**The Future of Denominational Education**

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**Introduction**

I am very grateful to David Quinn and the Iona Institute for the kind invitation to speak to you this evening on the future of denominational education. I am also grateful to Dr Ken Fennelly for accepting to respond to my paper and to Dr Martin Mansergh for honouring us by chairing this event.

I prefer to use the term "faith-based education", instead of "denominational education", and understandably, I am going to be speaking from the context of my own faith community, trusting that Dr Fennelly will complement my remarks from the perspective of the Church of Ireland.

In order to consider the future of faith-based education in Ireland, I want to begin by looking back over the past fifty years of magisterial teaching on Catholic Education. I do this for two reasons. The first is that in a fortnight it will be exactly fifty years since the promulgation of Vatican II's declaration on education, *Gravissimum educationis* (1965, hereafter, *GE*). It is therefore appropriate to honour this important anniversary. However, secondly, and more importantly, some of the issues that we face in terms of faith-based education in Ireland today were under discussion at Vatican II, as they were already live issues in many parts of the universal Church at the time of the Council. For instance, one of the issues the Council Fathers were grappling with was how to balance demand for recognition of education as a fundamental human right, a right to be acknowledged and vindicated by the state, with the demand, on the other hand, for Catholic educational institutions to exist and function free of all state interference, and this while at the same time benefitting from public financial support (Velati 2006, 204ff). So the teaching of the Council, and its development over the past half century, can serve as a reference point for mapping out the future of faith-based education here.

I propose firstly to present a brief summary the principal pointers *GE* continues to provide for positioning faith-based education today.

In the second part of the paper, I will consider what I see as a subtle but very serious underlying threat to faith-based education, a threat that, in fact, endangers not only faith-based education but education itself.

The reality, in my view, is that public education policy is now so hidebound to service of the labour market, and so infused with what Pope Benedict XVI called a "reductionist and curtailed vision of humanity" (Pope Benedict XVI), that it must be asked if it is at all compatible with the Christian vision of the human person, a vision that seeks to stress the inherent dignity of all human beings, and their right to an education which prioritises their flourishing as human beings and not merely their

economic worth or potential. I ask this knowing full well, and it is important to acknowledge this, that we have extraordinarily dedicated teachers and educational managers working within the education system who do their utmost to bring their Christian faith to bear upon their daily work and who see their work as educators as a vocation. At the same time, I believe many of them, perhaps many of you, would acknowledge the challenges this presents.

I will want to argue here that we desperately need the Christian vision of the human person at the heart of our educational system to prevent education as a whole collapsing into mere instrumental reasoning and a utilitarian and self-serving competitiveness that is essentially anti-human.

It is important to acknowledge, of course, that faith-based education has always had to struggle to be true to itself, as we know from reading, for example, the writings of John Henry Newman and understanding the context in which he wrote. There never has been a golden age for faith-based education. So that conversation will constitute the second part of my presentation.

In the third part of the paper I will examine some of the specific challenges we currently face as faith-based educators in Ireland, and then to suggest how we should respond. These issues are already familiar to us and were listed in the flyer for this event: freedom to operate faith-based schools in accordance with their ethos or characteristic spirit; freedom to teach on sexuality and relationships in accordance with the Christian understanding of marriage and the family, enrolment policies; divestment issues, and so on.

I will touch on these towards the end, and because they are so topical they may also take up much of our discussion time.

So there are three main parts to the paper:
1. **what we can learn from Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teaching on education;**
2. **the fundamental challenge that a reductionist and merely functional understanding of education presents to faith-based education;**
3. **brief reflections on the current concrete challenges to faith-based education.**

Some suggestions in regard to how we should respond to these challenges will serve as concluding remarks.


**1. What can we learn from Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teaching on education?**

*The responsibility of local churches*
First of all, we learn that variations in and complexities in regard to the Church-State relationship across the universal Church meant that **the Council could not be overly**

**prescriptive in regard to education.** As we learn from the *Preface* to *GE*, it opted instead for the establishment of a "special post-conciliar commission", which, along with episcopal conferences, would be responsible for adapting the general principles articulated in *GE* to local circumstances. This means that the Council put a specific onus and responsibility on bishops' conferences to oversee and safeguard Catholic education within their jurisdictions.

