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ARTICLES

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL: AVENUE TO AUTHENTICITY

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A document from the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education has confirmed that the fundamental purpose of Catholic schools is to create an educational environment promoting authentic humanity. This position has its basis in a Catholic concept of personhood, which underpins the thrust of the 1998 Roman document, The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium. *This article outlines a philosophical framework for Catholic education and establishes a comprehensive theological foundation for community living. Education, the life of faith, and the common good all come under the rubric of authentic humanity.*

The 1998 Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* is frank in content, realistic in observations, optimistic in predictions, and ecclesiologically inviting and inclusive. The purpose of the document, described as a letter to those engaged in Catholic education, is to convey to them "encouragement and hope" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 4). Its content is encapsulated in the following summary.

The Catholic school aspires to:

- be a place of integral education of the human person through a clear educational endeavor of which Christ is the foundation (pars. 8-10);
- establish an ecclesial and cultural identity (pars. 11-14);
- base its education mission on love (par. 15);
- perform service to society (pars. 16-17);
- generate an inclusive community (pars. 18-20).

While some of the issues noted have been explored in previous documents from Rome (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 1982, 1988), a relatively new notion is captured in *Third Millennium* by one of its key sentences: "The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 9). The document reinforces its stand by citing Pope John Paul II: "...the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school" (1998, par. 9). Indeed, the entire document explicitly and implicitly alludes to this concept.

The purpose of this article is to explore the concept of human personhood which underpins *Third Millennium's* message and to offer some illumination of the idea that "The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 9). Although this exploration is a personal response and may be viewed as not reflecting accurately what the Vatican intended, the offered interpretation is believed to be theologically orthodox. This paper is predicated on the notion that the Catholic school can legitimately set out "to be a school for the human person and of human persons" (par. 9) because Catholic teaching contends that:

- humans somehow image God and this imaging is fundamental to understanding the human person;
- since Christ is perfectly human, to become fully human is essentially to become more like Christ;
- spirituality is a characteristic of all of humanity and therefore to become more human is to become more spiritual;
- to be fully human presupposes relational and communitarian dynamics, which demand the honoring of social justice imperatives.

NATURE OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Human nature and the nature of education are intimately interrelated, since "Only when we know what man is can we say how he should be educated" (Beck, 1964, p. 109). *Third Millennium* concurs with the proposition that "There is a tendency to forget that education always presupposes and involves a definite concept of man and life" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 10). While the theology of human personhood imbedded in *Third Millennium* expresses traditional orthodoxy (Groome, 1996), its practical approach and optimism are new and distinct from the Augustinian pessimism that has negatively influenced Catholic orthopraxis concerning the human person (McBrien, 1994). Evidence is ample to conclude that "(h)istorically, Catholicism has often failed to live up to its own best theology of the human condition, practicing a negative anthropology instead" (Groome, 1998, p. 86). Since the second Vatican Council (1962-1965), there has been a significant reorientation in Catholic theological discourse con-

cerning what constitutes humanity. The constructs of medieval Thomistic philosophy have been jettisoned and replaced by a biblical understanding of the human person, which acknowledges contributions from the various human sciences and the contemporary human condition (Ludwig, 1995).

The metaphysics of Aristotle and the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas are based on the principle of purposefulness (teleology) in the natural world (Tarnas, 1991). Consequently, the medieval worldview of a geocentric universe demands that the earth be the only location for the pinnacle and finality of creation, the human person (Lonergan, 1993). With the acceptance of the heliocentric conclusions of Copernicus and Galileo, this element evaporated (Tarnas, 1991). Moreover, understanding the diversity of life implies that the human person is continuous with other life forms in the natural world (O'Murchu, 1997a). Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Flannery, 1996) echoes the prophetic Jesuit theologian Teilhard de Chardin (1959) when it acknowledges "mankind substitutes a more evolutionary concept of nature for a static one" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, par. 5). This seemingly obvious axiom implies that the human person is part of an evolutionary process and is not an endpoint (Lonergan, 1993). This suggests that any understanding of or theologizing about the human person must be continuous and evolving. *Third Millennium* attempts to promote this concept.

