

Catholic Candle

☪ June 2025 ☪ catholiccandle.org ☪ catholiccandle@gmail.com

Words to Live by – from Catholic Tradition

Bad leaders in the Church and in Society are a Punishment for Sin

We are suffering from bad leaders in the Church and civil society as Divine retribution for the sins of people in the human element of the Church and in civil society.

Here is one way that St. Thomas Aquinas, greatest Doctor of the Church, teaches this truth:

To deserve to secure from God the blessing of a good ruler, the people must desist from sin, for ***it is by Divine permission that wicked men receive power to rule as a punishment for sin***, as the Lord says by the Prophet Osee [13:11]: “I will give you a king in my wrath” and it is said in Job [34:30] that he “makes a man that is a hypocrite to reign for the sins of the people.” Sin must therefore be done away with in order that the scourge of tyrants may cease.

St. Thomas, *On Kingship*, ch.7 (emphasis added).

Catholic Candle note: Of course, the fact that God punishes people for their sins by giving them bad rulers, does not exonerate those bad rulers from their own culpability for their sins. God is merely using the sins of bad rulers as a tool to punish the sins of the people.



Catholic Candle note: The article immediately below is part eleven of the study of the Choleric temperament. The first ten parts can be found here:

1. Mary’s School of Sanctity – Lesson #36: About the Temperaments – Beginning our Study of the Choleric Temperament – Part I:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/08/27/lesson-35-about-the-temperaments-the-choleric-temperament/>
2. Mary’s School of Sanctity – Lesson #37: About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament– Part II:

<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/09/26/lesson-37-about-the-temperaments-continuation-of-the-choleric-temperament/>

3. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #38 -- About the Temperaments – Continuing our Study of the Choleric Temperament – Their Spiritual Combat – Part III:: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/10/24/lesson-38-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat/>
4. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #39 About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament – That Temperament's Spiritual Combat – Part IV: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/11/26/lesson-39-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat-part-iv/>
5. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #40: Temperaments – Choleric Temperament – Their Spiritual Combat – Part V: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/12/30/lesson-40-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat-part-v/>
6. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #41 - About the Temperaments - Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament: a Choleric's Spiritual Combat -- Part VI: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/01/27/lesson-41-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-choleric-spiritual-combat-part-vi/>
7. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #42: About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament – a Choleric's Spiritual Combat – Part VII: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/02/21/lesson-42-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-choleric-spiritual-combat-part-vii/>
8. Mary's School of Sanctity -- Lesson #43 About the Temperaments --Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament -- Their Spiritual Combat Part VIII: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/03/27/lesson-42-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-choleric-spiritual-combat-part-viii/>
9. Mary's School of Sanctity – Lesson #44 About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament – Their Spiritual Combat, Part IX: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/04/23/lesson-44-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-choleric-spiritual-combat-part-ix/>
10. Mary's School of Sanctity -- Lesson #45 About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament – The Choleric's Spiritual Combat Part X: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/05/20/lesson-45-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-choleric-spiritual-combat-part-x/>

Mary's School of Sanctity

Lesson #46 About the Temperaments – Continuing Our Study of the Choleric Temperament – The Choleric's Spiritual Combat – Part XI

Note: When referring to a person with a choleric temperament in this article we simply will call him a “choleric”.

In our last lesson we delved further into the typical form of pride a choleric has. Now we begin a more in depth look at the core of the choleric pride. We mentioned that the source of the choleric pride is a lack of mental discipline, that is, an unwillingness to force himself to reason deeply and carefully.

In order to discuss this unfortunate failure to use his intellect – which leads to pride – we need to have a basic understanding of how God expects us to use our intellect.

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius explains that man is created to praise, revere, and serve God.¹ The *Baltimore Catechism* refers to these actions as knowing, loving, and serving God.

The highest faculty a man possesses is his intellect and so it makes sense that the more a man knows, the better he will be able to praise, revere, and serve God. This is true even if he knows about God merely through observing God's creation.² The more someone knows the truth, the more he is inspired to love God and consequently to serve God

¹ Read these articles which examine this essential truth of our Faith and principle of human existence:

† <https://catholiccandle.org/2022/05/24/lesson-9-the-principle-and-foundation-part-i/>

† <https://catholiccandle.org/2022/06/27/lesson-11-the-principle-and-foundation-part-ii/>

² St. Paul teaches how man knows of God's existence and goodness through looking at the world around us:

For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also, and Divinity: so that they [atheists] are inexcusable.

Romans, 1:20 (bracketed word added to show context).

better.³

The Purpose of the Intellect

Man is intended to use his God-given reason to know his proper goal, namely, the happiness of enjoying God in heaven, and to take the proper means to accomplish this goal. However, because of original sin, man's mind has the wound of ignorance and his body has the wounds of the concupiscence of the eyes and the flesh. In addition to this, man is prone to inordinate pride (*i.e.*, the pride of life, as St. John the Evangelist calls it, 1 *St. John*, 2:16).

St. Thomas explains that the goodness of an action depends on the will of a man being directed to his proper end, that is, to God. He explains how God intended man's reason to direct and inform his will about the end (*i.e.*, goal) of man and about the proper means he should take to obtain his end. The whole of the moral life involves man listening to the voice of reason (also known as his conscience).

