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Catholic Schools and Universities

A Global View

INTRODUCTION

In November 2015, I was blessed to be able to go to Rome to attend an International Congress on Catholic education, which was organised by the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic education. I was excited to be attending, not only because the Congress was being held in the 'Eternal City', but also because it promised to bring together people from very different cultures as well as people with varying experiences of Catholic education. Perhaps too, I thought, we might catch a glimpse of what global Catholic education might look like in the near future.

We were informed before we left home, that the Congress would be held in two groups, one focusing on Catholic schools and the other on Catholic universities. We needed to choose to which group we wished to belong. Then, on arrival in Rome, we discovered that Pope Francis would be speaking to all of us on the final day. So there was good reason for the excitement in the air.

From the Conference pre-reading we learned that in 2011, the Members of the Congregation for Catholic Education's Plenary Assembly accepted Pope Benedict XVI's suggestion to celebrate two anniversaries in 2015. These were the publication of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Education *Gravissimum Educationis* (October 28, 1965)¹ and the Congregation of Catholic Education's Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (August 15, 1990)². In recommending this celebration, Pope Benedict was hoping to give new stimulus to the Church's role in education.

The Congregation began its preparation by organising two events. The first, a seminar involving experts from across the world, was held in June 2012. The second was a Plenary Assembly of the

Congregation's Members which met in February 2014. In the course of these meetings a number of reflections about Catholic education came to light which were put together in a handbook, or *Instrumentum Laboris*, titled *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*.³

Included in the *Instrumentum Laboris* was a questionnaire under four themes. Below is a sample question from each theme:

- The Identity and Mission of Catholic Schools and Universities

In your country, how are Catholic schools and universities consistent with their nature and aims?

- Those involved in Catholic Education (Subjects)

Is there provision for accompaniment in the faith for teachers, students and families of students who attend Catholic schools and universities?

- The Formation of Formators

How does one organise and guarantee the ongoing formation, both professional and Christian, of administrators, teachers and non-teaching staff?

- Challenges and Outlook

What are the best experiences and greatest weaknesses of Catholic schools and universities in your country?

This text *Instrumentum Laboris* was translated into various languages and distributed to Catholic Bishops' conferences, commissions for Catholic education, dioceses, religious congregations, associations, Catholic schools and Catholic universities. Clearly the handbook initiated significant thinking about the importance of Catholic education for evangelisation and human development in today's world.

Within a few months of the handbook's

1 (Paul VI, 1965)

2 (John Paul II, 1990)

3 (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 2014)

distribution, educational institutions and groups within the Christian community responded to the Congregation's invitation by carrying out rigorous analyses of their involvement in education, particularly by responding to what was asked in the questionnaire. The Congregation tells us these local and regional meetings

produced truly valuable documents ... offering not only answers, but also proposals and suggestions, grouped around the four themes. ... This is a sign of the whole Christian community's notable attention to problems in education as well as its heightened expectation – fifty years after the Council – for further suggestions on how to re-motivate our educational mission.⁴

Once the data had been received a 'well-qualified group of experts' analysed the answers scientifically, producing a comprehensive and coherent picture of Catholic education across the world – a picture ready to guide the work of the pending World Congress.⁵

THE CONGRESS

The Congress took place over four days from 18 – 21 November, 2015. For two of those days we travelled to Castel Gandolfo, about an hour's bus journey from the centre of Rome. Nearly 2000 people enrolled for this obviously important gathering. Here we were reminded that the Congregation's goal for the Congress was to recall the anniversaries of the two 'anniversary' documents and 'to revive ... the commitment of the Church in the field of education'.⁶

The programme included presentations by invited specialists, Eucharists and other prayers, and informal discussions. A number of documents had been handed out on registration including, importantly, a key Report titled *Challenges, Strategies and Perspectives that emerge from the Responses to the Questionnaire of the Instrumentum Laboris*. This Report, containing an initial synthesis of the findings, was published by the Congregation

for Catholic Education of which Cardinal Vincent Zani is the Secretary.⁷ It contains the results of the questionnaire for use during the work of the Congress. A more complete publication is to be published after the Congress.

