

AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION OF EDMUND RICE CHRISTIAN BROTHER EDUCATION

RAYMOND J. VERCRUYSSSE, C.F.C.

University of San Francisco

The Congregation of Christian Brothers (CFC), a religious community which continues to sponsor and staff Catholic high schools, began in Ireland with the vision of Edmund Rice. This article surveys biographical information about the founder and details ongoing discussions within the community directed toward preserving and growing Rice's vision in contemporary Catholic schools.

BACKGROUND

In 1802, Edmund Rice directed the laying of the foundation stone for Mount Sion Monastery and School. After several previous attempts of instructing poor boys in Waterford, this was to be the first permanent home for the Congregation of Christian Brothers. Rice's dream of founding a religious community of brothers was becoming a reality with a school that would reach out to the poor, especially Catholic boys of Waterford, Ireland.

Edmund Rice grew up in Callan, County Kilkenny. The Rice family was described as "a quiet, calm, business people who derived a good living from the land and were esteemed and respected" (Normoyle, 1976, p. 2). Some historians place the family farm in the Sunhill townland section of the county. The family farm was known as Westcourt. It was at Westcourt that Robert Rice and Margaret Tierney began a life together.

However, "this life on the family farm was to be lived under the partial relaxation of the Penal Laws of 1782" (Normoyle, 1976, p. 3). This fact would impact the way the Rice family would practice their faith and limit their participation in the local Church. Margaret Tierney was married before meeting Robert Rice and had two daughters by that marriage. After the death of her husband, she married Robert Rice and together they had seven sons. Edmund was born June 1, 1762, the fourth son in the blended family.

Due to the Penal Laws, the responsibility for nurturing a family faith life fell to Margaret. It is reported that many evenings around the family hearth, she would instruct the Rice children about the Bible followed by "the recitation of the rosary" (Normoyle, 1976, p. 12). Robert and Margaret placed a high value on education, and they sent their children to a "hedge school" on

Moate Lane. It was here that Edmund showed a studious temperament. However, furthering Edmund's education would mean sending him to live in Kilkenny with a family cousin, Maurice Rice, and additional studies at Burrell Hall (Fitzpatrick, 1945).

Edmund's parents decided that Edmund would be better served being an apprentice to Robert Rice's brother, Michael, in his thriving business in Waterford than by remaining on the farm which would pass to his older brother, Thomas. After finishing his schooling, Edmund moved to Waterford to begin the apprenticeship with his uncle Michael. This apprenticeship would result in Edmund inheriting the business upon his uncle's death. It was during this period in Edmund's life that he sharpened his business acumen and began to enjoy the social life of Kilkenny and the responsibilities that came with it.

Things were beginning to look up for Edmund. His business associates along the quay in Waterford would often consult him on business matters as well as personal issues. He became involved in the social life of Waterford, and it was through these experiences that he would meet Mary Elliot, and eventually marry her and start a family at the age of 23 (Normoyle, 1976).

Marriage was something that suited Edmund Rice and Mary Elliot well. The business was prospering as Edmund had a contract to provide provisions to English ships sailing to North America, and in particular, Newfoundland. It was significant that Edmund was both a practicing Catholic and owned his own business. At the time, this was unheard of, but nevertheless the English magistrates would often look the other way when it came to dealings with Edmund Rice.

Having gained some social prominence, Mary and Edmund Rice would often find themselves invited to the best social happenings in Waterford. One thing that Mary and Edmund enjoyed doing together was horseback riding. They would often ride together and allow their love for each other to deepen. It would not be long into the marriage that God would bless the couple with a child.

However, this blessing would soon lead to a tragedy. While the circumstances are unclear, Mary lost her life in an accident, and gave birth prematurely to a daughter. Edmund would name the child Mary, in memory of her mother and as a constant reminder to Edmund of the love he had for his wife. Young Mary was born physically and mentally challenged and would need a great deal of Edmund's attention. Eventually, Edmund sought help from his stepsister, Joan Murphy, in attending to Mary's needs.

