

IS THERE SOMETHING MISSING
- in our Catholic Education and Faith Formation? –

PASTORAL LETTER to the Priests, Lay Pastoral Co-ordinators, Diocesan Staff,
Directors of Religious Studies, Religious Education Teachers,
and all involved with ‘handing on the faith’

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This letter is intended to show my appreciation of your work and raise some issues for deeper reflection.

The question posed in the title is not being asked only, or even primarily, of our Catholic schools, because Catholic formation comes out of a partnership between Catholic homes, Catholic schools and Catholic parishes. In that partnership, the schools are extensions of the homes, and focal points of the parishes. The responsibility belongs to all.

In our schools RE is now in every sense a school subject. Its link with NZQA reinforces this status. We might well debate the merits of RE being perceived as one subject among others, but at least it now has a certain status in the eyes of young people who have exams to pass or credits to get. Previously, RE appeared to some of them as less important because it didn't count for the exams. Most of all, however, our RE programme gives young Catholics a good knowledge and understanding of the faith. And the programme in use in our country really is excellent – in its content, its teaching method, and its presentation.

In addition to the RE programme, Catholic schools provide a Catholic environment and Catholic “character”. In the early stages of a person's formation, this helps to strengthen their sense of Catholic identity – for the sake of taking that identity out into a pluralist and often indifferent society. A strong sense of Catholic identity at home does the same for Catholic students at State schools. [*1]

This Catholic ‘environment’ and Catholic ‘character’ are an *activity*. Treston describes the Catholic ‘ethos’ as

sharing something of the story and tradition of the Christian community (which include scripture, devotions, creeds, sacraments, prayer and rituals, spirituality, doctrines and works of justice, peace and ecology.... and especially, experience of the liturgical seasons (*Wisdom Schools*; Creative Enterprises, 2001, p.22 & passim.)

Unfortunately, teachers who belong to generation X, although they tend to be better versed in the instruction element of what they teach than were many of the teachers before them, they “have less experience of the Catholic cultural identity they need to contribute to the culture within the school community” (cf Siân Owen RSJ, in *Journal of Religious Education*, Vol. 53 (4), 2005, p. 21).

Obviously, a Catholic environment is itself a catalyst for ‘handing on the faith’ –even more so than programmes of religious education can be. The religious education programme is one component of this environment. The environment is meant to bring it to life.

Even beyond that, there is still something else needed – something relevant to the claim one sometimes hears: “I went right through the Catholic school system, but I didn’t meet Christ until I came to the New Life Centre.” That “something else” has to do with the difference between learning about Jesus and meeting him.

Despite all our efforts, questions are still being asked, for example about why only a small percentage even of primary school children regularly come to Sunday Mass. Is this question answered by the claim that Sunday Mass is not the only, or even the primary, benchmark of Catholic identity? Or is that claim a cop-out? After all, for Christians from earliest times, the Sunday gathering was the main event of their week.

We are sometimes competing with peer pressure that is not always supportive. We are sometimes giving answers to questions the young ones have not yet asked, simply because they have not yet had the experience that surfaces the difficult questions about life and meaning.

Still, when all is said and done, our young people do make choices. They also make sacrifices for the sake of what they want, when they want it enough. So the question being addressed in this letter comes down to this: “How can we help them to *want* the faith we are trying to hand on”? What follows are seven different approaches to this question. They are not alternatives to each other; they are all needed.

1. What do they see?

Perhaps the most obvious factor relevant to our question is what young people actually experience, and that has not always been encouraging. For example where is the enthusiasm that characterized the early Christians and excited the interest of others? What does the typical Sunday gathering “feel like” to young people? How realistic is it to expect them to be there when their parents are not there? And how can they not be disaffected by events that have damaged the Church’s credibility? (We have not been entirely unsuccessful, of course. We taught them the gospel standards by which they judge what they see, and sometimes find us wanting.)

Pope Paul VI put it this way:

People today more willingly listen to witnesses than to teachers. (*Apostolic Letter on Evangelization*, 1975, n.41. See also Sections 21, 26 and 76 of this land-mark letter.)