Gravissimum educationis: *a few key points*
*GE* is not a lengthy document, so a brief summary here will suffice. It begins by locating Christian education within the context of the Church's mission to evangelise all peoples. To Christian faith nothing human is alien, hence the Church's interest in and commitment to every field of knowledge and study that contributes to human flourishing. It defends education as a basic human right for all, essential to human dignity (n 1). It also **defends the right to a Christian education** for Christians as foundational for growth in faith, the provision of which is considered **"a grave obligation" for pastors (n 2) and for parents (n 3).**

A genuine education, according to the Council, prepares people **both for their service to society, and for their final destiny of life with God** (see Bruguès 2013, 529).

The Church plays a supportive role to **parents who are the primary educators** and whose **homes are the "principal schools" of both civic duty and Christian virtue (n 3). The Church's educational role is twofold: its goal in regard to Christians is to ensure that their whole lives "are inspired by the spirit of Christ" (n 3), and this is mostly achieved through adequate catechetical instruction (n 4)**. At the same time, through the richness of its tradition, it contributes to the "development of a world worthy of humanity" (n 3). In this, it **partners with civil society**, which is also required to support parents in educating their children (n 3).

Given that initially the Catholic school was the primary focus of the Council's deliberations, understandably, *GE* deals with this in some detail (nn 4 - 9). **"(A) spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel" (n 8) should animate the entire school. All knowledge communicated should be illumined by faith. Teachers are reminded that "it depends chiefly on them whether the catholic school achieves its purpose" (n 8), and that both by their lives and their teaching they are called to be witnesses "to the teacher, who is Christ".**

According to McKinney (2011, 150), one of the most important themes stated here was **the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ in Catholic education**, and we find this, along with an emphasis on **the teacher as witness**, amplified in a key document on Catholic schools issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education (hereafter CCE) in 1977, to which we will refer below. The CCE's school office later assumed the responsibility for the special commission called for in the *Preface* to *GE* (CCE 2014, n 1).

The final few paragraphs of *GE* contain the Council's consideration of higher education; we wont deal with this here.

*Vatican II: an enduring compass for Catholic education*
It is widely acknowledged that *GE* received insufficient attention from the Council Fathers.  Thus, in its *Instrumentum laboris* marking fifty years of *GE,* the Congregation for Catholic Education (2014, n 1) suggests that *GE* should be read alongside other conciliar texts and in particular specifies a reading of the two main Constitutions, *Lumen gentium* (1964), and *Gaudium et spes* (1965) as necessary for a comprehensive appreciation of the Council's treatment of education.

Bruguès (2013, 526) identifies six key themes of Vatican II that offer Catholic education a sense of direction:
*   **enthusiasm for the Word of God (especially found in *Dei Verbum*);**
*   **dialogue with the other religions;**
*   **a warmer ecumenical climate;**
*   **greater appreciation of the role of the laity;**
*   **a "critical benevolence" towards the contemporary world (especially in *Gaudium et spes*);**
*   **and finally, an emphasis on greater communion within the Church and enhanced collegiality among its pastors** (Bruguès 2013, 525).

Taken together, these themes provide an enduring compass in regard to how Catholic educational institutions, in fidelity to the Council, can position themselves in a changing cultural context.

Along similar lines, Chambers (2012, 187) says that the Council provided three hallmarks of Catholicity to be taken seriously by Catholic schools:
*   **the global church;**
*   **ecumenism;**
*   **and the relationship with non-Christian religions.**

In particular, he argues, **these equip Catholics schools well, from within their own tradition, to deal with increasing pluralism and diversity.** More generally, he suggests, the very concept of *aggiornamento*, the *Leitmotif* of Vatican II, is a legacy of the Council to Catholic schools, disposing them always to seek "the best way to express their Catholicity in a changing educational environment" (2012, 186).

*The Catholic School (1977)* and Ex corde ecclesiae *(1990)*
There are too many post-conciliar documents on education for us to consider here. However, two in particular merit brief consideration. Taking up the task entrusted to it by *GE*, the CCE issued *The Catholic School* in 1977 (hereafter CCE 1977). First, in a catholic school there should be **"constant reference to the Gospel and frequent encounter with Christ"** (CCE 1977, nn 55, 66). Second, the catholic school should be **a privileged place of encounter between faith and culture, and faith and life** (n 37). Third, secular subjects, if taught as genuine searches for the truth, **will eventually**

**open students up to Truth itself** (n 41). McKinney (2011, 153) stresses that the role of the **teacher is vital** in helping pupils to see beyond the truth to the Truth.

