

Notes and Comments

EDUCATING CATHOLIC FILIPINO YOUTH TODAY

A Commentary on "The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School"

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INTRODUCTION

A recent document from the Congregation for Catholic Education deserves serious consideration by all Filipino Catholic educators.¹ Since many similar documents from the Vatican remain in large measure unknown to those for whom they were written, this commentary aims primarily at bringing to the attention of those concerned the particular elements of the document that appear to be most relevant to our Philippine situation.² In addition, a running critique is offered, relating the document to local guidelines and contemporary literature in religious education.³

The document itself has five parts, with an important introduction that proposes the basic rationale of the document and its main sources. The focus throughout is on the "religious dimension": of Today's Youth (Pt. I), of the School Climate (Pt. II), of School Life and Work (Pt. III), and of School Formation (Pt. IV). Part V concludes the document with a "General Summary of the Religious Dimension in the Formation Process as a Whole."

This commentary does not follow the above order, but is rather arranged according to the principal themes developed. We shall begin with a brief *background* to situate the document, then proceed to treat its content on: 1) the *nature* of the Catholic School,

1. The Congregation for Catholic Education published "The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School," on Apr. 7, 1988.

2. The document itself asks "local ordinaries and superiors of Religious Congregations dedicated to the education of youth to bring these reflections to the attention of all teachers and directors of Catholic schools" (no. 113).

3. The prime resource used herein is *Maturing in Christian Faith, The National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1985), hereafter referred to as *NCDP*.

including its religious climate and pastoral service; (2) its *educational goals*, with their functions and criteria, together with the school's operative philosophy of education; 3) the specific *religious content* and methodology, with its focus on the Christian person; and finally 4) the characteristics of *students* today, and the ideal for Christian *teachers*.

BACKGROUND OF THE DOCUMENT

The document is grounded in Vatican II's "Declaration on Christian Education," which in some way it celebrates after "more than twenty years."⁴ It is structured along the lines of GE's description of what makes the Catholic School distinctive, namely, its *religious dimension*. This dimension is to be found in the school's: "a) educational climate, b) the personal development of each student, c) the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, and d) the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith (no. 1).

Previously the same Vatican Congregation had published three well-received documents, *The Catholic School, Lay Catholics In Schools: Witnesses to the Faith*, and *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education*.⁵ The present document is closely linked to the first two, while the third develops one part of its content — Catholic morality — in one defined area. Besides frequent references to major documents of Vatican II, the document cites as its major sources *The General Catechetical Directory*, Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae*.⁶ The local relevant resource in this subject is the *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines*, which serves as the major basis for this article's critique.

The document appears at a critical time in religious education in the Philippines. There is the unprecedented challenge in the new

4. Vatican II's "Declaration on Christian Education [Gravissimum educationis]" was promulgated on Oct. 28, 1965. It will be referred to as GE hereafter. Numbers in the text refer to sections of the document under discussion, not to GE.

5. *The Catholic School* was published Mar. 19, 1977; *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to the Faith* on Oct. 12, 1982, and *Educational Guidance in Human Love. Outlines for Sex Education* on Nov. 1, 1983.

6. The Sacred Congregation for the Clergy published *The General Catechetical Directory* on Apr. 11, 1971; Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* was issued on Dec. 8, 1975, and John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* on Oct. 16, 1979.

Constitutional provision for religious education at the elementary and secondary levels in all public schools. Moreover, the recently approved value education program for secondary education also highlights a cognate dimension to religion in public education. This has forced a new reflection on the nature, function and value of Catholic schools in the Philippines.

Within Catholic schools in the country, there is a growing felt-need for raising the standards and quality of the education provided, and specifically of their religion programs. This is significant because while the competitive demands of the "market" in education naturally impel constant renewal and updating in the prominent secular subjects, there is no such "natural" force — besides student indifference and financial problems — to induce major revisions and improvements in the religion programs. The NCDP offers significant guidelines for improving the religion programs of Catholic schools, and stresses the need for improved cooperation and collaboration among the Catechetical Formation Institutes and the Religious Congregations supplying the personnel for Catholic schools in the Philippines.⁷ But despite the noble attempts of some groups, there is still very limited sharing and cooperation in the field. The publication of this Vatican document, if it gains adequate hearing throughout the country, together with the forthcoming, long-awaited publication of the *National Catholic Catechism for the Philippines*, may well inspire renewed efforts in this line.

