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Mission Statement

- To seek to articulate the vision of Catholic education.
- To identify, explore and promote ways in which this vision can be lived in Catholic schools.
- To empower teachers with a renewed and revitalised sense of the vocational nature of teaching.
- To aid student and recently qualified teachers to understand and embrace the fundamental spirituality of their lived work and mission.
- To help promote the school as an integral and intrinsic part of the Church and wider community.
- To celebrate and share the lived experiences in schools as realisations and practical expressions of the Gospel values of justice, service, understanding and outreach.

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EDITOR’S WELCOME

The Good News of Christmas

The matter of location for the birth of Jesus is an important point in St Luke’s Gospel. He was not presenting extra details to make his story more poignant or sentimental. He really wants us to know that Jesus was not born in an inn. An inn is a place for travellers, for people who are passing through. Such people do not plan to stay long. The fact that there is no place for Jesus in the inn refers to a verse in the Book of Jeremiah (14:8): ‘O hope of Israel, its saviour in time of trouble, why should you be like a stranger in the land, like a traveller turning aside for the night?’ It is a prayer that God stay with the people of Israel, that divine care be present for them in time of need. Jesus is not born in the inn because he is not ‘a stranger in the land … a traveller turning aside for the night.’ He really is Emmanuel, ‘God with Us.’ There was no place for Mary and Joseph in the inn because an inn is not an appropriate place for the birth of Jesus, the Incarnate Word. The Lord is not passing through. He has come among us to remain with us. He is not a travelling stranger, but a native of our world, and he will not move on. He has a permanent interest in us and is here to stay. Jesus is placed in a manger designed to feed hay to cattle: he is nourishment, strength and meaning - anticipating the later gift of the Eucharist - our sure hope. He is thus ‘good news of great joy to all the people’.

In this edition:
John Shortt reminds us that good teaching and learning are thoroughly relational, they are about promoting connectedness, shalom. Roisín Coll’s wide experience of working in Scottish schools has confirmed her belief that teachers are exhausted under the burden of so many pressing demands, prompting her to offer advice on how teachers can nourish their spiritual wellbeing. Bronagh Starrs explains the growing recognition of psychological complexity in children and the transformative potential inherent in good relationships and rich contact between students and teachers. Jonathan Tiernan, with an eye to the future leadership of Catholic education, stresses the need to provide channels and experiences to form the next generations of school principals as strong academic, administrative and spiritual leaders. Michael Leonard Hahn explains why Catholic education does not simply aim to teach about God, but also to foster a knowledge of God, one which is both experiential and sacramental. Diarmuid Pepper underlines the importance of sleep, especially for teenagers, and provocatively advocates a later start to the school day. Chloe McDonald reports on how one school, through its eco-mission, is taking to heart Pope Francis’ call for a greater commitment to care for our common home. Brothers Shea and Cormac Haughey share something of the excitement and joy that they experienced last August when they attended the Papal Mass in Dublin’s Phoenix Park. Bríadin Ní Fhlanagáin, writing in Irish, offers an appraisal of InGrá Dé 6. Seán Skeffington reviews a recent study of the controversial Austrian paediatrician, Hans Asperger, and Niall McVeigh critiques a volume of essays on Catholic education. Paschal Scallon sets a seasonal tone as he reflects on the blessings which the Christmas message renews in our hearts. Finally, a Christmas theme of welcome to the stranger is beautifully encapsulated in Co. Down poet, Cathal O’Byrne’s (1876-1957) poem, Christmas Wayfarers.

Niall Coll
Palmer goes on to say, ‘With one remarkable image she said it all. Bad teachers distance themselves from the subject they are teaching … and from their students. Good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life. Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness.’ (1998, p. 11) This connectedness, this joining in the fabric of life, is a matter of what I call knowing (and teaching and learning) of the third kind.

A first kind of knowing is knowing that something is the case. I know that the square root of 25 is plus or minus 5, that water has its maximum density at 4 degrees Celsius and that Kiev is the capital of Ukraine. A second kind of knowing is knowing how to do something, the knowing of skills. I know how to walk, swim, ride a bike, drive a car. Knowing how is different from knowing that although some factual knowing may be involved. I may know how to drive a car without knowing that the clutch is the device that transfers rotational power from the engine of a car to the wheels. Knowing of the third kind is relational knowing. This is knowing followed not by ‘that …’ nor by ‘how …’ but by the direct object of a person, place or thing. It involves knowing that and knowing how but it cannot be reduced to either of them or to a combination of them. I may know a lot of facts about a person but that doesn’t mean that I know her. If, on the other hand, I claimed to know her and couldn’t recount any facts about her, you would rightly doubt that I know her. It is a matter of relationship, of connectedness with the person, place or thing.

Xhosa people of Southern Africa have the word ubuntu for human connectedness. It is usually translated as ‘I am because we are’ and says that not one of us can be human all by ourselves. The English poet John Donne said, ‘No man is an island’ and that anyone’s death diminishes us so we know in our hearts that, when the funeral bell tolls, it tolls for us. Our ubuntu connectedness with one another is very important to our teaching and learning le chéile. It is one aspect of our human-ness but the scriptures give us an even bigger picture of what it is to be human, what we are made for, what we are called to. It is hinted at by Palmer when he says that good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life. Our connectedness is not only with one another as human beings, it is also with the physical environment that we study together in the whole school curriculum. I am because we are. The Creation story tells us that God saw it was not good that we be alone. But earlier in the story it is said that we were formed from the dust of the ground. I am a physical being made of the same stuff as the rest of Creation. I am because the physical world is! We are not only connected with one another, we are connected with the whole physical environment in all the manifold aspects studied by us as we teach and learn together.