God has set down His laws plainly and His Catholic Church, in her Divine Element, has expounded upon the moral life in detail. Nevertheless, the law of God, the Natural Law, is written in the heart of each man – as *Genesis* tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God.⁴

³ Here is one way that St. Augustine, great Doctor of the Church, teaches this truth, addressing himself directly to God:

Heaven and earth and all that is in them tell me, wherever I look, that I should love You [*i.e.*, God], and they cease not to tell it to all men, so that there is no excuse for them.

St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, Bk 10, Ch.6 (bracketed words added to show context).

⁴ *Genesis*, 1:26-27.

So When Does the Failure to Use the Intellect Cause Sin to Occur? Whenever a Man Does Not Listen to His Reason.

Every conscious thought, word, or deed is either good or is a sin – there is no “in between”.⁵ Whenever a man is acting voluntarily,⁶ it is a sin for him to not act according to his reason. In other words, he sins whenever he voluntarily does something unreasonable.⁷

⁵ Here is one way this truth is explained by St. Thomas Aquinas, greatest Doctor of the Catholic Church:

It belongs to the reason to direct; if an action that proceeds from deliberate reason be not directed to the due end, it is, by that fact alone, repugnant to reason, and has the character of evil. But if it be directed to a due end, it is in accord with reason; wherefore it has the character of good. Now it must needs be either directed or not directed to a due end. Consequently, ***every human action that proceeds from deliberate reason, if it be considered in the individual, must be good or bad.***

Summa, Ia IIae, Q.18, a.9, *Respondeo*, *Whether an individual action can be indifferent?* (emphasis added).

⁶ St. Thomas contrasts voluntary (human) action with involuntary action proper to brute beasts:

If, however, [an action] does not proceed from deliberate reason, but from some act of the imagination, as when a man strokes his beard, or moves his hand or foot [*e.g.*, in his sleep]; such an action, properly speaking, is not moral or human [but is the type of action a brute beast could perform], since this [moral and human action] depends on reason. Hence [an act proceeding only from imagination] will be indifferent, as standing apart from the genus [*i.e.*, category] of moral actions.

Summa, Ia IIae, Q.18, a.9, *Respondeo*, *Whether an individual action can be indifferent?* (emphasis added; bracketed words added to show the context).

⁷ St. Thomas explains this truth by quoting and following Pope St. Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church:

Gregory says in a homily (vi in Evang.): “An idle word is one that lacks either the usefulness of rectitude or the motive of just necessity or pious utility.” But an idle word is an evil, because “men . . . shall render an account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36): while if it does not lack the motive of just necessity or pious utility, it is good. Therefore, ***every [voluntary] word is either good or bad. For the same reason every other action is either good or bad. Therefore, no [voluntary] individual action is indifferent.***

Pride is a type of unreasonableness because it is an unreasonable exaltation of oneself.⁸ Thus, pride is inherently a sin because it is inherently unreasonable.⁹

The Importance of Good Will in Using Our Reason

One must be of good will. That is, a man's will must follow the good shown by the reason. The will pursues the good or the apparent good. Thus, man has the grave moral responsibility to find out if a particular object is *really* good or is only *apparently* good. If something is only apparently good and not truly good, then we are obliged to avoid it. Because use of reason is the center of the moral life, a man has a duty to properly inform his conscience/reason.

Further, St. Thomas tells us that even if the will listens to (*i.e.*, follows) the reason in a situation where reason is erroneous, there is no sin provided that there is no bad motive on the part of the will and provided that the will (*i.e.*, the man) is not blamable for his ignorance.

This explanation shows how crucial the use of reason is in the moral life of the soul.

A preview...

We have more work to do to examine the subject of the choleric temperament and reasoning. What would motivate choleric to not think deeply and carefully? Here are some possible motives:

Summa, Ia IIae, Q.18, a.9, *Sed Contra*, *Whether an individual action can be indifferent?* (emphasis added; bracketed words added to show the context).

⁸ This article pertains to the unreasonable pride which is a sin. We are not treating the proper and reasonable pride that a parent might have for his child or a citizen might have for his country.

⁹ St. Thomas explains the unreasonableness of pride in this way:

Right reason requires that every man's will should tend to that which is proportionate to him [*i.e.*, he recognizes the truth about himself]. Therefore, it is evident that pride denotes something opposed to right reason, and this shows it [pride] to have the character of sin, according to Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv. 4), "the soul's evil is to be opposed to reason." Therefore, it is evident that pride is a sin.

Summa, IIa-IIae Q.162, a. 1, *Respondeo* (bracketed words added to show the context).

- They do not want to take the time necessary to think things through because they want to accomplish things quickly or they want to race forward to act in a way that would cause them to be perceived as heroes (or heroines).
- Or, they believe that it is too difficult to think carefully and deeply. (This fear of mental effort is what St. Thomas Aquinas calls *stupor*.)
- Or, they believe that they do not have the ability to think deeply.
- Or, they falsely view thinking deeply and carefully as “proud”.

Using these or other rationalizations, choleric are fooled by the father of lies.



***Catholic Candle* note:** The article below concerns the best education, a Catholic Liberal Education. Do not confuse it with many university programs called “liberal arts” but which are full of fluff, falsehood, and aimless so-called “enrichment” courses and “humanities”.

A liberal education also does not refer to liberalism nor is a true liberal education an indoctrination into that error of liberalism or *political correctness*. In fact, a true Catholic Liberal Education is the best antidote to the errors of liberalism.