A final preliminary remark is needed regarding the scope of the document. The Introduction limits the document to "educational institutions devoted to the formation of young people at all pre-university levels" (no. 4). This is confirmed in no. 40 which treats specifically of "primary schools," and in no. 52 which mentions a "Catholic secondary school." But the limitation seems to recede by no. 55 which describes college subjects, and no. 61 which, despite the opening phrase "in the upper grades," presents sources (Fathers of the Church, masters of Christian philosophy) which pertain rather to the tertiary level. This becomes explicit in no. 72 in treating of students' questions, when it refers in footnote 65 to "university 'apologetics' manuals." Hence it seems possible to take the document as pertinent in most respects even to Catholic col-

7. See NCDP, nos. 458-59, 479-84 et passim.

leges in the Philippines.

THE NATURE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Since the Congregation has already published *The Catholic School* in 1977, the present document limits itself to describing the nature of the Catholic school in three successive contrasts. The *first* is between the school as *academic institution* and as *value witness*:

If a school is excellent as an academic institution, but does not witness to authentic values, then both good pedagogy and a concern for pastoral care make it obvious that renewal is called for — not only in the content and methodology of religious instruction, but in the overall school planning which governs the whole process of formation of the students (no. 19).

This lays the ground work for the document's insistence on "integral education," which will be taken up below under educational goals. It comes at a time when commitment to *quality Christian formation* may be especially needed in Catholic schools in the Philippines, beset as they usually are with great financial difficulties, lack of qualified teachers, and the sheer number of students applying for admission.

The *second* contrast, following the new position proposed in GE, describes the school not only as *institution*, but also as *community*.⁸ But it is careful to note that in the Vatican II documents, "the community dimension is primarily a theological concept rather than a sociological category" (no. 31).

This is a particularly relevant distinction today in the Philippines since religious educators often seem to be quite overwhelmed by the great success and popularity of the social sciences. Not a few tend to lose all confidence in theological terms and meaning, and unconsciously reduce concrete reality to what is presented in the latest sociological survey or described in the currently popular psychological developmental theory. While recognizing the undeniable, valuable contributions of the social sciences to religious education, the document nevertheless pro-

8. See GE, no. 8, quoted in no. 31 of the document.

vides a sound basis for renewed confidence in a Christian wisdom based on sound philosophy, theology, history, literature and art (cf. nos. 57-61).

The *third* bipolar description of the Catholic school repeats the institution/community distinction, but develops both by adding modifiers: "*civic institution*" and "*Christian community*" (no. 67). The idea of the Catholic school as a "*Christian community*" in itself is related to "a real willingness to collaborate," to "keep channels of communication open," and "to discuss common problems candidly" (no. 39). Close cooperation with the family — a partnership based on faith — especially when treating sensitive issues such as religious, moral or sexual education, is urged (no. 42). But this can be accomplished only

if all the teachers unite their educational efforts in the pursuit of a common goal. Sporadic, partial or uncoordinated efforts, or a situation in which there is conflict of opinion among the teachers, will interfere with rather than assist in the students personal development (no. 99).

Essential Difference of a Catholic School. The document is very clear on what makes the Catholic school different from other schools: "it draws its inspiration and its strength from the Gospel in which it is rooted" (no. 47). This "religious climate" of the Catholic school is fostered by a number of conditions: 1) a consensus about educational goals and a cooperative effort to achieve them; 2) authentically Christian interpersonal relationships based on freedom and love; 3) clear witness to Gospel values in everyday activities; 4) a firm challenge to students to strive for the best in human and Christian formation; and 5) openness to the family, the local Church, and civil society (no. 103).

But lest the above seems much too idealistic, the document also enumerates common obstacles toward generating the proper religious climate in the Catholic school. Many unfortunately will be recognized as only too relevant by Filipino Catholic educators. Among the more common are: 1) badly defined educational goals; 2) insufficiently trained school personnel; 3) teachers antagonistic toward one another; 4) discipline imposed from on high without any student consultation; and 5) little concern for the problems besetting local society (no. 104). Interestingly enough, the weakening of the religious dimension of the school resulting from some

combination of these obstacles is proposed as a major cause for religious instruction becoming routine, "empty words falling on deaf ears." What is lacking is the force of clear, authentic Christian witness.