However, the Creation story did not even start there. It started with the Genesis 1:1 words ‘in the beginning God …’. Our relationship with God is the primary relationship in which we live and move and have our being. I am because God is. I am because the physical world is. I am because we are. Our connectedness is with one another and it is very important to our teaching and learning le chéile.
another and with the wonderful Creation about us and ultimately with our Lord.

We often say that the aim of education is the promotion of the common good. This is true but it is limited to our human-to-human relationality. It is focused on just one of three kinds of connectedness of which the Creation story speaks. There is a biblical idea that predates Aristotle and provides us with a wider and deeper aim for our teaching and learning. It is the idea of shalom.

‘Shalom’ is the Hebrew word for ‘peace’ but our English word ‘peace’ in ordinary language does not encompass the full meaning of ‘shalom’. Old Testament scholars tell us that it signifies wholeness, completeness, integrity, soundness, community, connectedness, righteousness, justice and well-being. There’s that word ‘connectedness’ again … and other words that matter to us as those who teach!

Philosopher of education Nicholas Wolterstorff writes, ‘Shalom is enjoyment in one’s relationships. … To dwell in shalom is to enjoy living before God, to enjoy living in one’s physical surroundings, to enjoy living with one’s fellows, to enjoy life with oneself.’ (2002, p. 101)

Shalom

Shalom is a relational matter – it has to do with our relationships with God, with self, with others and with the wonderful world he has created. This is how it was meant to be. However, we fell into sin with catastrophic effects on our relationships with God, with Creation and with one another. But Jesus Christ came to the rescue and shalom is restored through his death and resurrection! It is both now and not yet. It will be fully restored in the new heavens and new earth. We and those with whom we teach and learn all live and move and have our being in these relationships. For some these relationships will be characterised by shalom, for others they may not be so and there may be many whom we teach who do not acknowledge their relationship with God.

We learn and teach in relation with others. We learn and teach in relation with the physical world. This brings the whole curriculum into play. We aren’t merely learning and teaching subjects, we are opening windows on aspects of God’s world and going through them with those we teach so that we and they may relate better to that wonderful world. There is the mathematical window, the biological window, the psychological window, the linguistic window and all the other windows of the disciplines that we teach.

We are not only serving God when we teach religion or ethics – we are serving him when we teach physics, chemistry and biology, when we teach mathematics and art, when we teach history and geography, when we teach music and ceramics, when we teach anything about God’s wonderful world and the people he has made. He is the Great Mathematician; he is the Great Artist; he is the Great Musician; he is the Great Potter; he is the Great Biologist! We are made in his image and the children and young people whom we teach are made in his image.

It is all about connectedness - being connected with those we teach, being connected with the world about which we teach and helping them to be connected with it, and being connected with our Lord. Teaching for shalom is promoting that connectedness.

References

to Catholic education. Time is precious for our teachers and so I realised they would appreciate something easily applicable.

I decided it was important to go back to basics.

We are celebrating Catholic education, but what does this actually mean? What is Catholic education? In answering this we first need to consider Catholic education within the context of the mission of the Catholic Church, that is the continuation of the salvific work of Jesus Christ (i.e. proclaiming salvation/evangelization) Our Church is concerned with all aspects of humanity and that includes education which is, of course, a basic human right. It is generally agreed that the aim of education is to achieve the full potential of every person and contribute to the good of society. So what is different or distinctive about Catholic education? Well, its aim is that Jesus Christ is at the centre of all that is said and done in order to achieve the full potential of every person and contribute to the good of society. The Church is quite clear about its expectation of the Catholic school stating that ‘… everything that happens in Catholic schools should lead to an encounter with the living Christ’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014).

Stephen McKinney (2011) gives us a helpful way to unpack this further as we try to understand the purpose and mission of the Catholic school. He explains that all schools are concerned with epistemology and ontology. Epistemology is concerned with ‘knowledge, the knower and how to know things’ (p.140). Ontology is concerned with what it is to be human and human interaction with the world. For the Catholic school, then, Jesus Christ is at the heart of epistemology and ontology.

Such a claim throws the Catholic teacher into the spotlight. The Church is very clear about its expectations of its teachers. For example they should be credible witnesses to their faith; be outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life; and help young people realise the beauty of faith in Jesus Christ.

This job description of the Catholic teacher is daunting. Often, the reality is that our lives and how we live them can result in feelings of failure or unworthiness, leading to doubt or low self-esteem. What then can we do, to try and nourish our spiritual wellbeing and keep focused on our responsibility to position Christ at the centre of our work? At the conference in West Lothian, I offered three simple suggestions:

**The task of the ears!** Pope Francis calls on all Catholic teachers to use our ears properly, to ensure that we sit down and listen to young people. When we really listen we hear what others (pupils/colleagues) have to say and we show respect for those speaking. We demonstrate that we consider the person speaking to be of worth, recognising that they are made in the image and likeness of God. Thus listening or the task of the ears is a simple way of keeping Christ at the centre of our work because we really are taking a step in the right direction to ‘loving our neighbour’.

**Be challenged!** The second simple way of keeping Christ at the centre of what we do is to challenge ourselves. It is good to be reminded that the Gospels aren’t therapy! They are there to challenge us and when we are challenged we discover a bigger humanity. Challenge, even when associated with the smallest task, has the power to transform our humanity. Therefore, we can listen to what the gospels are saying and be challenged by their message. Challenge and spiritual wellbeing work hand in hand.