Young people are *attracted* when they see how much the faith means to us, and the difference it makes. On the other hand, the teacher who does not personally put into practice the faith he/she teaches, is effectively saying “it’s not really very important.”

They are also attracted by heroism, which is what they can see in the lives of the saints.

2. What about “spirituality” without “religion”?

There is a kind of Evangelical shortcut that simply dispenses with “religion” which it sees as a “man-made” system that isn’t necessary for, and only gets in the way of, simple direct faith in Christ based on the scriptures. Preachers of this persuasion can very effectively bring people to Christ, and we might have something to learn from them. However, the over-simplification of disjoining “religion” and “faith”, and the

implied privatisation of the individual's faith, have helped to create an even wider gap: the scriptures themselves, and Christ, and the very idea of historic revelation, are now lumped in with "religion" and dispensed with in favour of "spirituality".

In a small book subtitled *Bridging Spirituality and Religion Today*, David Ranson speaks of what happens when people who do want some sort of faith feel they cannot get it from the institutional church:

The churches are seen by many as devoid of spirituality – indeed, even as a threat and an obstacle to a truly spiritual life. Most often, the churches are simply regarded as irrelevant to a person's spirituality and spiritual journey. People are more ready now to assume a certain spiritual nomadism. They do not find a natural home in "religion" with its prescribed formulations and practices. They find it more than socially acceptable to construct their own personal spiritual itinerary and to wander around the many possibilities that are present. People wish to retain their freedom to select and choose rather than to commit to a tradition in which not everything might make sense to them. For many people "spirituality" is in the private realm: "my" way of seeking meaning, connection and a certain centeredness in life (*Across the Great Divide* (St Paul's 2002, Page 10).

Spirituality that does not put its roots down in a community of faith has its own hazards:

Without intellectual accountability, "spirituality" is adrift and free to meander into "spiritualism": the sense of an extra-terrestrial world inhabited by celestial and spirit beings of one kind or another with whom immediate and direct contact is both sought and acquired. Mostly, this has the objective of the manipulation of forces of power that give answer to life's powerlessness and apparent chaos. Such, however, is a sophisticated form of escapism... (ibid, page 16).

Using insights of the late Canadian theologian, Bernard Lonergan SJ, Ranson goes on to explain the connection between spirituality and the Church. It involves a journey which starts with *noticing* a deeper dimension to reality: (this can be triggered by moments of deep wonder or delight, or by a crisis or transition, or by some 'limit experience'.) This awareness leads to a *new way of seeing* one's own existence and the world; that in turn leads to a *desire* to know more. *Acting* on this desire leads to *the community that interprets and articulates* the meaning of what one has discovered.

The starting point on this journey is the person's own experience. So what we offer has to *connect with something that matters to them*, such as their attraction to a sense of the sacred in nature; their desire for authentic relationships; their being comfortable with paradoxes; their need for connections with family history and cultural identity; for dialogue, and for solidarity in resisting oppressive social and economic structures.

Young people are helped to make these connections by people who themselves can identify both with these natural desires and with the community that is able to interpret them.

But Ranson goes on to make the disconcerting claim that

Institutional religion seems pastorally inadequate to engage the nature of contemporary people's spiritual journeys. Most often, young people are unready to

accept an entire systematic and doctrinal interpretation of their spiritual experience. They are not ready to express their spiritual quest in ritual form, particularly as it is celebrated parochially. However, very little else is offered them. Consequently, they experience a significant dissonance between their spiritual questions and the doctrinal answers that religion provides them (ibid, page 36).

To surmount this, the answers (doctrines) we give must actually engage and interpret their own experience and yearnings. This also ensures that the spiritual moments which trigger the journey can *live on* within the life and teaching of the faith community. Otherwise, the Church's teachings remain abstract and barren. The community, in turn, is able to give depth, direction and meaning to those original spiritual experiences. Thus the bridge is built.

3. Overcoming the split

(T)he split between the faith that many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age (Second Vatican Council, *Church in the Modern World*, n.43).

This obviously refers to the scandal caused by inconsistency between what people profess and how they live. But it also implies that if people don't *experience the connection* between their religious faith and their daily lives, they soon begin to see religious practice as an 'extra', which they can do without.