RESPONDERS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Report informed us that a total of 149 questionnaires had been collected from 62 countries. Responders came from: Africa 9%, Asia 12%, Europe 33%, Latin America 1%, North America 7%, Oceania 12% and South America 27%. Overall Catholic Bishops' Conferences and religious congregations were the most frequent of the official responders ahead of universities, schools, dioceses and religious associations. In North America most responders came from dioceses (30%) and universities (30%), in South America from religious congregations (27%) and schools (32%) and in Oceania from dioceses (50%) and Catholic Bishops' Conferences (31%). The compilers of this Report noted 'that universities used an almost completely different vocabulary from that used by the other categories'.⁸

I found all this background illuminating. Yet the real jewels in the crown for me were the findings. I sought these even more after we were informed of the extent of the analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, that had taken place prior to the Congress. This was confirmed by those presenters at the Congress who had carried out this analysis.

FINDINGS

The initial work of collation and analysis of the questionnaire results was carried out by The Postgraduate School for the Development of Civic Society of LUMSA – The Libera Università Maria Ss. Assunta in Rome, directed by Professor Italo Fiorin, one of the speakers at the Congress. The quantitative method used was backed up by qualitative analysis using techniques of sociology and social psychology to assess strengths and weaknesses within the structures of Catholic education.⁹ The

4 (*Lineamenta Presentation*, 2015, pp. 1-2)

5 (*Lineamenta Presentation*, 2015, p. 2)

6 (*Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing passion: Programme*, 2015)

7 (Zani, 2015)

8 (Zani, 2015, p. 49)

9 (Zani, 2015, p. 187)

responders contended that

the major educational challenges faced today by the world's Catholic schools and universities, in a multicultural society in profound change, can be traced back to ... creating a workable model of holistic education for young people, which preserves the institutional identity of an educational community of evangelisation.¹⁰

This means that Catholic schools and universities are primarily communities and not just working organisations, further, they are educational communities and not just training services, and third, Catholic schools and universities are educating communities of evangelisation because they deliberately set themselves to be instruments providing an experience of Church.¹¹

From the global perspective, the respondents nominated the following four challenges:

- the challenge of identity,
- the challenge of holistic education and
- the challenge of education and the faith and
- the challenge of the poor.¹²

1. IDENTITY

The responders linked the identity of the Catholic school or university with its mission. More specifically they saw mission as putting identity into practice. They identified some tension between conservation and innovation lest, for example, 'the cold wind of secularisation ... sweeps away every reminder of the sacred and the transcendent'.¹³ For Pope Francis, the worst solution to this is 'to entrench ourselves in our own little world'.¹⁴

Respondents believe we need to be fully immersed in the reality of our own time, reviving our identity in proactive ways with new terminology. Catholic schools and universities are important today because:

- they are engaged in ways that substitute for or assist the State when the State's action is insufficient and

- they carry forward evangelisation and thus share in the universal mission of the Church.¹⁵

Many responders stressed the need for academic quality and concern for evangelisation to go hand in hand. 'It is not enough to attend only to didactic quality or student services, while neglecting the task of evangelisation'.¹⁶

Education today is challenged in its deepest values - the primacy of the person, the value of the community, the search for the common good and care for the weak. These values are challenged by individualistic competition, the adulation of efficiency and success at all costs. As the Congregation for Catholic Education states, 'The school [or university] should not give in to this technocratic and economic logic, even if it is under the pressure of external powers and ... is exposed to attempts at manipulation by the market'.¹⁷ Rather, as human beings, we are called to respect the ideas of others, encourage open debate, discuss and research in an atmosphere of friendship and cooperation. Our strongly held belief, say responders, is that everything must lead 'to an encounter with the person of Jesus, the living Christ'.¹⁸

Overall, Catholic schools and universities are seen to have the following features:

- a strong sense of vitality, a life of faith that pervades the whole person
- a sense of social justice and a search for the common good, the building of a united and fraternal society
- the involvement of students in activities outside the school [and university], with visits to institutions that are most in need.

