



## Critical thought provides a legacy of truth

When I was growing up on a farm back in the 1950s, my mother had a rather odd rule about summer drinks. If I had a glass of iced-tea or Kool-Aid, I could use no more than two ice cubes. She believed that too much ice would cause you to have stomach problems later in life. To prove her point, she would tell me repeatedly that my uncle Dick had consumed large amounts of ice water when he was working on the family farm, and now only in his early fifties he was suffering from stomach ulcers. Of course my mother firmly believed that her faulty cause and effect logic made perfect sense. In retrospect, while her reasoning was somewhat humorous, it caused no harmful results.

On the other hand, there are faulty cause and effect arguments that do lead to serious consequences. In 1998 British researchers published a report that claimed the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine caused autism. According to *WebMD*, the ever-present magazine in many doctors' waiting rooms, only 12 children were included in the study at a time when autism was on the rise. Over a dozen clinical studies have subsequently tried to duplicate the original link to autism and have found no connection. The MMR vaccine does not cause autism. However, the damage has been done and the erroneous autism claim has spread through social media so that now many parents do not have their children vaccinated. Potentially, those children who contract measles or mumps may have serious reactions causing hospitalization or in rare cases, even death. Parental concern continues about some additives in vaccines even though the Center for Disease Control has conducted nine studies which do not show any link to autism. Yet one in four parents in 2017 still believes vaccines can cause autism.

Before we severely judge the shortsightedness of these parents, we should realize that even within the scholarly confines of the Catholic Church, the same faulty reasoning occurs. Cornelius Jansen, a 15<sup>th</sup> century French theologian and bishop, wrote a paper concerning free will versus grace as presented by St. Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until after the bishop's death that Jansenism sprang up in Europe claiming that man was lacking free will and by nature was corruptible. This flawed interpretation of Jansen selectively spread through the clergy and parishioners in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries culminating in a very ascetic view of man. There are still remnants of this austere belief in circulation. Like so many inaccurate conclusions, Jansenism is based on a faulty generalization that all men are predestined to suffer a preordained fate.

What do these examples of misinformation and faulty logic have to do with the stewardship of our faith? To preserve and to expand our belief in the teachings of Christ, we must approach every unknown, every challenge, every doubt, with critical and prayerful thought. The Church is not a museum piece. It is a living institution that will continue to evolve and change and we are a part of that change. Our faith is based on our relationship with God, with family and friends, with neighbors and community and with cultures worldwide. We must critically examine what we do versus what we believe. We cannot exclude but must encompass all people, saints and sinners alike. This was the message Jesus relentlessly taught and demanded of His followers. Even on the cross, He extended His mercy to a convicted criminal. How much more does He expect from us? He gave us a brain and He expects us to use it.

Written by Ray Huss, member of our Stewardship Committee

*Dear Lord,*

*Thank You for teaching me to be generous as You have been generous with me.*

*Thank You for showing me that all I am and have are gifts from You and that these gifts from you, Lord, are meant to be shared.*



*Show me the joys of generosity.*

*Help me to understand that others, perhaps unknown to me, depend on me for help.*

*Remind me that my world, my parish, needs "Good Samaritans" to heal the wounds of our times.*

*Make me a gift to others in Your name.*

*Amen*