

Classroom Religious Education

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith

(SC for Cath Ed, Oct 15th 1982)

_ ‘Every Christian has been made a sharer in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ, and their apostolate is a participation in the saving mission of the Church ... All are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord himself’(n.6).

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith

‘The communication of truth as a professional activity is fundamentally transformed into a unique participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, carried on through one's teaching’^(n.16).

‘The Catholic Educator must be committed to the task of forming men and women who will make the “civilization of love” a reality’^(n.19).

V. Ayel "Shifts in Catechesis 1950-1980"

Word in Life (1981)29:3, pages 110-120

‘Teachers full of goodwill tried to organise discussions as “de-schooled” as possible, often disconnected, vague enough to include everyone, on human problems which were in fashion ... The justificatory invocation of non-directivity of a more or less Rogerian kind sometimes covered up fairly badly, among over-worked educators, a hidden propensity based on fear ... The young people see the trickery: we are really trying to coax them, manipulate them, in some hasty or even more or less clandestine way “baptise” their human experience and their inter-personal relationships ...

V. Aycl "Shifts in Catechesis 1950-1980"

Groups for exchanging experiences give young people the idea of something lacking seriousness and rigour when they compare these “meetings” with the kinds of teaching they otherwise receive. They make even wider the deadly gap between ordinary human culture and religious culture. There is a risk of letting it be understood that faith is a vague human morality, one opinion among others, or else a spineless fideism which is not worthy of serious intellectual attention.’

‘Religious education aims at deepening young people’s knowledge, understanding and affective appreciation of the Catholic faith tradition, of other religions and of contemporary religious issues. Religious education is thus specially concerned with informing young people about religion so that they will be in a better position to assess what religion and personal faith might contribute to their lives. In this way, religious education can foster the growth and maturation of young people’s personal faith.

Crawford and Rossiter

Teaching Religion in Catholic Schools

Religious education aims at developing in young people skills for an objective, sympathetic and critical study of religion. They can be helped to gain confidence in their own ability to inquire into religion and religious issues so that in turn they can be more confident in being able to make decisions about faith, values and lifestyle. (continued)

Teaching Religion in Catholic Schools

‘In addition to becoming more familiar with their own religious traditions, pupils should become more knowledgeable about other religions and of non-religious world views which are represented in their multi-cultural, multi-faith society. Through attention given to topics which relate more directly to personal development and contemporary social issues, religious education can help your people deepen their self-knowledge and become more critically aware of issues which affect the quality of their own lives and the lives of others.’

Classroom Religious Education

I. must not be identified with catechesis, which is:

- a voluntary faith-sharing experience
(‘echoing the faith’)
- presumes an initial conversion
and commitment to Christ
- is closely connected with the Eucharist
- is oriented towards the full initiation of the
believer into the religious practices and
sacraments of the Church.

2. is not a substitute for youth ministry or pastoral catechesis.

3. Religious Education can be the most educationally valuable subject in the curriculum provided attention is paid to both content and process:

- Dealing with personal, social, cultural matters
- Exploring profound contemporary issues for meaning and value
- Promoting aesthetic and affective development.

4. Whether or not classroom religious education ultimately enhances personal faith depends upon the free responses of the young people, in their own time and in relation to many other influences on their lives.

‘The quality and effectiveness of religious education are dependent on how much individual freedom is respected’ (Crawford & Rossiter, page 47).

‘Create a respectful free ‘space’ around the young people’s faith. There is no principle more important than this in religious education’(C&R, page 48).

‘He was nine years old; he was a child; but he knew his own soul and treasured it, guarding it as the eyelid guards the eye’(Tolstoy L. Anna Karenin)

The religion teacher's role is to involve students in an exploration of Catholic religious traditions. It is not to exhort them to reproduce the teacher's particular religious commitments. The teacher should be:

- knowledgeable about what is taught
- fair and respectful in presenting content
- able to show alternative points of view where these exist
- sensitive in managing student's questions and discussion
- responsible and creative in making reference to his or her own views.

The religion teacher should be expected to uphold the moral and religious values written into the school's philosophy and aims. For example:

- that religion is important in life
- that the school values the religious education and religious development of pupils
- that pupils be treated at all times with respect and dignity
- that there is opportunity for liturgy, sacraments and prayer.

The commitment of teachers to religious education

- requires freedom
- includes emotional investment and attachment to meanings and values
- is compatible with responsible criticism, uncertainty and doubt

J. Di Giacomo “Rel Ed in Aust Secondary Schools”

ACR (1984) 61:4, pages 401-402

‘Adolescents are engaged in a search for identity, trying to find out who they are, what they believe in, and what they value. Part of this search is the quest for religious identity. During the years from puberty to young adulthood, young people face the task either of affirming the commitments made for them as children by their parents, or seeking some other path.

J. Di Giacomo “Rel Ed in Aust Secondary Schools”

‘ They are often full of paradoxes, they resist indoctrination and resent any pressure to conform to adult standards of belief or practice, yet insist that adults exhibit commitment and consistency. Even as they postpone decisions, they want their adults to be role models of stability. They like to be challenged but do not want to be crowded. This strange mix of attitudes can cause frustration for the adults who work with them, but makes a good deal of sense ... The teacher must respect the student's freedom and need to question, to search, to postpone commitment and indeed even to reject ... (continued)

J. Di Giacomo “Rel Ed in Aust Secondary Schools”

‘Is there a risk in all of this? Of course. The student may choose to reject the teaching of Christianity, either as unconvincing or more often as simply not deserving of attention, much less commitment. But it is futile to try to guarantee acceptance by discouraging questioning, stifling discussion, or refusing a hearing to any but the official view of things.

J. Di Giacomo “Rel Ed in Aust Secondary Schools”

There will always be teachers who, with the best intentions in the world, attempt to inoculate their charges against heterodoxy by creating a kind of religious germ-free classroom atmosphere. Adolescents resent this kind of protectiveness. They want room to explore, to consider opinions, to challenge the accepted view of reality.

J. Di Giacomo “Rel Ed in Aust Secondary Schools”

‘Because their efforts are often clumsy or superficial, adults get nervous and become too directive. As a result, youngsters with an inquiring or critical bent of mind come to perceive religious education not as a vehicle of enlightenment but as a more or less subtle form of brain-washing. And so the truth serum, far from producing immunity from error, induces a negative reaction. The latter may be so strong as to resemble nothing less than an allergy to religious education of any kind.’

The Catholic school has a role to play in engaging staff, students and parents and all associated with the School enterprise in doing theology, that is to say, in bringing the light of faith to bear on the whole of human experience, and in seeking understanding of religious experience.

The Catholic school has a role to play in moral education, in discovering what the implications of love are in today's world; on what the next step of love is for a community and for persons; on how it is that we can be ourselves in being for others.

The Catholic school has a role to play in the educating of intelligence, in the perfecting of the students' capacity to discover truth.

The part played by schoolroom instruction in this is informational, so that the students will be able to bring to bear on any particular question the insights contained particularly in the rich tradition found in the Bible, in Church doctrine, and in the whole of the Catholic tradition.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

‘Be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart ...

Try to love the questions themselves.

Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given
because you would not be able to live them.

And the point is to live everything.

Live the questions now.

Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it,
live along some distant day into the answers.’