

# **Catholic Educational Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Catholic Leadership Conference, Sydney

30 July 2007

Dear colleagues and friends:

## ***Introduction***

Thank you very much Patrick [Duignan] for your generous introduction and especially for the very kind invitation issued by Brother Tony D'Arbon to be with you at this Fourth International Conference on Catholic Educational Leadership sponsored by Australian Catholic University and its Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership. It is especially wonderful to be back in cool but welcoming and sunny Australia – now for my third visit.

The Conference topic is extraordinarily timely: addressing the kind of leadership necessary for the flourishing of Australian Catholic schools in the third millennium. You are leaders who are shaping the future of society and the Church in this vast Continent through your ministry in primary and secondary education. As Secretary of the Congregation of Catholic Education, it is my pleasure today to express the Holy See's gratitude for your dedicated service and to provoke further reflection on several vitally important questions. Certainly it is the Congregation's earnest hope that your system will continue to be a keystone in the Church's pastoral life in Australia, where 50% of Catholic children attend more than 1,700 schools.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tony D'Arbon, "Career Aspirations of Potential Applicants for Principals of Catholic Schools: An Australian Perspective," *Catholic Education*, 10:1

words of the Servant of God, John Paul II deserve repeating:

The Catholic School system, of which the Church in Australia is rightly proud, was and is a response to the Church's right and duty to provide an integral human religious and moral education. The sacrifices which the hierarchy, the members of religious congregations and Australian Catholic parents have been willing to make in this cause clearly [stand to] indicate the conviction of the value of such education for the transmission of the faith, and for the application of the Christian message to the realities of life in society.<sup>2</sup>

After briefly describing the role of the Congregation for Catholic Education, I will then encourage you to continue your valiant efforts to strengthen the Catholic ethos of Australia's schools by creatively devoting yourselves to this task. Second, I would like to say something about how Catholic educational leaders can see their service as a ministry directed to building up the ecclesial and social community.

## **I. The Holy See and Schools**

First, a short introduction on the Holy See's concern for the primary and secondary education of children enrolled in Catholic

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(September 2006), 46-49.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of Australia, Sydney (26 November 1986), 6: *Insegnamenti*, 9/2 (1986), 1661.

schools around the world. From ancient times, the Church has fostered the setting up of schools. Indeed, “The problem of instruction has always been closely linked with the mission of the Church.”<sup>3</sup> Schools were first established close to cathedrals and monasteries, thanks especially to the initiatives of bishops and monks. The Pope’s role was initially limited to encouraging such endeavours. Later, in wake of the Council of Trent, the papal approval of religious congregations, especially those dedicated to the education of youth, also demonstrated the Holy See’s concern for schooling. During the nineteenth century, faced by States which claimed exclusive rights over schooling, the Popes began to formulate more explicitly their teaching on education.<sup>4</sup> Since then, the Vatican has zealously supported the founding of Catholic schools, defended their independence from civil control, recalled the rights of parents to choose such schools for their children, and promoted their specifically Catholic identity.

Papal solicitude for schooling is rooted in his ministry of leading, teaching and pastoring the universal Church. In carrying out this demanding responsibility which Jesus entrusted to Peter and his

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Address to UNESCO (2 June 1980), 18: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 72 (1980), 747.

<sup>4</sup> In his 1864 *Syllabus of Errors* Pius IX condemned those who denied the Church’s right to educate children (45, 47, 48). See also Leo XIII’s encyclicals *Sapientiae Christianae* (1890) and *Affari Vos* (1897), and Benedict XV’s letter *Communes Litteras* (1914). With his encyclical *Divini Illius Magister* (1929), Pius XI established the foundation of Catholic teaching on education.

successors (cf. Mt 16:18-19; Lk 22:31-32; Jn 21:15-17), the Popes have sought the help of others, who constitute the administrative apparatus at his service. The Roman Curia assists the Pope in his duties,<sup>5</sup> including his responsibilities in the area of schooling, a task now entrusted to the Congregation for Catholic Education.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council called for the setting up of a special post-conciliar commission to further develop the fundamental principles of Christian education declared in its document *Gravissimum Educationis*.<sup>6</sup> In turn, this commission concluded that a permanent body of the Holy See should be given this task. Hence, forty years ago, on 15 August 1967, Pope Paul VI established a Schools Office for this purpose within the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.<sup>7</sup> He assigned to this Office the task of overseeing, on his behalf, all Catholic primary and secondary schools around the world.<sup>8</sup> John Paul II confirmed this role in 1988,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Address to the College of Cardinals and Roman Curia (28 June 1984), 2: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 (16 July 1984), 6. The 1983 Code of Canon Law succinctly describes the Curia's function in canon 360: "The Supreme Pontiff usually conducts the business of the universal Church by means of the Roman Curia, which fulfils its duty in his name and by his authority for the good and the service of the churches."