In countries where Christians are in the minority, leaders believe their commitment to education is part of the evangelising mission of the Church. For them the best approach to mission is witness, not proclamation. This leads to 'an opportunity for dialogue, encounter and shared commitment to the common good'.¹⁹

The Report contained a number of direct quotations from the replies such as the following from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh:

10 (Zani, 2015, p. 5)

11 (Zani, 2015, p. 6)

12 (Zani, 2015, p. 6)

13 (Zani, 2015, p. 8)

14 (Zani, 2015, p. 8)

15 (Zani, 2015, pp. 9-10)

16 (Zani, 2015, p. 10)

17 Quoted in (Zani, 2015, p. 12)

18 (Zani, 2015, p. 13)

19 (Zani, 2015, p. 13)

as soon as people enter a Catholic school, they perceive a difference compared to other institutions. The difference is not that the school has an abundance of resources available, nor is it about glamour. What they perceive is rather “the sense of the presence of the divine”.²⁰

From the contributions received from the various places whose only form of mission is that of silent witness, the following traits were highlighted:

- a cultivation of respect for the identity of others
- the promotion of dialogue and cooperation
- a special attention to the civic, moral, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the person.

Globally lay people are becoming more dominant in the leadership and staffing of Catholic schools and universities. They have a greater awareness of the institution’s Catholic identity and the charism that inspired it. Many respondents reported on the real involvement and close collaboration between lay and religious personnel. ‘It is important for the lay members of staff to know about the founder’s charism, to feel part of the school’s mission and to have their roles and responsibilities recognised and accepted as gifts’.²¹

A final dimension of the identity of Catholic schools and universities is that of community. The Report summarises a community as one

that is born of a passion for education, of deeply sharing the same values, where there is room and shelter for all, without excluding the poor and needy. It is a community that requires building up and development which is not something limited to the teaching staff and students, but includes all those who form part of it, particularly the students’ families and the wider social community.²²

Community then is both an aim and a means of education.

2. HOLISTIC EDUCATION

In its paper *Instrumentum Laboris*, the Congregation states ‘Learning is not just equivalent to content assimilation, but is an opportunity for self-education, commitment towards self-improvement and the common good’.²³ This implies

the need for each person in the educational community to grow from an integral and holistic perspective – in the cognitive, affective, social, ethical, spiritual and professional dimensions. At all times the focus is on human development, the development of ‘the person’, focusing on faith formation and personality development. Three aspects of this development are:

- The creation of learning opportunities for all
- A focus on the circumstances in which the community operates and
- The professional development and formation of staff.²⁴

Respondents acknowledged the significant number of Catholic students who, because they come from disadvantaged backgrounds, cannot afford to attend Catholic schools. As a result networking is encouraged to provide different learning opportunities so as to keep the mission of Catholic education alive – one that has an impact on individuals and society at large. This may call participants to be creative, be willing to set out and restructure, innovate, discover and adopt new approaches.

Catholic Universities today operate in a globalised world that is dictated largely by materialistic and utilitarian goals. The main intent of most Catholic universities is to embrace the Catholic intellectual heritage, a search for truth which is based on the Catholic faith. Three features are emphasised:

1. Integrating intellectual progress with spiritual growth
2. A commitment to social justice and peace, reflecting a belief in what is right, in serving as agents of change, focussing on the common good and
3. A commitment to establishing supportive and enriching relationships leading to a sense of service.²⁵

3. EDUCATION AND FAITH

Instrumentum Laboris describes Catholic schools and universities as communities of faith and learning. A coordinating Office for Diocesan Schools in Spain reinforces this:

The educational community must offer a

20 (Zani, 2015, p. 13)

21 (Zani, 2015, p. 15)

22 (Zani, 2015, p. 16)

23 (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 2014, p. 7)

24 (Zani, 2015, p. 19)

25 (Zani, 2015, pp. 20-21)

witness of life that makes the Gospel message attractive and attuned, and must accompany this with more advanced training concerning the Catholic school's identity and evangelising vocation.²⁶

Catholic schools and universities are trying to respond proactively to the challenge of a more secularised teaching staff, as well as the difficulties in attracting and recruiting teachers who are qualified on the professional, moral and religious levels.