The Apostolic Constitution, *Ex corde ecclesiae* (1990), called all institutes of higher learning, whether religious or secular, to be places of genuine dialogue between faith and culture in the service of society. In regard to Catholic universities, Pope John Paul II states in the introduction:

> A Catholic university's privileged task is 'to unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth'.

The tone and content of the Constitution reflect concern that many of the accommodations made and compromises reached with contemporary culture by Catholic higher education institutions in the period following Vatican II, particularly in the West, have called authentic Catholic identity and distinctiveness in to question, and it sets out norms to address this. These concerns persist, and if anything, have grown in the intervening years, as the secular educational landscape becomes increasingly unreceptive to the Christian vision of education. Regrettably, Ireland is no exception to this and we will now attempt to map this emerging landscape.

## 2. The fundamental challenge of a reductionist and instrumental approach to education.

*Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI on education*
Pope Francis has called repeatedly upon educators to see their role as a vocation, and not just as a profession, and has spoken of the need to give young people a profound sense of hope (*Address*, June 7 2013). He has criticised the way in which education can be used in poorer countries to tranquilise people (*EG* 60). He has also called for a robust education that would develop critical thinking so that people would be able to engage in moral discernment (*EG* 64). Efforts at education often fail because we are not attentive enough to the real needs of young people (*EG* 105).

Most recently, he dedicated virtually the entire final chapter of *Laudato Si'* to the topic of education, and here he seems well aware of the clash between the Christian understanding of education and that which stems from and infuses a technological attitude to reality, by which is meant the view that all of life, including human life, is manipulable in accordance with our own desires. He writes:

> There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm (LS nn 111, 202)

His predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, also spoke on education many times and his critique is also important for our reflections.

*An educational 'emergency'*

Pope Benedict XVI used the expression 'educational emergency' in an address in 2007. By it, he meant that we live in an era in which there is a fundamental difficulty "in transmitting the basic values of life and correct behavior" to new generations, causing a crisis that affects, in his view, all educational institutions, whether ecclesial or secular. The then pontiff saw this emergency as an inevitable consequence of the creed of relativism, which eclipses the light of truth while, paradoxically, exercising a form of authoritarianism and dogmatism of its own.

Speaking to young university professors during World Youth Day in 2011, Pope Benedict asked how young people might be helped to encounter truth in a society increasingly confused and unstable. Traditionally, he said, the university, (we can include also, the school), was understood to be "the 'house' where one seeks the truth proper to the human person", and this was why the Church invested so heavily in education and promoted learning in all its authentic forms. However, he added that today a utilitarian approach to education seems to be commonplace. When "mere utility and pragmatism" prevail in education it results in a "reductionist and curtailed vision of humanity".

*Instrumental reasoning eclipsing educational goals*

Taking up Pope Benedict XVI's observations, the Congregation for Catholic Education (*CCE* 2014, 1e) criticises the European Union and World Bank for their "merely functional" understanding of education, one that fosters instrumental reasoning and competitiveness, and seeks to reduce education to the service of the labour market. It notes with regret that educational ministries readily adapt their policies to the demands of such bodies, meaning that "a multiplicity of skills that enrich the human person such as creativity, imagination, the ability to take on responsibilities, to love the world, to cherish justice and compassion" are no longer core educational goals.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams believes that Western democracies have shifted from being 'nation states' to 'market states', so much so that even the provision of state-funded lunch programmes in schools is defended on the basis of "increasing students' performance and thus enhancing the country's position in the global economy vis-á-vis the Japanese" (Williams 2012, 42).

McKinney and Sullivan (2013 loc 5044) identify several features of the contemporary mindset that, as they put it, "sit uneasily (at best) with Catholic principles". These are:
- **We have nothing to learn from the past;**
- **individual self-fulfillment is of supreme importance;**
- **there are no absolute truths or values;**
- **nobody has the right to tell anyone else what to do;**
- **humanity is at the centre of the universe;**
- **the human mind is the measure of all truth;**
- **no one can believe what s/he cannot fully understand;**
- **education will make us all better people;**

- **if something is pleasurable it must be good; so long as we do not hurt anybody, we are not doing wrong;**
- **people seem to get along quite well without God.**

This tension between Catholic principles and the contemporary mindset explains why Dennis O'Brien says that "there is a fundamental clash between Catholic faith and the modern university" (2002, 5). The clash, as Alasdair MacIntyre reminds us, is not (just) because God and faith are eclipsed, but because the operative education model is no longer primarily at the service of human dignity and flourishing.