**Love!** This word is not used enough in educational discourse. Thankfully, within the Catholic schools’ context it is part of our DNA. We are all called to respond to Jesus’ command to ‘love one another as I have loved you’ (John 13.34). For some Catholic teachers, where love is experienced on a daily basis through positive and affectionate family relationships, such expressions of love for pupils can come naturally. For others, particularly those going through difficult times or relationships, this can prove to be more testing. We are aware that, for many children, the school or classroom is the only real experience of love they receive during their childhood. Catholic teachers are able to keep Christ at the centre of our work by showing the children in our care that we love them, as he does, even in the most difficult of circumstances. Loving them includes respecting them, listening to them and encouraging them to reach their full potential. But love works both ways. If our pupils experience and know our love, more often than not that love will be reciprocated and, as Catholic teachers, we have permission from Christ the unique teacher to bask in this! Let our pupils’ love for us nourish and support us since this love testifies that we are not only effective teachers, but excellent Catholic teachers. It is important to recognise that none of this is new, even if we think it is! St Paul tells us we are already in Christ (Galatians 3:26-28) and so suggestions such as these simply encourage us to become more in tune with the presence of Christ enabling us to reposition him at the centre of our lives.

At the conference, I ended by inviting the teachers to spend just two minutes gazing into the eyes of the Icon of Jesus Our Teacher (above). The beautiful icon was written (icons are written, not drawn or painted) for the centenary year. It is busy, depicting saints and people associated with the history of Scottish Catholic education but what is significant is that every person depicted on the icon points to the centre where, of course, we find Christ.

Being a Catholic teacher in 2018 is a challenge but we are not alone. Jesus the unique teacher and our ultimate role model accompanies us every step of the way. Let’s make a commitment to get back in tune with him.

It is with gratitude to God and with some pride that we mark the enormous contribution made by Catholic education over the past hundred years to the life of our Church and to Scotland as a whole.

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**References**


Human Encounter in Education

Bronagh Starrs is Programme Director for the MSc Adolescent Psychotherapy in Dublin Counselling & Therapy Centre in partnership with the University of Northampton. Her latest book, Adolescent Psychotherapy: A Radical Relational Approach (Routledge, London), has just been published. She runs a private practice as a psychotherapist specialising in working with adolescents in Omagh, County Tyrone.

Several generations ago, the school environment was a compartmentalised space where children carried their books and a simple lunch to each day – and even maybe a clod or two of turf for the fire. The world they inhabited was repressed and authoritarian; school was a place for learning lessons and where the expression of challenging emotional experience was not tolerated. Some children were anxious, neglected, depressed and abused, however expression of this was not part of their behavioural repertoire, such were the times they lived in.

The recent dismantling of holding frameworks such as family and Church, the vast and deeply concerning psychological experiment of cyberspace, and greater cultural permission to express feelings, has created a radically redefined lifespace for young people. Today’s children show up at the school gates with all manner of psychological complexity and require more from the adults within the school community than a grounding in numeracy and literacy. Educators, in turn, are faced with the challenge of understanding how this adversity affects the children’s interpersonal, emotional and academic growth.

Childhood distress comes in many forms and common sources include physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect; witnessing acts of domestic violence; living with addicted parents; experiencing poverty, deprivation or homelessness; and being humiliated and isolated because of race, religion or sexual identity. Frequently, their distress involves caregivers and trusted adults, and occurs when they are learning to regulate emotion. Fear becomes a chronic condition and stress responses produce brain changes in the developing child which in turn lead to academic struggles, attention difficulties, absenteeism, interpersonal challenges and anxiety. Many children are ‘too scared to learn’ (Lacoe, 2016) and are unable to trust their environment and the people in it.

Each child is motivated by fundamental yearnings to inhabit a body which is healthy, able and safe; to have a sense of belonging with others who care for and appreciate him; and to experience himself and his world with benevolence.

If these yearnings are met, we can expect him to have a sense of wellbeing, security and comfort: he has faith in himself and in his world. Many children have experienced compromise to their yearnings for integrity and if the insult is severe, the result is a traumatised, dysregulated child. Employing techniques and teaching specific skills to encourage self-regulation are important in creating a trauma-sensitive culture within a school, however, mindfulness is only helpful if accompanied by compassion. We heal fundamentally through relationship and the single most important gift a school community can offer to each child is the creation of a space where people are safe. Rich contact is the opposite of trauma and when we deeply encounter another human being, even momentarily, there is healing and the possibility of belonging. So many of the children in your care do not know what it feels like to light up a room, to be tucked in at night by a loving parent, to feel known to another human being and to feel like they have a voice. The impact of these experiences are lacking and they do not know what it feels like to be a loved person. Each school’s Catholic ethos challenges its community to refrain from defining a child by their traumas, limitations and behaviours and to create imprints of new possibilities, stirring the imagination towards the potential of what might be. Translation of Catholic ethos into human lived encounter is to look beyond the child’s role as ‘student’ and see a human being who deserves to have a life worth living. This ethos calls us, not to make a difference, but to be the difference in a child’s life: ‘There is an ordinariness to the relationship, the dialogue, the learning, that conceals the power of the enterprise. When we look back over our own developmental journeys… and identify what we received from the adult world that helped us get through (or what was missing that would have made a difference), we nearly always discover something simple and largely unintentional, but, by the same token, something profoundly human and reassuring. Some senior member of the tribe stopped and took us in, got interested in us, and thereby got us interested in ourselves, in ways we had not quite expected. Someone sought us out, found us wandering and alone, took us by the hand (however momentarily), and led us to the light.’ (McConville, 1995)

Educators witness the transformative potential of their contact with children every day and neuroscience research now demonstrates that traumatised brains can be rewired through interpersonal integrity (Van der Kolk, 2015), which means rich, safe, personal, non-shaming contact. It is
within the human-to-human encounter that the most devastating hurt can be felt. It is also through this encounter that we experience the most profound repair and joy. Children are highly attuned to adult-world receptivity. Traumatised children are hyper-attuned to it. Bidding welcome to a child entrusted to your care is a tremendously hopeful endeavour. Of course, this gift of rich contact is one which can be extended to the adults within the school environment, not only the children. The impact on educators of supporting distressed students should not be underestimated. Compassion fatigue on top of other professional and personal challenges can take their toll and it is important to practice mindfulness and self-care strategies, to take time for prayerful reflection and to know when to seek support. Rich contact and belonging within the school community is vital for the adults, because if they do not experience welcome, nurture and respect, it will be virtually impossible to extend this to the children in their care. Overworked and overburdened as educators are, you cannot afford to be cynical and despairing. Our future depends on you.

