Chapter 7

What Makes a School Catholic?

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To educate, to teach, to help keep a school! These activities reflect one of the noblest vocations in life; there is none worthier than to be an educator. So why designate some education, or schools, or teachers — ‘Catholic’, and how might the term qualify what goes on as educating or schooling, or who one is as a teacher. Why the qualifier ‘Catholic’ at all?

An occasional attitude is that ‘it doesn’t really matter, except for the religion teachers . . . but not for us math, or literature, or social science, or . . . teachers.’ But this reductionism reflects some of the most debilitating myths of western education: that what people know should be divorced from who they are and how they live; that the disciplines of learning are not simply distinct but separate; that the environment and life of the school is not an aspect of its curriculum; that the ‘personhood’ of teachers does not impinge on how and what they teach; that all education, except what is clearly value laden (e.g., teaching religion), is value free. Beyond being untrue, such myths impede good education.

The qualifier ‘Catholic’ does mean something for ‘education’ so designated, but I first recognize some hazards in even inquiring about it. There are dangers of elitism, or worse still sectarianism. It could encourage a ‘witch hunt’ or make the qualifier into a ‘chapel call’. Though a Catholic educator is most likely someone whose ‘being’ is nurtured by the tradition of meaning and ethic that is Catholicism, there can be educators of other or even no religious persuasion who make fine ‘Catholic’ educators because they share the appropriate perspectives and commitments. And being Catholic can vary across many cultural expressions, theological positions and with different degrees and styles of participation in the institutional expression of Catholicism.

Though we must proceed with caution it seems imperative however for the integrity of Catholic education that we have some conceptual clarity about its qualifier. My proposal is a rather self evident one:

- that the distinctiveness of Catholic education is prompted by the distinctive characteristics of Catholicism itself, and these characteristics should be reflected in the whole curriculum of Catholic schools.

- By ‘curriculum’ I intend the content taught, the process of teaching, and the environment of the school.

It is difficult to specify what gives Catholicism its distinctive character. Richard P. McBrien, writes, ‘There is no one characteristic, apart from the Petrine doctrine, which sets the Catholic Church apart from all other churches (McBrien, 1980, p. 1172). Beyond its Petrine office, however, McBrien adds that there are ‘various characteristics of Catholicism. each of which . . . Catholicism shares with one or another Christian Church or tradition’ but that ‘a case can be made that nowhere else except in the Catholic Church are all of Catholicism’s
characteristics present in the precise \textit{configuration} in which they are found within Catholicism’ (ibid.). In other words, though Catholicism may share particular features to varying degrees with other Christian traditions, yet their combination and configuration within Catholicism constitutes its uniqueness — its ‘Catholicity’.

To see ourselves as others see us’ is always advisable with questions of identity. This makes the work of Langdon Gilkey particularly helpful here; a world renowned senior theologian, Gilkey is an American Baptist. From his Protestant perspective, he poses four distinguishing features in the unique ‘configuration’ of Catholicism:

- Catholicism’s commitment to \textit{tradition}; its sense of the reality, importance, and "weight" of tradition and history in the formation of this people and so of her religious truths, religious experience, and human wisdom,’
- Catholicism’s positive \textit{anthropology}; its realistic but optimistic understanding of people as capable of sin but essentially good, and its emphasis on the relational nature and communal grace of human existence
- Catholicism’s sense of \textit{sacramentality}; the conviction that God’s life and love — grace — comes to us and that we go to God through the created order and the everyday things of life.
- Catholicism’s commitment to \textit{rationality}, to the place of reason in life and in faith. Gilkey notes ‘throughout Catholic history a drive toward rationality, the insistence that the divine mystery manifest in tradition and sacramental presence be insofar as possible penetrated, defended, and explicated by the most acute rational reflection.’ (Gilkey, 1975, PP. 17—22)

Building on Gilkey, and dividing his anthropological aspect into two, I propose five particular and distinguishing characteristics of Catholicism. These characteristics, overlapping but distinct, are:

1) its \textit{positive anthropology} of the person;
2) its \textit{sacramentality} of life
3) its \textit{communal emphasis} regarding human and Christian existence;
4) its \textit{commitment to tradition} as source of its Story and Vision; and
5) its appreciation of \textit{rationality} and learning, epitomized in its commitment to education.

These five might be called \textit{theological characteristics} in that they are grounded in Catholic understanding of God and of human existence; there is theological warrant for them. But beyond and permeating these theological characteristics, Catholicism has three other pervading commitments that are particularly relevant for Catholic education. Echoing the old distinction of the virtues into theological and cardinal, we can call these cardinal’ characteristics in that they are the hinges’ (Latin, \textit{cardo} that permeate and bind the other five together.
What Makes a School Catholic?

These three cardinal characteristics are:

- Catholicism’s commitment to people’s ‘personhood’, to who they become and their ethic of life — an ontological concern;
- Catholicism’s commitment to ‘basic justice’ — a sociological concern; and
- Catholicism’s commitment to ‘catholicity’ — a universal concern.

I will review the five theological characteristics with regard to their importance for Catholic education, and then more briefly, the three cardinal characteristics and how these lynchpins in the configuration of Catholicism are to permeate Catholic Education. The collage of these eight characteristics constitutes education that is “Catholic”.