Secular culture sees "religion" as a kind of optional extra to life. It's fine for those who want it, or need it, but one can do without it, and not miss it. It is like a coat that one can put on or take off. It is not part of one's being.

Within this cultural environment we need to be able to show how faith is *connected to being genuinely human*; that one cannot become fully human and fully alive without it; that *being a person requires it*.

A theme that occurs through several of Pope John II's encyclicals is that

The human person is the primary route the Church must travel in fulfilling its mission: the primary and fundamental way of the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself (*The Redeemer of the Human Race*, n.14).

In his own successful dealings with young people, I think John Paul II started from the question they themselves naturally ask: "who am I in this world"?, and he connected it with the question of "why" they exist at all. He introduced them to the *wonder* of their own existence, – based on the mystery of God's freedom. Each is led to discover that "God did not need to create me, and so God must have really *wanted me*". This means I am *meant* to be; so my life matters; yes, there is a reason for my life. My existence is a calling; what more can I find out about God's purpose for me?"

That God would be concerned for us so much, or even concerned at all (cf Psalm 8), is our grandeur. It constitutes our deepest reassurance, and generates the very possibility of trusting – without which we cannot fully live. It leads to thanksgiving, because life perceived as a gift can only be received in the way a gift is received, i.e.

with “thank you”. Knowing how much we mean to God leads beyond religion perceived as a duty into the realms of desire, delight and prayerfulness.

It is our *self* that comes alive when we see our existence as a gift from God, and a personal calling. And it is our more-alive-self that looks beyond self to helping to make “human life more fully human.” (John Paul II) In this way, life itself becomes “true worship”. As Iraneus put it “the glory of God is the human person fully alive”.

Iraneus went on to say that being fully alive comes from “seeing” God, i.e. recognising God as the one who is present to us in every created thing.

This way of ‘seeing’ presupposes a reflective awareness that modern living does not easily allow. To “be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 45:10) is not easy in a world that seems afraid of silence, and allows constant noise to block out the deeper questions..

We introduce young people to this way of ‘seeing’ by helping them to experience love, belonging, goodness and beauty, and inviting them to reflect on these experiences. We should not underestimate the importance of beauty in a world that has become culturally resistant to hearing about right and wrong, true and false. The beauty we find in nature, the beauty we create in music, song and dance, the beauty that belongs to love, family, loyalty and faithfulness, can all touch people deeply and kindle the powerful suggestion that ‘all this is not for nothing’. Even the hardened and brazen can succumb before the miracles of life and love. At times it can be harder to believe there is no God than to believe there is. Handing on the faith means helping people to ‘see’.

Of course, the good experiences of life are not the whole story, and children learn soon enough that life can bring pain too. And they properly ask what kind of God “allows terrible things to happen”. I think they should be positively introduced to the mystery of suffering. The child who is taken or is allowed by his or her parents to visit the sick and lonely is being prepared for life as it is, and for a deeper faith than the one who sees only the sunsets.

Of course, there is no answer to the mystery of suffering and injustice apart from Christ, for it happened to him too, and this proved to be evil’s own undoing – not its elimination, but its being turned around on itself. The rest, as they say, is history.

But not quite: this is *salvation* history and so it is what God is *still doing*, and how God is *still being revealed*, and *still present* “in Christ”. This brings us to the difference between RE and catechesis. In RE we learn the truths God has revealed. In catechesis we learn to recognise and accept the God who is being revealed to us.

4. God still being revealed

In accordance with NZQA requirements, the units of our RE programme are introduced by identifying specific ‘outcomes’ to be achieved. Inevitably, though, the focus of courses that are meant to have measurable outcomes is on what can be measured, namely the cognitive dimension of RE. I am not questioning the importance of the cognitive dimension. In fact, every revealed truth points beyond itself to God.

