

# The Education Charism of Blessed Edmund Rice<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *Authentic Edmund Rice education is based on the spirit or charism of its founder. On the basis of primary sources—Bible annotations, private letters, Rules for the Brothers and historical transcripts—, we are presented with an account of Edmund Rice’s own spiritual experiences and insights. The first is a radical faith in the divine presence in his own life; the second, a profound sense of the dignity of every human person; and, the third, a heightened sensitivity to the poor and marginal. These experiences are at once sacramental—especially nourished through the Eucharist—and mission-focused—flowing over into his relationships and informing his educational philosophy. In Edmund Rice educational terms, we can speak of a charism which highlights the primacy of God (presence), cultivates a communal ethic of care (compassion), and is committed to humanized action based on justice (liberation).*

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**Key Words:** Edmund Rice; education; charism; presence of God; compassion; liberation; Christian Brothers

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**B**e intent on prayer and whatever may happen will turn to our good. Cast all your cares into the arms of Divine Providence... (Edmund Rice).<sup>2</sup>

Educators, who follow the Rice tradition, enquire about the meaning of the “Founder’s Charism” as it is to be applied in Edmund Rice Education. Charism in the Catholic culture means a Holy Spirit inspired insight, a “spirit-quake” which ignites passionately one of God’s people to bring forth Christ’s kingdom in God’s people, in a special way. Pope Paul VI insists that such gifts from God should not be ignored and reminds institutions like the Presentation and Christian Brothers of their obligations “to be faithful to the spirit of their founder, to their evangelical intentions and to the example of their sanctity.”<sup>3</sup> This being the case, “the charism of the founder and the spirit of the order are intended to be significant influences upon the culture and work of those Catholic schools derived from these traditions and origins.”<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to attempt to generate some appreciation of the spiritual foundations (shared beliefs, values and practices) emanating from Edmund Rice,<sup>5</sup> and embodying the Edmund Rice Education

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<sup>1</sup> I appreciate the time Br Philip Pinto and Br Michael Godfrey gave in reading and providing feedback for various drafts of this chapter. Nevertheless Philip’s and Michael’s feedback implies no endorsement from them of what is written.

<sup>2</sup> Rice, Circular letter, January, 1829, J.D. Fitzpatrick, *Edmund Rice* (Dublin, 1945), 207.

<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, “Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life,” in A. Flannery, *Vatican II, Vol. I, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York, Dublin, 1996), 685.

<sup>4</sup> G. Grace, *Catholic Schools: Missions, Markets and Morality* (London, New York, 2003), 129.

<sup>5</sup> Apart from Edmund Rice whose name was well established before he took the name ‘Ignatius’ (E.I.R.) on the 15th August, 1808 as his religious name, I use the religious name (second name) of the Brothers, the name most commonly used among themselves. Though Brother is used, the Brothers were identified in the local

charism. It is from this articulation that the bases upon which authentic Edmund Rice Education are developed.

The process employed in generating these conclusions is a documentary analysis of historical materials, directly related to Rice. There are four historical sources that invite investigation as they, in the light of an absence of a written tradition from Rice, appear to provide the optimum insights available into Rice's thinking. They are:

- (1) the specific bible references Rice wrote into the fly leaf of his bible;
- (2) his own letters;
- (3) chapter two of the 1832 Rules,<sup>6</sup> of which Rice was the main author; and
- (4) transcripts from interviewed contemporaries of Rice and/or the relatives and friends of his contemporaries.

## BIBLE VERSES

Rice had cultivated an extensive knowledge of the scriptures, which he probably commenced reading seriously between 1789 and 1791. Rice's early companions acknowledged him as an accomplished devotee of the Bible:

Br. Ignatius studied the Holy Scriptures deeply and profitably, even long before he became the Founder of the Christian Brothers' Society. He had an intimate knowledge of the sacred volume. He never relaxed in the daily perusal of his favourite book. Even in old age, when free from all responsibility, it was his great joy and comfort to read daily a portion of the book. It was here he imbibed his holy wisdom, solid virtue, exalted piety, and his conspicuous love for God and his neighbour; from his devout daily meditations on the teachings and maxims of the Scriptures, he learnt the lessons which guided his steps in the paths of virtue through his long and honoured life.<sup>7</sup>

Most visual depictions of Edmund Rice have him holding a book of scriptures, though curiously the Christian Brothers presented in the 1950s to their La Sallian confreres for their museum, a portrait of Rice holding the De La Salle Rule, *Sancta Regula*, instead of the Bible. Nevertheless, most biographies of Rice make reference to his regularly reading the scriptures:

In the only authentic portrait we have of the Founder- that painted at the wish of the 1838 Chapter and voted by his associates a good likeness, being housed today with the Carrick-on-Suir community- you will see his hand resting on a "Doway Bible." I should say, "resting over" it; for this is a large bible: the whole of the Founder's hand from heel to finger tips reaches down the width of the spine, and a goodly part of his forearm is in contact with the thick leather front cover. ...There is no reason for doubting this is the Bible belonging to the Founder since its purchase by subscription in 1791, fixed in our memories by the list of texts on usury cited by biographers as an important clue to his thinking...<sup>8</sup>

At the top of the fly leaf is Rice's autograph: Edmund Rice 1791. It appears again abbreviated vertically close to the spine. Below the owner's name comes a list of twelve

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community as Mr Rice, Mr Dunphy, or Mr Corbett. Some few were known by their Christian name e.g. Mr John (Baptist Leonard) of Cork's North Monastery, as a term of endearment.

<sup>6</sup> T.J. Moloney, "Study of Some Sources of the 1832 Rule," *Christian Brothers' Educational Record* (Rome, 1989): 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> *History of the Institute*, vol. I, Congregation of Christian Brothers, 393.

<sup>8</sup> R.C. Hill, "Edmund Rice's Bible," *Our Studies* 39.1 (1966): 41.

texts, containing fourteen references to nine books of the Bible, headed: Texts against usury. At the bottom of the page the date is written: Feby 26 1823. So that the reader is left in no doubt that this bible is Rice's, the following postscript is written by Br Patrick Ellis, an intimate friend of Rice and the Christian Brothers' first novice master.

The whole of the above Script is the handwriting of Br.Edmd  
I. Rice founder of the Society of the Religious Brothers  
of the Christian Schools. Waterford Oct 17th 1856.  
Br. P.Ellis

Eleven<sup>9</sup> texts have all been entered on the flyleaf together at the same time. The last reference from Second Esdras<sup>10</sup> is out of sequence; and the date Feby 26 1823, is an indication when this reference was added. Hill<sup>11</sup> is the sole commentator, who believes they were all written in 1823. This stance is not seriously entertained because in 1823, Rice would have been a veteran religious, and presumably issues of usury would not have been the main focus of his scriptural reflections. Moreover, a visual examination of the flyleaf handwriting indicates that Esdras was not entered with the rest of the verses.<sup>12</sup> It seems more likely that with the exception of *Esdras*, all were written in 1791. Such an interpretation is consistent with assertions that the Rice family was possibly overly focused on business and financial gain to the detriment of others. They were accused also of being so "ambitious for land ...and to get rich quick"<sup>13</sup> that they took advantage of the bad luck of their evicted neighbours by purchasing their reposed land at bargain prices.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, when Rice commenced a more serious pursuit of the spiritual, this focus on the authenticity of his business life would have been the obvious place to start. Below is a modern<sup>15</sup> translation<sup>16</sup> of the texts in the fly leaf of the Rice Bible.

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<sup>9</sup> J. E. Carroll, "From Charism to Mission to Ministry," *Edmund* 10 (1991): 19-46; P. Wilson, "The Depth of Edmund's Vision: A Re-examination of his Special Texts of Scripture," *Inheritance* 9 (1991): 5-53.

<sup>10</sup> Second Esdras is called Nehemiah in modern editions of the scriptures.

<sup>11</sup> Hill, *Edmund Rice's Bible*, 41-45.

<sup>12</sup> An examination of the flyleaf of the bible shows that the texts of the first eleven verses are in three columns of four. If the 2 Esdras was written in 1791, then the pattern would have followed to complete the framework. It would have been the last verse in line three. 2 Esdras begins a fourth line and is the sole entry. The handwriting of Luke 6 is larger and the flourish of the last letter is longer as it indicated an end of the line. This is absent in the verses at the end of lines 1, 2 and 3. In fact last verses in these lines are cramped.

<sup>13</sup> James Foley, n.d. but c. December, 1949, M.C. Normoyle, *Memories of Edmund Rice* (Dublin, 1979), 114. Mr Foley (76 years old in 1949) had lived in around the old Westcourt house, Rice's childhood home.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Heron, 1st December, 1949, Normoyle, (1979), 137.

<sup>15</sup> New American Bible, Washington, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> The original translation in Rice's Bible is below:

Ex 22, 25 If you lend money to any of my people that is poor, that dwelleth with thee: thou shalt not be hard on upon them as an extortioner, nor oppress them with usuries.

Lev 25, 35-6 If thy brother be impoverished, and weak of hand, and thou receive him as a stranger and sojourner, and he live with thee: Take not usury of him nor more than gavest. Fear thy God, that thy brother may live with thee.

Dt 23, 19 Thou shalt not lend to thy Brother money to usury, nor corn, nor any other thing.

Ps 14, 5 He that hath not put out his money to usury, nor taken bribes against the innocent; he that doth these things shall not be moved for ever.

Ps 54, 11-12 Day and night shall iniquity surround it on its walls; and in its midst thereof are labour and injustice. And usury and deceit have not departed from its streets.

Prov 22, 16 He that oppressteth the poor, to increase his own riches, shall himself give to one that is richer, and shall be in need.

Prov 28, 8 He that heapeth together riches by usury and loan gathereth them for him that will be bountiful to the poor.

