

## 1. Introduction

*And this is eternal life, that they may know you,  
the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you  
have sent. (Jn 17:3)*

In Bible Greek, *know* in the quoted passage is derived from *ginōskō*. This implies a knowledge through personal encounter and experience. Personal communion with the 'only true God' is our ultimate goal. To be one with God in intimate personal communion through Jesus, the Son of God is the end for which every person was created.

In Catholic education, all that we do and all that we learn should tend to this. It is or should be the goal of all our longing and the fullest rationale for all our doing. It is the most fundamental *why* of any curriculum planning in Catholic education. And since this union is achieved in and through Jesus, then Jesus must be *the* focus of the Catholic educational endeavour. It is Jesus who reveals God fully to us in his person and, at the same time, reveals in his person what it is to be fully human, fully alive. Jesus Christ must be at the centre of any school and curriculum called *Catholic*.

## 2. The Catholic School

### i. The Catholic school is Catholic.

Catholics believe in God. A God who revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ – Jesus Christ who rose from the dead to life undying. Through and in his body the Church he is present across time and generations. To believe in God is not simply to accept a notion, a conclusion of a thought process. It is to accept that God *is* and that all being is 'borrowed being' from the One who *is*. It is to know that in God we live and move and have our being<sup>1</sup>. A God who led the Israelites from Egypt, who went before them and dwelt in the midst of the people chosen as his own. In the New Covenant, this salvific closeness reaches its ultimate point in the Incarnation, the Word made flesh who dwells among us<sup>2</sup>.

*The 'Paradox' of the Incarnation continued in the Catholic School*

That God took human nature to himself was something beyond astonishing for the first believers. A God born in the midst of sheltering animals beneath a star in southern Judea was scandal to the religious authorities and incurable paradox for cultured Greek minds.

*... thou art now  
Thy Maker's maker, and thy Father's mother,  
Thou hast light in dark, and shutt'st in little room  
Immensity, cloister'd in thy dear womb.*  
lines from John Donne's 'Annunciation'

'In a Catholic school, everyone should be aware of the living presence of Jesus the "Master" who, today as always, is with us in our journey through life as the one genuine "Teacher"<sup>3</sup>. A sign of his 'paradoxical presence' in that power of a Catholic school to draw into happy unity things which seem at odds. After all, the Catholic school commits itself to ends which appear in tension. It is a particular place for the Church's mission and yet has profound respect for freedom of conscience. It is focused on integral formation of its students and yet prepares them for life. It forms the Catholic student as "both human and a person of faith, the protagonist of culture and the subject of religion"<sup>4</sup>. It teaches subjects with methods proper to them and yet imbues the curriculum with a Christian outlook. It is established for Catholic students and yet draws others to its doors.

#### *Christ's True Presence in the Catholic School*

Christ's presence in the Catholic school is in present tense, in the here and now. Realising this forces a change of consciousness as it translates 'from the ideal into the real'<sup>5</sup>. It is one thing to harbour notions about Jesus. It is quite another thing when his being is before us, present to sense, thought and imagination<sup>6</sup>. The presence of Christ in the heart of the Catholic school is real, not notional. Because of this, the Catholic school is never just a place of education with a religious adjunct, but a place where all the teaching and organization of the school is to be imbued with the spirit of Christ<sup>7</sup>.

Like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden<sup>8</sup>, the Catholic school should radiate the light within it, the light of Christ himself. To the extent that the school embraces the living presence of Christ at the centre, his light will shine out all the more brightly. Thus it should be for its community a place of encounter with Christ since the Catholic school is an essential part of the mission of the Church, in which it finds its true justification. Its principle and practice are aimed at bringing faith, culture and life into harmony<sup>9</sup>. The people, priests and bishops who spent themselves to establish Catholic schools in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain bear witness to the indispensability of the Catholic school in the mission of the Church. 'What is needed is a school'<sup>10</sup>.

#### *The Catholic School for All*

And such a school is Catholic also in the sense that it is for all, especially the poor<sup>11</sup>. As a true 'ecclesial subject'<sup>12</sup> its mandate and bounds extend outward to all people<sup>13</sup>. As of the Church, so of her schools: 'In you, all find their home'<sup>14</sup>. People are attracted to light even when they do not know the source. Since Incarnation of the Son of God reveals what it is to be fully human, people are drawn to the Catholic school by the sense that its sacred precincts guard true human values like the family, the moral law and the dignity of the

person<sup>15</sup>. In the setting of a Catholic school a pupil should experience their dignity as a person 'before they know its definition'<sup>16</sup>.