The Blessing of a True, Catholic Liberal Education

Part 1

The Heart of a True Education is *Thinking*, Not Merely Memorizing

Let us start by reflecting on a problem that has existed for many decades but which is now worse than ever before and continues to get even worse. This problem to which we refer is how common it is for people to graduate with a university degree without much (or any) real discernable improvement in their minds and thinking ability. This is true whether the degree is a bachelor’s degree or a doctorate.

In their course work, students primarily learn how to “talk-the-talk” of their field. An engineer learns engineering jargon. Accountants learn accounting jargon. Lawyers learn legal jargon. Financial analysts learn their field’s jargon. And so on. And, usually, they also learn the jargon of *political correctness*, such as “social justice”, “diversity, equity, and inclusion”, *etc.*

Their diplomas, and being fluent in their field's jargon, are the two ways these graduates show themselves to be members of their profession or field. Even if those people are rather marginal or inadequate for engaging in the work of their field, they are trained to speak the jargon.

So, being a professional in his field often means being someone with a credential in that field and who is skilled at sounding like someone in that field. Such jargon often might make a member of his field look and sound clever or learned, even when he is neither. It makes him look like he is a man of understanding when he has merely been taught to parrot the experts' statements – which have been “drilled into his head” through repetition and memorization.

To take one example: we saw how a great many physicians showed themselves to be unfit to practice medicine during the Covid scare. They took the comfortable, lazy, conformist path of saying and doing whatever they were told by the medical establishment, even though it was contrary to what the eyes and experience of a thinking physician would show.¹⁰ These conformist physicians followed evil protocols which harmed their patients.

One reason for the way they acted was because (for many of them) they were too cowardly to exercise their independent judgment for the health of their patients. That is a sufficient reason why these physicians are unfit for the practice of their profession – ***they don't value the truth.***

In addition to physicians like these who are simply cowards, other physicians were ignorant of the harm they did to their patients because they were not accustomed to engaging in the true ***practice*** of medicine. Instead, they slavishly followed the directives of the medical/political establishment, regardless of what those directives required. These physicians followed the rash and lethal covid protocols and rejected the common, safe, inexpensive, and effective mitigation treatments of prudent doctors.

¹⁰ For analysis of the Covid nonsense, read these articles:

- ❖ *The Overblown Corona Scare:* <https://catholiccandle.org/2020/10/01/the-overblown-corona-scare/>
- ❖ *Problems with Face Masks:* <https://catholiccandle.org/2020/12/01/856/>
- ❖ *Reject the COVID Vaccines!* <https://catholiccandle.org/2021/01/01/reject-the-covid-vaccines/>
- ❖ *Lockdowns are for Controlling People, Not a Virus:* <https://catholiccandle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/lockdowns-are-to-control-people-not-a-virus-2.pdf>

Based on their medical training, these physicians were conditioned to merely follow the medical establishment's flow charts, checklists, and handbooks. They did not use their independent judgment to treat the health of their patients.

They were accustomed to following the standard patterns such as ordering a medical test and then prescribing whatever pill was indicated by the flowcharts/protocols, depending on the test results.

Although it is true that the treatment for the same health problem tends to take a similar path in many persons, the problem is that those physicians did not use their **own professional judgment** but merely deferred to whatever the medical/political establishment told them to do, no matter how unreasonable.¹¹

It does not take a real physician to simply unthinkingly, uncritically follow the medical establishment's treatment flowcharts/protocols.¹² A professional (or someone who is proficient in whatever field) should be someone who uses his own good judgment and knows how to **act independently** and to practice in his field without anyone needing to tell him what to do. He should not merely be someone who is trained to follow the rules and flow charts, as the modern "professional" is so often trained to do nowadays by the professional establishment in whichever field he is in.

Learning how to follow the flowcharts does not "make" a physician (or any professional). Such medical treatment could be as adequately done (if it were legal) by a nurse, by a lab tech, or even, perhaps, by an eighth-grader who had been taught the medical jargon and how to follow the treatment flowcharts.

In this way, many physicians abdicate their responsibility to exercise their independent judgment, to reason carefully about a matter, and take full responsibility for their actions

¹¹ To take another example of a lack of critical thinking in the medical profession: back in the 1990s, one of the *Catholic Candle* Team was talking with a medical doctor about one of the news reports of the particular day, which asserted that studies showed that a person received **no benefit** from an exercise routine lasting fewer than 30 minutes per day. That Team member said to this doctor that such a claim made no sense for multiple reasons. The doctor placidly (and uncritically) said "well, that is what the research shows."

This anecdote illustrates the strong pull there is on doctors to conform to what the "experts" say rather than to think for themselves. Despite the medical establishment's many other errors, it no longer takes this unreasonable position. See, e.g., *Some exercise is better than none: More is better to reduce heart disease risk*, Science Daily, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/08/110801161414.htm>

¹² Read this article about the oppressive forces imposing medical conformity: *How Your Family Doc Became a Drug Enforcement Agent*, <https://brownstone.org/articles/how-your-family-doc-became-a-drug-enforcement-agent/>

and the results. So many physicians were (and are) unable to think critically since they never learned how to do so, because critical thinking is no longer taught in most schools.¹³ Instead of teaching students *how* to think, schools nowadays only teach students *what* to think – that is, the schools fill the students’ heads with the conclusions presented to those students to memorize.

The example above is about physicians, especially during the covid alarmism. But a similar situation exists in other fields and disciplines.

