

A systematic approach to faculty religious development

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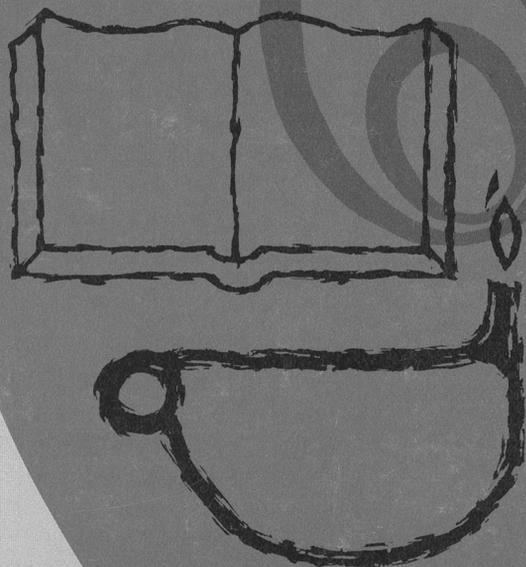
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A Systematic Approach to Faculty Religious Development

by Robert R. Newton, S. J.

I. Faculties in Catholic Schools: Shifting Patterns

The systematic religious development of faculties must be one of the primary concerns of Catholic educators today. There are many reasons for this concern. With the declining number of religious in the schools, it is no longer possible to take for granted a common set of assumptions held by all or the majority of the faculty. Lay persons, formerly just a sprinkling within the almost solid ranks of religious, have become the overwhelming majority in virtually every Catholic school. They emerge from a Church context which is diverse and confusing rather than from the ecclesial environment of fifteen years ago which was clear, distinct and sure of every answer and practice. They come to the schools with a variety of backgrounds, motivations and perspectives.

At the same time as the number of religious teachers has declined and the diversity of faculty backgrounds has multiplied, there has emerged an increasing urgency to show how the Catholic

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school is distinctively religious. This demand originated both internally—from faculties who are continually searching for redefinition of their function and purpose in a shifting Church, and externally—from parents and the Catholic community in general who are both less sure of the purposes of Catholic education and simultaneously expected to increase their support of more expensive school operations.

The concern for systematic religious development of faculties is also motivated by the greater stability of lay faculty members and the likelihood that many faculty members are seeking permanent positions rather than temporary jobs. Today there are more candidates for positions in Catholic schools in most parts of the country; thus, it is probable that there will be better initial selection and fewer teachers dismissed because of inadequate performance. Some teachers who formerly would have moved to public schools for more adequate salaries now, out of concern for the deterioration that has occurred in public education—declining authority, excessive bureaucratization, virtual elimination of the “vocational” aspect of public school teaching, etc.—are choosing to remain in Catholic schools. Also, many teachers now come to Catholic schools with explicitly defined personal and religious goals. The number of lay persons who are expert in religious education, an area formerly a preserve of the religious operating the school, symbolizes the many teachers who have chosen Catholic education not to fit into an environment dominated by religious but rather to work towards religious goals which are highly personal. They teach in Catholic schools because they believe in religiously oriented education and their role in this ministry of the Church.

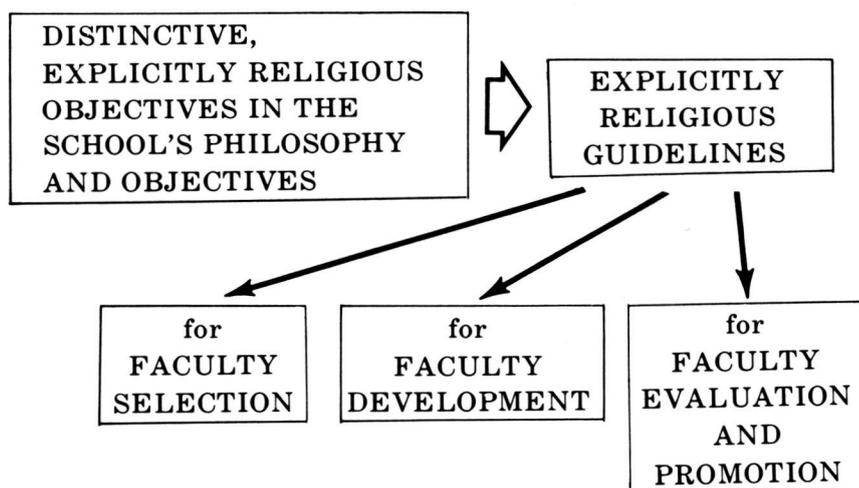
Though these initial comments have focused primarily on shifts in lay faculty patterns, it would be a serious error to leave the impression that the need for systematic faculty religious development is focused only on lay faculty members. The rapidly changing context within the Church and religious congregations has left members of religious groups almost equally in need of systematic programs to clarify, develop, and encourage their religious involvement in schools.