## ii. The Catholic school is a school.

As the Vatican II *Declaration of Christian Education* puts it: '[n]o less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth'<sup>17</sup>. The Catholic school as a *civic institution* is not at odds with its identity as a *Christian community* whose educational goals are rooted in Christ and his Gospel<sup>18</sup>. Thus it is truly civic and apostolic<sup>19</sup>. For this reason, Canon Law obliges Catholic school leaders under the supervision of their bishop to ensure that education in a Catholic school is at least as good as that in other schools<sup>20</sup>.

By way of analogy, a baptised person does not become less of a person by baptism. All that is humanly present and good by nature – gifts, talents, moral virtue, personality and so on – is graced by baptism, taken up and completed in the new creature. They become formed in Christ, who reveals what it is to be fully human, fully alive. And so, the Christian is ushered towards their full humanity in baptism. By analogy, the Catholic school is more fully a school in virtue of being a Catholic school. The blueprint of the school and the university we know today owes something to that which took slow form in the Church in myriad catechetical and theological endeavours in Christian homes, monasteries, cathedrals and parishes. Out of the graced emerged the good.

### *The Catholic School as Defender of the Curriculum*

To the mind which can only view Catholic schools as at best incidental and at worst oppositional to the aims of true education, the above will be contentious. And yet the appropriate freedom of secular enquiry in its own province has long been a concern of the Church. It is inspired by a consciousness of the unity of truth, of truth not contradicting truth, and of their ultimate harmony not in a proposition but in a person, Jesus Christ. Hence a Catholic place of learning should dedicate 'itself to every path of knowledge, aware of being preceded by him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"<sup>21</sup>.

Without this harmony, secular subjects are a threat to themselves. St John Henry Newman experienced from his early to mid-academic career the shift of a university curriculum from a classical basis to one in which emergent disciplines, like Geology, Botany, Political Economy, History, and so forth, came gradually to the fore. On the one hand, he powerfully defended the freedom of a discipline to be pursued in accord with methods proper to it. On the other hand, he saw the danger of the student being so deeply cut into the groove of their subject specialism as to fall into the presumption that its principles had mastery over other subjects. We live still in the

shadow of this presumption and of its reactionary sibling – the “post-truth” mentality.

### *The Catholic Harmony between Faith and Reason*

Faith and reason are not in conflict. Rather, they exist in a relation of reciprocal support<sup>22</sup>. They are ‘like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth’<sup>23</sup>. Insofar as a subject is a pursuit of knowledge, it is a pursuit of truth, with God as its source<sup>24</sup>. A Catholic school, then, must defend the true pursuit of knowledge, and respect ‘the autonomy and the methods proper to human knowledge’<sup>25</sup>. Hence it is that individual subjects ‘must be taught according to their own particular methods’<sup>26</sup>. However, the success of a method, say, of empirical science, in many areas of enquiry does not accredit it for studying every area of enquiry. A ‘scientific mentality’ is proper in its own domain but ‘incapable of explaining everything’<sup>27</sup>. ‘Students learn many things about the human person by studying science; but science has nothing to say about mystery’, in particular, the mystery of the person<sup>28</sup>.

### **iii. The Catholic school is of the person, for the person and by the person<sup>29</sup>.**

#### *The Catholic School of the Person*

*The Catholic school is of the person* because education is interpersonal, inherently social<sup>30</sup>. The first community into which a person is born, the family, receives directly from the Creator the mission and right to educate its children<sup>31</sup>. In the Christian family, at once the domestic Church and the school of virtues, we find the catechizing, educating and forming community as a type of the Catholic school. Even though an institution, a Catholic school should be like a home<sup>32</sup>. After the manner of St Paul VI, young people struggle in institutions, but flourish in families. And if they flourish in Catholic institutions, it is because these are families.

The capacity of persons for relationship and dialogue is not incidental to a Catholic understanding of education. The very general pedagogical remarks found in Church documents often serve to remind educators of the intrinsic personal character of their calling. They remind them that a student is a free and active agent in their own formation<sup>33</sup> and that this formation must necessarily be through interpersonal relations<sup>34</sup>. In this, dialogue, discovery, personal interest and rapport<sup>35</sup> all have a place – as do the questions of the young, especially religious questions<sup>36</sup>.