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, introduction.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Paul VI, *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, 79. The term "sacred" was dropped as a modifier of the curial congregations in John Paul II's 1988 apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Paul VI, *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, article 79. The exception to this universal scope are the schools under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the

charging the Congregation to make “every effort to see that the fundamental principles of Catholic education as set out by the Magisterium of the Church be ever more deeply researched, championed, and known by the people of God.”<sup>9</sup>

With nearly 52 million students in more than 200,000 Catholic schools worldwide,<sup>10</sup> the Vatican does not deal directly with individual schools; they fall under the authority of the local bishop or, in many cases, of a religious institute. The Congregation, however, at a very general level, “sets the norms by which Catholic schools are governed.”<sup>11</sup>

On a regular basis, the Schools Office draws up documents for the universal Church on various questions affecting primary and secondary education.<sup>12</sup> These official publications, which are so well

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Oriental Churches and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Competency for catechetical and religious instruction was assigned to the Congregation for the Clergy (cf. John Paul II, *Pastor Bonus*, article 94).

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, *Pastor Bonus*, article 114.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics for the school year 2004-2005 provide the following data about the number of Catholic school students in the different continents (in millions): Africa, 16; North and South America, 12.7; Asia, 11.7; Europe, 8.7; Oceania, 1 (Secretariat of State, *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae 2004: Statistical Yearbook of the Church 2004* [Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2006], 290).

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, *Pastor Bonus*, article 115.

<sup>12</sup> By periodically publishing documents, the Congregation fulfils *Gravissimum Educationis*'s charge to develop more fully the declaration's affirmations on the principles of Christian education and the specific mission of Catholic schools. It does so with a growing awareness of the challenge posed by increasing secularization and other obstacles. *The Catholic School* (19 March 1977) was issued on the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Schools Office by Paul VI in 1967. *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (15 October 1982) recognizes the enormous

known to you, deepen and apply Christian principles of Catholic education, especially in light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

## II. Catholic Identity and Life

Among the key principles is a set of concerns around the Catholic identity and life of schools. As educational leaders you work hard to secure the identity of your institutions, since that identity expresses their ethos, standards and practices. The question arises, as recently formulated by John Watts and Jim Hanley: Are the identity and ethos embodied in Australia's Catholic schools *really* Catholic, or are they merely *nominally* Catholic?<sup>13</sup> As David Ranson of the Catholic Institute of Sydney has written, this question is all the more pressing today because:

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decline in priests and religious teaching in schools, and formulates in positive terms the vocation of the lay Catholic educator in both Catholic and non-Catholic schools. *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Guidelines for Sex Education* (1 November 1983) places sex education within the general framework of all Christian education. The fruit of a long consultation, it wished to respond positively to parental concerns about sex education in the schools. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (7 April 1988) is a response to secularization and its effects on the young. *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (28 December 1997) discusses some contemporary challenges to the distinctiveness of the Catholic school and its contribution to the Church's evangelizing mission. *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools* (28 October 2002), following the previous document on the laity, reaffirms the importance of the educational apostolate for consecrated men and women. *Educating Together in the Catholic School: The Shared Mission of Consecrated Persons and the Laity* (15 August 2007) completes the trilogy on those who work in Catholic schools.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. John D. Watts and Jim Hanley, "Continuing the Catholic Ethos and Identity of a Catholic Institution When Disengaged from its Foundational Religious Founders or Traditions: An Australian Case Study," *The Australian Catholic Record*, 84:1 (January 2007), 12.

the success of the Catholic education system, and the end of sectarian sentiment, has meant that the Australian Catholic school has social prestige and is sought by a wider non-churched population who place little regard for the spiritual orientation of the school, and the formation in faith it offers, but who are keen to avail [themselves] of the quality teaching, human values, discipline and pastoral care that characterise our schools.<sup>14</sup>