An Example in Another Field, of Professional Conformity which Masquerades as Education

Above, we reviewed the incompetence demonstrated by physicians who blindly followed the deadly Covid flow charts and protocols issued by the political and medical establishment.

This conformity, and a lack of careful thinking and of exercising responsible professional judgment, is a much broader problem than merely among medical doctors.

Let us take another of countless examples of credentialed “professionals” who cannot (or do not) think on their own and merely speak the jargon of their field and mimic what the establishment tells them to say and do.

During the housing bubble of the early 2000s, risky, “subprime” mortgages of borrowers with bad credit histories, were packaged into bundles and were sold in the financial markets as AAA-rated securities. (The “AAA” rating is the highest rating, reflecting the best and safest of all investments.)

Let us look at how this practice resulted in a major financial crisis.

In the search for greater profits, banks made huge numbers of mortgage loans, at higher interest rates, to borrowers with poor credit histories.¹⁴ The banks lowered their loan underwriting standards in order to originate more mortgage loans and the banks sold these mortgage contracts to investors (so those banks would not have to suffer the consequences of their lax standards).

Because there was a housing “bubble” at the time, housing prices were increasing at an unsustainable rate. So, at the beginning of this “bubble”, when the subprime borrowers

¹³ Read this article: *The Evils of Social-Emotional Learning*:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/07/12/the-evils-of-social-emotional-learning/>

¹⁴ Read, e.g., this article: <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/041515/what-role-did-securitization-play-us-subprime-mortgage-crisis.asp>

failed to pay their mortgages, the houses were (in the short run) increasing in value fast enough so the lender could sell the loan's collateral (*viz.*, the house) without suffering a loss after the borrower defaulted.

But this housing bubble (like all such "bubbles") popped. When the housing prices did not continue their unsustainable rise and when the economy took a downturn, then these subprime mortgages went into default in large numbers, causing massive losses as the prices of houses went down.

These subprime loans had been bundled into large groups and the three big credit rating agencies (Fitch, Standard & Poor's, and Moody's Investors Services) had rated these investments as AAA (the highest investment quality).

Investors had been told that, although those subprime mortgages were risky investments *individually*, nonetheless, because they were bundled together, *collectively* those same mortgages became of the highest investment quality.¹⁵ The fallacy was that, if you add enough bad investments together, it becomes the best quality investment.

The certified financial analysts and the "whole financial world" parroted this nonsense. The idea being (as it were) that if you pile enough manure in one heap, it becomes gourmet food.

Writing in hindsight, *Investopedia.com* stated:

The packaging of mortgage debt into bond-like financial instruments, was a key driver of the 2007-08 global financial crisis ... that brought many major financial institutions on Wall Street and around the world to their knees when the U.S. real estate bubble burst. ...

The banks that held these ... investments lost tens of billions of dollars which almost caused the US banking system to collapse.¹⁶

Here is one report from the period shortly before the risky mortgage bundles started to suffer huge losses:

Subprime mortgage bonds carrying the highest, "AAA," rating have not eroded in quality despite price declines in the securities in recent days, Fitch Ratings said on Wednesday [August 8, 2007].

¹⁵ Read, *e.g.*, this article: <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-subprime-fitch-idUSN1831999120070718/>

¹⁶ See, *e.g.*, <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/041515/what-role-did-securitization-play-us-subprime-mortgage-crisis.asp>

"We continue to be confident that "AAA" ratings reflect the high credit quality of those bonds"¹⁷

In this foolishness, "everyone" went along with the herd. "No one" thought for himself, and "everyone" accepted the AAA credit rating for these bundles of junk mortgages because the "experts" told them they were ultra-safe.

While this foolishness was going on (and before the crash which later came), only a very few *thinking* people remarked that "this is nuts"!

Where did the Financial Analysts Go Wrong?

The financial analysts and other "professionals" who followed the herd on these mortgage investments had the academic degrees, spoke the industry jargon and could read spread sheets and charts. But they did not use their own independent judgment and think clearly about the assertions being made that risky junk mortgages became ultra safe (we would say "magically") if there were enough of them bundled together.

This results from the "institutions of higher learning" lowering academic standards and not teaching students *how to think*. Instead, these students and graduates merely do what everyone else does in that field without exercising independent judgment in their work.

Such bachelor and doctoral degrees have much less value than they appear. These considerations remind us that we cannot be sure of the competence of a person by merely confirming that he has the "correct" credential and sounds like he knows his field.

As we will see below, academic institutions have degraded their standards to lure more students (to gain students' tuition dollars which are subsidized by federal government handouts – given either as grants or as subsidized loans).

When the overall number of students greatly increases (as it has in the last seventy years), this necessarily includes those students who are less qualified/unqualified because the more qualified students would generally already be college-bound (or entering graduate school). Those underqualified students would not enroll at the particular school (or would not stay), if the universities did not greatly water-down their academic standards.

So, with diluted standards, academia pushes those students through the courses by teaching the students the jargon of their field and teaching them how to follow the flow charts and protocols of what they should do in their future work in their field, without

¹⁷ See, e.g., <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-subprime-fitch-idUSN1831999120070718/>

really teaching the students *how to think* and without equipping them to act proficiently as *independent professionals who practice in their field by exercising their own good judgment and acting on this judgment*.

The Problem of Degree Inflation in Modern Academia

Not only do universities admit many, many, unqualified people in order to expand the class sizes and increase their tuition inflow, but this watering down also fits in other ways with the universities' goals, since those institutions are captured by the leftists and promote leftist goals.