Parents are the first educators of their children<sup>37</sup>. Prior to any claim of the state, they have the right and duty to choose the form of schooling they think best for their children. Schools are ‘the principal assistance to parents in fulfilling the function of education’<sup>38</sup>. The common good requires that there be a plurality of school provision,

including Catholic school provision, in the state. This also entails a profound respect for freedom of conscience, in the absence of which the person and the personal will.

How is it that a Catholic school can at once respect freedom of conscience and yet insist on proclaiming the Gospel? Isn't the latter to indoctrinate, to attempt to force consciences? In answer, 'to proclaim or to offer is not to impose', since 'the latter suggests a moral violence' which is forbidden by the Gospel and Church law<sup>39</sup>. To receive truth as truth, one needs freedom of conscience, for the 'truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power'<sup>40</sup>.

An atmosphere for the transaction of truth is necessarily one of *dialogue*. For dialogue, too, is a mark of the personal and relational. Catholic schools and universities are particular places for dialogue between the Church and contemporary culture<sup>41</sup>. Ancient philosophy pioneered the dialogical way as a means by which deeper values could be disinterred, both for persons and in culture. In the free and respectful dialogical atmosphere of the classroom, the student is helped to lay greater hold on those truths religious, metaphysical and moral which give anchorage. This in turn promotes in them an assimilation of culture whereby they may become its critics rather than its creatures, opening up themselves to life as it is and creating an attitude to life as it should be<sup>42</sup>.

More generally, the Church in dialogue with culture questions the notion of a purely pragmatic education<sup>43</sup>. According to this notion education should be *useful*, that it should equip a person for life and livelihood. On the one hand, an education opposed to a person's participation in life and culture is no education at all. On the other hand, an education defined solely by external outcome is impoverished. To ask what education is for is inevitably to ask what humans and life are for. Some would say that these are leading questions. Yet while we educate, we answer them in some way. No education is value free, even one proposed as merely preparatory for life. In education, one cannot avoid either implicitly or explicitly a reference to a definite concept of humankind and life<sup>44</sup>. All education proposes an anthropology and answers, however implicitly, the question of the good for humankind. This unavoidably opens upon transcendent questions of meaning and purpose.

We are used to a strident secular mindset that see no fundamental question beyond the power of 'science' or 'reason' to answer. Yet there is perhaps a more pervasive secularism which, under the guise of pluralism, shies away from deeper questions on the grounds that these can only be divisive in a multicultural society. As an anxiety not to offend hardens to incuriosity about fundamental questions, human life becomes increasingly the unexamined life. As for the person so for society, to deny dialogue about the deeper

things is to be the more exposed to the danger of always reacting 'to passing, superficial ideas and to lose sight of the much deeper needs of the contemporary world'<sup>45</sup>.

The more this mindset prevails the more education tends to be viewed under a pragmatic aspect, alleging no overarching purpose but utility. But, as hinted above, the 'useful' education presumes *useful for what?* To answer 'life and livelihood' is not to inoculate against shifting or sinister purpose. There is always the danger that an education under the goal of pragmatism or efficiency will simply default to the spirit of the age in the matter of larger questions. While the useful is not always good, the good is always useful<sup>46</sup>. In Catholic understanding, then, a true education's usefulness stems from its goodness, not its goodness from its usefulness. Education comprehends training, but not vice versa. We can train for all manner of purposes, but we educate for the human person, the only creature on earth God willed 'willed for its own sake'<sup>47</sup>.

#### *The Catholic School for the Person*

***The Catholic school is for the person*** since it is a 'a place of integral formation by means of a systematic and critical assimilation of culture'<sup>48</sup>. The 'promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school'<sup>49</sup>. To become fully human, fully alive is to become a person for God and for others. Catholic education aims at the integral formation of the person in view of their final end, which sets their earthly journey against the horizon of eternity. This formation is often called 'integral' with its connotations of wholeness, of harmonising gifts and energies under a purpose truly human. It entails 'the gradual development of every capability of every student' – intellectual, social, spiritual, personal, moral – and includes 'the Christian religious dimension and recognizes the help of grace'<sup>50</sup>. The same Spirit who is at work to harmonize *within* is also at work to harmonise *among*: there are 'many different gifts, but it is always the same Spirit'<sup>51</sup>.