One of the most striking points raised by the document is its repeated insistence that the Catholic school's

specific pastoral service consists in mediating between faith and culture: being faithful to the newness of the Gospel while at the same time respecting the autonomy and the methods proper to human knowledge (no. 31).

Since this point repeats what GE had already proposed, and what was taken up again in *The Catholic School*,⁹ it seems that the document wishes to re-emphasize two particular ideas, both relevant to the Philippine educational scene. The *first* is that "human culture remains human, and must be taught with scientific objectivity." But the *second* is that to divorce faith from this culture "would be a major spiritual loss." Culture and religion are "not two parallel lines that never meet," but make contact in the "believer who is both human and a person of faith, the protagonist of culture and the subject of religion" (no. 51).

Within the Philippine religious educational scene a rather sharp contrast could be drawn between the more numerous, relatively conservative Catholic schools which constantly strive in one way or another to make religion or theology the "core of the curriculum," and the more avant-garde, "liberated" schools which tend toward a unilateral focus on the thrust for social justice, contextualization, and the like. While somewhat oversimplified, the contrast does represent actual tendencies among Philippine Catholic schools. Both groups would profit from serious reflection on the balance proposed by the document between recognition of the legitimate autonomy of human culture and a fully embodied grasp of Faith in its totality — not reduced to the prophetic cry, essential though this dimension may be.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Throughout the document there is a constant refrain: integral

9. GE, nos. 8, 10; *The Catholic School*, nos. 26-27, 35-36, and esp. 38-48.

education, integral human formation, integral formation of the person, integral human development (cf. nos. 63, 98, 99, 101, 108). While this represents the common Catholic educational perspective, what is noteworthy is the document's development of the importance, function and criteria for such a perspective. For example

A Catholic school is not simply a place where lessons are taught; it is a center that has an operative educational philosophy, attentive to the needs of today's youth and illumined by the Gospel message (no. 22).

This "operative educational philosophy" is grounded on a religious perspective whose criteria are spelled out in some detail. They include 1) respect for those raising fundamental questions about human existence; 2) confidence based on faith that we can attain the truth; 3) the ability to judge truth from falsehood, right from wrong, and to act on those judgments; 4) making use of a systematic framework within which to search for the best possible human response to today's challenges; and 5) confidence in the abiding truth value of the Gospel message in its lively dialogue with the world's present cultures (no. 57).

These criteria are admittedly very general, which perhaps is the main reason why so few religion teachers seem to take educational goals seriously. But the document insists on their importance by delineating the functions of such goals. They provide a *frame of reference* which:

- defines the school's identity: in particular, the Gospel values which are its inspiration;
- gives a precise description of the pedagogical, educational and cultural aims of the school;
- presents the course content, along with the values that are to be transmitted through these courses;
- describes the school's organization and management;
- determines which policy decisions are to be reserved to the professional staff, which to be developed with the help of parents and students, and which activities are to be left to the free initiative of teachers, parents, or students;
- indicates the way in which student progress is to be tested and evaluated (no. 100).

Practical Problem. With educational goals the difficulty is that they so often remain the concern of only the "professional educators," rarely if ever reviewed by classroom teachers outside the annual "faculty day" sponsored by the principal or Dean, or on the occasion of some accreditation team's visit. To get beyond this impasse, there must be a real effort on the part of both administrators on one side, and classroom teachers on the other, to collaborate more closely in the actual educational process. This demands the creation of structures for real inter-communication and mutual activities that are practical and workable — taking seriously the actual limitations in time, energy and expertise on both sides. It must be admitted that this is one area where sheer formalism has often dominated the scene to the grave detriment of the teachers' morale.

To sharpen somewhat the educational goals of the Catholic school, the document adds a brief check list for evaluating how the goals are being achieved. The first point is "fidelity to the Gospel as proclaimed by the Church," stressing the fact that the evangelizing mission of the Catholic school is actually a sharing in the mission of the *local* Church, with its particular situation and thrusts. The second norm is "careful rigor in the study of culture and the development of a critical sense," with proper respect for the autonomy of human knowledge noted above. Here however it adds "orienting the whole process toward the integral formation of the human person." Finally, "adapting the educational process to the particular circumstances of individual students," and "sharing responsibility with the local Church" are added as third and fourth criteria (no. 101).

