

FIVE ESSENTIALS OF THE NEW COVENANT COMMUNITY – PART 1: SHARED AUTHORITY

The following is part 1 of a series adapted from the Headmaster's address to the school community at Convocation, August 15, 2021.

New Covenant Schools represents a layer of community, not quite like our neighborhoods in which we live; rather, it is constructed around the common purposes of parenting, enriching our children's experience of faith, providing a pathway to advanced literacy, providing an arena where they can safely explore the world, and where they can make and recover from mistakes.

The fact that there is a price tag for the opportunity, should not blind us to the fact that we are a community, and that our relationships to one another cannot be boiled down to a mere contractual arrangement. A community is not transactional. Today we are faced as never before with extreme social pressures, political divisions, disease threats, and so much more. I want to offer you a clear reminder of who we are, what we stand for, and what a classical, Christian school can accomplish in your child's life.

First, participation in our school is a participation in the life of the culture of the Church. It was the Christian Church, committed to care and rearing of children, that, in the West spawned schools out of its cathedrals and eventually its parishes for the education of the young, and the transmission of faith and culture. Today, the secular public school has largely supplanted that, spawning its schools out of city hall, and should, by comparison, bring the differences into stark relief. I don't make my living decrying public education, but I do want you to be reminded of who we are and what we're about.

Second, participation in our academic and faith community assumes a receptive posture on the part of the parent and student. Here is what I mean: the school is not here as a performative platform upon which a student exhibits and manifests who he/she is. New Covenant is not a stage upon which dozens of ignorant, unformed selves, serially process, disclosing their preferences and desires to all who will watch. (I know that's almost a description of middle school, but I don't intend that.)

The purpose of the school is not to flatter the ignorances of the student; it is not here to indulge the unformed, or possibly mis-formed desires of the students; it is not to tolerate misshapen moral proclivities of the students; and it is not here to grant saint-hood to the current crop of supermodels, rap stars, or other notables in popular culture. We do not proceed in our endeavor celebrating the supremacy of the self-determining individual. Rather, we are here with a very long academic and faith tradition which is thick with the intention to turn students away from looking inward to themselves, and finding their recognition and their place within a community of shared values. What might those values be? There are five, and the first is this:

Our community is built upon on shared authority. We begin with the recognition by all that the Holy Scriptures define our world and our place in God's order. The Scriptures reveal to us where we came from, where we are going, and how we are to live in our historical moment. They teaches us what is good, true and beautiful, and shows us how to orient our lives to enjoy human flourishing. It not merely a voice among voices; it is *the* voice to which all of us subordinate ourselves. We do not negotiate the Scriptures against our experiences; we negotiate ourselves and our experiences against the Scriptures.

The Christian school is not designed as an escape mechanism from failing public schools. Our vision is not that we offer an

academic parallel to what a public school offers, adding a spice of religion in each grade. Our commitment is vastly more complex than that. We believe that the world we inhabit was created by God, that creation comes to us as a gift, and that it has a "givenness" about it. Because God is a rational being, the world made in his image is also rational. The nature of the world and human beings is stable and constant. It can be explored, investigated and known. It has meaning and purpose, which meaning and purpose can be understood in the light of the Scriptures.

Beginning in this way, the long history of the classical, Christian tradition, presupposes an intellectual coherence that assures us that our academic pursuits are situated within a unified field of knowledge. Each of the liberal arts thus represent a branch of human learning, reflecting the extraordinary diversity of the world. Even in this vast diversity, however, human knowledge possesses a fundamental unity. In recognition of this unity and diversity in our experience of the world, the Church invented what we call the "uni-versity," a word coined to express this basic fact.

The Western Church, which contributed so much to the development of education in our history, laid down what we might consider to be the pre-conditions necessary for the educational effort to progress. New Covenant continues in that tradition and is therefore decidedly not secular in its view of facts, as if brute facts could exist without meaning. There are no neutral facts in a world created by God. At the deepest level, the level of what we might call presuppositions, we are committed to the vision of the world as it is presented in the Scriptures, and we hold the Scriptures to be authoritative in our thinking.