So the Catholic school is not about facilitating a collection of individual self-development projects rather about prospering a goal of each becoming fully human, fully alive in a life of service. Hence it is that the integral formation of the person may also contribute to the common good of societies, peoples and nations<sup>52</sup>. The supreme 'Yes' of God in Christ for the salvation of humankind<sup>53</sup> is also a 'Yes' for their authentic development. It is Christ through whom the Father bestows on the world all that is good<sup>54</sup>. Given this, the absence of the Catholic school would be 'a great loss for civilisation and for the natural and supernatural destiny' of humankind<sup>55</sup>.

Those who hold that education should be 'faith-free' would no doubt feel the same in the matter of human development. And yet, down the centuries, philosophies of human emancipation bound to the

temporal either fall short or betray the human spirit and the ever 'new thirst for transcendent reality and for the divine'<sup>56</sup>. Philosophies which exclude God inevitably evict the person<sup>57</sup>. And where students are helped 'to see beyond the limited horizon of human reality', 'God cannot be the Great Absent One or the unwelcome intruder'<sup>58</sup>. It is in hearts oriented to eternity and in eyes lifted to the horizon that the energy and vision for authentic human development have been found.

### *The Catholic School by the Person*

***The Catholic school is by the person*** in that the person of Christ, the 'unique Teacher', the 'only Teacher'<sup>59</sup> is at its centre. Inspired by and bearing witness to him, the teacher helps students understand the mystery of God revealed in Christ and of themselves as persons<sup>60</sup>. It takes the human to form the human. Time and again, the Church proclaims the irreplaceability of the teacher at the heart of education. They are essential to a school's success. 'Perfect schools are the result not so much of good methods as of good teachers'<sup>61</sup>. 'Let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and program'<sup>62</sup>. The achievement of the Christian formation of pupils of the Catholic school 'depends not so much on subject matter or methodology as on the people who work there'<sup>63</sup>.

No good teacher tries to teach without a profound sense of their students, what influences them, what moves and inspires, what unsettles and confuses. In the great diversity of situations of young people across the world, the Church as Teacher discerns some common characteristics. There is 'radical instability' born from a desire to be freed from a 'narrow universe' which values only economic and technological progress. There is the 'poverty of human relationships', worry and uncertainty about the world and its problems, a temptation to close in on oneself and seek release by escaping into the illusory and addictive. On the other hand, there is a generosity, enthusiasm and desire to join with others in common cause – all of which have potential to be turned to enduring good<sup>64</sup>. There is also the ongoing cultural influence of 'atheism under the guise of secularism', mooted an 'excessively autonomous view'<sup>65</sup> of the human subject in a world entirely self-explanatory without reference to God<sup>66</sup>. Christians, too, 'have been shaped by the climate of secularism and ethical relativism'<sup>67</sup>, which works to separate the Gospel from culture<sup>68</sup>.

Catholic schools are for the poor. The 'new poverty of those who have lost all sense of meaning in life and lack any type of inspiring ideal, those to whom no values are proposed and who do not know the beauty of faith'<sup>69</sup> calls for a new apostolate. A youth to whom no values are proposed will get them from somewhere. In such a world

as ours, the young can all too easily fall for projects of false happiness marketed in tall tag lines but with terms and conditions in tiny letters. And yet it is the latter that all too soon apply to blight young hopes and further 'the subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism'<sup>70</sup> that mark our age. For these young people, it will most often not be arguments, but a person, a wise and good teacher, who will help point them beyond futile byways to the truth of a better way.

As well as by example and guidance, the teacher's personal skill and sensitivity mean that their teaching activity can unite elements seemingly separate (or even at odds) into a satisfying whole. In personal engagements of teachers and students are found the true resolutions to paradoxes thrown up by distinctions on paper. In this way, 'there is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom'<sup>71</sup>. Moreover, the essential partnership between home, school and parish is mediated through personal relationships. And in the midst of all this, there is the person of Christ, 'in whom all human values find their fulfillment and unity'<sup>72</sup>. Christ in whom 'all things hold together'<sup>73</sup>.

