

**THE «CATHOLICITY»
OF THE SCHOOL**

Educators, I feel, often make professions of faith to themselves. They develop a belief that there is a certain way to do things in order to bring about the best results. It is a conscience of craft which tells the teacher when he/she is doing mediocre work and when he/she is nearing perfection.

I am now ready to proclaim another profession of faith and this one concerns the nature of a Catholic school. I am speaking of the «Catholicity» of the school and not the more generic characteristics such as «religious» school, «Christian» school, or «nonpublic» school.

The Catholicity of a school must be rooted in three specific areas of school life this profession of faith tells me. (A) The Religion teachers and their influence on the school. (B) The Faculty and part that each one plays as a Catholic role model. (C) The School Environment, including school culture, activities, rituals, and facilities.

(A) RELIGION TEACHERS. «THE MISSIONARIES TO A TEENAGE CULTURE»

The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the schools are to be achieved. But the effectiveness of religious instruction is closely tied to the personal witness given by the teacher. This witness brings content to the lessons of life.

Students need to recognize authentic, human qualities in their teachers. They are teachers of

the faith; however, like Christ, they must also be teachers of what it means to be human. This includes culture, but it also includes such things as affection, judgment, patience in listening to others, prudence in response, and finally availability for personal meetings and conversations with students. (1)

**ACTION PLAN FOR
RELIGION TEACHERS**

(1) Meet as a department to discuss, but only after each has read, «The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School.» This paper, released for publication in June, 1988, was written by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education. This is a basic document for teachers of Religion. (See *endnote #1*).

(2) Build up a department resource center – tapes, books, current readings. I suggest that each teacher have a personal copy of : *Missionaries To A Teenage Culture*, and *Teaching Religion in Catholic Schools, Theory and Practice*, both by Marisa Crawford and Graham Rossiter. St. Mary's Press Publications.

(B) THE FACULTY – «THE CREATORS OF SPIRITUAL ENERGY»

It was a Hindu leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who believed that teachers educate themselves not to be separate from their students but to become one with them. He realized that the students' best textbook is the life of the teacher and that the

student will never learn to seek harmony, appreciate beauty, and desire spiritual energy unless he/she sees these exemplified in the lives of his/her teachers. (2)

ACTION PLAN FOR ALL TEACHERS

(1) Study the enclosed Opinionnaire and give it your best effort. These data will be helpful in planning the forms of support that may be needed by our faculties. We often speak of our teachers' responsibilities – now we are asking how the school may be of help to teachers to carry out these responsibilities.

(2) Review your own subject content. In checking to see if your lessons are really part of Gospel territory, note if you have an interdisciplinary dimension to your work, if multicultural concerns are addressed and if global issues are discussed, and if the students become familiar with Catholic social justice teachings.

* * *

(C) SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT – FACILITIES, RITUALS, ACTIVITIES

Airports have chapels. The US Congress begins its sessions with a prayer. Public schools have service clubs. Companies treat clientele cordially. All of these are nonsectarian in approach. Yet,

sometimes it is heard that prayer, service, respect, and a place to worship help to make our schools «Catholic.»

ACTION PLAN FOR ADMINISTRATORS AND CAMPUS MINISTER

(1) Students are evaluated daily. Teachers are evaluated regularly. Curriculum is evaluated periodically. When was the last time that the «periphery» was evaluated? Each school should re-view its activities, its school symbols, and the values that it celebrates to see if these fit into the Catholic environment. This could be interesting work, even if the only immediate outcome was that the words of the «Old Testament School Fight Song» are tempered. Maybe even the school's Yearbook will become a more authentic diary of life in a Catholic school!

Bro. Terence McLaughlin

(1) Congregation for Catholic Education Paper entitled: "*The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School.*" Origins, September 5, 1988.

(2) "*Contemporary Response Within Catholic Secondary Education,*" Fr. Henry Frascadore, Director of Education, Hartford, CN Diocese.