



INTEGRITAS

Wyoming Catholic College

COMMENCEMENT WEEK 2018

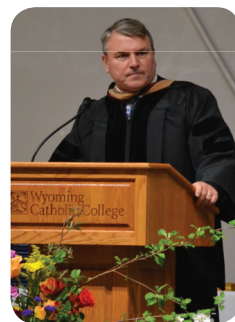
ISSUE 5.2

THE GOAL OF A TRUE EDUCATION

BY PROFESSOR JOSEPH PEARCE

PROFESSOR OF HUMANITIES, HOLY APOSTLES SEMINARY

(FROM REMARKS DELIVERED AT COMMENCEMENT ON MAY 12, 2018)



Reverend Fathers, President Arbery, members of the Board of Governors, faculty, staff, parents, family, friends and students of Wyoming Catholic College, and most especially, the graduates of the Class of 2018:

It is a joy, a privilege, and an honor to be here today; it's good to be back.

I was actually supposed to be here yesterday. Instead of joining President Arbery, board and faculty members, and the students at last night's President's Dinner, however, I found myself spending seven hours at Denver International Airport. Yet as I sat there in Denver, I realized that my experience was capturing something very fundamental to the nature of Wyoming Catholic: inconvenience. As G.K. Chesterton once said: "An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered," and coming out here to the beautiful remoteness of Wyoming, to undertake a rigorous academic program at this faithfully Catholic college is truly a great adventure—an adventure I am grateful to be a part of, even if only very occasionally, because this is a very special place. Please know that you are greatly admired throughout the English-speaking world—by those who love the Church and by those who love education and love what a truly Catholic, truly rigorous institution like this can mean for the world. It is so very good to be back!

Today, I'd like to ask you a question: "Quid est veritas? What is Truth?" That's Pilate's question, of course. But there are two ways of asking that question, aren't there? You can ask it as a question that you genuinely wish to be grappled with and answered. Or you can say it with a shrug, implying that truth is fundamentally unknowable (if it even exists at all), so what's the point of asking the question? The sad fact is that in the vast majority of today's (so called) "places of learning," the question I just posed is being asked in precisely that lazy, indifferent, and relativistic manner.

But not here; not at Wyoming Catholic. Because here we know that question has been answered! It has been answered by Christ himself: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” And because of that answer, we know that a true education has to be an education as if truth mattered, an education as if Jesus Christ mattered. Those who do not believe in truth cannot breathe life into education, they can only kill it. That’s why this project, here in “Middle-of-Nowhere Wyoming,” is truly a matter of life and death.

A true, life-giving education like the one that is offered here in Lander is an education that recognizes and embraces a world filled with goodness, truth, and beauty. It is also an education that requires virtue from those who undertake it. In the secular educational system today, the word “virtue” is essentially banned, because it is seen as judgmental. So, I regret to say, is the word “sin.” Not only has secular academia lost any sense of education as the pursuit of virtue, they refuse to even speak of it.

It is easy to see why an education in pursuit of truth—of He who is the Truth—will include formation in a range of intellectual disciplines: theology, philosophy, history, literature, and the other liberal arts. (Yes, even Euclid.) So often, though, beauty is left out of the conversation, or seen as something of a poor cousin. In many genuinely good Catholic schools, this aspect of education is sadly neglected. It’s as though the beautiful is a trailer that you hook onto the back of the truck in a great hurry; if you leave it behind, it’s not a big deal. “As long as you get the truth and the goodness right,” they seem to say, “the beauty will take care of itself.” And I think that way of thinking is a grave mistake; a sadly lost opportunity. An engagement with beauty awakens and enlivens the virtue of humility, a virtue which, in turn, opens our eyes to wonder. And it is wonder that leads us to contemplation and to a recognition of the fullness of reality, which is God. Wonder is an essential part of true education!

Yes, a good education requires an education in love and an education in reason—philosophy, theology, virtue, and the rest. But it also requires an education in beauty, an education that does more than just look on beauty with the eyes of wonder. We need an education that comes to experience and to understand beauty by engaging with it; that learns of beauty by doing beautiful things.

Now, one of the reasons I’m passionate about good education is because I had a bad one. In fact, I tell anyone who will listen that I went to the worst school

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in England—a school whose failure was perfectly captured in its motto: “This above all: to thine own self be true.” That’s William Shakespeare, right? Correct. And also, of course, radical relativism. But what I failed to recognize (even as I and my classmates were embracing this relativistic phrase as our personal motto) was that Shakespeare never said that. He wrote it, yes, but Polonius said it. And Polonius is a blithering idiot. And so was I and so were all my classmates—blithering, relativistic idiots, the lot of us, because we didn’t know the difference between Polonius and Shakespeare.

