

"The Character of Catholic Schools"

Singapore CEC Conference, March 2015

Thank you for the invitation as long ago as July last year to be with you these few days. My task is not easy – to say something fresh, perhaps even mildly inspirational on the much visited theme of "The Character of Catholic Schools."

If there is anything of inspiration in what I have to say, it will come from people like our Pope Francis, the writers of the excellent Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education document: "Education Today and Tomorrow – a Renewing Passion," and other authors like Boston College theologian, Thomas Groome, and Fathers Daniel O'Leary and Richard Rohr OFM.

On that word 'Character', much has been written over the years. Well before Jesus, Aristotle was teaching that moral virtues, like crafts, are acquired by practice and habit. We become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre. We become virtuous, strong of character, by doing virtuous acts. In the 13th century that great Dominican theologian, Thomas Aquinas, said that "most of what we do primarily affects us; if done poorly, it worsens us. For example, a good run makes the runner run better. A poised dance makes the dancer dance better...in effect, 'we become what we do'.

Some say sport develops character; others say it reveals character. I like Os Guinness' definition in his book, *When No One Sees – the Importance of Character in an Age of Image*, where he describes character as "what we are when no one sees but God."

I am reminded of the story of some children lining up for lunch in the cafeteria of a Catholic primary school. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The supervising Nun made a note, and posted it on the apple tray: "Take only ONE. God is watching." Moving further along the lunch line, at the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip biscuits. A child had written a note: "Take all you want. God is watching the apples."

Character lies deeper than our values and far deeper than our philosophies, allegiances, memberships, or accomplishments. Our character is the deepest expression of what constitutes us as unique individuals. Character is our personal seal, our indelible imprint. The Song of Songs says it beautifully: "Set me like a seal upon your heart, like a seal upon your arm. For love is as strong as death..." (8:8)

Another way of describing this character, this seal, is what the Australian Aborigines call 'songlines' - as captured in Bruce Chatwin's book of the same name:

"Each totemic ancestor, while travelling through the country, was thought to have scattered a trail of words and musical notes along the line of his footprints, and...these Dreaming-tracks lay over the land as 'ways' of communication between the most far-flung tribes. 'A Song', Arkady said, 'was both map and direction finder. Providing you knew the song, you could always find your way across the country.

'And would a man on 'Walkabout' always be travelling down one of the Songlines?' 'Yes!'".

When Dr Ann Clark, the Director of Catholic education in Sydney's Parramatta diocese died in 1997, her friend and homilist, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, told us at her Requiem Mass that Ann, from the time that she was a little girl, heard and loved the Song of Jesus. This is our most important Songline in Catholic education, of course, our constant reference point in the Word, Jesus Himself. "In the beginning was the word..." Like the apostles, when we are lost and do not know where to turn, we can say: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68) Jesus is our songline, our map and compass, our constant reference point.

So what more can we say about our seal, our indelible imprint, our songline in Catholic education? I believe there several pathways to ensure that we are walking along the correct songline. In attempting to describe these different paths, I want to focus on the **HOW** of Catholic education rather than the 'what'. After all, Catholicism is not just a set of ideas, it is not a series of 'no's as some make it out to be, but a comprehensive way of living. The Catholic Catechism says it well: "We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch." (Catholic Catechism #170) In other words, our Catholic faith is a way of seeing the world. Latin American theologian, Clodovis Boff, says it well: "Faith is not a landscape to be seen, but eyes for seeing. It is not a world, but a gaze upon the world. It is not a book to read, but a grammar for reading – for reading all books."

One of my Jesuit education colleagues in Australia has made this same point. At a recent meeting he said that "Catholic identity is a verb." In other words, it is not a brand, to slip into corporate speak for a moment, but a way of acting and doing things. Australian social anthropologist, Marist Father Gerald Arbuckle, has written eloquently about Catholic identity – pointing out that it is an ongoing process of becoming in a particular cultural context. It is not something static that we achieve once and for all. (cf Gerald Arbuckle SM, Crafting Catholic Identity in Postmodern Australia, Catholic Health Australia, 2007). He argues cogently that, in our post-modern or para-modern era, storytelling is the best process to articulate our Catholic identity. Indeed, he quotes Stephen Denning of the World Bank writing about the difficulties of organizational change: "Why storytelling? Nothing else worked. Charts left listeners bemused. Prose remained unread. Dialogue was just

too laborious and slow. Time after time, when faced with the task of persuading a group of managers...in a large organization to get enthusiastic about a major change, I found that storytelling was the only thing that worked."