Anthropology: In God’s Own Image and Likeness:

The core of Catholic anthropology — its theological understanding of the human condition — is often described as a ‘realistic optimism’ about us. It recognizes our capacity and ‘proneness’ for sin, but insists that we are essentially more good than evil. Though ‘fallen’, our divine image and likeness was never totally lost through original sin. Rather we retain our innate capacity for good and for God. Practically this means that people are always in need of God’s grace and have the capacity, with God’s help, to make a positive contribution to our personal and common welfare. Further, we are held responsible for the choices we make, and our graced efforts for goodness and truth have historical significance.

This Catholic anthropology has been forged over history as a mediating stance between two other classic but extreme positions: the total self-sufficiency of Pelagius (circa 400), and the total depravity of Calvin and the radical Reformers. For example, at the great counter-Reformation Council of Trent (1545-63) Catholicism took a middle position between Pelagius’ claim that we can ‘save ourselves’ and Calvin’s that we are a massa peccati, a mass of sin, incapable of contributing anything to ‘the work of our salvation’ (Phil. 2, 12), Trent articulated the classic Catholic position that the human condition is not self sufficient but a ‘fallen’ one, and yet we are not totally depraved but remain ‘inherently good’; we are responsible, by Gods grace, for our own wellbeing and for that of others.

This anthropology originates in the Biblical story of our creation in God’s own image and likeness (Cia. 1, 27), and undergirds all the covenants, including the new covenant in Jesus, that God makes with Gods people thereafter The biblical notion of covenant is that God bonds humankind with each other and with Godself in partnership to live by God’s intentions for all creation. Both parties promise to fulfill their side of this partnership, implying that humankind, with God’s help, is so capable. In the Christian dispensation, the goodness of the human condition is assured unequivocally by the Incarnation, the faith that God in Jesus Christ became human, was ‘made flesh, to dwell among us’ (Jo. 1, 14) and to forge a ‘new covenant’ of irreversible union between divinity and humanity. Likewise a Catholic theology of grace impinges here. Our conviction is that Jesus is the definitive catalyst of God’s life and love irrevocably turned toward us; in Jesus ‘grace abounded all the more’ (Rom. 5, 20).
The grace of God to us in Jesus builds upon our ‘original grace’, transforming our inner selves and empowering our human efforts to do God’s will; and all this without violating our freedom or alleviating our responsibilities. In the pithy summary of Aquinas ‘grace works through nature’.

This graced nature’ anthropology gives us both rights and responsibilities. Our dignity in God’s own image gives all of us inalienable human rights, but correspondingly our capacity to be partners and historical agents gives us responsibility to defend and promote similar rights for all humankind. Pope John XXIII, described out essential human rights and responsibilities as: to life and to a worthy manner of living; to respect as persons without discrimination on any basis; to pursue and express the truth; to be informed and educated; to worship God freely and to choose a state in life; to gainful employment, decent conditions, and just compensation for work; to organize, meet and associate; to participate in public affairs and to contribute to the common good (John GII, 1976, pp. 203—6).

Catholic anthropology of our innate capacity for good and for God, coupled with its theology of God’s grace in Jesus as renewing and working through this ‘nature’, has prompted a rich Catholic tradition of spirituality. This tradition has many schools’ of approach, (Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, Ignatian, etc.) but all reflect and serve the conviction that every Christian is capable of and called by baptism to a life of holiness as ‘right relationship’ with God, self, others, and creation. A Catholic sense of holiness also entails a life-long deepening of one’s personal relationship with God in the context of a faith community, living with consciousness of God’s presence in the midst of the world.

Overall, it can be said that a Catholic anthropology has encouraged its adherents to embrace life with enthusiasm, to approach it as a gift of God to be enjoyed, to defend it, celebrate it, affirm it, and to relish its essential goodness. Gilkey writes that Catholicism has ‘a remarkable sense of humanity’; ‘consequently, the love of life, the appreciation of the body and the senses, the joy and celebration, the tolerance of the sinner, these natural, worldly and “human” virtues are far more clearly and universally embodied in Catholics and Catholic life than in Protestants and Protestantism’ (Gilkev, op. cit., p. 19).

For Catholic Education: This understanding of our human condition before God calls the whole curriculum of Catholic education to reflect and promote at least three commitments:

- to affirm students basic goodness, to promote their dignity, to honor their fundamental rights, and to develop their gifts to the fullest - as God reflections;
- to educate people to live responsibly, with God’s help, for the fullness of life that God wills for self and others - as responsible partners;
- to convince and mold people to live as if their lives are worthwhile and have historical significance, that their every good effort advances the well-being of all - as history makers.
What Makes a School Catholic?

As God’s Reflections: The content, process, and environment of Catholic education should reflect to its students that they are made in the image and likeness of God. They have a right to a curriculum that convinces them of their inherent goodness, that nurtures their sense of dignity and self-worth, that treats them with respect, that helps to develop their every good gift and talent — mental, emotional and physical, intellectual, interpersonal and aesthetic and ultimately their spiritual appetite for personal relationship with God.

As Responsible Partners’ Catholic anthropology demands an education that informs and forms its students in their responsibility to initiate and work with others for their own and human well-being. To Cain’s age-old question “am I my brother (and sisters) keeper?” (Genesis 4:9), Catholic education must dispose people to respond a resounding yes and prepare them to respect and promote the human rights of all.

