

A stained glass artwork featuring a dove in profile, facing left. The dove is rendered in shades of blue and white, with a dark outline. The background consists of various colored glass panes in shades of blue, red, and white, separated by dark lead lines.

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education

The Catholic School

This is a new translation of the original published by the Dicastery *Congregatio De Institutione Catholica* in 1977 using inclusive language. Karen M. Ristau, Ed.D., President of the National Catholic Educational Association, is the editor. It has been reviewed and approved by the Most Reverend Gregory M. Aymond, Bishop of Austin, TX.



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Introduction

1. The Catholic school is receiving more and more attention in the Church since the Second Vatican Council, with particular emphasis on the Church as it appears in the Constitutions *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. In the Council's Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* the Catholic school is discussed in the wider sphere of Christian education. The present document develops the idea of this Declaration, limiting itself to a deeper reflection on the Catholic school.
2. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education is aware of the serious problems which are an integral part of Christian education in a pluralistic society. It regards as a prime duty, therefore, the focusing of any attention on the nature and distinctive characteristics of school which would present itself as Catholic. Yet the diverse situations and legal systems in which the Catholic school has to function in Christian and non-Christian countries demand that local problems be faced and solved by each Church within its own social-cultural context.
3. While acknowledging this duty of the local Churches, the Sacred Congregation believes that now is the opportune moment to offer its own contribution by re-emphasizing clearly the educational value of the Catholic school. It is in this value that the Catholic school's fundamental reason for existing and the basis of its genuine apostolate is to be found. This document does not pretend to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject; it merely proposes to state the premises that will lead to further fruitful study and implementation.
4. To Episcopal Conferences, pastorally concerned for all young Catholics whatever school they attend (1), the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education entrusts this present document in order that they may seek to achieve an effective system of education at all levels which corresponds to the total educational needs of young people today in Catholic schools. The Sacred Congregation also addresses itself to all who are responsible for education—parents, teachers, young people and school authorities—and urges them to pool all their resources and the means at their disposal to enable Catholic schools to provide a service which is truly civic and apostolic.

I. THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND THE SALVIFIC MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Salvific Mission of the Church

5. In the fullness of time, in His mysterious plan of love, God the Father sent His only Son to begin the Kingdom of God on earth and bring about the spiritual rebirth of humankind. To continue His work of salvation, Jesus Christ founded the Church as a visible organism, living by the power of the Spirit.
6. Moved by the same Spirit, the Church is constantly deepening its awareness of itself and meditating on the mystery of being and mission. (2) Thus the Church is ever rediscovering its living relationship with Christ “in order to discover greater light, energy, and joy in fulfilling its mission and determining the best way to ensure that its relationship with humanity is closer and more efficacious”(3)—that humanity of which the Church is a part and yet so undeniably distinct. The Church’s destiny is to serve humanity until it reaches its fullness in Christ.
7. Evangelization is, therefore, the mission of the Church; that is the Church must proclaim the good news of salvation to all, generate new persons in Christ through Baptism, and train them to live knowingly as children of God.

Means available for the Mission of the Church

8. To carry out the saving mission, the Church uses, above all, the means which Jesus Christ has given. The Church also uses other means which at different times and in different cultures have proved effective in achieving and, promoting the development of the human person. The Church adapts these means to the changing conditions and emerging needs of humankind (4). In encounters with differing cultures and with humanity’s progressive achievements, the Church proclaims the faith and reveals “to all ages the transcendent goal which alone gives life its full meaning”(5). The Church establishes its own schools because it considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole person, since the school is a center in which a specific concept of the world, of humanity, and of history is developed and conveyed.

Contribution of the Catholic school towards the Salvific Mission of the Church

9. The Catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church, especially for education in the faith. Remembering that “the simultaneous development of the member’s psychological and moral consciousness is demanded by Christ almost as a pre-condition for the reception of the befitting divine gifts of truth and grace”(6) the Church fulfills its obligation to foster in its members a full awareness of their rebirth to a new life 7). It is precisely in the Gospel of Christ, taking root in the minds and lives of the faithful, that the Catholic school finds its definition as it comes to terms with the cultural conditions of the times.

The Church's educational involvement and cultural pluralism

10. In the course of the centuries “while constantly holding to the fullness of divine truth”(8) the Church has progressively used the sources and the means of culture in order to deepen the understanding of revelation and promote constructive dialogue with the world. Moved by the faith through which it firmly believes itself to be led by the Spirit of the Lord, the Church seeks to discern in the events, needs and hopes of our era (9) the most insistent demands which it must answer if the Church is to carry out God's plan.
11. One such demand is a pressing need to ensure the presence of a Christian mentality in the society of the present day, marked, among other things, by cultural pluralism. For it is Christian thought which constitutes a sound criterion of judgment in the midst of conflicting concepts and behavior: “Reference to Jesus Christ teaches one to discern the values which ennoble from those which degrade”(10).
12. Cultural pluralism, therefore, leads the Church to reaffirm the mission of education to insure strong character formation. Members, then, will be capable both of resisting the debilitating influence of relativism and of living up to the demands made on them by their Baptism. It also stimulates the Church to foster truly Christian living and apostolic communities, equipped to make their own positive contribution, in a spirit of cooperation, to the building up of the secular society. For this reason the Church is prompted to mobilize its educational resources in the face of the materialism, pragmatism and technocracy of contemporary society.
13. The Church upholds the principle of a plurality of school systems in order to safeguard its objectives in the face of cultural pluralism. In other words, the Church encourages the co-existence and, if possible, the cooperation of diverse educational institutions which will allow young people to be formed by value judgments based on a specific view of the world and to be trained to take an active part in the construction of a community through which the building of society itself is promoted.
14. Thus, while policies and opportunities differ from place to place, the Catholic school has its place in any national school system. By offering such an alternative the Church wishes to respond to the obvious need for cooperation in a society characterized by cultural pluralism. Moreover, in this way the Church helps to promote that freedom of teaching which champions and guarantees freedom of conscience and the parental right to choose the school best suited to parents' educational purpose. (11)
15. Finally, the Church is absolutely convinced that the educational aims of the Catholic school in the world of today perform an essential and unique service for the Church itself. It is, in fact, through the school that the Church participates in the dialogue of culture with its own positive contribution to the cause of the total formation of humanity. The absence of the Catholic school would be a great loss (12) for civilization and for the natural and supernatural destiny of humanity.

