

JEA and JACSA EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2019

Thursday, 11th July 2019

Conference Dinner, Adelaide Oval



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Diocese of Port Pirie

Dear leaders in Jesuit and Ignatian schools

It happened that there was a dispute amongst the disciples, so Jesus took a little child and placed it in their midst, and held him in His arms, and said “of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

I am talking tonight to a group of people who have had the privilege of having had a child placed in their midst. Every teacher, every person associated with a school, in staff or administration or on a council, have had a child placed in their midst, a dignity and responsibility beyond most experiences. I congratulate you on your willingness to accept the reality of your situation.

Pope Francis has said numbers of things on the teaching vocation, the educational apostolate. He speaks of teaching as an attitude, a way of life, a form of love.

There are some quotations I wish to put before you, the first from Pope Francis:

When it comes to learning about a subject a computer is sufficient, but to understand how to love, to understand what the values and habits are that create harmony in the world, you need a good teacher....

Young people expect a teacher to be a guide, a compass, an answer as well as someone who asks them good questions....

(Italian Association of Catholic School Teachers, 16.3.2015)

The second quotation is the very well-known one from Pope Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which Pope Francis refers to as his favourite encyclical from Pope Paul.

Young people will listen to witnesses before teachers, and to teachers only if they are witnesses.

The third is also from Paul VI:

When in the Church even in the most difficult and extreme fields of the crossroads of ideologies, in the social trenches, there has been and there is confrontations between the burning exigencies of the man and the perennial message of the Gospel, there also have been, and there are, Jesuits (GC32, 3.12.74).

Pope Benedict quoted these words on 21 February 2008 in his address to the 35th General Congregation and referred to them as words “which remain engraved on your hearts.”

Then there is also Pope Francis again:

Jesus began to preach the Good News in the Galilee of the Gentiles, the crossroads for people of different races, cultures and religions. In some ways the context is similar to today’s world... We need to bring together the Catholic identity to meet the different “souls existing in a multicultural society”.

There are phrases from those quotations that hang in the air:

- values and habits.
- A teacher’s lived example
- The social trenches, the crossroads of ideologies
- A Galilee of the Gentiles
- The different souls existing in a multicultural society.

Into this world we now take out of our treasury things old and new. We are legatees as Jesuit and Ignatian teachers of one of the richest educational traditions in the Church. That is fact. It is a tradition that we hand on, that we are charged to hand on properly.

On his way back from Romania recently Pope Francis quoted Gustav Mahler, a fifth quotation, saying that tradition is the guarantee of the future, and “not the custodian of ashes.” We strive to hand on a tradition, and it is up to you leaders and colleagues to ensure that what we try to do is not a killing nostalgia, ashes, but rather, as the Pope said, “the sap from the roots that makes the tree grow, blossom and bear fruit.”

Every Catholic school has two wings which make it fly, justice and mission. And every Catholic school has a story to tell, the story of Jesus.

In a way there is only one teacher in a Catholic school, and His name is Christ Jesus. Everything, every action or style of conduct, or position adopted, must refer to Him for its authenticity, and especially in a Catholic school under the aegis of the Order, the Society of Jesus, that carries His name and everywhere displays that name in the IHS.

The two wings of justice and mission. Justice is what and how we do things: Mission is why we do them. Justice refers to how each child, each member of staff, is treated, that out of respect for the dignity and destiny of the child, with his or her future role in life, the strongest of efforts is made to provide an education that is most worthwhile, most human. If we produce graduates who are not disturbed by the signs of injustice around them, and who see the needy and the oppressed as nuisances rather than as challenges to their moral obligations, then how we talk in our schools and what we put before our students must be radically reassessed.

