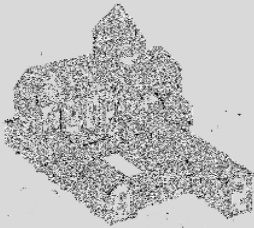


1. HISTORY AND RATIONALE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Why we have Catholic schools

The enormous investment of the Catholic Church in education is rooted in the commission of Jesus Christ to proclaim the kingdom of God to all nations

Monasteries



From about AD400 in Europe, monasteries for several centuries were active in contributing to the flourishing of the Christian faith, as well as of general knowledge and culture.

Universities



The Church was closely associated with the origins of the great archetypal European universities established at Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge, beginning in the eleventh century. The Franciscans and Dominicans became very influential in these early universities.

Nuns move beyond the cloister

Prior to 1500, women who entered religious life were mostly cloistered in convents. Congregations of nuns began engaging in activities beyond the convent walls such as visiting hospitals and prisons, catechising and teaching.

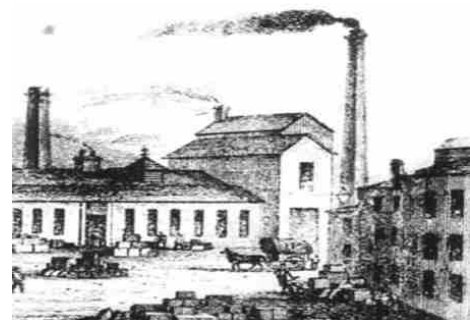


The Jesuits

The Jesuits, founded by Ignatius Loyola in the wake of the Reformation, founded many schools and universities. Education was seen as of prime importance in defending the faith.

Social dislocation

The political and industrial revolutions in Europe were accompanied by tumultuous social and economic dislocations. A host of far-seeing and faith-filled men and women established schools to respond to the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged. These schools had their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling.



Founded to serve the poor

Originally, most Catholic schools were established to serve the poor. They responded to the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged.



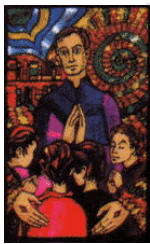
The France of Jean Baptiste De la Salle's time (1651-1719) was engaged in incessant foreign and internal wars. The peasants frequently had no bread. The plunder of their crops was followed by famine and ruin. De la Salle founded his institute to answer to their needs and conditions.



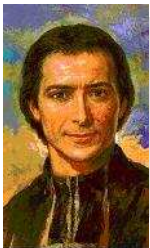
In the upheaval of the French Revolution, Julie Billiart (1751-1816) founded the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur with the mission of proclaiming God's goodness and saving girls from life on the streets. She opened free schools for poor girls, and day schools for middle-class girls and academies for the wealthy, both of which supported the free schools.



Catherine McAuley (1778-1841), moved by the neglect, disease, hunger, ignorance and despair she saw in the slums of Dublin, used the fortune she inherited to serve the poor. She established the Sisters of Mercy, who cared for working girls, orphans and poor children.



Edmund Rice (1762-1844), a successful businessman, was amazed at the poverty and the homeless young boys running about the streets of Waterford in Ireland. He sold his business and started a school, and soon realised that all the needs of the children, not just their education, had to be tended to. Gathering about him a few men who shared his vision, Edmund Rice and the Christian Brothers began what seemed to others the impossible task of educating Ireland's poor.



In post-Revolution France, education had collapsed, especially in the remote mountainous regions. Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840), recognising the need of thousands of young people suffering human and spiritual abandonment, founded the Marist Brothers to make Jesus known and loved among the young, particularly those who were most neglected.



The condition of the children confined in the prisons of Turin in Italy, where they were abandoned to the most evil influences, made such an indelible impression on John Bosco (1815-1888) that he resolved to devote his life to the rescue of these outcasts. He established institutes for homeless boys and taught them trades, and created the Salesians to assist him.

Expansion

In addition to teaching congregations, there were religious orders dedicated to other work, such as running hospices for the poor, caring for orphans and the aged, and curing the sick.