This difficult period in Edmund's life led him to turn more to prayer to find meaning in the death of Mary Elliot. Edmund spent his free time in spiritual reading and the book of his choice was the Bible (Normoyle, 1976). In doing so, Edmund's heart and eyes were opened to see more clearly the injustices of his day. He began to realize a disconnect between what he read in the Bible and the realities of his time. Catholics were still being treated as sec-

ond class citizens in Ireland; they were not allowed to have a proper education, to vote, or to own land or a business.

During this period of Edmund's life, it is reported that he would often visit with men on their way to the gallows and spend time with their families. After a hard day's work Edmund would occupy his evenings with works of charity. His life exemplified the role of a devout Catholic layman in the 18th century. "The poor of Waterford were the chief object of his [Edmund's] attention—in fact this wonderful sympathy for God's poor was one of his most distinctive characteristics" (Normoyle, 1976, p. 33). His charitable efforts would see him through this dark period of his life; it seemed that God had a plan for Edmund that was not fully revealed.

These events led Edmund to sell his successful business, set up a plan for the perpetual care of Mary, convert a stable, and establish his first community and school. He had noticed the aimlessness of young boys roaming the docks of Waterford whose futures were grim due to a lack of education. Moved by the good works of Nano Nagle and her Sisters for young girls in Cork, Edmund wanted to do something similar for young boys in Waterford.

Thus, Edmund Rice Christian Brother education began in the humble setting of a stable. His first followers did not stay with him because the work was too difficult. Not deterred by this, Edmund persisted and soon others would become engaged in this important ministry in the Church. "Edmund Rice was a man of action. Impelled by zeal for the salvation of youth, he [Edmund] determined to start his work for Christian education without further delay" (Fitzpatrick, 1945, p. 130) and thus the Congregation of Christian Brothers was begun.

BEATIFICATION OF EDMUND RICE

On October 6, 1996, in St. Peter's Square in Rome, Pope John Paul II beatified Edmund Rice along with three women religious founders. During the academic year 2006-2007, the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers in North America celebrated 130 years of ministry in North America, 100 years of Catholic education in the United States, and the 10th anniversary of Edmund being raised up in the Church as Blessed Edmund Rice.

Authentic Edmund Rice education is based on the spirit or charism of the founder (D. McLaughlin, personal communication, Spring 2006). To fully understand this charism, one needs to appreciate the heart, mind, and faith-inspired actions of Edmund Rice:

Following the tragic death of his young wife, Edmund made arrangements for the care and upbringing of their handicapped daughter and spent much time in developing successfully his merchant business. But there was more. During these years he reflected on the scriptures, developed a strong commitment to

the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist, prayed alone and with his friends, and became increasingly involved in charitable activities among the poorest and most destitute of his fellow citizens. The gospel was challenging him. He was gradually led by grace to abandon his successful career. In 1802 he devoted his wealth to founding free schools for poor boys.

Edmund showed great faith and trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit by exchanging his security in a flourishing business for the risks and uncertainties of a mission to the poor and deprived. He gave up his comfortable home for a makeshift room in the loft above the stable which served as a temporary school. His trust was soon rewarded as others, encouraged by his example, joined with him in offering their lives for the service of the poor. And thus we [the Congregation of Christian Brothers] began. (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 1985, pp. ix-x)

Today, the Congregation of Christian Brothers ministers around the world in 33 countries and in many settings providing Catholic education for the poor. This is a far cry from the hilltop of Mount Sion in Waterford where Edmund built his first community and school. Edmund's charism is what motivates Christian Brothers and colleagues to work to better the plight of youth through faith formation in Catholic education.

In the Introduction to the *Constitutions* (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 1996), it is written that

Edmund Rice was a human being with a great and expansive heart. He was a man of creative vision, practical wisdom and energetic know-how. He was in many respects a bridge builder. He wanted to build a bridge from what had been his experience of life in eighteenth century Ireland, and before, to what needed to emerge in the nineteenth century and beyond. He passionately wanted to build the bridge which would close the gap between the rich and poor, the educated elite and those without power or education. In many ways he also built and crossed bridges between people of different cultural and religious denominational background. (p. vi)

It is this charism, rooted in the life of Blessed Edmund Rice, that inspires hundreds of men and women ministering in Edmund Rice Christian Brother schools to educate for justice and to better prepare men and women attending these schools to become leaders in the Church and society and to make a difference.