Gerald Arbuckle takes his argument one step further by demonstrating that Jesus is the master storyteller through the use of parables. This process engaged his listeners by beginning with the realities of their own lives, and He assumed that the parables would be frequently retold to enable people to apply their lessons to their particular needs. By using parables, Jesus shows himself to be a brilliant teacher who engages his listeners by challenging them to think and reflect.

Writing about the Church's essential mission in his wonderfully radical and provocative book, Christianity Rediscovered, Vincent Donovan says: "Evangelization is a process of bringing the gospel to people where they are, not where you would like them to be." And again, "when the gospel reaches a people where they are, their response to that gospel is the church in a new place, and the song they will sing is that new, unsung song, that unwritten melody that haunts us all." Pope John Paul II agrees: In *Redemptoris Missio* he wrote about St. Paul taking the gospel to the Greeks at their cultural center, the Areopagus. As with Paul in the marvelous chapter 17 of Acts, the Pope reminded us that we need to bring the gospel to where people are converging in modern societies.

For me our Catholic faith is a way of seeing the world, and it has been gratifying to find support for this in Pope Francis no less. In late November 2013, the Pope had a three-hour conversation with the Union of Superiors General of religious men who questioned him especially about the identity and the mission of religious: "What do you expect of consecrated life? What do you ask of us? If you were in our place what would you do to respond to your call to go to the frontiers, to live the Gospel *sine glossa*, evangelical prophecy? What should we hear you calling us to do?" And further: "What should be emphasized today? What are the priorities?"

Without a written text, the Pope's interaction with these Church leaders contained some wonderful lines. For example, "The Church grows by witness, not by proselytism. The witness that can really attract is that associated with attitudes which are uncommon: generosity, detachment, sacrifice, self-forgetfulness in order to care for others. This is the witness, the "martyrdom" of religious life. It "sounds an alarm" for people.

"The Church must be attractive. Wake up the world. Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living."

I was particularly interested, however, by the following challenge extended by Pope Francis to these congregational leaders: "I am convinced of one thing: the great changes in history were realized when reality was seen not from the centre

but rather from the periphery. ...This is really very important to me: the need to become acquainted with reality by experience, to spend time walking on the periphery in order really to become acquainted with the reality and life-experiences of people. If this does not happen we then run the risk of being abstract ideologists or fundamentalists, which is not healthy. It is the most concrete way of imitating Jesus, who went toward all the peripheries. Jesus went to all, really all. I would not really feel uncomfortable going to the periphery: you should not feel uncomfortable in reaching out to anyone."

Austen Ivereigh, in his recently published splendid biography of Pope Francis, The Great Reformer, quotes the Pope saying in Brazil, 2013: "The way we see is always affected by the way we direct our gaze...The question (for the Latin American Bishops) was, 'How are we going to look at reality in order to see it?'" The answer for the Pope was...'with the eyes of discipleship.' (p. 300)

This challenge from Pope Francis to view the world from the peripheries, from the margins, reminded me of the challenge that his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, extended to the Jesuits at their General Congregation in 2008. Benedict challenged the Society of Jesus to go to the frontiers - to travel to those **"geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach."** In October 2010, our own Father Frank Brennan was accompanying his friend and former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, during the events celebrating the canonization of St. Mary MacKillop in Rome. The then Foreign Minister asked Frank whether he could arrange a meeting for him with the Jesuit General, Father Alfonso Nicolas, 'Nico' as he likes to be known among Jesuits. This was duly organized, and Mr. Rudd questioned Father General about what he saw as the greatest challenge facing the Jesuits today. Father Nico without hesitation answered: "The globalization of superficiality."