As History Makers The whole curriculum of Catholic education should help convince people of the deep worth-whileness and ultimate significance of their lives; that they can make a difference. It is to help them to take on, with historical agency the stated purpose of Jesus, “I have come that you may have life and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). They must be educated to cherish value and defend their own and all life, from womb to tomb. Countercultural to all forms of social fatalism, Catholic education prepares people to be ‘history makers’, creators and recreators of their context, confident that the seeds of every good effort will never be lost. Essentially it must prepare them to embrace and celebrate, to defend and promote the gift of God that is human life.

For Catholic education, the commitments demanded by its anthropology may be more pertinent for how people are taught and for the politics of the school environment than for the content of teaching, though the latter must clearly reflect such values as well. Affirming their goodness and dignity, promoting their rights and gifts, forming them in responsibility and with a sense of historical agency, all this is less likely with a pedagogy that treats students as passive receptacles for what Dewey called ‘predigested knowledge’ that teachers ‘ladle out in doses’ (Dewey, 1938, p. 46, p. 82). Called for, instead, is a pedagogy that engages students as active and creative participants in the reaching/learning dynamic, that draws upon their experiences and learning from life, that gives them direct access to enriching disciplines of learning and traditions of wisdom, and that encourages them to reach their own judgments and decisions. Likewise, the politics of the school environment should be permeated with a ‘life-affirming’ anthropology. In short, the whole curriculum should promote the ancient conviction of Irenaeus, that ‘the glory of God is the human person fully alive’.

Sacramentality: ‘To See God in All Things’

Catholicism has a cosmology — perspective on life and creation — very resonant with its anthropology. It takes the position that all of God’s creation is essentially good; though we can misuse or abuse it, what God has made and makes is never inherently evil, This cosmology, in turn encourages the Catholic principle of sacramentality.
For Catholics, mention of ‘sacramentality’ usually has an association with church and the seven sacraments. The liturgical sacraments, however, are climatic expressions of what Karl Rahner calls ‘the liturgy of life’ also described as ‘the principle of sacramentality’. McBrien writes, ‘No theological principle or focus is more characteristic of Catholicism or more central to its identity than the principle of sacramentality’ (op. cit., p. 1180). This principle reflects the central Catholic conviction that God mediates Godself to us and we encounter God’s presence and grace coming to meet us through the ordinary of life — through our minds and bodies, through our works and efforts, in the depth of our own being and through our relationships with others, through the events and experiences that come our way, through all forms of human art and creativity, through nature and the whole created order, through everything and anything of life.

A ‘sacramental consciousness’ means being aware of the presence of God as the backdrop and foreground of life, It is able to 'look through' reality to 'see' for oneself ‘the beyond in the midst’, the Ultimate in the immediate, the Transcendent in the ordinary, the Creator in the created, the Divine in what is very human. It experiences the ever present Spirit of God taking initiative and reaching out to us in the everyday. In the classic ‘catholic’ phrase of Ignatius of Loyola, a sacramental consciousness is able ‘to see God in all things’. It is the epitome of a truly ‘religious’ consciousness in that it is perennially aware that everything is ‘tied-back-into’ (re-1tgare or anchored in an ultimate ‘Ground of Being’.

The seven sacraments, then, are climatic instances of this principle of sacramentality. These liturgical rituals, through which the Risen Christ is essentially present by the Holy Spirit, intensify participants’ everyday experiences of the outreach of God’s life and love; but the mediating symbols between the people and God are still of the ordinary — bread, wine, water, oil, human love, and so on, and they are all celebrated as and through community.

Clearly a sacramental consciousness engages imagination, which is to say peoples’ ‘selves’ as historical agents. In this it has an ethical impulse that enables us to imagine what might and ought to be, what we can and should do, and disposes our wills to choose accordingly (Kearney, 1988). A sacramental consciousness not only ‘sees’ God’s presence in all but can ‘see’ what God wills for humankind. Here Christian faith nurtures people’s imaginations with the Vision of God’s reign, God’s ‘imaginings’ for all creation, the realisation of peace and justice, of love and freedom, wholeness and fullness of life for all, and the integrity of God’s creation. In Jesus’ description of the Last Judgment - (Mt. 25, pp. 31—45), the ‘goats’ claim that they ‘never saw’ — the hungry, the homeless, the oppressed, — but it will not be a sufficient defense. Christian sacramental consciousness has the disposition ‘to see’ who should be seen, especially people overlooked or made invisible by society, and to respond as of God’s reign; it encourages a faith that does justice.

‘For catholic Education, the intention of forming students in a sacramental consciousness should permeate the whole curriculum of a Catholic school. This does not mean ‘dragging in religion’ in a contrived kind of way; there were instances of this at one time in Catholic curricula (e.g., in math class: if the rosary has five decades of ten Hail Marys each, how many Hail Marys in the rosary?’).
What Makes a School Catholic?

Instead, education for a sacramental consciousness means encouraging students, regardless of what they are studying, to employ the critical and creative powers of their minds (reason, memory, and imagination) to look at life so intensely and rigorously that they begin to look ‘through’ it. More perhaps by the questions they ask than by the statements they make, teachers can prompt students to realize that every life-question is eventually a religious one, that all truth is grounded in Divine truth (even math depends on the notion of infinity), that every answer leads on to a question, and eventually to Ultimate and Gracious Mystery.

Teachers themselves need to bring a sacramental consciousness to their teaching. Contrary to what some might expect, this is marked first by a commitment to academic rigor, in other words to study carefully and thoroughly, honoring the academic canons of the particular discipline. And then it is marked by the constant sense that ‘there is always more here than meets the eye’ — a critical (in-the-questioning sense) and creative posture that urges students on to see ‘the more’ that always awaits them.