II. PRESENT DIFFICULTIES OVER CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

16. In the light of its mission of salvation, the Church considers that the Catholic school provides a privileged environment for the complete formation of its members, and that it also provides a highly important service to humankind. Nevertheless, the Church is aware of the many problems that exist and objections that are made against Catholic schools sometimes regarding the very validity of their existence and their functions. The issue is really part of a much wider problem which faces all institutions as such in a society as the present, characterized by rapid and profound change.

Objections raised against Catholic schools

17. In the debate about Catholic schools there are some easily identifiable central objections and difficulties. These need to be borne in mind if discussion is to be relevant to the actual situation and if teachers are to make a serious attempt to adapt their work to the needs of the contemporary world.
18. In the first place many people, both inside and outside the Church, motivated by a mistaken sense of the lay role in secular society, attack Catholic schools as institutions. They do not admit that, apart from the individual witness of its members, the Church also may offer witness by means of its institutions, e.g. those dedicated to the search for truth or to works of charity.
19. Others claim that Catholic schools make use of a human institution for religious and confessional purposes. Christian education can sometimes run into the danger of a so-called proselytism, of imparting a one-sided outlook. This can happen only when Christian educators misunderstand the nature and methods of Christian education. Complete education necessarily includes a religious dimension. Religion is an effective contribution to the development of other aspects of a personality in the measure in which it is integrated into general education.
20. According to others, Catholic schools have outlived their time;—as institutions they were a necessary substitute in the past but have no place at a time when civil authority assumes responsibility for education. In fact, as the State increasingly takes control of education and establishes its own so-called neutral and monolithic system, the survival of those natural communities, based on a shared concept of life, is threatened. Faced with this situation, the Catholic school offers an alternative which is in conformity with the wishes of the members of the community of the Church.
21. In some countries Catholic schools have been obliged to restrict their educational activities to wealthier social classes, thus giving an impression of social and economic discrimination in education. But this occurs only where the State has not weighed the advantages of an alternative presence in their pluralistic society. From such nearsightedness considerable difficulties have arisen for Catholic schools.
22. Allied to these points, objections are raised concerning the educational results of the Catholic school. They are sometimes accused of not knowing how to form convinced,

articulate Christians ready to take their place in social and political life. Every educational enterprise, however, involves the risk of failure and one must not be too discouraged by apparent or even real failures, since there are very many formative influences on young people and results often have to be calculated on a long-term basis.

23. Before concluding these comments on the objections raised against Catholic schools, one must remember the context in which contemporary work in the field of education is undertaken, and especially in the Church. Schooling in our rapidly changing society is serious for everyone. The Second Vatican Council has encouraged a more open minded approach which has sometimes been misrepresented in theory and practice. There are difficulties in the provision of adequate staff and finance. In such a situation should the Church perhaps give up its apostolic mission in Catholic schools, as some people would like it to do, and direct its energy to a more direct work of evangelization in sectors considered to be of higher priority or more suited to the spiritual mission, or should the Church make State schools the sole object of pastoral activity? Such a solution would not only be contrary to the directives of the Vatican Council, but would also be opposed to the Church's mission and to what is expected of the Church by Christian people. What follows emphasizes this fact.

Some aspects of schools today

24. To understand the real nature of the Catholic school one cannot divorce it from wider modern problems concerning schools in general. Apart from the ideas advanced by the promoters of de-schooling—a theory which now seems of minor significance—contemporary society tends to place greater importance than ever on the specific function of the school: its social significance (parental participation, increased democratization, equality of opportunity); its tendency to coordinate and eventually include the educational work of other institutions; the extension of the statutory duration of attendance at school.

III. THE SCHOOL AS A CENTER OF HUMAN FORMATION

25. To understand fully the specific mission of the Catholic school it is essential to keep in mind the basic concept of what a school is; that which does not reproduce the characteristic features of a school cannot be a Catholic school.

The general purpose of a school

26. A close examination of the various definitions of school and of new educational trends at every level, leads one to formulate the concept of school as a place of integral formation by means of a systematic and critical assimilation of culture. A school is, therefore, a privileged place in which, through a living encounter with a cultural inheritance, integral formation occurs.

27. This vital approach takes place in the school in the form of personal contacts and commitments which consider absolute values in a life-context and seek to insert them into a life-framework. Indeed, culture is only educational when young people can relate their study to real-life situations with which they are familiar. The school must stimulate students to exercise their intelligence through the dynamics of understanding to attain clarity and inventiveness. It must help students spell out the meaning of his or her experiences and their truths. Any school which neglects this duty and which offers merely pre-cast conclusions hinders the personal development of its students.