This holistic and evolving conception of the human person makes traditional body-soul distinctions problematic. A dualistic perspective (O'Murchu, 1997a) derived from Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy promotes a simplistic theology of the separation of body and soul at death and of the disembodiment of spirits until the final resurrection (cf. McBrien, 1994, pp. 161-162; pp. 1172-1174). In contrast, the conception of the human person as an animated body emanating from a biblical perspective (McBrien, 1994) better recognizes human unity (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 15-19). Rather than having a body and a soul, the unity of the human person is better expressed as being both body and soul: "...we *are* body and soul" (McBrien, 1994, p. 159).

Fundamental to this new understanding of the human person is the "image of God" theme found in the scriptures (Genesis 1: 26-7, 9:6; Wisdom 2:23, 7:26). Humans image God, and this imaging is fundamental to understanding personhood (Morwood, 1997). This image portrays humans as knowing and loving God in a uniquely intimate relationship (Groome, 1996), acting as partners (Genesis 9:17), and becoming a people of God (Groome, 1998). As a result, humans, as images of God the creator, are invited to enter into a relational responsibility with the creator as stewards of creation (cf. Genesis 1:28). Furthermore, this imaging portrays humans not as solitary, but as companionable, social beings of equal dignity, as male and female, an imaging which implies as much about God as communitarian and female as

it does about humans (O'Murchu, 1997a). It is this appreciation that perhaps led St. Irenaeus in the second century to exclaim that the glory of God is the human person fully alive (Irenaeus, 1872). Consonant with this perspective, Pope Paul VI (1967) believed that every person is called to full humanization as an ultimate goal:

> By the unaided effort of his own intelligence and his will each man can grow in humanity, can enhance his personal worth, can become more a person (par. 15). (S)elf fulfillment is not something optional.... (H)uman fulfillment constitutes, as it were, a summary of our duties.... By reason of his union with Christ, the source of life, man attains to a new fulfillment of himself, to a transcendent humanism which gives him his greatest possible perfection: this is the highest goal of personal development. (par. 16)

This perspective of human nature generates a legitimate rationale for religious-based education. From the evidence presented, it can be appreciated that any education devoid of a spiritual dynamic appears incapable of promoting authentic humanity. Moreover, the Christian revelation provides an even more compelling argument for the promotion of authentic humanity as the primary goal of Catholic education.

HUMANITY AND CHRIST

While it is argued that humans are created in the image and likeness of God, history demonstrates that humanity is seemingly inescapably involved in a distortion of this imaging, turning in on self individually and collectively (Daly, 1997) rather than pouring out of self for others, as required by the intent of creation (Genesis 3:1-24). While human dignity remains intact and the imaging of God is only imperfect, a new imaging of the intention of the creator is required to explore questions such as: What does it mean to reveal God in humanity? What does it mean to be fully human? What constitutes authentic humanity? (cf. Morwood, 1997, p. 53). These questions invite exploration if the sentence, "the Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 9) is to be fully understood and appreciated.

St. Paul uses biblical images to explain how Christ relates to humanity. Jesus is the new Adam, the perfect person who is contrasted with the Genesis Adam (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45-49). This image is intrinsic to an appreciation of Christian discipleship and spiritual maturation, since "the human person is destined to pass from the state of image of the first Adam to that of the second" (Latourelle & Fisichella, 1974, p. 23). Christ is the perfection of the image of God in a human person. Moreover, Christ was more than a perfect person; Christ was God in humanity (John 1:2-3). Adam prefigures and antic-

ipates the Christ who is to come. This is the point St. Irenaeus concluded: "...Christ did through his transcendent love become what we are, that we might become what he is" (Irenaeus, 1872, 3.10.2). Two centuries later, St. Athanasius offered this reflection on the same dynamic: "He was made man that we might be made God" (Athanasius, 1982, par. 54). The complementing perspective of this understanding is just as daunting. With believers becoming Christianized (Colossians 2:12; Ephesians 2:1-6; Philippians 3:10-11), their practical responsibility is to humanize Christ in their lives (Galatians 2:20). This is the rationale for the priority of "evangelization through witness": "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers..." (Paul VI, 1975, par. 41). That is the pivotal strategy for the contemporary Catholic school (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998). Consequently, it is only through this "Christogenesis" (Ludwig, 1995, p. 200) that the concepts of humanizing and Christianizing become tautological. "Through the humanity of the Christ there is no area of human life which is not touched by the divine. God came into our human condition as Jesus, not to separate the spiritual from the material, but to open the whole of humanity to the divine potential" (Smith, 1990, p. 28). This is the point that *Third Millennium* seems to be making when it asserts that:

> ...man's vital relationship with Christ, reminds us that it is in His person that the fullness of truth concerning man is to be found. For this reason the Catholic school, in committing itself to the development of the whole man, does so in obedience to the solicitude of the Church, in the awareness that all human values find their fulfillment and unity in Christ. This awareness expresses the centrality of the human person in the educational project of the Catholic school, strengthens the educational endeavor and renders it fit to form strong personalities. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 9)

HUMANITY AND SPIRITUALITY

Unfortunately, an increasing number of students in Catholic schools come from baptized parents who "have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel" (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, par. 58), as *Third Millennium* acknowledges (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998). Consequently, planned experiences aimed at promoting the cultivation of a relationship with Christ (catechesis) as the catalyst for full humanization and incipient spirituality are not realistic dynamics for many students in Catholic schools (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 1). However, the Christian understanding of the human person is an articulation of a more basic expression of the nature of personhood. All humans find common yearnings deep within. Chief among these is a realization that

life has meaning and so human actions carry with them a quality of "ought-ness." This becomes an explicit search for a relationship with the authentic "Other":

> Human persons are capable of moving beyond the constraints of what is given in their ordinary experience. We are not bound by the limits of what we are experiencing at this particular time and this particular place. This capacity to transcend what is immediate to us, the capacity to ask "Is there more?" reveals itself in everything, from our ability to be humorous and ironic, to our ability to ask questions about what is other than us, and indeed, about what transcends us entirely: the Other. (Carroll, 1998, p. 49)

Vatican II's *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (Flannery, 1996) acknowledges this reality.

> People look to different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on humans' hearts are the same today as in past ages. What is humanity? What is the meaning and purpose of life? ...What is the ultimate mystery beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend. (par. 1)

Though people may look to religion for solutions to these uniquely human phenomena, they are not of themselves uniquely religious issues. Indeed, religion is a relative latecomer in humanity's evolution:

> The major religions known to us today came into being in a time-span of about forty five hundred years (3000 BCE–1500 CE). Formal religion is a very recent visitor to Planet Earth. It has been around about 5 percent of humanity's spiritual journey, which began to unfold about seventy thousand years ago. (O'Murchu, 1997a, p. 11)

Moreover, there is substantial compelling evidence that it is spirituality, in contrast to religion, that "is an innate quality of human life. It is something we are born with, something essentially dynamic that forever seeks articulation and expression in human living" (O'Murchu, 1997b, p. 37). One can logically conclude that to be human is de facto to be spiritual (Groome, 1998, pp. 53-55). However, it is ironic that for so many in the developed world, the Christian church seems incapable of providing them with the spiritual nourishment they are craving. This reality is not lost on *Third Millennium*, which identifies "in countries of long-standing evangelization, a growing marginalization of the Christian faith as a reference point and a source of light for an effective and convincing interpretation of existence" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 1). This situation exists in the United States

(Ludwig, 1995) and the United Kingdom (Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1997).

While the Catholic Church in Australia is suffering a significant lack of confidence, reflected in a less than 18% worshiping population (Mason, 1997), Catholic schools, which educate 20% of the nation's children, enjoy considerable esteem (Ryan, Brennan, & Willmett, 1996). This phenomenon is recognized by the Australian hierarchy: "For many children, the school rather than the parish represents their Church and is their only contact with the Church" (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 1998, par. 61). While a similar observation was made by some in the Canadian episcopacy (Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1989, p. 16), the American Episcopal Conference also anticipated increased evangelization by Catholic schools (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972). In contrast to the perceived declining relevancy of the institutional Church (McLaughlin, 1999), the holistic education which the Catholic school aspires to offer (McLaughlin, 1996) seems to be appreciated and supported by students, the majority of whom are non- or irregular church attendees (Flynn, 1993); past students (Angelico, 1997); and parents (Chesterton & Johnston, 1999; Griffiths, 1999). *Third Millennium* accepts this reality:

> The Catholic school is thus confronted with children and young people who experience the difficulties of the present time. Pupils, who shun effort, are incapable of self-sacrifice and perseverance and lack authentic models to guide them, often even in their own families. In an increasing number of instances they are not only indifferent and non-practicing, but also totally lacking in religious or moral formation. To this we must add—on the part of numerous pupils and families—a profound apathy where ethical and religious formation is concerned, to the extent that what is in fact required of the Catholic school is a certificate of studies or, at the most, quality instruction and training for employment. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 6)

Despite these doubtful motivations, *Third Millennium* concludes that the Catholic school ought to be "a school for all" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 10), especially "those who have lost all sense of meaning for life...(Indeed), (t)o these new poor the Catholic school turns in a spirit of love" (1998, par. 15). Even if institutional religion appears to be eschewed by the majority of students in Catholic schools, research confirms that Catholic schools seem to be unique contributors to the nurturance of humanity, that is generating an authentic spirituality (Chesterton & Johnston, 1999; Fahy, 1992; Flynn, 1993, Griffiths, 1999; McLaughlin, 1999).

