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Theology, Relationship and Leadership in Catholic Education ®

Australia

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Introduction

It should be axiomatic that Catholic education and leadership in Catholic education has a solid theological base. While this may be highly desirable, it is simply not the case at present. Perusing the abstracts for papers at this Conference it is clear that there is an assumption that leaders in Catholic education are theologically literate and that they are comfortable in their roles as the theological, spiritual and ecclesial leaders of their School communities. Again, I am not convinced this is the case. In this paper I propose a theological foundation for leadership in Catholic education predicated on the concept of relationality and the idea of the relational person. This foundation is genuinely theological and will, in my view, enable leaders in Catholic education to be authentic witnesses to the Gospel.

Recent years have seen witnessed a turn to relationality in philosophy and theology. This academic trend is now being applied in a practical way to a range of contexts. In terms of leadership in Catholic Education, a relational anthropology offers a paradigm for vision, spirituality and action. The basic thrust of this paper is to explore how a theology of relational personhood prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable and can underpin a renewed understanding of leadership in Catholic education. The paper draws on the work of John Macmurray, Emmanuel Levinas and John Zizioulas to develop an authentic Christian anthropology. I reference these theorists throughout the paper but do not explore their ideas in particular depth due to constraints of time and space.

The paper has three sections. In the first I make some general comments on the concept of relationality and its emergence as a central theme in recent in philosophy and theology; secondly, I elaborate some key features of the anthropology I propose; and thirdly, I make explicit connections between these insights and the role of leaders in Catholic education as participants in the mission of the Church to the vulnerable.

Relationality

The last two decades have witnessed a gradual but growing movement in theology and philosophy toward “relationality”, such that it has become an all-pervasive feature in the contemporary sense of reality. For example, in the domain of sub-atomic physics, it is necessary to allow, not only for the fundamental constitution of matter in terms of the micro-entity as particles, but also as waves. This suggests an analogy for considering the human person, not only as an individual substance, but as the intersection of relationships. Similarly, ecological science, and the concerns it inspires, stresses the interactive habitat or ecosphere in which each living being exists. That too suggests, in an extension of meaning, the “ecology” and whole living milieu into which each human being is born, lives, acts and dies. At its most basic level the nature of the universe is an unfolding series of connections and relationships (O'Murchu, 1997: 33).

More philosophically speaking, the reality of each being, above all, the human person, is conceived of, less as a self-contained, independent entity as is the case in classical metaphysics, and more in interaction with the totality of the community of which it is a part. W. Norris Clarke develops the classic Thomistic approach along these lines. In his *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Clarke, 2001), he suggests adding the category of “system” to the traditional list of Aristotelian categories of being (substance, plus the nine accidents of quantity, quality, action, passion, relation, time, place, posture and vesture). The category of system is a new form of unity that resides in all members of the given group at once, as in families, teams, churches, social groups, ecologies, and, by extension, a school or a whole education system (Clarke, 2001: 135 - 137). Thus, a system is “set of relations forming a new unified order or “togetherness”, being together” (Clarke, 2001: 136). It is a primordial dimension of reality. The same philosopher highlights the relational character of personhood in his *Person and Being*: “relationality is a primordial dimension of every real being, inseparable from its substantiality....” (Clarke, 1993: 14). This is eminently verified in the kind of being that we name as “personal”. Personal beings are intrinsically relational, whether we are talking about human beings, God or angels. As John Macmurray puts it, “the personal cannot be thought of as the form of an individual self, but only through the mutuality of personal

relationship” (Macmurray, 1957:38). That is, the person cannot be identified or known except in the context of relationships. In this way “personal” can be seen to be interpersonal and dynamic by nature—interpersonal because attention must always be paid to the relational nexus within which the individual exists; dynamic, because interpersonal relationships evolve through the communications which take place between persons. These are critical elements for any leader, especially in Catholic education, to be aware of and to incorporate within their own leadership style.