### 3. Catholic Religious Education

#### i. Religious education is religious.

Religious education is 'religious' in at least three ways: a) in the teaching intent to serve the missionary mandate of the school, b) in the nature of its subject matter and c) in its being the bond of the curriculum, the 'core of the core curriculum'.

*The Religious Educator helping Faith seek Understanding*

a) The Catholic school should be 'a catechetical community in which the content and the life of faith is shared'<sup>74</sup>. The Catholic school is thus a community of faith, and religious education is where that faith seeks understanding. Only within this sense of a Catholic school as a catechetical community can religious education be construed as 'primarily educational'<sup>75</sup>. The subject matter of Catholic religious education (see below) would be taught very differently in an atmosphere of agnosticism. In an atmosphere of faith, religious education is, as it were, the engine room of the missionary dynamic of the Catholic school as a whole. Catholic schools exist for the sake of Catholic religious education<sup>76</sup>. Hence Catholic school leaders, leaders of religious education and, insofar as it is possible, religious education teachers should be committed Catholics.

*The Irreplaceable Contribution of the Religious Educator*

What has been said about the essential personal contribution of teachers to the success of the Catholic school applies especially in

the teaching of religious education. From the earliest years onward, the young look to teachers for guidance and good example in the practice of faith. A lived familiarity with Catholic liturgy, life, sacraments and prayer enables the teacher to convey, often unawares, something of the dignity, hope, joy and truth of the lifelong journey in faith.

And for students of all ages, whether younger or older, the religion teacher's personal engagement with them helps to unify in living practice what seems divergent on paper. For example, in religious education, how is it that a teaching experience might be catechetical for one, an evangelical moment for another, a drawing into good will for a third, and a reflective prompt for a fourth<sup>77</sup>? It is because of the teacher's gift and skill developed by personal sensitivity and pedagogical expertise.

#### *The Religious Educator and the Critique of Culture*

Later on, as a young person more earnestly seeks meaning and identity, the religious education classroom becomes a privileged place for the teacher and students to challenge erroneous, but deeply embedded, cultural mindsets. One such is the pervasive belief that unless we can 'prove' something, it cannot be known or considered true. This is the baleful legacy of arguments about knowledge and truth centuries before us. Since 'the conclusions of one generation are the truths of the next'<sup>78</sup>, a person may default to a provability standard which convinces on paper but is useless for life. And rather than the 'converging and convincing arguments'<sup>79</sup> which establish with certainty the truth of God's existence, a student, taught by culture, may presume that God's existence should be testable by natural science.

Incidentally, whether 'religious' or not, almost none of the behaviour we consider rational admits this latter standard. In ordinary life, many judgments we hold valid, convictions we hold certain, beliefs we hold true are not the upshot of scientific scrutiny nor testable by it. 'Life is for action ... to act you must assume, and that assumption is faith'<sup>80</sup>. We go out to the world upon a vision, discern meaning in it, draw on deep moral sources, enter relationship, join in common cause, act from a general framework about how things are and what is worth pursuing. What is rational is vastly greater than what is scientific (which is but a small subset). We may recognise what we cannot depict, understand more than we can explain, believe more than we can prove and know more than we can say<sup>81</sup>. To expect all our truths to resolve to some logical or empirical standard is to privilege clarity over truth, paper proof over lived certitude.

#### *The Subject Matter of Catholic Religious Education*

**b) The subject matter of religious education in a Catholic school is 'the comprehensive and systematic study of the mystery of God,**

of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the teachings of his Church, the central beliefs that Catholics hold, the basis for them and the relationship between faith and life<sup>82</sup>. Religious education is closely related to, but distinct from, catechesis, which presumes faith and aims at ‘maturity: spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic<sup>83</sup> and whose locus is the home and, especially, the parish<sup>84</sup>. A Catholic school ‘uses the same elements of the Gospel message’ but ‘tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity, and of how Christians are trying to live their lives’<sup>85</sup>. Religious education and catechesis are reciprocally supportive.

#### *Presenting a Christian Anthropology and Worldview*

As has been said above, any education must presume an anthropology, of what it is to be human. Religious education must present a Christian anthropology. ‘At the heart of Catholic education lies the Christian vision of the human person. This vision is expressed and explored in religious education<sup>86</sup>. This vision of the human person recognizes one ‘created in “the image and likeness” of God; elevated by God to the dignity of a child of God; unfaithful to God in original sin, but redeemed by Christ; a temple of the Holy Spirit; a member of the Church; destined to eternal life’<sup>87</sup>. This Christian anthropology is one with a worldview of all reality as from the creative activity of God, of sin in its power to limit and numb human beings, and of the all-conquering dynamism for human and cosmic renewal in the resurrection of Christ. ‘A world-view not incorporating these three elements cannot be authentically Christian’<sup>88</sup>.