Success, then, can be a two-edged sword. The Church in Australia has established great schools, but they face formidable challenges that educational leaders must confront. Throughout Australia the students increasingly come from homes where, even if they are Catholic, the faith is not practised and the children are not catechized. Add to this the growing proportion of non-Catholics in the schools and the indifference of many parents. Despite this situation, schools are still the best hope the Church has for evangelizing the next generation of Australia's Catholics.<sup>15</sup> But, is everyone ready and willing to embrace this adventure in uncharted waters; that is, to ensure that the schools are genuinely *Catholic*?

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* (2001), John Paul II pointed out that among the concrete pastoral

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<sup>14</sup> David Ranson, "Forming a New Generation of Leaders for Catholic Schools," *The Australian Catholic Record*, 83:4 (October 2006), 417-418.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Interdicasterial Meeting of the Roman Curia with a Representation of the Australian Bishops' Conference, *Statement of Conclusions*, 60.

strategies necessary for the inner renewal of the Church and her mission was that of “strengthening the identity of Catholic schools.”<sup>16</sup> He asked straightforwardly, albeit implicitly: Under your leadership, will Australian Catholic schools serve the Church’s mission of evangelization? Will they provide an alternative educational experience in which the students’ minds and hearts are formed “by taking their inspiration from the model of humanity offered by Christ”?<sup>17</sup>

Today, more than ever before, the greatest contribution schools can offer the Church and society is their uncompromising catholicity. Therefore, the Church’s schools in Australia must be genuinely Catholic in their self-understanding. Unquestionably, “it is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its ‘structure’ as a genuine instrument of the Church.”<sup>18</sup>

Aware of the multitasking and hectic lives of educational leaders, I would still suggest that you keep on the front burner the strengthening of the Catholic identity and life of your schools – an appeal repeatedly made in Vatican statements. This choice has to be intentional. All those involved must *decide* on their school’s future direction. A decision to foster a school’s Catholic mission is not to be

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<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, Address to Italian Educational Institutes (24 November 1998), 3: *Insegnamenti*, 21/2 (1998), 1052.

<sup>18</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 11.

equated with maintaining the *status quo*. Instead, it involves making positive institutional changes that will ensure a vibrant catholicity. Yours is no easy charge: to hold fast to the conviction that the Catholic school's distinctive character is "based on an educational vision having its origin in the person of Christ and its roots in the teachings of the Gospel."<sup>19</sup>

To help you in this task, I wish to suggest three ways that might focus your commitment for creating an educational culture that helps to reinforce the Catholic ethos of the schools you lead.

### ***1. Catholic Vision as the Soul of the School***

First of all, effective leaders need to be clear and honest about the role played by faith in the school. If Catholicism forms the school's defining religious culture, then its educational project will be authentically Christian in content and methodology. Catholicism expresses a compelling vision of reality that can animate every aspect of a school's curriculum and life. Speaking last September in Munich, Pope Benedict addressed educators with words which remind us of the need to ensure that Catholic schools foster a higher vision, one which gives suitable place to broader questions:

I urge you to keep alive in the schools the search for God, for that God who in Jesus Christ has made himself visible to us. I know that in our pluralistic world it is no easy thing in schools to bring up the subject of faith. But it is

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<sup>19</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 71.

hardly enough for our children and young people to learn technical knowledge and skills alone, and not the criteria that give knowledge and skill their direction and meaning. Encourage your students not only to raise questions about particular things – something good in itself – , but above all to ask about the why and the wherefore of life as a whole. Help them to realize that any answers that do not finally lead to God are insufficient.<sup>20</sup>

Leaders embody the memory of the essential truth that the aim of education is “the formation of a person, to enable him or her to live to the full and to make his or her own contribution to the common good.”<sup>21</sup> For a Catholic school to inspire its students with an integral education open to all dimensions of existence, educational leaders must foster in themselves and others a love for truth.