The leftists seek to eliminate meritocracy, which is the recognition and rewarding of superior objective performance. Meritocracy is the opposite of the modern leftist idea that “everyone wins” and “everyone gets a prize”. Obviously, this unrealistic mentality (*viz.*, that “everyone wins”) deceives the students about the real world, which has real winners and real losers. Thus, students are deprived of life-lessons which would foster in them resiliency of character and help them learn how to handle disappointments in life.

Further, the “everyone wins” mentality results in students not trying as hard as they should have – or would have – if they had not received good grades with little effort. This discourages superior accomplishment and striving for excellence.

One of the reasons there is so much protesting (on college campuses) about political causes (such as related to the Gaza war in 2024) is because colleges are full of persons who are unfit for learning deeply and reflecting carefully – which are the activities of a true education. Thus, many of these students are instead looking to live the life of action (not reflection). They are not looking to improve their minds but to “make a difference” in society, as that phrase would be defined by “political correctness”. Such students and faculty often demand that their college commits itself to social and political action in lieu of the life of education and knowledge.

There are many organizations in society (some good, some bad) which are dedicated to organizing and engaging in political action, promoting social causes, and focusing on practical pursuits. Such “students” really belong (temperamentally) in those organizations. If they are unwilling to postpone their life of action, then they do not belong at an institution of reflection and deep study (as a college should be).

Faculties should be largely communities of scholars, and the students should be apprentice-scholars. But modern students are so often not docile disciples of wise teachers but instead are “change agents”¹⁸ for social and political causes, often egged on

¹⁸ This is a phrase (usually used favorably by leftists) referring to persons changing society through protesting and other social activism.

by their leftist professors who do not belong at a *real* institution of learning any more than these students do.

The universities are inundated with frivolous sham “degrees” awarded for successfully memorizing sufficient leftist indoctrination – fields such as “black studies”, “women’s studies”, “ecological studies”, “sociology”, “psychology”¹⁹, *etc.*

The universities compete against each other for the same tuition dollars and so they offer students a curriculum which is attractive, easy, and “relevant” to them instead of offering a true scholarly education perfecting their minds through the pursuit of the highest universal truth. Instead of a real education, students can elect to study “theater arts”, “casino management”, “jazz performance”, “film production”, *etc.* Through these activities and “relevant” courses, students and faculties can flatter their self-image and “check the boxes” which result in a four-year degree.

Instead of a college producing careful, reflective, wise, and analytical thinkers whose minds are perfected by the highest truths, colleges produce graduates who can superficially talk the jargon of the field and function by following the protocols of the particular industry.

What *should* happen is that colleges would enroll only those who can learn (and who are committed to learning) what colleges must teach – *viz.*, the higher truths and wisdom. THIS would make colleges *truly* institutions of higher learning and would make their students *truly* educated. This curriculum would be a true Catholic Liberal Education (the elements of which we will examine in a later part of this article).

But instead, colleges enroll those who are neither prepared for a true education nor are interested in true knowledge and wisdom. So, the colleges give students what they want: functional, practical, “relevant” and (largely) shallow courses which are job training and social activism.

¹⁹ Concerning “psychological” counseling: there is certainly a science of the study of the soul. But in his Commentary on Aristotle’s *Treatise on the Soul* (“*De Anima*”), St. Thomas Aquinas shows the truth that, aside from medical problems in the brain as a bodily organ, which are caused by disease or physical trauma, what people need, who have “psychological” problems, is wise moral advice, sometimes over a prolonged period, concerning how to change their thinking about life and what moral choices they should make.

Thus, what is needed by people who have “psychological” problems is not someone with a particular academic degree or license but rather an advisor who has the virtue of Prudence, the Gift of the Holy Ghost which is called “Counsel”, and the other virtues and Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

The Problem of Grade Inflation in Modern Academia

Grade inflation increasingly is widespread and a grade of “A” often really should mean “average”. For example, roughly **79 percent** of the grades awarded at the prestigious Yale University in the 2022–23 academic year were A’s or A-minuses.²⁰ Likewise, almost 80% of Harvard students get an A, A-, or A+.²¹

With such grade inflation one could say that everyone (more or less) is at the top of his class. This means that the *cum laude* designation often deserves little praise and those who graduate *with distinction* are often distinctly average.

The watering down of academic standards is shown to be even worse when we consider that the average student coming into college can read at only the 7th grade level.²² Thus, if we were to assume that the student will make four years of reading improvement in the four years of college, then he would read at approximately an 11th grade level (junior in high school) when he graduates from college. This means that this average student would graduate from college still unable to read at the grade level of a high school senior.

Misunderstanding What True Education Is

We should perfect our intellects (as God created us to do). This is done through ***genuine education in universal truth***, especially the highest truths. (We will see more about this in a later part of this series.) But in our perverse and carnal times, few people do that, or want to do that, or even know that this ***should*** be their goal.

Most people go to college to get job training and to memorize what they are told to memorize, not to genuinely perfect their minds. Because the college life is no longer about the truth and no longer about developing the mind, it has become political and involves the concealing of racial and other types of performance disparities. The focus is on money, power, prestige, and self-interest.