But not only does science and philosophy point us in this more relational direction. History has played its part in provoking a deeper reflection on the meaning of human personhood. The tragedies of the 20th Century raised the question of the value of the human person under threat from violent, totalitarian ideologies. In reaction to the philosophical abstractness of past thinking on human nature, the concreteness and irreplaceable uniqueness of each human person, and the irreducible value of the “I”, have come into clearer focus. However, this too would vanish into abstraction unless it gave critical attention to the structures—or as Clarke would term them, the “systems”—that shape human life, be they social, economic, political, cultural. This transpersonal reality, the systemic “It” can either enrich human development or violently compromise it. The system in which people exist, though it is objectified as an “It”, is always implicitly inviting an expression of our common humanity as a socially and culturally formed “We”. But this more relational and inclusive sense of personal existence leads to range of questions which pierce to the level of conscience: With whom are *you* in solidarity? Who do *you* stand with? Who do *you* speak for? Obviously, this kind of thinking draws on the various versions of the option for the poor, of solidarity with victims, of history seen “from the underside.” They are critical questions for Catholic education and for leaders in Catholic education too. What does the student profile of our schools suggest about our view of solidarity? When we speak, who is it that we speak for? Leaders in Catholic education are faced with the daunting task of answering these questions not only for themselves but also for the institutions that they lead. A fundamental aspect of leadership in the Catholic context is its orientation to service. This is not a generalised service but one which prioritises the needs of the most vulnerable – anything less does not only fail to live up to the mission of Jesus, it actually hinders or even negates that mission.

A recent media report discussed a survey of Australian parents about their school choices for their children indicated that parents choose Catholic and other religious based schools for their perceived better educational standards, stronger sense of discipline and some sense of spiritual values. In contrast those choosing state schools indicated that they believed state schools encouraged diversity, tolerance and the acceptance of a people from a wide socio-economic and cultural background. These kinds of surveys are of limited value, but on hearing these statements I found myself wondering why it is that foremost in the minds of parents of students at Catholic schools are standards, discipline and spiritual values but not diversity, tolerance and acceptance? Any analysis of the demography of the Catholic education sector in Australia will indicate that the students are from a narrower range of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural, and special needs backgrounds than those of State School. I know that there are many complex issues which are pertinent here but the situations themselves do stand and they are something of an indictment on Catholic education in terms of its participation in the mission of the Church.

Returning to relationality, in the context of ecology and cosmology, there is a growing awareness that we are invited into an awareness of our embodiment in the interconnected, multiform life of the planet itself. The human person is newly perceived as an “earthling” in the great temporal and spatial genesis of the cosmos itself. The growing appreciation of such an “It”, the planetary web of life and the cosmic process that has given birth to it, inspires a fresh expansion of the “We”, the person, within a community, within a world of relationships. Here, the words of Einstein are resonant:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us the “universe”, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty (Nagler, 1982: 11).

Einstein’s expression of “our task” is eminently relevant to my concern to express a notion of personhood that can be of paradigmatic significance in education. Ever increasing “know-how” is continually in need of a larger wisdom, born of renewed humility before the vastness and complexity of reality, in all its relationships and connections. A holistic sense of the person is repelled by what is often criticized as

contemporary society's mono-dimensional, fragmented, mechanistic, instrumental relationship to the persons it seeks to serve (Fletcher, 1998).

Education is a relational exercise. The very term, taken from *educare*, means "to draw out." Implied in this is the sense that the one drawing out and the one who is drawn out are in a relationship. Note, I am not initially commenting on the quality of the relationship, just its existence. At this point I want to turn to the second part of the paper where I elaborate my own perspectives on relational anthropology.

A Relational Anthropology

Recognition of the centrality of relationality to the foundation of existence, and particularly to human persons, means that there is a need for a new "paradigm". Such a paradigm-shift has significant implications for fundamental change in theoretical and practical thinking – in the context of this paper, with respect to Catholic Education and leadership in Catholic Education. In order to develop this insight it is necessary to mine resources from the Christian and biblical tradition. The contemporary conception of the human person can call on analogies that were simply beyond the imagination of past philosophical and theological accounts of human personhood. However, a retrieval of the relational implications of Trinitarian and Christological doctrines can assist the present quest for a contemporary understanding of the person. Contemporary worldviews are necessarily influenced by the relational horizon of modern science. It speaks of everything from the interactions of most infinitesimal sub-atomic particles to the complex ecologies of the rain forest, from the wave and particle models of quantum mechanics to the fundamental forces pervading the whole cosmos, in relational terms. With this as a background, key doctrines from the Christian inheritance spring into new life as relational realities expanding the fundamental conceptions of the human person.