## ***2. Love for truth***

Even though the pursuit of truth has been extolled as the goal of education since the first schools were founded in ancient Greece, we can no longer take such a quest for granted. In fact, seeking truth today is often considered a hopelessly impossible, even naive, undertaking. The prevailing cultural climate makes people suspicious, if not hostile, to any claim to know the truth. In Pope

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<sup>20</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers (10 September 2006): *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 37 (13 September 2006), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome (11 June 2007): *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 25 (20 June 2007), 3.

Benedict's view, "it is considered dangerous and 'authoritarian' to speak of truth."<sup>22</sup> Even so, "in the education of the new generations, the question of the truth can certainly not be avoided."<sup>23</sup>

Australia's Catholic schools, like those in other post-modern societies, breathe the air of "the widespread conviction that the possibility of attaining truth is an illusion of traditional metaphysics."<sup>24</sup> In all but the scientific realm cultural and moral relativism reigns all around us. The practical fallout of this climate is, according to the recent Generation Y Survey taken in Australia, that very few young Catholics believe in the truth of Catholicism, that the majority think that it is acceptable to pick and choose beliefs, and that morals are relative. Undoubtedly there is considerable muddle about the notion of truth.<sup>25</sup> In face of this situation, leaders in the school system are called to recommit themselves to a simple proposition: the search for truth inspires all genuine education, and a search for that truth is what Catholic schools make available.

This means that you must be convinced that the human mind, however limited its powers, can indeed come to a knowledge of truth

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<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome (11 June 2007): *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 25 (20 June 2007), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome (5 June 2006): *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 24 (14 June 2006), 7.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, Message to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (5 May 2000), 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 21 (24 May 2000), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. George Cardinal Pell, Lecture, "Religion and Culture: Catholic Schools in Australia" (28 September 2006).

which, in turn, can be communicated to others. Indeed, “man’s unique grandeur is ultimately based on his capacity to know the truth.”<sup>26</sup> Catholic educational leaders cannot afford to be confused about the nature of truth.

Educational leaders take up the daunting task of freeing young people from the insidious consequences of what the Holy Father has called the “dictatorship of relativism”<sup>27</sup> – a moral totalitarianism that cripples all endeavours to foster the genuine education of Australia’s young people. Addressing a group of bishops last year, Pope Benedict lamented the negative consequences of relativism in schooling – and, unfortunately, Catholic schooling is no exception:

A particularly insidious obstacle to education today, which your own reports attest, is the marked presence in society of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. Within such a relativistic horizon an eclipse of the sublime goals of life occurs with a lowering of the standards of excellence, a timidity before the category of the good, and a relentless but senseless pursuit of novelty parading as the realization of freedom. Such detrimental trends point to the particular urgency of the apostolate of

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Diplomatic Corps (9 January 2006): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 2 (11 January 2006), 4.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, Homily for Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice* (18 April 2005): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 16 (20 April 2005), 3.

‘intellectual charity’ which upholds the essential unity of knowledge, guides the young towards the sublime satisfaction of exercising their freedom in relation to truth, and articulates the relationship between faith and all aspects of family and civic life.<sup>28</sup>

For their part, Catholic leaders cultivate in themselves and develop in their colleagues and students a passion for truth which challenges the prevailing secular dogma of moral and cultural relativism.

Unwavering commitment to truth identifies every genuinely Catholic school, wherein there is present “an atmosphere characterized by the search for truth, in which competent, convinced and coherent educators, teachers of learning and of life, may be a reflection, albeit imperfect but still vivid, of the one Teacher.”<sup>29</sup>

### ***3. Living the Catholic Faith in Australian Culture and Life***

As well as fostering a Catholic world view and reclaiming the search for truth, educational leaders share in the conviction that culture should be evaluated and transformed in light of the Gospel. Thirty years ago, in its first major document, *The Catholic School*, the Congregation for Catholic Education affirmed: “The specific mission of the school, then, is a critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith and the bringing forth of the power of Christian

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<sup>28</sup> Benedict XVI, *Ad Limina* Address to the Bishops of Ontario (8 September 2006): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 39 (27 September 2006), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 14.

virtue by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living.”<sup>30</sup> Catholic schools prepare students to relate the faith to their particular culture – in your case to the secularised but also generous and enterprising culture of Australia – and to live that faith in daily life. Educational leaders play a key role in the Church’s mission of evangelization, because through schools “the Gospel reaches out to the world, throwing the light of revelation on all secular realities.”<sup>31</sup>

