

NEW WAYS OF LIVING THE GOSPEL

Spiritual Traditions in Catholic Education

SAMPLE

Edited by
Jim and Therese D'Orsa

THE BROKEN BAY INSTITUTE
MISSION AND EDUCATION SERIES



COMMENDATION

The way in which we locate ourselves in history has changed. In fact, several writers speak of a change of epoch:

The defining aspect of this change of epoch is that things are no longer in their place. Our previous ways of explaining this world and its relationships, good and bad, no longer appears to work. Things we thought would never happen, or that we thought we would never see, we are experiencing now, and we dare not even imagine the future. That which appeared normal to us will probably no longer seem that way. We cannot simply wait for what we are experiencing to pass, under the illusion that things will return to being how they were before.
(Pope Francis to priests of Rome, 2013)

In *New Ways of Living the Gospel: Spiritual Traditions in Catholic Education*, the authors have boldly gone to the frontier of this time of liminality, placed a searchlight on our Australian story of charismatic leaders in the past, and probed the present with searching questions. Their searchlight shows how we are building on the spiritual traditions that are a vital element of our Catholic heritage. Various contributors from a sample of religious congregations provide evidence that this is not a self-indulgent nostalgia trip, but a revelation of the ways those charismatic leaders and their religious families rose to the challenges of earlier times, providing Catholic education and particularly in reaching out to those made poor. Theirs is a 'story to enter, a language to speak, a group to belong, a way to pray, a work to undertake and a face of God to see'.

Their probing questions are about the significant endeavours to rebuild the spiritual capital needed to sustain identifiably Catholic school communities. That spiritual capital now resides largely in the lay leaders and teachers who staff our schools. The lived experience of early formation and continuing formation of religious was the key to the influence of these religious. The question posed by one contributor, Bishop David Walker, is do we have a critical mass of mature lay Catholic education leaders? Are we building spiritual leadership density? We could similarly ask are we investing as much energy into formation as we are to buildings and curriculum and school improvement? It is pleasing to see chapters dealing with recent initiatives to energise lay staff in our schools, both at the school level and system level. As the authors observe, such initiatives in a sense chart what God's Spirit has done and point to the possibilities of what God's Spirit can accomplish. The other probing question raised by the authors is that just as leaders in Catholic schools

over the past two decades have learned to move their thinking from the operational to the strategic, the challenge of the next decade will be to move from the strategic to the missional.

This text worthily follows earlier texts in this Mission and Education series. Many readers will easily identify with the spiritual traditions they have inherited. The mapping of these and the present ‘disturbing’ questions will exercise the waking hours of all committed to sustaining and enhancing our spiritual capital in this liminal time.

Tony Whelan,

cfc AM Adjunct Professor Australian Catholic University

DEDICATION

This book honours those pioneering priests who, during the First Era of Catholic Education (1820 to approximately 1870), founded schools for Catholic children across the colonies.

It also celebrates leaders in the Fourth Era of Catholic Education (from approximately 2000 to the present) who are creatively refounding Catholic Education in tumultuous times. It celebrates in particular the dedicated and creative work of Terry Feely (1955–2011), Foundation Principal of St Peter’s College Cranbourne.

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Editorial

Ms Kate Ahearne for patiently assisting the authors in finalising the text.

Scripture

Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version, with the exception of the chapter by Bishop David Walker, in which the Jerusalem Bible is used.

THE BROKEN BAY INSTITUTE MISSION AND EDUCATION SERIES

The Mission and Education publishing project is divided into two series. The *Exploratory Series* seeks to serve leaders in Catholic education. It explores aspects of contemporary Catholic education in the light of the Church's official teaching on mission, and of the experience of those who attempt to embrace this mission in their personal and professional lives. The *Educator's Guide Series* is being prepared specifically for teachers in Catholic schools.

The richness of the resources now at the disposal of those who seek to explore education theologically can come as a surprise. Because the faith held by the Catholic community is a living faith, Catholic Church teaching on mission has developed, and continues to develop, in the light of contemporary societal and cultural changes. Similarly, Scripture continues to yield its treasures. Only now, for example, is the Bible being widely recognised as a witness to God's purpose or mission in the created universe, and as an account of human response to the unfolding of that mission.

