

Toward a Philosophy of Education in the Spirit of St. Bonaventure

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"There are those, [St. Bonaventure] writes, who desires to know only for the sake of knowing. This reflects an ideal at least as old as Aristotle who saw the speculative life as the highest ideal for man....That in which man becomes most like God is the pure enjoyment of truth for its own sake. The highest life for man is the life of pure speculation, which is its own reward; it is...self-sufficient and needs no other justification....

"...Newman could write...'Knowledge is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind that any kind of knowledge, if it be really such, is its own reward' (*The Idea of a University*).

"But, to the mind of Bonaventure, there is a danger in this viewpoint; for if we take it without further qualification, we run the danger of losing all sense of perspective and any scale of value....The danger of this attitude when pursued without further qualification, consists in the fact that one becomes lost and can no longer make the most important value-distinctions. This is what Bonaventure means by vain curiosity.

There are those, [Bonaventure] says, 'Who wish to know so that they may build up others; and this is charity. There are those who desire to know that they themselves may be built up, and this is prudence. Knowledge puffs up; but charity builds up. Therefore it is necessary to join charity with knowledge so that man be both knowledgeable and loving.'

"'Knowledge is one thing, virtue another' writes Cardinal Newman. There may indeed be pleasure in knowledge, but – as Bonaventure would be quick to point out – man is made not only to know. He is made to find joy, peace, and fulfillment in loving and transforming union with God. This is the only end he really has."