The criteria and norms proposed present nothing especially new, but they do go far to re-emphasize the importance and need for clear, decisive educational goals for the Catholic school.

RELIGIOUS CONTENT AND METHODOLOGY

The most specific sections of the document deal with the religious instruction offered in the Catholic school. To begin with, John Paul II's sketch of the Catholic school is quoted:

The special character of the Catholic school and the underlying reason for its existence . . . is precisely the quality of the religious instruction

integrated into the overall education of the student.¹⁰

What follows, however, is the most difficult part of the document, particularly in relation to our Philippine scene. A distinction is made between "religious instruction" and "catechesis," on the basis that catechesis is a life-long process, presupposing faith in the hearer, and taking place within a community living out its faith in a way not possible to a school (no. 68). A further reason for the distinction is drawn from the respective aims: *catechesis'* aim is maturity — spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic — while the aim of the *school* is given as "knowledge." Despite this distinction, however, the specific role of the school in the work of catechesis is recognized (no. 69).

There are some obvious reasons for this rather strange position. 1) the students' fundamental right of freedom of religion/conscience removes any guarantee of a faith-reception of religion teaching in the school; 2) in many areas, the students in Catholic schools are not even Christian, much less Catholic. Nevertheless, the distinction and the reasons grounding it will almost certainly cause as much confusion as clarity.

The first criticism of this position can be drawn from the document itself, which consistently proposes that the aim of the Catholic school is "integral human formation," *not* merely knowledge. Mere "head knowledge" is exactly what we don't want from the religion program of a Catholic school.

Secondly, the document likewise presents the Catholic school as a Christian community in itself, and hence its religious instruction also takes place within a community living out its faith. It is very doubtful, at least in terms of typical Filipino parishes and typical Filipino Catholic schools, that the faith is lived out so much more intensely in the former compared to the latter.

Thirdly, the phrase "religious instruction" is commonly related in the professional Religious Education literature to the social science approach of James Michael Lee.¹¹ Since this technical approach seems very far from the mindset of the present document,

10. *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 69, quoted in no. 66 of the document.

11. James Michael Lee, currently professor of education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, is noted for his trilogy: *The Shape of Religious Instruction* (330 pp.), *The Flow of Religious Instruction* (379 pp.), and *The Content of Religious Instruction* (814 pp.), all published by Religious Education Press.

it is highly probable that no such link is intended. Unfortunately, then, employing the phrase "religious instruction" seems only to add one more category to the long-fought battle over the more appropriate term: "religious education" or "catechesis," and the more recent debate over "religious studies" and "theology."

Perhaps the conclusion from this critique is that no one document can hope to cover all the possible local situations. Nevertheless, there has been considerable work published in this matter of teaching from a faith position while fully respecting the students' fundamental rights to freedom of religion and conscience.¹² Early on the document recognizes this challenge explicitly:

The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law (no. 6).¹³

Specific Content of the Religion Courses. While awaiting "the new synthesis of Christian doctrine" mandated by the 1985 Synod of Bishops (the so-called universal catechism), the document presents an "outline for the organic presentation of the Christian event and Christian message" (nos. 74-81). It treats in succession Jesus Christ and Mary (no. 74), the Mystery of God (no. 75), the human person (no. 76), the Church (no. 77), the Sacraments (no. 78) and the Last Things (no. 80). What is worthy of note is that the *educational value* of the doctrine is explicited at the end of each section, together with helpful comments on pedagogical methods.

The following section, entitled "An outline for a systematic presentation of the Christian life" (nos. 82-95) is not as successful. A major focus of the whole document is on the "Christian person"

12. To offer but a few examples: G. M. Rossiter, "Religious Commitment in the Classroom," *Living Light* 20 (1984) 318-28; B. Chazon, "'Indoctrination' and Religious Education," *Religious Education* 67 (July/Aug. 1972) 243-52; B. Hill, "Teacher Commitment and the Ethics of Teaching for Commitment," *Religious Education* 76 (1981) 322-36; and Brenda Watson, *Education and Belief* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

13. See Vatican II's "Declaration on Religious Freedom," nos. 2, 9, 10 et passim; also Canon 748, par. 2 of the *New Code of Canon Law*, is quoted in footnote 8 of the document.