- (1) Ex 22, 25: If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset;
- (2) Lev 25, 35-6: When one of your fellow countrymen is reduced to poverty and is unable to hold out beside you, extend to him the privileges of an alien or a tenant, so that he may continue to live with you. Do not exact interest from your countryman either in money or in kind, but out of fear of God let him live with you.
- (3) Dt 23, 19: You shall not offer a harlot's fee or a dog's price as any kind of votive offering in the house of the LORD, your God; both these things are an abomination to the LORD, your God.
- (4) Ps 14, 5: Who keeps an oath despite the cost, lends no money at interest, accepts no bribe against the innocent. Whoever acts like this shall never be shaken.
- (5) Ps 54, 11-12: I see violence and strife in the city making rounds on its walls day and night. Within are mischief and evil; treachery is there as well; oppression and fraud never leave its streets.
- (6) Prov 22, 16: He who oppresses the poor to enrich himself will yield up his gains to the rich as sheer loss.
- (7) Prov 28, 8: He who increases his wealth by interest and overcharge gathers it for him who is kind to the poor.
- (8) Ez 18, 12;31: ... (He who) oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not give back a pledge, raises his eyes to idols, does abominable things. Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, O house of Israel ?
- (9) Ez 22, 12; 31:<sup>17</sup> There are those in you who take bribes to shed blood. You exact interest and usury; you despoil your neighbors violently; and me you have forgotten, says the Lord GOD. Therefore I have poured out my fury upon them; with my fiery wrath I have consumed them; I have brought down their conduct upon their heads, says the Lord GOD
- (10) Mt 5, 42: Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.

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Ez 18,12;31 That giveth the needy and the poor; that taketh away by violence: that restoreth not the pledge: and that lifteth up his eyes to idols; that committeth abominations: that giveth up usury and that taketh an increase; shall such a one live? He shall not live. Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed, and make to yourself a new heart and a new spirit: and why should you die, O house of Israel?

Ez 22, 12;31 They have taken gifts in order to shed blood, Thou hast taken usury and increase, and hast covetously oppressed thy neighbour, and thou hast forgotten me, saith the Lord God. And I poured out my indignation upon them, in the fire of my wrath I consumed them: I have rendered their way upon their own head saith the Lord God.

2Esd 5, 11 Restore ye to them this day their fields, and their hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine and the oil, which you were wont to exact from them, give rather for them.

Mt 5, 42 Giveth to him that asketh of thee; and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away.

Lk 6, 35 But love ye your enemies; do good and lend, hoping for nothing thereby; and your reward shall be great and you shall be the sons of the highest for he kind to the unthankful and to the evil.

<sup>17</sup> This reference is missing in Normoyle's (1976), 30, list of references.

(11) Lk 6, 35: But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

(12) 2 Esd 5, 11: I ask that you return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, together with the interest on the money, the grain, the wine, and the oil that you have lent them.

There are at least two questions to pose from such a list. Were they deliberately chosen from extensive reading of scripture and written gradually over the years or were they a list Rice was given or came across for particular reflection? O'Toole is in no doubt that "(t)he texts ...Edmund Rice noted in his Bible appear to have been deliberately chosen, even to the surprising omission of similar texts on the same subject."<sup>18</sup> O'Toole provides no evidence for this assertion. However, if Rice's systematic study of scriptures commenced around 1791, then it would take many years to compile the list inductively. Even if it began in 1789, a few months after the death of his wife, it is unlikely that such a list could be inductively generated within a few years. Moreover, a personally inductive process presumably would have gathered many more texts than the content of this list, since a number of more obvious verses on usury have been excluded. It is more likely that "he came across this list somewhere and copied it in for future reference."<sup>19</sup> Cox comments on their collective insight: "Not all of the texts have a theological value. Some are ordinary secular maxims; others were quoted presumably because of the similarity in wording."<sup>20</sup> Consequently, they probably had their genesis with the sharing of texts by seriously, Christian-living business-men, such as Rice and his four companions, who participated at daily Mass at this time.<sup>21</sup> Rice used these texts about charging interest on loans and applied them to his business and personal life. By such an action Rice had decided that for him, Jesus Christ was to be either of no importance or of supreme importance.<sup>22</sup>

In trying to understand these scripture texts, the first eleven will be explored, then only after that, will attention be given to 2 Esdras 5,11 for its deliberate addition, which is dated so many years after 1791. Wilson has undertaken an analysis of Rice's bible verses. He contends that Rice "being a close reader of the scriptures ...had a better chance than those who read the isolated texts"<sup>23</sup> of deepening the scholarship behind the texts, in the same way as contemporary students using socio-critical methods applied to scripture. It is agreed that a study of these verses "can give to his (Rice's) followers today new theological insights, even if they were not all intended by Edmund himself..."<sup>24</sup> What is cautioned against is the application of modern biblical hermeneutics to these verses and making these conclusions attributable to Rice. A defensible alternative would be to try to understand the way Rice prayed the scriptures. Given, particularly his understanding of the Jesuits' use of scriptures in his experiences with Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*,<sup>25</sup> it is reasonable to accept that Rice applied each of these verses to his social

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<sup>18</sup> A.L. O'Toole, *The Spiritual Profile of Edmund Ignatius Rice*, vol I (Bristol, 1984), 44.

<sup>19</sup> Hill, *Edmund Rice's Bible*, 44.

<sup>20</sup> D. Cox, *Commentary on Scripture Texts Noted by E. Rice in his Bible* (Rome, 1975), Christian Brothers' Roman Archives, 013/0145.

<sup>21</sup> D. Keogh, *Edmund Rice 1762-1844* (Dublin, 1996), 31

<sup>22</sup> Abram Heschel, source unknown.

<sup>23</sup> P. Wilson, *A Mission of Justice* (Sydney, 1991), 18

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> O'Toole, *Spiritual Profile*, 1:58. Rice gave his copy to the Brothers who were sent to Sydney in 1843.

context of late eighteenth-century Ireland. It does seem less credible that Rice had developed the degree of scriptural sophistication that Wilson contends he had. Wilson argues that "(a)ll interpretations that conclude that Edmund would 'transcend the ideal of mere justice to arrive at a generous compassion for the poor' are therefore seen as reductionistic, limiting the breadth of Edmund's vision."<sup>26</sup> Yet it seems, that this is exactly what an educated non-expert devotee of scripture in Rice's cultural and temporal context would be expected to generate from this list of verses, using the Ignatian approach. Rice would have savoured the scripture verses, pondered them and then said: "Lord what are You saying to me now? What are you telling me about my life? Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Such a "presence" activity would become the process to focus expansively, not limit Rice's vision. Cox's analysis of these scripture verses seems to provide some credible and likely explanation of how Rice, an eighteenth century, educated Catholic may have interpreted them:

What we have in these texts is a line of development from a civilized code of justice, where the poor and deprived are taken care of because it is the right thing to do, to an internal ideal of total love for all...All these texts deal with the community-not merely the protection of the community, but the building up of the community, rich and poor. In the Old Testament texts this is done as an exercise of civic justice-the fulfilling of the Covenantal Brotherhood. In the last two texts, one from Matthew and one from Luke and both from the Sermon on the Mount, the motive is changed from within. Now it is not justice alone that is demanded but unrequited love.<sup>27</sup>

So what we have is the growth from an external, and very fine, ideal of what is right and just to a concept of an internal motive. One acts in a given way because one's nature has been changed from within. It is no longer done because the law of God says it must, but because inside you – your own very god-like nature, drives you to it. One no longer considers the attitude or the deserts of the object of this service, but rather the need. And the service is that of Jesus himself- precisely the activity of the "Servant of God." Jesus as "Servant" had the mission to make all things whole, to build the people of God. Thus as servants, these texts call for the up building of the community by giving service even when ingratitude and insult is the only response.<sup>28</sup>

Certainly this interpretation resonates with explaining Rice's direct contact with the neglected and despised of Irish society. This experience generated within him a heightened consciousness, culminating with his conversion experience. Rice now sees these urchins, for what they have always been, God's image. His graced insight is to liberate God's image in the distorted, crippled and disfigured, through a special education. Rice's motive has been changed from within. Evidence from the 1822 Chapter will be offered to indicate that Rice challenged his Brothers to do exactly that in their schools.

However, it is appropriate to consider separately 2 Esdras 5, 11 because it was added thirty-three years later to the list. O'Toole without justification explains its addition as a "silent witness to his ongoing interior struggle to attain the spiritual poverty necessary for total union with Christ..."<sup>29</sup> This is an unconvincing assertion. Another interpretation could be that Rice the Brother, was reflecting on the ethical bases of his business practices which continued to finance his education apostolate: "I heard some old people refer to the fact that Edmund Rice took farms which some less prosperous people

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<sup>26</sup> Wilson, *A Mission of Justice*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Fr Dermot Cox ofm, Scripture scholar and Roman Postulator for Edmund Rice's Cause for Sainthood; Carroll, "Edmund Rice and the Spirit of Poverty," *Christian Brothers' Education Record* (Rome, 1978), 26.

<sup>28</sup> Cox, 1975.

<sup>29</sup> A.L. O'Toole, *The Spiritual Profile of Edmund Ignatius Rice*, vol. II (Bristol, 1985), 82.

were unable to hold. He re-let these farms and from the proceeds financed his schools. Some of the descendants of the people who lost their holdings in the Minaun's area, Callan, were rather critical of and embittered against Br Rice.<sup>30</sup> However, it seems out of character that Rice as a seasoned religious, with a widely acknowledged reputation for possessing a finely honed sense of justice, would deliberately engage in dodgy business deals for the sake of the apostolate. So the question that begs asking is why he added this reference in 1823 from this relatively obscure book of the Hebrew Scriptures. This question cannot be answered without equivocation, but reasoned speculation will be employed.