School and attitudes of life

28. From this it is clear that the school has to review its entire program of formation, both its content and the methods used, in the light of that vision of the reality from which it draws its inspiration and on which it depends.

29. Either implicit or explicit reference to a determined attitude to life (*Weltanschauung*) is unavoidable in education because it comes into every decision that is made. It is, therefore, essential, if for no other reason than for a unity in teaching, that every member of the school community, albeit with differing degrees of awareness, adopts a common vision, a common outlook on life, based on adherence to a scale of values in which they believe. This is what gives teachers and adults authority to educate. It must never be forgotten that the purpose of instruction at school is education, that is, the development of the person from within, freeing them from that conditioning which would prevent one from becoming a, fully integrated human being. The school must begin from the principle that its educational program is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person.

30. It is one of the formal tasks of a school, as an institution for education, to draw out the ethical dimension for the precise purpose of arousing the individual's inner spiritual dynamism and to aid in the achievement of that moral freedom which complements the psychological. Behind this moral freedom, however, stand those absolute values which alone give meaning and value to human life. This has to be said because the tendency to adopt present-day values as a yardstick is not absent even in the educational world. The danger is always to react to passing, superficial ideas and to lose sight of the much deeper needs of the contemporary world.

The school in today's society

31. Precisely because the school endeavors to answer the needs of a society characterized by depersonalization and a mass production mentality which so easily result from scientific and technological developments, it must develop into an authentically formational school, reducing such risks to a minimum. It must develop persons who are responsible and inner-directed, capable of choosing freely in conformity with their conscience. This is simply another way of saying that the school is an institution where young people

gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life as it should be.

32. When seen in this light, a school is not only a place where one is given a choice of intellectual values, but a place where one has presented an array of values which are actively lived. The school must be a community whose values are communicated through the interpersonal and sincere relationships of its members and through both individual and corporative adherence to the outlook on life that permeates the school.

IV. THE EDUCATIONAL WORK OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Specific character of the Catholic school

33. Having stated the characteristics of the Catholic school from the point of view of “school” we can now examine its Catholic quality, namely its reference to a Christian concept of life centered on Jesus Christ.
34. Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. His revelation gives new meaning to life and helps people to direct their thoughts, actions and will according to the Gospel, making the beatitudes the norm of life. The fact that in their own individual ways all members of the school community share this Christian vision makes the school “Catholic”; principles of the Gospel in this manner become the educational norms since the school then have them as its internal motivation and final goal.
35. The Catholic school is committed thus to the development of the whole person, since in Christ, the Perfect Person, all human values find their fulfillment and unity. Herein lays the specifically Catholic character of the school. Its duty to cultivate human values in their own legitimate right in accordance with its particular mission to serve all people has its origin in the figure of Christ. He is the One Who ennobles the human person, gives meaning to human life, and is the Model which the Catholic school offers to its students.
36. If, like every other school, the Catholic school has as its aim the critical communication of human culture and the total formation of the individual, it works towards this goal guided by its Christian vision of reality “through which our cultural heritage acquires its special place in the total vocational life of all people”(13). Mindful of the fact that Christ has redeemed all people, the Catholic school aims at forming in Christians those particular virtues which will enable them to live a new life in Christ and helps them to play faithfully their parts in building up the Kingdom of God(14).
37. These premises indicate the duties and the content of the Catholic school. Its task is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian.

Integration of faith and culture

38. In helping pupils to achieve through the medium of its teaching an integration of faith and culture, the Catholic school sets out with a deep awareness of the value of knowledge as such. Under no circumstances does it wish to divert the imparting of knowledge from its rightful objective.
39. Individual subjects must be taught according to their own particular methods. It would be wrong to consider subjects as mere adjuncts to faith or as a useful means of teaching apologetics. They enable students to assimilate skills, knowledge, intellectual methods and moral and social attitudes, all of which help to develop their personalities and lead them to take their places as active members of the human community. Their aim is not merely the attainment of knowledge but the acquisition of values and the discovery of truth.
40. Since the educative mission of the Catholic school is so wide, the teacher is in an excellent position to guide student to a deepening of faith and to enrich and enlighten human knowledge with the data of the faith. While there are many occasions in teaching when students can be stimulated by insights of faith, a Christian education acknowledges the valid contribution which can be made by academic subjects towards the development of a mature Christian. The teacher can form the mind and heart of students and guide them to develop a total commitment to Christ, with their whole personality enriched by human culture.
41. The school considers human knowledge as a truth to be discovered. In the measure in which subjects are taught by someone who knowingly and without restraint seeks the truth, they are to that extent Christian. Discovery and awareness of truth leads one to the discovery of Truth itself. Teachers who are full of Christian wisdom, well prepared in their own subjects, do more than convey the sense of what they are teaching to their students. Over and above what they say, they guide their students beyond mere words to the heart of total Truth.
42. The cultural heritage of humanity includes other values apart from the specific ambient of truth. When the Christian teacher helps a student grasp, appreciate and assimilate these values, the teacher is guiding the student towards eternal realities. This movement towards the Uncreated Source of all knowledge highlights the importance of teaching for the growth of faith.
43. The achievement of this specific aim of the Catholic school depends not so much on subject matter or methodology as on the people who work there. The extent to which the Christian message is transmitted through education depends to a very great extent on the teachers. The integration of culture and faith is mediated by the other integration of faith and life in the person of the teacher. The nobility of the task to which teachers are called demands that, in imitation of Christ, the only Teacher, they reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behavior. This is what makes the difference between a school whose education is permeated by the Christian spirit and one in which religion is only regarded as an academic subject like any other.