For example, instead of studying literature with a technical rationality that dissects and ‘masters’ texts, it can be approached as a ‘mirror of life’ to surface life’s perennial questions and to glean wisdom from how others have grappled with living humanly. With this attitude good literature can reflect a ‘word’ of God to students not as revealed in scripture but as discovered from life. Most assuredly, all the arts can be approached as ‘teachable moments’ for a sacramental consciousness; nothing more stimulates the imagination — the primary mode of a sacramental consciousness. The Arts can turn participants toward the transcendent because they are ‘a reflection of the divine beauty in tangible form, and by engaging their own creativity and aesthetic ability they enliven people’s sense of identity with their Creator (The Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988. par. 61). Students can study the social sciences in a way that they come to ‘see’ the deep relationality of humankind, and to discover that we are ‘made for each other’. The natural sciences too can be taught with a style that prompts students to look ‘through’ reality to plumb the pattern design, mystery, beauty, awe, and wonder of God’s creation. They can discover that ‘the whole of creation, from the distant celestial bodies and the immeasurable cosmic forces down to the infinitesimal particles and waves of matter and energy, all bear the imprint of the Creator’s wisdom and power’ (ibid., par. 54). And so on for every discipline of learning; all can be taught with and to encourage a sacramental consciousness in students.

Community: ‘Made for Each Other’

Catholicism has a strong emphasis on the ‘communal’ nature of human existence: that we find our identity and true selves in relationship with others, This characteristic combines aspects of its anthropology and cosmology; the first suggests that we have a natural affinity for relationship and are capable of ‘right relationship’ with others, and its cosmology that the social structures and cultural expressions of our ‘public’ world, instead of being a ‘city of sin’ as the Reformers might have it, can be an instrument of God’s saving grace.
This communal characteristic has been reflected in Catholicism’s social and ecclesial emphases throughout its history, its accent on the social responsibility of Christian faith to contribute to the ‘common good’, and the necessity for Christians to actively participate in a Christian community — the Church. In fact, theologically, Catholicism’s communal emphasis arises from its conviction that we need to be ‘church — a community that welcomes all — for the sake of our salvation.

The Hebrew scriptures are the story of a people called to become a ‘people of God’ by entering into covenant with God and each other. Since the call of Abraham and Sarah, they are to live as ‘the people of God’. Throughout their history, the Israelites are always aware that their well-being — their salvation — depends on this covenant and community. Their sins and their graces, their faithfulness to God and their wandering away, are as a ‘people’. Recent New Testament scholarship has deepened awareness that Jesus called his followers together into ‘an inclusive community of disciples’ (Fiorenza, 1983). The inclusiveness of his table fellowship alone, welcoming the socially marginalized and public sinners, is a powerful parable of the kind of community he intended among his people. Paul posed the image of the Church as ‘the body of Christ’ (see 1 Cor. 12, 12—31, etc.), a compelling analogy for communal solidarity and ‘catholicity’.

When the Reformers rejected this ecclesial emphasis of Catholicism (and for some good reasons — corruption, exaggerated power of Church authorities, etc.), Catholicism clung to its emphasis that we encounter God as a community of faith, that the primary mode (not the only one) of God coming to us and our going to God is as Church’ — now the sacrament of Christ to the world. So deep was this Catholic conviction about the communality of Christian faith that it insisted on the solidarity of the whole Church of saints and sinners, living and dead. Over the Reformers’ objections, it reiterated that the baptismal bond of the Body of Christ is never broken, not even by death, that the living and dead can intercede for each other before God.

The Second Vatican Council deepened and amplified this characteristic of Catholicism by returning to a more clearly communal understanding of the nature and mission of the Church. Likewise, recent Church teaching has clan- fled the kind of community that the Church should be within itself and in its mission to the world. Within itself, the Church is to be a community of deep love, of total inclusion, and of ‘right relationship’ — the biblical description of justice. ‘While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, it recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and lifestyle found within the Church itself.’ For its mission to the world, the ‘mind of the Church’ seems clearer than ever that it is to be a community of effective action and witness — a sacrament — of God’s reign of peace and justice to the world, a catalyst for the ‘common good’. And, as throughout its tradition, Catholicism sees its schools as crucial agents in this communal mission to be Church and sacrament to the world, ‘The Catholic school finds its true justification in the mission of the Church’ (The Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, par. 34).
What Makes a school catholic?

For Catholic Education: Though this communal characteristic of Catholicism should permeate the content and process of the school’ pedagogy, it is clearly most significant for the life of the school itself. A school influences people’s identity perspectives and values — socialises them — primarily through the implicit curriculum (Eisner, 1979, ch. 5) of its ethos, structure and style, by its whole way of being together as school. The environment of a Catholic school needs to reflect community not simply as an ideal taught but as a value realised. (It is heartening to note the empirical evidence that community is, in fact, a notable value of Catholic schools) (Covey, 1992, p 33 p 108). In the words of Vatican II Catholic education ‘aims to create for the school community an atmosphere enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and love’ (Abbott 1966 par 8, p 646).

Its spirit of freedom should be reflected in an atmosphere of openness, intellectual and social, where students and faculty feel free to become their own best selves and to pursue knowledge and truth wherever they can be found, where the school strives to be a community of welcome and hospitality for all. The love commitment of the school should be realised as a profound care and ‘right relationship’ among and between teachers, administrators, and students, and toward the school’s extended community of parents, former students and the parish(es) of its local context. For analysis, we can think of this communal characteristic of Catholicism requiring a school to be both a public community and an ecclesial community.