Around the time of the Esdras entry (February, 26th 1823), on the 6th or 7th February 1823, Rice was forced to engage in litigation concerning a will.<sup>31</sup> Mr Joseph Power<sup>32</sup> of Newtown bequeathed to Rice and Mr. Richard Power Ronayne equally, shares and stocks totaling £3,700 “to be disposed of by us as we may think fit.”<sup>33</sup> Ronayne had privately taken legal advice which indicated he would be able to claim for the first twelve months, all the interest due on the funds and consequently refused to give Rice his share. Rice instigated legal proceedings. Rice was to lament: “I was told I may not get a shilling of my legacy (or rather that for the charities).”<sup>34</sup> The case was settled on 24th March, 1824 with Rice and Ronayne being awarded a half share of the bequest.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, Ronayne appeared to have no problem trying to gain a little extra for himself from the interest on the principal. Yet, he may have been less a businessman than Rice, rather than crassly greedy. Some twenty years later, when there was a legal investigation concerning whether the bequest had been used for the intended charitable purposes or not, Ronayne was forced to acknowledge that he not only failed to keep records of relevant transactions but he currently owed £12,000 to debtors.<sup>36</sup>

During this same time, in late January of 1823, Rice wrote a lengthy letter to Pope Pius VII, providing a full report of the 1822 Chapter proceedings, and requesting permission to open pay schools. Rice offered a substantial rationale for this request:

Memorialist further begs leave to state to your Holiness that with deep regret both he and his brethren of this Institute, witnessing in many instances the deplorable state of the children of Roman Catholics in easy and comfortable circumstances in life, exposed to so many dangers from want of Religious Education to this class of persons by opening day schools for their reception, and employing the emoluments arising from them to further extension of the instruction of the poor.<sup>37</sup>

Rice wanted to educate not only the poor, but also the middle class. He believed that those with more should also have an education but should share their ‘more’ with those who had less. Ideally, all children would be educated together on the same premises,

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Heron, 1st December, 1949, Normoyle (1979), 137.

<sup>31</sup> This will was to haunt Rice in his old age and almost forced the collapse of the Christian Brothers financially. For details see M.C. Normoyle, “Edmund Rice – His Last Active Years: A New Survey,” *Christian Brothers’ Educational Record* (Rome, 1987); and Positio, (abbreviation for) Congregation for the Cause of the Saints, Cause of Canonization of the Servant of God, Edmund Ignatius Rice (1762-1844 ), Positio Super Virtutibus (Rome, 1988), 690-92.

<sup>32</sup> J.D. Fitzpatrick, “Edmund Rice - The Trustee of Catholic Charities,” *Christian Brothers’ Educational Record* (Dublin, 1959), 1-22.

<sup>33</sup> Founder’s Account Book, Number One, March–April 1824, 23-31; Christian Brothers’ Roman Archives, 001/0001.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> M.C. Normoyle, *Christian Brothers’ Educational Record* (Rome, 1987), 102-4.

<sup>36</sup> Positio, 696.

<sup>37</sup> Rice to Pius VII, 24th January, 1823, Normoyle (1978), 126.

irrespective of class, defying the social bigotry of the time. Such a strategy, not only provided education for more but it attacked “systemic injustice.” This is a unique Ricean initiative and has its justification embedded in the Second Esdras verse.

In order to understand the relationship between these two events in Rice’s life and this scripture verse reference written at this time in his bible, it is important to appreciate some facts about the context of Second Esdras.<sup>38</sup> It is a typical Jewish apocalypse text, probably first written in Greek about CE.90, and soon translated into Latin and edited by an unknown Christian, who added to it some references to Christ (Chs 1-2). It was not included in Septuagint<sup>39</sup> manuscripts, being late and known only from the Latin, but was included in most manuscripts of the Vulgate<sup>40</sup> scriptures.

The purpose of Second Esdras is to offer some comforting explanation to God’s people, for God allowing the Temple’s destruction with the fall of Jerusalem in CE 70. It likewise exhorts true believers to maintain steadfast faith in their loving Yahweh. The focal characters of Second Esdras are Esdras, the priest and the lay administrator, Nehemiah. Their team work was responsible for the restoration and reorganization of Jewish life in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile during the 5th century BCE. Nehemiah is a talented and efficient layman, who decides to generously dedicate his extraordinary leadership and organisational abilities to the service of God and of God’s people. He provides security for the whole community by organizing the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. However, he is not contented with addressing the community’s focus on external enemies. In particular, he wants to address a fundamental social problem that corrodes the community’s security from within. “Now that the (external) opposition has been neutralised, the workers find that their own fellow Judeans are causing them miseries.”<sup>41</sup> He identifies the community’s primary cancer as the inhuman treatment of the Jewish poor by the Jewish rich, who have taken advantage of society’s common distress for their own profit. This chapter relates how Nehemiah engages with the elders and officials, the most wealthy and influential within the community. Nehemiah wants to resolve a province-wide financial crisis, by educating the wealthy to undertake a selfless responsibility for those outside of their own social boundaries, namely the poor. This is a new experience for both the wealthy and the poor, since previous governors have modelled extortion by the powerful against the powerless. In contrast, in the discharge of his duties, Nehemiah pioneers a disinterested form of justice to the community. The poor should have their wants addressed as a matter of justice and the wealthy are obliged to address them for sake of the common good of all.<sup>42</sup> Nehemiah engages across social divides to educate both groups that as God’s children, they grow authentically, when they complement each other and they both are ultimately distorted when the rich exploit the poor.

Second Esdras offers insight into Rice’s understanding of the Ronayne litigation and his request for pay schools. The good Irish citizen Ronayne, like the rich in Nehemiah’s

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<sup>38</sup> For an extensive analysis of 2 Esdras see: D. Janzen, “Politics, Settlement, and Temple Community in Persian-Period Yehud,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (July 2002), [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3679/is\\_200207/ai\\_n9115010](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3679/is_200207/ai_n9115010); accessed 2 July, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Greek translation of the first seven books of the Hebrew Scriptures, used during the first century CE by the Jewish Diaspora.

<sup>40</sup> Official Roman Catholic Latin version of the scriptures.

<sup>41</sup> R. North, “The Chronicler: 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah,” in R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer and R. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London, 2000), 394.

<sup>42</sup> United States Catholic Bishops’ Conference, <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/nehemiah/intro.htm>; accessed 2 July, 2005.



time was comfortable to exploit the situation and make a little extra at the expense of the poor. He sees he is already doing his bit of charity, but there is no passion about justice in him. Many of the well-to-do in Irish society had cultivated such attitudes:

As for the merchant-class, their self assurance had grown and throughout the eighteenth century as their own prosperity and their awareness of importance to the economy had gradually increased. One of the unintended results of the anti-Catholic laws on land-holding and education had been the growing involvement of the ambitious Catholic middle-class in business and commerce. Here they found that profit made no distinction of creed. The Catholic merchant, English-speaking, law abiding, and growing daily in respectability showed all the impatience of the self made man to unwelcome restrictions on his social mobility.<sup>43</sup>

Pay schools for Rice allowed more poor to be educated through the subsidy of the middle classes. Moreover, the education of the poor and middle class together on the same campus by the same Brothers attacked the very class distinction that generated institutional inequality and social mobility devoid of social responsibility.

## EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

Rice wrote many letters, most of which have been lost to posterity.<sup>44</sup> Those that are available for scrutiny are in the main of a business nature. It is supposed that Rice, a layman, unlike the ordained founders of other teaching brotherhoods, such as John Baptist de La Salle or Marcellin Champagnat, not having any formal theological education, felt it presumptuous for him as an “amateur” in the religious sense, to offer any written spiritual testament to his followers: “Edmund Rice was extremely reticent about his early life, the grace of his vocation, and the development of his spirituality. He left no spiritual notes, no diary, and no book of conferences as a legacy to his brothers.”<sup>45</sup> This reticence, shyness or preference for privacy is very appropriately illustrated in one of Rice’s letters to his close personal friend, Sir John Newport, Waterford’s long-serving Member of Parliament. “P.S. I enclose you £20 which you’ll (*sic*) have the kindness to send to the Mendicity Asylum,<sup>46</sup> Waterford. I have reasons for wishing that my name should not be identified with it, and therefore should thank you not to mention it.”<sup>47</sup> The result is that there is a dearth of data to analyse. Below is a tentative attempt to examine the limited writings of Rice and to identify key themes that seem to offer some insight into his thinking. There are at least three themes that can be generated. I will allocate the quotations into themes and then generate a synthesising conclusion for each cluster.

### Theme 1

1810 ...it’s a poor thing I must own to be expecting a reward of labour from creatures who frequently are forgetful and ungrateful for favours done them, but let us do ever so

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<sup>43</sup> G. Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the famine 1798 – 1848* (Dublin, 1972), 45.

<sup>44</sup> M.C. Normoyle, “The Founder’s Cause, 1911-1982,” *Christian Brothers’ Educational Record* (Rome, 1983), 69-70; J.D. Fitzpatrick, “The Virtue of Prudence as Practised by Our Revered Founder,” *Christian Brothers’ Educational Record* (Dublin, 1954), 44.

<sup>45</sup> M.C. Normoyle, *A Companion to a Tree is Planted* (Dublin, 1977), vi.

<sup>46</sup> This was founded and sponsored in 1822 mainly by wealthy Protestants. Rice was one of the few Catholics on its Board. It provided education for about 80 destitute children, as well as work, accommodation and food for destitute families. For more information see J.D. Fitzpatrick, “A Lost Chapter in the Life of Edmund Rice,” *Christian Brothers’ Educational Record* (Dublin, 1950), 110-121.