We live in a period of rapid cultural change driven by global dynamics. This has its impact on how we understand what knowledge is, how it is acquired, and how schools are best led and organised so as to maximise student learning and the economic and social benefits that are presumed to flow from sound educational policies. Very often the emphasis in such developments shifts from 'the learning student' to the more abstract concept of 'student learning'. This sits uneasily with the concept of a Catholic education.

The consequence of rapid societal change is that, in our time, new areas of mission present themselves with real urgency. It is now clearly necessary to include within the mission agenda both the processes of knowledge construction and meaning-making, and the modes of Christian participation in the new public space created by both globalisation and the communications media. These new areas of mission take their place alongside those fields already familiar to the faith community.

The Mission and Education Series seeks to bring together, in the one conversation, the light that human experience, culture and faith throw on particular topics now central to the future development of Catholic education. It also seeks to honour the significant efforts that Catholic educators make, on behalf of young people, to address the contemporary mission agendas within the total process of education. It provides a forum designed to stimulate further conversation about the 'what' and the 'how' of Catholic education as a work of the Gospel in our complex society and culture.

It is the hope of the Mission and Education Editorial Board that Catholic educators, both in Australia and beyond, will view the series as an invitation to contribute their own creativity to this vital conversation.

Therese D’Orsa
Commissioning Editor
The Broken Bay Institute

Also in this series

Explorers, Guides and Meaning-makers: Mission Theology for Catholic Educators

Catholic Curriculum: A Mission to the Heart of Young People

Leading for Mission: Integrating Life, Culture and Faith in Catholic Education

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1

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Our Christian understanding is that God is not distant, but rather that God has taken on our human condition and is actively involved in it. This heritage has its origins in the experience of our ancestors in the faith, the Hebrew people, who were sustained by a deep awareness of God's involvement in their history. The heritage was enriched and grounded definitively in God's entering human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' mission and closeness continues through the mysterious action of God's inspiring and sustaining Spirit at home among Jesus' disciples across time, and also guiding all people of good will, furthering God's purpose in the created universe, including life on this planet.

We are used to thinking about the action of the Holy Spirit within the Church, teaching and guiding. In more recent times, however, Catholic theologians have broadened their understanding and now accept, for example, that God's goodness is reflected in what is good and worthy in all human communities and cultures. God's action is both indirect and direct, hidden as well as discernible.

SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

'Spirituality' is the word most commonly used to describe the human experience of the transcendent, which is an important component of all cultures and is interpreted within a variety of frameworks. Spiritual traditions are coherent sets of beliefs and practices which have evolved over time as communities make sense of the transcendent and orient individuals, and sometimes whole communities, towards God. There is a rich array of Christian and Catholic spiritual traditions carried by sponsoring faith communities, and recognised by the Church as important resources in assisting people to engage in the spiritual quest or journey that gives

meaning and purpose to human life. These traditions have played a role in the emergence of all Catholic cultures.

Spiritual traditions which endure can often be traced back to the ability of charismatic individuals to interpret and articulate their experience of God in a way that is appreciated by and meaningful to their followers. The traditions have served a purpose beyond expressing and explaining personal and communal experience because invariably God calls people to action in the context of human need. Catholic spiritualities have been important in sustaining people in works of mission, often to a heroic degree. The litmus test for any authentic Christian spirituality is the extent to which it carries forward the mission of Jesus to create 'Kingdom spaces' within human contexts.¹ A spiritual tradition will be organised in a way suited to particular cultural or historical settings, and have its characteristic pedagogical expressions, practices and devotions, but to be authentic, it must also be rooted in the Christian faith community and its mission in the world.

In Catholic education, as in other aspects of the Church's ministry, spiritual traditions have developed as a response to the 'signs of the times'. As many of the chapters in this book well illustrate, those that endure are re-shaped and re-expressed as contexts change. The traditions are carried in the stories of particular communities.

The focus of this book is a sample of those spiritual traditions, old and new, that have salience within Catholic schools, and the contribution these make to the fulfilment of Jesus' mission in the twenty-first century cultural tapestry which constitutes the way of life of contemporary Australians. These traditions play an important role in helping to sustain the Catholic identity of the schools by keeping before leaders, and the entire school community, that the enterprise is committed to a spiritual quest that transcends the secular. They serve to shape the mission of the school and the patterns of relationship within and beyond it.