(cf. nos. 33, 55-56, 63, 70, 76, 84) which is rightly used here to ground a Christian ethics. But because the document lacks the three-part faith division of doctrine, morals and worship adopted by the NCDP, it has to rather clumsily repeat three times the same Christian basis for human dignity: creation, redemption, grace, and final destiny (nos. 56, 76 and 84).

The same lack also results in a confusing introduction to systematic Christian ethics. Instead of showing how Christian ethics is grounded in the Creedal truths mentioned, and inspired by and celebrated in Christian worship, the document begins its treatment of ethics by concentrating on prayer, the sacraments and the acts of religion. Greater clarity in introducing ethics could be achieved by clearly distinguishing between the three basic dimensions of the Christian Faith.¹⁴

The document does not enter into the content of general ethics beyond stressing the dignity of the human person, but it develops in considerable detail special ethics in its social dimension — another factor particularly relevant to the Philippine scene. One unfortunate slip mars its otherwise excellent treatment of Christian social ethics. While explaining the “preferential option for the less fortunate, the sick, the poor, the handicapped, the lonely,” the document links the life of service in the Church uniquely to the priesthood and the religious life (no. 87). The next paragraph immediately takes up marriage, but with no mention of service. Besides contradicting the clear teaching of Vatican II on the role and mission of the laity in the Church, this slip both confirms the common misconception in the Philippines of identifying the Church with the priests and religious, and at the same time inadvertently belittles the service of lay religion teachers who far outnumber the religious in Philippine Catholic schools. This is all the more surprising since it ignores the same Congregation’s own *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to faith*. A more balanced view could be drawn from the NCDP.¹⁵

Intellectual Work. Two particular points dealing with the Catholic school’s religious dimension and program seem especially

14. The three basic dimensions of the faith, and their inter-relations are explained in the General Introduction to Section Two, Basic Content of the Church’s Catechesis, nos. 159-64.

15. See, for example, the break-down of the various levels of catechists, NCDP, nos. 468-70.

relevant to Philippine religious education. The first concerns the value of *intellectual work*. After clearly asserting that "school" is much more than "teaching" and "classes" (no. 47), the document then goes on to defend the importance of intellectual work.

Although Christian life consists in loving God and doing his will, intellectual work is intimately involved. The light of Christian faith stimulates a desire to know the universe as God's creation. It enkindles a love for the truth . . . it awakens a critical sense . . . it impels the mind to learn careful order and precise methods and to work with a sense of responsibility. It provides the strength needed to accept sacrifices and the perseverance required by intellectual labor (no. 49).

This insistence on the value of intellectual work seems most appropriate for Philippine religious educators who have been sorely tempted in recent years — under the attractive appeals of one or other "experiential approach," or "contextualized social thrust" — to reduce or even eliminate the "academic" for the more "existential." What the document asserts of youth — that "concepts such as truth, beauty and goodness have become so vague today that young people do not know where to turn for help" (no. 9) — is used by some Philippine religious educators to reject the more traditional school religion programs in favor of what is allegedly more responsive to the "signs of the times."

The document itself supplies a good response to such social hyper-activists. After it describes mature faith as being able to recognize and reject cultural counter-values, it continues:

No one should think that all problems of religion and of faith will be completely solved by academic studies; nevertheless, we are convinced that a school is a privileged place for finding adequate ways to deal with these problems (no. 52).

The solution, then, would seem to lie NOT in running away from the problem by eliminating disciplined intellectual work, but rather in a prudent and reasonable process of educating the students' innate capacity for such work. This insistence on disciplined intellectual work is commonly admitted — if not practiced — in the secular subjects, especially those directly preparing the students for business. But we are speaking here specifically of the *religion*

courses in which the temptation to substitute sentimental piety or social ideological activism for hard learning is very strong.¹⁶

Ideal of Perfection. The second particularly relevant point in religious content is the theme of *perfection*, which according to the document "must be a part of this systematic presentation of the Christian message" (no. 95). In the Philippines, this idea of "perfection" is often mistakenly identified with the divine. Students confuse a "perfect man" with God, probably because of misunderstanding the traditional description of Jesus as "perfect man and God." The document strongly insists that to pass over the theme of perfection would be disloyal "to the Lord, who calls us to limitless perfection; to the Church, which invites us to perfection; and to the youth themselves, who have a right to know what the Lord and the Church expect of them."