100 YEARS LATER

A post-Vatican document, *Directives for Mutual Relations Between Bishops and Religious in the Church* (Vatican Council II, 1982), claimed that

The "charism of the Founders" appears as "an experience of the spirit" transmitted to their followers to be lived by them, to be preserved, deepened and con-

stantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in a process of growth. "It is for this that the distinctive character of the various religious Institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church." This "distinctive character" also involves a particular style of sanctification and apostolate which creates a defined tradition so that its objective elements can be easily recognized. (§11)

The "distinctive character" is what the early American bishops were looking for when they decided to establish Catholic schools. In 1906, Msgr. James W. Power invited the Christian Brothers to open a school in All Saints Parish, in present-day Harlem, New York. The Provincial, located in Ireland at the time, sent Brothers Jerome Hennessey, Titus Frisby, Joachim Ryan, Sebastian Curtis, Gilbert Mulloy, and Ambrose Kelly to America. In a group of brownstone buildings, these men opened All Saints School. Harlem at the time was an Irish Catholic enclave, and the school soon became well-known and a success for the Irish Catholic immigrant.

With eyes on bigger things, the Brothers established a private academy in 1909, All Hallows Institute, while teaching in All Saints Parish. Soon they would outgrow the building and look for land north of Harlem. In the south Bronx on 164th Street, the brothers moved All Hallows Institute into a newly built school in 1931. With foresight, the brothers took the abandoned brownstones and began Power Memorial Academy. Within a few years, they would outgrow that facility, and the brothers this time looked south, deeper into Manhattan, and on West 61st Street found a building that would house Power Memorial Academy in 1938.

The old brownstones would not be empty long. In 1938, the Christian Brothers opened Rice High School, the first school in the Congregation named for the founder. In a few years time (1942), Rice High School was moved to 124th Street, where it is still housed today.

These early Irish brothers would see their new homeland as an exciting place and their reputation as educators would soon be well established. The invitations to open schools soon flowed in and decisions had to be made as to which invitations they would accept and where they would expand in this new emerging province. In 1916, they established Iona School in Westchester County, and in 1923, they crossed the country to Seattle and took on the responsibility of managing O'Dea High School for the diocese, followed by Butte Boys' Central High School in Montana in 1924. In 1926, they arrived in Chicago, and took on the management of Leo High School on the Southside. Table 1 illustrates the pattern of expansion that took place in North America. The American province was established in 1916, with Brother P. Joachim Ryan as its first provincial.

As young men became interested in joining the Christian Brothers, a workforce of Catholic school educators would be able to establish more schools in the United States. In 2007, the Christian Brothers minister in 29 high schools, 2 elementary schools, and Iona College in New Rochelle, New York.

Table 1

Christian Brothers' High Schools in the United States: Openings and Withdrawals

School Name	Location	Opened	Withdrawn
All Hallows Institute	Bronx, NY	1909	
Iona Preparatory School	New Rochelle, NY	1916	
O'Dea High School	Seattle, WA	1923	
Butte Boys' Central High School	Butte, MO	1924	1986
Leo High School	Chicago, IL	1926	1992
Power Memorial Academy	New York, NY	1931	1984 ^b
Rice High School	New York, NY	1938	
Cardinal Hayes High School	Bronx, NY	1939	
Blessed Sacrament/St. Gabriel H.S.	New Rochelle, NY	1942	
Cardinal Farley Military High School	Rinecliffe, NY	1942	1971 ^b
Cantwell High School	Montebello, CA	1946	1990
Palma High School	Salinas, CA	1951	
Bergen Catholic High School	Oradell, NJ	1956	
Brother Rice High School	Chicago, IL	1956	
Catholic Memorial School	West Roxbury, MA	1957	
Bishop Francis Essex Catholic H.S.	East Orange, NJ	1957	2003 ^b
Notre Dame/Bishop Gibbons School	Schenectady, NY	1958	
Brother Rice High School	Bloomfield Hills, MI	1960	
St. Laurence High School	Burbank, IL	1961	
Msgr. Farrell High School	Staten Island, NY	1961	
Bishop Kearney High School	Rochester, NY	1962	2000 ^c
Damien Memorial High School	Honolulu, HI	1962	
St. Patrick's High School	Vallejo, CA	1968	1993
Bishop Hendricken High School	Warwick, RI	1971 ^a	
Seton Catholic High School	Chandler, AZ	1984 ^a	1995
Archbishop Curley/Notre Dame H.S.	Miami, FL	1984 ^a	
Tampa Catholic High School	Tampa, FL	1984 ^a	
St. John Neumann High School	Naples, FL	1988 ^a	2003 ^c
St. Joseph's High School	Madison, MI	1998 ^a	
Trinity Catholic High School	Ocala, FL	2000	

