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# THE RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND CATHOLIC RESEARCH IN ENGLAND: THE FOUNDING OF A NEW CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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In September 1996, the Centre for Research and Development in Catholic Education (CRDCE) was inaugurated at the University of London, Institute of Education, with the support of a group of its senior academics including Professor Peter Mortimore (the director), Professor Denis Lawton (a former director), and Dr. Paddy Walsh (head of the Curriculum Studies Group). It was proposed to the Director that the long historical neglect of research into Catholic education in England had to be overcome and that the Institute, as the largest and most prestigious research institution for education in the UK, should take an initiative in this field.

The first challenge has been to try to obtain foundation donations and grants to establish the CRDCE, appoint some support staff, and acquire resource material for prospective research associates and graduate students. As the Catholic bishops of England and Wales were unable to find funds to support this venture, an appeal was made to the religious orders with missions in education in the UK and Ireland. Donations have now been received from the Society of Jesus, the De La Salle Brothers, the Christian Brothers, the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Benedictines of Ampleforth, the Faithful Companions of Jesus, the Sisters of St. Paul, the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of Notre Dame, and the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

While the future of the CRDCE must still be secured by larger corporate funding, the financial support of these religious orders has been crucial to the short-term consolidation of CRDCE within the Institute of Education. This example demonstrates that while the direct role of religious orders in teach-

ing in schools and colleges may be changing, their indirect role in funding and participating in research into Catholic education at all levels can be a strategic new mission for the millennium.

The mission statement for CRDCE states that it exists "to support by research investigations and associated publications the developmental needs of Catholic schools and colleges in general, and of those in urban deprived areas in particular, in order to maintain and enhance the effectiveness and distinctiveness of the educational missions for the poor." In realizing this mission, CRDCE understands that there are those who are poor in economic terms, those who are poor in family support terms (who are deprived of family help and affection), and those who are poor in faith terms (those who are far from the faith) (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). Derived from the mission statement, CRDCE has a research and development agenda which, when fully operative, will involve the following projects:

- to investigate the role of Catholic schools in urban deprived areas so as to evaluate the extent to which such schools are still effectively in the service of the poor;
- to investigate the response of Catholic educational institutions to increased competitiveness and the impact of market forces in education;
- to investigate the contemporary role of religious orders in supporting Catholic education in areas of greatest need;
- to investigate the successes of Catholic education in academic, spiritual, moral, and social formation and to disseminate examples of such success and effectiveness to the whole system of Catholic schooling;
- to investigate the changing nature of Catholicity in schools and colleges and to evaluate the spiritual and moral outcomes of Catholic education;
- to assist, by research inquiry, any Catholic schools or colleges which are seen to be at risk, weak, or underperforming and to assist future development planning;
- to develop a research database on the nature of effective school and college leadership in the Catholic sector;
- to develop research networks linking the work of CRDCE with Catholic research agencies in the USA, Ireland, Australia, and elsewhere.

At present, the CRDCE is actively involved in a research project, "Catholic Secondary Schools in the Inner City: Challenges and Responses," funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Research interviews are currently being conducted with the head teachers of such schools in London, Liverpool, and Birmingham.

The dissemination of research through publications and conference presentations is a crucial function of CRDCE. This involves drawing the attention of Catholic educators to significant Church documents on education and to recent research and scholarship in the field (see References). The Society

of Jesus has had a key role in advancing this research and development initiative: (a) in providing the initial financial grant, (b) in providing a representative on the Management Committee, and (c) in encouraging liaison with Jesuit education research projects in England (Alan Harrison, S.J.) and in the United States (Joseph O'Keefe, S.J.). The foundation of the Center for Catholic Education at the University of Dayton in 1996, the launching of the journal *Catholic Education*, and the inauguration of CRDCE at the University of London provide encouraging evidence that Catholic educational research is coming out of the margins and into the mainstream of research and scholarship in education.

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