

# Catholic Schools: Church Embassies to Youth

By FATHER WILLIAM F. O'MALLEY, S.J.

The following is the second of two articles by Jesuit Father William O'Malley, of McQuaid Jesuit High School.

Last week's article strongly contended that the Catholic high schools have a unique "educational difference" over the public secondary schools. He cited their "greater concern for self-organization, more chances for personal contact, more demanding academic standards below the honors level and a unifying world-view." Today's article states that "there is a real religious difference" achieved in the Catholic school training of a high schooler.

Many critics of the Catholic secondary school believe their greatest argument for closing them lies in the "fact" that, even while still in them, students go to the sacraments less frequently and even stop going to Mass altogether.

If they're not teaching religion well, why have them? Reluctantly assuming for the sake of argument, that this assertion is provable, I wonder if we have really analyzed the causes enough to say we should close the Catholic secondary schools and rely solely on a weekly CCD class. I think this claim shows an appalling ignorance, at least of the mind of the present-day teenager and its needs.

He is not disinterested in religion so much as disappointed in it. It is a real problem for him, one in which ignorant heresies and ignorant guilt are constantly pulling him in opposite directions. He finds Mass doesn't talk to him. He finds confusion in the prestigious voices we all hear contradicting one another in today's Church.

But unlike us, he is not too long entrenched in "the Catholic habit" to consider kicking that habit impossible.

He feels this way not because he goes to a Catholic secondary school. (If he didn't go there, he'd probably get rid of the problem in the easiest way possible: by forgetting it.) He feels that way because the information explosion and the communications glut have saturated him with opinions we



Students receive Communion during Easter Rite Mass at McQuaid.

didn't hear even whispered until we were in college.

How many times when we were in high school, for instance, did we hear open justification of abortion by "other wise respectable" people? Today it's all over the papers and Sunday supplements. When did we hear masturbation not only judged allowable but recommended, and not by some tough kid but by reputable theologians? When did we hear whole nations of bishops standing up against the Vicar of Christ on Earth?

If we who are solidly, permanently committed to the Church find ourselves dizzy with confusion, how can we ask more of young people who have just begun to cope with what Baptism committed them to? We keep thinking that all we have to do is tell them the truth, even inflict it on them if necessary, and everything will be all right. The Church will be wiser and normal the way it used to be. But this isn't true. Why not?

First, saying true things and having true things heard are not the same thing. Second, there are many other voices telling them just the opposite, and doing it far more stickily and more convincingly than we are.

Third, we can get dull conformity from them, but it will only last until they get away to college. If we want something more, if we want commitment and understanding and love, we have to be patient and above all adapt our methods and materials to the needs of this particular audience.

As trite as it seems, parents just don't know what their kids are thinking or, more important, what has formed those ideas. They don't listen to their music or read their books. They don't even watch the cartoons the kiddies glare at all night, Saturday morning, absorbing, wondering, confusedly forming half-truths about life.

Many parents and priests do listen to the kids talk, but they don't necessarily hear what they're really saying because they take them literally. When youngsters say, "I hate Mass," they don't mean they see no value in what Mass claims to be. They mean, "If Mass is as important as you say, this isn't a very meaningful way for me to do it. It's not just boring; it's not doing what you say it will. It doesn't talk to me in the way it talks to you." Exploring at them will get them to go, but only as long as you are within hollering distance.

If for no other reason, we ought to keep Catholic secondary schools open to give youngsters a chance to put religion in perspective with all those other myriad details which claim to be just as important.

After all, John Lennon was right. Youngsters know, care about, and listen to the Beatles more than Jesus Christ. Why? Because the Beatles talk their language. There are not many who can make Christ talk their language, but I suspect that many of them are teaching in the Catholic secondary schools. It would seem we ought to keep together the interpreters and the people they want to serve.

any schools as a kind of arbiter between overbusy parents and churchmen on the one side and our future parents and churchmen on the other.

Just as the Vatican keeps embassies in foreign countries who understand the language, the customs, the people, the unspoken needs of "the other side," and can mediate between the two differing sides that are well known only to the middle man, so the Church must have an embassy to youth. They are, after all, our future.

No one feels he can deliver himself of an opinion on international finance without studying it for years, and yet every one thinks he can deliver an opinion on teenagers without ever having really talked with one.

We say, "I was once a teenager." No. You were never this kind of teenager — financially comfortable, bloated with contrary facts and opinions, with a hundred million valuable sources.

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Although I am admittedly prejudiced (and certainly financially naive), I would rather see us close down all our Catholic colleges before we close down a single Catholic high school. High school is where it's happening!

These kids are facing the questions and the conflicting answers we faced in college. By the time a present-day youngster gets to a college campus, the basis of his view of life is pretty well set. It will vary a bit, swerve occasionally, but it has already begun to jell. If he doesn't want to be bothered by thinking at eighteen, he will probably be the same at eighty.

I would suggest that the Church should be where men are most malleable, and the

American is most malleable between the ages of 15 and 18.

In conclusion, I would like to question the very premise with which this section began: that today's teenager is less religious than he was "in our day." How does one judge a youngster's religiosity?

When I was a boy, I judged myself by the number of sins committed or forewarned and by the items listed in the old Apostleship of Prayer leaflets: Masses heard, rosaries said, novenas attended. But I believe today's teenager must be judged by his concern — about the problem of God, about the persons through whom Christ manifests himself, about the way the Spirit is moving crookedly, according to our old comfortable criteria.

Today's teenager cannot, psychologically, commit himself as we did to something without picking it up and probing it, pushing it, testing its effectiveness. Perhaps he should not be that way. That is not the question. He is that way. We are not going to reach him by treating him as if he were docile.

