**THE FIVE CALLINGS OF A CATHOLIC TEACHER**

Many moons ago, at an interfaith seminar at Sheffield Hallam University, the keynote speaker was recalling her growing up in Pakistan and her troubled educational history as a somewhat precocious teenager. ‘So I had to leave one school and *then* my parents put me in a *Catholic* school run by *nuns.*’ Hearing this, my heart feared the worst – ‘oh no, here comes another pot-shot at the Church!’ - but she continued: ‘There I at last found people who respected me, who encouraged me, who channelled all my questioning into discovery. These nuns, who never forced their religion upon me or the other girls in the school, somehow gave me an appreciation of prayer and faith that has never left me and are the main reason why I am here speaking to you all today.’

Wow! A wonderful, public affirmation of Catholic education. At least two inches taller, I approached and asked her afterwards how she got on with her fellow Catholic pupils, yet to my further surprise she informed me that there were hardly any compared to Moslems and Hindus. Being a school governor at the time, obsessing about Catholic percentages on roll and the implementation of admissions criteria, it raised in my mind the classic question – ‘What is a Catholic School?’ From this evidence, the percentage of Catholic pupils was clearly not as important as the leadership and educational disposition of the Catholic teacher. But what makes for a Catholic teacher?

Assuming for a minute that there is more to it than a baptismal certificate, and at the risk of being accused of navel gazing, this is a question any of us involved in Catholic education must continually ask, a process of reflection which should never cease. So - more as an examination of my own conscience as a challenge to anyone else - I hereby submit for consideration, ‘five callings’ of the Catholic teacher – which help serve an authentically Catholic education. These may usefully be identified by principle, by tone, by wisdom, by dynamism and by creativity.

1. The core *principle* at the heart of the calling of the Catholic teacher must be our common human dignity. We are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Still more – we are children of God, we belong to the First and One who is our *Abba – Gentle Father* (Gal 4:6)*.* The Catholic teacher *necessarily* fosters a family atmosphere such that each pupil, each colleague, known by name and treated with dignity, is able to flourish. Radically inclusive, it is a fundamental option for the weak. It is a principle any Principal must reverence (cf. Murphy, 2001: 59-67).
2. The calling of the Catholic teacher involves a realization that teaching *tone* is as important as the teaching task. Catholic educators should be identifiable by generosity and enthusiasm which generates its own atmosphere. The extra mile, the extra smile – these make the difference. And just as ‘faith is more caught, than taught,’ so pupils’ love of learning and excellence in subject disciplines is fired by the enthusiasm of Catholic staff members alive to the adventure of education.
3. Catholic teachers are called to be seekers of *wisdom*. This demands prudence, since excess novelty or conservatism in pedagogy can lead to madness. In a world where politicians and pedagogues appear addicted to novelty and change, the wise scribe, the wise teacher, recalls the words of Jesus to ‘bring forth from the treasure house things new and old’ (Matt 13:52). Catholic teachers should be skilled in the best pedagogies, whether they be ancient or modern (cf. Robinson, 2002: 139-154).
4. The Catholic teacher recognizes the *dynamism* inherent in the Gospel promise: we are ‘created by God, redeemed by Christ and destined for eternal life’ (Richardson, 2013:34). Catholic education offers a compass for life’s journey. If our ultimate destiny is in the eternal mystery of God, then our everyday actions are imbued with a dynamism committed to the building of a better world which every student can be part of. The young are the worst casualties of a contemporary cynicism which decries the sacred beauty of love lived out in the ordinary and measures personal significance only by fame, or, if that proves elusive, infamy. Not everyone has obvious gifts, but all can learn to give. The Catholic teacher knows that the Kingdom of God is a vocation, not a location, lived out not on TV screens but in the everyday ennobling of lives lived in the service of others.
5. The Catholic teacher is called to foster *imagination –* there is good sense in wonder! Catholic education recognizes that creativity, art, music, drama, poetry and play – whether sporting or less energetic – all form part of the learning adventure. These express dimensions of our humanity, they stimulate the soul and fire the imagination. Jesus came ‘that we might have life to the full’(John 10:10). Monochrome, 2D ‘just teach the exam’ learning is simply not enough. Catholic education must have valency with beauty, in a world Manley-Hopkins describes well as ‘charged with grandeur of God.’

Now of course there are more than five angles we could explore, but as a fan of St. Thomas Aquinas and his fivefold exploration regarding God’s existence, five seemed as good a number as any! Staying with the Dominican tradition a moment, the ‘macro-calling’ of the Catholic teacher can be summed up in their prayer-motto, *contemplare aliis tradere,* ‘to pass on to others [the fruits of] contemplation’ Seasoned in prayer, our principles, our tone, our wisdom, our dynamic and our creativity will be blest by the Father, through a sacramental life in Christ, empowered with the vitality - ‘the x-factor’ - of the Spirit.

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