Integration of faith and life

44. The fundamental aim of teaching is the assimilation of objective values, and, when this is undertaken for an apostolic purpose, it does not stop at an integration of faith and culture but leads the pupil on to a personal integration of faith and life.
45. The Catholic school has as its specific duty the complete Christian formation of its students and this task is of special significance today because of the inadequacy of the family and society. It knows this integration of faith and life is part of a life-long process of conversion until the students become what God wishes them to be. Young people have to be taught to share their personal lives with God. They are to overcome their individualism and discover, in the light of faith, their specific vocation to live responsibly in a community with others. The very pattern of the Christian life draws them to commit themselves to serve God in their brethren and to make the world a better place in which to live.
46. The Catholic school should teach its students to discern in the voice of the universe the Creator Whom it reveals and, in the conquests of science, to know God and humankind better. In the daily life of the school, the students should learn that they are called to be living witnesses to God's love for humanity by the way they act, and that they are a part of that salvation history which has Christ, the Savior of the world, as its goal.
47. Being aware that Baptism by itself does not make a Christian—living and acting in conformity with the Gospel is necessary—the Catholic school tries to create within its walls a climate⁽¹⁵⁾ in which students' faith will gradually mature and enable them to assume the responsibility placed on them by Baptism. It will give pride of place in the education it provides through Christian Doctrine to the gradual formation of conscience in fundamental, permanent virtues—above all the theological virtues, and charity in particular, which is, so to speak, the life-giving spirit which transforms a person of virtue into a person of Christ. Christ, therefore, is the teaching-center, the Model on Whom the Christian shapes his or her life. In Christ the Catholic school differs from all others which limit themselves to forming people. Its task is to form Christian men and women, and, by its teaching and witness, show non-Christians something of the mystery of Christ Who surpasses all human understanding ⁽¹⁶⁾.
48. The Catholic school will work closely with other Christian bodies (the family, the parish and Christian community, youth associations, etc.). But one must not overlook many other spheres of activity in society which are sources of information and in their various ways have an educational influence. Alongside this so-called "parallel school", the school proper is an active force through the systematic formation of the students' critical faculties to bring them to a measure of self control ⁽¹⁷⁾ and the ability to choose freely and conscientiously in the face of what is offered by the organs of social communication. They must be taught to subject these things to a critical and personal analysis ⁽¹⁸⁾, take what is good, and integrate it into their Christian human culture.

Religious teaching

49. 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 virtue by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living. Consequently, the Catholic school is aware of the importance of the Gospel-teaching as transmitted through the Catholic Church. It is, indeed, the fundamental element in the educative process as it helps the student towards the conscious choice of living a responsible and coherent way of life.
50. Without entering into the whole problem of teaching religion in schools, it must be emphasized that, while such teaching is not merely confined to “religious classes” within the school curriculum, it must, nevertheless, also be imparted explicitly and in a systematic manner to prevent a distortion in the child’s mind between general and religious culture. The fundamental difference between religious and other forms of education is that its aim is not simply intellectual assent to religious truths but also a total commitment of one’s whole being to the Person of Christ.
51. It is recognized the proper place for catechesis is the family helped by other Christian communities, especially the local parish. But the importance and need for catechetical instruction in Catholic schools cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Here young people are helped to grow towards maturity in faith.
52. The Catholic school must be alert at all times to developments in the fields of child psychology, pedagogy and particularly catechetics, and should especially keep abreast of directives from competent ecclesiastical authorities. The school must do everything in its power to aid the Church to fulfill its catechetical mission and so must have the best possible qualified teachers of religion.

The Catholic school as the center of the educative Christian community

53. For all these reasons, Catholic schools must be seen as “meeting places for those who wish to express Christian values in education”(19). The Catholic school, far more than any other, must be a community whose aim is the transmission of values for living. Its work is seen as promoting a faith-relationship with Christ in Whom all values find fulfillment. But faith is principally assimilated through contact with people whose daily life bears witness to it. Christian faith, in fact, is born and grows inside a community.
54. The community aspect of the Catholic school is necessary because of the nature of the faith and not simply because of human nature and the nature of the educational process which is common to every school. No Catholic school can adequately fulfill its educational role on its own. It must continually be fed and stimulated by its Source of life, the Saving Word of Christ as it is expressed in Sacred Scripture, in Tradition, especially liturgical and sacramental tradition, and in the lives of people, past and present, who bear witness to that Word.

55. The Catholic school loses its purpose without constant reference to the Gospel and a frequent encounter with Christ. It derives all the energy necessary for its educational work from Him and thus “creates in the school community an atmosphere permeated with the Gospel spirit of freedom and love”(20). In this setting students experience their dignity as persons before they know its definition. Faithful, therefore, to the claims of human and of God, the Catholic school makes its own contribution towards its students’ liberation, making them, in other words, what their destiny implies, those who talk consciously with God, people who are there for God to love.
56. “This simple religious doctrine is the cornerstone of the existential, Christian metaphysic”(21). This is the basis of a Catholic school’s educational work. Education is not given for the purpose of gaining power but as an aid towards a fuller understanding of, and communion with humankind, events and things. Knowledge is not to be considered as a means of material prosperity and success, but as a call to serve and to be responsible for others.