The trouble is, though, it is possible to know the truths of faith and still not be changed by them. There is another way of knowing that changes us. It involves a “conversion”, i.e. a complete turn-around in the way we ‘see’ everything – ourselves and the whole of creation, and consequently a different way of living. Handing on the faith is meant to make that kind of difference. Learning the truths of faith on its own is not enough. [*2]

Yes, of course faith is a gift, but the gift comes to us in the human ways that we come to know the Giver. Yes, it’s true that we cannot supply another person’s act of believing. But it is still the *faith* that we want them to have, and not just knowing the truths of faith:

The essential question is not how to educate people in the Catholic faith, but how to form people with a Catholic mind and heart (J Hanvey SJ, *On the Way to Life: Contemporary Culture and Theological Development as a framework for Catholic Education, Catechises and Formation* (Study done for Bishops of England & Wales, 2005, page 52).

The fact that people can know truths but still not believe them is a problem theologians and catechists grappled with during the second half of last century. Foundational work had been done by Karl Rahner who focused on *the intimate connection between divine revelation and being a human being*. Revelation is about the meaning of one’s existence. Much of this work was done at the East Asia Pastoral Institute under Fathers A Nebreda SJ and J Calle SJ. At a workshop in Christchurch in 1975, Calle gave an overview of how the Church has proclaimed the gospel in different eras, depending on how revelation and faith were being perceived and on changing pastoral needs. Summarising (and greatly reducing) his work:

- (a) In the earliest days of the Church, all their preaching was around the person of Jesus. In his person God is revealed, and how much we mean to God is also revealed. Christian life was the mystery of “Christ among you, your hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Corresponding to this understanding of revelation, faith was the acceptance of the person Jesus. His real presence among them made possible their real encounters with him and real union with him. The result was a message they received with power, conviction and joy (cf 1Thes. 1:4-6).
- (b) During the Patristic era, the focus was on the “wonderful things” God had done in history and was now doing above all in the liturgy.
- (c) In the Middle Ages, when the great summas were being written, the focus was on the truths of faith. When it became necessary for the Church to defend itself against various errors leading up to the Council of Trent and the first Vatican Council, revelation came to be identified with the truths taught by the Church. Corresponding to this, faith was perceived as assent to those truths. This is how matters stood into the first half of the twentieth century.
- (d) But it was now beginning to become clear that the truths of faith do not always make the difference that faith itself makes. This led to the kerygmatic movement, which once again focused on proclaiming the wonderful things God had done, in the hope of inspiring gratitude and conversion. But revelation was being viewed predominantly as a past event. The bible was the text. Students became tired of hearing about Abraham and Moses. Kerygmatic catechesis was not connecting with *their own experience*. Crossing the Red Sea was not their problem.

- (e) It was the Second Vatican Council that set the scene for a dramatic change of focus – from revealed truths to revelation itself, and to making the connection with people’s lives and experience. It was realised that knowing the teachings of the Church, and knowing the teachings of scripture, could not possibly catch the full dynamic of revelation and faith understood as an act of self-revelation on God’s part, inviting each person into God’s friendship, and awaiting their “yes”.

At best, the teaching of the Church and the teaching of scripture, as well as the Catholic environment and Catholic character of our schools, can only provide the *backdrop* to what really needs to happen. What needs to happen is a process of discovering *the signs of God’s interest in us*, already *hinted at* in one’s deepest yearnings, and *awaiting validation* from outside one’s self.

There are certain profound yearnings that God has planted in the human heart, which are the first intimations of what God really made us for. Such are the yearnings for life and love, freedom and personal responsibility, relationships and solidarity with others. These yearnings are what we find confirmed or validated in the ‘wonderful things’ God has already done, and is doing, in the lives of others – those written about in the scriptures, and those in whom the risen Christ’s life is still being revealed.

‘Seeing’ Christ in this way translates as *meeting Christ* in one’s own life; as “live” encounters that evoke our response and acceptance.

This is why the people of God

labours to decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this people has a part along with other people of our times. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God’s design for the human vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human (Second Vatican Council, *Church in the Modern World*, n.11).

As you can see, all this amounts to *something more* than handing on the truths of faith, as in our RE programmes. The role of those who facilitate this discovery of God in our lives is not so much the role of teacher, or master or even guide. It is the role of the prophets. They are those who ‘see’ and ‘listen attentively’ (cf Matthew 13:14-16) and so are able to help others interpret their own experience by recognising it as a hint of God’s wonderful purpose. The gospel then validates this interpretation, enabling a person to know that his or her existence really is purposeful. This also connects them with the *community* that already lives by those same assurances.