But the document is equally strong in grounding the call to perfection in the *gift* of the Lord given in Baptism through the mediation of the Spirit. What the gift requires is the students' cooperation:

The only thing they have to do is live their lives as students as well as they can: do their best in study and work; put into practice the virtues they already know in theory — especially love, . . . accept difficulties with courage; help those in need; give good example. They must find the inspiration for their daily lives in the words and example of Jesus. They must converse with him in prayer and receive him in the Eucharist (no. 95).

By explaining the Christian ideal of perfection in such a way, no student could say that it was simply an "impossible dream."¹⁷

STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Following its brief introduction, the document significantly begins with "today's youth," emphasizing its paramount concern for the students. This is explicitated in the last summary. "A

16. John Paul II insisted on the balance between orthopraxis and orthodoxy, between a "serious and orderly study of the message of Christ" and "concentrating on human experience," in *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 22.

17. On the Christian ideal of perfection, see Vatican II's "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," nos. 42, 39.

school and all its activities have only one purpose — to help the students in their growth toward maturity" (no. 108). The opening chapter discusses in detail "some common characteristics of the young." Those more relevant to the Philippine scene include: 1) the condition of radical instability coupled with an inner desire to go beyond economic and technical progress; 2) worry over an uncertain future, leading at times to abuse with drugs, the erotic, etc.; and 3) a vague sort of generosity shown in great enthusiasm for popular causes, but often without any specific orientation or inner coherence (nos. 10-14).

But the most pertinent youth characteristic taken up by the document is their "gradual abandoning of religious practices," their "religious indifference," and their "religious questioning" (nos. 15-17, 20-21, 71-72). This may seem at first sight irrelevant to the Philippines, noted as it is for its religiosity. But Filipino Catholic religion teachers today are aware of the sharp upswing of secularism among the youth, and understand their greatest challenge today as being one of deepening the students' understanding of their Christian Faith.

The document makes a real effort to face squarely this worldwide phenomenon and to advise on how teachers should respond to this challenge. Two ideas seem to dominate the proposed response: 1) that of stressing *attitudes* and *values*, and 2) *stimulating student participation*.

Stressing Values. Regarding the first, the document emphasizes integrating the values of science and technology with the "traditional civic values such as freedom, justice, the nobility of work and the need to pursue social progress" (no. 45). Particular "school" values are enumerated:

- school work accepted as a duty and done with good will;
- courage and perseverance when difficulties come;
- respect for teachers;
- loyalty toward and love for fellow students;
- sincerity, tolerance, and goodness in all relationships (no. 47).

There is so much being written today in the Philippines about values and value education — much of it borrowed from limited studies abroad that consciously exclude any religious dimension — that this solid, down-to-earth treatment recommends itself highly

to Filipino religious educators. As the document counsels:

One important result of religious instruction is the development of religious values and motivation; these can be a great help in obtaining the willing participation of the students. . . . Values must lead to action; they are the motivation for action (nos. 107-8).

The paragraph then explains how a religion teacher learns through experience to lead the students to a deeper appreciation and love of the religious truths being taught. "A truth which is loved by the teacher and communicated in such a way that it is seen to be something valuable in itself, then becomes valuable to the student." This is then applied to the Christological approach recommended in the document, and to the "supernatural dynamism of grace which enlightens and leads to faith, to love, to action that is in accord with the will of God, through the Lord Jesus, in the Holy Spirit" (no. 107).

Such a Trinitarian exposition can seem very far from most actual classroom conditions, even in Catholic schools. But the truth rests there, if only the religion teachers are sufficiently prepared to bring such vibrant Catholic Faith to bear on the daily routine of school instruction.¹⁸

Stimulating Student Activity. The second recommendation of stimulating student participation is addressed in more than one section of the document. No. 72 puts it simply: "Let them talk!" But no. 21 remarks that "words are not enough for the young people of today. They want to be active — to do something worthwhile for themselves and for others." Finally, nos. 105-6 underline the fact that students are "the active agents in their own formation process . . . it is impossible for education to be genuine without the active involvement of the one being educated." To inspire this active participation the document advises:

When students are trusted and given responsibility, when they are invited to contribute their own ideas and efforts for the common good, their gratitude rules out indifference and inertia.

