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The Catholic Homeschool Companion

Selected and Edited by
Maureen Wittmann and Rachel Mackson

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*To my first-born child, Christian,
who has shown me how to be
a home educator, a mother,
and a Christian.*

Maureen Wittmann

*To my father, Gregory New,
who made this book a possibility;
to my beloved husband, Dave;
and to my cherished children:
Philip, Grace, and Emily.
In loving memory of my grandmother,
Teresa New, and my mother, Susan.*

Rachel Mackson



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Appreciation

The authors who contributed essays to *The Catholic Homeschool Companion* have our warmest thanks. They took valuable time from their families and their homeschooling endeavors to share their stories, but their contributions do not stop with the publication of this book. They have inspired us to be better homeschoolers and better mothers. We hope they will inspire you as well.

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Most important, we give thanks to God for the grace necessary to be writers and editors, in addition to wives and mothers.



Foreword

Bishop Carl Mengeling

As you pursue your God-given responsibility for the education of your children, allow me to offer some encouragement.

You have made a choice, you have a right to make that choice, you believe in that choice, and you are committing yourself to that choice: to be homeschoolers of your children. Others do not make that choice, and that is their business, but you have made the choice and you are proud of it, and the Church is also proud.

That choice was made by today's saint, Thomas More. If you know his life, you know that he was a homeschooler in every sense. At the heart of his family was nothing but the total education of the human person centered, above all, in religion. As one of the great leaders in Europe, he brought to his home a great renaissance of learning and a renaissance of faith. He taught his daughters languages. He taught them political science. He taught them music. He taught them, above all, religion. That is why the choice he made, when put to the test by King Henry VIII, ultimately recalls the fullness of Scripture.

You and I must never expect that what happened to Jesus is not going to happen to us. We, too, are going to be put to the test. We are being put to the test now, and the Church has always been put to the test. The Lord separates the goats from the sheep. He

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summons us in these times of trial and testing to measure up and to rise higher and higher. This is the time, as it was five hundred years ago in Europe, when we need saints. Saints are the solution. That is the Church's solution to everything, and that is what you want. You want your children to become saints.

Education has a twofold objective. Number one is to become citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Number two is to become effective citizens here, while that kingdom is taking shape in this world. Citizens of this world, citizens of the next: that is our vision.

I do want to stress something very important, and that is the absolute centrality of religion in the entire education program. Without that, it is merely preparing people for what they are going to do in this life. That is important, but secondary. Far more important, my dear Catholics, is not what we are going to do, but who we become; that we become men and women of God and saints of God, the presence of Christ in this world. That is the object of education: who we become. You and I are not done with it. That is why we keep coming to the Eucharist. That is why we keep going to Confession, because we are not yet the person we can become by God's grace.

Maria Montessori said that the whole essence of her educational program lay in two words: *milk* and *honey*. You may not have thought of it that way, but Augustine, who died in the year 430, said that the milk stands for all the fundamental needs we have in this life — the need for food, shelter, and clothing. Augustine said that is important, but the milk is not enough by itself.

Today, as you well know, most Americans are drowning in milk. We have too much milk, and yet we want more milk; we want more junk, more stuff. We are drowning in milk, and education today, for the most part, is to prepare people to get more milk. Yes, we need the milk, and we need education that gives us the knowledge and the skills to build all the factories and the automobiles and to provide food and everything else, and in no way do I

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denigrate that, but it is not enough. We are more than that. What is missing in the lives of so many people is the *honey*.

What is the honey? The honey is what gives meaning and purpose and destiny to my life and ties it all together and gives meaning to all this milk stuff. Think of it, my dear Catholics, how sweet it is to be a believer. How sweet it is, like honey, to see myself the way God does: born in the image and likeness of God, with the capacity to know and love God and to know and love one another. To see myself as the Lord Jesus on the Cross sees me, worthy enough that he died for me. Oh, how sweet it is to be so loved. How sweet it is to have faith, to see the whole picture, not just a fourth of it, or a half of it. Not just in terms of this world, but in terms of eternity and the kingdom of God, which gives meaning to all of this. How sweet it is to have the faith, the mind and heart that God reveals in Jesus humanly, so that we can grasp it. How sweet it is to see everyone else the way God sees them. To see that every person has value and meaning, that everyone is worthy, that everyone is to be loved and given a break and saved.

Yes, that is the honey: to be a believer, a person of hope and optimism and enthusiasm, no matter what is going on. It isn't always easy; it's tough. You say how great it is to be a Catholic. It's *tough* to be a good Catholic. But it's worth it.

John Paul II said so beautifully when he challenged university professors in 1988, "Education is an act of love of man toward man, of parents toward children, of teachers toward students, and adults toward minors." He calls it an act of love. Think about it. That is precisely what you are motivated by in the choice that you have made as homeschoolers: an act of love that requires tremendous sacrifice, a tremendous dedication and patience and perseverance to educate your own children and others with you in the environment you have chosen. That is an act of love. Education is not a job. It is not a profession. We can look at it that way, but that is not enough. Educators, parents, are gifts for their children.