Christian Anthropology, or the Christian view of the human person, is an interpretation of humanity in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Christian life does not primarily consist in a set of doctrines or beliefs, but in following Jesus (Scanlon, 1987: 27). Action has priority over reflection, and ethical behaviour has precedence over doctrinal orthodoxy. Christian theology, especially Catholic moral theology, has been articulated in the past by an understanding of the world, society and persons in philosophical terms deriving from a metaphysics of substance

and the ontological and moral order of the universe deriving from natural law (Lehmkuhl, 1999). The nature of the human person was taken as the norm for the moral goodness or badness of particular action intending an end or means in accord with, or contrary to, the laws of nature and reason (Kelly, 1992: 29). A relational theology of personhood broadens the context, especially by explicating the communitarian dimensions of Christian life and conduct. This change of emphasis and foundation for theological reasoning has significant implications for education, as we shall see in the third part of this paper.

It must be emphasised that the concept of communion, or community, is larger than an ensemble of individual relationships; it also includes the *quality* of the communication that is occurring in the field of interpersonal relationality in question. For communion recognises and affirms the persons involved, as each unique Other affects the self-identity of all (Zizioulas, 1991: 45). In this, a *telos* or ultimate goal is envisaged, deriving from the divine intention to draw all into unity through a common participation in the life of the Trinity.

In addition, the concept of communion goes beyond that of society and the interactions that make it up. Being “in communion” transcends the social situation of rivalry, violence and fear, to find its expression in active and loving relations between the persons (Macmurray, 1991: 151). John Macmurray uses the metaphor of mother-child relations, including their mutual need each for the other, as the basis for all human relationships (Macmurray, 1991: 43). This relationship is not reducible to a biological relationship or even a gendered one. I agree with him in seeing this relation as a primary metaphor for all interpersonal relations. It is a relation characterised by personal mutuality, linking the self and the Other in the nurture of a shared life (Kirkpatrick, 2001: 69). The mutual transformation enacted in the relation is more fully expressed in the relationship between lovers. In such an encounter, there is a notable intensity which moves the self to embrace the Other, in a communication that transforms both parties (Marsh, 2002: 279). The self is newly experienced as being both for, and from, the beloved Other (Zizioulas, 1991: 44). Communion, understood in this way, does not imply the loss of self, nor absorption in the other, but the realisation of the true self through the affirmation of the unique other (Zizioulas, 1991: 40 - 41). In this, both the self and the Other are subjects of communication (Zagzebski, 2001: 416). What is at stake is not some base level of contingent relationality, (Russell, 2003: 181) but the progressive realisation of a goal. In this regard, this kind of experience of mutuality and communion suggests

analogies, not only for communication within the Christian community as it engages in evangelisation or celebrates the Eucharist, for example, but for an understanding of the forms of community that derive from the Trinitarian community itself (Zizioulas, 1991: 80 - 81).

In short, an emphasis on community and relationship does not undermine the unique reality of the persons involved. It is not a matter of promoting an amorphous collective, but of recognising both the ontological basis of personhood and the experiential importance of relationships in the psychological constitution of persons. Entering into a relationship with the other neither dissolves nor constitutes the unique reality of the “someone” who the person is. On other hand, the field of communion, interaction and interpersonal relationships affirms and enhances the living identity of the persons involved. Hence, I argue that an exclusively metaphysical understanding of persons is restrictive, by accenting an ontological minimum, irrespective of any stage of development. Likewise, functionalist views of personhood are inadequate in that they limit themselves to empirically demonstrated abilities/capacities, e.g., reason, and so fail to account for continuity of existence at every stage of personal development. The notion of relational personhood I have articulated represents a third and more comprehensive way of thinking about personhood. By combining the ontological and the psychological, it overcomes the limitations of metaphysical individualism and empirical functionalism. By stressing the relationality inherent in personhood, it is possible to understand the importance of community and social relations for the development of personal existence (Del Colle, 2001: 82f). The person is “someone”, yet the potential to realise this uniqueness lies in actuating an endless field of relationships. Modern paediatrics has demonstrated the way that even very early embryos respond to the world around them and develop in particular ways in response to changes in their environment (Brazelton, 1993). Likewise, Jean Vanier’s work with the profoundly disabled is based on the centrality of a relational framework in his remarkable ministry (Vanier, 1999). It is within the field of education, however, that the validity of this insight is observed and demonstrated every day. School communities function only because of the relationships involved. They are Christian communities only when those relationships are mutual and interpersonal. This is an attribute of Catholic education to which the leaders of schools and systems may not attend – but developing awareness of it is a central aspect of their role as leaders.

