

ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW



CATHOLIC EDUCATION WEEK LECTURE GIVEN BY CARDINAL THOMAS J. WINNING AT ST. ANDREW'S CAMPUS OF GLASGOW UNIVERSITY

My dear friends

I do not claim to be an educational expert.

I have never taught in a school except as a priest.

However I have been involved in Catholic education and in Catholic schools since I became a priest. As a Bishop, whose task is to teach the faith, I am particularly responsible for the formation and faith development of every Catholic in the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

In nearly 30 years as a Bishop, I have observed, advised and made decisions concerning Catholic education with great frequency.

I have a vision of formation in the faith as concomitant with the secular world's commitment to education for life. It is from that viewpoint that I share some thoughts with you today.

When I was thinking about some of the themes of today's address at the end of last month, the Church celebrated the Feast of St John Bosco - the Apostle of Youth.

Don Bosco died 100 years ago, and it's said that my predecessor, archbishop Eyre invited him to set up an educational facility in Glasgow. Unfortunately numbers didn't allow it, but at a distance of a century I think there's still a lot to be learned from this great Catholic educator.

His working conditions were very similar to our own. He was shocked by what he found in the great housing estates on the outskirts of Turin. They were zones of turmoil and revolution, places of desolation. Unemployed, sad and restless adolescents caused problems on the streets.

Don Bosco recognised early the link between poverty and lack of achievement.

He responded by developing a philosophy of education built on four foundations: Home, School, Church and Play.

Built on each of these foundations he recognised four human needs which must be satisfied if success and fulfilment were to be achieved.

- Home, he said, is where we experience belonging.
- School is where we experience learning.
- Church is where we encounter meaning
- And society is where we experience play as children and social interaction as adults.

I think that any analysis of Catholic education today would do well to focus on these four foundations and use them as a kind of examination of conscience.

Do we focus so much on structures and ecclesiology that we forget that the Church is, in its simplest form, Mater et Magistra - Mother and Teacher? If we lose sight of that fact we fail to grasp the meaning of life, and sacrifice the minutiae of administration for a sense of wonder at the great questions of life ... Who am I? Why am I here? What is God's will for me?

And as we look on wider society do we spend so much time analysing that we lose our capacity for action?

Do we prefer to construct a structured thesis on poverty rather than take practical steps to alleviate it?

In these areas Don Bosco points us in the right direction. His life is an example of how to keep the big picture in mind by paying attention to foundations.

A New Evangelisation

The Synod of European Bishops held in Rome last October had as its theme: "Jesus Christ alive in His Church, Source of Hope for Europe." That theme, chosen by the Pope, is typical of the evangelising thrust which has marked his pontificate. From 1978 he has been calling for a new and second evangelisation of Europe.

He sees the need to mobilise the whole Church, every member, to an endeavour which is new in its fervour, its expression and its strategies. We are called to respond to that mobilisation as Catholic educators.

What this in fact amounts to is a new vision of the Church. If Jesus Christ, alive in His Church is the source of hope for the new Europe, the Church, that is, you and I, have to be alive too. Where there is no vision the people perish. (Prov. 29,18)

When the Bishops at the Synod came to their conclusions, they discerned that the central challenge facing all of us is how to hand on the faith to coming generations effectively.

Today we are gathered to celebrate Catholic Education which aims to promote the transmission and development of faith.

We are faced, as always, with new challenges; without them we become either indifferent or complacent.

That is why I have chosen to entitle this address "Foundations".

For in times of turbulence we have to ensure that our institutions are deeply and securely established on solid foundations.

And so I want to start by stating quite unequivocally that for the Catholic Church in Scotland, Catholic education is the number one priority.

That means it deserves to be supported vocally, financially, politically and personally by the entire Catholic community.

That commitment does not mean our views are static. Changing demographic patterns will require movement, redistribution of resources and new solutions to be found. To accept this - where it is really justified - is not to water down one's absolute commitment to Catholic education, it is merely a recognition of reality. Our commitment to Catholic Education though, must be 100 per cent.

When we reflect on the faith formation of children and young people three basic institutions come readily to mind: the home, the Church and the school.