Living life on the surface, living alongside the world rather than within it, can be seductive for all of us. In July 2009, on the occasion celebrating 150 years of Jesuit education in the Philippines, Father Nicolas spoke of two frontiers, two peripheries as 'the frontier of depth' and 'the frontier of universality.' Both frontiers remain relevant to us in Catholic education six years on today. Taking the example of Jesus in the Gospels, he noted that Jesus always responded in depth. Look at any healing story: the way Jesus heals the paralyzed man brought in by his friends through the roof; the leper; the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus first responds to a concrete, immediate need: the healing of a sickness. But then he goes on to respond to a deeper need: the burden of guilt or the sense of hopelessness or rejection and isolation. Finally, he goes deeper still and offers what they long for most, often without knowing it: the gift of the Kingdom of God, of friendship with a God of unconditional love, in a way that transforms them at the core of their persons."

In an effort to evaluate the depth of the education we provide, Father General asked four questions:

How deeply do we respond to our students' needs? If our instruction is good and up-to-date, then we respond to their need for forming and developing their talents. But beyond that are deeper needs. And how do we respond to their deepest hungers for meaning and purpose, for strength and hope that is the Kingdom of God experienced in their lives?

How deeply do we help them see? "When you live in Rome, you enter many beautiful churches adorned with glorious images, frescoes, statues, paintings, stained glass windows, and you realize that in an earlier age, these were the images that filled people's imaginations. They were images that taught people to aspire to a certain model of humanity. But our young people are growing up in a world where the media floods them with other glittering images, on billboards, on websites, on magazine covers and MTV's. They are images that are filled with promises. They sell dreams that tell them that they become more human when they have the right gadgets and wear the right clothes. What these images do is hide the face of the poor and the suffering, and make them invisible. How can we help them see more deeply, to truly see the real beyond the virtual, to see beyond these images that make false promises so that they can see the face of the hidden humanity of the poor in a way that moves them to want to serve in compassion?"

How deeply do we invite them to think? When I look around and see so much fundamentalism and fanaticism around the world, and the suffering that these escapes from sober thinking have produced, I wonder whether we have to think more creatively of how we can ensure that our students learn how to think deeply?

From my own experience, I can remember teaching a Year 11 Religion class on bio-ethics and one of my students wrote in an essay – I think he was trying to annoy me: "I guess if anything I'm into Hedonism. Do what feels right, but that doesn't mean don't take anyone else into consideration. Life's pretty complex – thinking about it doesn't do much good, so why bother? I believe in the NIKE motto: 'Just do it.'"

How deeply do we form their inner persons, their commitments and convictions, their faith and their strength? As the external supports become weaker, then the inside must become stronger. Depth of knowledge and, even more important, depth of experience, must mature into a depth of conviction that is able to remain peaceful and steadfast even in a confusing and hostile world.

In the end, the test of whether our education is one of depth, is whether we are able to produce people who can "decide from inside" - which is another way of

saying, the test of our education as Catholic educators is whether we are able to produce people of discernment.

In terms of the frontier of universality, I heard a Rockhampton priest say at a 2014 Catholic education conference in Mackay, Queensland: "Would that our Australian shores were as welcoming as they are protected!" Father Nicolas asked these four questions of Jesuit educators in the Philippines:

First, do our students, as a result of their time with us, end up with a broader sense of belonging and responsibility than their own families, classes, clans? Are we forming men and women for others and with others—men and women whose hearts have been universalized and broadened, so they feel this compassion for the poor and the suffering who are not members of their blood family, but who are now part of their larger human family?

Second, with regard to the schools themselves, can we break out of our narrow sense of belonging to this particular school? More and more, the schools cannot live in indifference to and competition against one another, but rather address their many common concerns together.

Third, can we break out of our particular school system and serve those outside the Jesuit system in the Philippines (read Singapore)?

Fourth, can we break out of our concern for the Philippines (read Singapore) and start thinking of how more we can serve the wider world of Asia around us?