Other aspects of the educational process in Catholic schools

57. Whether or not the Catholic community forms its young people in the faith by means of a Catholic school, a Catholic school in itself is far from being divisive or presumptuous. It does not exacerbate differences, but rather aids cooperation and contact with others. It opens itself to others and respects their way of thinking and of living. It wants to share their anxieties and their hopes as it indeed shares their present and future lot in this world.
58. Since it is motivated by the Christian ideal, the Catholic school is particularly sensitive to the call from every part of the world for a more just society, and it tries to make its own contribution towards it. It does not stop at the courageous teaching of the demands of justice even in the face of local opposition, but tries to put these demands into practice in its own community in the daily life of the school. In some countries, because of local laws and economic conditions, the Catholic school runs the risk of giving counter-witness by admitting a majority of children from wealthier families. Schools may have done this because of their need to be financially self supporting. This situation is of great concern to those responsible for Catholic education, because first and foremost the Church offers its educational service to “the poor or those who are deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith “(22). Since education is an important means of improving the social and economic condition of the individual and of peoples, if the Catholic school were to turn its attention exclusively or predominantly to those from the wealthier social classes, it could be contributing towards maintaining their privileged position, and could thereby continue to favor a society which is unjust.
59. It is obvious in such a demanding educational policy all participants must be committed to it freely. It cannot be imposed, but is offered as a possibility, as good news, and as such can be refused. However, in order to bring it into being and to maintain it, the school must be able to count on the unity of purpose and conviction of all its members.

The participation of the Christian community in the Catholic schools' work

60. From the outset the Catholic school declares its program and its determination to uphold it. It is a genuine community bent on imparting, over and above an academic education, all the help it can to its members to adopt a Christian way of life. For the Catholic school mutual respect means service to the Person of Christ. Cooperation is between brothers and sisters in Christ. A policy of working for the common good is undertaken seriously as working for the building up of the Kingdom of God.
61. The cooperation required for the realization of this aim is a duty in conscience for all the members of the community—teachers, parents, pupils, administrative personnel. Each has his or her own part to play. Cooperation of all, given in the spirit of the Gospel, is by its very nature a witness not only to Christ as the corner-stone of the community, but also as the light Who shines far beyond it.

The Catholic school as a service to the Church and to society

62. The Catholic school community, therefore, is an irreplaceable source of service, not only to the pupils and its other members, but also to society. Today especially one sees a world which clamors for solidarity and yet experiences the rise of new forms of individualism. Society can take note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the common good. In the pluralistic society of today the Catholic school, moreover, by maintaining an institutional Christian presence in the academic world proclaims by its very existence the enriching power of the faith as the answer to the enormous problems which afflict humankind. Above all, it is called to render a humble loving service to the Church by ensuring that its presence is in the scholastic field for the benefit of the human family.
63. In this way the Catholic school performs “an authentic apostolate”(23). To work, therefore, in this apostolate “means apostolate performing a unique and invaluable work for the Church”(24).

V. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL TODAY

64. The real problem facing the Catholic school is to identify and lay down the conditions necessary for it to fulfill its mission. It is, therefore, a problem requiring clear and positive thinking, courage, perseverance and cooperation to tackle the necessary measures without being overawed by the size of the difficulties from within and without, nor “by persistent and outdated slogans”(25), which in the last analysis aim to abolish Catholic schools(26). To give into them would be suicidal. To favor in a more or less radical form a merely non-institutional presence of the Church in the scholastic field, is a dangerous illusion (27).

65. At great cost and sacrifice our ancestors were inspired by the teaching of the Church to establish schools which enriched humankind and responded to the needs of time and place. While it recognizes its own inadequacies, the Catholic school is conscious of its responsibility to continue this service. Today, as in the past, some scholastic institutions which bear the name Catholic do not appear to correspond fully to the principles of education which should be their distinguishing feature and, therefore, do not fulfill the duties which the Church and the society has every right to expect of them. Without pretending to make an exhaustive enquiry into the factors which may explain the difficulties under which the Catholic school labors, here are a few points in the hope of encouraging some thought as a stimulus to courageous reform.
66. Often what is perhaps fundamentally lacking among Catholics who work in a school is a clear realization of the identity of a Catholic school and the courage to follow all the consequences of its uniqueness. One must recognize that, more than ever before, a Catholic school's job is infinitely more difficult, more complex, since this is a time when Christianity demands to be clothed in fresh garments, when all manner of changes have been introduced in the Church and in secular life, and, particularly, when a pluralist mentality dominates and the Christian Gospel is increasingly pushed to the side-lines.
67. It is because of this that loyalty to the educational aims of the Catholic school demands constant self-criticism and return to basic principles, to the motives which inspire the Church's involvement in education. They do not provide a quick answer to contemporary problems, but they give a direction which can begin to solve them. Account has to be taken of new pedagogical insights and collaboration with others, irrespective of religious allegiance, who work honestly for the true development of humanity—first and foremost with schools of other Christians—in the interests, even in this field, of Christian unity but also with State schools. In addition to meetings of teachers and mutual research, this collaboration can be extended to the pupils themselves and their families.
68. In conclusion it is only right to repeat what has been said above (28) about the considerable difficulties arising from legal and economic systems operating in different countries which hinder the activities of the Catholic school, difficulties which prevent them from extending their service to all social and economic classes and compel them to give the false impression of providing schools simply for the rich.

