



CATHOLIC  
HUMANISTIC  
FORMATION  
PHILOSOPHY  
SYMPOSIUM AT ISJ  
2015-2017



Institut  
Sankt Joseph

## **CATHOLIC HUMANISTIC FORMATION**

Philosophy symposia at Institut Sankt  
Joseph, 2015-2017

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## Catholic Humanistic Formation

From August 2015 to August 2017, ISJ implemented a series of symposia for all teachers and social educators. The goal was to qualify the understanding of, the conversation on, and the development of ISJ as a Catholic school. Below is a brief overview of the essential points. The text cannot stand independently and is considered a starting point and scaffolding for good discussion at ISJ, about what it actually means to be a Catholic school.

# What is a Catholic school?

- a) A cultural and curricular goal: Students should become skilled.
- b) Develop "Humanitas": Students should become human. Who am I? Who is God? Who is fellow man/human being? > On becoming oneself
  - The absolute, inviolable and inalienable worth of man
  - Man's duty and responsibility over their own life, fellow man and the world
  - Man's religiosity and spirituality.

## On faith and knowledge

- Faith and knowledge are not opposites. (c.f. Niels Steensen: Steensen's coat of arms is a heart with a cross. Steensen is the scientist who became known as Nicolas Steno, the Catholic bishop, and was later canonised and beatified.)
- Factual knowledge can be verified: Is it right or wrong?
- Understanding and interpretation can and will be under continual discussion.
- (Religious critique, historical/critical bible interpretation etc.).
- The knowledge and thinking that deals with meaning and truth is called faith. It relates to anything other than the material and social, namely that which is transcendent (or "exceeds" the material world). "Faith-knowledge" cannot be verified factually but can be experienced as true.

## Charles Taylor's model on worldviews and existence beliefs

### IMMANENT AND TRANSCENDENT

The concept of immanence is to be understood in the physical world-extensively in time and space (sense, measure and weight). The transcendent (metaphysical), on the other hand, is to be understood as that which transcends i.e. exceeds or goes beyond the physical world. It is something we cannot understand completely, but that we nevertheless have a clear notion of. Man is a being whose experiences stretch beyond the immanent and transcend the boundaries of time and space.

### HUMANISM

The concept of humanism has its genesis in antiquity, when Cicero (Roman politician 106-43 B.C. amongst others) spoke of "humanitas" as the ideal for all human life, for example; dignity,



generosity, greatness, tolerance and piety. Over the past hundred years, humanistic thinking in the Western world has been crucial in appreciating values such as human well being, freedom and dignity, even though these values are, to a lesser extent, justified religiously/transcendentally. (c.f. The preamble to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world..." Humanism today attaches utmost importance to human inviolability and individuality, but does not justify this position in a religious sense.

*Existence Beliefs/  
Worldviews  
Charles Taylor  
(Canadian philosopher, 1931 - )*

## Søren Kierkegaard, on truth and subjectivity

- "Subjectivity is truth, but truth is not subjective."
- "Subjectivity" relates to the passion to dare to move and live life.
- That subjectivity is truth means that man should focus on what it means to be oneself, how to "be" in relation to fellow man and



*Søren Kierkegaard,  
cartoon*

to God. This does not, however, mean that everything is relative but that one should simply realise one self. According to Kierkegaard, there is one truth!

- The truth is therefore not subjective; one needs to acknowledge, through subjectivity, that one is not his own master. "Truth is, then, to maintain uncertainty with passion" that is, to have faith in God.

**"The truth is not subjective"; examples from the Catholic school:**

- Faith in an inviolable and inalienable human worth is justified and rooted outside man himself, outside human beings – in God.
- "That God loves every single human being unconditionally", "Don't be afraid".
- Humans become human by the attempt and by living life with love in relation to God and to other human beings.
- Students' and teachers' religious practices and experiences at ISJ.
- Prayer understood as man's conversation with God, at any time.

## On freedom and love

### THE SCHOOL'S MISSION STATEMENT

"ISJ builds its work on the Catholic Christian philosophy of life and humanity, and as its particular characteristic, aims to create a value-based school environment where the evangelical spirit of FREEDOM and LOVE are alive."