Having experienced for myself the grave harm that can be done by a bad secular education, I know how desperately we need a restoration of true education, both in America and in the world. It is crucial to the future of civilization. That which is rooted in the past will blossom in the present and bring forth beautiful fruits in the future, but that which is rootless withers and decays. The culture of death is more than just dangerous to our present; it is deadly to our future.

One of my favorite ways of thinking about education is a metaphor given by the poet, Roy Campbell. A convert to Catholicism, he likened civilization to a car. There’s technological and educational and societal progress, which is the accelerator of the Car of Civilization. But there is also tradition, which acts as a brake. And there is wisdom, the steering wheel. Today, we live in a world that refuses to use the brake and has thrown away the steering wheel. Such a society is doomed to destruction. Your job as graduates of Wyoming Catholic College is to go out and teach the world what you’ve learned here. Teach them how to *drive* through life, guided by wisdom. Teach them (by your example and your leadership) that they can and must become more fully human. To be fully human is to love the Good and to know the Truth, and when knowing and loving become the same thing, we will be truly rational and truly beautiful. This is the ultimate goal of a true education, as it is the ultimate goal of life.

Graduates, you’ve received a good education. Now go forth and live a good life that is true and beautiful and in the service of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Thank you, and God bless you.

Professor Joseph Pearce serves as a Professor of Humanities and as the Tolkien and Lewis Chair in Literary Studies for Holy Apostles Seminary. A native of England, he recently served as the Director of the Center for Faith & Culture at Aquinas College in Nashville, TN. He is editor of the *St. Austin Review*, series editor of the Ignatius Critical Editions, executive director of Catholic Courses, and the internationally-acclaimed author of many books. A world-recognized biographer of modern Christian literary figures, his books have been published and translated into Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Italian, Korean, Mandarin and Polish.

SENIOR ADDRESS

BY KELLY DALY, CLASS OF 2018, WYOMING CATHOLIC COLLEGE

(DELIVERED AT COMMENCEMENT ON MAY 12, 2018)



Reverend Fathers, President Arbery, Dean Kozinski, Mr. Kellogg, Professor Pearce, distinguished faculty and staff, parents and grandparents, friends and family, beloved fellow graduates.

My friends, we have heard it said in *Moby-Dick* that “Man’s insanity is heaven’s sense” (322). Herman Melville himself was considered by many to be insane so he is clearly an authority on the subject. Man’s madness is definitely close to all of our hearts from the first days we spent here in Lander getting our Wilderness First Aid certificate until now as we sit in these seats and pray we will not trip in our heels as we walk across the stage. Without a doubt, I can look at us all and say that we have earned the right to wear these gowns and sit before you all today. We braved the 21-day backpacking trip complete with 18 days of torrential downpour, squatted in lightning position for hours as we told each other our life stories, learned how to tie knots, swim in lakes, make our own food, and compared our feet as we tried to decide which level of trench foot we had achieved.

People I have talked to think we are mad for freely choosing to be soggy for that many days and hike so many miles, but during those three intimate weeks together, we may have had a doubt every now and then, but it never showed through the joy we all felt at being encompassed by nature. The “Freshman 15” was a coveted thought as we cleverly rationed our food each week so that we would be able to enjoy endless desserts. Coming back to civilization, though, we tightened our belts and thought how lucky we were to have lost weight—unless you were that rare soul who somehow managed to hike almost 100 miles and gain your “Freshman 15” in the backcountry thus claiming the nickname “Chunky” for yourself. Insanity is dazzling, and we were its willing disciples and still are.