Note. ^aThe date when the Congregation of Christian Brothers assumed responsibility for the already existing schools; ^bThe date the school was closed; ^cThe date the school became a sponsored ministry of the Eastern American Province.

Source: (Vercruysse, 2004)

EDMUND RICE CHRISTIAN BROTHER EDUCATION: THE ESSENTIALS

In July 2000, the provincial leadership convened an educational conference at Iona College in New Rochelle. The conference culminated a full year's effort to gather input and data from the administrators, faculty, students, parents, and alumni of various schools in North America. When the assembled body of the conference, 85 in all, began its work, it had material that would be reduced to what was later named *Essential Elements of a Christian Brother Education* (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 2000). The conference was held over a 4-day time period.

This group of men and women were charged with the task of designing elements that would be characteristic of all the schools conducted by the Christian Brothers. The list below represents the essential elements as articulated in 2000:

In ministry begun by Jesus Christ and inspired by the vision of Blessed Edmund Rice, a Christian Brother education...

- Evangelizes youth within the mission of the Church
- Proclaims and witnesses to its Catholic identity
- Stands in solidarity with those marginalized by poverty and injustice
- Fosters and invigorates a community of faith
- Celebrates the value and dignity of each person and nurtures the development of the whole person
- Calls for collaboration and shared responsibility in its mission
- Pursues excellence in all its endeavors. (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 2000, pp. 2-5)

For the next 6 years, these elements would mark opening school presentations to students and parents, permeate orientation programs for new faculty, be listed in faculty, student, and parent handbooks, begin significant events in the form of prayer services, be used for administrator evaluations and school visitations within the consortium of Christian Brother schools, assist boards in their decision making, and be posted in classrooms and hallways of the schools. At the close of the 2000 education conference, delegates agreed to return in 6 years to evaluate the use and effectiveness of the written elements and ascertain whether in reality they represented Christian Brother education in the 21st century.

In July 2006, delegates from the various schools in North America arrived at Iona College and another education conference was held to discuss the relevance of the essential elements. Over the course of 4 days, the dele-

gates were led through a process which resulted in an overwhelming affirmation of seven essential elements. They were to remain as written but the title which refers to them was changed. They are now known as *The Essential Elements of an Edmund Rice Christian Brother Education* (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 2006).

In the 2000 version, each element was followed by bulleted points further elaborating each element. In the 2006 draft, these points were modified due to the new identification and the addition of Edmund Rice's name to the title of the document. The changes were minor and *Essential Elements of an Edmund Rice Christian Brother Education* (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 2006) are listed below.

The Essential Elements of an Edmund Rice Christian Brother Education calls educational ministry sites and those working in them to:

- Evangelize youth within the mission of the Church
- Proclaim and witness to Catholic identity
- Stand in solidarity with those marginalized by poverty and injustice
- Foster and invigorate a community of faith
- Celebrate the value and dignity of each person and nurture the development of the whole person
- Collaborate and share responsibility for the mission
- Pursue excellence in all endeavors. (pp. 3-5)

THE EDUCATIONAL CHARISM OF EDMUND RICE

In 1988, Brother Raphael Bellows, CFC, assistant to the Superior General of the Congregation of Christian Brothers, delivered a presentation at St. Boniface College, Plymouth, England, in which, he identified five characteristics that were common to Christian Brothers' schools throughout the world. These distinctive characteristics, suggested by Bellows (1988), "help identify them [the schools] as inheritors of the spirit and traditions of Edmund Rice, founder of the Christian Brothers" (p. 185). They were:

- The encouragement given to pupils in our schools to strive for scholastic excellence in a disciplined atmosphere...
- Christian Brothers' schools offer a religious dimension that permeates the entire education available to their pupils...
- The cultivation of a strong devotion to Mary, the Mother of God...
- The emphasis given to the care and concern for each individual in the school community...
- Christian Brothers' schools demonstrate a particular concern for the poor. (pp. 185-189)

These five distinctive characteristics of Christian Brothers' schools are an essential part of the educational patrimony that the Christian Brothers' schools have inherited from Rice and his early followers.

In the document, *A Short History of the Founder and the Institute* (n.d.), written by an anonymous Christian Brother sometime in the late 1920s, the author provides the following aims and ideals of the Christian Brothers and their educational core values:

- To foster and develop latent capacity, in their pupils.
- To inculcate habits of order and self-reliance.
- To arouse the youthful mind to the attractions of knowledge.
- To fit the pupils under their tuition for the battle of existence according to their talents.
- To help them, by principles imparted, to encounter the varied problems of life.
- To make virile and virtuous citizens and subjects.
- To join in building the social edifice in the land in which they teach and live.
- To offer education which shall combine the intellectual and moral essentials, and co-ordinating the Primary and Secondary education. (p. ix)

The document continued to state:

A Nation is what its schools have made it. Schoolmasters are the teachers of the race—as they mould the child[’s] mind, so is the nation moulded. The school is the nation’s home, where its children are trained; as home life leaves its impress on the family, so is the impress of the school left on the civic and national life. The school boys to-day are the men who will rule our destinies to-morrow. (p. ix)

The statement revealed some of the core values or essential elements of a Christian Brothers' education as seen in the 1920s in a school operated by the Christian Brothers.

A diligent reader may go back to Rice's thoughts as expressed in the 1832 *Constitutions* (Hickey, 1981). This document reflected the thoughts, feelings, and charism as Rice transmitted it to his early followers. The first chapter, "Of the End of this Institute," stated:

The end of this institute is, that all its members labour, in the first place, for their own perfection; and in the second, for that of their neighbour, by serious application to the instruction of male children, especially the poor, in the principles of religion and Christian piety.

It is a duty incumbent on the Brethren each day of school, to have the children taught the catechism; and also, on these days, to explain it to them, each

in turn, according to the order observed. They are, in the explanation of the Christian doctrine, to speak in a simple and familiar manner, adapting their language to the age and capacity of their hearers, avoiding every thing abstruse or difficult, which might embarrass themselves or the children.

The Brothers should recollect that the instruction of poor children is the great object of their Institute, and for which, through the mercy of God, the Institute has been particularly raised up. They should always teach them gratis; nor can they receive from them or their parents, anything by way of retribution for their education; but shall content themselves with the glorious recompense promised to all “who instruct many unto justice.” This gratuitous instruction of the poor is one of their vows. (Christian Brothers, 1832, pp. 1-2)

Further stated in the 1832 *Constitutions*, in the chapter, “Of the Schools; and how the Brothers are to Conduct Themselves Therein, in Regard to the Children,” it is declared that “The Brothers shall teach the children, in the way of science, such things as are befitting them” (Christian Brothers, 1832, p. 11). Rice maintained:

The Brothers are to recollect, that the instruction of the children in piety and religion, is the great and main end of their institute. This is to be their first and principal care in regard to their pupils.

They shall be careful that the children be instructed in the Christian Doctrine, for half an hour, each day of school; and particularly that they be taught how to dispose themselves for the receiving worthily the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist.

They shall use their endeavours, that order and regularity be kept up in the Schools, and particularly that silence, the foundation of both be observed.

They shall cherish a tender affection for all Scholars...out of love for that God whom they more particularly represent.