This is also the specific character of a homily: against the backdrop of the scriptures which depict God’s presence in human history, the homilist helps people to recognise the signs of God’s presence in their own lives.

5. Re-inventing our language

In his review of *On the Way to Life*, Timothy Radcliffe OP picks up on what that document says about “the death of the language of religion”, and the need for “a living language” capable of helping people to interpret their own yearning for life.

The truths of our faith are in one way or another about sin and salvation. But the language we use is a kind of church-speak that does not engage our hearers. This leaves society to find its own explanations: guilt comes to be understood as a psychological state, but “who wants to come to church to feel bad about themselves”? (Radcliffe). Its antidote comes to be thought of merely as therapy, of the kinds that are popular today. Our teachings on sin and salvation would be more engaging if our language and imagery were drawn from what people can more easily recognise as paths to death and to life.

We have to offer the story of sin and redemption not as a mental drama for which therapy is the answer, but as the story of destruction and creation. Our story begins with the creation of the world. We are partners of the one who spoke the word and all came to be. We are made in the likeness of God because creativity is at the heart of our humanity. We can also be destructive. We can speak words, and do deeds, that either give life or death, that heal or hurt. The drama of Good Friday and Easter Sunday was in overcoming the powers of destruction. If we find ourselves inside this story of God’s unutterable creativity, then we can face the awful things that we do without a mental guilt that paralyzes us, but with confidence in the creative grace that works within us (T Radcliffe, *Review of on the Way to Life*, Catholic Education Service, Bishops’ Conference, England & Wales, 2005, pp 31-32).

Moses had taught the people that they chose life by keeping the law and all its prescriptions. Saint Paul taught that the law can only point to *what we fail to do*, and that we now receive life – in spite of our sins – as a pure gift, made present to us in the person of Christ.

The language of being creative or destructive gives an existential edge to the truths of faith. It re-unites what our recent tradition had unhelpfully divided into doctrine, ethics and spirituality. The truths of our faith are really aspects of salvation history in the doing.

This also makes it easier to recognise the *beauty* of our doctrines. Seeing their beauty is seeing their truth, because beauty and truth are ultimately one.

6. Dialoguing with our culture

The environment, culture and times in which we live are not entirely extrinsic to us because they enter right into the process of our becoming fully human and fully alive. Catholic formation takes place not in isolation but in dialogue with contemporary culture. In fact, evangelization requires of us a genuine dialogue with people within our contemporary culture.

Society would be more open to us if it could see that a relationship with God can make an even better job than secularism can, of validating, interpreting and safeguarding the very yearnings that modernity treasures: for example, the yearnings for tolerance, self-expression, human rights, participation, democracy, etc. The difference is that modernity rejects the need for any decisive point of reference beyond the individual’s own self. The individual’s claims are supposed to be self-validating, which means they never can be. [*3]

Modernity’s inability to make ultimate sense of what the human heart yearns for is already showing up in distorted interpretations of those same yearnings. Freedom, authenticity, honesty, love, tolerance, equality and human rights, are all being skewed by the expectation that they mean whatever the individual believes they mean.

These confusions within our culture go back to the separation of faith and reason . Reason without faith cannot know the transcendent dignity of the person, and so a person's worth is ultimately their usefulness to themselves and to others. Conversely, faith without reason lacks the infrastructure it needs even to account for itself, and is ultimately defenseless against the barbarities of fundamentalism.

This separation of faith and reason had its origins in the Enlightenment. Reason had a rightful place in correcting the excesses and abuses of authority, culture and tradition, but not as a complete replacement for faith. Within a short while there was a revolt against the excessive claims made on behalf of reason itself. This gave rise to Romanticism – “the cult of the heart” and individualism. It became a person's sincerity that mattered, more than the *meaning* of their actions. The Catholic Church still has a hard time convincing people that morality is based on the *meaning of one's actions*, as well as on their intentions. In post-Modernity it is the individual who gives them their meaning.