Taken together, these observations provide worrying evidence of a growing gap between the vision of education put forward by Vatican II, and the reality in schools and colleges on the ground.

In regard to Catholic schools, McKinney and Sullivan (2013, loc 5052) have raised another concern. They caution that we "need to monitor the kinds of success they (the schools) seem to be advocating as worthwhile, the types of futures they hold in view for students." Are such futures sufficiently anchored in an understanding of knowledge in the service of love, and of humanity's ultimate destiny?

Both of these shortcomings affect those who nonetheless "get through" the system, and may have opportunities to flourish later. But, in the Irish context at least, there are many who don't, despite heavy investment in various educational initiatives and policies. According to the Central Statistics Office, illiteracy levels in Ireland were the same in 2012 as they were in 1994. Transfer from secondary to tertiary education is still determined largely by environmental and socio-economic factors (Callanan *et al*, 2014). Walsh *et al* (2013) have tracked the lengths that schools try to go to overcome inequality of educational opportunity, often with very limited results.

*The explosion of managerialism*
The educational crisis also manifests itself in the spread of managerialism in education. According to McKinney and Sullivan (2013, loc 5094 - 5343), "managerialism can sacrifice beauty for the idolatry of the final, and only, goal of measurable efficiency". Managerialism is operative, when there is an unhealthy emphasis on testing, measurement of progress, and audit trails, to the detriment of support for individual growth and the broader social goods of education. The result is intended to be greater accountability and transparency, but this isn't always the outcome. Instead, managerialism regrettably sometimes leads to greater emphasis on compliance and conformity, and contributes to a culture of mistrust.

The willingness to be vulnerable, to take risks and to be open, dispositions integral to creative learning, are not served well if more attention is given to procedures than to principles, and loving relationships are sacrificed to centrally prescribed norms.

John Walshe's account of his time as special adviser to the then Minister of Education, Ruairi Quinn, unwittingly details the root causes of the 'educational

emergency' in the Irish context (Walsh 2014). The book self-describes, accurately, as getting "to the heart of the mix of idealism, egotism and pragmatism that drives those who govern" (back cover). The only potentially redeemable quality listed here is idealism, and what little there is, as the book shows, is swiftly sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. The details Walsh provides regarding how membership of advisory boards and so-called expert panels is manipulated, and their findings spun, with the willing collusion of some media elements, is just one example of "the political totalitarianism which easily arises when one eliminates any higher reference than the mere calculus of power" (Pope Benedict 2011).

Walsh's book also provides clear evidence of what Peter Berger describes as an elite secularist subculture at work, in the Irish context. Once a strong proponent of secularisation theory, that is, the view that the more modern a society becomes, the more generally secularized it becomes, Berger now believes that "a purely secular view of reality has its principal social location in an elite subculture." While thinner on the ground than generally believed, secularists can nonetheless become "very influential as they control the institutions that provide the 'official' definition of reality, notably the educational system, the media of mass communication and the higher reaches of the legal system" (Berger 1999, 10 -11).

*Internal secularisation of Catholic schools and colleges*
Given what we have seen of the contemporary educational landscape, one would not expect, or wish for, a comfortable *modus vivendi* between Catholic educational institutions, and the prevailing culture, especially in the West.

The CCE (2014, III) says Catholic education today is an "unglamorous mission" and schools "should not yield to (the) technocratic and economic rationale, even if they are exposed to outside forces as well as market attempts to use them instrumentally, even more so in the case of Catholic schools".

The CCE document urges students to be educated to exercise their freedom of conscience and to take conscientious stances. For this to happen, however, Catholic educational institutions need to challenge the prevailing culture and to avoid being "prone to being seduced by fashionability or what can become an easier sell." CCE (2014) cites *Ex corde ecclesiae* (n 32):

> If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.

