

University of Oklahoma College of Law

From the Selected Works of Brian M McCall

June 7, 2014

Commencement Address Notre Dame de La Salette Boys Academy June 7, 2014

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Reverend Father McMahon, Reverend Fathers, Holy Religious, Esteemed Faculty, Parents, Family, Friends, Benefactors, and to the boys, about to become young men, of the graduating class of 2014, I am truly honored to address you today. I have not come here today to teach you. The time for teaching you on this hallowed ground has come to an end. All I can do in these final few moments of your precious time here is to attempt to distill for you the essence of this esteemed institution. I hope to pull together the threads of what you have been doing here these past few years, to summarize why it is that your parents have made such heroic sacrifices, of which I am deeply aware, to give you the great gift of a La Salette formation.

What then is the essence of La Salette? To know the essence of something is to know it for what it is—to know it through its causes. Simply put, the essence of La Salette, known through its final cause, is to form young men. You entered the doors of the chapel in September of 2010 boys and you will process out the doors of this Coliseum men, albeit young men. This final cause of La Salette is what makes her a sign of contradiction to our world. Although there are still a small number of institutions who school only males, these few do not form men. There is a significant difference between simply being a male and being a man.

What does it mean to be a Man? Shakespeare places these words on the lips of his character Hamlet: “What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an Angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me;”

Hamlet poetically captures the position of Man as a creature between purely spiritual and purely corporeal beings. In his highest faculties Man is capable of rising to the level of angelic action and participating in the very nature of God. Yet, although capable of the operations of an angel and the apprehension of God, rather than rising to the height of his potency, Man can also be drawn down to the level of the brutes. He can sink to the dust of the unmanly family members who disgust Hamlet. To form a Man is to educate him to apprehend like God, to rise to his highest nature.

St. Thomas more philosophically defines the divinely established end of Man when he teaches that the common good of Man is his “proper virtue” or “that which makes its subject [Man] good.” The common origin of the Latin words for Man (*Vir*) and Virtue

(*Virtus*) demonstrates that even the pagan Romans understood this inextricable connection between Man and the call to virtue. Simply stated, a true Man is he who is virtuous.

This common end of Man found in virtue consists in that tranquility of order (*tranquillitas ordinis*) spoken of by St. Augustine and St. Thomas. St. Augustine defines it thus: "Peace between man and God is the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal law. Peace between man and man is well-ordered concord."

Things can only be well ordered by reason. Doing so requires obedience to Eternal Law, which St. Thomas defines, in part, as nothing other than the Divine Reason (*ratio*) directing all things to their due end. This action involves both intellect and will. It is the power of the will directing according to the power of the intellect. The tension in such is between ordering which consists in a power or strength (again *virtus* connotes not only virtue but strength or power) rationally directed to a due end. Hence tranquility of order requires both strength and peaceful concord, both intellectual and moral virtues. One without the other deflects Man from his true end and results not in a Man but a deformation of Man. Peace can only be if it is rightly ordered.

These facsimiles of Men malformed by the World today emerge by emphasizing one of these components over the other. One facsimile of a Man is produced by directing males to peace without the strength found in obedience to Eternal Law. This produces the effeminates so prevalent all around us. These hollow men, whom T.S. Elliot lamented a century ago, seek peace at any price. These Chamberlains abandon the powerful strength of obedience to the Eternal Law chasing after an elusive false peace. They are blown about by the winds of time not fixed to anything real but in a false hope of concord flitter through history. They have invaded the Church and seek to make disordered peace between the Church and the World, between the princes of the Church and the Prince of this World, between vice and virtue, and ultimately between God and the devil. These Churchmen seek to transform your beloved motto: *Contra hostes tuos* into *Cum hostibus tuis*, neglecting the reality that a Man cannot be *cum hostibus tuis* until the *hostes* become *fili tui* and thereby *Fratres nostri*.

When the world does not turn males into effeminates it perverts the balance towards the power and strength of order. In so doing they pervert authority into the authoritarian. They deform strength into brute force drawing these males down to the level of brute beasts (the dust which disgusts Hamlet). This unbridled, disordered authoritarian force produced the bloodiest century in the history of the world, a century in which males reduced to beasts legally killed babies in their mother's wombs, a century in which millions of people were exterminated in an interminable series of wars. This accentuation of power and authoritarian strength is

why the streets of our cities are no longer safe to walk and why totalitarian brutes have usurped the good of government across the globe.

Unlike the malfunctioning institutions referred to as schools, the La Salette formation cultivates both halves of the balance of the tranquility of order. Strength and power are required to *direct* to an end. Forceful strength is cultivated through active and consistent training. Aristotle and Plato recognized thousands of years ago that one could not come to understand virtue through dialectic unless one lived virtuously, at least to some extent. One must practice virtue to understand it. For this reason all your powers—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—have been trained by being tested and pushed to what seemed to be their limits. This is we you were pushed to survive Father McMahon P.E.s. Then just when you thought your body could not be pushed any more physically, Mr. Schelstrate appeared to challenge you even more. Intellectually, this is why your Latin teacher pushed you to master the uses of the passive periphrastic (which you would have needed to utilize in translating my greeting to you). This is why you were required to pass oral examinations in religion, during which you had to defend every statement you uttered. Your intellect was pushed when you were on this hot seat so that you probably felt you wished the floor could swallow you. This is why your history teachers forced your mind to remember what color the Tiber flows or which of Henry VIII's "wives" were "married" by proxy or why your literature teacher quizzed you on the type of car Julie drove in *Brideshead Revisited*. Spiritually you were challenged every early morning to push your spiritual faculties to make the most challenging act of all prayer, mental prayer. You cultivated the spiritual power to tame your tongue during silent recollections. Finally before commencing this final year, you took up the challenge of St. Ignatius across the centuries to make the Spiritual *Exercises* on your retreat at Ridgefield. All of these strength building experiences pushed your faculties to the limits and have formed physical, intellectual, and spiritual power.