Instead, without ever learning how to think carefully and critically, the students imbibe the politically correct conclusions and learn to become “social justice warriors” without ever learning how to evaluate the leftist garbage that is crammed into their minds. Such

²⁰ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2023/12/06/nearly-80-percent-grades-yale-were-last-year>

²¹ <https://www.dailysignal.com/2025/02/11/colleges-whose-students-cant-read-books-arent-elite/>

²² <http://themosimportantnews.com/archives/average-college-freshman-america-reads-7th-grade-level>

students neither are capable of, nor interested in, leading the life of a scholar, pursuing the truth, and perfecting their minds.

Whereas universities should be offering a student precious years in which to gain wisdom and learn deep truths, instead those institutions compete for students by offering the cheapest and quickest road to an “academic” degree to be used as a tool with which to get a “good job”. Thus, degrees nowadays are largely mere job training – which is not real education. The idea is that with a degree, they can command a higher income in the job market.

A big part of the problem is that the government subsidizes education (including taxpayer subsidized state schools). When something is subsidized, more people “buy” it – including many people who would not value it enough to “buy” the item if it were not subsidized. So often students go to universities (at least in part) in order to grab government tuition freebies/handouts, have “fun”, and delay the time at which they must support themselves.

Thus, it would help reduce degree “inflation” if the government stopped pumping money (subsidies and freebies) into the universities. If that happened, there would be fewer students and more real education. (There would also be other benefits such as a reduction of the injustices that society suffers, through the elimination of this socialist wealth-redistribution which occurs by such government subsidies).

Whereas, for hundreds of years, until recent decades, an academic degree indicated that a person had a somewhat exclusive intellectual formation, now those credentials have been so debased by a proliferation of low-standard college credentials that they often mean little else besides marking a period of four years of leftist indoctrination. Moreover, during those four years, the focus is increasingly on “student experience” rather than on student learning. In other words, the focus is on the “student as customer and consumer” rather than as a seeker of the highest knowledge and wisdom.

As we will see in a later part of this article, this highest knowledge and wisdom is truly beyond all price and should be valued “more than kingdoms”!

To be continued



***Catholic Candle* note:** Sedevacantism is wrong and is (material or formal) schism. *Catholic Candle* is not sedevacantist.

Below is the tenth article in a series which covers specific aspects of the error of sedevacantism. As context for this tenth article, let us recall what we saw in the earlier nine articles:

In the first article, we saw that we cannot know whether the pope (or anyone else) is a formal heretic (rather than a material heretic only) – and thus whether he is outside the true Catholic Church – ***based simply on his persistent, public teaching of a heretical opinion.***²³

Then in the second article, we saw that we must not judge a man to be a formal heretic if he professes to be Catholic and says he believes what a Catholic must believe now, in order to be Catholic now. When a person professes a heretical opinion, we must judge him in the most favorable light (if we judge him at all). So, we must avoid the sin of rash judgment and we must not judge negatively the interior culpability of the pope and the 1.3 billion²⁴ people who profess to be Catholic. We must not judge they are not “real” Catholics if they tell us that they are Catholics. Instead, we should count them as Catholics who are very confused.²⁵

Thus, we must judge the conciliar popes to have been material heretics, not formal heretics, and that each was pope in his turn until his death (or abdication). Regarding any of the world’s 1.3 billion self-described Catholics who hold heresy, we must judge them to be material heretics only (if we judge them at all), unless they themselves tell us that they know they don’t qualify to be Catholics.²⁶

In the third article, we examined briefly the important difference between persons in authority who fulfill their duty to judge those under their charge in the ***external forum***, as contrasted to a sedevacantist or ***anyone else except God*** who judges the ***interior*** culpability of other persons and (rashly) judges them to be formal heretics.²⁷

²³ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/09/26/cc-in-brief-sedevacantist-questions/>

²⁴ The Vatican estimates that the number of Catholics worldwide is about 1.375 billion. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2023-10/fides-catholic-church-statistics-world-mission-sunday.html>

²⁵ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/10/24/are-we-allowed-to-decide-that-pope-francis-knows-he-is-not-catholic/>

²⁶ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/10/24/are-we-allowed-to-decide-that-pope-francis-knows-he-is-not-catholic/>

²⁷ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/11/26/bishops-have-excommunicated-heretics-cant-we-judge-the-pope/>

In the fourth article, we saw that it does not help us to protect ourselves better from a conciliar pope's heresy, to declare that we know he is not the pope and is not a Catholic.²⁸

In the fifth article, we saw that it is possible for a pope to teach (or believe) heresy and in fact, popes have taught and believed heresy at various times during Church history.²⁹

In the sixth article, we saw that the Church infallibly assures us that we will have a pope at all times until the end of the world, except during very short interregnums between papal reigns, *during which the Church is in the process of electing a new pope and during which the Church's unified government continues to function*.³⁰

In the seventh article of this series, we saw that the Catholic Church is a visible Body and will be visible to all. The Catholic Church has a visible monarchical government and the pope is visible to all. Thus, we know we have a pope and that he is visible to all.³¹

In the eighth article, we saw that the necessary visibility of the Catholic Church and the pope, requires as a corollary that whoever virtually all Catholics see (believe) is pope must *be* the pope, since the pope must be visible to all.