The Catholic school is to be a public community’ that educates its students in social responsibility, informing and forming them to contribute to the ‘common good. In this, Catholic education is often counter—cultural to the mores of rugged individualism, self-sufficiency and social indifference that permeate western society. It will socialise its students to care about and contribute to the common good through its own ethos of right relationship and social consciousness, through its operative values of peace and justice, and by credible concern for the marginalized and suffering of society. Its explicit curriculum will teach for such ‘right relationship’ and common good’ by allowing this ethic to permeate its formal content, and more effectively, perhaps, by its very style of teaching.

Commitment to community advises a pedagogy grounded in relationship, and marked by participation, by conversation, and by cooperation. Teaching styles that reflect domination, passivity, monologue, and competition would seem antithetical to this communal commitment, And formation in a social consciousness calls for teaching styles that encourage critical reflection and questioning of the social/political context, that nurture creative imagination about what can and should be done in the public arena. Stated negatively, if a school does not challenge and encourage its students to oppose racism, sexism, militarism, ageism, and all other such ‘isms’ that bedevil our society and world, its education is not Catholic.

We can note two emphases in the Catholic school as an ecclesial community: its close association and partnership with the local church, and through this affiliation its bond with the universal Church; and second its efforts to be a Christian faith community within itself,
Thomas H. Groome

The Catholic school should always think of the Church, local and universal, as its primary sponsor, as the parent community to which it belongs. Always its mission finds its warrant and ideology, and is realized within the broader mission of the Church. Even for its own well-being, it needs a partnership with the faith community(ies) of its context, and to develop networks of support. This is the ‘functional community’ of Catholic schools that provides their ‘social capital,’ and which Coleman credits as a significant factor in the schools’ effectiveness (Coleman and Hoffer. 1987, p. 378, note 6).

A Catholic school is not a parish. Yet its very nature and purpose calls it to be a community of Christian faith. As such, it is to share in the traditional tasks of a Christian community, albeit in an educational way. Since the earliest days, the Church has recognised that the mission of God’s reign in Jesus entails at least four historical tasks: to teach, preach, and evangelise the word of God in scripture and tradition (kerygma); to witness as a community of faith, hope and love in the world (koinonia); to worship God in prayer and communal liturgy (leitourgia) and to care for human welfare (diakonia).

In a school community, these functions of word, witness, worship, and welfare cannot be relegated to the chaplaincy or the religion department, but should permeate and engage its whole shared life and curriculum. Clearly students should have access to the scriptures and traditions of Christian faith (elaborated under Tradition below). But beyond that, the school is to offer opportunities for prayer, communal worship, and intensified spiritual experiences (retreats, etc; it should be an effective witness — a sacrament — of Christian faith through every aspect of its communal life (style of administration, discipline procedures, hiring and promotion policy, means of evaluation, school governance, projects and group activities, school assemblies, outreach, relationships, etc.); and it should be a communities of welfare or service to its own students, and give them opportunities to care for the welfare of others.

John Dewey claimed that the schools of a democratic society should be democratic societies themselves in embryonic form’ (Dewey, 1971). Likewise, a Catholic school should be a Christian faith community in embryonic form’.

Tradition: To Share ‘Story and Vision’

The Second Vatican Council states that Catholic education ‘strives to relate all human culture eventually to the news of salvation, so that the light of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of the world, of life, and of (human) kind’ (Abbott, op. cit., p. 646). The core of this ‘news of salvation’ is the person of Jesus Christ. Everything else about Christian faith must be permeated by the Incarnation, the conviction that God became human in Jesus of Nazareth, Christianity is now the historical movement of God’s word continuing to ‘become flesh’ by being realised and lived in every time and place. Because it is essentially an enterprise of Catholic Christian faith, Jesus and this incarnational principle is the heart of Catholic education Encounter with the person of Jesus Christ and his good news of salvation is mediated now through Christian Story and Vision — the meaning and ethic of Christian faith they should be at the core of the curriculum of a Catholic school.
What Makes a School catholic?

Christian ‘Story’ refers the whole scripture and tradition that grew up before Jesus in the ancient people of Israel, around him from his person and preaching, and after him down through the ages as his community of disciples, the Church continued to develop in their understanding, living and articulation of Christian faith. As Vatican II stated ‘the tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit ... there is growth in the understanding of the realities and the words handed down...’ (Abbott, op cit p 116). As a metaphor for the whole reality of Christian faith, ‘Story’ helps to avoid Reformation polemics (scripture and/or tradition), gives a sense of something that continues to unfold and it captures what Gilkey intends by Catholicism’s characteristic emphasis on Tradition. He means to highlight the Catholic resistance to the Reformer’s cry of scripture sola — scripture alone, and its insistence on carrying the whole ‘Story’ of Christian faith as it unfolds over history as symbol of revelation now. The ‘Story’ of Christian faith, then, includes: its scriptures and liturgies; its creeds, dogmas, doctrines and theologies; its sacraments and rituals, symbols, myths, gestures and religious language patterns; its spiritualities, values, laws, and expected lifestyles; and so on. Any symbol that reflects and carries the historical reality of Catholic Christian faith is an aspect of Christian Story.