We see them as a powerful partnership in the rearing and education of children.

What we are apt to overlook is the bedrock in which all of these institutions are founded and that is the Catholic community: a unique community in that it resembles, one might say, the cross. Reaching vertically up to God and horizontally out to people.

Theology of Communion

That the Church is a communion, a community, is the most central message of Vatican II.

In 1985, 20 years after the closure of the Council, the Bishops of the world, in union with the Pope said: "The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents." (Final Report, C,1)

The final report of that synod from 1985 goes on to say: "The structures and relations within the Church must express this communion ... likewise, every community is called to study deeply the concrete exigencies of the mystery of the Church and of Her communion."

What matters, in other words, is that the ecclesial community enters the mystery of salvation by being in communion with God through Word and Sacrament.

Although this communion is a mystery of salvation, it is also visible and tangible.

It can be seen and identified as the "people of God."

God saves us the way He created us. Human beings are made to relate to others: corporateness is our way of existing. We have a communitarian *modus vivendi*.

We are referred to at times, and rightly, as social animals.

We cannot realise ourselves as persons except in and through community. We discover truth and life's values only by considering and reflecting on them with one another.

We as Catholics, belong to a people with its own culture: its way of being, thinking and doing. Our culture has its own language, patterns of behaviour, interpretations of the world, its values, what it prizes and what it rejects.

In all of this Jesus Christ is the key.

Embodied in the mystery of Christ, the Catholic family assumes a unique role in the life of the Church.
The role of the family

It is the family which is the foundation of so much that we try to do as educators.

We have talked a lot about the foundations for education being Church, school and family.

But, especially in recent days, I think we need to spell out exactly what we mean by "family".

The Church is very clear on what constitutes a family. It is the community of husband and wife at its most basic level. Built on that marital foundation it is the slightly bigger "domestic church" of father, mother, children, or husband, wife and offspring.

In the last two hundred or so years from the Industrial Revolution in the west to the urbanisation throughout the known world the concept of the family has assumed many forms.

But the foundation for family life, in the mind of the Church, remains marriage.

Marriage is not an institution of the Church. Marriage comes from the natural law.

The Church, realising how essential to children is the stable union for life between a man and a woman has made it one of the events in human living which can expect special and continuous help from Jesus Christ. Marriage is for the Church, a sacrament.

The family based on the foundation of marriage is of nature. It will always be wish us, substantially the same, its authenticity assured by father, mother, man and woman, husband and wife and the fruit of their union, children.

That is God's plan for humanity.

Of course some marriages do not work out. No-one who is a victim of marriage breakdown should feel anything less than cherished and loved by the Church. However even divorcees generally recognise that marriage would be their preferred option, and indeed most people who are divorced openly admit they would want to get married again.

For children the security and stability of marriage are irreplaceable.

It is quite literally the foundation on which they base their lives. That is why I believe it is so important to stress marriage as the sure foundation for family life, and, beyond that, for Catholic education.

Britain has the highest divorce rate in Europe; the highest rate of one-parent families in Europe and the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe. In these circumstances Catholic educators are called to state a few simple truths.

Is it too terrible to tell the truth that marriage is the foundation of all family life and the best foundation for child-rearing?

Is it too unpolitically correct to note that homosexual unions do not provide the best start in life for children?

That divorce is painful for all involved? And that education in chastity is the best deterrent to teenage pregnancies.

Asserting marriage as the foundation of family life is in no way discriminatory, and we, as Catholic educators must be prepared to make that assertion boldly.

In recent weeks some very interesting things have happened in the sociology of the new Scotland. A kind of instinctive sense of morality has emerged which give me grounds of hope that Christian values are still strong among our fellow Scots.

In defence of the marriage-based family, Christians who are, doctrinally-speaking, poles apart, have come together in a way that no formal ecumenical initiative could have achieved.

Many Scots who could be regarded as "unchurched" have warmed once more to the basic Christian view that marriage and family are to be supported and defended.

Even elements of popular culture have, when challenged to side with a kind of values-free political correctness or traditional morality, opted for the latter.

That should encourage all of us who are concerned about the foundations of Catholic education.