It has become fashionable to seek to justify the continuance of state-funded faith-based schools and colleges on the basis that they enhance diversity of provision in a pluralist society. But in order genuinely to enhance diversity, they need to act differently from their secular counterparts. And in order to do so as Catholic institutions, they need to show leadership in articulating uncomfortable truths in regard to the prevailing educational policy. This presents leaders of Catholic schools and colleges with an unenviable challenge: how to render both unto God and to Caesar (Mk. 12: 17).

A telling question to ask is: if it became a crime to operate a Catholic college or school, on what basis would a conviction be secured, or, similarly, if a catholic educational institution was obliged to stop expending resources specifically linked to promotion of its identity or ethos, how much money would, in fact, be saved?

Rowan Williams helps us to understand why an instrumental rationality is inherently secularist, and therefore why it represents a particularly serious threat to Christian ethos and identity. What he calls 'programmatic secularism',

> finds specific views of the human good outside a minimal account of material security and relative social stability unsettling, and concludes that they need to be relegated to the purely private sphere. It assumes that the public expression of conviction is automatically offensive to people of other (or no) conviction (Williams 2012, 26).

Christianity has a distinctive understanding of what constitutes the human good, based upon the conviction that in Jesus Christ, who was fully human, we find the deepest possible account of human dignity and destiny. Williams is acknowledging, however, that in a pluralist society there will be different and often contradictory understandings in regard to what constitutes the human good, and varying convictions in this regard. He also accepts that such understandings can be a source of social disharmony and even conflict, and these may need to be carefully negotiated so that they can best accommodated.

Secularists, however, take the view that the best way to deal with conflicting understandings of the human good is to push them into the background; to consider them as merely private opinions that have no place in public discourse. 'If you have convictions, then keep them to yourself', this is their default position. Their motivation, he implies, is that, given the poverty of their own perspective, they find the deeply-held convictions of others "unsettling".

To give an example from the Irish context: a subcultural secularist elite of education policy makers, politicians and media, in the context of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism, has sought to banish specific expressions of religious conviction and to impose the teaching of an inherently secularist approach to the study of faiths, in a new programme called Education about Religions and Beliefs & Ethics, even in faith-based schools.

A great richness can result in a society that negotiates differences in regard to what constitutes human flourishing and accommodates them as much as possible. Conversely, and this is Williams point, if visions of the human good are eclipsed, the meaning and dignity of human life is also lost sight of, and human beings become easy prey to a culture that puts the market first, a culture in which some humans may thrive, economically speaking, while others, even the majority, are means to their ends. This is why he speaks of the public square being filled by a "merely instrumental liberalism."

The instrumentalisation of the workplace is one expression of this. Having forsaken any serious discussion of the "what" or the "why", we get hung up on the "how" of things, merely on procedures for auditing, monitoring and measuring, and so on. I think any of us working in publicly funded environments can testify to the epidemic in regard to procedures and protocols, with little if any discussion of the values or principles such procedures are meant to serve. Such a culture, as Williams has shown, is inherently anti-Christian because it is intolerant of Christianity's vision of human flourishing and precludes it from being advanced in the public square.

It is important to note a point often missed by advocates of the secularist approach. The very idea that issues of human good and conviction are or can be merely 'private' matters is itself a public expression of a particular conviction in regard to what is good for human beings. So, far from creating a level playing-pitch in which differing views of the human good can be tested, secularists are effectively clearing the pitch so that their views can go uncontested. The fact is that there can never be a 'neutral' public space, free of conflicting perspectives on matters of human flourishing and conviction. The erroneous position that there can be a neutral public space is itself a particular conviction. Neutrality is never neutral.

*The distinctive Christian contribution to education*
Secularism is antithetical to visions of the human good in general. Yet there is one further point to be made in regard to how and why it is a particular threat to the Christian understanding. According to my colleague Rik Van Nieuwenhove (2014), a non-instrumentalist disposition is at the heart of the Christian life. Our ultimate concern or focus in life should be God: this is what Augustine meant with "the fruition of God" which should pervade every aspect of our lives.  Now, it is exactly *because* God is our ultimate concern, and not any creaturely targets of attachment, such as power, prestige, money, food, the nation, sex, consumer-items, and so on, that we can begin to treat creaturely things with the respect that is their due, without idolizing them, in other words, turning them into our "gods", which would cause us to misuse them, and ultimately to lose ourselves.  Instead, by being focused on God, and by refraining from treating creaturely goods as gods, we can actually begin to treat created things as valuable, without idolizing them, or eventually discarding them in our disillusionment and boredom. Thus, through knowing and loving God in faith and charity, we can foster a theocentric focus in the midst of our life, which is deeply non-instrumentalist, and which redeems created things for us.