References

Focus on School Leadership central to future of Catholic Schools

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Principals in Catholic schools have a much more challenging job than those in most schools. Most principals strive to lead schools that aim to be excellent educational institutions by accepted standards of the profession. Catholic school principals do this too, with great success in most cases. However, they must also nourish and celebrate a distinctive mission to be a Catholic school, inspired and guided by a great spiritual tradition.

The ability of our Catholic school leaders to continue to achieve both sides of this leadership equation will be a key determinant in the long-term ability of our schools to remain intentionally and authentically Catholic. This is one of the biggest challenges that Catholic schools will face over the coming decades in continuing to be, as US academic John Dilulio has referred to them, sacred places serving a civic purpose.

This dual role that we expect of our Catholic school leaders, to be both the pastoral leader as well as the leader of teaching and learning, raises deeply important questions for all those who are invested in strengthening and sustaining Catholic schools. If we take a moment to reflect honestly, how would we answer the following two questions: i) Are we working hard enough to ensure that there is a sustainable pipeline of Catholic school leaders for our schools? ii) Are we preparing our current and aspiring school principals adequately to lead intentional Catholic schools? If the answer is ‘No’ to one of these questions we should be concerned. If the answer is ‘No’ to both of them then we should be ringing the alarm bell.

Succession planning is a vital component in any organisation, and failure to identify the next generation of committed and competent leaders can often have a detrimental effect on the overall mission and direction of an organisation. It could be argued that we have come through the first significant ‘succession’ phase in Catholic schools pretty well. This first phase can be identified as the transition from a long history of vowed religious and priests leading our schools to the first generation of lay leadership. As demographics change, and the growth of secularism continues, we must ensure that we continue to recruit leaders who are as committed to the spiritual character of their schools as they are to the school’s academic reputation. To enable this we must provide channels and experiences for this next generation of school leaders to be strong academic, administrative and spiritual leaders.

Preparing Catholic school principals to lead should be as intentional as the school culture we expect them to foster and promote. It should not be left to chance and it must be holistic. Holistic in the sense that it focuses not only on the management capacities that school principals require, but also on the unique gifts required to lead a school grounded in a specific faith tradition.

Archbishop Eamon Martin reminded us in 2016 address entitled Intentional Catholic Schools - Hubs of God’s Mercy, ‘how easy it is to pay lip-service to our Catholic ethos and to simply put on a good show when necessary. If our schools are to avoid this trap, and instead be vibrant centres of faith and reason the calibre and commitment of the next generation of school leaders will be the fulcrum on which the future of Catholic schools hinges.

Leading Catholic schools in modern...
Ireland is not an easy task. Archbishop Martin also recognises that ‘it is sometimes difficult in Ireland to be an intentional Catholic school. In recent years it has not been politically correct to speak too loudly about the Catholic ethos - some have labelled us exclusive, sectarian even’. Writing in the book Why Send Your Child to a Catholic School? (2014) Bishop Donal McKeown alluded to one of the challenges of leading a contemporary Catholic school while also pointing to where school leaders might draw encouragement, ‘In a rapidly changing world, Catholic education is faced with the need to reinvent itself for new environments. However, the many strengths of the Catholic school will continue to give encouragement to those who must lead that development.’ This changing world will require school leaders who are confident and competent in articulating the many strengths of a Catholic education and advocating on its behalf.

Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education

For the past twenty years the University of Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) Ireland has, in partnership with partners across the island, sought to identify, motivate, and develop leaders who are committed to revitalising the Catholic character of Irish primary and secondary schools in the 21st century. We believe that nothing is more important for the future of our Church than the quality of our schools, and nothing is more important for the quality of our schools than the formation of the next generation of school leaders. To address the need of schools for transformational school leaders ACE’s leadership programmes focus on three main domains: Instructional Leadership, Executive Management and School Culture. By focusing on these three areas school leaders develop the skills and knowledge necessary to increase academic achievement through data-informed, mission-driven instructional leadership, apply executive management skills to direct school operations, and cultivate a strong, positive, intentional Catholic school culture. Many leadership programmes focus heavily on the management tools needed to run a modern school, in which policies, procedures and directives occupy so much of a principal’s time. Some also seek to build the capacity of participants to lead more effectively teaching and learning in their schools. However a focus on strengthening and sustaining Catholic school culture is often the missing element in how we prepare school leaders. For those leading Catholic schools understanding how and why school culture contributes to forming an intentional Catholic school cannot be overlooked. School culture can often be seen as a woolly concept, and thus not open to rigorous attention. Contrary to this notion, our experience in ACE both in the United States and in Ireland is that if you provide school leaders with the concepts and skills required they, along with their staff, are capable of creating and sustaining a strong, positive, intentional school culture aligned with the mission, vision, beliefs, and values of their schools.

Our Catholic schools need people with energy, enthusiasm and tenacity to lead them. Jesus captured his disciples by teaching and living in a challenging and deeply compelling way. Our school leaders must be capable of forming schools inspired by this model, in which students encounter a learning community that is at once challenging and deeply compelling in its efforts to foster both faith and reason. Are we doing enough to cultivate the next generation of Catholic school leaders? Are we doing enough to support principals to lead intentional Catholic schools? We must ensure the answer to both questions is always yes!