Justice and our sense of mission should characterise our schools. The education we offer should feature education for choice and education for depth, as discernment and reflection are key components of the Ignatian charism. In a world where choices and availability can overwhelm a young person, the art of discernment, the gift of making a right choice according to the prompting of the Spirit is crucial, and if we are to have wisdom there must be education for depth, the looking at the magis, the deeper and the more. Reflection upon experience, and relishing and savouring the greater, the more generous should be features of our schooling. Our teachers in Jesuit and Ignatian schools should be teachers of silence and teachers of the imagination. “Be still and know that I am God”. In the crossroad of ideologies and the multiverse of voices assailing our young people, the ability to come home to oneself, to listen to one’s heart, is a goal of high significance for Jesuit and Ignatian schools. Ignatius makes great use of the imagination in the Exercises. Applied in our daily life it is the source of art and wonder. Our Peter Steele SJ once wrote that literature is the engagement with the imagination of another. The imagination rescues us from the common place. It was imagination that took those early Jesuits to the Reductions of Paraguay, to the extraordinary missions in China and Japan, the adaptations of Matteo Ricci and Robert De Nobili, the North American Jesuits, the work of the early Fathers in astronomy, geometry, cartography and music. Imagination fires the thirst to find God.

The challenge of running an organisation can sometimes so preoccupy us that we forget or lose our focus on why we are running that business. In reading the annual reports of the various works of mercy conducted by the Church, works that were formerly conducted by religious orders, it is

noticeable that these works are very good at telling us what they are doing, but rarely why. The Sisters have been replaced by men in suits, and the annual reports show an observable change in profile. One needs to read closely to find out why some of these works are doing what they are doing. The answer may be well-known to the leaders (Matthew 25) but it is not featuring in the profiles. The schools are making an outstanding effort to maintain and further the charism of their founders, but advertisements will not infrequently reveal nothing of the purpose and identity of the institution as a Catholic school. The effort schools make to induct staff into the spirituality of the founders of the school is admirable, but it must be borne in mind that a staff reflects the wider society with its religious diversity, and its religious non-adherence. We are in the Galilee of the Gentiles, and an ordinary staff will reflect the crossroads in ideologies, as Paul VI termed it. So effective formation programmes in the charism of our schools must be aimed particularly at the movers and shakers and the atmosphere-makers in the staff if the formative ethos of the school is to be maintained and furthered. There can be a temptation in the staff to leave the spirituality side to others, to focus on their own professional responsibilities and see the spiritual dimension as someone else's duty. It is still good seed. Jesus said that the seed that fell in good soil produced a harvest of one hundred, sixty, fifty. Not everybody can respond at the level of the one hundred, but to the degree that they do it is good seed sprouting for the Kingdom.

We must also be firm in our thinking that we exercise our mission in the context of the Church. Jesuit schools must not regard themselves as an *imperium in imperio*. We can sometimes give the impression of disdain as regards others, acting effectively as if we have nothing to learn from them, that we are the repository of all the answers. Jesuit schools can find themselves seduced into complacency and self-congratulation. The moments of our success can mask the moments of weakness. We must remember the frog in the water, not noticing that its environment was changing.

There is a form of the Examen, that very Ignatian exercise, that can be adapted for a school and undertaken collectively by everyone – administrators and leaders, members of council, all staff. A stocktake of the following questions can be a helpful antidote to drift. Ignatius would have us undertake the exercises twice a day. The following exercise could be adapted for an institution and undertaken by a staff or council once a semester, twice a year. The questions are:

- Why was this school founded?
- Secondly, how has it adapted that purpose for today?
- What self-vision are we communicating to our students (how do we want them to see themselves?)
- Are our children safe?
- What might unravel us?

- What voices are missing in our conversation?
- For what now in our ministry do we praise God?

For us Ignatian spirituality as expressed through the Spiritual Exercises is fundamental to our meaning. God is there to be found in all aspects of creation, if we look and listen. The dynamic insight of the Spiritual Exercises is that God speaks to us directly and individually. Do we convey this to our students? This idea of a personal calling by God that enlivens any individual helps give our students a vision of their uniqueness, that they have a thumb print that nobody else has, and there is a purpose for them in the world for which God placed them. Life is vocation, not a pastime. And is lived out in the context of the community of humanity.

Ignatius founded his first schools in an era of intellectual and cultural ferment. It was the Renaissance. Being more of a Medievalist himself he could have rejected these new overtures, but he embraced them. The classics had been rediscovered. Some of the early Jesuits thought they were inappropriate for school boys. Ignatius disagreed. The schools were a volte-face for Ignatius. He founded the first one in Messina in 1548, almost as an experiment, and sent to it some of the brightest of his early Jesuits. Against significant opposition within the Society, Ignatius embraced the model of the school as a form of ministry, and by the time he died, eight years after the first school, he had commissioned forty more, and thirty-five were up and going, at a time when there was simply one thousand Jesuits, the majority of them in formation.

