 29:19-20)

To insist on the centrality of love in courtship, however, is *not at all* to suggest that discernment has no place. It is *vital* necessary; for instance, in helping us to distinguish between authentic love and counterfeits like infatuation or mere sexual attraction, or to decide whether or not this particular love ought to end in marriage, or whether it might be right to marry even in the absence of an intense “inloveness.”⁷ But, crucial as it is, rational discernment is not the essence of the matter, and if we talk as if it is, we will end by cheating young men and women out of the height of human happiness, and with it the moral power they will need to live out their married lives well.⁸

The objective and subjective dimensions

A second distortion in the above-described courtship method, related to the first, is in its too impersonal or lop-sidedly “objective” treatment of the vocation to marriage. This can be seen in the very idea of making lists of potential spouses, and in the notion of

needing parental permission to begin courting.

In Catholic understanding, marriage is a *vocation*—not just to a general state, but to a particular person. And like a vocation to the religious life, it is based on an intimate, interior call of God. In other words, it is something profoundly *subjective*⁹—beyond the reach of purely objective judgements and categories.¹⁰ Therefore, *it is not fitting* for a man who wants to marry to make lists of the qualities he’s looking for in a wife, or lists of the various women who attract his interest. This exposes and reinforces an impersonal and de-personalizing view of marriage—as if it didn’t really matter whom one marries, as long as she has the right qualities for the role she is to play. It encourages a man to be on the lookout for a “type” rather than for a person—an approach that has devastating consequences, particularly for women.¹¹

Neither is it fitting for a couple to put the decision to court or to marry a particular person in the hands of their parents, or any other superior. No matter how

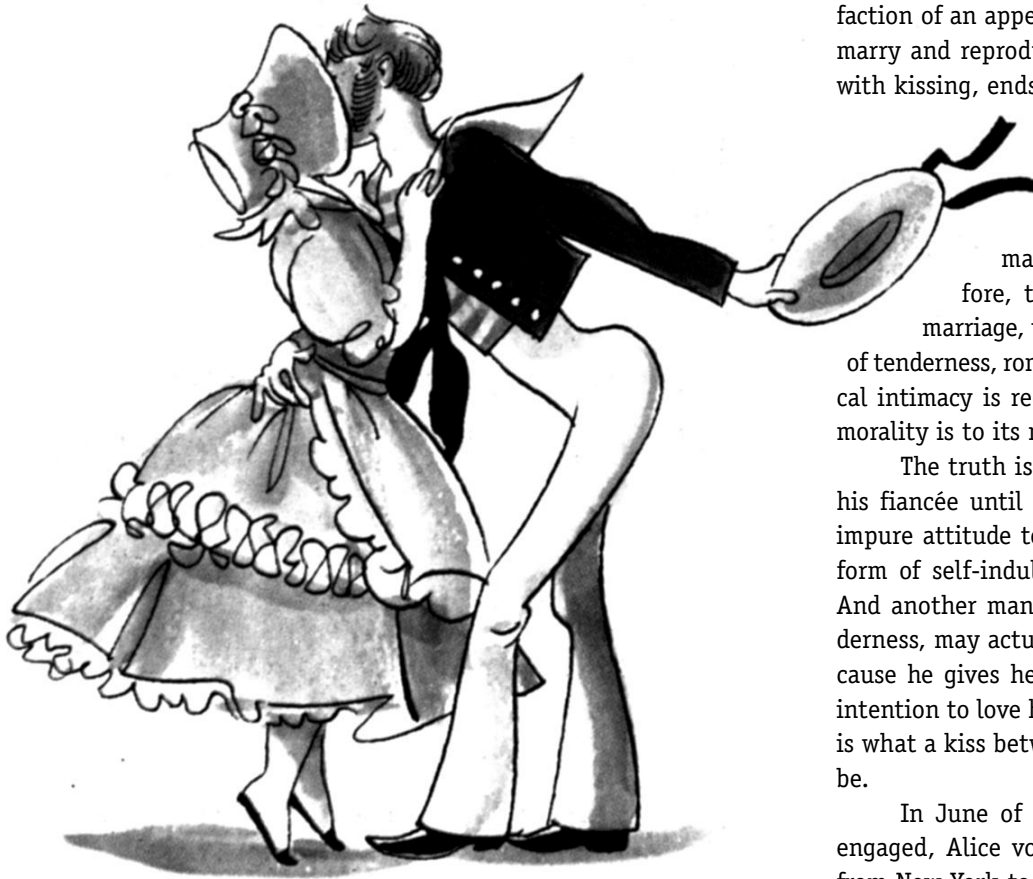
much he may have the best interests of his daughter in mind, a parent cannot see into her heart, and is therefore *simply unqualified* to make that most intimate and ultimate of decisions for her. But, again, to say that the parents should not hold veto power over their adult child’s choice to court or marry is *not at all* to suggest that they do not have an essential role to play in helping their off-spring to court and marry well. A parent’s perspective is priceless and irreplaceable.