A Sacramental Understanding of Catholic Education

Michael Leonard Hahn, OSB, a Benedictine monk of Saint John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, USA, taught in the Department of Theology at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University from 2010 until 2014. He is currently a doctoral candidate in theology and education at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

Most teachers today would not claim that the Catholic Church has the answer to every question, and for good reason. The church itself rejected the image of ‘having all the answers’ as a form of triumphalism during the Second Vatican Council. And yet, the contemporary approach to faith education in many classrooms still suggests that God’s word can be contained in a neatly-packed box of truth, which can be known through question and answer, study, and memorisation alone.

This essay begins with the premise that our understanding of how God communicates with us affects how we communicate about God. In other words, our approach to faith education (for better or worse) likely reflects our understanding of how God’s word is revealed.

From propositional to sacramental

In Models of Revelation, Avery Dulles, SJ helpfully describes the various ways that Christians have explained revelation, or God’s self-disclosure. The dominant model of revelation prior to Vatican II, for instance, was ‘revelation as doctrine,’ or what I will refer to as a propositional understanding of revelation. According to this model, revelation consists of objective truths in the form of propositional statements. Thus, knowledge about God was understood to come through comprehension and assent to doctrines as they were proposed by...
the bishops. It is important to note that this model emphasised knowledge about God - a point that I will return to later in the essay. An instructive example of a propositional understanding of revelation is seen in Pope Pius XII’s encyclical letter *Humani Generis* (1950), which described revelation as a body of truths, the ‘deposit of faith,’ entrusted only to the bishops for their authoritative interpretation. Accordingly, faith education before Vatican II privileged the study and memorisation of this body of truths. In the United States, for example, faith education primarily involved teachers and students reciting questions and answers from the *Baltimore Catechism*. For every question, there was an answer!

In contrast, Vatican II articulated a sacramental understanding of revelation in *Dei Verbum*, the council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, intended to invite believers into a deeper relationship with God. It is worth recalling, as several eminent theologians including Yves Congar have observed, that the bishops of the Second Vatican Council decided in 1962 to reject the preparatory draft on divine revelation *De fontibus*. This initial draft reflected a propositional understanding of revelation as described above. The rejection of the preparatory draft clearly signaled that Vatican II desired to move in a new direction. But how to articulate a renewed understanding of revelation proved to be one of the more challenging questions that the council considered. Only in the fourth and final session of Vatican II did Pope Paul VI promulgate *Dei Verbum* (1965).

The turn toward a sacramental understanding of revelation in *Dei Verbum* is immediately evident in the relational account of God’s self-disclosure. Revelation begins, not through propositional statements, but with God’s active desire to be present and enter relationship with humanity (DV 2). The church is constituted by listening and responding to the word of God, which is entrusted not only to the bishops but to the whole church. Indeed, *Dei Verbum* will emphasise that all the faithful through their experience and study contribute to the ‘growth in understanding’ of God’s word (DV 8). And, *Dei Verbum* clarifies that the bishops, though responsible for authoritative interpretation, are not above the word of God but serves it (DV 10). As a young theologian, Joseph Ratzinger concluded, *Dei Verbum* presents a sacramental view of revelation that engages the whole church in both learning and teaching.

Several points of contrast between a propositional understanding of revelation and *Dei Verbum*’s sacramental understanding are identifiable. To begin, whereas a propositional understanding primarily emphasises intellectual comprehension, a sacramental view of revelation involves the whole person. God’s word is primarily directed to the human heart. The sacramental view does not deny an intellectual dimension, but revelation is not limited to only rational knowledge. It also includes the affective and experiential dimensions. Moreover, a sacramental view of revelation is fundamentally relational and participatory. In contrast to a propositional understanding, which tends to regard revealed truth as a static reality, a sacramental view is concerned with the ongoing dialogue of salvation. God not only continues to speak to humanity, but the church as a community of faith continues to grow in understanding of God’s word. Finally, a sacramental view of revelation requires humility, for God’s revealing activity in the world always surpasses our ability to comprehend. In other words, we never have all the answers!

If divine revelation is understood propositionally, then it follows that faith education occurs in the form of propositional statements. If, on the other hand, divine revelation is understood sacramentally as *Dei Verbum* teaches, then a corresponding educational approach is required. Gabriel Moran was one of the first scholars to recognise the need to reconsider traditional educational approaches in light of the renewed understanding of revelation in *Dei Verbum*. As ‘personal knowledge,’ Moran insists that revelation is not a collection of foreign concepts that the teacher must discover how to put inside the student. The more critical challenge is that teachers become familiar with their students, listen to their experiences, and appreciate their questions, for it is within the student that the understanding of revelation occurs.

‘Where is God present in your life?’

Ever since Vatican II, however, the concern has been raised that experiential and dialogical approaches to faith education do not adequately deliver the content of faith. As every experienced teacher realises, both content and method are essential, and it is futile to see them in competition, for even the best content still requires effective educational methods for stimulating the interest and engagement of students. Yet, this concern, what some have called the ‘crisis of catechesis,’ brings us back to the more foundational question of what it means to know God. Catholics who learned the faith during the years of the *Baltimore Catechism* still proudly recite that ‘God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in heaven.’ But even this memorised answer - for
it to reflect reality - invites a relational, experiential, and holistic approach to faith education.

The ultimate motive of faith education is not knowledge about God that can be studied, memorised, and recited, but rather knowledge of God - this is the difference between a propositional and a sacramental understanding of revelation. Asking students to recite the Apostles’ Creed, or lamenting the fact that they cannot, is an activity concerned with knowledge about God. Knowledge of God is fostered when students are invited to reflect on their experience of God’s salvation in their lives. A sacramental understanding of revelation challenges teachers to consider what questions they will ask rather than what they will say. ‘Where is God present in your life?’ is always a worthy question to begin faith education. Knowledge of God is not learned in isolation but in an authentic community of faith where every member has something to teach and something to learn about God’s word.