All of these factors—the diminished numbers and shifting role of religious in the schools, the less certain context within the Church itself, the demand for more explicit definition of the distinctiveness of Catholic education, the increasing stability and commitment of lay faculties—point to the need for an approach to faculty religious development which is more explicit and systematic than previous eras of Catholic education required.

II. Criteria and Guidelines

The process of faculty religious development must be derived from and integrated into the larger framework of the religious goals of the school. Development or inservice programs should be viewed as a three stage process: selection, development, and evaluation.

Every Catholic school has (or should have) in its philosophy and objectives a clear statement of its distinctive religious objectives expressed in specific terms; this goal statement and these objectives are the source from which criteria and guidelines for faculty selection, development, and evaluation should be derived.



Explicit criteria are essential because too often the processes for faculty hiring, development, and evaluation are divorced from the religious goals of the school. Strong statements of religious purpose are prominent in the school's philosophy; but the corresponding operational procedures and criteria for faculty frequently focus exclusively on academic competence and performance. Without a framework which specifically inserts the religious dimension into the various phases of organizational operation, it is unlikely that the religious objectives of the school, in which the faculty play the key role, will be either comprehensive or effective.

III. General Categories/Criteria

Personnel procedures emphasizing the religious element in hiring, development, and evaluation should be based on two key assumptions: 1) a school's religious objectives are essential to its success, and 2) all members of the faculty are expected to contribute actively to these objectives. The failure to make these assumptions in the past has been the source of a variety of problems—e.g., the assumption or insistence that the religion teachers or the counseling department should take full responsibility for the religious development of students. Such a mistake is based on the failure to distinguish between the religious education (academic goals) and religious formation (pastoral goals)*. While the *academic* can rightly be seen as the responsibility of the religion department whose members are specially trained in the theological disciplines and in religious education methodologies, the *pastoral* mission of the school must be seen as the obligation of every faculty member, no matter what his/her subject or area of responsibility. The explicitation of the assumption that all members share in the pastoral role of the school is critical to a systematic program of faculty religious development. The expectation should be stated plainly and simply: the

*Though there could be disagreement over the terms religious *education* and religious *formation*, the essential point is a distinction between the academic and the pastoral; the religion department is concerned primarily with the first of these goals; the faculty in general must assume the responsibility for the second.

religious growth of students is an essential goal of this school; each faculty member is expected to contribute to its attainment.

Though one of the distinctive features of Catholic education has been decentralization and the capacity of individual schools to adjust their policies and programs to particular clientele, at the same time there is a core of religious assumptions which finds its way into most statements of philosophy and objectives for Catholic schools. The following categories are consistent with this inner core of assumptions, and, as a consequence, should be operative generally in personnel policies which touch the religious dimensions of hiring, development, and evaluation.

Knowledge A faculty member in a Catholic school should be a religiously literate person, knowledgeable about religion in general and his/her religion in particular.

Personal Religious Experience A faculty member should be someone for whom religious questions are important and who has integrated religious/moral beliefs and values into his/her life. Each person need not have come to the same conclusion; but each person should have a reflective and experience-tested set of beliefs and values.

Commitment to Catholic Education A faculty member should have a sense of the purpose and ministry of the Church in education and an awareness of the distinctive mission and role played by Catholic schools, both in the Catholic community and American society in general.

Awareness of the Process of Religious Development A faculty member should understand how young people develop religiously and the role that formal education and teachers play in this development.

Social Awareness A faculty member should be aware of the contemporary social teaching of the Church and the importance of education in developing Christians with the perspective and ambition of service.