My own parents never did anything to try to “control” my dating in college. The unspoken understanding was that they had done for me what they could by raising me well, and now it was up to me to live as I thought right.

When I was a sophomore I had a boyfriend—someone I thought of as a great Christian leader and a potential spouse. I was not in love with him, but I expected that would come in due course. One day I asked my Dad, “Would you be happy if I married him?” He hesitated before answering, and in that single instant of fatherly hesitation (which surprised me) all the

subtle doubts I had been harboring in my own heart crystallized into certainty: this relationship would never work; he was a great person, but he was all wrong for me. My father’s knowledge of me and his broader experience of life allowed him to see it before I did. And my implicit trust in his judgement and his loving concern for my happiness made me see it much sooner than I

When we compare a kiss to “putting a key in the ignition” and “challenge” young people to wait until they are married, we obscure the deepest meaning of human sexuality as the expression of our nature as persons created to give ourselves in love.



would have on my own—which spared me (and the boyfriend) a lot of needless heartache.

My parents never had the least hesitation about Jules. But neither would they have picked him for me out of a crowd of potential husbands. Until they saw how we loved one another, they could not have imagined how right he is for me. It was a revelation for them too.

Parents wield an enormous influence over their children. They have a right and a duty to *advise* their grown sons and daughters, and to bless or withhold their blessing from their “courtship choices,” as their loving parental wisdom dictates.¹² But they cannot make those choices for them, and they can do damage if they try.

A right understanding of human sexuality

The third serious defect of this method of courtship (also related to the first two) is in the way it treats human sexuality. It is not exactly a puritanical treatment, since it grants that sex is good and innocent in the right context, i.e., marriage. But still, it is reductive. When we compare a kiss to “putting a key in the ignition” and “challenge” young people to wait until they are married, we obscure the deepest meaning of human sexuality as the expression of our nature as per-

sons created to give ourselves in love. We reinforce the disastrous misconception that sex is basically the satisfaction of an appetite (designed by God to induce us to marry and reproduce)—a pleasure process that begins with kissing, ends with intercourse and results in children. Since that appetite is so powerful—so the thinking goes—it needs to be strictly controlled until marriage, when according to God’s law it may be satisfied without guilt. Therefore, the less we indulge ourselves before marriage, the safer we are. No mention is made of tenderness, romance, reverence, self-donation. Physical intimacy is reduced to sexual foreplay, and sexual morality is to its negative aspect of sin avoidance.

The truth is that a man may refrain from kissing his fiancée until their wedding day and still have an impure attitude toward her, because he views sex as a form of self-indulgence, rather than as a gift-of-self. And another man, who kisses his girlfriend with tenderness, may actually *grow* in purity as he does so, because he gives her that kiss as a sign and seal of his intention to love her and lay down his life for her. This is what a kiss between a man and a woman is meant to be.