The metaphor ‘Vision’ emphasises that the Christian Story always has historical import; it is not simply to be remembered but realised again, not simply to be known about but lived (see Groome, 1991, Ch. 4). What the Story means for us, how we are to live it on all levels of existence (personal, interpersonal and social/political), and who we are to become in response to it, this is the Vision of Christian faith, Ultimately this Christian Vision is the reign of God — the ongoing coming to fulfillment of God’s intentions of shalom and fullness of life for humanity, history, and all creation. More immediately, Vision refers to the meaning and ethic, the hopes and responsibilities, the promises and demands that every aspect of Christian Story symbolizes for adherents.

For Catholic Education: Catholic education should intentionally catechize its students in Christian Story and Vision, Catholic catechesis has never settled for a ‘religious studies’ type of programme, a learning about the Catholic or other religious traditions. Beyond learning about’, Catholic education intends students to ‘learn from’, and even, with ecumenical sensitivity and respecting students’ backgrounds to be personally influenced and enriched by Catholic faith. The Catholic school is to educate the very ‘being’ of its students, to form, and transform their identity and agency — who they are and how they live — with the meaning and ethic of Christian faith. Beyond knowing about Jesus, it intends that they become disciples of his way’. Beyond knowing about justice and compassion, it intends its students to become just and compassionate, and so on for every symbol of Christian Story.

Such catechesis, however, cannot be some form of indoctrination nor settle for uncritical socialization. Catholic catechesis must be marked by good education, education that brings people to know the data of the tradition, to understand it, to personally and critically appropriate it, and to come to life decisions in response to it.
Precisely because the intent is to move beyond knowledge to wisdom, beyond information to the ‘being’ of participants, such pedagogy must personally engage students, all of their capacities and dispositions. My own proposal is for a catechesis that actively engages students to name and reflect on their lives in the world, brings them to personally encounter the Story/Vision of Christian faith, and enables them to place these two sources of God’s ongoing revelation in dialogue with each other, to critically appropriate the ‘faith handed on’ to their lives, and to make historical decisions in response to it (See Groome, op. cit.)

Clearly this commitment to Tradition calls for a specific catechetical curriculum in Catholic schools. But, like all these characteristics, it should also permeate the whole curriculum. Every teacher in a Catholic school, regardless of what discipline of learning lie/she teaches, has umpteen teachable moments for mediating between the lives of students and Christian Story/ Vision. When the sophomore talks to the math teacher as a friend about the recent death of a grandmother, this is likely to be a more teachable moment about Christian faith in resurrection and eternal life than might be available in the formal religion class, The first grader who wonders ‘where babies come from’ in reading class is likely to be most teachable then about the mystery, sacredness, and Godgiftedness of life. And beyond such explicit catechesis and teachable moments, Catholic Christian Story and Vision should be the pervasive ideology that under-girds the Catholic School, lending its distinct identity and raison d’être, shaping its style and commitments, bonding its members into a cohesive community.

Rationality: ‘Faith Seeking Understanding’

Though it may surprise some Catholics, Gilkey is correct in crediting Catholicism with an abiding commitment to rationality. The clearest historical expression of this characteristic is its commitment to education, and to a ‘humanities’ curriculum centred upon the liberal arts, classic texts, and critical rationality.

The Jewish context of Christianity gave deep roots to its commitment to education. And Catholicism came to at least three theological warrants of its own for commitment to scholarship, rationality, and thus to education:

- its optimistic but realistic anthropology that affirms both the need and potential of education;
- a this as well as an otherworldly understanding of salvation, for both here and hereafter, thus recommending humanising education as an aspect of ‘the work of our salvation’ (Phil. 2, 12); and
- the conviction that reason and revelation are essential partners in the life of Christian faith
What Makes a School catholic?

Striking a path between fideism (blind faith) and rationalism (sufficiency of reason), Catholicism has been convinced that understanding and faith reason and revelation, need and enhance each other. Though there has always been support for Tertullian’s defiant stance that Jerusalem has no need of Athens, Catholicism has favored a more balanced view well summarized in a classic statement of Aquinas ‘just as grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, so sacred doctrine presupposes uses and perfects natural knowledge’ (Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica, Ia, I 8 ad 2).

The early Apologists (c 120—220) used their classic education to present Christian faith in a compelling way to the learned. At Alexandria, a group of scholars began to forge a ‘Christian paideia’, a synthesis of the gospel and secular learning into a Christian humanism. Under the leadership of Clement (c.150—n5) and Origen (c185—254), this ‘school’ educated people in Christian faith and the best of classic culture, convinced that the latter could be ‘stirrups to reach the sky’ of spiritual wisdom (Origen). It became the model for other Christian schools throughout the Empire. St Augustine (354–430) reiterated this appreciation of secular scholarship, arguing that as the Israelites had taken booty from Egypt, so Christians should make their own the best of pagan learning. Throughout the ‘dark ages’ (c.450—950), the Church’s monastic schools were beacons of learning. Monks like Alcuin and Rabanus Maurus led Carolingian renaissance (c.830), and the monastery and cathedral schools that era became the founding roots of the great universities of the West (Oxford, Salamanca, etc.).

At the dawn of the second millennium, the great scholastics — Abelard, Peter Lombard, and then the greatest of them, Aquinas, forged a Christian paideia. They married faith and reason into the science of theology and enabled it to hold its own in the universities; in fact it became the of the sciences. They insisted that ‘faith alone’ is enough for salvation. Though rightly chastened Catholicism insisted at the Council of Trent (1545—1563) that while ‘faith alone saves’, people’s faith is strengthened by reason and understanding. This complementarity was reiterated at the First Vatican Council (1869—70), and reason can never disagree; ... they are even mutually advantageous. For right reason demonstrates the foundations of faith and, . . . faith . . sets reason free. . . The Catholic Church, at its best and when faithful to its own long tradition, champions the right of people to think critically for themselves and encourages the dynamic interplay of faith and reason.

