



# The Liberal Arts Tradition

with Dr. Kevin Clark and Ravi Jain

## Lesson 4: Piety

### Outline:

#### Lost in the Cosmos

- *Lost in the Cosmos*, Walker Percy
- We do not have resources for knowing who we are, where we are going, or what our life means (no identity and no resources for finding our identity).
- We want to know who we are and where we are going, and that question is off limits to contemporary education in a secular society.
  - Education is about the formation of loves.
  - If you do not know what you ought to love or whom to love, how can education be ordered unto love?

#### Piety

- In a modern context, we have a tradition of not being “taken in” (fooled). A modern education project that focuses on critical thinking, being able to find out who I am on the basis of my own reason.
- This is the opposite of what is found in the tradition. According to the tradition, to be human is to know where you are from, who you are, and where you are going.
- **There is a story that we fit into (participate in), not that we make up.**
- Modernity is structurally opposed to the tradition.
  - John Locke says that children can throw off obligation to their parents.
  - This conflicts with Jesus’ teaching to honor your father and mother.
  - The idea that we can make things up on our own is modern heresy, a fundamental rejection of all the wisdom of all traditional cultures.
  - The *Abolition of Man* is a meditation on the fact that piety and cultivating piety was the central motif of education in all traditional societies.
  - We have set up a system of people who are independent thinkers, who ground ideas and beliefs on the basis of their own reason.
  - Augustine: Think about the way that you have learned. We never would have persevered through the study of grammar to Virgil if our elders had not praised him. It was not what or how they needed to know, it was whom they need to trust.
    - Who do we learn from? Who do we trust? Can I trust the Scripture? Do I trust my mom and dad? Do I trust these authors?
- *Credo ut intelligam*, I believe that I may understand.



- We have to love before critiquing.
- The proper way to understand the truth is to begin from a posture of love.
- How does one foster love? You learn love through practice.
- Maximus the Confessor
  - True wisdom only comes through service because wisdom itself is a divine service unto man.
- Piety is submission
  - Piety is submission to Christians who have gone before us and calling us to practices.
  - Grow in love through services and practices.

## Piety in Education

- Piety has to do with the structuring of time, space, and language. These inculcate what we love and value.
- Time
  - The order of the day
  - The students spending time with the teacher
  - The life we live among one another
  - How do we begin the day (in prayer)?
  - Is our day ordered by prayer?
- Space
  - The classroom
- Language
  - Curriculum
  - Authors and stories
- Upper school Christian thought teacher
  - Bring the text into class and give attention to it together.
  - The posture of the teacher toward the text structurally putting piety into the curriculum.
- Do the writings of the Church fathers inform the things that we do and say together?

## Luke 6:40

- When a student is fully trained, he will be like his teacher.
- Society becomes reorganized around the idea of the individual beginning with skepticism (Descartes). The problem with doubting everything is that you have no place to stand.
- What happens if a student is not going to be like his teacher?
  - He is never going to be fully formed.
  - How is he to be fully formed if he begins from a place of methodical doubt?



- Richard Weaver says we are fundamentally impious. We owe something to our neighbor, the past, and to nature. When we reject this, how does this disorient society and education?
  - This leaves the student feeling like they have an endless buffet of potential lives to choose from, and they do not know if there is any one that is better than another.
  - Students are taught to be skeptical of authority.
  - You do not need to wander around in disarray, you are Christ's. You are the body of Christ in the Church. Live that out. Teach your kids to the education of the Lord. Make your children lovers of wisdom. This is the task of Christian education. **Teach them to love.**
- There are not only tried and true ways of learning to know the liberal arts, there are people to trust. There are things that are worthwhile doing. The canon hangs on piety.
- "How should I live," should not be the last question, but the first question in the classical Christian tradition.
- **Pagan piety is transformed and realigned around the gospel, which is a self-giving love.**
  - What if the self-understanding of a teacher was participation in disciple-making?
  - Philippians 2: Though he [Christ] was rich, he became poor.
    - If that is the fundamental move of the teacher before the students in order for the students to realize that is their inward call.
  - As a teacher, as I give myself to this task, I am modeling piety for them. The teachers are not there for the wage, but for giving themselves away.



Pius Aeneas  
by Matthew Clark