> The climate and environment of a Catholic school is valued by many students... Many young people value the welcoming, friendly and personal-

ized help they receive from their teachers and peers, and the individualized help they receive with their learning. Some students note they get help with life and living issues. The Catholic school is more than an education institution. For many students, the school is a big family: it's a place of belonging; it's a place where you develop life long bonds and intimate and fulfilling relationships; it's a place that provides security and protection from threats from the broad society...and finally it's a place which connects them with a broader community and their religious heritage and identity.... In addition, there are indications that young people value the Catholic school's efforts to dialogue with contemporary culture and society. Unlike the institutional church which is considered to live in and for the past, Catholic schools in general are perceived to be present and future oriented. Catholic schools help young people to not only understand their world but to also find ways of participating in it. (Angelico, 1997, pp. 46-47)

This response from Catholic schools is viewed as legitimate participation in "the evangelizing mission of the Church" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 11). The term "evangelization" can have a variety of meanings (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997), but Pope Paul VI set the essential parameters: "For the Church, evangelization means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and, through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new..." (1975, par. 18). He also indicated what he believed to be the primary vehicle of evangelization:

...for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life.... Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world. (par. 41)

Third Millennium likewise honors this strategy by asserting that the objective of the Catholic school is "complete [human] formation through interpersonal relations" (par. 18). This is especially evident when mature, Christian teachers individually and collegially share themselves with their students:

Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of man's most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material but on the very spirits of human beings. The personal relations between the teacher and the students, therefore, assume an enormous importance.... (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 19)

Such a direction minimizes neither the importance of religious education (Paul VI, 1975; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997) nor the devotional and sacramental rhythm maintained in Catholic schools; but it signals a priority:

...there is no true evangelization if the name of Jesus and the Kingdom of Jesus are not proclaimed in word. These proclamation moments, however, are more infrequent. Witnessing is the every day challenge. But pastoral counseling, small group liturgies, retreat days, school Eucharist, reconciliation services and graced moments of personal story-telling [without being "churchy"] on the part of a Catholic educator, all constitute moments of the proclamation of the word. (Mulligan, 1994, p. 79)

Catholic evangelization in *Third Millennium* reflects an integrated theology, in which it is difficult to distinguish between the concepts of the sacred and profane and in which to honor authentic human values is a dynamically spiritual experience:

That is why I find this theology so appropriate to describe the nature and purpose of Catholic education. Indeed, there is no neutral subject or discipline. The gospel perspective is the lens through which Catholic educators and students together investigate and analyze all values and actions, attitudes and relationships. (Mulligan, 1994, p. 78)

Such a rationale provides evidence for *Third Millennium's* assertion that "the Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 9). It also illustrates how the pursuit of experiences which promote authentic humanity is also a spiritual quest.

In the Catholic school's educational project there is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom. The various school subjects do not present only knowledge to be attained but also values to be acquired and truths to be discovered. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 14)

However, the Catholic notions of authentic humanity and evangelization demand a relational and inter-relational responsibility. Ironically, individuality is defined by relationships with others, and it is only in community that authentic humanity is nurtured (cf. O'Murchu, 1997a, pp. 86-90). *Third Millennium* explicitly relates this reality to the Catholic school's purpose: "The educating community, taken as a whole, is thus called to further the objective of a school as a place of complete formation through interpersonal relations" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 18). Catholic evangelization therefore incorporates a critically social responsibility (Paul VI, 1975) into its dynamic, an issue *Third Millennium* addresses in detail.

AUTHENTIC HUMANITY AND COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITIES

The concept of community has its origins in an understanding of the nature of humans, who are themselves images of the nature of God (cf. O'Murchu, 1997a, pp. 86-90):

> Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and so strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a new model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire solidarity. This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three Persons, is what we Christians mean by the word "communion." (John Paul II, 1987, par. 40)

This rationale provides the fundamental "*theological foundation* [italics added]" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 18) to assert unambiguously, as well as to elaborate Vatican II's policy, expressed in the 1965 *Declaration on Christian Education* (Flannery, 1996), that the primary distinguishing characteristic of the Catholic school ought to be the creation of genuine Christian community (cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, pars. 53-57; 1982, par. 22; 1988, par. 31).