Catholicism places particular emphasis on the historical responsibility of reason to serve human well-being. In this it rejects the disembodied rationality of Cartesianism, and avoids the dichotomous schema of Kant that separates theoretical from practical reasoning and thus science from ethics. It rejects the now common assumption that reasoning is ‘objective’ (non-perspectival ‘value free’ (above ethic). Instead, Catholicism sees reason as a gift of God that is to bring us to both understanding and moral responsibility.
Bernard Lonergan is a fine contemporary instance of a Catholic rationality. Lonergan, acknowledging his indebtedness to Aquinas, delineates the dynamics of cognition (the acts we perform when we come to ‘know’ something) as four fold: attending to the data of experience and tradition, understanding this data through reasoning, judging the truth or accuracy of our understanding, deciding responsibly what to do with what one ‘knows’ (Lonergan, 1974 1), Note that the outcome of this schema moves beyond understanding to judgement and responsibility.

For catholic Education: Catholic education should not tell people what to think but prepare and practice its students to think for themselves. It should form them in the habit of critical reflection, a kind of questioning that engages people’s reason, memory, and imagination, and is critical in the sense of becoming aware of the historical source and responsibility of all knowledge. Building on Lonergan’s schema this means that Catholic education should encourage students to attend to their own historical reality and to actively engage the knowledge and wisdom of the ages in all the sciences of learning to try to personally understand their lives and the disciplines of scholarship to make their own informed judgments in dialogue with others; and to reach responsible decisions that are conceptually and morally adequate, i.e.. make sense, and are life-giving for self and others.

Such rationality coupled with Catholic anthropology means encouraging people to think for themselves, to trust their own discernment and decision making. Its sacramentality suggests helping people to think with imagination and perception, to discern the ultimate in the immediate, and to be critically conscious about society. Rationality coupled with community encourages students to think in dialogue and conversation, to test their reasoning in discourse with others and with communities of wisdom and faith, Catholicism’s commitment to tradition coupled with rationality means enabling students to critically appropriate the tradition to their lives rather than passively inheriting it, to make it their own rather than accepting it blindly, and to think about tradition in ways likely to encourage personal and social responsibility.

‘Personhood’: An Ontological Concern

Catholic education intends to inform and form the very ‘being’ of its students, to mold their identity and agency — who they are and how they live. In traditional philosophical terms, its intended learning outcome moves beyond the epistemological (episteme, knowledge) to the ontological (ontos, being), without leaving the former behind. Catholic education ‘aims not only to influence what students know and can do but also the kind of people they will become’ (Bryk at al., op. cit., p. 10).

This characteristic is not to be taken for granted; in fact it is counter-cultural to much of modern education. So much education has fallen prey to the diminution of epistemology that severs peoples knowing from their being and reduces knowledge to a technical rationality, a ‘know how’ for productivity.
**What Makes a School Catholic?**

I say diminution because for Plato to know the good is to become good, for Aristotle knowing arises from and shapes one’s ‘being’ in the world. Likewise in the Hebrew and Christian traditions, to know means a wisdom that brings ones very ‘being’ into right relationship with God, self, others and creation; ultimately to know is to love and the one without love knows nothing of God (1 Jn 4 8).

Western philosophy, however, failed to maintain this ancient unity and severed knowing from being (Descartes being a leading culprit). Now the pervasive assumption is that knowledge is ‘objective’ and ‘value-free’ as if it is not to engage ‘persons’ as ‘persons’ or influence their ethic. Catholic education has consistently refused this dichotomy, and insists on engaging and educating the ‘being’ of its students.

This ontological commitment permeates the anthropology of Catholic education as it engages the whole ‘being’ of people to empower them to become ‘the glory of God fully alive’. The sacramentality of Catholic education is ontological as it shapes people’s outlook on life and forms the perspective that, as Gerard Manley Hopkins insists, ‘the world is charged with the grandeur of God’, its community emphasis is ontological as nurtures people in social responsibility and ecclesial identity. Catholic catechesis is ontological as it teaches tradition in a way that molds people’s very ‘being’. And the rationality of Catholic education is ontological as it encourages people to think for themselves - forms them as thinkers, with intent of both conceptual ’and moral adequacy.

**Justice: A Sociological Concern**

Catholicism has always had an accent on ‘practical charity’; witness its tradition that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are integral to Catholic life, However, for a variety of reasons, Catholic consciousness has shifted ‘beyond charity’ to justice, to see that Christian faith has serious social responsibilities (Groome, op. cit., pp. 389—93). Justice is a central mandate of our faith. In fact, ‘action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation’ (See Gremillion, 1971, p. 514) (my emphasis).