VI. PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS

69. After reflecting on the difficulties which the Catholic school encounters, we turn now to the practical possibilities open to those who work in, or are responsible for, these schools. The following more serious questions have been selected for special comment: organization and planning, ensuring the distinctive Catholic character of the school, the involvement of religious in the school apostolate, the Catholic school in mission countries, pastoral care of teachers, professional associations, the economic question.

The organization and planning of the Catholic school

70. Catholic education is inspired by the general principles enunciated by the Second Vatican Council concerning collaboration between the hierarchy and those who work in the apostolate. In consequence of the principle of participation and co-responsibility, the various groupings which constitute the educational community are, according to their several competencies, to be associated in decision-making concerning the Catholic school and in the application of decisions once taken (29). It is first and foremost at the stage of planning and of putting into operation an educational project that this principle of the Council is to be applied. The assigning of various responsibilities is governed by the principle of subsidiarity and, with reference to this principle; ecclesiastical authority respects the competence of the professionals in teaching and education. Indeed, “the right and duty of exercising the apostolate is common to all the faithful, clerical and lay, and laypeople have their own proper competence in the building up of the Church”(30).
71. This principle enunciated by the Second Vatican Council is particularly applicable to the apostolate of the Catholic school which so closely unites teaching and religious education to a well-defined professional activity. It is here, above all, that the particular mission of the lay person is put into effect, a mission which has become “all the more imperative in view of the fact that many areas of human life have become very largely autonomous. This is as it should be, but it sometimes involves a certain withdrawal from ethical and religious influences and thereby creates a serious danger to Christian life”(31). Moreover, lay involvement in Catholic schools is an invitation “to cooperate more closely with the apostolate of the Bishops”(32), both in the field of religious instruction (33) and in more general religious education which they endeavor to promote by assisting the pupils to a personal integration of culture and faith and of faith and living. The Catholic school in this sense, therefore, receives from the Bishops in some manner the “mandate” of an apostolic undertaking (34).
72. The essential element of such a mandate is “union with those whom the Holy Spirit has assigned to rule God’s Church”(35) and this link is expressed especially in overall pastoral strategy. “In the whole diocese or in given areas of it the coordination and close interconnection of all apostolic works should be fostered under the direction of the Bishop. In this way all undertakings and organization, whether catechetical, missionary, charitable, social, family, educational, or any other program serving a pastoral goal will be coordinated. Moreover, the unity of the diocese will thereby be made more evident”(36). This is something which is obviously indispensable for the Catholic school, inasmuch as it involves “apostolic cooperation on the part of both branches of the clergy, as well as of the religious and the laity”(37).

Ensuring the distinctive Catholic character of the school

73. This is the framework which guarantees the distinctive Catholic character of the school. While the Bishop's authority is to watch over the orthodoxy of religious instruction and the observance of Christian morals in the Catholic schools, it is the task of the whole educative community to ensure that a distinctive Christian educational environment is maintained in practice. This responsibility applies chiefly to Christian parents who confide their children to the school. Having chosen it does not relieve them of a personal duty to give their children a Christian upbringing. They are bound to cooperate actively with the school—which means supporting the educational efforts of the school and utilizing the structures offered for parental involvement, in order to make certain that the school remains faithful to Christian principles of education. An equally important role belongs to the teachers in safeguarding and developing the distinctive mission of the Catholic school, particularly with regard to the Christian atmosphere which should characterize its life and teaching. Where difficulties and conflicts arise about the authentic Christian character of the Catholic school, hierarchical authority can and must intervene.

Involvement of religious in the school apostolate

74. Some problems arise from the fact that certain Religious Institutes, founded for the school apostolate, have subsequently abandoned school work because of social or political changes and have involved themselves in other activities. In some cases they have given up their schools as a result of their efforts to adapt their lives and mission to the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council and to the spirit of their original foundation.
75. It is necessary, however, to re-assess certain arguments adopted against the teaching apostolate. Some would say they have chosen a “more direct” apostolate (38), forgetting the excellence and the apostolic value of educational work in the school (39). Others would appeal to the greater importance of individual over community involvement, of personal over institutional work. The advantages, however, of a community apostolate in the educational field are self evident. Sometimes the abandonment of Catholic schools is justified on the grounds of an apparent failure to gain perceptible results in pursuing certain objectives. If this were true, it would surely be an invitation to undertake a fundamental revision of the whole conduct of the school, reminding everyone who ventures into education of the need for humility and hope and the conviction that this work cannot be assessed by the same rationalistic criteria which apply to other professions (40).
76. It is the responsibility of competent local ecclesiastical authority to evaluate the advisability and necessity of any change to other forms of apostolic work whenever particular circumstances dictate the need for a re-assessment of the school apostolate, keeping in mind the observations above on overall pastoral strategy (41).

The Catholic school in mission countries

77. The importance of the Catholic school apostolate is much greater when it is a question of the foreign missions. Where the young Churches still rely on the presence of foreign missionaries, the effectiveness of the Catholic school will largely depend on its ability to adapt to local needs. It must ensure that it is a true expression of the local and national Catholic community and that it contributes to the community's willingness to cooperate. In countries where the Christian community is still at its beginning and incapable of assuming responsibility for its own schools, the Bishops will have to undertake this responsibility themselves for the time being, but must endeavor little by little to fulfill the aims outlined above in connection with the organization of the Catholic schools(42).

