

Fr. Perozich comments —

The author wishes Catholic schools to teach, to guide, to sanctify, to be unapologetically Catholic in forming students as disciples of Jesus.

The Don Bosco story shows how one man fought for this.

The highlighted comments reflect the author's concerns for the current crisis in Catholic education as well as the way forward through courage and fidelity, knowing that Catholics will make enemies in the church and in the world by being faithful as we should be.

Are We Catholic Enough to Make Enemies?

St. John Bosco underwent assassination attempts because of his bold mission in Catholic education. Should Catholic schools expect to make similar enemies if they are truly teaching the Faith?



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[Sean Fitzpatrick](#)

It is calamitous how Catholic institutions have buried their lamps beneath bushel baskets in these diverse, intolerantly tolerant days of fear and trembling, concealing the true Faith as if it were a secret. Catholic schools in particular—including diocesan schools, sad to say—have become all but synonymous with the CINO (“Catholic In Name Only”) moniker. And that’s the way the devil likes it—hypocrites one and all.

Speaking of hypocrisy, this week is “**Catholic Schools Week**” and the general unawareness of this celebration is reflective of how Catholic schools downplay their sacred identity for the sake of secular integration. To paraphrase Eliot’s “**Hollow Men**,” this is the way Catholic education ends, “not with a bang but a whimper.” In short, it’s a legitimate question if Catholic schools have much right to celebrate their Catholicism.

Today we celebrate the life of a veritable giant of Catholic education, St. John Bosco—a man whose mission to promote the Faith through education was so fearless and outspoken (and successful) that he was a target for assassination. Imagine that! Is it going too far to wonder if Catholics—whether teachers, parents, priests, or what have you—are not living their Faith out fully in a faithless society if they aren’t ruffling feathers or even making enemies?

St. John Bosco rescued troubled boys by giving them a loud and lively Catholic education based on reason, religion, and kindness. And for that, he suffered significant persecution. Following the seizure of the Papal States by the newly-united kingdom of Italy in 1870, there were great tensions between the Italian government and the Catholic Church. Many anticlerical, nationalist officials suspected Don Bosco’s oratory was a front for training a revolutionary militia to overthrow the anti-Catholic establishment.

Don Bosco also drew the ire of the Freemasons, who were bent on secularizing the field of education. As recorded in a Salesian archive, in December 1880, a certain lodge issued death marks on twelve people, and Don Bosco was among them. Twelve society members armed themselves and pledged to their dark duty.

John Bosco had grown accustomed to attempts on his life and was wary when a shifty-eyed stranger appeared at his door. He sat next to him on a sofa, as the agitated visitor began speaking angrily. Don Bosco could not follow his monologue, which grew increasingly disjointed as he gesticulated violently with his arms. One of these gestures caused a revolver to drop from the man’s pocket onto the seat. He did not notice it, but Don Bosco did, and with a juggler’s deftness, he slipped the gun into his own pocket.

Shortly afterward, the young man leapt to his feet and, with eyes ablaze, thrust his hand in his pocket. Nothing. He appeared confused. He fumbled in another pocket. Still nothing.

“Looking for something?” Don Bosco asked.

“Yes, no...I thought I had something—I can’t imagine where it could have gone...”

Don Bosco stood up. “You wouldn’t think you could drop a revolver without someone noticing, would you?”

“Exactly...I mean, no,” The young man froze in terror as he watched the priest draw the gleaming weapon from his cassock. He cocked the hammer.

“Is this what you’re looking for?” Don Bosco asked in a steely voice, leveling the revolver at the man.

“How did you get that?” he gasped, backing away.

“You came here to kill me, didn’t you?” The revolver remained trained upon the would-be assassin. “Do you know what’s going to happen to you now?”

“No...please...”

“When was the last time you went to confession?”

The man dropped to his knees. “May God have mercy on your soul,” said the saint, throwing open the door and ordering two of his assistants to drag the petrified Freemason to the gate. Outside, a group of loitering men piled into a carriage when they saw the unceremonious discharge, leaving their accomplice and his failure in their dust.

***This, and much more,** occurred because Don Bosco was devoted to Catholic education. There is an argument to be made that the worth of any holy mission can be judged by the level of attack from hellish forces. St. John Bosco had dangerous enemies as an educator, though he was not a party to their animosity; and he was probably continually confirmed in his ministry of picking up poor boys off the streets to give them a Catholic education insofar as he was picked on by powerful men.*

Don Bosco’s Catholicism was totally unapologetic, unconditional, and unavoidable—which is why he was targeted. Which brings us back to the vanilla affair of **Catholic Schools Week**. Open houses, teacher appreciations, all-school Masses, disclaimer-laced refrains, colorful logos—it’s all so harmless it’s useless. Catholic schools are just too preoccupied with competing with public schools and the demands of the world to operate as, first and foremost, *Catholic*.

And by *Catholic*, we must mean to be unwaveringly faithful to the morals and magisterium of the Church, adhering to the perennial wisdom of tradition and Western civilization, seeking the good, the true, and the beautiful without compromise or contortion, and defining education as a formation in virtue and a cultivation for sainthood. *But as they are, strangled by sex and gender ideologies, social justice agendas, litigious culture, chameleon cowardice, and heterodox infiltration, Catholic schools are too “safe” and “inclusive” to pose a threat to a canceling, godless society.*

On top of all that, **the pervasive error that education is purely for pragmatic, career-oriented, outcome-based ends rather than holiness, virtue, and wisdom has not found correction in Catholic schools but, instead, only further corrupted them.** The Catholic-school world is too worldly to be truly Catholic and won't deserve a week of recognition until it embraces that education is meant to give man, in Chesterton's words, “abstract and eternal standards, by which he can judge material and fugitive conditions.”

A tribute like Catholic Schools Week seems disingenuous with the current lukewarm ethos of Catholic education. Resetting goals and boosting morale is one thing, and there's nothing wrong with such exercises, but if this observance is feigning that Catholicism is the chief feature of Catholic schools, that is just another symptom of the relativist, rah-rah-us insanity that our schools have succumbed to.

Let's be honest: a failure in faith has led to a lack of ownership in our Catholic character and, therefore, our Catholic institutions. This is especially the case in Catholic schools; and the secular has moved into the growing void and largely taken over. The assimilationist—or, conversely, isolationist—identity that most Catholic schools assume is just playing the game the world wants them to play. **Catholics seem more**

concerned with making buddies by fitting in rather than making converts by sticking out.

Catholic education has to mean **more** than education with a few Catholic trappings—it **has to mean that Catholicism informs every aspect, every activity, and every academic course.** Difficult as that may be to implement, especially when the world is pushing a very different set of standards, teachers and administrators have to be brave enough to proclaim the teachings and wisdom of the Church first and foremost, even if that means assuming hardship or hostility.

We all know that Christ said He came not to bring earthly peace but a sword, and we are all familiar with the paradox of the Beatitudes, but have we ever thought about what these might mean in our lives and labors? Are we blessed with persecution? Does the world hate us as it hated Christ? If not, shouldn't it? St. John Bosco felt that hatred, that persecution, and rejoiced and was glad—and his reward was great in Heaven. **So should it be for all of us, and especially for those in the joyful battlefield of Catholic education.**

It may be a hard or harsh thing to say that if you're not making enemies, you're not being Catholic enough. Don Bosco's motto was, "Give me souls," which expresses the modern controversy of education: **Catholic education forms Catholics.** Little else matters and it is well worth proclaiming far and wide at the expense of a few enemies. Until Catholic schools face and fight the enemies St. John Bosco faced and fought in the name of education, they may not be worth celebrating with a Catholic Schools Week.

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