In June of 1987, a year before Jules and I got engaged, Alice von Hildebrand asked me to drive her from New York to Virginia, where I was to take a summer course of hers. Knowing that my own courtship was about to begin, and wanting desperately to do it well, I asked her if she would share her thoughts with me. One of the many wonderful things she said to me that day was: “Reserve intimacy for only the most exceptional moments.” It was only a few words, but they managed to encapsulate and communicate a profoundly true and beautiful image of human sexuality (one without any reductive tendencies) that served as a help and inspiration for Jules and me throughout our courtship. Her words were pervaded with profound reverence for the sexual sphere, as well as with a humble awareness of its depth, seriousness and power, and therefore its potential to do great harm if misused. It is the kind of teaching I wish every young couple could receive before they approach courtship. (How much less unhappiness there would be if they did!)

People will say that I am too romantic and idealistic; that the sex-saturated culture of today demands that we *get practical* with young people if we are going to protect them from sin and devastation. But, I think we give much more genuine help when we teach single men and women *reverence*, when we hold up for them images that reveal the heart-melting beauty of a pure human love (in place of the obscenity, violence and vulgarity pop-culture bombards them with.) Once they see

it, they cannot help but long for it, and, under Grace, *aspire* to it. Their aching desire for authentic love gives them courage and insight; they begin to recognize intuitively and shrink from the impurity that threatens their chance of attaining it...

I know this was true in my own life, and I know I am not alone.

Feelings and femininity

If I had the space, I would like to develop here one final thought—a background problem attendant on the de-emphasis on feelings. I would like to show how this way of thinking tends in practice to devalue women, because they are generally speaking more “emotional” while men are more “rational.” If we see feelings as needing to be dominated by reason, which is superior to them, we will be under psychological pressure to imagine that men are superior to women. We will blind ourselves to the many important ways that, spiritually speaking, the emotions (rightly understood) “lead” reason—because they are deeper and more sensitive. (Recall Pascal’s words: “The heart has reasons that the reason does not know.”) But that will have to wait for another place. I have already gone way beyond the normal length limits of a *Concourse* article.

To conclude my critique of this method of courtship, let me say two things. First, that for all its errors it embodies a moral and religious seriousness that are greatly to be admired and *infinitely to be preferred* over the thoughtless self-centeredness and promiscuity prevailing in the dating scene of the world today. Though it is not the fullness of truth, it can be for many young people what it was for me—namely, a giant step in the right direction. And second, if I fault FUS for sometimes promoting bad ideas about dating, it is also true that it was in philosophy classes there that I first encountered the writings of Von Hildebrand, Wojtyla and Kierkegaard, among others great thinkers about Love (for which I give special thanks to Dean Healy.) Even more, I met Jules at FUS, and FUS provided the backdrop of our courtship. So, when I criticize, I do so only with a very grateful sense of how much I owe my *alma mater* for what she gave me in the way of love—which is much more than I can ever repay. ■

Kathleen van Schaijck graduated in 1988. She now lives in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where her husband, Jules (class of '89) teaches philosophy at Ave Maria College. She is currently writing a book on Catholic courtship.

ing to become a pastor) sums up this view succinctly: “It goes without saying that they do not approve of premarital sex, but what is a little more surprising is that they do not approve of premarital emotional intimacy either. If a couple are courting, they are supposed to be seriously considering each other as husband and wife, and they are supposed to do so with some overt participation by parents or other elders. Ideally, they should not be alone together, or if they are it ought to be in a public place—a Friendly’s, say—where liquor is not served and where they are unlikely to give into temptation.”

² I have lost the reference here, though I saved the quotations. It was from a pamphlet advertising a series of tapes on this subject by a Protestant minister named Jonathon Livingston, I think.

³ Some of these principles can be found in Kimberly Hahn’s tape series, “Dating and Courtship: A Catholic Perspective” (recorded in Steubenville in 1997, and available through St. Joseph Communications.) But it would be unjust to lump her views on this subject with thoroughly rationalistic approaches. Her tapes give a lot of good practical advice, and they reveal a genuine openness to the fullness of Catholic truth. There is much to be admired in them. For instance, she makes a very clear distinction between the basic self-centeredness of fornication and the self-donation of the marital act. Also she acknowledges the phenomenon of “falling in love,” and agrees that marriage is a vocation to love a particular person. Still, I think some aspects of her teaching can be fairly criticized for betraying a rationalistic tendency not completely unsimilar to the method I’m here critiquing.