### FREEDOM

- Freedom is often understood as unrestricted action/freedom of choice. However, there are overriding existential and social boundaries and obligations; rather, it can be seen as arbitrariness: Freedom for what?
- Freedom is not an end in itself but a prerequisite for the "humanistic life".
- Kierkegaard: "You have to choose yourself; to be the one you are created to be - otherwise you are not FREE but bound by the flock; of desire, pleasure, anxiety or anything else."

### Evangelic spirit of freedom:

Paul in Hebrews, Chapter 2:

"14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."





Paul in Galatians, Chapter 5:

13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control."

*"The annunciation", Fra Angelico (1387-1455)*

Human life is often marked by anxiety and fear of loneliness and death. Freedom as understood evangelically is to be/to dare to be what you are created for:

- A life in love to God and fellow man/humanity.
- "Sanctification": To live life through and come closer to God and to oneself.
- Save = Free; to be set free as man/human).

## LOVE

### Evangelium

- a) The Greatest/Double Commandment (Matthew 22:36): “36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
- b) 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 17 This is my command: Love each other. (John 15:12)
- c) 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (1.John 4:16)

## EXISTENTIAL/RELIGIOUS

Kierkegaard has the absolutism and presence of God as a prerequisite for the understanding of Love.

- a) Kierkegaard: “The structure of Love”:  
“The loving presupposes that love is in the heart of the other human being, and precisely by this premise he builds the love of him from the ground up, in so far as he lovingly assumes it in essence.”
- b) Kierkegaard: “Love is to accept Love”:  
“If, on the other hand, one would think that he was loving, but also that everyone else was not loving, we would say: no stop, this is a contradiction in the thought itself because being loving assumes that other people are loving (lovable, ed.). Love is not a lasting property, but a property by which or in which you are for others.”

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## RELATIONALLY / PEDAGOGICALLY:

Greatly inspired by Søren Kierkegaard, Brian Degn Mårtensson\* writes in his 2015 book: “Competition State Education – a criticism and an alternative (Konkurrencestatens pædagogik – en kritik og et alternativ”): A necessary normative pedagogy has love as a non-rational *primus motor*/first mover!

In general, Brian Degn Mårtensson writes about the task of formation:

- a) If pedagogy is regarded as an exact means for a predetermined existence in which humanity is to perform something already defined, human beings become an object. “Man and humanity





must thus always be the goal. Competitiveness can at most be a by-product of the educational effort" (p.158).

- b) "We must, in our educational choices, continuously and without scientific certainty deal with qualitative notions of, for example, life, freedom, the soul, love, art, the good, the beautiful and righteous. Of course, we cannot expect to be able to determine questions about this, but lively discussions conclude that such questions are a prerequisite for a pedagogy that does not simply seek to adapt the individual to an existing power structure." (p. 120).

*The new kindergarten pupils are expected*

And on love as pedagogy's non-rational primus motor:

- a) It is a prerequisite for Kierkegaard that love itself cannot be seen or observed, in other words, it is an act that must be performed. p. 131.
- b) When I refer to love as primus motor as unfounded, it is due to the fact that in everyday language there are certainly many good reasons to love others, but a positive observable reasoning,



