

Eden's Children Grown-up

Address given by Linny Dey at the Silver JuDilee of The Imago School, April 1, 2006

What kind of a person is an Imago education aimed at shaping? What do we, who teach at Imago, want for our students? Our primary focus is not training young people to earn a living or even to be good citizens, though these may come as by-products. We are primarily concerned with what kind of person he or she will become. We want to ennoble human beings. We do not say to our students, "You can be anything you want to be," because it's not true; we don't make ourselves. "It is He who hath made us and not we ourselves," said the Psalmist. Rather we say, "Be what you were made to be; you are Eden's children made in the image of your Maker. God has made you to be like Him, and His work in you is to conform you to the image of His Son." The ideal we aim for is *theimago dei*, people as God meant them to be, people like the one perfect human being who walked this earth, the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

There is a right kind of idealism and a wrong kind of idealism. The wrong kind is based on the idea that we make ourselves. It ignores what we learn from Creation. It is based on the belief that anything is possible. It ignores what we learn from the Fall; it does not take into account the fallenness of man. Right idealism aims to recover what God intended in the first place. It recognizes that we can't do it perfectly in our present condition, yet it moves in the direction in which we were meant to go, and it looks ahead to the time when 'We will be like Him for we will see Him as He is.'

With this in mind then, what does the ideal Imago student look like? What do we seek to give him? What kind of grown-up do we want her to be? Our mission statement uses three words to describe our ideal. We want our students to be bold, compassionate and articulate. Let's take a brief look at each of these qualities.

Boldness is a willingness to act against opposition, to face a challenge, to go against the stream, or to stand firm. To what end do we want boldness? We want students to be bold, to stand for what's right and to fight for truth and justice. We want them to be bold like Christ who was bold enough to clear the temple of money changers and bold enough to eat with "sinners", and heal on the Sabbath in spite of the opposition of the religious leaders. We want Imago students to become bold parents who, with confidence, tell their children, "No, you can't do that even though your friends do it." We want bold building inspectors who say, "No, I won't overlook these code violations." We want them to become bold nurses who say, "No, I won't go along with not feeding this patient even if it means I lose my job."

This boldness is not just a feeling or a natural character trait. It can be learned; it can be worked on. One can make the choice to act boldly no matter what his natural inclination may be. Think of Peter in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe when Aslan sent him to rescue his sister from the wolf. It says, "Peter didn't feel very brave. indeed he felt he was going to be sick. But that made no difference to what he had to do." He chose to act bravely; he chose to be bold in order to save Susan. Boldness is a choice.

Can a school teach boldness? Should a school teach boldness? In light of the fact that the end of education is not knowledge but virtue, yes. Knowledge is not just meant to make us smarter; it's meant to make us better. The Bible tells us to do the truth. We can empower students; we can help them become bold by teaching them a right view of human nature, by teaching them what they were made for, by giving them tools and skills and experiences that build their confidence,

and by filling their imaginations with stories from literature and accounts from history of people who acted boldly. They will leave Imago with pictures of boldness in their minds, pictures of Esther going before the king to save her people, of Daniel praying in defiance of the law, of Atticus Finch standing up to a lynch mob, of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain saving the day at Gettysburg..

We also want Imago graduates to be compassionate. Compassion is the ability to feel with others, to see their needs, and to act to help. We want our students to be those who act to help those broken by the Fall and those hurt by the crippling lies of the modern world. We want them to be able not only to discern wrong ideas but also to see and weep for the hurt which those wrong ideas cause. We want them to be compassionate like Christ who went home with Zaccheus, who wept over Jerusalem, and who laid down His life for all the pain, hurt, suffering, and sin in the world. We want Imago students to become compassionate parents who demonstrate hospitality by bringing the needy in their communities into their homes thereby modeling compassion to their own children. We want them to be compassionate counselors in crisis pregnancy centers or at camps for children with AIDS.

How can a school teach compassion? Strictly speaking, it can't, but it can prepare the soil in which compassion can grow. It does this by teaching that the world as it is, a broken, abnormal place in need of redemption, by teaching in history and literature that man's basic problems are not economic, political, or environmental but are intellectual and moral problems of the mind and heart. It does this by continually urging children to come out of themselves, to forget themselves, to see the world and others as they are. Truly Christian education does not focus on self-discovery and self-development but on self-forgetfulness and discovery of the world out there. The passion is there within young people, but it needs to be molded so that it's not about you meeting my needs but about me seeing and wanting to meet your needs.

One might say at this point that we might get one or the other, boldness or compassion, but not both. However, we want both; we need both. To paraphrase the psychologist who said, "Truth without love is cruelty, but love without truth is sentimentality," we could say that boldness without compassion is brazen, but compassion without boldness is enabling. C. S. Lewis says something similar in his essay "On the Necessity of Chivalry." The code of chivalry demands both fierceness and meekness. A knight is to be a fierce fighter against the enemy and a meek helper of the poor and disadvantaged as well as a gentle man in the banquet hall. The ideal knight, says Lewis, "is not a compromise or happy mean between ferocity and meekness; he is fierce to the nth and meek to the nth." He also points out that the knight "is a work not of nature but of art; of that art which has human beings, instead of canvas and marble, for its medium." The combination doesn't happen naturally, it needs to be learned, it needs to be worked at. Fierceness alone becomes brutality; meekness alone becomes softness. The idea of chivalry, concludes Lewis, "offers the only possible escape from a world divided between wolves who do not understand, and sheep who cannot defend, the things that make life desirable." And so, at Imago we aim for boldness to the nth and compassion to the nth.

Finally, we want our students to become articulate. This one doesn't need a lot of explanation; it's what one would expect from a traditional school. Furthermore, if you listen to much radio or television, you can appreciate why we would like to feed a stream of articulate adults into the society. But, to recap what's been said in other places, we want Imago graduates to be good language users able to speak with clarity, precision, and even beauty in the service of truth. God revealed truth to us in words; we were made language users like God so that we can speak the truth, and we are being conformed to the image of Christ who is the Word made flesh and who spoke words of life. We want our graduates to be able to explain clearly to their fellow employees

why they won't sign the petition that violates their principles. We want them to write editorials to the newspaper or speak convincingly to the school board about why certain things shouldn't be taught in school. We want them to be able to answer well their own children's questions about what is right and what is true and just about what IS. Toward this end an Imago education is logocentric, and good, clear writing and speaking is modeled, taught, and supported in every subject from grammar to drama, from reading to science. Not only do we want to give students something to say which is grounded in a right understanding of the world, but we want them to know how to say it. We want them to be articulate.

We would like to think that we are teaching the next Francis Schaeffer, or William Wilberforce, the next C S. Lewis, the next Amy Carmichael or Gladys Aylward or Elisabeth Eliot as well as future parents, school board members, layers, electricians, musicians, mechanics, ministers, secretaries, soldiers, builders, teachers - witnesses to truth, goodness, and beauty across the whole spectrum of life to whom we say: "Sing, Eden's children, through the night" boldly, clearly, and compassionately.