Every teacher brings into the classroom a set of presuppositions about the world, their students, and pedagogy. For Catholic educators, it is worth considering their belief about how God communicates with the world and whether their belief is fostering knowledge of God for their students. When we educate following a sacramental understanding of revelation, we educate toward comprehending the faith, of course, and also for experiencing the faith and living the faith.

References


Christmas renews God's Blessing

Paschal Scallon, CM is Provincial of the Irish Province of the Vincentian Community. A native of Co. Fermanagh, he is based in Dublin. In 2018 he completed a term as Chair of the Board of Management of Castleknock College in Dublin.

Joy and excitement are the typical experience of children as Christmas approaches. For many adults, teachers, of course included, Advent and Christmas are more akin to a long slow dose of paracetamol, designed to mask the symptoms of whatever makes us anxious and distressed.

In St Matthew’s gospel Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) with eight proclamations, in the light of which I would like to suggest that the antidote to anxiousness and fear is blessing. These eight blessings are called the Beatitudes and they establish the character of a Christian, a disciple, one who follows and learns from and lives by the example of the one whose birth we celebrate each Christmas. To live with a sense of such blessing is a transforming grace. If a person feels blessed – in any of the ways we feel we can be, in our families, in our pupils and students, in our friends and colleagues, in the opportunities given to us – then we will not easily succumb to a sense that we are isolated, exposed or vulnerable. We will not easily become afraid.

What is, in every sense of the word, wonderful about the gospel generally is that Jesus blesses everybody even though some people reject him. Jesus blesses the poor in spite of their poverty. He blesses the persecuted and those who mourn because their need is obvious. In Jesus’ time, as in ours, poverty was seen as a judgement and an excuse to despise people who had nothing or were ill or disabled. Jesus would undo the fear such prejudice causes but in the teeth of the fear in us, that makes us look down on others so we can feel better about ourselves. Jesus blesses the merciful and the gentle because they are the ones who, like God, know the justice each person deserves. They also know the mind and heart of God, though, and are willing to mitigate or forego altogether the ‘satisfaction’ we often imagine justice requires when people suffer the consequences of their own folly or their malice.

Jesus blesses those who hunger and thirst for what is right. He blesses the peacemakers and calls them children of God because they have immersed themselves in the creative passion of God who is never indifferent to us or the world we live in. Advent and Christmas bring us to the one whose first thought is to bless us. In the biblical accounts of Christ’s birth we cannot deny that there is much bewilderment. There is compulsion in the orders of an imperial decree. There is Herod. There is a sense of obligation to God and to each other: in Mary and Joseph, in Zechariah and Elizabeth. There is the uncertainty of the various journeys to Bethlehem: Mary’s and Joseph’s, the shepherds’ and the Magis’. But, at the still heart of it is Christ, whose advent will not be postponed and which focuses everyone. Christ’s birth is the renewal of our blessing in God, a blessing – and a healing - that has always been ours and which has never been taken away, for all that we may fear it has. That’s the good news of Christmas and the teacher has a privileged position to share it anew.
Want Pupils to Perform Better? Let Them Sleep!

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It’s the foundation of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, but is so often overlooked and even derided in our increasingly fast-paced 21st Century life. Sleep is as the very core of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs for a reason: it is vital to our well-being, perhaps even more-so than food and shelter.

If you live until you’re 75, you will have spent 25 years of your life asleep. Sleep is vital for our performance and our well-being, yet we live in a society where people boast about pulling all-nighters or getting by on a few hours of sleep each night. No one would ever boast about neglecting Maslow’s other basic needs like food or water, so why do we do so over sleep?

If we want our children to succeed in school, we need to prioritise sleep, and here’s why. Scientists have been looking more into why we sleep, and one of the reasons is very intuitive: for restoration. A lot of genes and pathways that are associated with restoration that are turned off while we are awake, are turned on while we sleep.

But there is another reason why we sleep, one that is even more closely associated with improving pupil performance. Sustained research has shown that sleep aids memory retention. We acquire new knowledge in our waking hours but it is in our sleep, when we literally and figuratively have the time and space to do so, that our brain cements this knowledge in our long-term memory (Berry, 2015).

We are bombarded with information from all angles during our waking hours, and it is while we sleep that we make sense of all these pieces of new information and make them fit with our previous knowledge. So in short, if you can’t understand why information just won’t stick with your pupils, maybe it’s because they didn’t get the deep sleep and rest required to consolidate that information. In addition to this, numerous studies show that people with a good night’s sleep are up to three times better and faster at problem solving than are sleep deprived people. Sleep deprived pupils are then hit with a double penalty: unable to solve new problems and also unable to consolidate their knowledge.

Sleep deprivation is a problem for everyone, but particularly for teenagers. Adequate sleep makes you less prone to illness, and therefore pupils with adequate sleep are less likely to miss school. But the reason why sleep is such a big issue for teenagers is far greater than this. During your teenage years, your biological body clock drastically changes. Hormonal changes in the body during teenage years mean that the release of melatonin, the hormone which regulates sleep, kicks in at around 11pm, which is two hours later than for adults. In essence, the teenage body clock is off by two hours, so that waking a teenager at 7am is the equivalent of waking an adult at 5am (Typaldos and Glaze, 2017).