There are still basic Christian foundations on which to build ...

The condition of our family lives is crucial in the year 2000. Unfortunately many of the parents of young children cannot pass on the faith because they have failed to grasp its meaning. That is not their fault. Many grew up in a period of catechetical confusion in the early 70s when religious education programmes were not all they might have been.

Despite their own problematic formation, these young people enrol their children for a Catholic education.

There is a very important apostolate waiting to be fulfilled with the parents of these young children.

Yet even with first class programmes of religious education our work is, at best, only half-complete.

My experience of the school is that material poverty coupled with only a nominal attachment to the Church - a situation which prevails in a large proportion of our families - constitute a major disincentive to realising the children's potential, their formation and faith development

A preferential option for the poor

Within our commitment to Catholic education there is a particular need therefore for special care for the poorest and most disadvantaged in our community.

That was something Saint John Bosco instinctively recognised.

Shortly after ordination he wrote: "To see so many children, from 12 to 18 years of age, all healthy, strong, intelligent, insect bitten, lacking spiritual and material food, was something that horrified me. "

Today's social problems in Scotland are not so far removed from those Don Bosco encountered in Turin 160 years ago.

Today, as yesterday, the most disadvantaged have to be encouraged. Many of our young people are handicapped by poverty, family breakdown, low personal self esteem; poor history of achievement; disciplinary problems and lack of support from parents and peers.

The Church has to stand by these families and their children.

Some of the brightest youngsters of my school days came from very poor homes. Few of them took the opportunity to follow through with their education.

Today, alas, the problem is just as acute. In addition we note the more recent phenomenon of loss of faith and decreasing religious practice among those who feel society has left them behind.

An ever-more effective catechesis

The Catholic school's challenge today is to present the faith in an appealing way to such people - a way that is relevant to life in modern society.

By an "appealing way" I mean positively, emphasising what Pope John Paul II calls "the essential mission, the distinctive vocation and the deepest identity of the Church which is to bring the good news of God's love." In a special way during the Jubilee Year that means reminding people of God's forgiveness to all.

This means that the name, the teaching, the life and the promises; the total self giving of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, need to be presented afresh as the answer to life's problems.

Presenting the faith in a way that is relevant to modern society means that we teach a thoroughly Christian anthropology: the creation of human beings in God's image; and redemption by Jesus Christ; eternal salvation; the reality and mystery of evil; the need to relate to God by prayer and communion with the Church; the application of the Gospel to life's concrete challenges; an understanding of faith and reason, duties and responsibilities, family life, peace and justice.

These are the foundations we must build upon. Foundations capable of supporting the weight of the innermost questions of humanity.

Community dimension in evangelisation

Our best efforts at catechesis are doomed to failure unless we till the communitarian soil so that the seeds planted in the minds of our youngsters have adequate space to grow.

Even the strongest seeds of faith can grow and thrive only when planted in fertile soil.

One spiritual writer, Mgr Luigi Giussani, illustrates this vividly. He sees what he calls the communitarian dimension as the necessary adjunct to reason and knowledge if we are to take a leap of faith and live a life of Christian coherence.

"The communitarian dimension does not replace freedom, personal energy or commitment. Rather it is the condition for these responses.

"If, for example, I place a seed of a beech tree on the table, it will not develop into anything, even after a thousand years.

"On the other hand, if I place the seed in the soil, then it soon becomes a tree.

"The soil is the condition needed for the seed to grow, just as the community is the environment necessary for the individual to grow." (L. Giussani, *Il Senso Religioso*)

The soil is the Christian community. But the soil has to be fertile, not stony.

There is a crying need to take a close look at the partnership of parish, family and school and not simply take it for granted.

Where it is taken for granted presumption is often the harbinger of deep frustration and disappointment. Education Sunday is a case in point.

Year after year the very real opportunity to market Catholic schools and Catholic values is lost because - to put it bluntly - too many people just don't care.

In the past Catholic education formed and protected the faith of poor, often immigrant children against institutionalised hostility, injustice and second-class citizenship.