<sup>47</sup> Rice to Newport, 5th July, 1830, Normoyle (1977), 347.

little for God we will be sure he will never forget it, nor let it passed unrewarded. How many of our actions are lost for want of applying them to this end...<sup>48</sup>

1810 ...but one thing you may be sure of, that whilst you work for God, whether you succeed or not, he will amply reward you.<sup>49</sup>

1810 The will of God be done in this and everything we undertake.<sup>50</sup>

1810 ...I hope God will supply our inability...<sup>51</sup>

1813 May the will of God be done...<sup>52</sup>

1813 The world and everything in it is continually changing which proves to us that there is nothing permanent under the Sun, and that perfect happiness is not to be expected but in another life.<sup>53</sup>

1825 We have said many prayers to beg the direction of almighty God which we hope he will give.<sup>54</sup>

1825 ...we must wait for God's time.<sup>55</sup>

1826 ...You will please to join your prayers with the rest (of the Brothers) until God is pleased to hear us.<sup>56</sup>

1829 Be intent on prayer and whatever may happen will turn to our good. Cast all your cares into the arms of Divine Providence...<sup>57</sup>

1830 Pray to God to direct the matter...<sup>58</sup>

1832 ...I am not one bit in dread that a Priest, Nun or Monk will sink under its dire hand (cholera).<sup>59</sup>

1835 It is a painful anxiety, but to some of us it is not so much as one may imagine. The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away, so blessed be His name for ever and ever'. This should be all our motto.<sup>60</sup>

1836 Providence is our inheritance.<sup>61</sup>

1840 God will send us enough.<sup>62</sup>

1842 Pray... that God's will may be fulfilled in me.<sup>63</sup>

The first theme could be summarized: Rice experientially knew (in contrast to believed) that he was God's loved child, completely accepted by God and cared for by God. God's abiding, caring presence was real for him.

## Theme 2

1826 Mr Trappes promised me in Dublin that the Brothers should have an opportunity afforded them of getting Mass every day. Let me know if this be done.<sup>64</sup>

1827 Tell Mr Burke to say 30 Masses for which I shall pay him.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10 August, 1810, Normoyle, (1977), 7.

<sup>49</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10 August, 1810, Normoyle, (1977), 7.

<sup>50</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10 August, 1810, Normoyle (1977), 8.

<sup>51</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10 August, 1810, Normoyle, (1977), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Rice to Mother Mary Biggar, 20 December, 1813, Normoyle, (1977), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Rice to Mother Mary Knowd, 2 November, 1813, Normoyle (1977), 12.

<sup>54</sup> Rice to Fr. Trappes, 24th June, 1825, Normoyle (1977), 117.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Mother Joseph Wall May 4th 1835; J.E. Carroll, "An Edmund Rice Discovery: Two New Letters," *Christian Brothers' Educational Record* (Rome, 1986), 133.

<sup>56</sup> Rice to Corbett, 16th December, 1826, Normoyle (1977), 163.

<sup>57</sup> Rice, Circular letter, January, 1829, Fitzpatrick (1945), 207.

<sup>58</sup> Rice to Corbett, 27th March, 1830, Normoyle (1977), 337.

<sup>59</sup> Rice to McGrath, 12th June, 1832 Normoyle, (1977), 402.

<sup>60</sup> Rice to Corbett, 3rd July, 1835, Normoyle (1977), 461.

<sup>61</sup> Normoyle, *A Tree is Planted*, 283. The last quotation is in the minutes of the 1836 Chapter.

<sup>62</sup> Br. Alphonsus Collins' recollections of Br Rice, 1912/13, Normoyle (1977), 62.

<sup>63</sup> Br. Stephen Carroll's recollections of Rice, August 28th, 1888, Normoyle (1979), 40.

<sup>64</sup> Rice to Br Austin Grace, 20th September, 1826, Normoyle (1977), 161.

1832 Live Jesus in our hearts.<sup>66</sup>

1836 May He be blessed and praised forever and ever.<sup>67</sup>

1840 God did we even now rightly begin to serve you your loving heart would take us all to its final embrace.<sup>68</sup>

1844 Praise be to Thee, O Christ.<sup>69</sup>

The second theme could be summarized: For Rice, Jesus is the sacrament of God, a means through which God's Spirit can break open hardened-hearts and nurture compassion. Rice's participation in the Eucharist increased his awareness of the dignity of each person. Rice experienced Christ's presence at the Eucharistic table **and** in the Eucharistic urchin.

### Theme 3

1810 ...were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we would prize it more than Gold or Silver.<sup>70</sup>

1826 you will require great watchfulness over yourself to perform well the task which is assigned to you, and you should beg frequently of God light and Grace to effect it and above all beg of Him to give you the virtue of humility, which is so necessary...for those who have the care or direction of others. If you acquire this virtue, it will always guide you safely let your path be ever so cross or difficult. Never allow Vain notions of your own sense, abilities, or other natural or acquired qualifications to take root in your mind, but always beseech God to make known to you, your sins and imperfections.<sup>71</sup>

1826 You should be always careful never to do or say anything that may give...the least offence.<sup>72</sup>

1827 I am glad to hear of the account you give me of your boys.<sup>73</sup>

1830 I could wish with all my heart that I had it in my power to render you any little service for the many acts of kindness which I have received at your hands...<sup>74</sup>

1832 P.S. I enclose you £20 which you'll have the kindness to send to the Mendicity Asylum, Waterford. I have reasons for wishing that my name should not be identified with it, and therefore shall thank you not to mention it.<sup>75</sup>

1836 ...give (to) the poor in handfuls...<sup>76</sup>

1837 ...have courage; the good seed will grow up in the children's hearts later on.<sup>77</sup>

The third theme could be summarized: Rice's sense of the Eucharistic mystery nurtured his compassion for the poor ("accepting and desiring with all possible eagerness, what Christ loved and embraced..."), to a heightened sensitivity towards their suffering, misery, injustice, and ignorance as well as to the apathy, prejudice and hostility of the prosperous classes, be they Protestant or Catholic. This sensitivity compelled him to develop his

<sup>65</sup> Rice to Br Patrick Corbett, 4th July, 1827, Normoyle (1977), 178.

<sup>66</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers* (Dublin: Joseph Blundell, 1832), 8 (Chapter 3, article 9).

<sup>67</sup> Rice to Mother Patrick Keeshan, n.d. but c. 1836, Normoyle (1977), 495.

<sup>68</sup> *History of Institute* 1:393.

<sup>69</sup> Br. Thomas Drislane's recollections, 24 March, 1912, Normoyle (1979), 87.

<sup>70</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10th August, 1810, Normoyle (1977), 7.

<sup>71</sup> Rice to Br Austin Grace, 20th September, 1826, Normoyle (1977), 160.

<sup>72</sup> Rice to Br Austin Grace, 20th September, 1826, Normoyle (1977), 160-1.

<sup>73</sup> Rice to Patrick Corbett, 4th July, 1827, Normoyle (1977), 179.

<sup>74</sup> Rice to Newport, 5th July, 1830, Normoyle (1977), 347.

<sup>75</sup> Rice to Newport, 5th July, 1830, Normoyle (1977), 347.

<sup>76</sup> Rice to Mother Patrick Keeshan, n.d. but c. 1836, Normoyle (1977), 495.

<sup>77</sup> Rice to Br Patrick O'Flaherty, 28th June, 1837, Normoyle (1977), 500.

education as a means to liberate their imprisoned and truncated humanity. This by definition meant action based on justice resulting in personal and social liberation.<sup>78</sup>

It is agreed that such foundations are not unique to Rice in his Christian journey, but the analysis of his written correspondence indicates that these axioms appear to be guiding principles that he identified, accepted and lived by in his life. They were the foundational touchstones of his integrity.

**CHAPTER TWO OF THE 1832 RULES**

Moreover, there appears to be a direct link between these themes and the thrust of Chapter Two of the 1832 Rules. The 1832 Rules were the product of ten years of reflection, prayer and discussion by a Commission of Brothers, chaired by Rice, starting at the end of the 1822 Chapter and culminating in their acceptance at the 1832 Chapter. The adoption of such a strategy indicated that the Christian Brothers did not adopt the French Rule unequivocally. Since the French Brotherhood was a male institute of lay men, dedicated by vow to the education of youth, it was to be expected that Rice would find many things in harmony with his own perspective. Moreover, Canon Law at the time provided limited flexibility in the development of Constitutions among religious institutes in general. This was particularly so in this case, since the Irish Brothers were using the precedent of Pope Benedict XIII’s Brief of 1724, which accepted La Salle’s lay Brotherhood as legitimate. The proposed Irish Brotherhood is described by a Vatican official as “nearly resembling that which has been instituted in the kingdom of France.”<sup>79</sup> As well as selected La Salle rules, Rice and his colleagues adapted and incorporated in the generation of their final product, sections of the Presentation Rule, the Jesuit Summary of the Jesuit Constitutions as well as Rice’s unique individual insights. The final product became the 1832 Rules. On examining the Rules, the French Brothers were forced to acknowledge their uniqueness, recorded in the flyleaf of their copy: “Profound changes have been made.”<sup>80</sup>

It is appropriate here to illustrate these “profound changes” using article two of Chapter Two of the 1832 Rules entitled: Of the spirit of this Institute, which is to be the animating principle with all its members.

<i>De La Salle Rule - Chapter 2</i>	<i>1832 Rules - Chapter 2</i>
The spirit of our Institute is therefore first, a spirit of faith, which should induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God, always entering into these sentiments of Holy Job: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, as it hath pleased the Lord, so it is done;” (Job 1.21)...	Art.2. The Spirit of this Institute is <b>that</b> spirit of faith, <b>which inspires its members to view nothing but with the eyes of faith, to do nothing but with a view to God, and to ascribe all to God;</b> at all times entering into the sentiments of Holy Job: “The Lord gave” <b>to me</b> , “the Lord hath taken away” <b>from me</b> : “as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done: <b>Blessed be</b>

<sup>78</sup> See John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, art. 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers* (Dublin, 1832), 52.