#### *Religious Education the Bond of the Curriculum*

c) Religious education is ‘religious’ in the sense of being the bond of the curriculum, ‘the core of the core curriculum’<sup>89</sup>. Though root meanings of words are not always instructive, ‘religious’ in the sense of ‘binding together’ works aptly for religious education under this aspect.

For some, ‘religious’ alongside ‘education’ or ‘Catholic’ alongside ‘school’, suggest things prior, namely ‘education’ or ‘school’, which were then given a certain character, namely, ‘religious’ or ‘Catholic’. The ordering of history subverts the ordering of words. It wasn’t that the school (as we often know it) was invented and then someone had an idea to establish Catholic schools. Over long centuries, it was an atmosphere of Christian faith expressed in liturgy, catechesis and life which slowly gave rise to a familiar western model of a school and university. Similarly, lots of curriculum subjects weren’t ‘invented’ to which religious education was added. It was a Christian religious vision of reality which in time proved fertile ground for the emergence of the different disciplines, each pursuing the truth under some aspect. It is in faithful and engaging religious education that a

student can gradually appreciate other subjects as separate disciplines but find their rationale and unity within a Catholic religious vision of reality. 'Therefore, religious education is never simply one subject among many, but the foundation of the entire educational process'<sup>90</sup>.

## ii. Religious education is education.

Just as 'a school ... which does not reproduce the characteristic features of a school cannot be a Catholic school'<sup>91</sup>, so too religious education cannot be such unless it has the character of education. Both for religious education and for other subjects, the 'light of Christian faith stimulates a desire to know the universe as God's creation ... a love for the truth that will not be satisfied with superficiality in knowledge or judgment ... a critical sense which examines statements rather than accepting them blindly. It impels the mind to learn with careful order and precise methods, and to work with a sense of responsibility'<sup>92</sup>. In any school, Catholic or not, the Church considers 'human knowledge as a truth to be discovered'. To the extent that a teacher teaches 'knowingly and without restraint seeks the truth ... they are to that extent Christian'<sup>93</sup>.

In this matter, we must guard against what loosely can be called a 'head or heart' heresy. That is, when we deal with religion, we must opt for 'heart', when we deal with, for example, physics, we must opt for 'head'. This, again, is the effect of contrasting errors, centuries old, seeping into contemporary attitudes. The ancients knew better. All human beings by nature desire to know<sup>94</sup>. The affective dimension of 'desire' and the cognitive dimension of 'to know' are always united in the living enquirer, no matter whether they study religion or physics.

### *The Hierarchy of Truths*

'Systematic' is one of the more frequent descriptions in the Church's understanding of religious education<sup>95</sup>. It implies relations and dependencies. It calls on the intellect and memory. It admits of careful curriculum planning with sensitivity to age and ability. It involves knowledge and rigour in the development of what is sometimes called 'religious literacy'.

The truths of the faith are related to one another in a hierarchy of truths. This is not a hierarchy in which one truth is 'less true' and another 'more true'. Rather it is that one truth in its scope (for example, the truth of the last things) is true because it rests on truths more fundamental<sup>96</sup>. The 'most fundamental and essential teaching in the "hierarchy of truths of the faith"'<sup>97</sup> is the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the light that enlightens all other mysteries of faith<sup>98</sup>. (This is to convey a theological hierarchy, not to suggest a pedagogical order). In an atmosphere of faith, learning is not

separated from formation<sup>99</sup>, knowing about Christ and knowing him. In this way, 'education ... is not to impart lifeless knowledge; but to work together with God in the salvation of souls'<sup>100</sup>.