Justice is clearly a Biblical mandate. In the Hebrew scriptures, God’s covenant with humankind calls people to live in ‘right relationship’ with God, self, others, and creation. This summarizes the biblical sense of both justice and holiness of life; God’s people are to be holy like their God in their relationships with each other (see Lev. 19, pp. 2—35), and especially by imitating God’s special favour for those to whom life is most denied — the poor, widows, orphans, and aliens in the land — people of other races (see Jer. 7, 6, etc.). In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus announces his life and mission as fulfillment of the most radical social innovation of his Jewish tradition — the Jubilee Year of Isaiah 61, pp. 1—2, a promise of ‘good news to the poor’, ‘release to the captives’, ‘sight to the blind’, and ‘to let the oppressed go free’ (see Lk. 4, pp. 18—19).
The first Christians, following Jesus’ preaching and praxis of agapaic love, added an emphasis to justice as ‘doing the truth with love’ (See Eph. 4, 15; 1 Pt. 1, 22; 1 Jn. 3, 18, etc.), and reiterated the ‘favor for the poor’. Catholicism appropriates this Biblical mandate of justice with a distinctive accent, namely, a dual commitment to the dignity of the person and to the common good of all. This is reflected in its description of ‘basic justice’ as commutative (one on one), distributive (group to person), and social (person to group) (see Hollenbach, 1979, p. 155).

Justice permeates the anthropology of Catholic education as it treats students with dignity, and prepares them to respect and promote the human rights of all. Justice is reflected in its sacramentality as it enables people to see’ and respond to the poor and oppressed of society, and to imagine how to change unjust social structures and oppressive cultural mores. Justice is taught as the school community embodies ‘right relationship, and educates students in their responsibility to the ‘common good. The Tradition fosters justice when teachers highlight God’s liberating actions in the Hebrew Scriptures and in Jesus, and propose the Vision of God’s reign as shalom and fullness of life for all. And justice permeates its rationality as it encourages students in a critical social consciousness with the practical interest of living the truth, doing the good.

Catholicity: An Inclusive Concern

In Finnegans Wake James Joyce writes: ‘Catholic means here comes everybody.’ Etymologically, ‘catholic’ has its roots in kata holou, meaning ‘embracing the whole’, or better still ‘including everything and everyone’. This suggests that the best synonym for ‘catholic’ is ‘inclusive’ rather than the often used ‘universal’. The latter can mean one aspect dominating everything else and excluding or destroying all that is ‘other’. Both Nazism and Communism had ambitions of universality, but in a dominating way. ‘Catholic’, on the other hand, means to include and welcome all, to embrace diverse ‘others’, in a participative and bonded community. In this, Joyce was right.

To claim to be the Catholic tradition of Christianity is rather pretentious. Some Christian communities settle for naming themselves by a central doctrine (Baptists), or after their first mentor (Lutherans), or by their form of governance (Presbyterians), and so on. Our claim to be ‘Catholic’ should confront us with our sins of exclusion and sectarianism, and ever challenge us to become an inclusive community with hospitality and openness to all. Clearly this commitment must permeate Catholic education.

Catholicity is reflected in its anthropology as the curriculum affirms each person’s worth and engages all their gifts in a holistic way. Its sacramentality is catholic as it encourages people to appreciate both the unity and diversity of life, to experience God’s Spirit as the love energy of all creation. Its community emphasis is catholic when the school is truly a place of welcome and inclusion, and educates its students that ‘neighbour’ has no limits. Teaching the Tradition is catholic as it convinces students of the universality of God’s saving presence and love for all peoples, and grounds them in this particular tradition without prejudice or
What Makes a school Catholic?

sectarian bias. And its rationality is catholic as it opens people to the truth, wherever it can be found.

What I have laid out here is surely more the Vision than the Story of Catholic education, more what we are called to than what we ever fully realize. Some participants in the conference on The Contemporary Catholic school and the Common Good at St Edmund’s College, Cambridge in July 1993, found my proposal unduly positive and optimistic, giving insufficient attention to the underside’ of Catholicism. They pointed out persuasively that it has often preached and taught a negative anthropology, tried to control and limit the sacramentality, of life, practised its communality as a system of domination and exclusion, failed to institutionally represent the richness and depth of its own tradition discouraged critical rationality especially in matters of ‘faith’, often neglected its priority for persons and concern for justice, and failed in its own ‘catholicity’. I readily admit that the pages of history are strewn with such ‘evidence to the contrary’. Certainly the Vision I propose above needs to be empirically realised. But that it has been much sinned against does not lessen the authenticity of such a Vision. It is, I am convinced, warranted by the whole broad sweep of Catholicism, albeit at its best. To propose it, with so much evidence to the contrary, may sound as ‘foolishness’ (1 Cor. 1, 21). I insist, however, that we must reclaim and renew this Vision to inspire and sustain our efforts. Without it ‘the people perish’ (Prov. 29, 18), and to concede a lesser Vision will be to settle for less than Catholic education.

Notes

1 It is interesting to note that these characteristics are echoed in empirical research on the characteristics of Catholic schools. For example, Bryk at al. found ‘three major characteristics that are widely shared by Catholic secondary schools: an unwavering commitment to an academic programme for all students, .. a pervasive sense, .., of the school as a caring environment, .. and an inspirational ideology that directs institutional action toward social justice ...’ (p. 10).


3 Bryk, Lee and Holland are correct in saying that Vatican II’s insistence on freedom in matters of faith implied a profound change in the style of Catholic catechesis. ‘The concept of faith as a free choice made over time by an informed, educated conscience replaced the spirit of indoctrination into the mind of the Church, which had been enacted through such instruments as the Baltimore Catechism.’ (Bryk et al, op. cit., p. 49).

4 Here again research indicates that such a shared ideology does, in fact, contribute to the effectiveness of the school. See Bryk et al op. cit., esp. pp. 301—4.