



TAKING THE HIGH GROUND VIRTUES AND VALUES IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Catholic schools rightly see the development of values and virtues as central to their work in education. This paper aims to bring together some ideas which may be useful to trustees, principals and teachers as they focus on values and virtues.

The school is “a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole person.” It aims for “the acquisition of values and the discovery of truth, ... the bringing forth of the power of Christian virtue by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living.” (*The Catholic School*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education).

Catholic schools share the development of virtues and values with other types of schools, and so it is important to consider what is specific to Catholic schools in this area.

1.1 DEFINITIONS

Values are internalised sets of beliefs or principles of behaviour. Not all values are consonant with moral or ethical behaviour, even though they may be strongly upheld. Nor do people necessarily act in accordance with the values they hold.

Virtues are qualities of moral goodness or excellence. Many virtues can be derived from universally accepted principles. To be effective, they need to be nurtured and practised so that individuals live by them, not merely believe in them.

1.2 CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND VIRTUES AND VALUES

For Catholic schools the following are all crucial activities:

- the analysis of the school’s actual current values,
- the development of those values that the school wishes to live by, and
- the development of programmes to support the growth in virtue of each individual.

In Catholic schools work on virtues is rightly combined with the school’s central role of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Where State schools might seek to develop persons of virtue, Catholic schools seek to transform a person of virtue into a person of Christ. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, #34).

Therefore, Catholic schools need to promote both human and spiritual values and virtues, so that all in the school community can see that their ultimate purpose is to develop the divine potentialities within themselves.

1.3 Catholic schools as “Schools of Holiness” (Pope John Paul II)

Catholic schools need to be obviously and unashamedly Catholic

- knowing what they stand for
- living what they stand for

“within an atmosphere enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity.”

(Vatican II, *Education* Section 8)

Catholic schools are authentic if they live by the vision of the Gospel. This vision finds expression in the way the school organises itself and in its encouragement of students to become active citizens contributing to the common good of society.

2.0 PRACTICAL STEPS SCHOOLS CAN TAKE

- Re-examine the school's philosophy and ethos – its aspirations. Revisit the school's basic definition of its culture, (its Mission Statement) and the Catholic values that arise from this definition. (See A Definition of Catholic School Culture below.)
- Identify the values and virtues of the school's particular tradition or charism and promote these. Wherever possible, link these explicitly to Scripture or to the words or actions of the Saint or founder identified as central to the school
- Identify (through discussions, focus groups and questionnaires) the values that staff, students and parents think the school actually operates by and what changes might need to be made to bring the school into line with its aspirations. These two exercises provide formative development for everyone in the school community. (Parents as first educators of their children need to be involved with defining the values the school is to live by.)
- Make use of the richness of the Biblical and Church tradition, so that the community can be inspired and sustained by the living heritage of Catholicism. (See Drawing on our Catholic Tradition below.)
- Ensure that values, virtues and aspirations are on display, regularly mentioned in school newsletters, printed in the school's promotional material, referred to frequently in discussion, and that all staff, students and (as far as possible) parents can state what these values are, and know what sort of behaviour is expected as a result.
- Design courses that take up the moral questions encountered by students – many resources are readily available.
- Offer students of all ages programmes that centre on self-understanding, philosophical enquiry, meditation and positive self-criticism or personal challenge, as well as an exploration of the spiritual dimension of their lives.
- Offer programmes that enable students to get in touch with the roots of our Western heritage and the indigenous values of our nation, through an exploration of the great ideas of a range of civilisations and religions. This will provide a rich context for specifically Christian and Catholic values to be more deeply understood.
- Provide regular reflective time and discussion for staff and students, and for parents where practicable, on what the values and virtues mean in practice, and what further changes are needed in school culture to embed them further.
- Provide students (and staff) with opportunities for solitude, silence and meditation.
- Set up practical learning experiences which enable students to practise values and virtues, including a Service Charter or other service programmes, where these do not already exist. Community outreach programmes are a traditional part of service learning. Programmes such as peer mediation, 'cool schools' and other recent developments also enable students to make values and virtues their own in a practical way.
- Encourage students to volunteer, in order to build up in them the habits of service.
- Find ways to remind teachers that values are caught not taught, that students need to feel that their teachers care deeply about them, and that their teachers model a way of behaviour worth emulating. Students are seeking an inspiring vision of life mediated to them by loving individuals.