Theologically, this concept extends beyond individual togetherness and its existence cannot be engineered or coerced. Those attempting to develop community in Catholic schools should acknowledge, respect, and honor the validity of human experience, which implies that the identity and dignity of each person is inextricably bound up with the quality of the relationships developed throughout life (Boswell, 1996).

Such a perspective provides the rationale for certain axiomatic Christian principles to be used to critique the authenticity of "community" toward which the Catholic school supposedly aspires. These principles are honored in *Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998). They include solidarity with the oppressed, distributive justice, preferential option for the poor, democracy, power sharing, and basic human rights. These principles are the prerequisite "building blocks" of authentic community and in turn authentic community is the glue that holds together these principles (Cappo, 1996). The acceptance of this expanded concept of community demands:

> ...not only a redistribution of material resources, but also for measures to reconnect the excluded, the poor, the unemployed; to provide them with opportunities for social interactions; to give priority to the most vulnerable; to bring them out of dependence and isolation into interdependence and alongsideness with other groups in the community. What is crucial to community is the community seeking of inclusion, reparation or redress. (Cappo, 1996, p. 16)

This is the very point *Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998) asserts as a particular challenge for Catholic schools:

> ...it is a school for all, with special attention for those who are weakest.... The Catholic schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people...who have lost all sense of meaning in life and lack any type of inspiring ideal, those to whom no values are proposed and who do not know the beauty of faith, who come from families which are broken and incapable of love, often living in situations of material and spiritual poverty, slaves to the new idols of a society, which, not infrequently, promises them only a future of unemployment and marginalization. To these new poor the Catholic school turns in a spirit of love. Spurred on by the aim of offering to all, and especially to the poor and marginalized, the opportunity of an education, of training for a job, of human and Christian formation, it can and must find in the context of the old and new forms of poverty that original synthesis of ardor and fervent dedication which is a manifestation of Christ's love for the poor, the humble, the masses seeking for truth. (par. 15)

From this perspective of community, it is impossible for the authentic humanity of a particular group to be promoted to the detriment of the common good (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 1992; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998) or those who are the "weakest" in society (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 15). Consequently, evangelization for the Catholic school community, while addressing deficiencies, must scrutinize the structures within society that generate inequalities, which create the new poor (Paul VI, 1975, pars. 30-32). "To be the conduit of the church's social teaching, to propose a critical education with the purpose of transforming society—this is an authentic and credible raison d'être for Catholic education" (Mulligan, 1994, p. 78). A Catholic school which appears to opt out of this obligatory communal responsibility and focus de facto primarily on the cultivation of middle-class respectability or even social elitism "is not Catholic" (Groome, 1996, p. 116), an observation with which *Third Millennium* concurs (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998):

> Unfortunately, there are instances in which the Catholic school is not perceived as an integral part of organic pastoral work, at times it is considered alien, or very nearly so, to the community. It is urgent, therefore, to sensitize parochial and diocesan communities to the necessity of their devoting special care to education and schools. (par. 12)

From such a perspective, a private Catholic school is oxymoronic, a point elaborated on in *Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998):

> In this way the Catholic school's public role is clearly perceived. It has not
> come into being as a private initiative, but as an expression of the reality of
> the Church, having by its very nature a public character. It fulfills a service
> of public usefulness and although clearly and decidedly configured in the
> perspective of the Catholic faith, is not reserved to Catholics only, but is
> open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified educational pro-
> ject.... Catholic schools, moreover, like state schools, fulfill a public role,
> for their presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above
> all, the freedom and right of families to see that their children receive the
> type of education they wish for them. (par. 16)

The Vatican's focus is timely, since unfortunately and ironically the Catholic school's track record as a challenge to the status quo is unremarkable, at least in Australia. There is ample evidence (Turner, 1992) that Australian Catholic education has been outstandingly successful in being the prime catalyst for providing upward social mobility to a repressed and discriminated Irish remnant that constituted the pioneer Australian church, poignantly illustrated in the 1990s when Australia's Governor General, Prime Minister, and Chief Justice were all of Irish-Catholic heritage. This Australian perspective mirrors in many ways the evolution of Catholic education in the United States. "The election of an Irish-Catholic to the presidency in 1960 was a watershed event" (McLaughlin, O'Keefe, & O'Keeffe, 1996, p. 11).