In a culture in which the issue is not ‘the truth’ but ‘whose truth?’, there is no longer a basis for seeking truth beyond the individual's own perceptions.

One of the marks of late Modernity/post-Modernity is the collapse of the humanist consensus. The (Second Vatican) Council makes the Church one of the most powerful defenders of ‘the human’, the dignity and destiny of every person irrespective of their birth, nationality, status or abilities (Hanvey, op. cit. page 41).

This needs to be a main focus of our evangelisation, catechesis and apologetics.

Ultimately the Church has something more radical to offer humanity than does secularism because its gospel is about a love for life and for the world that does not stop at what can be merited or deserved or found useful. Nothing more fully embraces the world as it really is than love poured out where it is not merited – like God's love (see 1 John 4:17).

This is why the Church will recover its own credibility not by looking back in nostalgia to past shapes and forms (real or imagined), but by moving further into the life of the world, recognising and naming the God who dwells in all reality. This is Catholicism's special charism: its sacramental way of ‘seeing’ (cf Hanvey, op. cit. passim). [*4]

7. Liturgy

It is above all

the mystical orientation within religion that has the capacity to engage the deeply personal yet universal quest for meaning (Ranson, op. cit. page 49). [*5]

It is in the liturgy that we touch “the mystery which is Christ among you” (Colossians 1:20). The point of “full, active participation” is not to multiply activities, but to actively let oneself be absorbed by the mystery unfolding around us, in a community that becomes “one body, one spirit, in Christ” (Eucharistic Prayer III).

Such absorption calls for responses that involve body, mind and spirit: - attentive listening; gestures of adoration and reconciliation; songs of thanksgiving and joy; times of stillness and silence.

When young people find the liturgy “boring” it is sometimes because we are not relating it to their own experience. The Mass has been designed by adults for adults. Making adaptations to better engage children or young people is justified by the paramount law of proclaiming the mystery of God’s presence to *all*, and therefore according to their circumstances of age, culture, condition, etc. Adaptations must always respect the main structure of the liturgy and the purpose of its particular parts, because it is always *the Church’s liturgy* we celebrate, not something of our own making. (There is a process of authorisation for those adaptations that are intended to be ongoing; other small accommodations are made for the occasions they are needed.) [*6]

Failure to adjust to the needs of a particular congregation is failure to make the liturgy accessible to people according to their capacity to receive.

The capacity of young people to be absorbed by “the mystery” of Christ among us should not be under-estimated. It is one of the things they can feel strongly attracted to, as the history of Taizé demonstrates dramatically.

The physical setting, the symbols, and the ‘atmosphere’ at any liturgy are intended to deepen our awareness of being in God’s presence.

We need to enhance the repertoire of the symbolic, non-verbal practices of faith and prayer (Hanvey, *op. cit.*, page 68).

Here, too, there is room for creating the experience of beauty.

Parishes do well to sometimes invite young people to make suggestions regarding the setting, symbols and atmosphere, and to give them roles in the Sunday liturgy.

Conclusion

The obligation of “handing on the faith” includes bringing people to faith (through evangelisation), nurturing their faith (through prayer, liturgy, catechesis and the actions of Christian living), and informing their faith (through religious education). In different ways, these responsibilities are shared by Catholic homes, Catholic schools and parishes.

By publishing its religious education programme, the Church in New Zealand took the position that the content of religion classes in our schools was to be specifically *religious education*. (For students who already have faith, the knowledge gained through religious education also has the potential to nurture their faith; for students who do not have faith, it respects their position.)

But the policy of giving religious education status in its own right does not mean that the specific activities of evangelisation and catechesis are excluded or not expected of the school. Some schools run programmes for young people interested in becoming Catholics, and these deserve the warm support of the parishes. This practice does not mean the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Children of Catechetical Age has been *removed* from the parishes; the school is an arm of the parish, and so adapted forms of the rite are carried out at the school on behalf of the parish(es). The schools in turn need to remember that the sacraments of initiation are initiation into the life of the whole Church community. This is why they are celebrated in the midst of the assembly,

preferably at a Sunday Mass. Celebrations at times or places which privatise the occasion, or involve only the young persons' peers, are *diminishments* of occasions that should be proudly featured in the parishes.

But the opportunities for evangelisation within the schools will be mainly informal, as occasions arise, both in and out of the classroom. This suggests that just as teachers have a right to receive training in religious education, they also have a right to receive training in evangelisation and catechesis as described above. "They need to be able to perceive when a faith question is being asked, and be willing to answer it on that level" (G Finlay, Director, National Centre for Religious Studies).

In religious education we talk about what Jesus said and did. If handing on the faith is our agenda, this can never be enough. They need to see that for us personally, Jesus is someone whose company we enjoy, whom we love dearly and would trust with our lives, and someone we are grateful to.

Parishes whose preparation of candidates for sacraments is more like religious education than catechesis are asked to think seriously about what they are doing. (Perhaps they could try to locate themselves within the historical synopsis given in section 4 above). It should be clear that the processes of faith formation involve more than just programmes – whether they are RE programmes or parish programmes preparing candidates for sacraments.

Evangelisation/catechesis are to the fore in retreat work carried out in the diocese; they are also being used by our diocesan Religious Education Team in its work with teachers; they are also being used by our Diocesan Team for ministry with Young People.

It is first and foremost adults who need to be more deeply changed in the ways that faith changes our way of seeing and our attitudes. In turn, it is *our attitudes* that children pick up. In this way they are drawn into the process of faith-formation. They act out the attitudes of faith. In living the faith they learn the faith. They begin to *want* the faith we are trying to hand down. That was the question we posed at the beginning of this letter.

Is it time for us to say again "woe to any home that can undermine all this by failing to be a place of prayer"?

End Notes:

[*1] The Catholic identity of homes was the point of my pastoral letter on Evangelization, Pentecost 1990.

[*2] The desire to learn the truth is greater when it comes out of this conversion. In his Apostolic Letter on Evangelization, Pope Paul VI described a sequence which starts with personal conversion, which finds expression in witness, in doctrine, in liturgy, and in action for social justice. The inference is that personal conversion itself is *not complete* if it does not seek expression in all these ways. In turn, the experience of good witness, good liturgy, good teaching or involvement in social justice issues can also lead to conversion, or to deeper conversion.

[*3] Modernity seeks to be self-grounding; it rejects the transcendent as a form of validation....

With the discovery of the new continent of the unconscious, the ‘turn to the subject’ cannot be the liberation it was thought to be. Instead, it is an encounter with a self that is unknown and a will whose sources lie in subterranean motivations and experiences. Reason, like Samson, has been blinded and shackled to another God. The subject, then, is not the simple turn to an unproblematic interior. Given the abyss of the unconscious that opens, the search for ‘authenticity’ can have no end. We can never gain any certainty about the ultimate ‘honesty’ of our motives. The source of validation that frees and absolves the self becomes inaccessible. The ‘turn to the subject’ that characterizes Modernity, when combined with the process of differentiation, produces what McIntyre has described as ‘an epistemological crisis’ (Hanvey, op. cit. pages 13, 20).

[*4] A Catholic culture is an incarnational way of living in history. It involves the habit of embracing humanity’s own deepest yearnings in each era, purifying them in the light of the gospel, interpreting and promoting them. A truly Catholic culture is not the mere preservation of any one particular moment in history.

[*5] Sacral religion is earthed. It is embodied. It is not seduced into thinking that spirit gives itself in any other way than through creation. It has learned to listen, and to perceive in the ordinariness of life something greater. It is able to recognize in that which is finite, the pull of infinity, and in that which is human, what is divine. Therefore, religion marked by the sacral can truly hear the fresh signals of spiritual irruption in the world and not be condemned simply to retracing its steps (Ranson, op. cit. page 50).

[*6] A good sense of the guiding principles of “adaptation” can be got from the Directory on Masses with Children (1973).

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Sources:

- Ranson, D *Across the Great Divide* (St Paul’s 2002)
- Calle, J. *Catechesis for the 70’s*. (This booklet is probably out of print, but a copy is available in the diocesan library.)
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Be assured of my appreciation of you all, and of your privileged calling

Yours fraternally,

P J Cullinane
Bishop of Palmerston North