The person is always indefinable (Zagzebski, 2001: 421 - 422). The path to personhood is never finished. This is crucial when considering the situations of children, the infirm, the disabled and the unborn. If “personhood” is constructed as an ideal of some kind, say, a fully functioning rational adult, then all who fall short of the ideal must have diminished moral status. If, on the other hand, there is recognition that persons are beings in the process of becoming, then those who do not meet the usual ideal are not simply excluded or thought to have less moral status. This is a challenge for those of us involved in education, especially school education. We operate within a social structure and in a model of education that assumes that the *end point* is a fully functioning rational adult. Within our field of enterprise, our main communication partners are children of diverse needs and varying degrees of vulnerability. Added to this is our Christian perspective that all those who are baptised are equals in Christ. In this respect it is useful to ponder the difference between how the Catholic school and a State school envisage the human person. Is there a difference? If not, on what do our claims of distinction rest?

Theologically speaking, I have been arguing that those who do not meet the social ideal have a special role in interpersonal relations, since they are among the most vulnerable. In them, we meet Christ, but also through them all are called forth into a deeper understanding of how we belong together in a personal world, subject to limitations, yet with the capacity for self-transcendence (Engelhardt, 1999: 126).

In terms of education, conceptualising persons as relational beings has a dramatic impact on the context of education. The emphasis is placed, not on a curriculum, an educational model or a measurable outcome, but on the person. Admittedly, this entails risks and its own kind of stress, once education professionals recognise themselves and the vulnerable other in an interpersonal, relational mode. It is here that leaders in Catholic education can, potentially, make the most impact. When persons so interact, a transformation of all parties can occur, even if, educationally speaking, high attainment of all the key performance descriptors is not possible. In other words, in a person-centred and person-oriented environment transformation – in Christian understanding, resurrection – is possible. The facilitation of such an environment fundamentally lies with the leaders of these communities. This is the case not due to some perspective of authority or power but due to the requirement that Christian leaders are servants who, recognising their own vulnerability, live out a commitment to the vulnerable for whom they are called to care.

Each instance of interpersonal communication calls the persons involved beyond themselves. In this regard, there are a number of variations on Martin Buber's "I-Thou" model of interpersonal relations (Buber, 1937). Where John Macmurray privileges the "mother-child" (Macmurray, 1991), Alistair McFadyen puts the emphasis on "call – response" (A.I. McFadyen, 1990). Such perspectives are not blindly idealistic about the positive nature of all relations. Both these authors recognise the power of relations to deform those concerned. Buber had conceded the potential of objectifying the Other, so that the relationship would be more like "I-It", rather than "I-Thou" (Buber, 1937: 3). Similarly, Macmurray accepts the possibility of the mother-child relationship being abused (Macmurray, 1991: 188ff). For his part, McFadyen sees the distortion as taking on a monological style of communication (A.I. McFadyen, 1990: 122). While these negative possibilities are treated differently in each case, these authors are in fundamental agreement: instead of being life-giving and expansive, relationships can be limiting and alienating. McFadyen adds a further precision: bad relationships do not mean that persons are not formed relationally, but, rather, that the formation process is distorted (Alistair I. McFadyen, 2000). Whether the relationships are good or bad, encouraging or limiting, persons become what they are in and through their interaction with others. Though the capacity for self-determination remains, it nonetheless takes place in an interactive field of relationships.

Faced with an invitation to dialogue, be it offered either implicitly or explicitly, an individual can either enter into the communication with some degree of openness to the other, and so affirm the other as a person, or treat the other merely as an object. In that case, all that is considered in the communication is the "I" or, for that matter, the exclusive "We", outside of which the other has no significance. Communication ceases to be dialogical. It is restricted to a monologue in which the active party receives and responds merely to echoes of itself (A.I. McFadyen, 1990: 122f). As noted above, distorted patterns of relations do not diminish the relational nature of persons; it is simply, and tragically, that the communication process is defective (Smail, 2003: 26). For anyone caught up or drawn into a monological form of encounter, the resultant relations are oppressive. Even so, relations continue to shape the self and the other, and reveal an inherent connection with the other (Levinas, 1989b: 247). Responsibility for the other is not thereby diminished, regardless of the pattern of current relations, for responsibility is prior to any specific relation (Levinas, 1989a: 83). On a more hopeful note, distorted relations still remain open to the possibility of transformation and redemption (Alistair I. McFadyen, 2000:

206ff). Here, Levinas' insight has its special value. Relationships mean responsibility for the Other however disfigured it might appear (Levinas, 1989a: 83 - 86). Confronted by the Other, especially in its vulnerable state, self-transcending responsibility is always possible.

