

What Makes Catholic School Different?

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The Supreme Court has compelled us to focus on what we have been minimizing and deemphasizing for the sake of state aid in dollars — namely, on the religious nature of Catholic education. The Justices stated emphatically that Catholic education is religious. Though the decision disappointed vast majorities, yet it could be, from the viewpoint of re-focusing, a blessing in disguise.

Catholic schools have been in trouble, because, I think, that to secure state aid we have in the past few decades deliberately blurred our basic mission in education. We stressed the secular function of the Catholic school. We instituted odious comparisons. We argued that our schools did as good a job as the public school. And parents began to wonder if that was all they did, then why not just the public schools?

The Catholic school came into being to add dimension that could not be had in the public school system. That dimension was the fourth R — religion! Religion was added not just as a course, but was made the essence of all courses in the school. For Catholic education has a unique view of man. It sees man, not just as a thinking animal, but as a son of God destined for life in this world and beyond it. Accordingly, the whole Catholic school system is geared to helping a person become the person God intended him to be — to learn how to live, as well as how to make a living; to be good, as well as to make good; to go to heaven, as well as to learn how the heavens go.

To make the unique dimension of our schools come alive, the Catholic school has five distinctive qualities.

PRAYER is an integral part of every Catholic school. School prayer is both individual and communal. Fidelity to and spontaneity in prayer is taught.

Traditional devotions such as the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, Novenas, First Fridays, etc. are explained in their proper context as private devotions. They are not ignored, as though of no value; nor are they put on the same level as the Mass and the Sacraments.

If students are to break away from the "tide of superficiality" inundating a sensate culture and to become aware of their "inner self," a definite prayer rhythm must be introduced into their lives.

DISCIPLINE is built into the Catholic school system. Discipline means setting limits for the sake of order. It is more than conformity imposed from without. "Education

by constraint, fear and punishment is positively bad education." Catholic discipline springs from interior motivation and a deep sense of responsibility for others.

The Catholic school has reasonable rules and regulations. Principal and faculty take the prudent risk of providing an atmosphere of freedom and trust in which students may exercise a certain freedom of choice appropriate to their age.

Christian discipline and the formation of conscience are closely intertwined. Conscience is formed by motivating students to make right choices. This is done not so much by telling them what to do as by example. Formation of conscience means reversing the process of scandal. Scandal consists in making evil alluring; formation of conscience consists in making good alluring. Example, therefore, of teacher and class is of superlative importance. When a student starts doing what he ought to not because he is made to but because he wants to, then Christian education is taking hold.

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL IS A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. The transmission of the Christian faith and values is an osmotic process. That is, faith and Christian values are handed on to students more by what we are than by what we say. As most of the values in the home are absorbed nonverbally, so are they in the classroom. Therefore, "an atmosphere enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity" is vital. Enough freedom prevails so that children can learn to act conscientiously; and charity enough is practiced so that children will learn to bear one another's burdens.

PERMEATION. The Catholic school situates all its teachings in the context of the Christian faith. When we were kids, the Sunday newspaper carried a puzzle page supplement. Once in a while a game would be printed consisting of a picture of a family picnic. There were clouds, trees, the automobile, table, food, Mom and Dad and the kids. Under the picture was the line, "Can you find the face of the man hidden in the picnic scene?" At first you could not see him. You stared, then moved the picture sideways, then upside-down, and stared and stared. Then a cloud began to take the shape of an ear, a branch became a smiling mouth, and suddenly, by golly, there it was, the face of a man.

After you had discovered the picture, the scene no longer remained just a picture scene to you. So after Christ entered the human condition, life is no longer the same. In every human scene, there is the face of Christ. Faith alone can see it. Once it has, then nothing can ever remain the same, not even secular

subjects or school days. Holydays, for instance, are different from every other day in a Catholic school.

Permeation of the Catholic school with Christian philosophy is what separates Catholic education from secular humanism. The secular humanist teaches that good ought to be done for the sake of goodness. Its motivation stops at the level of mankind. The Christian humanist teaches good ought to be done because it sees the face of Christ in the human condition. Christian humanism takes into account the Incarnation. This makes all the difference in the world. Secular humanism and Christian humanism, like low do and high do, are an octave apart.

THE FACULTY in a Catholic school is student-oriented, not teacher-centered. It is erroneous to assume that whatever a teacher chooses to do is all right just because the teacher chooses to do it. Since the ideological character of the teacher cannot be separated from teaching any more than Shylock could separate one pound of flesh from blood, the teacher in the Catholic school is imbued with the Christian philosophy of education. The teacher sees the child not just as a thinking being but as an individual person, with a destiny in this world and in the next, basically good but struggling with evil, and constantly in need of God's grace. Therefore, the teacher has a reverence for the child not unlike Christ's — a consecration, a dedication, a sense of mission. In such a context, teacher example becomes as important as the teaching itself. For this reason, many religious choose to wear the religious garb in the classroom as a nonverbal sign of the religious nature of their educational mission.