Though an individual school might propose a set of categories somewhat different from the above, these general areas should be common to most schools and can serve to illustrate a systematic ap-

proach to faculty religious development. As noted above, these criteria and the procedures that follow are intended as *equally applicable* to both religious and lay teachers.

*IV. A Systematic Approach to Hiring Faculty for Catholic Schools**

The second stage in the development of a systematic approach to faculty religious development is creation of a process for selecting faculty members who are both interested in and capable of contributing to the religious goals of the school. The criteria described in the previous section become the basis for a schedule of questions to explore the candidate's relationship to these criteria. Also part of the interview format is a parallel set of expected responses which an ideal candidate would be expected to give. Obviously, these religious questions would be inserted into a more comprehensive interview which explores the candidate's academic background, teaching skills, extracurricular interests and so forth.

<i>Criteria/ Categories</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Expected Responses</i>
<i>I. Knowledge</i>	What are the important changes that have taken place in the Catholic Church in recent years?	Makes specific reference to at least two such changes.
	What is your impression of these changes?	Evidences more than a superficial knowledge; has reflected on issues mentioned and has a personal position.
	What are the big issues that will face the Catholic Church in the near future?	Refers to specific issues; evidences personal opinion on these issues.

*The substance of section IV originally appeared in "Faculty Selection," *Religious Education*, LXXIV (1), (January-February, 1979), pp. 94-99.

<i>II. Personal Religious Experience</i>	<p>Could you give me some idea of religion in your own life?</p> <p>Do you think that religion has resulted in any practical conclusions for you?</p>	<p>Describes some personal religious <i>experience</i> and/or personal religious involvements/practices.</p> <p>Responds affirmatively and gives examples.</p>
<i>III. Commitment To Catholic Education</i>	<p>How do you think Catholic schools achieve their religious goals?</p> <p>How do you think the fact that this is a Catholic school might make a difference in your performance?</p> <p>How do you think a graduate of a Catholic school should differ from the graduate of a public school?</p>	<p>Indicates—not only by teaching religion but also by creating a Catholic environment.</p> <p>Refers to some positive contribution he/she would hope to make.</p> <p>Describes specific differences, e.g. greater knowledge and openness to religion, more religious experience, etc.</p>
<i>IV. Attitudes Toward Personal Development of Young People</i>	<p>A student comes to you to tell you that he/she does not think he believes he/she can be a Catholic anymore. What would you do?</p> <p>How do you think adolescents develop religiously?</p>	<p>Says he/she would listen and encourage student to talk his/her way through problem; points out that this is something that occurs to many adolescents; no need for anxiety.</p> <p>Mentions shift from religious conformity to more autonomous faith; may describe temporary confusion or crisis of faith.</p>
<i>V. Social Awareness</i>	<p>How do you think the Church should relate to the major contemporary social problems?</p>	<p>Mentions specific examples of social justice problems, e.g., international development, racial problems, etc.; sees the Church as involved.</p>

How should the school communicate social justice values to students?

Indicates that school cannot communicate knowledge alone but must also provide an experiential base for the development of these attitudes.

VI. General You have read the philosophy and objectives of this school. How do you think that you personally can contribute to the religious objectives of the school?

Responds with specific, personal examples which evidence genuine and reflective interest and commitment.

It would be a rare candidate who would give all of the hoped-for responses. At the same time, a skilled interviewer should be able to discern in the responses that do emerge whether the candidate shows genuine interest and promise of growth in these areas. Also the interviewer may elicit a response other than the one listed but equally acceptable. Devising a structured set of questions and responses (whether one uses this one, adapts it, or devises a different set of categories and questions) forces a school to define with precision and comprehensiveness what it is seeking in candidates; it also supplies a method to determine whether what it is seeking is either actually or potentially present in the candidate. Such an interview has the additional advantage of signaling to the candidate the school's expectations of faculty in the religious area, should he/she be hired.

V. Religious Development Program for Faculty

The criteria derived from the school's philosophy and objectives also provide the outline for a comprehensive faculty religious development program. The same qualities which were sought in candidates for teaching positions are those which the school now attempts to develop in its faculty. The suggestions below illustrate how an inservice program could emerge from a clear definition of criteria.