In the ninth article, we examined what true obedience is and saw that when the Church has a bad pope (as She does now), we must resist the evil commands of the pope but should not suppose that his bad commands prove that he is not the pope.³²

²⁸ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/12/30/protecting-ourselves-from-a-bad-pope-or-bad-superior/>

²⁹ Read this article here: *It is Possible for a Pope to Teach Heresy and Remain the Pope?*: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/01/27/it-is-possible-for-a-pope-to-teach-heresy-and-remain-the-pope/>

³⁰ Read this article here that the Catholic Church's unified government always continues, even during an interregnum: *The Catholic Church Will Always Have a Pope*: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/02/21/the-catholic-church-will-always-have-a-pope/>

³¹ Read this article showing that *The Catholic Church Will Always be Visible, and Will Always Have a Pope Who is Visible to All*, which can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/03/27/the-catholic-church-will-always-be-visible-with-a-pope/>

³² Read this article examining false obedience to sinful commands of a lawful superior: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/05/20/the-false-obedience-of-cowardly-and-weak-catholics/>

Below, in the tenth article of this series, we will more deeply what schism is and how sedevacantism is schism.

Sedevacantism is Inherently Schism³³

As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, schismatics are:

“those who refuse to submit to the Sovereign Pontiff, and to hold communion with those members of the Church who acknowledge his supremacy.”³⁴

That is exactly what sedevacantists do. There are two parts to St. Thomas’ definition. Schismatics are those who refuse:

1. to submit to the Sovereign Pontiff; and
2. to hold communion with those members of the Church who acknowledge his supremacy.”³⁵

The sedevacantists refuse both of these things.

1. The sedevacantists refuse to submit to the current, reigning pope, asserting that he has no authority over them because he is not “really” the pope.
2. Also, the sedevacantists do not “hold communion with those members of the Church who acknowledge his [*viz.*, the pope’s] supremacy”.³⁶ Instead, the sedevacantists declare they themselves do not belong to the same church as the 1.3 billion persons whom the sedevacantists rashly judge to not be “real” Catholics even though these 1.3 billion people consider themselves to be Catholic and are part of the “mainstream” human element of the Church (however confused these Catholics are concerning doctrine and morals).

³³ This is true whenever the Church has a pope, such as Pope Francis before his death and Pope Leo XIV after his election. The only exception to the Church having a pope is during the very short interregnum periods during which the Church is electing a new pope.

Read this explanation of why it is clear that we are not in an interregnum now:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2025/02/15/the-catholic-church-will-always-have-a-pope/>

³⁴ *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.39, a.1, *Respondeo*.

³⁵ *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.39, a.1, *Respondeo*.

³⁶ *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.39, a.1, *Respondeo*.

Summary of this Section: Sedevacantism is *always* schism because it is always a refusal to submit to the authority of the current reigning pope (and also to hold communion with those who submit to the pope’s authority).

Don’t Confuse the Sin of Schism with the Sin of Denying the Authority of the Papal Office in the Abstract (Which is Heresy).

We should not confuse the sin of schism (which is refusing submission to the authority of the *current, reigning* pope), with the sin of heresy, in which a person rejects as a matter of principle the very notion of the authority of the papal office – the authority of which is revealed as part of our Catholic Faith.³⁷

In contrast to the sedevacantists’ gravely wrong position, faithful and informed Catholics recognize that the *current, reigning* pope has authority over us all. Even though we frequently cannot do what the pope commands us to do (because the command is sinful), nonetheless we must “acknowledge his supremacy”, as St. Thomas teaches us that we must.³⁸

We must do what the pope commands us to do if we can do so in good conscience. We must obey his commands that are not sinful. Thus, for example, if Pope Leo XIV were to command Catholics to recite at least five decades of the rosary each day, under pain of sin, we would be bound in conscience to do this, under pain of sin.

Of course, it would be the sin of false “obedience” if we were to “obey” a sinful command of our superior – including the pope – because that supposed “obedience” to the superior

³⁷ Here is how St. Thomas explains this distinction:

Heresy and schism are distinguished in respect to those things to which each is opposed essentially and directly. For heresy is essentially opposed to faith, while schism is essentially opposed to the unity of ecclesiastical charity. Wherefore, just as faith and charity are different virtues, although whoever lacks faith lacks charity so too, schism and heresy are different vices, although whoever is a heretic is also a schismatic, but not conversely. This is what Jerome says in his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians: “I consider the difference between schism and heresy to be that heresy holds false doctrine while schism severs a man from the Church.”

Summa, IIa IIae, Q.39, a.1, ad 3.

³⁸ Again, St. Thomas teaches that schismatics are “those who refuse to submit to the Sovereign Pontiff, and to hold communion with those members of the Church who acknowledge his supremacy.” *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.39, a.1, *Respondeo*.

would be false obedience and would actually be *disobedience* to God.³⁹

Can a Sedevacantist Go to Heaven?

“Schism severs a man from the Church”, as St. Thomas teaches, quoting St. Jerome.⁴⁰ Further, there is *No Salvation Outside the Church*. So it would *seem* that no sedevacantist could ever go to heaven.

But we must make a crucial distinction; there are two ways to be severed from the Church: 1) Materially; and 2) Formally. Let us look into this distinction further.

When a man holds the grave, false position that we have no pope (whereas we **do** have a pope), there are two ways he can hold this position. He can either:

- ❖ Hold this error culpably (*i.e.*, he “knows better”); or
- ❖ Hold this error innocently (*i.e.*, he does not “know better” and does so in ignorance).