No one of these theories of person-in-relation is beyond criticism. Macmurray's philosophy can appear to be too optimistic and ideal. Levinas' emphasis can be so fixed on the Other, that there is little room for the subjective (Casey, 1999: 75), and the developmental side of personhood (Bookman & Aboulafia, 2000: 172). McFadyen's emphasis on the "sedimentary" effect of relationships, apart from employing an unusual metaphor—since "sediment" does not imply any buoyancy to relational life—does not attend sufficiently to the ontological datum of the person, as when he writes,

The centred way in which we organise ourselves as persons does not arise out of internal processes or out of any qualities or attributes... rather it takes shape through our communication and relation with others. We cannot be personal centres in ourselves... (A.I. McFadyen, 1990: 113).

If "we cannot be personal centres in ourselves", this poses quite serious metaphysical and theological problems. Is there an endless regression of relationships leaving the individual person as a metaphysical vacuum, as the skins of the onion are peeled away, as it were, with nothing at its centre? On the basis of what, then, does one person relate to the other? In what does the transcendent value and dignity of the person consist? Norris Clarke would point to the need for an ontological perspective where the person is actualised and expressed in the world through their ontological structure as the basis for the value and dignity of the person (Clarke, 1993: 31 - 32). Clearly McFadyen, on the other hand, has placed his emphasis on an interactive psychology of person-formation, even if the objective basis of the respective personal "components" in the formative process remains elusive.

So, while no one of these approaches gives or pretends to give a full account of the many dimensions of personhood, there still remains a convergence and complementarity of great value for the relational personhood that this thesis is presenting. Macmurray presents the inter-subjective communication inherent in personal existence. Levinas, for his part, by prioritising the Other in the relationship, prevents it from collapsing into solipsism. McFadyen's view is, in a sense, midway between these two approaches, with his emphasis on the often dramatic exchanges

involved in the personalising process. Theologically speaking, all three (Macmurray (Stern, 2001: 25), Levinas (Levinas, 1998: 91), and McFadyen (A.I. McFadyen, 1990: 158 - 161)) face us with the question, “Who is my neighbour?”—with reference to biblical texts, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” (Lev 19:18) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25- 37).

Relational Personhood and Leadership in Catholic Education

What are the links between this theological position, the idea of leadership in Catholic education and the role of leaders in Catholic education? That is, what impact might this theology have on the way we conceptualise leadership in our context and, then, on the practicality of that leadership?

Earlier in this paper I have argued that the human person can only be genuinely understood in the context of each person’s relationships and their relational history. The previous section of the paper concluded with the biblical question, “Who is my neighbour?” I think that the implications for leadership in Catholic education can be distilled through reflection on this argument and the question it inevitably generates.

To ask, “who is my neighbour?” is an open ended and perilous question. It actively seeks an answer and that answer inexorably leads to a renewed insight about who I am, who the Other is and the relationship between us. Moreover, it is perilous: the question implies that I will be required to act and to do so in a way determined not by the extent of my willingness or capacity but by the need of the neighbour.

Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity has always clearly articulated the need for freedom in moral action. I am not denying this or trying to reject it. Rather, I am pointing to an imperative provided by the Gospel that should shape and guide our moral development, thinking and actions. If the mission of Jesus is to proclaim the Reign of God, the nature of that reign is to reach out to the vulnerable. The parable of the Good Samaritan which is Jesus response to the question, “who is my neighbour?” is not the only example from the Gospels that indicates the priority of the vulnerable in the mission of the Christian. Equally powerful is the parable of the Last Judgement in Matthew 25: 31 – 46. Here those being judged are judged according to the degree to which they responded to the real and tangible need of the

vulnerable. In the parable the vulnerable are the hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick and imprisoned. These were the most vulnerable of Jesus' time and the most vulnerable of our own time. What is clear from this parable, like that of the Good Samaritan, is that it is the real and concrete need of the Other which calls forth the response. The response is absolute and involves self-giving. I am convinced that it is not possible to really feed the hungry or clothe the naked without looking into their face and seeing not only their naked vulnerability but also being forced to recognise my own.