<sup>80</sup> O’Toole asserts that this quotation was written on the flyleaf of a copy of the 1832 Rules deposited in the La Salle Roman archives. A.L. O’Toole, *Spirit of the Institute*, F.R. Hickey (ed.), Inheritance: Collection One (Rome, 1982), 108. Br Neville Thornton, Congregational archivist and I visited the De La Salle archives searching for this reference under the guidance of archivist Br. Peter Gilfedder fsc, a fellow Australian, but to no avail.

	<b>the name of the Lord!"</b>
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O'Toole<sup>81</sup> has made an analysis of the minutes of the 1822 Chapter and has concluded that Chapter Two, was substantially written by the end of the 1822 Chapter and was to be a guide for the continuing government of the Institute as well and the framing for the rest of the 1832 Rules. The 1822 Chapter's directive, that "novices...should be deeply imbued with the particular spirit of the Institute as developed in the second chapter of the Common Rules"<sup>82</sup> (*italics original*), presumes that this chapter existed at the time the Chapter minutes were written in 1822. Nineteenth century Congregational historian, Br Dominic Burke makes it clear that Rice ensured the essentials underpinning the original Presentation Brotherhood were transferred to the new pontifical congregation: "The former practices of the Body and the peculiar spirit of the Institute has been fully and clearly kept in view."<sup>83</sup> Though not stated, it is reasonable to assume that Rice as founder of the Presentation Brothers and Superior General of the new Christian Brothers authored the draft Chapter Two. He, more than any one else appreciated the urgency and held the formal responsibility of getting it right during the transition period. He understood that his responsibility was to provide clarity about what he saw as the essential spirit of his Brotherhood.

Almost two decades lived according to the Presentation Rule had spiritualised all the qualities of Edmund Rice, the successful businessman: sureness of vision and decision, readiness to dialogue with his associates in a frank exchange of ideas directed towards the success of a common enterprise, and finally a readiness to seek expert advice in difficult or doubtful matters. All these were brought to bear on the task of compilation of the Books of Rules.<sup>84</sup>

Clearly then, it must be from Chapter Two that fundamental aspects of Rice's charism can be identified. O' Toole has argued from a variety of sources<sup>85</sup> that "to live only for Christ and the establishment of his kingdom in the hearts of all"<sup>86</sup> appropriately encapsulate the holistic theme of all the articles in chapter two.<sup>87</sup> Chapter Two has a clear plan that is illustrated in the following figure.

*Overview of the structure of chapter two: Of the spirit of the Institute, which is to be the animating principle with all its members*

Art. 1	Rationale for the importance of the spirit which should animate the Brothers	That which is of the utmost consequence...make it their first concern and chief consequence to preserve and augment it in themselves;...all should be
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<sup>81</sup> O'Toole, *Spirit of the Institute*, 121-2.

<sup>82</sup> History of the Institute, Vol. I. 55

<sup>83</sup> History of the Institute, Vol. I. 55.

<sup>84</sup> O'Toole, *Spirit of the Institute*, 104.

<sup>85</sup> O'Toole, *Spiritual Profile*, 1:219.

<sup>86</sup> O'Toole, *Spiritual Profile*, 1:179. It should be noted that this is not a quotation from Edmund Rice. It has been inaccurately included in a catalogue of quotations as originating from the writings of Edmund Rice. This catalogue was read out before the beatification ceremony. See R. Hickey, A shining example: the cause and beatification of Blessed Edmund Rice, 1911-1996, History of the Institute, Rome, 1997, .84. Its spirit is embedded in articles 5 and 13 of Chapter two of the 1832 Rules.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 225.

		convinced, that without it, it will be extremely difficult to preserve the grace of God. (Art. 1)
Arts 2, 5 & 13	Essential core of Edmund Rice charism To live only for Christ and the extension of his kingdom.	(Art. 2) “that” particular spirit of faith, that believes we are all ultimately in our Father’s caring hands and so nothing can be really harmful to us. Such an attitude leads to a “disengagement” or detachment that “we must wait for God’s time”; <sup>88</sup> for “God will always send us enough”; <sup>89</sup> indeed, “whilst you work for God, whether you succeed or not, he will amply reward you.” <sup>90</sup> “that” faith is not passivism but a challenge “to live only for Christ...”(Art. 5) ; and to labour for the “salvation of the dear little ones confided to their care: thus extending the kingdom of Christ” (Art. 13)
Arts 3, 4,	Means to achieve that spirit	Authenticity of life (Art.3) The more authentically human we are, the more Christ-like we become. (Art. 4)
Arts 6-13	Characteristics of “that” spirit	Commitment to following the incarnated Christ (Art.6) Living a life that promotes authentic humanity, while rejecting that which distorts it. (Art 7) Cultivating an outlook that values authentic spirituality: the more human one is the more spiritual one is. (Art. 8). Authentically living a life consistent with one’s calling - for Rice this was through the three vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. (Arts 9,10,11) Loving Christ means service to Christ present “in the dear little ones.” (Art. 12) Prayer is the catalyst “to draw down

<sup>88</sup> Letter to Mother Joseph Wall May 4th 1835, Carroll (1986), 133.

<sup>89</sup> Br. Alphonsus Collins’ recollections of Br Rice, 1912/13, Normoyle (1977), 62.

<sup>90</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10 August, 1810, Normoyle (1977), 7.

		this spirit from God” (Art. 13). “Be intent on prayer and whatever may happen will turn to our good. Cast all your cares into the arms of Divine Providence...” <sup>91</sup>
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It is appropriate to juxtapose key themes from Rice’s letters with the content of Chapter Two of the 1832 Rules.

*That Spirit of Faith: Lens One*

Rice writes that the defining spirit of his institute is that<sup>92</sup> spirit of faith - a special kind of faith clearly differentiating it from the more global meaning in the La Salle rule, a point which will be extrapolated later.

Themes from letters	Chapter 2 of 1832 Rules
<p>Theme one identifies a peculiar type of personal faith as the dominant motif in Rice’s letters, from 1810 in his first letter to Brian Bolger to an 1842 recollection by a then young novice. Rice held an unwavering radical trust in the presence of a loving God, his compassionate Father, who is caring for each one of his children in spite of their suffering and trauma and apparent successes and failures.</p> <p>That spirit of faith for Rice is: God is always present. I am loved personally and unconditionally by this ever present God; My life is in his hands. May He be blessed and praised forever and ever.<sup>93</sup> Rice’s holy “disengagement” has its bases in that spirit of faith.</p>	<p>Art.2: The spirit of this Institute is <b>that</b> spirit of faith, which inspires its members to view nothing but with eyes of faith, to do nothing but with a view to God, and to ascribe all to God; at all times entering into the sentiments of holy Job: “The Lord gave” <b>to me</b>,<sup>94</sup> <b>“the Lord hath taken away” from me: “as it hath pleased the Lord, so it is done: Blessed be the name of the Lord.”</b></p>

Rice’s unconditional faith in his loving God had been tested and refined through the wrenching death of his devoted soul-mate and wife, Mary as well as through the rapid deaths in succession of his father, his uncle Michael and his younger brother, Michael. In addition, he experienced the single-focused, unconditional love, devotion and trust of his baby daughter. For Rice that faith had its genesis in those very personal and traumatised experiences leading to doubt, depression and aimlessness. God had taken one seemingly, irreplaceable love, and replaced it with another, as powerful and life-changing, as it was different. Rice was to gradually appreciate that this Lord of his, had knocked him down

<sup>91</sup> Rice, Circular letter, January, 1829, Fitzpatrick (1945), 207.

<sup>92</sup> The La Salle Rule has “a” spirit of faith. Rice had something special in mind when he replaced the indefinite article “a” with the demonstrative adjective “that”. The extracts from Rice’s letters, I argue, provide insight to defining “that.”

<sup>93</sup> Rice to Mother Patrick Keeshan, n.d. but c. 1836, Normoyle (1977), 495.

<sup>94</sup> “To me” and “from me” are Rice additions absent form the La Salle Rule.

only to swing him on his back, so that his eyes were focussed heavenward.<sup>95</sup> As in child-birth, Rice's 'presence of God experience' gestated to completion through trauma. Edmund Rice knew from the very depths of his being exactly what Job's desperate cry of faith entailed: "The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away, so blessed be His name for ever and ever'. This should be all, our motto."<sup>96</sup> What is interesting in critiquing these one quotations is that Rice did not engage in any traditional prayers of petition, pleading for God to change things, but prayed that God direct the matter<sup>97</sup> and whatever may happen, will turn to good.<sup>98</sup> This characteristic was observed in Rice by one of his contemporaries: "He had a great faith in Providence, and he would patiently wait for a long time to have the Divine Will accomplished."<sup>99</sup>

It is important to appreciate what Rice was about in his identification of "**that** spirit of faith" and his rejection of "*a* spirit of faith" that was the text in the De La Salle Rule. For Rice, faith was more than an acknowledgement in the reality of an almighty, omniscient deity, whose source we should ultimately honour as the De La Salle text offered. Rice chooses to personalise his understanding of faith, seeing "**that** spirit of faith" as a progression beyond "belief" to primarily a personal and intimate relationship. He makes this distinction by his addition specifically of: "to/from me" to the Job quotations: "The Lord gave `to me'; the Lord hath taken away `from me.'" His experiences of so much death in his relatively short life generated an insight about the presence of his God, even when God seemed so absent. Death, in particular his wife's death was the trigger, the invitation for Rice to be "born from above,"<sup>100</sup> by personal transformation characterised by a husband-like faithfulness, commitment and presence to an always present God. Consequently, "that spirit of faith" while intrinsically relational is about being present to the reality of a God who says: "I have called you by your name, you are mine...You are precious in my sight and honoured and I love you."<sup>101</sup> Rice's response to this presence is: "The Lord gives to me, Bless him. The Lord takes from me, Bless him"; "...one thing you may be sure of, that whilst you work for God, whether you succeed or not, he will amply reward you."<sup>102</sup> This concept of presence<sup>103</sup> is quintessentially broken open by Christ in the parable of the Good Samaritan, a man, like Rice of some material substance, who gave from his wealth to assist the assailant's victim. But the Samaritan's primary wealth was not money, but his capacity to be present to the victim, in ways those supposedly close to God were incapable of being or even understanding. Like both the Samaritan and the victimised traveler, Rice had experienced a defining 'Jesus moment' in his life: "Emerging from his inner wilderness, Jesus knew himself to be alive

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<sup>95</sup> Br Philip Pinto (oral communication, Rome, 18 August, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Rice to Corbett, 3rd July, 1835, Normoyle (1977), 461.