In addition to seeing the world from the peripheries, from the margins, we want our students to catch something of the sacramental vision that is essential to our Catholic faith. I am a great believer in Thomas Groome's words that Catholic education is about helping people to see – themselves, their world, and their God. Catholic education is blessed with a rich vision to offer its school communities. Some have called it the sacramental vision – the capacity to see God in the heart of all creation, in every moment of our lives. We Catholics are great believers in the power of symbol – bread and wine, water, oil, light, blessing – because words are often quite insufficient to capture God's presence in our complex lives. This finding God in all things, and allowing ourselves to be found by Him, is a very Catholic skill that all of us need to learn.

This way of seeing the world is at the heart of Catholic education. It is, in Daniel O'Leary's words, "a graced way of parting the veils of our complicated lives and of perceiving God at the heart of all creation." This sacramental vision happens when "we must love the world more, not less. That is how we save it. And, in all our efforts, nothing goes to waste – every effort, every setback, every daily disappointment and mistake, even temptations and sins – all are transformed. And

all are safely harvested.” (Daniel O’Leary, Already Within – Divining the Hidden Spring, Columba Press, Dublin, 2007, p.9)

A few years ago, I received a letter from one of my former students asking if I would celebrate his marriage later that year. In part this is what he wrote: “I have many memories of my time at Riverview, including a passionate debate in a religion class you took. I appreciate greatly the opportunity of a Jesuit education, and what resonates with me strongly today, is the core ideal of teaching people to think for themselves and make up their own mind, avoiding fundamentalism. This tempered with what I believe is the core teaching of our faith, which is to love – ‘to love one another as I have loved you.’ I try to live my life in this way.”

Our Catholic faith is multi-layered and one of its essential parts is the imagination. Indeed, in his book Begin With the Heart – Recovering a Sacramental Vision, he exhorts Catholic school teachers to go all out to reclaim and restore it. After all, imagination is seeing with the eyes of the soul. It is a reflection of God’s imagination. Indeed, I often recall those haunting words of Thomas Moore in Care of the Soul that “we are condemned to live out what we cannot imagine.” American author and poet, Kathleen Norris, maintains that “we have become afraid of the imagination, thereby settling for false certitudes and unable to embrace ambiguity and mystery.”

One might also call this imaginative seeing a sense of wonder. In a fine article on spirituality in the classroom, British Jesuit Damian Howard writes that “The Christian humanist is open to a double sense of wonder: not only at the extraordinary richness, diversity, and depth of human experience, but also at the generosity of the God who joins us in it...To be caught in amazement at the beauty, subtlety, symmetry or whatever of something we are studying is a key spiritual gift. It is to be able to lose yourself in something other, and we know from the Gospels that it is only in losing ourselves that we find them.” (“On not having to be John Keating: Ignatian spirituality in the classroom.” Posted on “Thinking Faith” August 22nd, 2014)

Let me return to what Father General Nicolas has called the frontier of universality. Surely, this is the heart and soul of what ‘Catholicism’ really means. The Vatican’s 2014 document on Catholic Education has much to say on this.

- “Teachers are called upon to rise up to a major educational challenge, which is the recognition, respect and enhancement of diversity.” (Section 5)

- Catholic educational establishments “are found worldwide and the majority of their students come from different religious backgrounds, nations, and culture. However, students’ confessional allegiances should not be seen as a barrier, but as a condition for intercultural dialogue, helping each pupil grow in their humanness, civic responsibility and learning.” (Section 6)

- "Many Catholic school students belong to a multiplicity of cultures, therefore our institutions must proclaim the Gospel beyond believers, not only with words, but through the power of our educators' lives, which must be consistent with the Gospel." (Section: 'The Challenge of Identity')

Described by his biographer as a "master builder of cross-frontier relationships," (Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer*, p.321), Pope Francis had this to say to Italian and Albanian Jesuit school teachers and students: "I have a special greeting to the *Albanian College of Scutari* which, after the long years of repression, reopened and welcomed Orthodox, Muslim students as well as students from agnostic families. In this way, a school becomes a place of dialogue and peaceful encounter promoting attitudes of respect, listening, friendship and a spirit of partnership." (6.6.2013)