*"Expulsion of Paradise",  
Masaccio (1401-1428)*

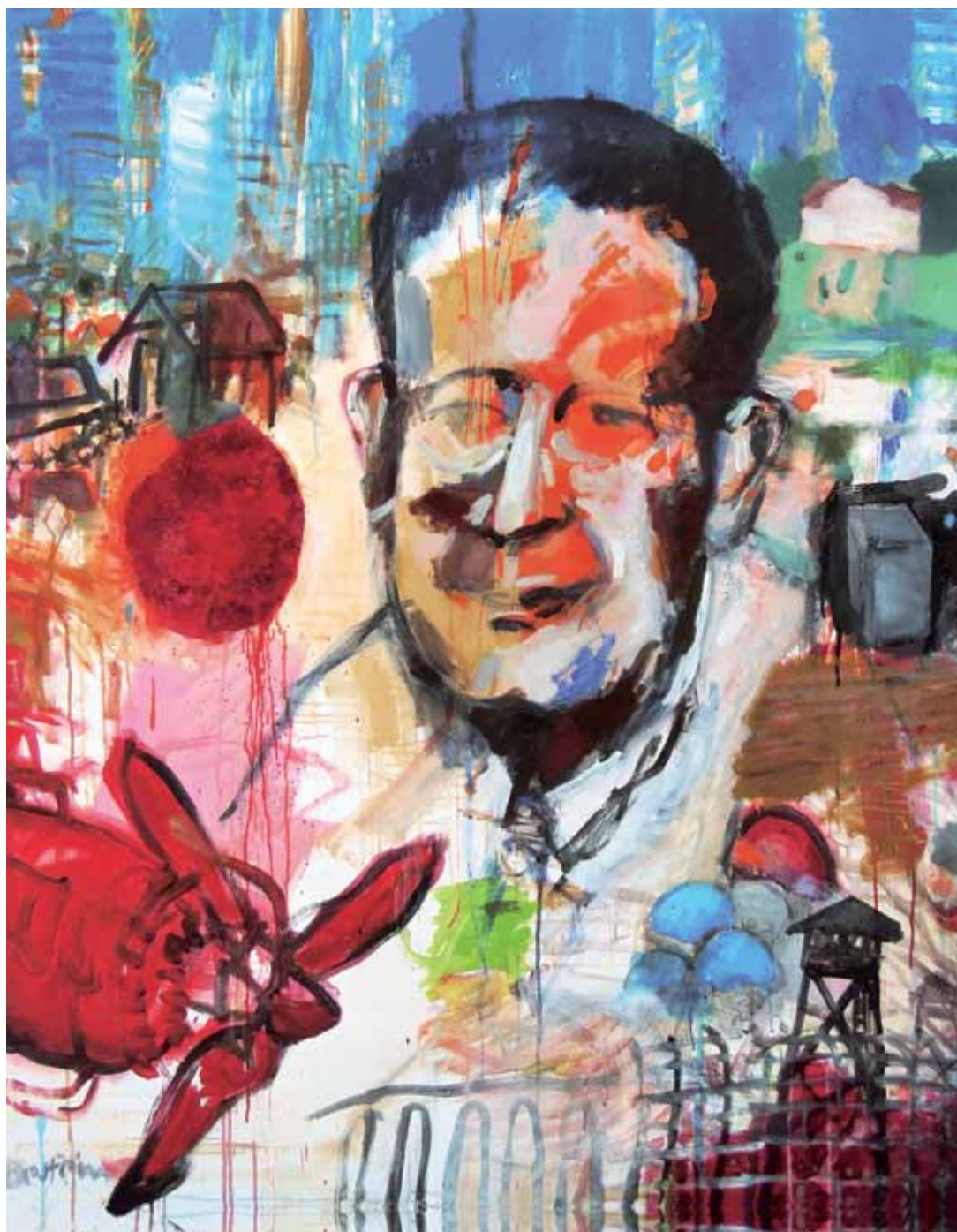
referring to anything other than love itself, cannot be formulated in scientific language. On top of that, such love for the other must be a postulate or assumption about this love, which can never be verified, since love in its essence must be definitive; that is, an unconditional way to see the other. p. 121.

- c) According to Kierkegaard, the most a human can do is to set another human free. p.132.
- d) Love is *both a gift and a task*, and thus both a condition and a duty, which is present as a provision in the meeting between people. p. 133.
- e) Pedagogically, love as *primus motor* leads to the fact that a child should not be made into someone or something specific, but *must become himself/herself in his/her own lovable form*. p.138.
- f) Maintaining love as pedagogy's non-rational *primus motor* takes the form of a faith-based view of the individual who is a free and lovable person. p. 139.

## Renaissance art's perspective on humanity

- Renaissance ideals involve a new perspective on man and humanity – a fascination with the world and life's possibilities. It does not appear as a break with Catholic tradition, which marked parts of Europe at the time, but in contrast, as a renewal.
- In Renaissance art, it is great and pleasing to be human. There is a focus on individuality and on the individual person's dignity, opportunity and necessity. There is also focus on God's "Yes" to man and on man's hope, guilt and loss.
- What happens when Man meets God or the divine?
- See the following pictures: "The Annunciation" by Fra Angelico (1387-1455) and "The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden" by Masaccio (1401-1428).