⁴ I have heard of cases wherein the fact that the man felt no love for the woman he was thinking of marrying was conscientiously disregarded in his “discernment process.” (My heart aches for those women.)

⁵ This insight, which is the basis of the Pope’s profound “theology of the body,” is elaborated in his ethical work *Love and Responsibility*, and very movingly illustrated in his play, *The Jeweler’s Shop*.

⁶ See his *The Heart, or Man and Woman, or Marriage: the Mystery of Faithful Love*.

⁷ I am thinking for instance of the case of a widow with small children, who finds a good man who wants to marry her and provide for her and her children. She may sense that it is good and right to marry him, even if she is not madly in love.

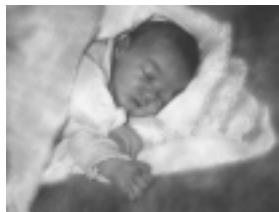
⁸ Max Scheler has shown that happiness is a source of moral strength in human persons. This is something we experience all the time: when we are happy we are able to do good that is beyond us when we are depressed. The happiness that comes into a person through the experience of loving and being loved is a very vital help in meeting the challenges and demands of married life which might otherwise be crushing.

⁹ The term subjective is unfortunately ambiguous, and easily

¹ A recent article in the NY Times Magazine (2/27/00) about a fundamentalist Christian family (the father of which is study-

katieandjules@attglobal.net

Announcing James Edwin Schmiesing



born Feb 25, 2000, weighing 9 lbs, 8 oz.
(my mommy is trying to fill up space!)

Communio

the next meeting will be on Wednesday, April 5 from 6:00-7:30pm in the Fireside lounge. For further information, talk to Fr. Bramwell or check his bulletin board.

FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY FORUM

Fr. Bramwell will meet with us on Friday, March 31 at 7:30, speaking on von Balthasar's kenotic theology.

Anyone interested in the Forum, contact Ben Brown at x6948 or email Joseph Little at Sapmariam@hotmail.com.



There is still time to compete for the Concourse annual Grand and Baby Grand Prizes for best articles. But don't wait long!

Attention Ave Maria and Our Lady of Corpus Christi students, staff and faculty: We want to hear from you! Lend us your ideas. Let us know what you think. Help us grasp more of Truth.

misunderstood. I am by no means advocating *subjectivism*, which is as different from subjective in my sense as feminism is from feminine. I mean, rather, to follow the Holy Father's use of the term to denote the unique and inscrutable interior plenitude of each individual human soul.

¹⁰ The mysterious subjectivity of this call is stirringly expressed in *The Jeweler's Shop*. When Andrew, who has just proposed to his future wife says about her: "There must have been something in Teresa that suited my personality. I thought much at the time about the "alter ego". Teresa was a whole world, just as distant as any other man, as any other woman—and yet there was something that allowed one to think of throwing a bridge."

¹¹ This is material for a whole article in itself. It has many dimensions. One is in the psychological dynamics that come into play. A single woman who wants to be married will feel pressured to conform to an artificial ideal of wifeliness. She might be depressed at how little she measures up to it, at how many younger, prettier women there are who are better representatives of it than she. In a desperate effort to appear

attractive as a potential wife, she will try hard to appear to be what she is not, even though it makes her feel phony and fills her with despair... A married woman, after the initial thrill of being a wife wears off and hardships begin to crop up, might experience a demoralizing doubt that her husband loves *her*. "Did he marry me for me, or did he marry me for my home-making skills?" She starts to feel "objectified," *used*. A pitiable longing to be loved *as a person* may drive her to do terrible things, such as unconsciously suppress her "positive attributes" in order to test her husband—to see whether his love for her really goes to the heart of who she is. (The worst thing a husband can do in this circumstance is rebuke his wife or "call her on" for not fulfilling her wifely duties.) But this is not the right place for developing this point.

¹² That wisdom may in some circumstances suggest prudential action. For instance, if parents fear that their freshman daughter has gotten involved in a very destructive relationship, they may decide not to continue paying her tuition to the college her boyfriend attends. In a very serious case, such a measure might well be justified, even called for.