Consistent with their sacramental vision of life, Catholic schools seek to offer an integral education. This is another piece of their seal, their indelible imprint, and their 'character'. In other words, as the Vatican education documents continue to point out (section 1), Catholic schools seek "to prevent a situation in which the life of faith is experienced or perceived as being separate from other activities in human life." British Jesuit Damian Howard quoted above has written that "it has been one of the more perverse effects of modernity to compartmentalise our lives into non-communicating fragments – we have 'private' lives, 'professional lives', 'sexual' lives, 'family' lives, and 'spiritual' lives...with precious little to integrate them." I believe that our Catholic tradition "asks us to draw all of these together: our faith, our politics, our aesthetics, our sense of humour, our capacity for friendship, and indeed everything which passes for the human." Howard goes on to say rather poignantly that "a spirituality which holds out the promise that a whole world of experience is out there, waiting to communicate the mystery of God to us, sits rather uneasily with the compulsive mind-set which places the latest reality TV event at the centre of things." Our Catholic tradition offers us the riches of this spirituality which is both pro-cultural and counter-cultural.

Our Vatican education documents have said consistently that Catholic education "cannot be subservient to economic power and its workings". (Section 1) Ours must not be a merely functional view of education, as if it were legitimized only by serving the market economy. This is the challenge of integral education for Catholic schools.

To illustrate this further, let me quote from a forum with our Father General in Sydney in January, 2013. One young teacher asked him the following question: *A significant component of Jesuit Education is the pursuit of excellence. In contemporary society, 'excellence' or 'success' or 'achievement' seems to be measured increasingly by material or superficial outcomes, such as exam scores and statistics or a physical result on a sporting scoreboard. While these are*

important, surely an overemphasis on the 'product' diminishes the importance of the 'process' of education, where the real learning occurs in our context in terms of the education of the whole person. I feel this is a real challenge in our schools, that is, to be counter-cultural to an extent and draw our students back to the 'process'. How do we do this in a society that is placing increased pressure on the 'product' over the 'process', when it comes to education?

Father General replied: I think this is a very relevant question. This will be, to my mind, an ongoing challenge to us.

"My impression is that this will never be solved fully, because part of the process of education is that an education is successful when it's freely received, so education is a dialogue. It is not the work of the teacher, it's a dialogue, and therefore the receptivity of the student and their ability to digest and make it part of their lives is going to be always a part of education. Therefore it's going to be always an open question how much of what we give is digested, accepted and incorporated into a new frame of mind or a new spiritual framework.

Even so, the question at the end is, what can we do to encourage or to improve on this matter? I would say the first thing is to deepen the sense that excellence has nothing to do with social, financial or professional success, it's an excellence in humanity. It's forming better human beings; people with a heart, with compassion, with understanding; people who can understand our society without bias, without ideological impositions; people who can be attentive, responsible, understanding, et cetera. It is an effort of the whole Christian institution to help young men and women grow with this openness and this understanding. Whenever this excellence is put in terms of immediate results, we are being unfaithful to our message, so we are not giving the totality of the person, we are giving only one part.

Particularly challenging was Father General's piece about failure in his answer. He said: I think maybe we can encourage service, and I would say I would include failure in the process as a normal event.

I feel that the majority of humanity experiences failure in life. Failure of communication with children, failure in marriage, failure in their job, failure in promotions that don't happen, et cetera. So failure is very much part of life for the majority of humanity. There should be a way of incorporating failure also in celebrations, and I say we should celebrate failure for the kingdom of God, when someone really goes so much out of himself that in a sense he doesn't respond to expectations of others, but thanks to this sacrifice in a sense others do much better. This I think is a very good way of channeling the energies and the talents that God has given us.

This same thought about the importance of working through failure was picked up

by Pope Francis in the above-mentioned talk to Italian and Albanian Jesuit school communities in 2013. In question time with the students one teenager told the Pope that he was trying hard to believe in God and be faithful, but that he often struggled with doubt. Pope Francis replied: *The journey of life is not easy, because it requires juggling the need to move forward with the importance of taking time to reflect. If we go too quickly, we'll get tired and won't be able to reach our destination, yet if we stop or take our time, we won't get there either. Life's journey is truly the art of looking at the horizon, reflecting on where I want to go, but also putting up with the fatigue from this journey. Don't be afraid of failure. The problem with the journey of life and faith isn't falling; it's not getting back up. Get right back up, immediately and keep going. Don't embark on this journey alone, either, because that would be awful and boring. Go as a community with friends and people who care about you very much, because that will help us get to our destination.*

The world frowns on failure, of course, but it comes to many famous people. It has been written anonymously that Jesus Christ was "a young man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman...He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to university... He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself...