A better and more effective coordination is considered essential for guiding the training processes for teachers for Catholic schools at the early stages of their university studies.

The terms 'leader' and 'leadership' are mentioned often in the questionnaire responses. So too is the concept of 'spiritual leadership' in an environment of increasing secularisation of staff, including those in managerial roles. Responders see as critical the importance of excellent recruitment and high quality training of leaders for the future of the world's Catholic schools and universities.²⁷ The introduction of post-graduate programmes in educational leadership is now widespread in many parts of the world.

In Catholic schools and universities, leadership is understood as a quality of the whole community, disseminated at different levels within and outside educational institutions. Respondents highlighted community building as a constant challenge in multicultural, multi-religious and increasingly secular contexts.

In the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* parents are seen as the primary educators. Educational institutions, particularly Catholic institutions, are required to do all that is possible to work with families by promoting dialogue, participation and shared responsibility.

Respondents highlighted the importance of promoting the participation of families as is expressed in this response from a school in Spain:

Education needs a significant partnership between parents and educators, so as to offer everyone an education rich in meaning, an

education that is open to God, to others and to all life in the world. This partnership is even more necessary because education is a personal relationship. It is in the process that we see revealed transcendental faith, family, Church and ethics, with an emphasis on the community dimension.²⁸

This is not always easy, as explained by another quotation from the responses quoted in the Report, this time from the Chile Catholic Bishops' Conference:

Many families seek out a high school not for its faith formation, but for the emotional support and academic quality it offers. They fail to value what the school offers in terms of spiritual formation towards the transcendent, both for themselves and for their children.²⁹

The response from the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Russia develops this:

It is obvious that only if parents clearly perceive our schools to be offering outstanding quality teaching, will the Church have the possibility of providing meaningful witness through this activity, and of possessing a unique and attractive form for dialogue. The formation of staff, teachers, administrators and the families of the students is essential.³⁰

Catholic schools and universities certainly favour the participation of parents. This participation includes listening to the families' needs, inviting them to formation meetings (formation in the faith, formation about their children's studies), participation in events and moments in the life of the institution and one-to-one meetings. However, some seek a greater level of cooperation and integration.

4. THE POOR

Catholic schools and universities are frequently called to pay attention to the poor. Respondents focused on material poverty and the lack of resources needed:

- to lead a dignified life;
- to continue one's studies and

26 (Zani, 2015, p. 22)

27 (Zani, 2015, p. 24)

28 (Zani, 2015, p. 27)

29 (Zani, 2015, p. 28)

30 (Zani, 2015, p. 28)

- for people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Added to this, people have relational, cultural and spiritual needs related to the crisis of community, the weakening of affective interpersonal relationships, questions of solidarity and the spreading of social exclusion. Finally, there is the need to give meaning to one's life.

Attention to poverty – old and new, material and spiritual – is a fundamental trait of our educational institutions' identity, an imperative that Catholic schools and universities cannot avoid without losing their very essence. Colleges and universities endeavour, said a religious congregation from Chile, 'to provide comprehensive quality education, addressing all dimensions of the human person, without social discrimination, but focusing mainly on the poorest'.³¹

Secularisation is a breeding ground for a form of spiritual poverty which is spreading rapidly. The Report states:

in mainstream culture and common thought, God is increasingly less present and everyday life is dominated by a sense of self-sufficiency that renders any reference to Christian values redundant. These values are often confined to the private sphere, are seen as being a leftover from childhood, or sometimes are decidedly ignored.³²

Respondents believe the urgent need for Catholic schools and universities is to learn to speak to the human heart and grow in their ability to rekindle the question about the meaning of life and reality, which risks being forgotten. They asked how can we help people's choices to evolve 'so that what prevails is not a utilitarian choice, but a choice for a holistic formation'?³³

Catholic schools and universities live daily with the challenge of having to do more with limited resources. The economic crisis has given rise to new forms of poverty, even for those who once represented the middle class. On the one hand this has made school fees unaffordable for many families; on the other hand, it has increased the need for subsidies to education for the poorest, who

no longer have any social coverage because of the downsizing of welfare protection by the State.