*Dag Hammarskjöld. Painting by Kim Frans Broström*



# Dag Hammarskjöld

Dag Hammarskjöld was the UN's second Secretary-General from 1953 to his death in 1961. He was a diplomatic genius and seemed very unlike the major political figures of his time. It was not Dag Hammarskjöld's intellectual capacity that made him unique, but his personal integrity.

In his Christmas greetings from the UN in 1953, he wrote:

“Our work for peace must begin inside every individual's own private world. To build a world for people without fear, we must be fearless. To build a world of righteousness, we must be righteous. And how can we fight for freedom if we do not have inner freedom ourselves? How can we pray for sacrifice if we are not prepared to sacrifice ourselves? Only if we really and alone have everyone's interest in mind, can we achieve the strength and independence, the unity in what we care for, and the balance and legitimacy of our assessments that are necessary if we are to be able to live up to our duty to the future, as people of one family that now has the opportunity to build a world of peace.”

Shortly after Dag H's death in 1961, his private notes “My Negotiations with myself and with God” were found. These notes about Dag Hammarskjöld's inner experiences and considerations were later published under the title “Markings”. (Route) markings are found in the Swedish wilderness, where small discreet colour markings on stones mark the path, to prevent getting lost. Figuratively, Dag Hammarskjöld's markings can be used as a guide on the spiritual path of the individual through life. “The longest journey is the journey inward.”

- Dag Hammarskjöld: “The closer I come to God, the closer I come to myself.” (Similar to e.g. Kierkegaard and Augustin)
- It is basically about becoming yourself, but not enough.
- Dag Hammarskjöld referred to his thoughts and reflections on the meaning of life as his “negotiations” with himself and with God.
- Who is God and who is fellow man – is it the same question? “What I think about myself and what I think about God is the same motion.”
- Is the other human being a goal or a means? Peace house (The UN or ISJ) deals with this issue.
- Dag Hammarskjöld lived his life with an open attitude. He wanted to be in the moment as much as possible and say, “yes” to the other human being.

*Students from Institut Sankt Joseph visit the Meditation Room in the UN Building in New York, 2017*



Dag Hammarskjöld wrote the following text for visitors to the meditation room in the UN headquarters in New York:

“We all have within us a centre of stillness surrounded by silence. This house, dedicated to work and debate in the service of peace, should have one room dedicated to silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense.

It has been the aim to create in this small room a place where the doors may be open to the infinite lands of thought and prayer.

People of many faiths will meet here, and for that reason none of the symbols to which we are accustomed in our meditation could be used.

However, there are simple things which speak to us all with the same language. We have sought for such things and we believe that

we have found them in the shaft of light striking the shimmering surface of solid rock.

So, in the middle of the room we see a symbol of how, daily, the light of the skies gives life to the earth on which we stand, a symbol to many of us of how the light of the spirit gives life to matter.

But the stone in the middle of the room has more to tell us. We may see it as an altar, empty not because there is no God, not because it is an altar to an unknown god, but because it is dedicated to the God whom man worships under many names and in many forms.

The stone in the middle of the room reminds us also of the firm and permanent in a world of movement and change. The block of iron ore has the weight and solidity of the everlasting. It is a reminder of that cornerstone of endurance and faith on which all human endeavour must be based.

The material of the stone leads our thoughts to the necessity for choice between destruction and construction, between war and peace. Of iron man has forged his swords, of iron he has also made his ploughshares. Of iron he has constructed tanks, but of iron he has likewise built homes for man. The block of iron ore is part of the wealth we have inherited on this earth of ours. How are we to use it?

The shaft of light strikes the stone in a room of utter simplicity. There are no other symbols; there is nothing to distract our attention or to break in on the stillness within ourselves. When our eyes travel from these symbols to the front wall, they meet a simple pattern opening up the room to the harmony, freedom and balance of space.

There is an ancient saying that the sense of a vessel is not in its shell but in the void. So it is with this room. It is for those who come here to fill the void with what they find in their centre of stillness."

*The backpage shows the great labyrinth in the floor of the cathedral of Chartres in France from approx. 1200. A 260 metres long meditative walk.*