Pastoral care of teachers

78. By their witness and their behavior teachers are of the first importance to impart a distinctive character to Catholic schools. It is, therefore, indispensable to ensure their continuing formation through some form of suitable pastoral provision. This must aim to animate them as witnesses of Christ in the classroom and tackle the problems of their particular apostolate, especially regarding a Christian vision of the world and of education, problems also connected with the art of teaching in accordance with the principles of the Gospel. A huge field is thus opened up for national and international organizations which bring together Catholic teachers and educational institutions at all levels.

79. Professional organizations whose aim is to protect the interests of those who work in the educational field cannot themselves be divorced from the specific mission of the Catholic school. The rights of the people who are involved in the school must be safeguarded in strict justice. But, no matter what material interests may be at stake, or what social and moral conditions affect their professional development, the principle of the Second Vatican Council has a special application in this context: "The faithful should learn how to distinguish carefully between those rights and duties which are theirs as members of the Church, and those which they have as members of society. Let them strive to harmonize the two, remembering that in every temporal affair they must be guided by a Christian conscience"(43). Moreover, "even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform valuable work for the evangelization of the world"(44). Therefore, the special organizations set up to protect the rights of teachers, parents and pupils must not forget the special mission of the Catholic school to be of service in the Christian education of youth. "The layperson is at the same time a believer and a citizen and should be constantly led by Christian conscience alone"(45).

80. In the light of what has been said, these associations, while being concerned for the rights of their members, must also be alive to the responsibilities which are part and parcel of the specific apostolate of the Catholic school. Catholic teachers who freely accept posts in schools, which have a distinctive character, are obliged to respect that character and give their active support to it under the direction of those responsible.

Economic situation of Catholic schools

81. From the economic point of view the position of very many Catholic schools has improved and in some countries is perfectly acceptable. This is the case where governments have appreciated the advantages and the necessity of a plurality of school systems which offer alternatives to a single State system. While at first Catholic schools received various public grants, often merely conceded, they later began to enter into agreements, conventions, contracts, etc. which guarantee both the preservation of the special status of the Catholic school and its ability to perform its function adequately. Catholic schools are thereby more or less closely associated with the national system and are assured of an economic and juridical status similar to State schools.
82. Such agreements have been reached through the good offices of the respective governments, which have recognized the public service provided by Catholic schools, and through the determination of the Bishops and the Catholic community at the national level. These solutions are an encouragement to those responsible for Catholic schools in countries where the Catholic community must still shoulder a very heavy burden of cost to maintain an often highly important network of Catholic schools. These Catholics need to be assured, as they strive to regularize the frequent injustices in their school situation, that they are not only helping to provide all children with an education that respects their complete development, but they are also defending freedom of teaching and the right of parents to choose an education for their children which conforms to their legitimate requirements (46).

VII. COURAGEOUS AND UNIFIED COMMITMENT

83. To commit oneself to working in accordance with the aims of a Catholic School is to make a great act of faith in the necessity and influence of this apostolate. Only one who has this conviction and accepts Christ's message, who has a love for and understands today's young people, who appreciates what people's real problems and difficulties are, will be led to contribute with courage and even audacity to the progress of this apostolate in building up a Catholic school, which puts its theory into practice, which renews itself according to its ideals and to present needs.
84. The validity of the educational results of a Catholic school, however, cannot be measured by immediate efficiency. In the field of Christian education, not only is the freedom-factor of teacher and pupil relationship with each other to be considered, but also the factor of grace. Freedom and grace come to fruition in the spiritual order which defies any merely temporal assessment. When grace infuses human liberty, it makes freedom fully free and raises it to its highest perfection in the freedom of the Spirit. It is when the Catholic school adds its weight, consciously and overtly, to the liberating power of grace, that it becomes the Christian leaven in the world.

85. In the certainty that the Spirit is at work in every person, the Catholic school offers itself to all, non-Christians included, with all its distinctive aims and means, acknowledging, preserving and promoting the spiritual and moral qualities, the social and cultural values, which characterize different civilizations (47).
86. Such an outlook overrides any question of the disproportion between resources available and the number of children reached directly by the Catholic school; nothing can stop it from continuing to render its service. The only condition it would make, as is its right, for its continued existence would be remaining faithful to the educational aims of the Catholic school. Loyalty to these aims is, moreover, the basic motive which must inspire any needed reorganization of the Catholic school institution.
87. If all who are responsible for the Catholic school would never lose sight of their mission and the apostolic value of their teaching, the school would enjoy better conditions in which to function in the present and would faithfully hand on its mission to future generations. They themselves, moreover, would most surely be filled with a deep conviction, joy and spirit of sacrifice in the knowledge that they are offering innumerable young people the opportunity of growing in faith, of accepting and living its precious principles of truth, charity and hope.
88. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, to foster the full realization of the aims of the Catholic school, extends once more its warmest and heartfelt encouragement to all who work in these schools. There can be no doubt whatever of the importance of the apostolate of teaching in the total saving mission of the Church.
89. The Church in particular looks with confidence and trust to Religious Institutes which have received a special charism of the Holy Spirit and have been most active in the education of the young. May they be faithful to the inspiration of their founders and give their whole-hearted support to the apostolic work of education in Catholic schools and not allow themselves to be diverted from this by attractive invitations to undertake other, often seemingly, more effective apostolates.
90. A little more than ten years after the end of the Second Vatican Council the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education repeats the final exhortation of the Declaration on Christian Education to the priests, religious and lay people who fulfill their mission in the Catholic school. It reads. "They are urged to persevere generously in their chosen duty, continuing to instill into their pupils the spirit of Christ; let them endeavor to excel in the art of teaching and in the advancement of knowledge. Thus they will not only foster the internal renewal of the Church, but will safeguard and intensify its beneficial presence in the modern world, and above all, in the world of the intellect"(48).