New Ways of Living the Gospel: Creating and Sustaining Spiritual Traditions in Catholic Education represents a snapshot in time of how individual schools and groups of schools go about the task of affirming God's action alive in the life of the school, giving it a unique identity and mission.

¹ See for example discussion in Jim and Therese D'Orsa, *Leading for Mission: Integrating Life, Culture and Faith in Catholic Education* (Mulgrave: Garratt Publications, 2013), 246-7.

IDENTIFYING AND EXPLORING SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS IN SCHOOLS

The presence of spiritual traditions within Catholic schools raises a number of questions:

- Which traditions have genuine salience for Catholic education today?
- Why have these grown in importance in recent years?
- What is the present form of the tradition?

While space has been a constraint in addressing these questions, we believe the sample of traditions covered in this book illustrates the growing role spiritual traditions play in stabilising the Catholic identity of the schools.

To be meaningful, spiritual traditions have to be consciously articulated and so become cultural expressions. As such, they can be analysed in cultural terms. Such an analysis raises a number of questions:

- What is the narrative of the tradition?
- What mythic elements does the narrative emphasise?
- What values does the tradition honour?
- Have these changed over time, and if so, how and why?
- What are the tradition's main forms of expression among young people today?

Because spiritual traditions shape how Christian life is understood and lived, they are circumscribed by the context in which they emerged. They helped, and in many cases inspired, people to see the Gospel calling them to service in a new way, a way matched to the evident needs of particular contexts. Many of the traditions that developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, responded to the needs of unemployed, socially marginalised youth living in degrading conditions in industrial towns, often without aspiration and without hope.

To understand the genesis and trajectory of a tradition, it is important to ask:

- What social context gave rise to the tradition in its original form?
- What aspects of the Gospel message give the tradition its coherence?
- How has the tradition evolved as social conditions have changed?
- How has the sponsoring community changed and what impact has this had on the development of the tradition?

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

Many, but certainly not all, of the spiritual traditions explored in this book have a religious congregation as their sponsoring body. Such groups interpret

their spiritual tradition within a theological and ecclesial framework in which the core concept is ‘the charism of the founder’. Founders develop a particular emphasis on how they understand God, and what this understanding calls them to do in response to the needs of the time. This is perhaps simply illustrated by Ignatius of Loyola in the spirituality which calls on people ‘to see God in all things’. The Holy Spirit is regarded as playing an active role in helping founders see the world with an enthusiasm and vision that attracts followers and enables a community to form which is capable of addressing the mission needs of an era. ‘Charism’ is a gift to the Church and to the wider society that the community who carry the gift is called upon to serve. It is therefore important, in respect to congregational traditions, to ask:

- How does the congregation understand, articulate and seek to communicate the charism of the group?
- How has this understanding evolved as times and contexts change?
- What forms of witness has the charism given rise to, and what dialogue partners are now seen as essential in sustaining the tradition?

OTHER SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS EMERGE

While spiritual traditions have been largely sponsored by religious congregations, the Holy Spirit is by no means constrained by this historical fact. As the membership of congregations has contracted, as schools have amalgamated, and as new schools with no connections to congregations have been founded, the Spirit continues to act to sustain the spiritual quest for God that is the privilege of every human life and every human community. In some cases this has resulted in schools calling on the richness of multiple spiritual traditions, and in other cases embarking confidently on creating their own tradition, as one of the chapters in the book illustrates. Such a project is not without its pitfalls and there is much to be learned from the experiences of those engaged in them. What is clear in each case is that the adoption of a spiritual tradition, either through historical connection or conscious choice, provides a means to help leaders evangelise not only the students, but also the school’s culture. A spiritual tradition provides school leaders with a coherent way to proclaim the Gospel that brings together the three components of authentic mission – word, witness and dialogue.

When it comes to mission, a school does not act on its own in today’s world; it requires dialogue partners to be effective. So it is necessary to ask:

- Who do school leaders recognise as necessary dialogue partners in achieving the school’s mission?

- How does it seek to engage them?
- What do the dialogue partners bring to the table?
- What does the school leadership learn from its dialogue partners, and what do they, in turn, learn from the school leadership?