Australia’s Catholic educators form students within their own culture, teaching them an appreciation of its positive elements and fostering a more profound inculturation of the Gospel in their particular situation. On the other hand, a leader also seizes opportunities which give voice to the Church’s prophetic word to transform culture, whether it touches on matters of the sacred dignity of every human life, the appeal for justice, the preferential option for the poor, the equality and complementarity of men and women, or the value of chastity. Faith and culture are intimately related as on a two-way street, and young people should be led, in ways suitable to the level of their intellectual development, to grasp the significance of that relationship. “The world of human culture and the world of religion are not like two parallel lines that never meet; points of contact are established within the human person. For a believer is

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<sup>30</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Special Assembly for Oceania, *Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth and Living His Life* (1998), 26.

both human and a person of faith, the protagonist of culture and the subject of religion.”<sup>32</sup> Leaders are those on the vanguard in helping others recognize this relationship.

### **III. Educational Leadership as an Ecclesial Ministry**

As the Church in Australia carries out her evangelizing mission through the network of Catholic schools, she counts on educational leaders to lend their hand. She regards what educational leaders do as a response to a calling, a ministry that builds up the Church and transforms society. Their mission is a splendid vocation which “requires special qualities of mind and heart, most careful preparation and a constant readiness to accept new ideas and to adapt the old.”<sup>33</sup>

#### ***1. Leadership as a Vocation***

Like all other Christians, you share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, living out your vocation to holiness precisely in the educational sphere.<sup>34</sup> Yours is a supernatural vocation, “with the fulness of life and the personal commitment that the word implies.”<sup>35</sup> Those involved in Catholic school leadership do more

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Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 51; cf. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 64.

<sup>33</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 37.

than exercise a socially valuable profession; they perform an indispensable service in the ecclesial community.<sup>36</sup>

In the Catholic tradition, leadership is understood as a *diakonia*, a ministry for the Church and the wider society. It is about being in the midst of colleagues as “one who serves” (cf. Lk 22:27); it is about stewardship of a great intellectual, cultural and religious patrimony. If being a leader in the educational apostolate is truly a vocation, then it must be discerned as a specific call to serve the Church’s mission in this specific ministry. Consequently, the discernment of leadership is a process which requires prayer, dialogue with those already in ministry and evaluation by competent authority.

Since leaders in Catholic education exercise an *ecclesial* ministry in their chosen vocation, the Church expects them to adhere faithfully to the teaching expressed in her authoritative Magisterium. A disgruntled or dissident Catholic would be a fish out of water. Furthermore, effective leadership depends on prayer enriched by Scripture and the Liturgy, regular celebration of the sacraments, especially Eucharist and Reconciliation, and living marriage in a canonically regular way.

## ***2. Formation for Educational Leadership***

Catholic leaders also embrace their vocation with all its professional demands. For this they need appropriate formation, a formation that various institutions of higher learning in Australia are,

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 33.

thankfully, making available. Because all formation is ultimately self-formation, this is truly a lifelong process.<sup>37</sup> While leaders know they need good professional formation, they require more than this as *Catholic* leaders. As your personal experience confirms, the inadequate or faulty formation in the faith of any educator harms the mission of the Catholic school. If Australia is like the rest of the world, it is an uphill battle to ensure that adequate attention be paid to leaders' theological and spiritual formation.

Regardless of their position within the educational system, every leader needs a solid and comprehensive formation in the essentials of the Catholic faith. In short, to be effective bearers of the Church's educational tradition, they must have a "religious formation that is equal to their general, cultural, and, most especially, professional formation."<sup>38</sup> As questions arise about authoritative Catholic teaching, as they inevitably do, leaders should be familiar with the lay of the doctrinal ground and, when necessary, they should consult other colleagues, pastoral leaders or theological specialists. As a minimum, all those involved in the Catholic school system would benefit greatly from a sound and thorough knowledge of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

More important than either professional or doctrinal preparation is spiritual formation, now that, in the great majority of cases, this can

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 63.