They shall make it their study to exhibit to the Scholars...edifying example of that modesty, and every other virtue, which they both teach and exhort them to practise. (pp. 12-13)

Another example of Rice’s charism is visible in the Presentation Brothers’ version of a charism statement as both Congregations claim Rice as their founder. The Presentation Brothers’ mission statement begins, “We, Presentation Brothers, faithful to the spirit and charism of our Founder, Edmund Ignatius Rice” and maintains

Our journey through Scripture, through our history and with our Brothers reveals to us a vision of our charism as the Congregation of the Presentation Brothers. Since charism is the special gifting of a community by the Holy Spirit, through its founder and founding community, we acknowledge our charism to be:

The gift of courageous and zealous service through Christian formation with faith in Divine Providence and openness to the Spirit to discern the needs of our time, especially the needs of youth.

The gift of bringing comfort and consolation to those in distress by showing active concern and compassion for all God's people, especially the youth, the materially poor and the disadvantaged.

The gift of Gospel discipleship in cheerful community living, with care and support for one another, and a willingness to reach out to those in need.

The gift of a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, to whom our Congregation is dedicated. (Hickey, 1988, pp. 63-64)

The Congregation of Christian Brothers (1985) reported in its *Constitutions* the results of its first International Spirituality Conference, held in Ireland, on efforts to reach an agreement on the charism and spirit of the Congregation of Christian Brothers. The conference body was comprised of Brothers from all provinces and regions of the Congregation throughout the world. These statements acted as the impetus for a second conference, held in the United States. The charism statement is contained in the following:

Deeply aware of the Father's providential presence in his life, Edmund Rice was moved by the Holy Spirit to open his whole heart to Christ present and appealing to him in the poor.

He was given the grace to respond by identifying through Christ with the poor in order to evoke in them a deep awareness of God's loving presence.

His example attracted others to share his gospel insight and response in an apostolic religious community which mainly through Christian education would raise the poor to an awareness of their dignity as children of God. (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 1985, pp. 52-53)

The Conference further developed a Spirit Statement that maintained:

The spirit of the Congregation is that spirit of faith which leads the Brothers to surrender to the Father's will, relying joyfully on his providential care. They see the mystery of the loving God, present in all things, most fully revealed in Jesus Christ who is "the way, the truth, and the light." One in mind and heart with Christ and imitating his spirit of prayerful detachment, the brothers strive to see people, events and things as gifts coming from God and leading to his glory.

The spirit of the brothers—which has its source in that same Spirit of God who anointed Jesus "to bring the Good News to the poor"—is present in its authentic form when it arises out of prayer and a contemplative approach to the mission of the Church. Thus empowered by the Spirit and radically committed by the vows, the brothers grow in freedom to risk all for the sake of the Kingdom in response to the "signs of the times."

United by their shared experience of Christ in community, they are called by Christ in others to apostolic service. With zeal and compassion, they reach out to the needy, especially the materially poor, educating them and awakening in them a consciousness of their dignity as children of God. (Congregation of Christian Brothers, 1985, p. 53)

Brother Dermot Barrett (1978), in an address to a group of Christian Brothers in India, asserted:

Edmund Rice had his vision after he was stricken in love; his wife died, and his daughter would remain an imbecile. He would never adequately satisfy and fulfill his paternal love. Frustrated as a husband and as a father, he could appreciate the agony of both Hosea and Jeremiah. In the darkest and loneliest of nights, he communed with God. The vision emerged. He saw Jesus as the Good Shepherd caring for the little ones who were being neglected, and he saw Mary, Jesus' mother. (p. 38)

According to Barrett, Rice perceived his mission in the Church "to safeguard and to foster the faith especially of youth" (p. 41). This clear mission, for each member of the Congregation of Christian Brothers, is still as vital today as it was in Rice's time.

Coldrey and Kilmartin (1989) defined charism as

The Christian's attempt to repeat the life of Christ. For this task the Spirit may give him a charism—a special gift linked to his natural inclinations—to be a focus for the Christian community of some aspect of Christ's presence to the world. (p. 3)

The authors continued by claiming that a charism is a special grace, but must be understood in the context of conversion, "a turning away from and a turning to something" (p. 3). For Rice, his conversion process commenced with the tragic death of his wife in 1789.