On a frigid winter Wyoming night, we piled almost our entire class into the bed of Michael Morelli’s pickup truck in order to see the Northern lights. When asked, many of us will fondly refer to that night as the coldest we have ever experienced, an exaggeration perhaps. It is difficult to

hide from subzero wind in the back of a truck as we now all know. Our class bonded over these perfectly imperfect experiences. From learning how to fly fish with President Roberts, hunting chukars, horse packing for a week, and studying *The Virginian* in teepees as a school, to early mornings drinking coffee in the graveyard as we watched the sunrise, our experience of Wyoming has been rich and full. Melville puts it better than I in his epic, *Moby-Dick*:

For the most part, in this tropic whaling life, a sublime uneventfulness invests you; you hear no news; read no gazettes; extras with startling accounts of commonplaces never delude you into unnecessary excitements; you hear of no domestic afflictions; bankrupt securities; fall of stocks; are never troubled with the thought of what you shall have for dinner—for all your meals for three years and more are snugly stowed in casks, and your bill of fare is immutable. (133)

Much like Ishmael on the Pequod, we too have been safely stowed away here at Wyoming Catholic. We are not up on the latest gossip, we communicate through sometimes unbearably long email chains where the main concern is who would like a can of Campbell's chicken noodle soup, and we have only the most basic knowledge of current events, much to Dr. Virginia's dismay. But this "sublime uneventfulness" is far better than knowledge of these little things. For it is here that we have had the western tradition of thought ingrained in us through the passionate teaching of our professors. Our class has been taken through Dante's circles of Hell: Euclid, Mathematical Reasoning, Statistical Reasoning. But like Dante, while we may have been in an inferno, God's Providence and overflowing mercy were abounding and we have reached the other side purified and made ready to encounter Him.

And so, on behalf of my classmates, I would like to thank all of our professors. There have been multiple toasts and speeches over the course of the past few days but there is no amount of words that can relate all you have done for us. I have never encountered another school where the professors dedicate their lives not only to what they are teaching, but to the institution they teach at and the students within it. We owe you an enormous debt of gratitude for showing us the sublime world in which we live, for re-enchanting this disenchanting cosmos for us. To the humanities professors who bore with our horrifying amount of comma

splices - which seemed to plague every class's papers; to the theology professors who patiently talked through our many heated questions regarding the Christian state of perfection and the Incarnation; to the philosophy professors who have engrossed us in the works of Aristotle to Immanuel Kant; to the ever-underappreciated mathematics professors who are still trying to convince us that parallel lines meet. With you as our guides we have sat with Achilles on a Grecian beach, ascended the levels of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven alongside Dante, each apprenticed ourselves to a great writer, lovingly labored through theses and orations and now arrive at our next voyage.

There are those of you who, like us, will not be coming back here next year. So to the Kozinskis, thank you for never being afraid to tackle a subject, whether it be Simone Weil's controversial mysticism or simply life problems that we bring to you in our overwhelmed states of mind. Our discussions with you both never allow us to think in a reactionary manner. You have taught us the most important and difficult skill of delving into a subject which intimidates and confuses us. To Dr. Kwasniewski thank you for inspiring wonder in our souls through the music and art courses. I guarantee that none of us can ever listen to music or stare at a piece of art again without contemplating the effect it has on our soul.

And to you Father Bob, thank you for acting as a pillar of love and faith not only to my class, but to all of the students here at the school. Never once have I heard you complain about the countless hours you dedicate to the school. Your work here has only ever been joyful through your warm-hearted perspective on all matters. You have been our guiding light in the ways of faith as a true model of the tranquility that rests in a soul turned toward our Heavenly Father. May God bless you as he is blessing us on this next stage of the journey in our lives.

Yet while we are all leaving, we can never forget that ambergris, the sweet substance found in a whale which makes perfumes so fragrant - that the whalers in Melville's novel risked their lives for. It is this same priceless substance that we seek in our classes, that truth, goodness, and beauty that must be gently sought. Much like the harpooner Tashtego who fell into the head of the Sperm whale, into the honey pot of spermaceti, so too have we been swimming in this sweet pool of priceless knowledge.

“Would that [we] could keep squeezing that sperm[aceti] forever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, [we] have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fireside, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti.” (323)

It is the hearth that calls to us now. We cannot call our love for this ambergris madness, but like Melville must call it “heaven’s sense”. For now we have been born into wisdom, through the honey-pot of ambergris. It is time for each of us to make our own hearth now in “the mystic ocean”; “that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some indiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it.” The restlessness of our souls seeks this mystic ocean, discontent now to laze in the odor of ambergris which God has nurtured us in here at Wyoming Catholic College. He did not make us for comfort alone and has given the great gift of the perennial philosophy which will forever reside in our souls.

So now I must say that there is nothing else and yet so much more I could say to you all here today, but as we sit together for the last time in this place I can only say how grateful I am to be able to call, in no other way than with fond love, Wyoming Catholic College our *alma mater*.

Kelly Daly ('18) was selected by the members of her class to deliver the Senior Address, the Class of 2018’s formal farewell to the Wyoming Catholic College community.