As in the United States (Lesko, 1986), the Catholic school in Australia provided this mobility, not by addressing the injustices in that society, but through acceptance of the agenda of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment, becoming part of it, and attaining leadership roles within it (Ryan & McLaughlin, 1999). Instead of being what Vatican II's *Declaration on Christian Education* (Flannery, 1996) coined, the "saving leaven in society," it is suggested that at least some "Catholic secondary schools have absorbed an ethos which is pragmatic, competitive, consumerist, and materialist" (Collins, 1986, p. 217).

To some degree, this issue is being addressed in the United States, where despite decreasing financial resources, decisions are made from racial and social justice principles to maintain inner-city Catholic schools, the clientele of which are Black and Hispanic. In many schools, there is a large non-Catholic enrollment (McLaughlin, O'Keefe, & O'Keeffe, 1996). Such an initiative has been found both practical and rewarding, where Catholic schools "are on the basis of unquestionable evidence, the most effective institutions in the country in overcoming the effects of poverty [physical and spiritual] on young people" (Greeley, 1987, p. 112).

This issue is still a major challenge for Australia's Catholic schools, though there is evidence in some areas of its redress. Proportionally, indigenous children are underrepresented in Catholic schools in Australia

(Chesterton & Johnston, 1999). Attempts to respond to this situation by Catholic education authorities, particularly in rural areas, have been opposed by some White parents on apparent nonracial grounds, that with the enrollment of indigenous children, the school's academic standards decline. The tension generated has caused indigenous children to re-enroll in government schools or a critical number of White children in Catholic schools to withdraw, thus threatening the viability of the Catholic school due to the decrease in the student population. In the face of this parental opposition, *Third Millennium* gives a clear, principled policy direction for Catholic education authorities. The Catholic school is "a school for all, with special attention given to those who are weakest" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 15).

From a macro perspective, it would also seem a logical obligation for Catholic education to challenge the economic rationalist government goals and policies so that the fundamental humanity of a nation's children and young people is respected, protected, and nurtured, and not merely utilized. Perhaps,

> ' (t)he great contribution that Catholic educators can make to the national conversation on schooling is to seek to balance the growing utilitarian emphasis with constant reminders of the potential of schooling to enhance the growth of the individual, to ennoble the human spirit, to build a compassionate community and to revitalize the culture. (Dwyer, 1993, p. 6)

The theological foundation of community dictates that authentic, personal, and societal growth can only occur in the context of the common good (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference 1992; Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1997), something with which purely secular education seems unable to grapple. It is to be expected that in the government school systems this spiritual-human dimension is relatively muted and questions of the common good are generally considered as political and reserved for private debate. Therefore, the de facto concept of humanity operating in government schools has been insightfully described as *"homo economicus"* (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993, p. 319), in which the "good" is judged by "...a utilitarian calculus of individual self-interest" (Bryk et al., p. 320). This phenomenon is not confined to government schools, since Coleman's American study of government, independent, and Catholic schools concluded that nondenominational independent schools "constitute with few exceptions an extreme individualism in education" (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987, p. 216), a philosophy that is the antithesis of the common good. However, there appears to be evidence that such a philosophy is obliquely cultivated in some Catholic schools (Angus, 1988; Treston, 1997). These schools cannot legitimately claim to be Catholic, because when they exclusively focus on the develop-

ment of the individual, they fail to promote authentic humanity (Groome, 1998). It is precisely in respecting the dignity of the individual human person that a rationale is developed for the advancement of a just and caring society (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference 1992). This ethos, labeled an "inspirational ideology" (Bryk et al., 1993, p. 320), deliberately gives preference to the common good over individual choice. Such a purpose is said to be unique to Catholic schools. It follows logically, that the Catholic school cannot exist for the promotion of the individual person per se.

> These aims (of a Catholic school) are formally joined in an educational philosophy that seeks to develop each student as a "person-in-community." Not surprisingly, this educational philosophy aligns well with social equity aims. Moreover, when such understandings meld to a coherent organizational structure with adequate fiscal and human resources, desirable academic and social consequences can result. (Bryk, 1996, p. 33)

It is hoped that an argument has been presented which provides an adequate appreciation that the words "The school for the human person and of human persons" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 9) express the essential aim of the Catholic school: that "learners might become fully alive human beings who contribute to society for the common good....(T)his personal-cum-social [is the] purpose of [Catholic] education" (Groome, 1998, p. 72).