While he was still a young man the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies...He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth, and that was his coat. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen, nearly twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is...the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the kings who ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that One Solitary Life."

So far we have looked at several parts of the character, the seal of Catholic education – its sacramental vision, its integral and universal education. The Vatican document talks about the 'climate' in Catholic schools and I want to argue that its hallmark is Hospitality. It has ever been thus. Writing in the sixth century, St. Benedict counselled his monks to "receive all guests as Christ." Indeed, there is a story said to originate in a Russian monastery, which has an older monk telling a younger one: "I have finally learned to accept people as they are. Whatever they are in the world, a prostitute, a prime minister, it is all the same to me. But sometimes I see a stranger coming up the road and I say, 'Oh, Jesus Christ, is it you again?'"

It is no accident that we call the bread of the Eucharist the 'host', and with very good reason. Sharing a meal can often be a very intimate event. We come to the table with no artillery, just our lives to share. What an honour we pay to those at that table! Jesus as our Host shares His life with us every time we come to His table in the Eucharist. How we receive His hospitality, how we let the Eucharist touch us, is what we mean by salvation in the here and now. Good liturgy in all its forms, therefore, should be a distinguishing feature of Catholic schools.

The 2014 Vatican document maintains that "Catholic schools and universities educate people, first and foremost, through the living context, that is, the climate that both students and teachers establish in the environment where teaching and learning activities take place." In elaborating the challenges of building community in our catholic schools, the document goes on to say that "the friendly and welcoming ambience that is established by teachers who are believers – who sometimes are the minority – together with the common engagement of all those who have educational responsibilities, irrespective of their beliefs or convictions, might allow students to overcome moments of loss or discouragement and open new prospects of evangelical hope."

Hospitality is such an indelible part of Catholic schooling, that I want to share a variety of quotations about it:

- "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it." Hebrews 13/1-2
- "The City which forgets how to care for the stranger has forgotten how to care for itself." Homer, The Odyssey
- "A hero is one who turns strangers into friends"
Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his eulogy of Cardinal Basil Hume OSB, in 1999
- HOSPITALITY - the fine art of having an open soul and a listening mind. HOSPITALITY is not merely a matter of opening the door; it is a matter of opening the heart.
- "Hospitality is the ability to make another person comfortable in strange space: ours". Joan Chittister OSB
- To welcome the other means the willingness to enter the world of the other, to let the other tell his or her story.
- The whole mission of Jesus according to Luke can be summed up in the phrase 'the hospitality of God'. B.Byrne SJ, The Hospitality of God
- In the Scriptures hospitality to the stranger is connected to the presence of God. "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me..." (Matthew 25)
- To be a true host, we must welcome ideas and initiatives as well as people
- Humour welcomes – it is a subtle way of showing hospitality

In my own Ignatian spiritual tradition, conversation is a very important ingredient. The Vatican document prefers to talk about the challenge of 'dialogue' and emphasises that 'the circular character of communication between teachers and students' is rightly receiving much more attention today. We will talk more about this in the next session on the Road to Emmaus, but it is important to remember that Jesus taught with authority – that is, from the Latin verb *augere* (to add, nurture, nourish), Jesus taught in such a way that people grew. As the Vatican document says it, we should teach with "the authority that comes from credible testimony."

Related to this topic of dialogue, which the Vatican calls 'the circular character of communication', it is worth noting that a great deal of research on the identity of Catholic Schools has been carried out in recent years at the Catholic University of Leuven. (Cf "Framing the identity of Catholic Schools: empirical methodology for quantitative research on the Catholic identity of an education institute" in International Studies in Catholic education, vol.2, no.2, October 2010, pp. 193-2011) Putting to one side the complex technical language in which the research is framed, what has interested me is the top priority given on The Victoria Scale to what is termed the Dialogue School. The Victoria Scale is a measure of two dimensions – a school's capacity to live out a generally shared Catholic inspiration alongside its capacity to be open to and receptive of other life visions and life attitudes.