<sup>97</sup> Rice to Corbett, 27th March, 1830, Normoyle (1977), 337.

<sup>98</sup> Rice, Circular letter, January, 1829, Fitzpatrick (1945), 207.

<sup>99</sup> Julia Buggy, 13th December, 1913, Normoyle (1979), 17.

<sup>100</sup> Jn 3:3.

<sup>101</sup> Isa 43:1, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10th August, 1810, Normoyle, 1977, 7

<sup>103</sup> This chapter was substantially completed in August, 2005. In October, 2005, Br. Peter Harney sent me a copy of interview transcripts conducted by Mr. Tom Cashman before his death in 2004. Tom had undertaken initial doctoral studies on Edmund Rice. As part of his research, he interviewed Brs. J.E. Carroll and F.S. Keane. From reading Tom's interview transcripts, I noticed Br. Carroll also identified a spirit of presence as a peculiar Ricean characteristic. A discussion of this with Dr. Bill Sultmann, Director of Edmund Rice Education, Queensland led to his referring me to the following article: J.E. Carroll, Seeds for a revolution, Wellsprings, Summer, 2003.



with the life of God, in tune with the love of God, grounded in the being of God. He was aware that the purpose of his life was to share that presence, to bring love, to give life, to make whole, to heal the hurt of unlove, to break the power of sin.”<sup>104</sup>

Presence for Rice was his gateway to compassion and liberation. For him “that spirit of faith” precipitated a new way of being present to God and God’s people. Its outcome is self-forgetfulness, being less present to the ego’s demands, labeled by Rice as holy disengagement, and more open to the presence of the “human” Jesus in the everyday, ordinary moments of life. Rice became present to “especially the poorest, (whom he recognised) as most resembling Our Lord Jesus Christ.” This experience was his invitation to consciously begin his lifelong journey of transformation. He literally began to see things differently: “how we see reality matters, for how we see ‘what is’ profoundly affects how we experience and live our lives.”<sup>105</sup> Rice’s transformation was ignited by this graced insight. “That faith” is no longer an act of the will, but an act of the heart, to be present to the reality of God’s presence, and to respond to it, primarily through a life of being present to and loving that which God loves or as Rice put it “to accept and desire with all possible eagerness, what Christ loved and embraced.”<sup>106</sup> Consequently that spirit of Faith for Rice was a presence.

It is hardly surprising that Rice’s first school was christened Mount Sion, though this is hardly a typical name for a Catholic establishment. Rice the veteran devotee of the scriptures, knew that Mount Sion was where King David placed the Ark of the Covenant as its permanent home (2 Sam.6,12). The Jews believed that God was present, literally on Mount Sion:<sup>107</sup> “The Lord has chosen Sion; he wants to make it his home” (Ps. 132, 13). Solomon built the first temple on Mount Sion to make an even fitting home for the Ark. Rice’s school, Mount Sion was to be a ‘home’ where the boys met the presence of God, and felt God’s love in the care they experienced in their fatherly teachers. Likewise, the Brothers met the presence of God in their boys, especially in the poorest of them. In addition Rice would have read that there was a long held tradition, that the last Supper was held in an upper room, the cenacle, in a building on Mount Sion. The name, Mount Sion was associated with the institution of the Eucharist – the real presence of Christ.<sup>108</sup> Throughout his religious life it was observed that Rice “...was always first to adore the Blessed Sacrament.”<sup>109</sup> Interestingly, Luke<sup>110</sup> narrates that after Jesus’ passion and crucifixion, his disciples “continued to receive hospitality in the same upper room.”<sup>111</sup> Likewise, Rice’s Mount Sion was not only a school but a real house of hospitality: “...as I visited Mount Sion I noticed the old bake-house where the bread was baked and delivered to the poor and hungry pupils.”<sup>112</sup> So for many reasons the name “Mount Sion” epitomised the very essence of Ricean education. However, Br Burke in the 1890s chronicles that the name was supposedly given to the school at its opening not by Rice but by Bishop Hussey in June 1803, since the heights of Ballybricken reminded him the rocky cliffs of Mount Sion

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<sup>104</sup> J. Spong, *This Hebrew Lord* (San Francisco, 1993), 170-71.

<sup>105</sup> M. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (San Francisco, 2003), 36.

<sup>106</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers*, (Dublin, 1832), 4.

<sup>107</sup> M. Mills, *Images of God in the Old Testament* (London, 1998), 90.

<sup>108</sup> N. Mitchell, *Real Presence: The Work of the Eucharist* (Chicago, 1998), 100-103.

<sup>109</sup> Br. Regis Hughes, 24th December, 1911, Normoyle (1979), 146.

<sup>110</sup> Luke 22:11-12; 24:36-49; Acts 1:13-14.

<sup>111</sup> E. LaVerdiere, *The Breaking of the Bread* (Chicago, 1998), 90.

<sup>112</sup> James O’Rourke (May 4th, 1912), former student of Mount Sion who said he was educated by Brother Rice and the Mount Sion Brothers, Normoyle (1979), 231

in Jerusalem.<sup>113</sup> In contrast, both Br. McCarthy<sup>114</sup> (1926) and Br. Fitzpatrick<sup>115</sup> (1945) have Bishop Hussey naming Mount Sion on June 1, 1802. But this could not be so, since Hussey was still in exile on the continent at that time and did not return to Waterford until December of that year. However, it is also recorded that the first official act of the new Bishop, John Power was to open and bless Mount Sion on May 1, 1804,<sup>116</sup> not 1803, though the school had been unofficially in operation for some months. It was probably at this ceremony in 1804, that Mount Sion was publicly christened. Br. Austin Grace in 1845 has offered further evidence to support this interpretation:

The Right Rev. Dr. Hussey, who died in July 1803, was succeeded by the Right Rev. Dr. Power. This prelate whose name was associated with every charity and whose virtues shed a lustre around his high Episcopal character, became one of the most sincere and zealous friends of the institute. It was by this venerable Bishop that the site of the Waterford house was denominated "Mount Sion."<sup>117</sup>

Given the long term intimacy between Rice and Power and their partnership in introducing the Presentation Sisters to Waterford, it is highly unlikely that Power described in the Brothers' first history Origin as a "warm and sincere friend"<sup>118</sup> would have named Mount Sion on his own initiative, without consulting Rice. Such a courtesy was to be expected from a pastoral bishop and friend, since the entire spiritual, organisational and financial basis for Mount Sion originated with Rice. The name, "Mount Sion" seems a very deliberate choice emanating from Rice and it reflected the core of his spirituality - presence.

*That Spirit of Faith: Lens Two*

Rice writes "that spirit of faith" inspires a "life lived only for Christ." O'Toole comments:

Edmund Rice's Chapter 2 (of 1832 Rules) contains a specific Christian spirituality i.e., a spirituality based on the Mystery of Christ, which is directed towards the assimilation by the Brothers of the fullness of the Doctrine of the Incarnation- a spirituality which is grounded on the Gospel reality of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.<sup>119</sup>

<b>Themes from letters</b>	<b>Chapter 2</b>
Theme two identifies Christ as Rice's entry into the mystery of God. Soon after his wife's death, Rice began a spiritual journey, centred on Christ. The mystery of the Incarnation was the fabric of his spirituality. Rice's relationship with Christ is encapsulated by the aspiration: "Live Jesus in our hearts, forever." Praise be to Thee, O Christ. <sup>120</sup>	Article 5...thus to live only for Christ Article 6 ...and to accept and desire with all possible eagerness, what Christ loved and embraced... ...to seriously follow Christ ...to resemble Jesus Christ, who has given the example, and who is the way, and life that leads to glory.

<sup>113</sup> *History of the Institute* 1:13-14.

<sup>114</sup> W.M. McCarthy cfc, *Edmund Ignatius Rice and the Christian Brothers* (Dublin, 1926), 83-4.

<sup>115</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Edmund Rice*, 137.

<sup>116</sup> Origin, *Inheritance Two*, 374.

<sup>117</sup> *The Biographical Register*, Normoyle (1979), 352.

<sup>118</sup> Origin, *Inheritance Two*, 374.

<sup>119</sup> O'Toole, *Spirit of the Institute*, 111-2.

<sup>120</sup> Br. Thomas Drislane's recollections, 24th March, 1912, Normoyle, 1979, 87.