In our present age Catholic schools nurture the faith of a people who are encountering new tyrannies:

- People who will stand up for morality when basic Christian values are rejected by society's leaders;
- People who will give God His place in an era of worship of false gods;
- People who will uphold the principles of the kingdom of God and raise their voice in protest at violence, terrorism and bigotry.
- People who will speak out with compassion on behalf of the oppressed.
- People who will be a voice of conscience in a nation prone to indifference and political correctness.
- People who will discern the reality of situations instead of allowing them to be concealed under the cloak of euphemism or seductive semantics.
- People who are careful stewards of the world's goods.

Our foundations have to be laid now to support this kind of person in the future.

They require full commitment from home, parish and school. Traditionally the link between school and parish has been warm and supportive. In Primary Schools the parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor, in the Secondaries the chaplain is a respected member of staff. But today the Church calls for much more.

Schools have to learn a new role - that of playing a vital role in the life of the parish. Parishes also need to learn to become a vital part in the life of the school.

The family-school-parish relationship has lain comparatively static here in Scotland, except, perhaps, where no Catholic school is available. There, faith formation in the family and in the parish is a necessity, a sine qua non.

Unfortunately, where Catholic primaries exist, too many families and parishes have abdicated their responsibilities and placed the task of faith formation firmly on the shoulders of teachers.

Educating children in the faith exclusively in the school weakens the church-school-family links. Youngsters can grow up without a sense of belonging to a wider Christian community, especially if their parents and they themselves are non-attenders.

The time has come to remedy this trend and return to a sharing of responsibility for formation by clergy, parish community, families and teachers.

We all know that many young parents following society trends have strayed from the Church. If you question that, ask your local parish priest how many children he has baptized prior to First Communion celebrations. And if parents have strayed you can expect the children to be going along the same path.

There is, however, a very attractive way of bringing children and parents back to Mass on Sundays and that is the Children's Liturgy. The practice of providing the liturgy of the Word suited to children. I should like to see every parish in the country developing this idea. Indeed, we would do well in each diocese to have a children's liturgy commissions to learn and share good practice.

In some parishes the clergy have already organised training programmes for parishioners willing to lead the children in the liturgy of the word. Those training programmes can be developed to include prospective catechists who will make a parish contribution to the preparation of children for first confession, confirmation and first communion.

You will have noticed that a number of dioceses are reverting to the traditional order of sacramental initiation for children, namely baptism - confirmation - eucharist, admission to communion being the final step of full membership of the Church.

This is a courageous move and as such I commend it to our primary teachers.

It goes without saying that Bishops must bear primary responsibility for organising and supporting this effort.

The role of clergy

The priests' role is outlined by Pope John Paul II. He says: "The Council has called you 'instructors in the faith'; there is no better way for you to be such instructors than by devoting your best efforts to the growth of your communities in the faith. Whether you are in charge of a parish, or serving as chaplain to schools and universities, or have responsibility for pastoral activity at any level, especially youth work, the Church expects you to neglect nothing in establishing a well-organised and well-orientated catechetical effort." (cf *Cat Tradendae*)

The role of parish communities

With regard to the role of the parish community here is the Pope's exhortation: "I wish to stress ... that the parish community must continue to be the prime mover and the pre-eminent place for catechesis. Whatever we may think of parish structures, realism and wisdom demand that we continue along the path, aiming to restore to the parish, as needed, more adequate structures and, above all, a new impetus through the increasing integration within it of qualified, responsible and generous members..."

"Without monopolising or enforcing uniformity, the parish remains the pre-eminent place for catechesis. It must rediscover its vocation which is to be a welcoming family home, where those who have been baptised and confirmed become aware of forming the people of God."

The role of the family

As for the family itself, the Pope has these words of encouragement: "The family's catechetical activity is, in a sense, irreplaceable. Education in the faith by parents should begin from the children's tenderest years."

"In its life it will celebrate the reception of baptism and confirmation and feasts of the liturgy. But that is not enough. Christian parents must strive to follow and repeat, within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching received elsewhere."

Building on the foundations of home-school-parish must be regarded as a priority which is now urgent. This will mean finding personnel and resources in each parish or group of parishes and embarking on the process of training catechists.