Knowledge If it is important that your faculty be aware of what is happening in the Church and religion generally, the following types of opportunities are appropriate inservice activities:

—Presentations/discussion on areas of current religious interest. Recent developments in the religious subdisciplines—systematic theology, scriptural studies, moral development, pastoral theology—provide a rich field of new ideas which could enlarge faculty knowledge and stimulate faculty interest. Principals of Catholic schools are more than aware that one of the most frequent reasons offered for reluctance to become involved in religious experiences or discussions with students is the faculty member's feeling of uncertainty about "what is being taught nowadays." Knowledge of events seems an appropriate way to dispel or reduce this reluctance.

—Availability of journals, magazines, newspapers which treat topics of current interest to Catholics. How many faculty rooms (since, like it or not, faculty usually do not use periodicals in the student library) have subscriptions to local and national Catholic newspapers, magazines such as *America*, *Commonweal*, or journals like *The Living Light*, *Religious Education*, or *The New Catholic World*?

—Exposition of the religion program used in the school to the entire faculty, with an opportunity to explore its assumptions, content and progression. Such a description not only informs the faculty of what their students are learning but also increases their knowledge of the methods and process of contemporary religious education, a field which has undergone rapid changes in recent years.

Personal Religious Experience Many schools have attempted to enlarge and deepen the religious experience of their faculties. The following are among the numerous opportunities that schools have provided:

—Faculty liturgical events planned and implemented by faculty members on a regular basis throughout the school year, e.g., built into the schedule of orientation programs, inservice days, faculty dinners, and so forth.

—Retreat programs for faculty in a variety of forms: days of recollection or retreats for the entire faculty, for small groups, for faculty and their spouses—at the school or in retreat houses.

—Spiritual direction for faculty. Some schools have designated a popular (usually religious) faculty member as available for the spiritual direction of faculty who wish guidance.

—Prayer groups for faculty. One of the functions of informal groupings in a faculty is mutual support; there is no reason why this could not be extended into the religious realm to promote mutual support both for personal religious growth as well as for a communal sense of apostolic mission in their work.

—Christian Life Community or other organizations. These options should be available for faculty members who wish the opportunity for a more organized process of religious development.

Finally, though perhaps obvious, it seems worth highlighting the expansion of religious experience that takes place through faculty involvement in student religious activities. The old adage about the teacher really learning a subject only when he/she must teach it may be applied analogously to the process of assisting in the religious growth of one's students.

Commitment to Catholic Education The directive of the Third Council of Baltimore that every parish have a Catholic school is no longer first among the reasons for the existence of Catholic schools. Rather, Catholic schools must constantly justify their existence on the basis that they are different and, for the population they serve, better than other private or public alternatives. Capitalizing on the need to articulate the distinctiveness of Catholic education, several possibilities for faculty development emerge:

—Most schools are regularly involved in accreditation processes which require a statement of objectives as a prelude to self-evaluation or outside evaluation. The events which generate such statements can be taken seriously or completed in a perfunctory manner. The creation of a new goal statement could be utilized as an opportunity to expand and redefine the faculty's awareness of commitment to the unique mission of Catholic education.

—The majority of Catholic schools were founded or staffed by members of religious groups which at some period in their history, usually as part of charism of their founders, devoted themselves to education. Longstanding traditions, many of which for centuries blended spiritual and educational traditions, provide a rich source for increasing faculty awareness of the unique ministry of their school. There are usually key historical or contemporary documents which give a breadth of vision to the educational apostolate of the religious group. These can be explored in various ways. For example, the provincial or religious superior of the religious community operating the school could be invited to present his/her vision of the importance of this school in the educational apostolate of the congregation and the local church.

Attitude Toward Personal Religious Development The development of awareness of how young people grow religiously can take place in two ways: 1) through an increased knowledge of research in the field of religious development, and 2) through an enlarged experience with students in student religious activities.

—As the recent emphasis on moral development has shown, there is a great deal to learn about how students develop morally (e.g., the stage development theories of Kohlberg or Fowler which have received wide interest in Catholic circles). Two approaches to increasing knowledge seem appropriate: presentation of recent theory and research on religious/moral development, and discussion with the faculty in general, perhaps by the counseling staff or religion department, of case studies in normal and abnormal religious development.