Possibly, there is no more real touchstone than finance, which challenges the rhetoric of this supposed uniquely Catholic value. This is particularly so in the United States, where government subsidies to Catholic schools are negligible, but where there is ample evidence of commendable self-sacrifice and creative innovations (O'Keefe, 1999). In contrast, in Australia, where substantial government aid is provided to Catholic schools, research concludes that economics is the major reason that deters the lower socioeconomic groups and the indigenous population from sending their children to Catholic schools (Canavan, 1994; Johnston & Chesterton, 1994). The Australian Catholic school community must resolve this challenge if its practice is to match its rhetoric. The Catholic school is obligated to negotiate dignified and equitable strategies in this area of economics, for failure to do so inevitably leads to "the exclusion from Catholic schools of those who cannot afford to pay, leading to a selection according to means which deprives the Catholic school of one of its distinguishing features, which is to be a school for all" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 7), "with special attention for those who are weakest" (par. 15).

Mindful of an exception (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982), the concept of community in Roman documents, Arthur (1995, p. 57) asserts, has been defined as: "primarily a theological concept rather than a sociolog-

ical category" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, par. 31). *Third Millennium* breaks new ground when, in asserting the importance of sociological dimensions, the theological foundation should not be underemphasized: "...this community dimension in the Catholic school is not a merely *sociological category* [italics added]; it has a theological foundation as well" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 18). Possibly, *Third Millennium* is reminding the reader that the "evangelization through witness" priority for Catholic schools is not humanism, but authentic humanization: "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mysteries of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (Paul VI, 1975, par. 22). However, Jesus is primarily proclaimed through the authentic lives of committed Christians (Galatians 2:20). This evangelization priority is particularly emphasized in *Third Millennium*. "Catholic schools are at once a place of evangelization, of complete formation, of inculturation, of apprenticeship in lively dialogue between young people of different religions and social backgrounds" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 11).

Third Millennium's sociological communitarian perspective is offered through sentiments rarely cited in Vatican documentation concerning humanity which supposedly distinguishes Catholic schools. "During childhood and adolescence a student needs to experience *personal* [italics added] relations with outstanding educators" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 18); and "(t)he *personal* [italics added] relations between the teacher and the students assume an enormous importance and are not simply limited to giving and taking" (par. 19).

Moreover, the community dimension must extend to the families of pupils in Catholic schools, since the growth of the child is to a large extent dependent upon quality family life. This relational and inter-relational dynamic of human personhood is honored often in *Third Millennium*. Indeed, a respectful *"personalized* [italics added] approach" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 20) is recommended with parents who may be delinquent in their parental responsibilities, if the "educational project is to be efficacious" (par. 20). It is the very human, dignified, sensitive, and respectful response, characteristic of evangelism through witness, that *Third Millennium* recommends.

> ...we cannot forget the part played by Catholic schools in organic pastoral work and in pastoral care for the family in particular, emphasizing in this respect their discreet insertion in the educational dynamics between parents and their children and very especially the unpretentious yet caring and sensitive help offered in those cases, more and more numerous, above all in wealthy nations of families which are fragile or have broken up. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 5)

And

> Therefore, it is necessary to foster initiatives which encourage commitment, but which provide at the same time the right sort of concrete support which the family needs and which involve it in the Catholic school's educational project. The constant aim of the school should therefore be contact and dialogue with the pupil's families. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, par. 20)

CONCLUSION

The promotion of authentic humanity within an inclusive school community is the major theme emanating from *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*. For many Catholics, adults and children, "the face of Christ in the school is the only face of Christ they will encounter, at least the only encounter with Christ that makes any sense to them" (Treston, 1998, p. 70). This implies that students, parents, and staff experience first and foremost the common decency, fairness, care, and graciousness of a very human Christ. This is the essential linchpin for a Catholic school's authenticity and the primary challenge for leadership in Catholic education. "By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16).

In the third millennium, the dominant purpose of the Catholic school may be the provision of an authentic educational environment where the value of the human person is affirmed, where knowledge is integrated for the sake of ultimate truths, and where the relationship of the human person with God is modeled as well as taught. Such a response is legitimately Catholic.

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