The Catholic school, primary and secondary, has contributed considerably to the present strength and cohesion of the Church in Scotland. But this is a time for examination of conscience for all of us.

Today, I remember the kind of people my teachers were more than I recall what they taught me.

There is a great responsibility on the Church and on her Education Commission to offer greater support to all of our Catholic teachers.

It comes first in every revised programme for the future but never seems to be realised.

Teachers of religion take the risk of developing faith and imparting important knowledge only to have it nullified by what the children are exposed to during the rest of the day.

We need to help them to be touched by God. By that I mean, they need to have from us the elements of how to pray and how to reflect on God's word. They have to be familiar with the life and teaching of Jesus Christ; to see Him as a real person, still alive, still supporting, still listening.

The children also need good role models. Role models like the saints of today

In recent years the Pope has created a vast array of new saints and beati - saints of our times. Saints who drove cars, who watched TV, who worked in ordinary jobs and lived out their family commitments in a heroic way.

I'm inspired when I read about Saints like Joseph Moscato, the doctor from Naples who died in 1927. The poor were his favourite patients and he never accepted payment from them. He was a brilliant medical student who was also a totally committed Christian. He wrote: "Love the truth; show yourself to be what you are without embarrassment, without fear, without paying too much attention to what they might say about you."

His day was full of appointments at the university where he taught, surgeries and visits to patients, but it started with a meditation before breakfast and early morning Mass at the Gesu Church in the centre of Naples.

I'm inspired by the story of Josephine Bakhita, the slave girl from the Sudan who was subjected to all sorts of humiliations and tortures before escaping captivity to travel to Italy in the last century and becoming a Canossian Sister. She will be canonised very soon.

I'm inspired by the young Spanish girl Montserrat Grases, who died in March 1959 at the age of just 18. Born into a normal family, a perfectly normal popular girl who lived her faith simply and naturally. When she was told in June 1958 that she was suffering from cancer she reacted naturally and supernaturally, quickly accepting death and offering up her sufferings for the Church. Her story is as inspiring as it is heartbreaking. Her cause of canonisation is also well advanced.

Some of the young martyrs of the Spanish Civil War, very many of whom are now being beatified and canonised, whose conduct in their final hours and minutes of their lives made such an impression on their captors that the firing squad found themselves unable to carry out the death sentence.

I pick those four examples at random to give you a flavour of the kind of heroes of Christian life that are out there, and that we would do well to find out about and tell the children about.

We need to give them role models who are capable of inspiring them. People of our own time, of their own age and similar background who lived the Christian life to a heroic degree, who were happy to make Jesus the centre of their lives. People like Frederic Ozanam, Contardo Ferrini, Margaret Sinclair. Today's martyrs, like St Maximilian Kolbe.

New Beginnings

We live in an age of new challenges and new opportunities.

Our Catholic schools are rightly prized. Of course we are citizens who contribute to the upkeep of our schools and as such they are not a privilege. Nevertheless, we have to realise that in many other countries the Catholic school system is not so well organised and supported as it is here.

Looking to the future we see many signs of hope.

Soon in Glasgow we will have 11 new secondary schools - five of them Catholic secondaries. All other secondaries in the city will undergo major refurbishment so as to equip them for the decades ahead.

We have to respond to such bold, innovative thinking and planning, as Catholic educators, by ensuring our teachers have the best possible foundations professionally and spiritually to match the opportunities offered by the new facilities I have just mentioned.

That is why the new foundation that is born out of the merger between Glasgow University and St Andrew's College is so important.

In many ways it is the foundation of other foundations. If we do not get our teacher training right how will we succeed in teaching future generations of children the faith?

That is why it is so vital that the merger works out well, guaranteeing the continued supply of teachers for our Catholic schools, while at the same time strengthening the quality of training and formation given.

Catholic Identity

Several years ago, Pope John Paul wrote a letter about Catholic institutions of further education. It was entitled "Ex Corde Ecclesiae" - from the Heart of the Church. That is a very significant title as it shows the foundational importance of Catholic higher education.