—More important than attempts to advance the knowledge of faculty members will be opportunities to enlarge their experience with students as the students attempt to grow religiously. Liturgies, retreats, prayer groups, service programs, discussions on religious questions (both inside and outside of classes)—all are areas where faculty participation is vital and faculty growth promoted.

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Social Awareness Again there is a need for both a knowledge and experiential base and for events for faculty which provide the opportunity for both.

—There is obviously a great deal of literature and a large number of experts willing to speak to students or faculty about subjects such as social justice, hunger, international development, and peace studies. A school interested in social justice will have a regular series of events which focus attention on these areas.

—There have been numerous recent attempts to provide materials and processes to allow teachers to insert social justice issues into the curriculum. Opportunities could be provided for faculty to become aware of these materials and of how they can be adapted to their classes. This program could involve events not only in school but also in workshops, inservice days, and conventions staged by the diocese or local agencies.

—Just as with students, the most important instrument to create faculty interest in social justice issues is actual involvement with the destructive symptoms of these problems. Possible are both special experiences for faculty or participation in (frequently direction of) student social justice programs and projects.

Orientation Toward Religious Development Generally Though it may seem as though no specific activities are appropriate under a general heading, there are several important elements that can be mentioned in connection with the school's overall commitment to religious development:

—The level of resources devoted to faculty development should reflect its importance in the eyes of the school and be an obvious priority in the eyes of budget planners.

—The importance of the religious purposes of the school should be emphasized in brochures, public pronouncements, teacher applications, student assemblies, faculty meetings and so forth.

—The work of faculty in their own and their students' religious development should be amply reinforced and rewarded.

—In general, the school should say by its structures and processes that the faculty's religious development and contribution

to the religious growth of students is an essential expectation and an important service to the school.

VI. Evaluation

The evaluative phase of this systematic process of faculty religious development proceeds from the same basis as the processes of hiring and development: the criteria derived from the philosophy and objectives. Evaluation of a person's religious contribution should be twofold: first, a self-evaluation by the teacher of his/her level of religious development, participation, and contribution; second, a reaction on the part of the principal either validating or questioning the teacher's self-evaluation. Either teachers might be asked to indicate in a general way in their annual self-evaluations how they have participated in the many activities available for religious development (i.e., those mentioned in the preceding section), whether they have grown personally, and how they feel that they have contributed to the religious goals of the school and religious growth of their students; or the faculty members might be given the six criteria described above and asked to describe their involvement in each of these areas.

In either case the concern of the principal would be the faculty member's participation and growth in the six areas mentioned. As suggested at the beginning of this paper, the attitude of the principal and the teacher should be that the religious goals of the school are of critical importance and that every staff member, religious and lay, is expected to contribute to their attainment. The large number of activities provides a variety of opportunities so that each can contribute in a way that he/she feels most comfortable. Evaluation of the religious dimension of faculty performance strengthens teachers' perceptions that this is a key area of school life which requires serious time and effort. It also provides the administrator with a more accurate picture of the overall level of religious involvement and activity among the faculty and identifies areas which need greater emphasis.

A systematic program of faculty religious development which focuses on hiring and development programs but neglects evalua-

tion omits a significant and essential organizational element which virtually all theorists of organizations see as a vital element to the success of any program. If schools are serious about their religious purposes, they will identify them clearly and also build them into ordinary operating procedures. This will include not only devices for reinforcing those whose achievement is significant but also methods for pointing out to less effective faculty a) the need for improvement and b) concrete ways in which they can improve performance.

VII. Summary Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to suggest a systematic approach to faculty hiring, development, and evaluation based on religious guidelines derived directly from the philosophy and objectives of a Catholic school. Acceptance or rejection of this particular approach is not as important as the need for every Catholic school to have a systematic process for faculty religious development.

Today more than ever circumstances are converging to endanger the traditional religious identity of the Catholic school. Catholic schools must respond with increased emphasis on the key element in the achievement of religious objectives—its faculty—to insure that faculty are prepared for and committed to the school's religious goals. Faculty religious development deserves the same level of resources, planning, and concern as the academic development of faculty. Only by insisting on a systematic religious development program for faculty can the contemporary Catholic school be assured that its clarity of purpose and achievement of its religious goals will match the outstanding record of the Catholic school of the past.