- Build into the heart of the school attitudes of respect for every student, teacher and parent, making space for individual freedom and individual conscience, and for forgiveness and reconciliation. These attitudes are crucial to the love that every member of the community strives to put into practice. Restorative justice programmes are part of this behaviour.
- Tell stories that communicate Gospel values, and encourage listeners to wonder about the implications of these stories.
- Use words that promote and support the idealism of the young, and that challenge them to higher levels of commitment to virtues and to service. Talk about the value and meaning of human existence, as it is illuminated in the person of Jesus Christ.

3.0 A DEFINITION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL CULTURE

3.1 Core Values in Catholic Schooling

Culture is ‘the way we do things around here.’ Catholic school culture is a “way of life rooted in Christ, a Gospel-based creed and code, and a Catholic vision that provides inspiration and identity, is shaped over time, and is passed from one generation to the next through devices that capture and stimulate the Catholic imagination such as symbols and traditions.”

The school needs to be a community whose members hold values in common and are closely linked and interact with each other both in and out of the school setting.

Certain core values and beliefs, as a configuration, distinguish Catholicism from other Christian denominations: sacramentality, mediation and communion.

Catholics acknowledge God’s presence in the world and therefore view the world and life as *sacrament*, believing they can encounter God in the world through the *mediated* presence of Christ and His Church. The Catholic experience of God also occurs within *community*, a community that is *universal* and *inclusive*, which includes the *communion of saints*. Catholics believe that God reveals Himself through Scripture as well as through historical *tradition*. Believing in the interplay of *faith and reason*, Catholics imagine God through analogy and metaphor and experience religion through the five senses. Catholics believe in basic *human goodness*; therefore, each individual has a *personhood* deserving of dignity and respect. Because of this, Catholics believe that all people have a social responsibility to protect all human life by working for *justice*. ... These core beliefs and values should permeate all Catholic institutions, including Catholic schools. ... The bottom line is the degree to which the core values are universally accepted and set a definitive framework for educational decision making.

(Cook, T.J., *Architects of Catholic Culture*, pp 16-21, Washington DC, NCEA, 2001)

3.2 GOSPEL VALUES ANIMATING CATHOLIC SCHOOL CULTURE

- Faith:
Truth, fidelity, tradition, doctrine, prayer, revelation, reading scripture
- Service:
Commitment, caring, concern, involvement, empathy, almsgiving
- Courage:
Sacrifice, self-denial, fortitude, restraint, discipline, patience, temperance
- Justice:

Courage, risk, human dignity, stewardship, prophecy, interdependence, peace-seeking, equal distribution of goods, fortitude, empathy

- Hope:
Optimism, confidence, joy, realism, providence, trust, prophecy
- Love:
Oriented towards God - reverence, worship, submission, prayer; oriented towards self - self-esteem, prudence, temperance, creativity; oriented towards others - care, concern, respect, acceptance
- Reconciliation:
Forgiveness, mercy, compassion, humility, conflict resolution, working to eliminate evil, love of enemy
- Community:
Personal dignity, belonging, equality, fellowship, trust, care

(Reck, C, 'Vision and Values', quoted in *Architects of Catholic Culture*, p19, Washington DC, NCEA 1983)

4.0 DRAWING ON THE RICHNESS OF OUR CATHOLIC TRADITION

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Part 3, Article 7, p 443-451) is an invaluable reference on Virtues. It provides a very worthwhile staff reflection or basis for discussion. It includes the following points:

The *Catechism* defines a **virtue** as “an habitual and firm disposition to do good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. ... ‘The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.’ (St Gregory of Nyssa)”

- The **Four Cardinal Virtues** (i.e. the pivotal human virtues):
Prudence, justice, fortitude (courage) and temperance. (cf Wisdom 8:7)
- The **Three Theological Virtues** (which enable human beings to participate in the divine nature, cf 2. Peter 1:4):
Faith, Hope, Charity.
- The **Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit** (these sustain the moral life of Christians):
Wisdom, understanding, counsel or right judgment, fortitude or courage, knowledge, piety or reverence, fear of the Lord or wonder and awe. (cf Isaiah 11:1-2).
- The **Twelve Fruits of the Spirit** (“perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory”):
Charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity. (cf Galatians 5:22-23)
- **The Beatitudes**: In Part 3 Article 2 (p 426 ff) the *Catechism* also reminds us of the role of the Beatitudes, (Matthew 5, 3-12) which show us the love of Christ, and the actions and attitudes which should characterise of Christian living.

