

My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 32

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Whether I taught American Literature or World Literature, I always worked the opening three chapters of the King James version of Genesis into my curriculum. I spent at least two 80 minute class periods on the material. This gave me enough time to discuss the literary devices of allegory, symbol, and metaphor, while introducing Divine Principle themes. I would diagram the four position foundation, speaking about mind-body unity, marriage, family, and our relationship with the natural world. Once introduced, I returned to the four position foundation diagram constantly throughout the year, as a vehicle to discuss character development and conflict relative to the ideal, within the works of literature we discussed. The students internalized the diagram and it would bring me great joy to see it scattered throughout their notes.



In these lectures, I spoke about the world of heart as the final resting point for all of our longings. Through our discussion of literary themes, I led my students to understand that happiness presented a great irony: the more we sought it for ourselves, the less content we would be, and the slimmer our chances of being happy. The resolution of this paradox is that we become happy by being concerned for

the wellbeing of others. These themes fit perfectly within the Social Justice component of Cardinal Newman's educational charge, which encouraged the students to actively serve in their families and communities, to "live for the sake of others."



I concluded my exploration of Genesis by teaching the Fall of Man, again as an exercise in literary analysis, but with a very pointed conclusion: WAIT! I then opened the class up to a realistic discussion of growth, maturity, and sexual relations, by asking them why something we desire so strongly can make us so very unhappy. I found Buddhist scriptures compiled by Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai to be very helpful in this regard, because it broadened the scope of the discussion outward from an exclusively Judeo-Christian one. These lectures provided more of a rational motive for restraint to the students than their Theology classes could. It also opened the way for individual students to approach me over the years and feel comfortable discussing the most personal of issues. There were times when I would refer students to professional counseling, or even when mandatory reporting requirements kicked in. But the tone of my presentation of the subject matter in class made me accessible to them.

Unfortunately, my own children never felt that same freedom in their high school years. But those are stories for a later chapter.

From my first day of teaching, I brought along a Guide Dog for the Blind puppy we were raising in our family. When my daughter turned 10 years old, we contacted our local puppy raising group and set the process in motion for her to become a raiser. Over her Christmas break in December 2000, we received an 8 week old yellow lab, Charleston, from Guide Dogs for the Blind. Puppy raising became our family service project. As raisers, my children learned to take responsibility for another creature, to be patient, and to overcome themselves by performing chores such as waking in the middle of the night to relieve a distressed, whining dog, then bathing him, and cleaning a disgusting kennel soiled with diarrhea. Most importantly, they learned to love a puppy and then give it up to be the highly trained companion for a blind person.



Having a dog in the classroom proved remarkably helpful, as puppies naturally broke down barriers and eroded inhibitions. The puppies were an endless source of entertainment and consolation. Kids who were struggling, who had lost a friend or even a parent, would come in during breaks just to be with my dogs. This would often open the way to conversation as students felt comfortable. I enlisted the students in the mission of puppy raising, as their interactions with the dogs had to necessarily follow specific training protocols. Sometimes, these were violated, as when a Junior Class Officer during a council meeting in my classroom, unbeknownst to me, fed a young puppy all of the green bell peppers off his pizza. The peppers were too much for the stomach of this particular four month old lab, who had explosive diarrhea in the back of my SUV on the way home. The following day, the young man and I shared a teaching moment.



Following our lessons on Genesis, the kids were ready to begin reading selections from Homer's "Iliad," in preparation for reading all of "The Odyssey." From the outset, I read these works aloud to my classes. Epic poems were the songs of wandering poets and were originally created to be heard on the ear not read. We analyzed them passage by

passage, line by line. The utter strangeness of the text provoked curiosity, though becoming accustomed to the language and names proved a frustrating challenge at first to many. But, with patience and perseverance, students worked the text and their initial frustration slowly transformed to pride at having achieved a degree of mastery over difficult material. By the conclusion of our curriculum on Homer, students could parse the allegory and discuss the deeper lessons on virtue offered by the texts. Moreover, they had taken an

important step in the direction of cultural literacy, a foundation they would never lose.

