



THE ACADEMIC JOURNAL

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Welcome to our thirtieth edition of "The Academic Journal," a bimonthly bulletin in which you can read about MCA's educational philosophy, instructional methodology, and the various viewpoints and positions of our faculty, staff, students, and families.

E Pluribus Unum : Out of Many, One

First from the perspective of philosophy, then from civics, and most recently from ethics, the past three issues of the Academic Journal have considered MCA's role in helping to live out our nation's motto of *E Pluribus Unum*. This is the conclusion.

As a school being built on a classical model that emphasizes democratic ideals and moral classicism, MCA offers the public a means of understanding humanity and all that is around us as a cohesive whole rather than as a fragmented world left deconstructed by cold analysis and the limits of our five senses. We offer an education that helps equip this republic to live in unity as we struggle through the challenges of society. We extend academic learning to include the ordering of affections, so that virtuous young men and women may one day lead.

Part IV: Closing

Philosophically we advance the idea of the metaphysical, an understanding of life that includes that which can and that which cannot be seen, heard, tasted, smelled, or touched. In a world without the metaphysical, there is nothing beyond the immediate and the tangible; there is no ultimate truth. Without ultimate truth there are 7.046 billion opinions, one for each person on the globe, and no way to reconcile them. Although empirical knowledge (that which we experience through our five senses) necessarily informs our thinking, it does not limit us, so we are able, therefore, to address the visible and the invisible, the physical world and intangibles, such as truth, goodness, and beauty. We can "know" through reason as well as through experience. (To safeguard that our propositions are valid and that our statements may be true, we bind our reason by the laws of Aristotelian logic, which include: the law of non-contradiction, the law of causality, the analogical use of language, and the basic reliability of the senses.)

Civic minded we provide equal access to a quality education that equips our students to engage in public life. We help equip our students with the ability to understand the nuances of issues so they can contribute to the public debate and to do so gallantly, genially, and thoughtfully. Along with their parents, we enable them to think independently, to be guided by truth, goodness, and beauty, and not by trending opinions. In essence, we perpetuate our nation's founders' belief in social equality, individual freedom, and self-government.

We provide intellectual rigor. The work for a student at MCA is challenging, mentally and physically. In addition to the vast content of the core subjects (English, history/geography, mathematics, and science), this education requires arts, music, philosophy, Latin, logic, and rhetoric, and all at a very high level. A student is not allowed to skirt difficult tasks and ideas, but is coached through them, so that on the far side, the student is more mature and better equipped to live in liberty, that is to live freely.

In "The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto," to which ideas we subscribe, Mortimer Adler states, "Universal suffrage and universal schooling are inextricably bound together... [We] take seriously the commitment of the



democratic society to the objective of a high quality basic schooling for all children.” Ours is an education for everyone.

Ethically we set before our students an enticing ideal of virtue. Because we acknowledge objective truth, we have a basis from which to help our students determine justice from injustice, beauty from ugliness, goodness from badness. Not only may we help our students distinguish between virtues and vices, but we can also help them order their affections, as Aristotle said, to love what they ought and to hate what they ought. During the last century, C.S. Lewis agreed with Aristotle, “All things were made to be yours and you were made to prize them according to their value.”

Out of many, one: We cast MCA’s story on the backdrop of the larger story, a single backdrop of transcendent, objective truth. Because we have placed our torch into the fires of classical education, our flame is being fed by thinking that was built on the shoulders of giants for thousands of years. We do not throw out the old just because it’s old, nor do we esteem the old just because it’s old. Likewise, we do not esteem the new just because it is new. Rather, we fan the flames of ideas and practices that are inherently worthy, and step thoughtfully forward with new light. Even then there are no sacred fires, none that cannot be questioned or refined through reflective, logical deliberation. The old fires are meant to *ignite* our thinking, not to *be* our thinking.



On this backdrop of knowable, objective truth as nuanced and as difficult as the journey will be, there is hope. Only in this story of universal truth is there something outside of our finite, human experience. We are not the truth, but we can discover our place in it. Without the singularity of universal truth there is no *one*, just the *many*. The *many* by necessity lead only to chaos and anarchy. The *many* reduce life to a shallow, if not meaningless, human existence with no enduring purpose, value, or virtue— only the here and now— no direction, no justice, nothing noble, and eventually the dark emptiness of nihilism. Without transcendent truth, we are born; we exist; we die. And when we die, the only legitimate epitaph for our tombstones is a date of birth and a date of death because everything in between was meaningless. MCA’s backdrop, however, allows for a narrative where the flame of truth, goodness, and beauty can inform our daily lives and offer the possibility of a more perfect union.

More personally, MCA’s classical education has as its primary aim to enrich humanity, heart and mind, affections and intellect. We intend to cultivate the intellect, develop personal judgment, and inspire affection in right things. We aim to prepare young men and women for liberty and happiness. At MCA we bring together the heart and the head.

According to the Jewish Torah, God commands Aaron (via Moses) to light the lamps in the Tabernacle. The Jewish Sages noted that literally, however, the word for light means “when you raise up” and not “when you light.” The Sages teach that the lesson in this word choice is that when the priest went to light the lamps, he could not simply touch a flame to a wick and move on to the next wick. The priest had to keep the flame on the first wick until the flame “went up,” meaning, it fully caught on fire and was burning brightly on its own. Our educational fire sheds light on the soul of humanity— the mind, the will, and the emotions. And, in doing so, we hold our flame onto the flickering spark of our students’ flames until theirs burn brightly with wisdom and virtue, and only then do we remove our own flame. In the end, the many independent flames burn brightly as if one. *E pluribus unum*.

Kirby R. McCrary, Headmaster