#### *Religious Education, the Communication of Culture and World Faiths*

Every school has 'as its aim the critical communication of human culture and the total formation of the individual'. In this, religious education has a vital role to play in the heart of a Catholic school as 'it works towards this goal guided by its Christian vision of reality'<sup>101</sup>. Here again, the person of the religious education teacher is essential in that dialogue whereby students are helped to integrate faith, culture and living. Important in this is the engagement with other religious traditions and with students who belong to these. As Benedict XVI said to students gathered from across the land: 'it is only right that respect and friendship for members of other religious traditions should be among the virtues learned in a Catholic school'<sup>102</sup>. A respect for ways of thinking and of living<sup>103</sup> from non-Christian religious traditions **requires** some knowledge of these traditions. This is not at cost or compromise to the Gospel. A friendship arising from recognition of a common desire for truth about the deep questions of human life has the power to affirm Catholic truth that God's saving design extends to all peoples. What is true and holy in other religious traditions has its source in the Truth which enlightens all<sup>104</sup>.

## 4. Conclusion

The vocation of teacher is a high calling in the Church – 'God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers ...'<sup>105</sup>. In any school, the engagement of the teacher with the young at their critical formative period should evoke a sense of privilege and awe. For 'the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirits of human beings'<sup>106</sup>. 'No one forgets a good teacher' has the truth of a proverb.

'In a secularized world, characterised by the fragmentation of knowledge and moral confusion'<sup>107</sup>, the task of the educator, and even more so of the religious educator, is not easy. Just as the followers of Christ must be ready to offer a reason for the hope that is within them<sup>108</sup>, so too the 'Catholic school must be able to speak for itself effectively and convincingly'<sup>109</sup>. Problems, challenges, difficulties there have ever been, not only for teachers and schools, but for the whole Church. The Church's only encyclical on education, *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929), was promulgated in the shadow of a nascent fascism which would usurp the Church's right as educator and impose a nationalistic schooling.

And yet to leave things in lament would be to leave things too soon. The Gospel has ever prospered in adversity. The Church's response to challenges in education is her response to any challenge: 'her

judgements on reality are always a diagnosis of the need for mission<sup>110</sup>. In the 'complex, vast and urgent' task of education, Catholic educators must keep in mind 'the formation of the human person in its totality, particularly as regards the religious and spiritual dimension'<sup>111</sup>. 'A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above this, should help all its students to become saints'<sup>112</sup>.

In this may Catholic educators call on Mary, who taught her Son, the divine Word, the first syllables of human speech. May she who is the Seat of Wisdom, who pondered in her heart the mysteries of her Son<sup>113</sup>, intercede for us in our difficulties. May teachers in Catholic schools receive the hope and joy of the Spirit, who gives them in their efforts an unearthly stamina.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Acts 17:28.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn 1:14.

<sup>3</sup> RD, 25.

<sup>4</sup> RD, 51.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. RD, 25.

<sup>6</sup> This was the sort of distinction that St John Henry Newman made between the notional and the real.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. GE, 3; DIM, 80.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mt 5:14.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. RD, 34; 2009 Circular on RE, 9.

<sup>10</sup> RD, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. CSTTM, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 2009 Circular on RE, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. DIM, 26; CS, 85.

<sup>14</sup> Ps 87:7.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. DIM, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. CS, 55.

<sup>17</sup> GE, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. RD, 67.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. CS, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Canon Law, 806.

<sup>21</sup> ECE, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> St John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Introduction.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. CS, 41.

<sup>25</sup> RD, 31.

<sup>26</sup> CS, 38.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. GDC, 20; GS, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. RD, 76.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. CSTTM, 9; RD, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. DIM, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. DIM, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. RD, 28.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. RD, 105, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. CSTTM, 18; CS, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. RD, 72, 74.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. RD, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. CS, 73.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Canon Law 796 §1.