Yet, this power has been formed in concert with the formation of orderly concord. Tranquility comes from things being in their proper place, from doing what one should be doing at the right time and place, and ultimately from being ordered to one's due end. This is the consistent commitment to our duty of state so eloquently spoken of in Father Sick's sermon at the Solemn Mass this morning. Examples from the lives of the saints illustrate this harmonious commitment to doing what one should when one should. I have heard similar stories associated with many saints but I will relate one in the life of St. Gerard. One day at recreation his turn came in the game the religious were playing. He was asked what he would do at that moment if he knew he were about to die. He replied he would take his turn at the game because that is what he was supposed to be doing at that very moment. That is the essence of the *tranquility* of order. To form this tranquility is why you have moved through a hierarchical progression of assigned

jobs. Whether it was washing dishes or shoveling snow or mopping out the Fieldhouse basement which flooded yet *again*, you were practicing this well ordered harmony by doing your duty. This is why you have learned the answer to the literary question and discovered it was **you** *for whom the bell tolls*. This is why you followed a schedule that accounted for every hour, waking or sleeping, of your day. This devotion to your duty of state has formed a concord between you and God and among yourselves. This harmony of order produces a serenity that is palpable to anyone who sets foot on this sacred campus. Every time I have come to La Salette this serenity is immediately a salve to a soul normally dwelling in the disordered, discordant world out there. I observed it; I felt it just yesterday. Upon arrival while sitting quietly on the porch of the Golightly's front porch sipping peach tea. As I looked out across the campus I saw boys scurrying about setting up for the play and graduation. Yet they moved with a serenity that was unmistakable. It would be inconceivable to the world that a campus of over eighty boys could be so quiet. It is the quietness of an ordered harmony. This serenity of La Salette is the essence of the well ordered life.

Now that you have received this great formation, this perfect balance of strength and tranquility, what comes next? The external must from now on become internal. Starting tomorrow there will be no bell for you; you must be your own bell. Father McMahon will not be posting a schedule for you. You must make your own schedule that lives this tranquility of order formed within you. You must maintain the vigor of this well ordered strength amidst a disordered world of effeminate and brutes. Do not permit your newly formed powers, obtained at such a great price by your parents, to atrophy.

You are about to become young men but this is not the end but merely the beginning. Man, in this life, always both is and is becoming. This is the answer to the ancient question of the Greek philosophers: are things always the same or always becoming. For finite creatures, the reality of potency and act solves the riddle. Man always is what he is but always becoming something else, either the perfection of what he is or its degeneration. After this ceremony you will *be* Men; from that moment you must *become* Magnanimous Men. We have discussed what is a Man. What is a Magnanimous Man?

St. Thomas explains that "Magnanimity by its very name denotes stretching forth of the mind to great things. [A] man is said to be magnanimous chiefly because he is minded to do some great act." You must now stretch forth your well-ordered strength to do great things. What is the great act you are called to stretch forth to perform? It is to be a Man amidst the effeminate and beasts of our world. The accidentals of this great act will vary for each of you. Some of you may be called to be a Magnanimous Man by being sent as a missionary to India, following in the footsteps of Father McMahon. Others may be missionaries to the pagan land here at home. Still others may be called to be religious brothers tilling the field so that it may be fruitfully sown by the priests. Others may

be called magnanimously to be fathers of Catholic families, to beget and rear Men for the future. Some of you may be called to reclaim the professions from the malformed males dominating them. Perhaps some of you will become doctors to practice the art of medicine subject to the science of ethics. Others may be called to be lawyers or to reclaim the good of government so perverted in our time by re-subjecting human law to the natural and divine law. Some of you may be called to master the crafts disappearing from history. Although we live in an Athanasian time when they have the buildings but we have the Faith, someday we will have the buildings too. We will then need master craftsmen to reverse the reckovations of the buildings by beasts directed by the effeminates seeking to make peace with the ungodly. Stone masons, carpenters, and other craftsmen will need to restore the sanctuaries to be fitting homes for Christ the King.

Whatever the details of your calling, you have been formed to fulfill your duty as Magnanimous Men formed in the tranquility of order. As you go forth remember that behind every Magnanimous Man there first was a mother. I am reminded of the story of Pope St. Pius X. Following his episcopal consecration he showed his ring to his mother. She holding up her wedding ring reminded him that before he could have that ring she had this one. You go forth with two mothers who have come first—your natural mother and the mother of your formation here, Notre Dame de La Salette. Do not forget she is behind you as you go forth to confront her enemies. She will always be there behind you. As your natural mothers have learned these past four years, sending you forth does not bring you further from her but rather closer. Notre Dame de La Salette will grow ever closer to you the further forth you stretch your soul toward greatness. My challenge to you today is to make her proud of you! Stretch forth and be minded to perform your great act! Be a Man! Be a Magnanimous Man!