Here again there is need of prudent, practical experience to be able

18. The *NCDP* develops, for example, ways in which the mystery of the Blessed Trinity can be communicated in a more experiential manner. Cf. nos. 198-205.

to realize this ideal in the concrete order. But the over-riding fact remains: *people learn by doing!* This holds for religious instruction as much as in any other subject, and it is the challenge of the religion teacher to find ways and means to stimulate the students to active personal responsibility in the deepening of their own Christian Faith.

TEACHERS IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

We finally come to the document's treatment of the *teachers*. "The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved" (no. 96). The "prime responsibility" for creating the unique Christian school climate "rests with the teachers as individuals and as a community" (no. 26). So crucial is the role of the teachers that the document goes out of its way to encourage Religious Congregations engaged in education "not to give up this work. . . . In fact, the Church hopes that many more others will take up this special vocation" (no. 36).

Hopefully this official encouragement will strengthen the commitment to education of some religious congregations in the Philippines who have been strongly urged by some to shift to more directly pastoral needs. The ideal presented in this document is rather to *increase* commitment to schools:

The Congregation offers enthusiastic encouragement to those dioceses and Religious Congregations who wish to establish new schools. Such things as film clubs and sports groups are not enough; not even classes in catechism instruction are sufficient. *What is needed is a school.* (no. 41, emphasis added)

Lay men and women engaged in Catholic schools are also given full tribute, including the explicit mention of being given charge of the schools — thus repeating the message developed in the Congregation's previous publication referred to above (note 5).

All Teachers. Throughout the document a strong point is made that *all* the teachers in the Catholic school contribute their part to the religious dimension of the school climate — not just the "religion teachers." For example:

Teachers dealing with areas such as anthropology, biology, psychology, sociology and philosophy all have the opportunity to present a complete picture of the human person, including the religious dimension (no. 55).

Regarding the religion teachers themselves, the section on religious content contains a good number of practical guidelines: "religion teachers will find the way already prepared for an organic presentation of Christian anthropology" (no. 56); "teachers should guide the students' work so they will be able to discover a religious dimension in the world of human history . . . [and] in the philosophy of the human person" (nos. 58, 63); "teachers will help students to discover the real value of the Sacraments: they accompany the believer on the journey through life. This journey takes place within the Church" (no. 78); "teachers should insist that the commandment of Christ is new and revolutionary" (no. 86). But their primary mission is the "systematic presentation of religion" (no. 67).¹⁹

The document also shows itself sensitive to the teachers' ordinary strengths and trials. In no. 44 it states: "teachers find light and the courage for authentic Religious education in their unity among themselves." No. 71 counsels teachers to take into account the students' attitudes of indifference and insensitivity — something the school curriculum as such cannot do — and with kindness, understanding, and friendly manner to "prepare the soil" like John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-3).

But perhaps the most moving passage of the whole document is its description of the ideal religion teacher:

Teachers of religion must be men and women endowed with many gifts, both natural and supernatural, who are also capable of giving witness to these gifts; [with] thorough cultural, professional, and pedagogical training. . . . They are teachers of the faith; however, like Christ they must also be teachers of what it means to be human. This includes such things as affection, tact, understanding, serenity of spirit, a balanced judgment, patience in listening to others and prudence in the way they respond, and finally, availability for personal meetings and conversations with the students (no. 96).

19. No. 97 stresses the need for adequate training of religion teachers, while warning: "in this area, especially, an unprepared teacher can do a great deal of harm."

CONCLUSION

To conclude briefly, this document on the religious dimension of education in a Catholic school offers the religious educator in the Philippines a balanced sketch of the Catholic school's essential operative educational philosophy today. It represents a fine blend of the traditional and the current practical theory in Catholic religious education. Outstanding in its presentation is its stress on: 1) the whole religious climate of the Catholic school; 2) its pastoral service of mediating culture and faith; 3) its close relationships with family and local community; 4) the value of disciplined intellectual work; and 5) the functions and criteria of clear educational goals.

Also very relevant to the Philippine religious educational scene is its emphasis on: 1) what makes a Catholic school different; 2) the innate value and dignity of the student, human person and Christian; 3) the spiritual ideal of Christian perfection; and 4) the cooperation and contribution of *all* teachers to the religious climate and mission of the Catholic school. Hopefully, a serious study of this document will bring increased vigor and inspiration to the Catholic schools in Asia's only Christian nation.