If the sedevacantist is blameless for his grave act of schism, then he has no interior culpability (*i.e.*, no sin on his soul) although his position is **objectively** a grave act of schism. This is like the man who commits the objective act of theft by innocently (although wrongfully) taking someone else’s umbrella (believing it to be his own umbrella), as he departs from a restaurant. The man taking the umbrella commits an objective act of theft without having interiorly culpability (on his soul) for the sin of theft. This man is a “material thief” but not a “formal thief”.

Similarly, if the particular sedevacantist is ignorant and is not interiorly culpable (according to God’s judgment of his soul) for his false opinion that we have no pope, (and thus not recognizing the authority of the pope who is then reigning), then he is a “material schismatic” and not a “formal one”. The material schismatic is a person who refuses to submit to the authority of the current reigning pope, wrongly believing that it is permissible for a Catholic to do this.

By contrast, the sedevacantist is a **formal schismatic** if he has interior culpability (according to God’s judgment of his soul) because he truly “knows better” than to deny the authority of the reigning pontiff. This distinction (between material and formal schism) is analogous to the distinction between material and formal heresy:

³⁹ Read an explanation of this Catholic principle here:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2025/05/20/the-false-obedience-of-cowardly-and-weak-catholics/>

⁴⁰ *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.39, a.1, ad 3 (St. Thomas Aquinas, quoting St. Jerome).

Just as:

- a material schismatic is a person who ignorantly holds that we have no pope, and thus, this materially schismatic person is materially outside the Catholic Church,
- so also, a material heretic is ignorant that he holds heresy and this material heretic is materially outside the Catholic Church.

But both the material schismatic and the material heretic are still *formally* inside the Church and so it is still possible for such persons to go to heaven because their grave error is (by hypothesis, in this example) innocent and committed in ignorance.

By contrast, a formal schismatic, is a person who is sinfully culpable for his error of holding that we have no pope. This schismatic is formally outside the Catholic Church. This is like the formal heretic who is sinfully culpable for his error in holding heresy. This heretic is formally outside the Catholic Church. Such persons – both formal schismatics and formal heretics – cannot go to heaven because *there is No Salvation Outside the Catholic Church*.

For the reasons set forth in *Catholic Candle*'s article which examines the sin of rash judgment,⁴¹ we must not judge particular sedevacantists to be formal schismatics. Only God can judge that (unless they themselves tell us that they know that they do not qualify as Catholics because of their refusal to recognize the authority of the pope). Instead, if we judge individual sedevacantists at all, we must judge them in the best possible light (as St. Thomas teaches). This would result in our supposing that they are material schismatics, not formal schismatics.⁴² This is true even if, in our judgment of the sedevacantists' culpability, we would "err frequently through thinking well" of them. *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.60, a.4, ad 1.

⁴¹ Read this article here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2024/10/24/are-we-allowed-to-decide-that-pope-francis-knows-he-is-not-catholic/>

⁴² Again, when we say that we must not judge sedevacantists, we mean that we must not judge their personal subjective interior culpability. But we can – and often MUST – objectively judge their error itself. So, when we meet a sedevacantist, we should neither immediately conclude that we know he is in mortal sin and would go to hell if he were to die right now, *nor* should we merely shrug our shoulders, and say, "who am I to judge?" *about the gravity of the objective error that he holds*.

The virtuous route is in the middle: We do not judge that his soul is in mortal sin because of his grave error, but we also avoid his error and do our reasonable best to prevent him from contaminating others with his error. In other words, we are on guard against a sedevacantist's error not because we know he is in mortal sin but because we know his error is grave and dangerous.

The Common Root of Schism and the Sedevacantists' Rash Judgment, is not an Accident.

As St. Thomas teaches, the sin of “schism is essentially opposed to the unity of ecclesiastical charity.” *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.39, a.1, ad 3.

Rash judgment also, is a sin against charity. One way to see this is true, is that we would want our neighbor to judge us (if at all) in the best possible light. If we do not judge our neighbor this same way, then we fail to “do unto others”, as we would have them “do unto” us. *St. Matthew's Gospel*, 7:12. Thus, we are not charitable and are not treating our neighbor as ourselves, as required by the Second Great Commandment. *St. Matthew's Gospel*, 22:39.

Further, our judgments should always be made with a “habit of charity”, as St. Thomas explains.⁴³ We must judge our neighbor (if at all) according to “our goodwill toward him”, ready to believe the best of him.⁴⁴ For charity “believeth all things”, as St. Paul teaches us. 1 *Corinthians*, 13: 7. St. Thomas teaches us that Our Lord “forbids judgment which proceeds not from benevolence but from bitterness of heart.”⁴⁵

Although we must not judge the interior culpability of individual sedevacantists, it is not by chance that schism and rash judgment are both, at their root, sins against charity. This connection is not by chance any more than the fact that gluttons tend to commit other kinds of sins connected to gluttony, such as pampering their flesh through inordinate attachment to bodily comfort. (These connections between sins are objectively true, regardless of a particular person's culpability.)

Summary of this article

All sedevacantists are in schism because they all refuse to submit to the authority of the pope and refuse to be in communion with (*i.e.*, acknowledge as fellow Catholics) the mainstream of people who consider themselves to be Catholic but are greatly confused about doctrine and morals.

The schism of the sedevacantists is material or formal – depending on whether they are culpable for their grave error.

⁴³ *Summa*, Q.60, a.4, *respondeo* & a.2, ad 1.

⁴⁴ *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.60, a.4, ad 2.

⁴⁵ *Summa*, Q.60, a.2, ad 1.



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