Over half of Irish pupils are sleep deprived, and perhaps this is because of school times. If a school day starts before 9am, it then becomes incredibly difficult for a teenager to possibly get the recommended amount of sleep needed to tackle new problems and to acquire and consolidate new information. If you’re a teenager who has to be in school before 9am, and it takes you an hour and a half to get from your bed to school, it is almost impossible to get the bare minimum 8 hours of sleep that you require, since you don’t release melatonin until around 11pm. (And remember, 8 hours isn’t the magic number, it’s the bare minimum). A recent study has shown that when schools start at 10am instead of 9am, pupil illness is halved and there are significant gains in pupil performance. So why don’t we simply make school start at 10 instead of 9? Because it would be a logistical nightmare for teachers and parents alike. Extra-curricular activities would go on later; if you are a working parent you would have to work around a new school time-table; bus schedules would need to be re-worked, etc.

But then we must ask ourselves: would this inconvenience to parents and teachers be worth it for the benefits to the pupils? I think it would. The physical and mental benefits are clear, but so too are the academic ones. Maths and reading scores have been found to go up 3% when school begins an hour later (Edwards, 2012); that’s the same benefit you get by reducing class sizes by a third.

For too long the school day has been based around what suits the adults, and it’s time to think about the pupils. Teenagers work on a different body clock to us, and it’s time to acknowledge this.

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Nurturing ecological thinking in our Catholic Schools

Chloe McDonald is from Co. Down and she graduated from St Mary’s University College in 2018 as a Geography specialist primary teacher

The influence which school ethos can have on pupils’ attitudes and values towards the environment and sustainability was the theme of my final year Capstone.

The school where I undertook my research was St Bronagh’s Primary School, Rostrevor, Co. Down. As I soon discovered, the attitudes and values of staff are highly significant in forming the ethos of care and responsibility towards the world around us. From the early years pupils learn to give thanks to God for their beautiful new school and its stunning setting, nestled as it is between the backdrop of the Mourne Mountains, Kilbroney Forest and Carlingford Lough.

The interdependence between humanity and creation is embedded in the ethos of St Bronagh’s, where pupils learn to value the gifts of creation. They are encouraged to see themselves as part of that creation and to contribute to the greater good of humanity by living more sustainably. As Pope Francis reminds all Catholic educators in *Laudato Si’* (2015): ‘the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development’. (para 13.)

My research brought me to a deeper understanding of what working together as a school family really means. I learnt that as Catholics we are called to care for everything around us, be it plant, animal, person and the world itself. The staff and students in St Bronagh’s approach their eco-mission as a faith-focused family, working collectively, caring for and about each other and making informed decisions about how to use the gifts of creation. Taking inspiration from Pope Francis’ insistence that things can change for the better and that we can help this happen, the pupils are championing sustainable thinking and living nurtured by school staff and supported and encouraged by the local community. The school’s hard work and dedication has led to its being recognised as an Ambassador Eco-school for the next three years. We all need to commit to environmental ethics and the contributions we can make to the greater good of the human family by thinking and living sustainably.
Pope Francis in Dublin

Shea Haughey (P6) and his brother Cormac (P3) are pupils at St Francis’ Primary School, Lurgan, Co. Armagh

On the 26th August we went with our parents to see Pope Francis in Dublin. Early that morning we started our journey from the Croke Park Hotel to the Phoenix Park with our stools and picnic in our rucksack walking with the young and the old along the way.

The Army and Gardaí helped and guided people to the Park. The walk was long and tiring but we met up with friends from Lurgan and other parts of Ireland including a Dublin woman called Louise. She was not travelling to see the Pope that day but she asked us and our mum to pray for her and her daughter Rebecca, who had died the month before.

The weather was changing all the time. One minute it rained and everyone stopped to put their rain gear on and a few steps later we stopped again to take it off in the heat of the sun. People had stopped along the paths in the Park to eat their picnics and fuel up for the final part of the journey. At this stage we could see the helicopters above us and wondered if we could catch sight of the Pope as he landed. We headed for Zone SF in the yellow section and as we approached it, we met one of the many volunteers who said to me and my brother, ‘Boys this is a day you will remember for the rest of your lives- when you are old men like me you will remember the day you saw Pope Francis’.

Just before we reached our zone a crowd gathered in front of us and mum and dad put us on their shoulders to see what was happening. Just then Pope Francis drove past in his pope mobile. He was waving and blowing kisses at all the people as he passed. When we arrived to our place and sat on our stools along with other families as Mass began, we saw Pope Francis on the big screen in front of us. The Pope blessed all the families living in Ireland and all those who travelled from across the world for the World Meeting of Families. He said Mass with the help of a translator and the volunteers came to give out Holy Communion in the field.

Before we left Zone SF we said a special prayer for Louise and Rebecca and then we made our way along the path to the train station to head home.

That volunteer was right - this was a day we will remember for the rest of our lives!

Léargas le Múinteoir Gaelscoile ar I nGrá Dé

Bridín Ní Fhlanagáin, Múinteoir Rang 6/7, Bunscoil Mhuire agus Phádraig, Dún Pádraig

Is múinteoir Rang 6/7 mé agus thosaigh mé ag úsáid an chlár nua I nGrá Dé le mo rangsa i mbíonna. Caithfidh mé a rá go bhfuil an-dúil agam sa chlár nua seo cheana féin agus tá na páistí i mo rangsa ag baint an-sult as. Mothaím go mór go bhfuil siad níos páirtí sa chlár ná mar a bhí siad le Beo Go Deo.

tá roinnt mhaithe nasc traschuraclaim trí an chlár agus tá seo iontach úsáideach dom agus mé ag iarraidh go leor ama a fháil chun gach ábhar a chlúdú i gceart le linn na seachtaine. Tá sé deacair, áfach, na háiseanna a úsáid ó leabhair an mhúinteora de bhri nach bhfuil an leabhar ar l峭 ar-líne. Is breá le mo rangsa na hamhráin seo arís eile, bheadh sé galánta id a bheith ag aon duine eile i mbáilte i nGaeilge. Mothaím gur rud aoidhinn é fosla do díoghlacht a bhíonn ar an t-ainm de chuid de bhuidhre; mar shampla, scéalta a scidire i nGaeilge srl. Agus sin rí impo, mothaím go bhfuil ach líon mar chuid de bhuidhre i nGaeilge.

páistí i mo rang a las coinneal agus iad faoi bhron mar gheall ar rudaí éagsúla agus chuidigh sé go mór leo. Ní thig liom an t-alt beag seo a scíobh gan tréacht a dhéanann ar a chur ar aghaidh. Fuair muid amach go bhfuil ceoltóirí iompinn i bhfeidhmiú mar a bhíonn i mbíonna.

