

**AND THESE SIGNS  
WILL ACCOMPANY  
THOSE WHO BELIEVE  
(3/3)**

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There are **six components** which comprise, shape, direct, and check the curriculum in a Catholic school. They are, in other words, what makes a Catholic school "Catholic," "academically excellent," and "institutionally viable." It is these "components" which a Catholic school promises. They are: maturity, the ability to think, religious consciousness, the ability to love, a commitment to service and justice, and the experience of leadership.

**First**, maturity at any level is essentially a kind of openness to and responsibility for one's physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and religious growth. The Catholic school commits itself to enabling a student to see himself/herself as a complex being whose maturity is not the result of passivity, but of activity. This activity is self-motivating, self-challenging, and self-stretching. The Catholic school, in its comprehensive understanding of curriculum, presents important opportunities for the student to explore his mind, body, feelings, imagination, and religious consciousness. If the unexamined life is not worth living, as Socrates would have us believe, then flexibility and openness become essential learning tools for the student's listening and reflective capabilities. He/She must listen to the challenges and risks which his/her body, mind, and feelings present in the face of a difficult and painful society; he/she must reflect upon experiences of success, failure, indecision, and inaction.

**Secondly**, the ability to think is an essential element of the Catholic school. O'Malley's indictment on this issue is an important one:

*Most kids I've taught believe they know how to think. They don't. They know how to mull; they know how to worry an idea; they know how to grab hold of a few words in the quest and b.s. about it -- fill the space with words for as long as you give them -- but they don't know how to think.... The data is only fodder. We want them to learn how to think logically, thoroughly, open-mindedly, accurately. (25)*

The ability to think, then, is pan-curricular and pan-departmental: gathering data, ordering data, synthesizing data,

drawing conclusions, and asking for a critique. It is, essentially, the way the mind works. *That's the way we come to understand things. It's the whole purpose of basic education. And it's the only thing we never tell the kids. (26)*

The "signs" or results of a student's ability to think will be found in his/her mastery of the fundamental skills of language and mathematics; the ability to summarize and synthesize material; clear, concise, and coherent oral and written expression; logic skills and critical thinking; and appreciation of cultural heritages and historical connections; an understanding of politics and the policy implication of the uses of science, technology, and capital; an understanding of his/her rights and responsibilities as a citizen of the United States; and an appreciation for the images of humanity as presented in literature, biography, and history. Whatever "mastery" will mean for an individual student in a Catholic school will be seen in the power of these "signs" to move the student on every level of his/her being in order to shape in him/her a more compassionate, just, and hopeful appreciation of the human community in its variety and potential.

**Thirdly**, the curriculum must include experiences which open a student to his/her religious consciousness. Clearly, a basic knowledge of the major doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church and an informed understanding of its vast history are important. The theology curriculum must also include a study of the Gospels, the person of Jesus Christ, the church's teachings about Jesus and the sacramental expression of his mission in and through the Church, familiarity with the Church's teachings on social justice, and exposure to non-Christian and non-Catholic religious traditions. While these are all formative and affirmative, the purpose of these seemingly academic exercises is that they have the power to help the student to choose or confirm his/her fundamental orientation toward God, and they prepare the way for his/her commitment to the Church.

The key, however, to the formation of one's religious consciousness is that it be integrated and validated. In its 1977 document, *The Catholic School*, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education stated that *The fundamental aim of teaching is the assimilation of objective values, and, when this is undertaken for an apostolic purpose, it does not stop at an integration of faith and culture but leads the pupil on to a personal integration of faith and life. (27)*

The Catholic school, then, can assist the work of the local parish by providing personal experiences of God and prayer through liturgies, communal penance services, days of recollection, retreats, "searches," Christian Life Communities, community service programs and projects, and meaningful programs in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation.

**Fourthly**, the ability to love is a component of the Catholic school curriculum because it establishes personal identity. Self-love is the singlemost difficult "lesson" of the curriculum because it moves the student beyond self-interest and self-centeredness in order that he/she might risk love at deeper levels of relationships. Fidelity and trust in friendship, (student-to-student, student-to-teacher), enables the student to accept and love himself/herself. This includes an ability to laugh at oneself and to go beyond personal prejudices and stereotyping. The ability to love is best learned and challenged in experiences of community. The Catholic school must provide such experiences and they are usually extra- or

co-curricular: athletic teams, intramurals, theatre, the school newspaper and yearbook, speech and debate, and student government, to name a few. The ability to love must also include discussion of and interaction with the opposite sex so that the student will be able to integrate his/her sexuality into his/her whole person. Finally, the ability to love includes service to others as the natural response of one who loves himself/herself and feels the need to express and share that love.

**Fifthly**, the Catholic school curriculum allows for the experience of service and justice. At any given time or place, the Catholic school finds itself in the midst of the wider, local community. Experiences must be created through which the student will begin to see his/her place as a responsible, competent, concerned member of the community. At this point in the curriculum, love is manifested in deeds, and the "signs" or results of faith are evident. The direct experiences of service and justice which the Catholic school provides must issue from the student's self-understanding of his/her own selfish attitudes and tendencies – the roots of injustice. Education to the imperatives of justice must begin with an understanding of the complexity of the structural roots of injustice in social institutions, attitudes, and customs. Suetow states that

*The desire to build a better world should involve a positive attitude to work, pupils siveing in it a means of developing themselves, of serving others, of building up the world, and of promoting justice and peace. This in turn involves making demands on leadership to assume responsibility for changing harmful structures as well as finding opportunities for channeling efforts into relieving those in need. (28)*

From this knowledge, direct experiences can be created so that the student will begin to realize that the values of society are sometimes in direct conflict with the demands of a just society and indeed with the Gospel. Such experiences of service and justice must include a facilitated reflection component so that students are better able to understand, deepen, and personalize what they have experienced.

**Sixth** and lastly, the Catholic school curriculum must include the experience of leadership. This component teaches the student initiative and the important difference between actions appropriately taken as an individual and the effectiveness of concerted group actions in affecting outcomes. In supervised extra- and co-curricular experiences as both a follower and a leader, the student will learn to seek

challenges and responsibilities; organize, direct, and supervise and effort as a concrete way of putting his/her ideas into effect; experience and reflect on failures and successes; negotiate his/her way through change and compromise; accept criticism; embrace humility; and ultimately realize that people are more important than any \*thing."

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What has been articulated in the preceding pages began with and is sustained by a belief that God's action in human history is a call to bring all men and women to faith in Christ Jesus. The Catholic educator, mindful of his/her own createdness in God's image, stands before God in the midst of a believing community of colleagues to proclaim the Gospel through the ministry of teaching. Catholic education is a partnership – however delicate – with the parents with whom we serve as co-educators in the Christian formation of their child. But it is only as believers that we are able to face our persistent and sometimes resistant charges.

If the sketches I have drawn of a Catholic school faculty and the graduate on graduation day seem too quixotic or look like caricatures, if they appear too idealistic, too unattainable, or even too rigid, then perhaps we need more faith. For it is faith that gives shape to our wildest dreams; faith which keeps our hope aflame; and faith that empowers and enables our love to be realized in "signs."

The apostles said to the Lord: "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea.' and it would obey you." [29]

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(25) William J. O'Malley, S.J., "Converting the Baptized," *America*, vol. 161, no. 8, (September 30, 1989), p 182.

(26) *Ibid.*, p. 182.

(27) Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, Boston, Massachusetts: The Daughters of Saint Paul, n.d.), #44, p. 19.

(28) Harold A. Suetow, *The Catholic School: Its Roots, Identity, and Future*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988), p. 84-85.

(29) Luke 17:5-6.