Are our Catholic schools and colleges really fostering a non-instrumental, non-possessive way of relating to the world among our students? Is this what we, as teachers, witness to in our own working lives? Is our operative culture as institutions genuinely cultivating "a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel" (*GE*, n. 8)? Can we, upon this basis, claim we are making a distinctive contribution among a plurality of educational providers?

"For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?" (Mark 8:36). Compliance with various evaluation measurements and key performance

indicators set by secular educational policy-makers, necessary as that may be to ensure survival of state-funded institutions, gives no indication at all that the very soul of that institution has survived and that it is still a vibrant part of the mission of the Church. For the governors of Catholic educational bodies to rely on secular performance management criteria alone as measure of institutional success, is a form of negligence.

**3. What has all this to say to our contemporary context in Ireland and the issues we are currently dealing with?**

*What Vatican II and subsequent Church teaching tell us*
Let's recall in summary form the first part of this paper, that is, what we can learn from Vatican II and post-conciliar teaching:

- Local bishops have a particular responsibility to plan for and direct Catholic education (*GE*, Preface), the goal of which is to ensure that the whole of life is inspired by the spirit of Christ (*GE*, n 3). This is mainly fulfilled through catechetical instruction (*GE*, n 4).

- Christians have a right to a Christian education and the provision of this is a grave obligation both for parents and pastors (*GE*, nn 2, 3);

- Parents are the primary educators of their children, and their homes should be schools of civic duty and Christian virtue (*GE*, n 3);

- We know a school or college is Catholic if it is characterized by the following:
  - A spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel animates the entire school (*GE*, n 8)
  - Young people are being prepared both for service to society **and** for their final destiny of life with God (Brugues, 2013);
  - It is in partnership with civil society in contributing to the development of a world worthy of humanity (*GE*, n 3).
  - All knowledge being communicated is being illuminated by faith.
  - If teachers see themselves as witnesses, both by their lives and their teaching, to the teacher, who is Jesus Christ;
  - If subjects are taught as searches for the truth in such as way as they open people up to Truth itself (CCE 1977, n 41);
  - If teachers realise that it really depends on them whether or not a Catholic school achieves its purposes; that they have a key role in leading pupils to see the Truth beyond particular truths (McKinney, 2011, 153);
  - It is a privileged place of encounter between faith and culture (CCE 1977, n 37);
  - Most importantly, the person of Jesus Christ is at the centre.

What the Council and post-conciliar teaching had to say, as we saw, in regard to openness to other Christian denominations and to non-Christian religions as well as the other general orientations of the Council is also of relevance here.

*The reforms that are being proposed[1]*

We can be grateful for Atheist Ireland for summarizing their key demands under what they are calling the "School Equality PACT" (note the use of the word "equality"). As it happens, their demands bear a remarkable similarity to the general thrust of the recommendations that came from the Department of Education and Skills' *Forum on Patronage & Pluralism* (2012).

PACT stands for Patronage, Access, Curriculum and Teaching. Let's look briefly at the demands under each of these headings in turn:

(1) Patronage

In their view, state-funded schools should have an inclusive public ethos, and private ethos schools should be optional extras.

(2) Access

Religion should never be allowed as a selecting factor in terms of admissions policies, even in regard to faith-based schools.

(3) Curriculum

The state curriculum should include teaching about religions, beliefs and ethics in an objective and pluralist manner. Faith formation should take place outside the school working day. By no means should a faith-based characteristic spirit "inform and vivify the whole work of the school", in state-funded schools, and so Rule 68 for Primary Schools must go.

(4) Teaching

Teachers' private lives are just that, and the only basis upon which teachers should be hired in state-funded schools is their teaching ability.

In light of what we have reflected upon as the key elements of Catholic education, how are we to evaluate these proposed reforms? How are we to respond?