“To seriously follow Christ”<sup>121</sup> is about daily choices “to accept and desire with all possible eagerness, what Christ loved and embraced...”<sup>122</sup> This process is epitomised in the aspiration Rice chose to be regularly recited by the Brothers throughout their day: “Live Jesus in our hearts, forever.” The aspiration<sup>123</sup> has its genesis in Ephesians (3, 17-19): “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God.” While Rice incorporated this aspiration from the La Salle practice, it was prescribed for only a few occasions a day by the French Brothers’ Common Rules. It was only in 1901 that the La Salle General Chapter legislated its use to finalise exercises of piety used by the French Brothers.<sup>124</sup> In contrast, Rice’s 1832 Rules envisaged it as permeating the whole of the Christian Brothers’ day:

After morning prayer and after the Brothers leave the chapel; immediately after breakfast; at the beginning of recreation after dinner; at eight o’clock in the evening; and before and after study, the Brother Director shall devoutly say: Live Jesus in our hearts; to which the brothers shall answer for ever. When the brothers meet each other on the stairs or corridors or in any other parts of the house it is recommended to them to repeat the same pious aspiration.<sup>125</sup>

It is important here to explain what is meant by Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith and why this aspiration expressed quintessentially what Rice understood when he wrote “that spirit of faith.” From his prolonged and reflective study of the scriptures, Rice understood that heart was a metaphor for the deepest level of self, “...a level below our thinking, feeling, and willing, our intellect, emotions and volition. The heart is thus deeper than our ‘head,’ deeper than our conscious self and the idea we have in our heads. Faith concerns this deeper level of the self. Faith is the way of the heart not the way of the head.”<sup>126</sup> Consequently, for Rice the essence of the aspiration ‘Live Jesus in our hearts’ was his attempting to live his life with the vision and values of Jesus. Where to start has clearly been shown to the follower: “According to Jesus, compassion is to be the central quality of a life faithful to God the compassionate one.”<sup>127</sup> For Rice, that spirit of faith is immersed in compassion. Growth in compassion is the touchstone for the quality of life in the spirit. Christ tells his followers to “be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate.”<sup>128</sup> Compassion is not charity. Compassion is about deepening one’s humanity. It is the capacity of feeling the oppression of others “from the gut” and then being driven to act. In the Hebrew, the plural form of the word ‘womb’ is the word ‘compassion’ and it is often chosen to describe God’s relationship with God’s people:

Thus says Yahweh:  
Is Ephraim my dear son? My darling child?

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<sup>121</sup> Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers, 1832, Dublin, 6

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> O’Toole, 1:152.

<sup>124</sup> C. Stanislas fsc, *Our Community Prayers* (Rome, 1953), 48.

<sup>125</sup> Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers, 1832, Dublin, 8 (Chapter 3, article 9).

<sup>126</sup> Borg, *Heart of Christianity*, 26.

<sup>127</sup> M. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco, 1995), 48-9.

<sup>128</sup> Luke 6:36. The New English Bible and the Jerusalem Bible prefer ‘compassionate’ as a more accurate translation than ‘merciful.’

For the more I speak of him'  
 the more I do remember him.  
 Therefore my womb trembles for him;  
 I will truly show motherly-compassion upon him.<sup>129</sup>

The writer deliberately wraps around God the loving Father, the language of a mother. Interestingly, Rice was remembered in similar terms: "The amount of good he did with the little means at his disposal was what people most wondered at. This seemed never absent from the minds of the people particularly Br. Rice's goodness to the poor. He was a father and a mother to them."<sup>130</sup> What Rice was perceived as providing was more than charity. He was moved from his very depths and acted from compassion as both a father and mother to the poor. Such a concept invites some elaboration:

To say that God is compassionate is to say that God is 'like a womb,' is 'womb-like'...Like a womb God gives birth to us – the mother who gives birth to us. As a mother loves the children of her womb and feels for the children of her womb, so God loves us and feels for us...to be compassionate as God is compassionate is to be like a womb as God is like a womb. It is to feel as God feels and to act as God acts: in a life-giving and nourishing way.<sup>131</sup>

One of the most insightful aspects of Rice's compassion was his regular attendance at public executions, a phenomenon often referred to in interview transcripts.

In Bro. Rice's time, the Christian Brothers used to attend and give religious instructions to prisoners who were being executed in the early morning to prepare them for death and thus to assist the priests.<sup>132</sup>

Br Rice and one of his disciples Br. Murphy, used to instruct the condemned and help them at the place of execution. This was a special privilege extended to Br. Rice as he was credited with having a wonderful power of moving to repentance some of the most hardened people who seemed callous even when appealed to by the clergy even.<sup>133</sup>

...Br Rice used to instruct the prisoners in the jails and that he instructed the condemned. He accompanied them to the place of execution and he helped them to die in the friendship of God.<sup>134</sup>

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, capital punishment was regularly prescribed for many offences. However, actual executions were fewer than anticipated, since many executions were commuted. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, juries became more reluctant to convict for capital crimes. Transportation to Australia was often a preferred option to capital punishment. Although there were over 3,000 capital convictions recorded between 1826 and 1844, 421 persons were executed.<sup>135</sup>

Public executions in Waterford were in front of the county prison and had become a ghoulissh spectacle. "The attendance of the public was very great and the remotest spot from which a glimpse of the scene could be had was thronged to excess."<sup>136</sup> The following newspaper report indicates the reporter's respectful admiration of the compassionate Rice.

At twelve o'clock the mournful procession left the inner court of the gaol...Thomas F... was attended by the Rev Walter Cantwell, R.C. curate, and the other prisoner by the

<sup>129</sup> Jeremiah 31:20.

<sup>130</sup> M. Power, (nd. 1912/13), Normoyle (1979), 249. Mr. Power went to Mount Sion in the 1850s.

<sup>131</sup> Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again*, 48.

<sup>132</sup> Cornelius Dempsey, 28th November, 1912, Normoyle (1979), 79.

<sup>133</sup> G. Briscoe, 26th March, 1913, Normoyle (1979), 14.

<sup>134</sup> J. Dunphy, n.d. but c. 1912/3, Normoyle (1979), 90.

<sup>135</sup> J. Murphy, *Ireland, A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791-1891* (Dublin, 2003), 38

<sup>136</sup> The Waterford Mirror, 19 March, 1836.

Rev. Edward Power R.C. Curate of Trinity Without. In addition to these Rev. Gentlemen, the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Mount Sion, ever to be found where they can administer comfort or alleviation under such trying circumstance, were assiduous in their exertions from the time the men left the dock after conviction.<sup>137</sup>

The above seems more a commentary on the compassion of the Brothers, with the condemned and the clergy sidelined. Being on “centre stage,” physically present with the condemned at such macabre spectacles must have been personally trying for Rice, a man with a very retiring disposition. Moreover, many of these criminals were callous brutes, yet Rice chose to be present with them at the lowest time of their lives. Likewise, it was reported that two young men were executed in Dublin on 5th November, 1829. The condemned were “attended by two monks<sup>138</sup> from Hanover Street who were unremitting in their attention, from the moment of their condemnation until the last minute of their earthly existence.”<sup>139</sup> Rice dignified and respected these outcasts as God’s “dear little ones.”<sup>140</sup> He walked with them during the last few steps of their lives. The last hand they ever touched and the last eye they ever saw was from a man who chose to be present with them and from whom they felt his unconditional love. This may have been the insight, the newspaper reporters concluded that distinguished the anonymous Christian Brothers from the clergy.

Dogma carries little weight or relevance for the masses crying out for fresh hope. In their world, preaching Christ or teaching Christ carries no long term meaning; being Christ to them is what will make a difference. And being Christ to the other is not a rational option of the head but an emotional, inspired response from the heart. At the end of the day it is love rather than “truth” that endures!<sup>141</sup>

“Live Jesus in our hearts” is about Christ transforming incomplete and wounded humans into compassionate beings, people who can engage authentically with others at their very core. Such a capacity does not occur as a maturation process. It involves regularly paying attention to Jesus, as Rice did:

His devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar was intense, and to It, according to the tradition of Mount Sion, he brought his letters and cares, his difficulties and doubts during the fateful and trying years that intervened, before the loosely connected threads of his great work were woven together by Papal Authority. The saintly old Brother from whom I have gathered these traditions of the venerated Founder said that he and the Brothers in those early years often heard from older members of the Congregation that it was the prudence, and almost inspired foresight, the charity, the forbearance, the enlightenment of the Founder, all of which were the fruits of silent prayer before the tabernacle, that enabled him to steer his bark through many storms into the harbour that was opened to it by the Apostolic Brief of 1820.<sup>142</sup>

Compassion is at the very heart of an Edmund Rice Education: “...compassion for the poor and the afflicted was one of the precious heirlooms our beloved Founder left to his children...”<sup>143</sup> Consequently for Rice, that spirit of Faith is an experiential compassion. Pope Paul VI expressed this concept a generation ago: “Modern people listen

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<sup>137</sup> The Waterford Mirror, 5 March, 1836.

<sup>138</sup> Rice had transferred the Generalate to Hanover Street and was residing there at this date.

<sup>139</sup> Freeman’s Journal, 10 November, 1829.

<sup>140</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers* (Dublin, 1832), 7.

<sup>141</sup> D. O’Murchu, *Catching Up with Jesus: A Gospel Story for Our Time* (New York, 2005), 15.

<sup>142</sup> Br. Xavier Weston, 14th June, 1913, Normoyle (1979), 324.