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- <sup>39</sup> Cf. RD, 6.
- <sup>40</sup> DH, 1.
- <sup>41</sup> Cf. CS, 10, 15, 17.
- <sup>42</sup> Cf. CS, 31.
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. CSTTM, 10.
- <sup>44</sup> Cf. CSTTM, 10; CS, 29.
- <sup>45</sup> CS, 30.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. St John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 164.
- <sup>47</sup> GS, 24.
- <sup>48</sup> CS, 26.
- <sup>49</sup> CSTTM, 9; cf. St John Paul II, Address to the I National Meeting of the Catholic School in Italy, in "L'Osservatore Romano," 24 November 1991, p. 4.
- <sup>50</sup> RD, 99.
- <sup>51</sup> 1 Cor 12:4.
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. GE, 2,3; GDC, 18; CSTTM, 5.
- <sup>53</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 1:20.
- <sup>54</sup> Cf. Eucharistic Prayer III.
- <sup>55</sup> Cf. CS, 15.
- <sup>56</sup> GDC, 22; cf. ECE, 18, 43; CCE 2009 Circular Letter on Religious Education, 10.
- <sup>57</sup> Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *The Church on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*: 'The eclipse of God [is] thus the eclipse, indeed the destruction, of all that is human'.
- <sup>58</sup> RD, 51.
- <sup>59</sup> GE, 8; CS, 43.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. RD, 76.
- <sup>61</sup> DIM, 88.
- <sup>62</sup> GE, 8.
- <sup>63</sup> CS, 43.
- <sup>64</sup> Cf. RD, 10-17.
- <sup>65</sup> Cf. GDC, 22.
- <sup>66</sup> Cf. EN, 55; LC, 41; GS, 19.
- <sup>67</sup> Cf. GDC, 25; TMA, 36b; GS, 19c.
- <sup>68</sup> Cf. RD, 15; EN, 20.
- <sup>69</sup> CSTTM, 15.
- <sup>70</sup> CSTTM, 1.
- <sup>71</sup> CSTTM, 14.
- <sup>72</sup> CSTTM, 9.
- <sup>73</sup> Col 1:17; Cf. Col 3:11; 1 Cor 15:28.
- <sup>74</sup> Cf. RECS, 3 (and cf. GDC, nn. 218, 259).
- <sup>75</sup> RECS, 7.
- <sup>76</sup> Cf. St John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 69.
- <sup>77</sup> Cf. RECS 4: 'We recognise that in a Catholic school the witness of its life is, for some, a first announcing of the Gospel, or even preparation for that announcement.'
- <sup>78</sup> GA, 229.
- <sup>79</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 31.
- <sup>80</sup> St John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 95.
- <sup>81</sup> Cf. St John Henry Newman, *Oxford University Sermons*, 258-9: 'All men reason, for to reason is nothing more than to gain truth from former truth, without the intervention of sense ... but all men do not reflect upon their own reasonings, much less reflect truly and accurately, so as to do justice to their own meaning; but only in proportion to their abilities and attainments. In other words, all men have a reason, but not all men can give a reason'.
- <sup>82</sup> RECS, 5; cf. RD, 65.
- <sup>83</sup> RD, 69;
- <sup>84</sup> Cf. CS, 51.
- <sup>85</sup> RD, 69.

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- <sup>86</sup> RECS, 4.
- <sup>87</sup> RD, 84.
- <sup>88</sup> GDC, 16.
- <sup>89</sup> St John Paul II, Ad Limina address to English Bishops, 1992 ...
- <sup>90</sup> RECS, 4.
- <sup>91</sup> CS, 25.
- <sup>92</sup> RD, 51.
- <sup>93</sup> CS, 41.
- <sup>94</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book I.
- <sup>95</sup> Cf. CS, 49, 50; RD, 65, 73, 82-95; GDC, 73; cf. CCE 2009 Circular Letter on Religious Education, 18; RECS, 5, 7.
- <sup>96</sup> Cf. GDC, 114.
- <sup>97</sup> CCC, 234; cf. GCD, 43.
- <sup>98</sup> Cf. GDC, 114.
- <sup>99</sup> Cf. CSTTM, 14.
- <sup>100</sup> St John Henry Newman, *Sermons 1824-1843*, vol V, 373.
- <sup>101</sup> CS, 36.
- <sup>102</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Pupils, Sports Arena of St Mary's, 17 September 2010.
- <sup>103</sup> Cf. CS, 57, 85.
- <sup>104</sup> Cf. Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, 2.
- <sup>105</sup> 1 Cor 12:28.
- <sup>106</sup> CSTTM, 19.
- <sup>107</sup> CCE, 2009 Circular Letter on Religious Education, 20.
- <sup>108</sup> Cf. 1 Peter 3:15.
- <sup>109</sup> CSTTM, 3.
- <sup>110</sup> GDC, 32; cf. CSTTM, 3.
- <sup>111</sup> CCE, 2009 Circular Letter on Religious Education, 4.
- <sup>112</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Pupils, Sports Arena of St Mary's, Twickenham, 17 September 2010.
- <sup>113</sup> Cf. Luke 2:19, 51.