Many congregations sent their members to take their work to far-flung parts of the world, including South Africa.



The age of the laity

Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), most Catholic schools were staffed and led by members of religious teaching congregations.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65), popularly called Vatican II, marked a watershed in the history of the Catholic Church. Its purpose was the spiritual renewal of the church and the reconsideration of the position of the church in the modern world. One significant development of Vatican II was its elaboration of the dignity of the laity and their role in the mission of the Church. Vatican II called for the apostolate of the laity to be broadened and intensified.

In the last half of the twentieth century, lay people have increasingly taken important roles in the running of dioceses, parishes, church institutions and organisations.

In Catholic schools too, lay people have taken over governing, managing and teaching roles. They are co-workers in the Church's evangelising mission.

The Holy Spirit continues to renew the youthfulness of the Church by inspiring new ideals in many of the lay faithful

The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church (1988)

Some congregations who founded schools in South Africa

Assumption Sisters
Brothers of Charity
Christian Brothers
Dominican Sisters
Holy Family Sisters
Holy Cross Sisters
Holy Rosary Sisters
Jesuit Fathers
Notre Dame Sisters
Loreto Sisters
Marist Brothers
Oblates of Mary Immaculate
Salesian Fathers and Brothers
Salesian Sisters
Sisters of Mercy
Sisters of the Precious Blood
Ursuline Sisters



Leaven of the community

The Vatican document *The Catholic School* (1977) called for a new school environment where schools would act as “the leaven of the community”.

Catholic schools engage with the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often extreme features of the world in which we live. This engagement stems from the Catholic school's understanding of itself as sharing in the evangelising mission of the church.

Mission is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit, who calls forth and renews all of creation. The call to the Church is to share in the work of the Spirit in bringing to fruition our daily prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Schools are to be instruments of transformation and social justice bearing the message of hope, building community and serving all people

Affecting and inspiring learners' lives

While providing a sound academic education, a Catholic school gives learners opportunities to explore the answers which faith provides for the questions of life, and for them to encounter the love and mercy of God. It suggests a way to live life in friendship with God and in harmony with others. Faced with the pressures of our consumerist, competitive and materialist society, and bombarded with messages about what counts as success, they will go through life empowered by Gospel values of sharing, simplicity, service, littleness, magnanimity and solidarity, and with a sense of purpose: to open the way for the kingdom of God.



Pointing to the Kingdom of God

As a Catholic school we are pilgrims on a journey. We are conscious of our present human condition and are aware always of our failures, imperfections and contradictions; even so, we see the vision beyond our present reality and strive to offer an experience of things as they can and ought to be. We strive to be an outward-looking community permeated by the Gospel spirit of love and freedom.

Catholic schools are counter-cultural

Catholic schools do not provide education for society as it is, but for society as it should be, as envisioned in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. We have something that society needs, not that society wants.

It follows that a Catholic school cannot be anything but an agent of transformation. We are oriented toward what may be, rather than toward what is. This is the great adventure of Catholic education.

Welcoming those of other faiths

Catholic schools have always welcomed people of other faith communities. We presume that parents of faiths other than Christianity who choose to send their children to a Catholic school do so because they are broadly in harmony with our values and ethos. Their involvement enriches the school community. A more harmonious future is secured when children learn to respect and enjoy one another's differences.



The risen Christ: centre, source and inspiration of Catholic education

The risen Christ – summoning, inviting and challenging us today – is the centre of Catholic education and our source and inspiration. This is what we mean when we say that Catholic schools are Christ-centred. It is why we pray together at the beginning of every day, every assembly, meeting and school trip. We have put our faith in Jesus Christ as our God.

Catholic Education is, above all, a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others. The cause of Catholic Education is the cause of Jesus Christ and of His Gospel at the service of humankind.

Pope John Paul II, Message to the National Catholic Educational Association of the United States, 1979



This pamphlet is part of a series on aspects of Catholic education for teachers, parents and board members, produced by the Ethos Committee of the Catholic Schools Board of the Archdioceses of Pretoria and Johannesburg



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