“Happy are the poor in spirit: theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy are the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage.
Happy are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.
Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied.
Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.

Happy are the pure in heart: they shall see God.

Happy are the peacemakers: they shall be called the children of God.

Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.”

- **The Corporal Works of Mercy:** (cf Matthew 25: 31-46):

- To feed the hungry

- To shelter the homeless

- To clothe the naked

- To visit the sick and imprisoned

- To bury the dead.

- **The Spiritual Works of Mercy:**

- To teach the ignorant

- To counsel the doubtful

- To convert the sinner

- To bear wrongs patiently

- To forgive enemies

- To comfort the sorrowful

- To pray for the living and the dead.

5.0 SOME THOUGHTS FROM CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL WRITERS

Barry Dwyer (1993) called for Catholic schools to further strengthen their foundational activities of evangelisation and explicit and deep respect for the individual and individualised learning, and to become

- more reflective – recognising the need for ongoing evaluation and review
- more generative – focusing on growth and development
- more communal – celebrating growth and development, an more prophetic – proclaiming the gospel clearly in an often unfriendly culture

A focus on values and virtues is central to growth in this way.

In the same vein, McLaughlin stressed that school personnel can never settle for a superficial understanding of the faith nor be content with their own spiritual development, for the life of faith is a journey undertaken daily. He stresses that ongoing faith formation is the best assurance the Church can have that educators are fully prepared to integrate their own life of faith into the daily discipline of the school. The life of faith is inseparable from a focus on growth in virtue, which is faith in action.

“The interrelationship between intellectual development, religious faith, and personal growth is central to the Catholic philosophy of education.” (Quillinan, Jim, *Catholic School Studies* Oct 2002)

“The great contribution that Catholic educators can make to the national conversation on schooling is to seek to balance the growing utilitarian emphasis with constant reminders of the potential of schooling to enhance the growth of the individual, to ennoble the human spirit, to build a compassionate community and to revitalise the culture.” (Barry Dwyer, writing within the Australian context, but equally applicable to New Zealand.)

The proper focus of Catholic schooling is the formation of each unique, individual human being – education is, in Catholic tradition, essentially a moral endeavour, not merely an intellectual one.

6.0 ELEVEN PRINCIPLES OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

When considering the school's work to promote values and virtues the principles of character education can provide a very useful framework:

1. Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.
2. "Character" must be comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behaviour.
3. Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life.
4. The school must be a caring community.
5. To develop character, students need opportunities for moral action.
6. Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them succeed.
7. Character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation.
8. The school staff must become a learning and moral community in which all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.
9. Character education requires moral leadership from both staff and students.
10. The school must recruit parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort.
11. Evaluation of character education should assess the charter of the school, how the staff members function as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

7.0 WORTHWHILE RESOURCES

This is not a comprehensive list of resources – it simply draws attention to some items that schools may wish to be reminded of.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, St Pauls, Homebush NSW, English translation 1994

Cook, T. J., *Architects of Catholic Culture*, National Catholic Educational Association, Washington DC, 2001. This book is particularly useful. It costs US\$18, and can be ordered online at www.ncea.org (On-line Store)

Jacobs, R.M., *The Grammar of Catholic Schooling*, National Catholic Educational Association, Washington DC, 2001

Christopher Notes (copies available from NZCEO):

Gifts of the Spirit, Gifts from the Soul

Seven Deadly Sins or One Good Life

Heart and Soul: the Spiritual Works of Mercy

Contacts:

The Living Values programme no longer has major funding, however the material is still available. Lyn Birch, the former DRS of St Dominic's College, Henderson, Auckland, and now a lecturer at the Catholic Institute of Theology, Auckland, was responsible for very successful work using this programme at St Dominic's.

The Virtues Project runs training seminars regularly for teachers. Information can be obtained from www.virtustrust.org.nz, or email Beth Lew at virtues@paradise.net.nz

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