Spiritual traditions have a theological content that is used to make sense of the human experience of God at work in the lives of individuals and groups. They also have a unique way of expressing this understanding in practices and devotions. Some spiritual traditions are understood principally in terms of these.

To understand the tradition, it is necessary to ask:

- What religious practices/devotions are integral to the tradition?
- How have these evolved over time?
- What have been the principal drivers of this change?

Finally, spiritual traditions provide an important means in evangelising students and school cultures. If the Holy Spirit is active in the life of the school, which is what our faith tells us, then there must be some evidence of this, which raises a final set of questions:

- What are some of the important impacts that the school's spiritual tradition has on students? teachers? parents?
- What positive impact does the spiritual tradition have on school culture?

THE MANDATE ACCEPTED BY THE CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS STUDY

The various contributors to this 'snapshot in time' were asked to explore what is happening in their school or system of schools in light of the questions raised above. The experiences set out in the chapters that follow provide examples, options, and some warning signals. They chart a willingness to explore the Gospel in our time, and a willingness to discern where in the context of human need and human aspiration 'Kingdom spaces' can be created.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is set out in four parts.

Following the Introduction, Part 1 focuses on matters historical. Bishop Walker outlines aspects of the historical development of Christian spirituality, so setting a context for the discussions that follow. Jim and Therese D'Orsa provide, in broad brush strokes, elements of the narrative of spiritual traditions as these have emerged in Catholic education in Australia.

They do this from the perspective of participant-observers.

In Part II the emphasis is scriptural. Discipleship is a major theme in all Christian spirituality, and this finds a much-loved articulation and theological warrant in the Gospel of John. Therese D'Orsa explores this Gospel as a gift capable of sustaining mission.

Part III looks at how spiritual traditions operate in a sample of congregational schools. This sample illustrates the way in which spiritual traditions help anchor the leadership, mission and Catholic identity of these schools. The congregational traditions featured in Part III are those of the Good Samaritan Sisters, Sisters of St Joseph, Salesians, Mercy Sisters, Christian Brothers, Marist Brothers, De La Salle Brothers and Jesuits.

Part IV provides examples of where three diocesan school systems and a regional Catholic college have set out to sponsor a spiritual tradition appropriate to their needs. In the case of the Diocese of Broken Bay, the spirituality centres on the notion of discipleship with the school system working within a framework developed with the Bishop for the Diocese as a whole. In the second, the Diocese of Townsville's Catholic school system has adopted a spiritual tradition of meditation based on the work of the Benedictine, John Main. The school system in the Diocese of Lismore has adopted the spirituality pioneered by St Ignatius of Loyola in pursuing its development of teachers for the Catholic schools of the diocese. Finally, St Peter's College Cranbourne has developed, since its inauguration under the founding principal, Terry Feely, a spirituality based on the person of St Peter, as we know him from the Gospels.

Because spiritual traditions help people make sense of their experience of God, both as individuals and as communities, they operate within the ambit of mystery, and an element of ambiguity. It is not uncommon to hear critics of the promotion of particular spiritual traditions claim that teachers and students seem to know more about Marcellin Champagnat, Mary MacKillop or Edmund Rice, than they do about Jesus. The fact is, however, that at a certain point in a young person's religious development, such heroic figures play an important role in mediating what being a follower of Jesus can mean, and the relevance and shape of participation in God's mission. The Holy Spirit is especially active in shaping human aspiration. This is a fundamental tenet of Ignatian spirituality and a theme in other traditions. Heroic figures mediate Jesus and his mission to young people and are an important resource in living a full Christian life.

The founders of congregations, in their own way, embarked on a mission to the marginalised, inspired by their reading of the Gospel. In doing so they often redefined the patterns of Christian life, revitalising the Church and creating hope for the people they worked with. This combination of

spirituality, vision and action drew other people to them, companions who shared their aspiration and eventually their mission. This is a dynamic of the Spirit, and there is no reason to believe that the Spirit is not as much at work in the world today as when these heroes of the past were inspired. The forms that the work of the Holy Spirit takes, as Part IV illustrates, may be different from the past, but Catholic educational leaders and sponsors can be confident that the Holy Spirit is still active. Developing and sustaining spiritual traditions remains a major challenge for those leading and sponsoring Catholic schools. From Gospel times until now, such traditions have been most effective vehicles of God's mission.

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