The cost of Catholic education is affected by three main structural drivers of change:

1. More sophisticated learning environments signify a push towards increased costs in premises, new technology, staff training and expansion of support resources;
2. The reduction of religious personnel leads to greater reliance on lay teachers, who tend to be paid more;
3. New systems of accountability – with the consequent emphasis on documentation, transparency and procedures – introduce new forms of inflexibility in educational processes, with more upward pressure on the costs of compliance.³⁴

The shortage of resources is a global problem for Catholic schools and universities. Responses to the questionnaire suggested the need to develop policies for financial assistance, both directly through scholarships and indirectly through fee differentiation. The Queensland Catholic Education Commission offered a possible approach:

Co-responsibility is used ... [in the religious institute schools] to contribute according to their possibility and receive according to their need. Co-responsibility supports schools with mostly low socioeconomic families to function with little fee income.³⁵

Overall, respondents highlighted the supportive role played by Catholic schools and universities in assisting students, with a clear movement towards a policy of giving scholarships to students and families in need.

CONCLUSION

Between 1971 and 2012 the numbers of students in Catholic schools and universities grew from thirty-one million to fifty-eight million, an increase of eighty-four per cent. Growth has been particularly significant in Africa and Asia. This growth provides a background to the responses from across the world to the principles laid out in

31 (Zani, 2015, p. 34)

32 (Zani, 2015, p. 34)

33 (Zani, 2015, p. 35)

34 (Zani, 2015, p. 36)

35 (Zani, 2015, p. 37)

the Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* and the Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. The Report nominates some key emerging questions:

1. What are our institutions' defining characteristics?
2. Can we really be satisfied because our institutions are sought after?
3. How do we respond to the disengaged or uninterested Catholic families who want a Catholic education for their children?
4. How do we help students and their families deepen the religious meaning of education within a Catholic school or university?³⁶

Even in extreme circumstances where the Church is present but silent and where the proclamation of the Gospel is limited to the witness of our lives, there are Catholic schools and universities offering a humanly rich educational environment, quietly building bridges that favour the encounter between cultures and between religions.

Finally, based on this analysis of the questionnaire responses, the Report proposes the following guidelines for the mission of Catholic schools and universities:

1. Research - That there be more cooperation between Catholic schools and universities to overcome a great superficiality regarding moral and meaning-related issues.
2. Witness - Understood as coherence of life and passion for others, witness is the primary form of communication and, in some cases, the only one possible.
3. Dialogue - involves the search for mutual understanding and a desire to find points for encounter. It involves searching for possible ways to cooperate with a focus on the common good.
4. Service - Catholic education should lead students to make their knowledge and skills available to others. 'If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society'.³⁷
5. Inclusion - 'The real test of whether the service offered by Catholic schools and universities is authentic is the attention they pay to the poor and those in disadvantaged circumstances.

6. Hope - In the context of education, hope makes us believe it is always possible to develop new ways 'of going out of ourselves towards the other'.³⁸ We walk in hope, in the midst of difficulties, without losing joy, in the certainty that the Father will give us all that we require.

I have found it a privilege to participate in this Congress and to study the responses from Catholic educators from around the world. The findings can only augur well for the contribution Catholic education, at both the school and university levels, can offer our future.

Throughout the Congress, the atmosphere was one of prayer, reflection and conviviality. Participants gathered at every opportunity in informal language groups to chat informally and share their thoughts. I left feeling optimistic about the contribution today's Catholic educators are making to the building of the Kingdom.

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36 (Zani, 2015, p. 39)

37 (Francis, 2015, p. 163 (N208))

38 (Francis, 2015, p. 162 (N208))