On the issue of **patronage**, we should encourage the state in fulfillment of what is its responsibility, not ours, to address adequately the demand for alternatives to faith-based schools. We are providers of faith-based education. Where it is merited, the provision of alternatives to faith-based education may be assisted by divestment, but that is one, necessarily limited, means by which the State can fulfill its responsibilities. Unfortunately, however, the bizarre impression has been allowed to develop that it is the Churches' responsibility to facilitate and enable the provision of non-denominational schools.

Church communities that see faith-based education as part of their mission of evangelisation should not rush to abandon schools where these can still be genuinely at the service of its mission.

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[1] For this part of the paper I acknowledge the assistance of Dr Thomas Finegan (MIC).

A related point: co-operation in the policy of divestment should be conditional upon tangible commitments in regard to non-interference through public educational policy in the implementation of the characteristic spirit of schools that remain faith-based. This includes in regard to anti-bullying policies, policies on sex education and so on. Incidentally, we urgently need the development of proper faith-based policies in these areas.

Work is also needed on making the case very clearly as to why the State can and should fund faith-based schools and colleges. This will draw, *inter alia*, upon the the freedom to practice one's religion, the contribution religion makes in the public square and to civil society (albeit denied by some), and through the provision of examples of best practice in regard to the state-funding of faith-based education in other jurisdictions.

The reality is that globally, Catholic education is thriving. It is estimated that there are currently some 51 million pupils in Catholic primary and secondary schools worldwide, and that this number is steadily increasing, keeping pace with the growing global Catholic population (CARA, 2014). Similarly, the number of Catholic Universities and Institutes of Higher Education now exceeds 2000, with a steady increase in the number of degree-awarding institutions recognized by the Holy See especially in Africa and Asia.

On the issue of **access** the following points need to be noted. In an ideal world, a faith-based school, certainly one that takes its lead from the teaching of Vatican II, would be open to all and would welcome all, space and resources, of course, permitting. In so doing it would be fulfilling its role as part of the evangelizing mission of the faith community. In so doing, the school would also be that privileged place of encounter between faith and culture we mentioned earlier.

There is considerable evidence that faith-based schools, because of the hard work of their principals and their teachers, meet very successfully the challenge of being as welcoming to all as possible, and this on a daily basis and in very practical and meaningful ways. This should not surprise us, because in so doing they are not merely complying with policy directives, but are also responding to Gospel imperatives. A few references are worth recording in this regard:

- The ESRI Report 2012 entitled *School Sector Variation Among Primary Schools In Ireland* noted that Catholic primary schools are "more likely" to have working class backgrounds and the traveller community … and that the "widest spread of nationalities was evident in Catholic schools" (Darmody, Smyth & McCoy, 2012: 7)

- The Inspector General's Report 2013 found that "high proportions (95%) of the parents surveyed as part of the WSE process during 2010-2012 agree that schools are welcoming of them" (Chief Inspector General, 2013: 38). The report concluded by saying, "Primary schools were found to be managing

their pupils well and the vast majority of parents were happy with their child's school" (*Chief Inspector General*, 2013: 104).

- Finally, the 2012 *Forum* noted that: "… inter-faith and inter-cultural initiatives work best in schools where the **Catholic** students and parents are **most committed to their own practice** (p. 93, my emphasis).

Ironically, the *Forum* went on to make recommendations that would undermine the schools ability to support pupils in developing a commitment to their own faith-practice.

I don't in any way want to underestimate the very real dilemma faced by parents who do not wish their children to be taught in faith-based schools and who find themselves with no alternative. This should not happen; their right to have their children educated in accordance with their beliefs should be vindicated by the State. At the same time there is a danger that the current focus upon possible discrimination on the basis of baptismal certificates or their absence could distract from other equally pressing forms of exclusion that stem from economic injustice. We can be grateful that faith-based schools score so highly in regard to inclusion across a whole range of important criteria and we should not lose sight of this in the present debate.

That said, I believe a faith-based school, which, while state-funded, is also actively supported by the local parish community because it is part of the Church's mission, would be entitled to use religious affiliation and commitment as criteria for admission, if places had to be limited. This would seem only reasonable.

We turn to the issue of **curriculum,** and objections to a faith-based ethos informing and vivifying every aspect of the school's day. There are several points to be made in this regard and time will not permit an adequate treatment of them.