Coldrey and Kilmartin (1989) offered two understandings of Rice's charism. They wrote:

The charism...proposed for Edmund Rice is "to the poor"—the stress on clothing, feeding, teaching the ultra poor of the displaced country folk; to help the goaled, the condemned, the deprived. (p. 4)

The second view they offered included the idea that:

The charism of Edmund Rice was to instruct ignorant boys and young men in the Catholic faith. It is true that the poorest youth could often be the most spir-

itually ignorant, but not always and not necessarily. Edmund addressed the spiritual ignorance of Irish youth as his first priority and their material poverty second. Edmund's modern disciples have, perhaps unwittingly reversed the priorities. This is a perversion of his charism. The constantly reiterated emphasis in the modern world on Edmund "hearing the cry of the poor" suggests addressing their material poverty as first priority. For Edmund Rice it was second. (p. 6)

Coldrey (1989) wrote in the *Christian Brothers' Educational Record* that Rice's charism was tied to his interest in the faith formation of the Irish Catholic poor because of the Protestant proselytism in the schools that existed in his day. This stance caused the Congregation's leadership and individual brothers around the Congregation to oppose his position. This interpretation by Coldrey currently is not embraced totally by the general membership of the Christian Brothers.

Brother J. E. Carroll, CFC, lectured extensively to groups of Christian Brothers when they attended the International Tertianship Program in Rome. In one presentation, Carroll (1975) suggested:

Among the many charisms sown by the Holy Spirit in mankind down through the centuries the charisms of founders are certainly the greatest. They continue to flourish and to bear fruit in the Church sometimes even centuries after the particular founder has passed away....Like all charisms, they have their origin in the Holy Spirit and aim at emphasizing in the Church each a definite aspect of the immense riches of Christ. (p. 1)

Carroll (1975) in notes from a lecture maintained:

God brings prophecy out of the bowels of the prophet; the human man in the terrible human situation. All prophecy has its unique message. The man is the message. The man goes to God and touches God at that point....God works in the whole person of Edmund Rice to bring a certain unique divine service into being for the people of God. God gives Edmund Rice a charism, an evident gift from the Holy Spirit to an Individual for the good of others. (p. 1)

Years later, in an article, published in *Wellsprings*, Carroll (1999) clarified the above quote, listing its source as St. Thomas Aquinas and that this divine gift or charism has many elements:

- a core
- human competencies
- spiritual gifts
- mission
- a particular colouring to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience

- a unique spirit
- a unique spirituality

Carroll wrote two versions of a watershed article, “From Charism to Mission to Ministry,” published in both *Edmund* (Carroll, 1992) and *Wellsprings* (Carroll, 2002), in which he offered a definition of Rice’s charism by quoting Boff: “A true charism blossoms where individuals place all that they are, all that they have, and all that they can do at the service of God and the neighbour” (2002, p. 21). In the article, Carroll (1992, 2002) demonstrated that a charism emerges from the framework of a specific mission and for Rice that mission was to the poor Catholic boys whose faith was not being developed. For Rice, this mission led him to a lifelong ministry of Catholic education on behalf of the poor of Ireland (Carroll, n.d.).

EDMUND RICE CHRISTIAN BROTHER SCHOOLS TODAY

Today, Edmund Rice Christian Brother schools in North America make every attempt to be governed by the Blessed Edmund Rice charism. In each individual school’s attempt to pursue academic excellence, the spirit of the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers prevails in the daily decisions and curriculum design. Catholic education is just as relevant today as it was in years past. The challenges may be different, but the importance for the future of the Church is still very much needed and in line with the teachings of the magisterium.

An authentic expression of an Edmund Rice Christian Brother education rests in establishing an environment in which the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice is embraced by all those engaged in ministry. However, it does not stop there; it must be shared with students, parents, alumni, and the civic community in which the school finds itself. When this is accomplished, the Church may find that Blessed Edmund Rice will be known as St. Edmund Rice, patron of the poor and marginalized.

NOTE

Many of the references found in this article can be located in the Christian Brother Archives by contacting Br. A. E. DeLorenzo at 30 Montgomery Circle, New Rochelle, New York or at aed@atgnet.com for further information.

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- Raymond J. Vercruysse, C.F.C., is director of the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership at the University of San Francisco. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Brother Raymond J. Vercruysse, C.F.C., University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117.*