Conclusion

91. This document in no way wishes to minimize the value of the witness and work of the many Catholics who teach in State schools throughout the world. In describing the task confided to the Catholic school it is intended to encourage every effort to promote the cause of Catholic education, since in the pluralistic world in which we live, the Catholic school is in a unique position to offer, more than ever before, a most valuable and necessary service. With the principles of the Gospel as its abiding point of reference, it offers its collaboration to those who are building a new world—one which is freed from a hedonistic mentality and from the efficiency syndrome of modern consumer society.
92. We appeal to each Episcopal Conference to consider and to develop these principles which should inspire the Catholic school and to translate them into concrete programs which will meet the real needs of the educational systems operating in their countries.
93. Realizing that the problems are both delicate and highly complex, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education also addresses itself to the whole People of God. In the economy of salvation we poor humans must confront problems, suffer their consequences and work might and main to solve them. We are certain that in the last analysis success in any venture does not come from trust in our own solutions but from trust in Jesus Who allowed Himself to be called Teacher. May He inspire, guide, support and bring to a safe conclusion all that is undertaken in His name.

Rome, March 19th, 1977, the Feast of St. Joseph
GABRIEL-MARIE Cardinal GARRONE, Prefect
Antonio M. Javierre, Secretary, Titular Archbishop of Meta

Backnotes

- (1) Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Declaration on Christian Education “Gravissimum Educationis”*, 7.
- (2) Cf. PAUL VI, *Encyclical Letter “Ecclesiam suam”*, 7.
- (3) *Ibid.* 13.
- (4) Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “Gaudium et Spes”*, 4.
- (5) PAUL VI, *Allocution to Cardinal Gabriel-Marie Garrone*, November 27th, 1972.
- (6) PAUL VI, *Encyclical Letter “Ecclesiam suam”*, 15.
- (7) Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Declaration on Christian Education “Gravissimum Educationis”*, 3.
- (8) SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation “Dei Verbum”*, 8.
- (9) Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “Gaudium et Spes”*, 11.
- (10) PAUL VI, *Allocution to the Ninth Congress of the Catholic International Education Office (O.I.E.C.)*, in “L’Osservatore Romano”, June 9th, 1974.
- (11) Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Declaration on Christian Education “Gravissimum Educationis”* 8.
- (12) Cf. PAUL VI, *Allocution to the Ninth Congress of the O.I.E.C.*, in “L’Osservatore Romano”, June 9th, 1974.
- (13) SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “Gaudium et Spes”*, 57
- (14) Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Declaration on Christian Education, “Gravissimum Educationis”*, 2.
- (15) Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Declaration on Christian Education, “Gravissimum Educationis”*, 8.
- (16) Cf. *Epb.* 3, 18-19.
- (17) Cf. *Pastoral Instruction “Communio et Progressio”*, 67.
- (18) Cf. *Ibid.*
- (19) PAUL VI, *Allocution to the Ninth Congress of the O.I.E.C.*, in “L’Osservatore Romano”,
- (20) Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on Christian Education “Gravissimum Educationis”*, 8.
- (21) Paul VI, *Valore dell’oblazione nella vita*, in “The Teaching of Pope Paul VI”, vol. 8 (1970), p. 97.
- (22) Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on Christian Education “Gravissimum Educationis”*, 9.
- (23) Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on Christian Education, “Gravissimum Educationis”*, 8.
- (24) Paul VI, to Prof. Giuseppe Lazzati, Rector of the University of the Sacred Heart (Milano), in “The Teaching of Pope Paul VI”, vol. 9, p. 1082.
- (25) Paul VI, *Allocution to the Ninth Congress of the O.I.E.C.*, in “L’Osservatore Romano”, June 9th, 1974.
- (26) Cf. above, nn. 18, 20, 23.

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- (27) Cf. Paul VI, Allocation to the Ninth Congress of the O.I.E.C., in “ L’Osservatore Romano “, June 9th, 1974.
- (28) Cf. above, n. 58.
- (29) Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “ Gaudium et Spes “, 43.
- (30) Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity “ Apostolicam Actuositatem “, 25.
- (31) Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity “Apostolicam Actuositatem “, 1.
- (32) Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, “ Lumen Gentium “, 33.
- (33) Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity “ Apostolicam Actuositatem “, 10.
- (34) Ibid., 24.
- (35) Ibid., 23.
- (36) Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Bishop’s Pastoral Office in the Church “ Christus Dominus “, 17.
- (37) Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity “ Apostolicam Actuositatem “, 23.
- (38) Cf. above, 23.
- (39) Cf. above, nn. 38-48.
- (40) Cf. above, n. 22.
- (41) Cf. above, nn. 70-72.
- (42) Cfr. above, nn. 70-72.
- (43) Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church “ Lumen Gentium “, 36.
- (44) Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church “Lumen Gentium “, 35.
- (45) Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity “Apostolicam Actuositatem “, 5.
- (46) Cf Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education “Gra vissimum Educationis “, 6.
- (47) Cf Second Vatican Council, Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-christian Religions “ Nostra Aetate “, 2.
- (48) Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education “Gravissimum Educationis “. Conclusion.



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