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How sweet it is when our children know what it means to be honest, to be truthful. How sweet it is when other people know that what they say or what we say can be relied on as truth. How sweet it is when we have a deep sense of respect for others. How sweet it is to have patience and endurance, never to give up on anybody, to know that no one is waste or garbage, and that everyone counts. How sweet is chastity. How sweet that decency, how sweet it is to integrate the sexual reality of who we are in the reality of love. How sweet it is to have a mind that is pure and chaste and a voice that speaks decency.

That, my dear Catholics, has to be taught. That has to be experienced in the home. It is a battle today to find role models, because we are surrounded with pornography, and yet at the same time you and I roll up our sleeves and we keep on striving for that which is right and good. How sweet it is to respect other people's property. That whole gambit of acquisition and taking becomes more for us who are giving. Yes, the choice between being a giver or a taker.

My dear Catholics, the whole reality of our religion is the honey. The whole of the Gospels is the honey. The teachings of Jesus, the eight Beatitudes, are the honey. That is where the meaning of education lies. Take the honey away, and all we have left is the milk, and that does not give you a reason to live. It does not give you a destiny. It does not give you a purpose. All of the things that prepare us for that — and they are important: mathematics and science, the language arts, and all the other subjects — do not give you a reason to live. They are just tools. Faith, hope, and love are what give you a reason to live.

In the Eucharist, we celebrate the love of Christ, the risen Lord, who is present to draw us in. You hear in the Mass, "This is my body given up for you," and "This is my blood poured out for you." The body given up, the blood poured out — total gift. The world hates that. The world is against that. The world is always

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attracting us to be takers — me, me, me, take, take, take, milk, milk, milk. The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, is just the opposite: the Giver and the Honey in which the milk finds its meaning.

So, my dear homeschoolers, you are on the right track. You're doing the right thing, and I know it isn't easy. A lot of people don't like you for it, and some people criticize you for it. You're in good company. Jesus, they said, was possessed by the Devil. They couldn't wait to kill him. So we're in good company. Amen.

*+Bishop Carl Mengeling
Feast of St. Thomas More*

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

John 20:29

Introduction

Like *A Catholic Homeschool Treasury*, *The Catholic Homeschool Companion* addresses a wide variety of topics and provides an insight into the homes of real-life Catholic homeschoolers. However, my children and Rachel's were young when we compiled and edited the first book, and therefore it's heavy on grade-school information. With *The Catholic Homeschool Companion*, Rachel and I have taken great care to include a chapter exclusively on high school instruction. Additionally, we devote entire chapters to topics such as home management and learning disabilities.

We're also excited to have more fathers contributing to *The Catholic Homeschool Companion*. If you look at *A Catholic Homeschool Treasury*, you'll see that Dad has a prominent place on the cover. That was very important to Rachel and to me, as fathers are too often overlooked in homeschooling circles. In producing this book, we made a special effort to seek out male authors. This book is not just for mothers; homeschooling fathers will find that this is their book, too. (You'll even find several essays of interest to your older children.)

We encourage husbands to assist their wives in the education of their children. This often leads to better communication between spouses and mutual commitment, and therefore leads to stronger marriages. Assistance can include teaching a course, providing wives with the tools necessary for success, taking little ones

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for a weekly night out so that wives can plan the school week, and providing moral and spiritual support. In this way, homeschooling becomes much more than an educational model; it becomes a way of life for the family. Education is not a place or system; it's an experience.

Just as schoolteachers refer to themselves as professional educators, so should homeschooling parents. Professionals keep up to date in their fields by reading all the right books, subscribing to professional journals, joining professional organizations, and attending conferences. As home educators, we benefit greatly when we follow this example. For this reason, you'll find an extensive Catholic resource section in the appendices of this book. The information there will give you a step up in taking on the attitude of a professional educator.

Rachel and I do not presume to be homeschooling experts with all the answers. We presume to be experts only in the Mackson and Wittmann homeschools. You are the expert in your homeschool. No one person knows your children better than you and your spouse do, and through the sacrament of Marriage you have the grace necessary to teach your own children.

The Church teaches us that parents are the primary educators of their children (CCC, 2221-2231). This is not a teaching to be taken lightly, and as home educators, we take that teaching to heart. Most important, we're responsible for the formation of our children's souls in addition to their intellect.

There are many ways to homeschool. This is why *The Catholic Homeschool Companion* presents a wide range of family situations and solutions. It's my hope and prayer that you'll be able to learn from the writers of the following essays, taking the ideas and recommendations that will work in your home.

Ultimately, if parents want to be successful homeschoolers, they must have a burning desire to take their children's education into their own hands. If they have that desire, and they prayerfully

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look for God's will in making the decision, everything else will fall into place. I've seen, firsthand, parents overcome great obstacles in order to homeschool, and you will, too, in reading the following pages.