<sup>38</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 60.

no longer be entrusted to a Religious institute. If educational leadership is not grounded in a personal relationship with God, then no matter how accomplished that leadership may seem to be, it cannot bear lasting fruit (cf. Jn 15:16). There is no doubt that *spiritual* formation ought to occupy a privileged place in a leader's life.<sup>39</sup> Nothing can substitute for personal encounter with Christ. What the Holy Father said in Melbourne in 1986, while addressed specifically to teachers, applies *a fortiori* to leaders and those who aspire to leadership. Listen to his words:

Your attitude towards Christ and your personal closeness to him are fundamental. Closely linked to this are your attitude towards the Church and your sense of having a special mission within her. You are not isolated agents in an impersonal bureaucracy. You are not merely professional educators. You are called to be faith-inspired collaborators in the heart of the Christian community.<sup>40</sup>

Again and again we hear Pope Benedict talk about the importance of friendship with Christ. It is a *leitmotiv* running through his homilies and discourses. Before all else, we are called into a communion of life with Jesus, to be his "friends" (cf. Jn 15:15). This means knowing Jesus in an increasingly personal way, listening to

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Council, Staff and Students of the Institute of Catholic Education, Melbourne (28 November 1986), 3: *Insegnamenti*, 9/2 (1986), 1711.

him, living together with him. “For education and Christian formation, therefore, it is above all prayer and our personal friendship with Jesus that are crucial: only those who know and love Jesus Christ can introduce their brothers and sisters into a living relationship with him.”<sup>41</sup>

A programme of spiritual formation cannot produce this friendship with the Lord, for it is his gracious gift, but a structured programme can help those who seek it, prepare them to receive it, and, when it is given, develop its fruits in their lives of leadership. Leadership, therefore, calls for a “formation of the heart”: an encounter with God in Christ which awakens leaders’ love and opens them to others. As a result, their ministry in education will be a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6).<sup>42</sup>

No particular spirituality has yet been developed for educational leaders, beyond their being grounded in God’s word and the sacraments. One aspect, however, deserves mention: love for the Church. This entails allowing the Church’s great Tradition to shape one’s educational vision, ideals, and identity as a leader. The leader must be a man or woman of ecclesial communion, formed in that spirituality of communion, which is the “guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed.” In his

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<sup>41</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome (11 June 2007): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 25 (20 June 2007), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 31.

apostolic letter at the close of the Great Jubilee, John Paul wrote:

A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a “gift for me.” A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other’s burdens” (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.<sup>43</sup>

This vision of communion is closely linked to the leader’s ability to welcome all the gifts of the Spirit, enabling “an organic blending of legitimate diversities as people work together as members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (cf.1 Cor 12:12).”<sup>44</sup> For the leader, this means spending time helping his or her colleagues understand the importance that their various contributions make to Catholic education and the Church’s mission of evangelization. People will give heart and soul to a task if they believe that it makes a difference.<sup>45</sup>

I urge you, as Catholic educational leaders, to recognize for yourselves, as well as for your colleagues, the need for professional,

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<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Dennis Holtschneider, “Leadership for Ethos,” *Doctrine & Life*, 57:2 (February 2007), 57.

doctrinal and spiritual formation, and to take steps to pursue it on an ongoing basis. It is critical that the theological and religious formation of leaders be lifelong. Nor is this formation a luxury to be pursued only when time and resources are readily available – they never are! For at least twenty years now, in every dimension of the Church’s life, the Holy See has been encouraging continuous formation as necessary for promoting effective evangelization. No Catholic leader in the sphere of education can ignore this pressing appeal for ongoing *aggiornamento*. “To do so would be to remain locked up in outdated knowledge, criteria, and attitudes. To reject a formation that is permanent and that involves the whole person – human, professional, and religious – is to isolate oneself from that very world that has to be brought closer to the Gospel.”<sup>46</sup>

### ***3. The Witness of the Leader***

Besides being professionals who are doctrinally and spiritually formed, leaders shape the destiny of their schools by the integrity of their witness to the Gospel. This witness “is a vital part of the school’s identity.”<sup>47</sup> To a group of Australian bishops on an *ad limina* visit in Rome, John Paul noted the need for educators to be coherent; that is, to practise what they preach: “Young people are searching for

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<sup>46</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 70.

