

A Unique Educational Role

By **TIMOTHY E. LEAHY**
Superintendent of Diocesan Schools

It seems apparent that today more than ever before in the history of American Catholic schools, the attitude of parents and the choice that they make are decisive factors. What this means is that our Catholic schools, which at one time were largely a Church enterprise, are becoming increasingly parental in their patronage, support and control. Church authority and leadership are still very much present but Catholic school patronage is more the result of parental initiative and free choice rather than pastoral mandate.

It is good that this initiative and choosing is more evident and the result of thoughtful and informed decision making. I feel strongly that parents and the public at large need to be informed about Catholic schools; what they are trying to do; the nature of their programs, and the results. It isn't enough just to remind parents of this duty. It is imperative that they also be able to recognize that Catholic schools are and should be different from public schools. As concerned parents they need to know the nature of that difference and they have a right and a duty to insist that there be a difference.

The document "The Catholic School", issued July 5, 1977 by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, reemphasizes the "essential and unique service" rendered by the Church's schools in a pluralistic society. The following excerpts appeared in the Dec., 1977 Journal of the National Catholic Education Association entitled "Momentum" and they focus on two important factors parents should look for, and find, in our diocesan Catholic schools.

— Specific character of Catholic Schools:

"Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. His revelation gives new meaning to life, and helps man to direct his thought, action and will according to the gospel, making the beatitudes his norm of life. The fact that in their own individual ways all members of the school community share this Christian vision, makes the school Catholic; principles of the Gospel in this manner become the education norms since the school then has them as its internal motivation and final goal. The Catholic school is committed thus to the development of the whole man, since in Christ, the perfect man, all human values find their fulfillment and unity. Herein lies the specifically Catholic

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"These premises indicate the duties and the content of the Catholic school. Its task is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian."

— The Christian Teacher:

"The cultural heritage of mankind includes other values apart from specific ambience of truth. When the Christian teacher helps a pupil to grasp, appreciate and assimilate these values, he is guiding him toward eternal realities. This movement toward the uncreated source of all knowledge highlights the importance of teaching for the growth of faith."

"The achievement of this specific aim of the Catholic school depends not so much on subject

regarded as an academic subject like any other."

I firmly believe that our Catholic schools in the Rochester Diocese have made and continue to make important contributions to society by educating a significant number of citizens and through savings to taxpayers. In addition they render a far more important service to society — that of guarding, both in principle and in practice, diversity and freedom of choice in education. Catholic schools represent competition for public school... not the cut competition of two educational systems each trying to outgrab the other in seeking money and students, but the fruitful competition of self-improvement. More fundamentally, however, our Catholic schools are important because they insure that there will not be an educational monopoly in America.

Not enough people recognize the economic advantage to a community that is fortunate enough to have a good Catholic school. Not enough people realize the contribution of

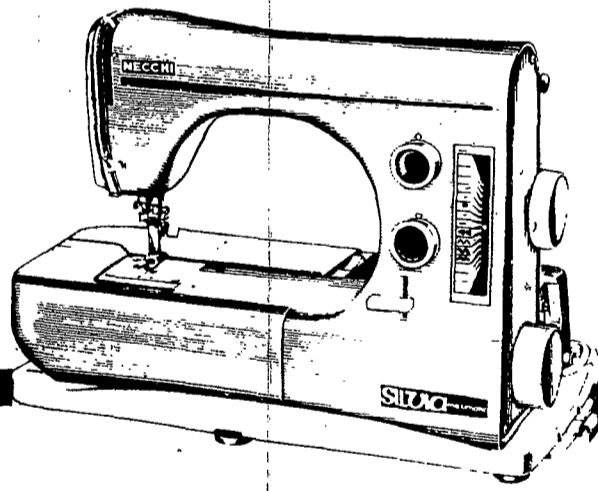
our schools in keeping alive the right of Americans to freedom of choice in education. Not enough people are aware of the great leadership our schools have exercised in education as a whole. This realization is important at a time when quality education is being demanded by all. Catholic schools help to build a better society with a noble contribution to value education and the preservation of ethnic and cultural diversity.

As our schools continue to strive to grow in vigor and strength we have good reason to be proud and celebrate the existence in our Diocese of an educational enterprise that has taken upon itself the vocation of acting as a partner with parents in creating an education environment in which religious values can be freely explored in an atmosphere of love and freedom.

All of us must pledge ourselves to continue to work together to ensure that our message, our heritage and our continued viability are pronounced loudly and clearly for all to hear.

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