Four types of school are identified in this schema, and at the risk of providing oversimplified descriptions here, they are referred to as:

- The Monologue School, which has a high Christian identity with minimal interaction with other worldviews. It is almost a Catholic ghetto
- The Colourless School, which operates in a neutral sphere where people are free to choose their own philosophy of life in isolation from others. It has a 'live and let live' attitude with very little sense of community and communal support
- The Colourful School, where there is strong support for plurality, but where the Catholic religion is replaced by a variety of worldviews and individual philosophies of which Christianity is but one.
- The Dialogue School, the preferred type of Catholic school, which explicitly chooses to be inspired by its Christian traditions while accepting the presence of other traditions. In this school there is a preferential option for the Christian tradition, which keeps re-evaluating what it means to be a Christian in the midst of a plurality of other options. It is this school that promotes a maturity in the students' own faith through dialogue and interaction.

In terms of the broad meaning of hospitality as openness to the 'other', the Dialogue School is clearly the most Catholic in its identity

Surprisingly, the 2014 Vatican document has little to say explicitly about another deeply embedded characteristic of Catholic schools – namely, social justice. Implicitly, it is there in muted tones throughout the document, but we need to hear Pope Francis' clarion call to build what he calls in *Evangelii Gaudium* 'the Samaritan Church', the Church that heals by direct personal contact. In 1990, as Auxiliary Bishop in Buenos Aires, Francis gave retreats to the clergy reflecting on the Good Samaritan story. Unlike the priest and the Levite, who passed by on the other side, the Samaritan "got on his hands and knees to get close to the victim, opened his heart to him and bound his wounds, shouldered him and spent his money on him. 'That is what we will be judged on', Bergoglio told the priests, adding that this proximity was at the heart of the Incarnation.'" (Ivereigh, The Great Reformer, p.219) In other words, social justice is a matter of getting close to the people, looking the poor in the eye and speaking to the heart. It is 'a fleshly business', to use the words of the Pope's biographer, Austen Ivereigh. (p.220) Indeed, I am reminded of the words of a former school Principal colleague of mine who used to tell his staff that "we are what we walk by." We need to be people of 'nearness and proximity', as Pope Francis has challenged us, if we are to exercise social justice.

While I have focused in this paper on 5 parts of the character, the seal, the indelible imprint of Catholic schools – their sacramental vision, their integral and universal education, their climate of hospitality/dialogue and social justice – I want now to end on a hopeful note. It is so easy to get caught up in the challenges facing us that we can underestimate all the good that we are doing in this great ministry. I was reminded of this when last year I asked for some responses from Jesuit schools in our Asia Pacific region to a draft of a new document on Jesuit education. One experienced Jesuit educator wisely wrote back to me saying that we needed another chapter on 'the good news about the contemporary world.' In other words, discernment should begin with acknowledging our blessings, scanning contemporary experience to see what can be celebrated as surely good. "Recognizing this good enables us, gives us the confidence to increase it....Only then are we in the correct position to discern what can now be seen as clearly bad and what remains as ambiguous i.e. it looks bad but might be good, or looks good but might be bad." In other words, he was asking us to look at our world as a grace place before we named its deficiencies and challenges.

Let us take the technological revolution – or should we say the technological 'evolution'. We can worry about the bad effects of this digital age, but we can also see it in the way my learned Jesuit colleague describes it as "today what the print revolution was to the time of the Renaissance and Reformation, i.e. a major contributing cause to their happening." All of us educators are "challenged to be leaders in the way technology transforms the classroom, pastoral care, social

action, administrative structure, liturgies etc.; and we give thanks for the ways in which this is already the case.”

In terms of globalization, “many of us meet at airports...where the local city becomes linked to the global and global lands in a specific location...Air terminals are the railway stations of our time, indeed the cathedrals. Aren’t they wonderful? God loves them.”