This is straightforward theology and theological ethics. What does implications does it have for Catholic Education? There are obvious lines of conclusion linked to enrolment policies; the inclusion of special needs students; the development of schools in areas of disadvantage, etc.. In this paper, however, I want to draw out some implications for leadership in Catholic education, especially in the Catholic school setting.

A former Archbishop of Sydney gave to St Patrick's College, Manly his own motto: *Omnia Omnibus*. This has a variety of translations but is usually considered to mean "all things to all people". I think this has proved to be an unfortunate ambition to set before the Australian clergy and it has spilled over into what we expect of those in leadership positions in Catholic education. I am not proposing to add to the already onerous list of tasks that leaders in Catholic education are expected to undertake. Instead, I want to focus on the aspect of their leadership which should shape, direct and unify the other aspects of their role – that of leader of a faith community.

According to the theological position I have articulated, Catholic leaders are not those able to hire and fire staff, not those charged with administering large sums of money and exercising fiduciary responsibility, not those responsible for ensuring the competent delivery of curricula. Of course, all these are central and important to the role; they are not, however, anything of distinction in terms of Catholic leadership. As my colleague Denis McLaughlin has demonstrated, the attainment of leadership positions has often been a matter of joining the powerful establishment and virtually repudiating the values of the Gospel (McLaughlin, 2005: 217).

As leaders of faith communities in Catholic education a different way of fulfilling the core tasks of leadership must be apparent. I suggest that a focus on relational personhood in which the absolute priority is always the vulnerable other will provide

the framework and guidance necessary to enable the leaders in Catholic education to be distinctively servants of the Gospel. Or, as I noted earlier in this paper, the task of leaders in Catholic education is to facilitate an environment where persons can flourish this requires servants who can recognise their own vulnerability and through it live out a commitment to the vulnerable for who are entrusted to our care.

The challenge of this is, for leaders in Catholic education to make the vulnerable the focus of their own activities and to model this standard of care for those they lead. They need to be able to answer the question, 'who is my neighbour?' that the neighbour is the one with whom I am in relationship. The demands of the Gospel then indicate that for a Catholic leader the vulnerable have a special call on our attention and demand that we look them in the face, acknowledge their otherness and their vulnerability. In this we both see the face of Jesus, as Matthew tells us in 25:31 – 46, and it is possible to lead others to the same revealing experience.

Leaders in Catholic education need to be careful to shape their communication in dialogical ways – seeking the face of the other means to engage actively and not developing monological styles of communication which belittle the other, even implicitly. Levinas has noted that each time we look into the face of another person there is an encounter in which the other can either be affirmed or rejected – such rejection he says is the same as hearing the plea of the other, “do not kill me” and ignoring that plea (Levinas, 1992). By ensuring that each encounter is affirming rather than rejecting, the leaders in Catholic education bear witness to the Gospel. This is enacting, living out, the moral responsibility that the face of the other demands.

The pace of contemporary school terms and years, the pace of educational administration – the need to be responsive to the latest educational, social, political requirement for schools and education systems – risks tacitly encouraging leaders to enter into monological forms of communication that dehumanise and reject the other.

As leaders in a faith community, a community fundamentally shaped by a response to the question, 'who is my neighbour?', a response that is consistent with the Gospel, we need to give our leaders the time, space and encouragement to always enter into dialogical communication with all those in their care. The response to the question is that all those we encounter are neighbours... there are no limits indicated in the Gospel to the demands made of us in this regard. Who do you stand in

solidarity with? Who do you speak for? In each case the answer is, the vulnerable other.

This is a significant demand, in addition to all the other demands facing educational leaders; however, if the claim of Catholic education to be an integral part of the Church's mission is to be authentic, then leaders in the system must engage with the other in ways consistent with the Gospel. This means recognising that persons are relational beings and that any encounter with them must either build up their personhood or reject their personhood. Leaders in the Catholic community need to see this as the central aspect of their role, the feature which shapes their leadership and which must be apparent in all their dealings with students, parents, staff and the broader community. Only in this way can leadership be authentic in the manner which faith in Jesus demands. For leaders in Catholic education this obligation extends beyond themselves to their role to shape future participants in the Mission of the Church and future leaders of that Mission. The identity of each person, the leader in Catholic education and those they lead, derives from our relationship with Jesus – entering into relationships for the Catholic leader then must reflect Jesus and his priorities.

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