A folk Mass speaks more clearly to him than to his parents, just as a Mass in English speaks more clearly to us than one in Urdu.

I don't think the Catholic secondary school is selling out Christ by adapting the language and the media of the Christian message to its new and highly volatile audience any more than Peter was selling out when he yielded, painfully, to Paul on the issue of circumcision. The Greeks were sophisticated, but Paul spoke their language. The American Indian was apparently simple, so Isaac Jogues spoke and sang to them of the mighty gitche Manitou.

If Christ the Shepherd of troublesome sheep spoke to us, we rejoice. But if Christ the Outsider the one who found human pain more demanding than human joy, speaks to our children, who are we to stand in his way? He was both — obedient to the Law and critical of it. Let us raise up sons to him.

A generation is waiting in the wings. They can come on-stage cold, and perhaps disinterested in the style of play we have handed on to them. But this is not a play opening in New Haven; it is the future of

## CENSUS NOTE

Jacksonville Beach, Fla. — (NC) — An updated census in the St. Augustine diocese has disclosed a Catholic population of 68,828. There are 18,197 Catholic families.

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## Education

### Alumni: A Positive View

New York — (RNS) — Catholic college alumni who graduated in June 1961 seem to have "a more charitable view of their schools" than many faculty members and other critics, Father Andrew M. Greeley, noted Catholic sociologist, reported here.

In an article in the Jan. 25 issue of America, national weekly, Father Greeley summarized attitudes of 1961 graduates of Catholic and non-Catholic colleges.

He also reported as a "secondary finding" that "there continues to be no evidence that attendance at a Catholic college or university is either an economic or an academic handicap."

"From the data presented in this article," he said, "a Catholic higher educator might take reasonable encouragement that his former students do not think he did

so badly, and apparently have by no means rejected the idea that such an educational experience would be helpful for their own children.

"One might even go so far as to say that the alumni seem to be more confident of Catholic higher education in the future than do many Catholic educators."

The Catholic alumni tended to view their colleges as developers of character, intellect and good citizenship much more than as a way to prepare for a career, according to the survey.

While the Catholics were

more critical than the others of the research facilities, including libraries, at their colleges, they showed a higher opinion of the caliber of the students and of the opportunities for personal contact with the faculty.

Catholic alumni "are much more likely to feel that their schools helped them to learn how to make their own decisions, helped them to learn how to get along with others, gave them a broad knowledge of the arts and sciences, helped them to formulate values and the goals of their lives, and prepared them for marriage and family life," he reported.

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### "Little Things Mean a Lot!"

A simple "Thankyou" means as much! A kind gesture of thoughtfulness is sometimes all we need to make our efforts seem worthwhile. In the mistle field, where frustration is often a next-door neighbor, gratefulness is appreciated even more.

The following mission incidents illustrate this kind of thoughtfulness that gives witness to a truly living Christianity.

A certain woman from the bush country in Africa recently walked 40 miles to give a priest 12 oranges. The gift and the journey were signs of her gratitude to him for having saved her daughter's life three years before. Father had been out in the bush when he had found the little child. He brought her back to the mission hospital where the Sisters diagnosed her malady and operated to relieve a terrible growth on her leg. The woman wished to express her gratitude at once in some tangible way, but she could not because of her poverty. She waited, and three years later, she proudly walked 40 miles through the bush with 12 oranges — to make her thanksgiving to the priest. What a truly human, and truly Christian response!

In another area, there was an old priest who, after 38 years of missionary work, died, leaving his possessions locked in a safe. The priests who were in charge of gathering his belongings thought there must be something tremendously valuable in the safe, since the old priest had taken such great pains to hide the key. When they finally found the key and opened the safe, they discovered, to their surprise, only a \$20 bill and a note from their old friend asking that his money be used for refreshments for those who came to his funeral. A small matter, perhaps, but what consideration this old priest had for others!

We can learn much from the example of these two incidents. What seems to be most significant, though, is the real value in our small acts of thoughtfulness and generosity.

Your sacrifice for the missions need not be huge. Your efforts need only be accompanied by a sincere interest in those who are trying to help. In this way, your contribution, whether large or small, will mean so much more to those in the mission lands.

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**Crowned "C" winners, from**  
Pupils of Corpus School last week of "most courteous" and classmates in a "Campaign" initiated and principal, Sister Mary SSJ.  
The youngsters were to write the "reason" for their choices. Boy ballot winners were for each grade.  
The "Courtsey Queen" and the "most courteous" then were ed by a teacher "S" chaela, Sister Mary Mrs. Lawrence Uge.  
Queen Josephine I an eighth grader, crown by receiving other accolades: "and polite to everyon  
**CYO C**  
Result  
Holy Rosary, Christ and St. Charles Borromeo were defeated in the County CYO. B.Y. League's high school of Jan. 26.  
St. Thomas More Salome teams also beaten as of that da grammar school sections:  
HIGH SCHOOL SEN  
Northern Division  
St. Charles Borromeo  
Holy Cross  
St. John (Greene)  
Our Lady of Mercy  
Our Mother of Sorrows  
St. Thomas Apostolic  
Holy Name of Jesus  
Corpus Christi  
Eastern Division  
Christ the King  
O. L. Perpetual Help  
St. Bridget  
St. Andrew  
St. Cecilia  
St. Salome  
St. Stanislaus  
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Our Lady of Lourdes  
St. Joseph (Pensilv)  
St. Augustine  
Holy Spirit  
St. John (Rochester)  
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Sacred Heart  
St. Christopher