First of all, one has to question fundamentally the concept of education underpinning suggestons that a "neutral" school ethos is possible. That, in fact, was my main criticism of the *Forum*: its basic conceptualization of education was deeply flawed. However inadvertently, it tended towards reducing education to the communication of mere factual information and data. *Some* ethos will inevitably inform and vivify the school working day in every school. This ethos will be based upon some operative set of values, be they the values of the market and the economy, or of secularism, or of religious faith, or whatever.  We cannot say it often enough: neutrality is never neutral.

While every reasonable effort needs to be made to accommodate parents who wish their children to be exempt from religious instruction, in a faith-based school the reality is that religious faith will characterize every aspect of that school's life, or else the school is failing in its mission. Here is what one Catholic primary school principal puts in writing to prospective pupils' parents: "religion in our school is cross-curricular and if parents do not wish their child educated in such an environment, it

would be prudent for them to seek multi-denominational education."

It really cannot be any other way in a faith-based school, or else it is not really faith-*based*.

I wish to make just one more point on the issue of curriculum. It is proposed, at the request of Atheist Ireland, to introduce a new programme entitled Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB), and Ethics. This is already in the pipeline, and primary teachers, including in faith-based colleges of teacher education, are already being taught how to teach it. It is envisaged that ERB and Ethics will be mandatory for all pupils, including in faith-based schools.

It is bizarre, in my view, that a faith-based school would be required to offer what is essentially a secularist understanding of religious faith. Given that it will be mandatory to make this programme available in faith-based schools, and given also the reality of limited teaching resources, as well as time on the curriculum, its introduction in faith-based schools will undoubtedly adversely affect religious instruction and a faith-based school's characteristic spirit. This issue needs careful and urgent attention.

Finally, we turn to the issue of **teachers**. We need to be very grateful for the high calibre of teachers and managers in our faith-based schools and colleges. I know this very directly from the Masters' programme in Christian Leadership in Education offered by my department which prepares the next generation of leaders in Catholic schools.

Three things tell us that we teach the person we are: Church teaching, which we reviewed earlier, every respected educational theorist, and plain commonsense. We are always teaching something implicitly *while* we are teaching. What this is will be determined by our values and beliefs as much as by our technical knowledge and expertise.

In a faith-based school, the teacher's values and beliefs should witness to the Gospel of Christ. As St Paul reminds us (Rom 3:23), of course, we all fall short. However, we cannot simply accept the notion that is becoming prevalent that our personal or private lives as educators do not matter, only our expertise and competence. In light of this, proposed changes to Section 37 of the Employment Act need to be considered very carefully. In due course, greater diversity of patronage should mean that only teachers who desire to work in a faith-based educational context and promote its ethos would do so.

We need to do more to support both the continuing professional development, and the faith formation of teachers, and I support Archbishop Eamon Martin's recent call in this regard (NEC, Knock, 27 Sept 2015). The Catholic Schools Partnership is already doing great work in supporting ethos issues in Catholic schools. Measures they are taking, for instance to encourage and enable school personnel to evaluate school ethos are very welcome.

At second level, it is proving increasingly difficult to have religion teachers released from school for the very modest amount of time needed to participate in study days offered by patrons. These study days need greater support and recognition.

It is unclear, in its PACT, which seems to propose a 'one-size fits all' model of education, how Atheist Ireland proposes to take account of the specific wishes of parents or whether, in fact, it sees parents as the principal educators of their children. Faith-based education, on the other hand, considers the role of parents to be pivotal. We need to be much more proactive in helping parents to appreciate and understand the distinctiveness of faith-based education and the distinctive appreciation of their children's dignity and worth that it offers. This is an important task for the future.

Finally, what can be said in regard to the underlying issues we looked at in the second part of the paper, that is how the dominative operative educational paradigm is no longer at the service of human flourishing but instead works out of a truncated understanding of the human person whose task is to serve the labour market?

This is a fundamental challenge for us as faith-based educators, but it is also a great opportunity. We need to recover our confidence that an educational system which has at its heart an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, and which is founded upon the understanding of what it is to be truly human that is uniquely revealed in him, is urgently needed in our world.

We need to remind ourselves that every day we cross the threshold of our schools or colleges, even if they are said to be faith-based, we do so as missionaries, and that as Pope Francis has said repeatedly, evangelisation, and not self-preservation must be our goal (*EG*, n 27).

Thank you for your kind attention.

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