The opposition continued. The schools were seen as a bottomless pit absorbing too many men, but the leaders of the early Society maintained their conviction in the worthwhileness of this new apostolate. In 1586, thirty years after the death of Ignatius, six Jesuits of different nationalities were called together to compile the *Ratio Studiorum*, the code of Jesuit studies, the outline of how every Jesuit school was to be conducted, in process and in curriculum. Jesuits schools had become the first major international network of schools in the story of the Church. This committee met several times over the decades and produced different editions of the *Ratio*, examining and adopting the best teaching techniques of the day. The overall structure of the *Ratio Studiorum* reflected the spirituality of Ignatius, that God deals directly with the individual, and there is the presence of God in all things and nothing is beyond the realm of God in study and commitment. As the Jesuit poet Gerard Manly Hopkins wrote, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God”.

There are key aspects of the Spiritual Exercises reflected in that prime document of 1586, the *Ratio Studiorum*. There is the insistence on reflection and repetition, in order to gain the inner meaning, the notion of *sentir*, the relishing, the pausing to find fruit, the affective as a means to ensuring the

effective; the use of the imagination; the motive of generosity and search towards the greater, the magis, the deep, the art of communication, of *eloquentia* as a goal.

In 1552 Ignatius wrote through his secretary to the Jesuits of Portugal giving the reasons why colleges should be founded:

Our present students will in time assume various roles, some in the religious life, some in the government of the land and in the administration of justice, others in responsible occupations. For the children of today become the adults of tomorrow, so their good formation in life and learning will benefit many others, with the good results of that spreading more widely every day, to the greater glory and service of God our Lord.

That paragraph contains perennial points for us. Jesuit education is unashamedly about formation.

“... their good formation...in life and learning...benefitting many others.”

Ignatius was not content with talking about values. He wanted virtues. A value is an ideal to which we aspire, like compassion, kindness, justice. Ignatius wanted students graduating at a level deeper than that, he wanted them graduating with virtues, a value lived in practice. So that rather than having students who aspire to compassion, service and justice he wanted to see our schools produce students who were compassionate, students who were generous, students who act justly, students who were living in action what the ideals were. This is reflected in the school motto of the very first Jesuit school in Australia, St Aloysius College at Sevenhill, founded in 1856. The motto was *Virtus et Doctrina*, Knowledge and Virtue. Knowledge itself does not lead to virtue, as the twentieth century has clearly shown. Virtue without knowledge is mindless, and therefore does not reflect the grandeur of God.

There are a number of adages that have summarised my understanding of what should be our way of proceeding as Jesuit and Ignatian schools, which summarised to my mind key elements in our tradition.

The first is an adaptation of the Spiritual Exercises. It is the opening line of the Spiritual Exercises, and I believe completely summarises the ideals and goals of Jesuit education. “We were born to

praise, reverence and serve God our Lord and by this means to save our souls. Our students are to be praise, exulting in their talents as they develop them, seen all as gift. The world is the theatre of God's presence to be treated with reverence, the place where we search for His presence in all things, and we are to revere the sacred in all our sisters and brothers. As Christians we are born to serve, to work for our neighbour.

The second adage is from Leonardo De Vinci, "The artist is always painting himself". Ignatius put it far less poetically when he said the interior flows to the exterior. That is why our attitude toward education is a formative one and we wish to focus on inner formation.

The third adage is that "the heart of education is the education of the heart". For Ignatius in the Exercises the affective is a key area of focus, as we seek to discern what desires are good and which are disordered.

The fourth adage is, "No school can rise above its common room". Jesuit and Ignatian education is a collective exercise, and commitment of a community dedicated to the service of the young for their better growth in life and learning to benefit many others.

And finally, with thanks for the honour in having been invited to address you, there is the statement of one of the great early Jesuit school masters, Juan de Bonifacio who became a Jesuit in 1557 in Spain and worked all his active apostolic life in the schools. He once wrote *institutio puerilis renovatio mundi*, the education of the youth is the renewal of the world. You are called to the dignity of that same work.

Thank you.