

Education and the Gospel

Vatican II. On Christian Education §8, Oct 1965

‘The Catholic School pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school.

What makes the Catholic school distinctive is:

- its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love.

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Vatican II. On Christian Education §8, Oct 1965

- It tries to guide the adolescents in such a way that personality development goes hand in hand with the development of the 'new creature' that each one has become through baptism.
- It tries to relate all of human culture to the good news of salvation
- so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the students will gradually come to learn about the world, about life, and about the human person.'

Australian National Catholic Education Commission
Ministry and Formation of Catholic Educators (1982), 4

‘One crucial measure of the success or failure of the educational ministry is how well it enables men and women to hear the message of hope contained in the gospel, to base their love and service of God upon this message, and to achieve a vital, personal relationship with Christ.’

Pat Browne, "The Religion Lesson"

Catholic School Studies(1983)56:2, page 42-43

‘A generation ago the concerns that guided pastoral care and religious education were deeply influenced by the social context in which Catholic schools operated. Catholics felt themselves to be an oppressed, but finally triumphant, minority. They nurtured long memories of persecution in Ireland and of discrimination in earlier days in Australia when Catholics were distinctly working class and poor. In particular they resented being taxed for schools to which they could not in conscience send their children.

Pat Browne, "The Religion Lesson"

Not surprisingly, Catholics saw their schools as the hope of the future, symbols of defiance and fortresses of the faith, and the Sisters and Brothers who staffed them were the heroic garrison. Their dedication procured the scholarships and examination results that would ensure future Catholic prosperity, and their influence would mould the Catholic faith of the coming generation. That was what Catholic education was about.

Pat Browne, "The Religion Lesson"

Perceived oppression was a powerful cement to bind the Catholic people. We packed a tight scrum! Added to this was a clear Catholic identity composed of Friday fish, Saturday confession, Sunday Mass in universal Latin, strong authority, answers for all questions and rules for almost everything.

Pat Browne, "The Religion Lesson"

To a child it seemed that most things were either forbidden or compulsory, and that everyone in your world, from your parents to the Pope, was unanimous about which was which. There was a very definite world that you belonged to, and an equally definite, faintly hostile world outside it. Many of us had no sense of having a choice or of wanting a choice about whether or not we would be Catholic ...

Pat Browne, "The Religion Lesson"

That brings us to an important distinction. Through an intricate web of relationships and attitudes, what was being transmitted to the young in those days was, primarily, Catholic tribalism - not faith, which is always a matter of gift and personal response. Of course Catholic faith very often developed in great depth and strength. But tribalism is one thing and faith is another. It is easier to see that distinction now than it was then.'

Pat Browne, "The Religion Lesson"

Pat goes on to speak of the changes that hit us all so suddenly in the 1960's, when the 'black and white Catholic rules seemed to fade into murky, make-up-your-own-mind grey. Within a few years there was a drastic loss of corporate identity, of cohesion, authority and discipline as they had been known. All the symptoms of the de-tribalisation of a people were visible.'

Crawford M & Rossiter G.

Teaching Religion in Catholic Schools:

theory & practice 1985, 41-42.

1. The Catholic school is an educational community sponsored by the Catholic Church to contribute to the schooling of young Australians, particularly those of the Catholic faith. The school is to provide a sound education which meets all the requirements of the appropriate governmental authorities while also being challenged to take into account the bearing that Christian values and the Christian faith may have on education.

Crawford M & Rossiter G.
Teaching Religion in Catholic Schools:
theory & practice 1985, 41-42.

2. The Catholic school should provide a comprehensive religious education which will help young people become well informed about their Catholic faith tradition and about religion and religious issues generally, so that they will be in a better position to see what religious faith and practice might contribute to their lives.

Teaching Religion in Catholic Schools:

theory & practice 1985, 41-42.

3. The school is to provide opportunities for prayer and liturgy, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. It should provide structures and opportunities for nurturing, expressing and sharing faith commitment; there should be opportunities for participating in voluntary commitment groups and voluntary religious activities.

Crawford M & Rossiter G.

Teaching Religion in Catholic Schools:

theory & practice 1985, 41-42.

4. All of those in the Catholic school, teachers and pupils alike, should endeavour to live and work together as a caring learning community which tries to exhibit the qualities of life emphasised in the Gospel - particularly the qualities of love, freedom, justice and peace.'

The school is ‘a place where one has presented an array of values which are actively lived. The school must be a community whose values are communicated through the interpersonal and sincere relationships of its members and through both individual and corporative adherence to the outlook of life that permeates the school’ (The Catholic School 32).

Teachers & School Policy

‘It is obvious that in such a demanding educational policy all participants must be committed to it freely. It cannot be imposed, but is offered as a possibility, as good news, and as such can be refused. However, in order to bring it into being and to maintain it, the school must be able to count on the unity of purpose and conviction of all its members.’(The Catholic School 59)

The Australian National Catholic Education Commission

‘Teachers in Catholic Schools share in the mission of the Church to the world as a consequence of accepting a position in a Catholic School. Acceptance of their appointment implies a commitment to helping to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. It involves healing, sharing, consoling and working with others to make a new vision of life a reality for their students and for one another. This role belongs to all teachers ...

The Australian National Catholic Education Commission

Teachers in Catholic Schools are called to work with confidence and enthusiasm to bring Christ's vision of the human person into being. They are called to provide an education in which all aspects of life are given significance within the context of a faith which is not divorced from everyday life, but which gives meaning to life. They are also called to give evidence of, and witness to, the fact that they themselves are identified with and involved in the Church's mission to society.'

‘How can the Church and Catholic education remain human, Christian and Catholic? One powerful guarantee would be a clear solidarity with the poor ... When we accept solidarity with the poor, human dignity is measured in its own right – not in power, money, possessions or prestige. Christian standards of justice and compassion are applied to the disadvantaged, the oppressed and the hungry at home and abroad. A truly Catholic attitude is realised in the universal acceptance of all and the rejection of every form of false distinction and unjust discrimination. Christ’s love is for all, but if his option is for the poor, so it must be for his disciples.

Archbishop Carroll of Canberra-Goulburn writes:

The centrality of the poor to the Gospel poses questions for the whole Church but it has multiple application in Catholic education. I fear that in many instances we are sinning against the poor. I do not say that this is by deliberate choice, but perhaps we have allowed external and internal pressures to affect us too much. At any rate, we do need to face anew the challenge of the preferential option for the poor.'

Pope John-Paul II in Melbourne 28.II.86

‘In a very special way you share in the mission of the Church. No matter what subject you teach, it is part of your responsibility to lead your pupils more fully into the mystery of Christ and the living tradition of the Church. Baptism is a call from Christ, a call which affects our whole life, the way we act and think. It moulds our attitude and behaviour. This is seen very clearly in the work of a Catholic teacher.

The impact you have upon your students and especially upon their faith in Christ will depend on the vitality of your own Christian life, and on the motives, attitudes and principles which shape your behaviour. Your attitude towards Christ and your personal closeness to him are fundamental. Closely linked to this are your attitude towards the Church and your sense of having a special mission within her. You are not isolated agents in an impersonal bureaucracy. You are not merely professional educators. You are called to be faith-inspired collaborators in the heart of the Christian community.'

‘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.’