In early December 2013, when returning from Auckland, I stopped at the Tullamarine airport’s duty-free shop to purchase some spiritual sustenance for my Xavier Jesuit community. After discerning what spirit was most appropriate for my abstemious brethren, I went to the counter to pay for it. The young lady in attendance there greeted me with the question: “Are you in transition, sir?” “Yes,” was my reply, “aren’t we all?”

Ours **is** the age of transition, the age of the backpacker – sometimes a pilgrim, more often a tourist. Perhaps we should see globalization as offering far more opportunities than terrors?

If ‘connection’ is one of the buzzwords of our time, and prayer is a ritual of connection as cartoonist Michael Leunig describes it, how do our liturgies connect people with their God? After all, the word liturgy is linked with the word ‘ligament’.

One of the best writers on matters religious in my experience is Kathleen Norris, an American Presbyterian, who has penned much of her excellent work as a guest in Benedictine monasteries. Throughout her writings she reminds us that religion etymologically “is linked to the words ligature and ligament, words having both negative and positive connotations, offering both bondage and freedom of movement.” (*Dakota*, p.133) This is similar to what Richard Holloway, the retired Bishop of Edinburgh, said in a Radio National ‘Encounter’ program some years ago. He related the story of the British playwright, Dennis Potter, who was dying of cancer and was asked in a television interview whether his imminent death had brought a new religious intensity or a recovery of boyhood faith. Potter’s reply was: “Religion to me has always been the wound, not the bandage.” (“Inns on Roads”, Radio National *Encounter*, 23.12.2001)

When religion focuses exclusively on orthodoxy and doctrinal formulation, it can so easily become the bandage, the ligature. “Christianity”, Kathleen Norris affirms, “is at its worst when it becomes defensive. Often, enshrining orthodoxy into words has caused more trouble, more pain, more evil in the world than it was worth.” (*Amazing Grace*, p.222) The easy answers of religious fundamentalism “are about control more than grace.” (*Dakota*, p.95)

Understood correctly, religion should be about connection, about the ligament. It is worth recalling that the word 'belief' means simply 'to give one's heart to.' In recent times, however, the term has been impoverished by taking on the narrow intellectual meaning of a head-over-heart assent. (Amazing Grace, p.62) For Kathleen Norris, however, it is important to view religion as connection. She relates how she begins to appreciate religious belief "as a relationship, like a deep friendship, or a marriage, something that I could plunge into, not knowing exactly what I was doing or what would be demanded of me in the long run." (Amazing Grace, p.66) That is why she can see all the events of her life, large or small, leading and connecting her to God.

All experience is mediated through culture, principally through language, and increasingly today through narrative and story. Such was the experience of the early Church through its gospel stories. In other words, the Incarnation has taught us to be pro-cultural as well as counter-cultural. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God", Jesuit poet Gerard Manly Hopkins wrote so beautifully.

Let me end with some beautiful words of our Jesuit General, Father Nicolas, at the centenary celebrations of Sophia University in Tokyo in November, 2013. Echoing one of the constant messages of fellow Jesuit, Pope Francis, Fr Nicolás urged Japanese Catholics to promote religious sensitivity in their country and not to lose hope because they represent a small minority of the country's population.

Comparing how many people have lost attentiveness to music because of the many other distractions of the modern technological age, Fr Nicolás said, "Just as this musical sense is being eroded and weakened by the noise, the pace, the self-images of the modern and postmodern world, so is religious sensitivity."

"I suggest that mission today in Japan and Asia must first of all work toward helping people discover or rediscover this musical sense, this religious sensibility," he said. "This awareness and appreciation of dimensions of reality that are deeper than instrumental reason or materialist conceptions of life allow us."

We are not in education for proselytism, but for transformation. We want to form a new kind of humanity that is musical, that retains this sensitivity to beauty, to goodness, to the suffering of others, to compassion."

"We offer a Christian education because we are convinced that Christ offers horizons beyond the limited interests of economy or material production, that Christ offers a vision of a fuller humanity that takes the person outside himself or herself in care and concern for others," Father Nicolas said.

May the Good Lord bless all of us in our efforts to develop an excellence of humanity in our schools that is more musical.