On May 22, 1994, a joint document of the Congregation for Catholic Education and the Pontifical Councils for the Laity and for Culture, stated that the Catholic institution achieves its purpose when: "...it gives proof of being rigorously serious as a member of the international community of knowledge and expresses its Catholic identity through an explicit link with the Church, at both local and universal levels -- an identity which marks concretely the life, the services and the programs of the university community.

In this way, by its very existence, the institution achieves its aim of guaranteeing, in institutional form, a Christian presence in the university world..."

Catholic identity lies at the heart of Ex corde Ecclesiae.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II, in an address to the Catholic academic community at The Catholic University of America, stressed the importance of the Catholic character of Catholic institutions of higher learning:

He said: "Every university or college is qualified by a specified mode of being. Yours is the qualification of being Catholic, of affirming God, his revelation and the Catholic Church as the guardian and interpreter of that revelation. The term 'Catholic' will never be a mere label either added or dropped according to the pressures of varying factors.

Ex corde Ecclesiae highlights four distinctive characteristics that are essential for Catholic identity:

- Christian inspiration in individuals and the university community;
- Reflection and research on human knowledge in the light of the Catholic faith;
- Fidelity to the Christian message in conformity with the Magisterium of the Church;
- Institutional commitment to the service of others.

These principles should serve as sure foundations for the work of our new Board of Catholic Education. They provide a sure base on which to build the future of Catholic schooling in our country and serve almost as a mission statement for our new merged institution

I see the move to teacher training at the University as a very significant and positive decision. This St Andrew's community needs our support. It must not be allowed to exist on the fringes of the Catholic community, but right in its heart, not in terms of physical location, but in terms of influence.

Earlier I referred to the Church as Mater et Magistra - Mother and Teacher. I see these words as a perfect description of St Andrew's and all it is called to be.

It should be the first place teachers turn to for support, updating and pastoral encouragement. It is to be the model of a Catholic institution of learning. It has to be seen to be involved all over the country as the public face of Catholic education.

St Andrew's College, as part of the University of Glasgow, will be determined to engage in research in general and in research into Catholic education in particular.

In doing so it will be carrying on a very venerable tradition. Down through the centuries the Church has an unsurpassed record in its commitment to education. There is no need for any inferiority complex.

However, to be more pragmatic, what does worry me is the absence of any kind of systematic updating of our secondary teachers on the moral issues of the day.

Who supports the Catholic teacher of modern studies by providing up-to-date findings on issues like population growth? Who helps the biology teacher with the Church's insights into bioethics? Who keeps the religious education teacher updated on the latest encyclicals, the findings of synods or the latest pastoral insights?

For me, this is an area of support which requires urgent attention.

Headteachers too deserve particular attention. Like priests they are leaders in the faith of the school and animators of that faith.

Catholic heads have something special expected of them and something special to offer their communities. In the school, the head teacher is the chief catechist; the leader in Christian spirituality, moulding the pupils and supporting the staff.

I have done nothing

I started with Don Bosco and I end with him too. St John Bosco invented a System of Education with its foundations built in the home, the school, the Church and social interaction.

After one hundred years Don Bosco has still a message for us all. One of his biographers composed the following words for his spiritual master:

"I was a person like you. I tried to give meaning to my life. With God's help I decided against having my own family to become a father, a brother and a friend to those who do not have a father, brothers or friends.

"If you want to be like me we will walk together sharing our life with people deprived of affection, of meaning in life, poor people who need God and you to go on living.

"In any case, if you do not feel like living as I did, I still want to remind you of a very important truth: life, this great gift which comes from God, is to be spent well. You will spend it well if you do not hide egoistically in your shell but open yourself to love, committing yourself to the good of the one who is poorer than you. "

That is a message that contains sure foundations for Catholic Education.

I gave this address the title of "Foundations". Its subtitle might well be: Walk tall; Think Big.

We are at a period of new beginnings. The contribution to Catholic education of the Catholic community can be improved.

I said it is our first priority as Church. We should ask ourselves what we must do to improve the service we offer and how to achieve that goal.

How much money, time, talent and enthusiasm are we prepared to spend on the Catholic Education of our children?

These are the big questions we ask today and which will be answered, I hope, in the weeks, months and years ahead as the Catholic community prepares to respond to the challenges of the 21st century.