Mar fhocal scoir, molaim an clár nua seo go mór. Níor chuaidh mé an leabhar go hiomlán go fóill, ach táidíodh ag baint an-sult as i nDún Pádraig!
**Book Reviews**

**Edith Sheffer (2008), Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna.**
New York: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 320, £20

The website of the National Autistic Society, (www.autism.org.uk) in introducing Asperger syndrome, tells us that the 'profile was developed as a concept and introduced to the world by psychiatrist Lorna Wing in the 1980s. The term derives from a 1944 study by Austrian paediatrician, Hans Asperger.'... People with Asperger syndrome are of average or above average intelligence. They don't have learning disabilities but they may have specific learning difficulties.' The website's introduction further notes Hans Asperger's 'problematic history.'

This book is a contribution to the debate on Asperger and his relationship with the Nazi regime. It is not just about Asperger but looks at the concept of eugenics and its importance in Nazi thinking.

Johan (Hans) Asperger (1906-1980) worked as a paediatrician in Vienna focusing largely on children with autism. Having trained as a doctor, Asperger began work in Vienna's Children's Hospital in 1931 rapidly rising to the role of director of the hospital's clinic. He began work at a time of political volatility which saw the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, the consolidation of power by Hitler and eventually the Anschluss in 1938.

It was against this background and the ongoing world war that Asperger published a postdoctoral study in 1944 detailing his work with children with autism who were deemed to be 'high functioning'. This did not reach a wider public until its posthumous publication in 1980. The British psychiatrist, Lorna Wing, whose daughter Susie had been diagnosed with autism and moderate learning difficulties, came to study Asperger's work. Lorna Wing was to become a major figure in raising the profile of autism. In 1981 she published a paper in which the term 'Asperger syndrome' was first used.

Asperger, who had never been a member of the Nazi party, had continued to work with children after the war and indeed claimed to have shielded and protected his young patients from the Nazi party suggesting this had brought him to the attention of the Gestapo. Sheffer has worked with material not previously available that points a rather different picture. In her meticulously researched and documented work she paints a picture of a doctor only too willing to work with the authorities in sending those children deemed to having 'lives not worthy of life' to the killing wards of Vienna's Am Spiegelgrund. While she acknowledges Asperger's support for children she points out that 'files reveal that Asperger participated in Vienna's killing system on multiple levels. He was close colleagues with leaders in Vienna's child euthanasia system and through his numerous positions in the Nazi state, sent dozens of children to Spiegelgrund children's institution, where children in Vienna were killed.'

This is not an easy book to read. Indeed it is quite disturbing. It is nevertheless an extremely important contribution to our understanding of darker times and darker happenings in Europe - not that hugely long ago.

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**Sean Whittle (ed) (2016)**

**Vatican II and New Thinking about Catholic Education: The impact and legacy of Gravissimum Educationis.**
London: Routledge, pp.264

This collection of 17 papers arises from a conference at Heythrop College (University of London) to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Vatican II's document on education, *Gravissimum Educationis*. The first chapter sees the well-known scholar Gerald Grace offer an informative summary of his much respected thought on Catholic education. Part 3 of the book is most interesting as the reader is drawn to reflect more theologically and philosophically on the meaning and goal of Catholic Education. Lieven Boeve challenges the reader to consider how difference and dialogue could contribute to ‘[the] project of identity formation’ in the quest to re-contextualise Catholic education for contemporary society. Sean Whittle’s reading of the theologian Karl Rahner to advocate a non-confessional Catholic school did not convince me. More promising I thought was the thinking of Irish theologian Dermot Lane, when he, like Boeve, called for a deeper grounding of Catholic education in theological anthropology. Lane’s perspective examines matters such as rationality, dialogue, embodiment, language and a recognition of the new order that exists in the world today.

This synergy found in this volume between the work of theologians and Catholic education is refreshing and informative. It offers perspectives which bring a greater clarity to the philosophy, theology and practice which ought to underpin Catholic schools. The last section, part 5, addresses the relationship that exists between Catholic education and tertiary education and John Sullivan’s essay here is particularly valuable. In conclusion, while this publication adds little new to our understanding of *Gravissimum Educationis, it does present compelling perspectives about the current and future role of Catholic education as it seeks to remain authentic to itself in service to humanity.

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Mary and Joseph leave for Bethlehem in the morning ... In Ireland, their journey is still marked by a Christmas Eve tradition of leaving a lighted candle in the window of the house on Christmas Eve to show that the Holy Family is welcome there. It’s a tradition captured in Cathal O’Byrne’s poem.

Christmas Wayfarers

Redden the hearth and sweep the floor,
let the candle-light through the pane be showing,
bring sweet well water, and leave the door loose on the hasp, for who would be knowing what poor soul, lonely and travelled far,
walking the world on the naked highway
might follow the gleam of the Candle-Star, and its welcome win in this lonesome byway.

So, for sake of two who went out from the city by bridle lanes down to Bethlehem
and who failed to find there, for love or pity, a kindly soul who would welcome them,
redden the hearth, let the comfort-sharing
glow of the peat-fire shine fair and bright,
and may a tired, poor Man and a Maiden wearing a mantle of blue, be our guests to-night.