<sup>143</sup> Br. Virgilius Jones, 7th May, 1912, Normoyle (1979), 151.

more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”<sup>144</sup>

*That Spirit of Faith: Lens Three*

“That spirit of faith” acknowledges that compassion by definition leads to action aimed at liberation, for “...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberation.”<sup>145</sup>

...it is only when we appreciate this dimension of Jesus’ emphasis upon compassion that we realise how radical his message and vision were. For, Jesus, compassion was more than a quality of God and an individual virtue: it was a social paradigm, the core value for life in community. To put it boldly compassion for Jesus was political.<sup>146</sup>

Embedded in the concept of compassion is a passion for justice, as Rice’s letters and Rule indicated. Moreover, the analysis of the Second Esdras verse demonstrates that Rice viewed justice as the social dynamic of compassion, a means in Rice’s own words for “extending the kingdom of Christ.” Rice’s concept of justice demanded more than that wrongs be righted. His liberatory education addressed the effects of tyranny and oppression on others, particularly those who unreflectively used socially imposed filters to make opaque the reality that all are fundamentally bearers of God’s image. This is a radically egalitarian premise if taken seriously, which Rice clearly did. This world view liberates us to be really present to self, and to appreciate the other’s presence.

<i>Themes from letters</i>	<i>Chapter 2</i>
Theme three identifies Rice’s action emanating from his deep compassion for the “dear little ones” in which he saw his incarnational Lord, as the motivation for his education ministry. “...compassion for the poor and the afflicted was one of the precious heirlooms our beloved Founder left to his children...” <sup>147</sup> Rice’s understanding of serving Christ in the least of his brothers and sisters is expressed in: ...were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we would prize it more than Gold or Silver. <sup>148</sup>	Art. 12 Finally, the spirit of this Institute is an ardent zeal for the instruction of children; for rearing them up in the fear <b>and love</b> <sup>149</sup> <b>of God...</b> Art 13 ...they shall labour to procure the salvation of the dear little ones confided to their care: thus extending the kingdom of Christ, and advancing more and more the divine honour.

The Kingdom of God is the central message of Jesus of Nazareth,<sup>150</sup> who deliberately chose the term to illustrate what it would be like if God’s values were honoured systemically. This ‘political’ term is a call to action based on principles of justice, the

<sup>144</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelisation in the Modern World* (Sydney, 1976), art.41.

<sup>145</sup> 2 Cor 3:17.

<sup>146</sup> Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again*, 49.

<sup>147</sup> Br. Virgilius Jones, 7 May, 1912, Normoyle (1979), 151.

<sup>148</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10 August, 1810, Normoyle (1977), 7

<sup>149</sup> “And love” is added by Rice. It is not in the La Salle Rule.

<sup>150</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelisation in the Modern World* (Sydney, 1976), art.8.

obligation to right wrongs, and then to challenge those who succeed with the maintenance of the status quo, to liberate them from self-centric thinking. Rice's education had liberation as its fabric. Rice's compassion for the poor is evidential; but so also is his focus on personal and the social liberation of the poor, (lifting up the poor) and ironically the wealthy, by sensitising them to the inhumanity of indifference, in other words liberating them to presence. He was challenging the thinking underpinning the legitimacy of the status quo. While Rice was providing a quality, relevant education, he was questioning the social fabric that accepted and legitimised the indifference towards poverty and existing social divisions. He attacked the injustices perpetrated by politically motivated government legislation. He likewise confronted the indifference of the "comfortable" Irish. If the Irish were to be really free, then they must be present to those structures which divided them and denied the acknowledgement of the fundamental equality of all. What Rice was doing two hundred years ago in Ireland is reminiscent of what Bishop Helder Camara did in South America in the twentieth century: "When I feed the poor, the people call me a saint; when I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist."<sup>151</sup> Education for liberation is radical and freeing as well as dangerous and subversive. Many of those who educate under this banner are criticised and marginalized, by both civil and ecclesial authorities, but there is a dividend for gospel mavericks: "Those who instruct many into justice will shine as stars for all eternity" (Dan 12:3).

For Rice, these poor "little ones" were images of his Lord and he saw his education as a gradual process in discovering that image and liberating it. Rice was sensitized, transformed and enriched through his immersion with and commitment to the poor. Such a rationale underpins his statement: "...were we to know the merit and value of only going from one street to another to serve a neighbour for the love of God, we would prize it more than Gold or Silver."<sup>152</sup> Rice's education had a focus on liberation, for it was in rediscovering the divine in each person and nurturing this through a special education that Rice believed his pupils might reach the fullness of their humanity that they are invited by God to reach. Rice knew that the catalyst of his liberatory process was presence and compassion. Rice's young pupils witnessed this presence and compassion in him, especially in his twilight years:

Boys had such veneration for Br. Rice that they regarded it even as a privilege to get a look at him, though he was reserved in his manner towards them. He was ever kind in his intercourse with them. When old, he was driven about in a small car by boys, and on such occasions he conversed familiarly and kindly with the people who seemed to have great veneration for him.<sup>153</sup>

Likewise, Waterford's parents saw that Rice was offering a special education; they appreciated Rice's presence, compassion and genuine affection for their children, "the dear little ones, confided to... (our) care".<sup>154</sup> "The people loved him and thought him a saint, he did such wonders for the children of his time. Nothing would vex or disturb Brother Rice. He told me not to be vexed when he would not punish the boy for me."<sup>155</sup> For Rice that spirit of Faith is liberatory and mirrors the kingdom message of the Jesus who lived in his heart:

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<sup>151</sup> M. Maddox, *God under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics* (Sydney, 2005), 252.

<sup>152</sup> Rice to Brian Bolger, 10 August 1810, Normoyle (1977), 7.

<sup>153</sup> Patrick Browne, 22 March 1912, Normoyle, (1979), 16.

<sup>154</sup> *Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Religious Brothers* (Dublin, 1832), 7 (Ch.II, art.13).

<sup>155</sup> Anne McDonnell, 19th June, 1913, Normoyle, 1979, 180.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.<sup>156</sup>

## CONCLUSION

A founding education charism has been described as a three-fold gift by its very nature.<sup>157</sup> It involves:

- (1) a unique faith vision: for Rice this was presence
- (2) a unique form of living: the call to wholeness that is attractive and dynamic- for Rice this was compassion.
- (3) a unique response: for Rice this was liberation

From an analysis of the above data sources, the foundational shared beliefs emanating from Edmund Rice, that form the bases upon which authentic Edmund Rice Education is generated, are:

### *Presence*

For Rice, life was about apprehending or being present to an already existing relationship with God, and then responding to this relationship by being present to and loving that which God loves. This presence becomes a radical humanising process for the invitation is to be present to and examine our current humanity and decide what kind we might be. The reality is we are defined by the quality of our relationships. However, we are ignorant of this until we are present to that dynamic. God's mutilated and distorted presence especially in the poor, marginalized, damaged and rejected was at the very core of an Edmund Rice Education: "They are to have a tender affection for all the children, especially the poorest, as most resembling Our Lord Jesus Christ."

### *Compassion*

For Jesus the quality of our human life is dependant upon our nurturing of compassion. "...to be compassionate is be 'womb-like': life-giving, nourishing, embracing. So God is, so we are to be."<sup>158</sup> Compassion is the atmosphere that vitalises and revitalises Edmund Rice Education. The cultivation of an ethic of compassionate care is at the heart of an Edmund Rice Education.

### *Liberation*

Compassion by definition demands action to regress tyranny and oppression. Justice is the social manifestation of compassion. It is about providing a critical education, and deliberately provoking consciousness-raising in learning about the way systems control and limit authentic growth. Edmund Rice's Education not only cultivated an ethic of care in its schools, but sought to challenge and transform conditions determining oppression. An ethic of critique has always been fundamental to Edmund Rice Education. Students are freer because an Edmund Rice Education makes them present to

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<sup>156</sup> Luke 4:18-19.

<sup>157</sup> J.E. Carroll, "What is a Founding Charism?" *Christian Brothers' Educational Record* (Rome, 1979), 223.

<sup>158</sup> Borg, *Heart of Christianity*, 122.



the many forces that truncate their common humanity. "Br. Rice...may be called the LIBERATOR...he started educating the people...(and)... gave the education which has taught them how to use that liberty."<sup>159</sup> To do justice, to love kindness, To walk humbly with your God.<sup>160</sup>

### *Postscript*

The above interpretation concerning the foundational shared beliefs emanating from Edmund Rice, that form the bases upon which authentic Edmund Rice Education is generated, is consistent with the Christian Brothers' Charism statement:<sup>161</sup>

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.

It is hoped that these three dimensions of what contributes to an Edmund Rice educational charism might be knocked about, become soiled, possibly generate ridicule as well as become touchstones for authenticity in pushing the boundaries of Edmund Rice Education. A charism that is as old as Rice's, if it is authentic must look soiled for it has been used so often.

Edmund Rice's educational charism has shown itself over two centuries to be attractive, accessible and inspirational to generations of Brothers, teachers, students and their parents. It has been a special, unique and effective vehicle of experiencing God's reign and will continue this tradition so long as Edmund Rice's followers are gifted to re-enquire, renew, re-interpret and re-vitalise the charism. Fundamentally, Edmund Rice's educational charism offers God's people a contemporary, compelling story, which has woven in its fabric a language with which to touch hearts, a passion to right wrongs, a mind to combat ignorance, a community to nurture and be nurtured, an insight to prayer, a mission to embrace and most importantly a face of God to see.

Charism is a living passion  
for whatever dimension of the life of Christ is missing now,  
here in our time, where we are.  
The truth is since charisms are the saving mysteries of the life of Christ  
for the church and the world  
they never die.  
The problem is  
they can die in us.  
They can die in us if we refuse them.  
They can die in us if we rigidify them.  
They can die in us if we fail to give them away.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> James Healy n.d. but c 1912-13, Normoyle (1979), 128. Normoyle has no date for this letter. It had been misfiled in the Roman archives as being part of Br Cullen's 1949 research, Christian Brothers Roman Archives, HL-C-40 MH, s66.

<sup>160</sup> Mic 6:8.

<sup>161</sup> A.M. McDonnell, "The Spirituality of Edmund Rice," *Spirituality* 3 (1997): 68.

<sup>162</sup> Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. Source unknown.

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