<sup>47</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education John Paul II, *Ad limina* Address to Bishops from Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin (30 May 1998), 4: *Origins*, 28:5 (18 June 1998), 77; cf. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 32, 40.

faith and for ideals by which they can live. In their desire to test the authority of their elders they are quick to perceive any discrepancy between word and deed. For these reasons, the Church is justifiably concerned that teachers be outstanding not only for their teaching ability, but also for Christian doctrine and for Christian living.”<sup>48</sup> Students learn far more from the example of their educators, especially in the practice of Christian virtues, than from masterful pedagogical techniques. “The central figure in the work of educating,” asserts Benedict XVI, “is specifically the form of witness. This witness becomes a proper reference point to the extent that the person can account for the hope that nourishes his life (cf. I Pt 3: 15) and is personally involved in the truth that he proposes.”<sup>49</sup>

The prophetic words of Paul VI ring as true today as they did more than thirty years ago: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”<sup>50</sup> Talking a lot about ourselves and our faith is unnecessary, for we give witness to Another: “the witness never refers to himself but to something, or rather, to Someone greater than he, whom he has encountered and whose dependable

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<sup>48</sup> John Paul II, *Ad Limina* Address to the Australian Bishops (13 October 1988), 6: *Insegnamenti*, 11/3 (1988), 1206.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome (6 June 2005): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition (15 June 2005), 7.

<sup>50</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.

goodness he has sampled. Thus, every educator and witness finds an unequalled model in Jesus Christ, the Father's great witness, who said nothing about himself but spoke as the Father had taught him (cf. Jn 8: 28)."<sup>51</sup>

Leaders are the principal witnesses, the chief "martyrs" of the school systems – and in more ways than one! In order that this mission of bearing witness to Christ and the Church be fulfilled in Catholic schools, those in charge should work to ensure that a "significant proportion of the staff should be practising Catholics"<sup>52</sup> committed to the Church. For this reason, they are to be particularly attentive to having in place hiring policies that recognize the importance of witness. Exceptions to this requirement should be infrequent and limited to certain subject areas. John Paul II called attention to the reasons for implementing such a policy in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*:

The identity and success of Catholic education are linked inseparably to the witness of life given by the teaching staff. Therefore, the Bishops recommended that "those responsible for hiring teachers and administrators in our Catholic schools take into account the faith-life of those

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<sup>51</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome (6 June 2005): *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition (15 June 2005), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Interdicasterial Meeting of the Roman Curia with a Representation of the Australian Bishops' Conference, *Statement of Conclusions*, 61.

they are hiring.” School staff who truly live their faith will be agents of a new evangelization in creating a positive climate for the Christian faith to grow and in spiritually nourishing the students entrusted to their care. They will be especially effective when they are active practising Catholics, committed to their parish community and loyal to the Church and her teaching.<sup>53</sup>

While always recognizing the difficulties sometimes involved of filling positions with appropriate candidates, the matter is one of grave concern and constantly in need of your attention. The reason for this is straightforward: authentic Catholic education can take place only when the Christian witness of educators is transparent.

### **Conclusion**

Amidst no small amount of challenge, the leaders and all those dedicated to the cause of Australian Catholic schooling rightly deserve the admiration and gratitude of the whole Church. Yours is a noble task, an exhilarating endeavour, a thrilling venture – even if sometimes a burden. I trust that you will continue zealously along the path you have chosen. Strengthened by the sacraments of initiation,

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<sup>53</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 33; cf. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 231: “Recruit teachers who are practising Catholics, who can understand and accept the teachings of the Catholic Church and the moral demands of the Gospel, and who can contribute to the achievement of the school’s Catholic identity and apostolic goals. . . . While some situations might entail compelling reasons for members of another faith tradition to teach in a Catholic school, as much as possible, all teachers in a Catholic school should be practising Catholics.”

you share in the mission of the Church: to cast out into the deep where others might fear to cast their nets (cf. Lk 5:4).

Last month the Holy Father spoke of a the “great ‘educational emergency,’ of the increasing difficulty encountered in transmitting the basic values of life and correct behaviour to the new generations, a difficulty that involves both schools and families and, one might say, any other body with educational aims.”<sup>54</sup> The task of leaders in Australia’s Catholic schools is, therefore, more arduous today than in the past. Yet it is a vocation full of hope. May the good Lord grant you joy in serving him as an educational leader in the Church!

+J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Secretary  
Congregation for Catholic Education

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<sup>54</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome (6 June 2005): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition (15 June 2005), 7.