Unless Catholic schools emphasize, not so much what makes them like the public schools, but what makes them different, and unless Catholic schools implement these differences, then they deserve neither parental nor ecclesiastical support.

A Catholic school has prayer, discipline, an atmosphere of freedom and charity, courses permeated with Christian truths, and a faculty that is Christlike. "Christianity," wrote Cardinal Newman, "and nothing short of it, must be made the elements and principle of all education. . . . Where revealed truth has given the aim and direction to knowledge, knowledge of all kinds will minister to revealed truth. But if in education we begin with nature before grace, with evidences before faith, with science before conscience, with poetry before practice, we shall be doing much the same as if we were to indulge the appetites and passions, and turn a deaf ear to the reason. In each case we misplace what in its place is a divine gift."

Superstar Christ Not the Jesus of the Gospels

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"Jesus Christ, Superstar" will be playing Saturday at St. John Fisher College. In order to account for this play's great popularity, I think we have to reckon with some other things that have been happening in the youth culture of today: the turning away from material goods, the peace movement, the search for hyper-sensual experience, the disillusionment with conventional religion, the antagonism against established authority. And now they have discovered Jesus as a Hero in all of these things, as the Superstar of all these hopes and strivings.

The British authors of "Jesus Christ, Superstar" are having their lucky day, they have hit the jackpot, shaping into the rock-idiom of the young the story of Jesus' Passion and Death.

However, the Jesus of this folk-opera is not the Jesus I know from the Gospels, and

from my experience of prayer and communion. The Jesus Superstar is a confused and groping man, once even a hysterical man. He acts like a trapped animal, unsure of Himself, ranting against His Father. Now it won't do, in defense of this, to say, as I've heard even some priests say, "But after all, we do believe that Jesus is true man, and that means not some make-believe man, but a real man who suffered and was in every thing like us, excepting sin. And so why fault "Superstar" for bringing this out sharply and accenting it?" I agree.

But "Superstar" exaggerates, distorts and misrepresents. He is not the Jesus of the 19 centuries of all the saints and mystics who have loved Him, from St. Paul to Pope John the XXIII and Mother Teresa who serves Him so bravely among the teeming poor of India.

The "Superstar" Christ is shown as an isolated phenomenon, unrelated to the history of His people, uncertain about His mission and destiny, totally de-

void of desire and joy in His sacrifice. But the real Christ is not an isolated phenomenon: He is tied by a hundred cords to the history of His people, and sees Himself as the fulfillment of Israel. He is very certain of His destiny: indeed, one has to be very ignorant of the Gospels to overlook the many times when Jesus revealed that it was His very meat and drink to fulfill the will of His Father, and to overlook how, all during the years of His ministry, His thoughts and His face were set toward the final journey up to Jerusalem, where would come the culmination of His career and His Passover to the Father.

But this is not the way Jesus is presented in "Superstar." Here it is a kind of blind fate that pushes Him into the grip of His bitter enemies, and as He sees it coming He is made to shout out in wild rock music a hectic cry to His Father: "Why should I die? Can you show me now that I would not be killed in vain? Show me just a little of your omnipresent brain. Show me there's a reason for

your wanting me to die. You're too keen on where and how and not so hot on why. All right, I'll die! Just watch me die! See how I die! . . . God, thy will is hard, but you hold every card. I will drink your cup of poison, nail me to your cross and break me, bleed me, beat me, kill me, take me, now before I change my mind."

Let's say it bluntly: This is not Jesus Christ.

It is a robot animated by the emotions and antagonisms of the rock generation. And the music that expresses and accompanies all this, I find banal and mediocre except for one piece. That one piece, which I think is quite lovely, is the song, "Everything's All Right," which Mary Magdalen sings to Jesus.

Do you remember how, a few years ago, one of the Beatles remarked that they drew bigger crowds than Jesus? Perhaps God is allowing the phenomenon "Jesus Christ Superstar" as an ironic retort: the Beatles are disbanded, and "Superstar" is packing in the crowds.

I must not overlook what Jesus said one time in answer to John who protested: "Master, we saw a man using your name to expel demons, and we tried to stop him because he is not of our company." Jesus told him in reply: "Do not stop him, for any man who is not against you, is on your side." (Luke 9:49-50).

With all its limitations, "Superstar" is surely not against us. Therefore, it may be reckoned on our side, particularly if it is aiding an otherwise alien generation to turn toward Christ and to find in Him the answers to their anguish and their doubts. And as long as they can come to admit that JESUS IS LORD, and St. Paul assures us that no one can do this except in the Holy Spirit, then we may reasonably hope and should surely pray that the Holy Spirit will lead these people still further into the mystery of the real Jesus, and thereby they may come into a genuine and alive faith, not in Jesus Christ Superstar, but in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer.