Preamble

Fire has become an image etched in the Australian psyche – we know its strength, its totality in the fierce blazes that strike up through the summer; its sweep through the cane fields and smoking heat through the gums in drought. We also know its warmth and comfort in the cold of night, and its calming mood in the candle flame. It is no accident that fire, with its associations of awe and energy, of comfort and stillness, is an enduring cultural image.

It is also no surprise then that fire is one of the earliest and richest images associated with the heart of God and the human passion for the Divine. It is an image traced through scripture, and embedded in the mystic tradition of Christianity. In the metaphorical language of Christian spirituality, fire speaks of the deep transformational experience that is the mystery of God’s work in the heart of humanity. In a post modern landscape, a landscape that extinguishes all which does not boldly and directly connect, fire is an image that retains an active, elemental, real and raw energy.

In any landscape, spiritual formation is a dynamic and challenging lifelong journey. Because in any landscape, it remains a journey of the heart – as simple and as confronting as that is.

Christian spiritual formation is deeply personal and radically communal in its vision and praxis. While the shape of a spiritual life is in the end a matter of unique mystery between God and the individual person, spirituality in the Christian tradition is developed in company. There is no such thing as a private Christian: Christian spirituality has a communal dimension which is integral to the journey.

Christian spiritual formation infuses every aspect of living, involving head, heart and hands – and it is about ultimate purpose. It is the growing into a personhood that reflects, in a way unique to the individual, the transforming engagement with the heart of God. It is about life to the full; it is about a particular vision of the world; and it is about living that out in the minutiae of each day.

This way of seeing the world and living in it constitutes a core belief system of reality that is shared and nurtured. In this sense alone, it poses a counter cultural challenge to a post-modern time. For, while our post-modern culture tends to reject universal narratives, the reign of God is the transforming vision for those who choose to stand in the Catholic Christian tradition. And while the individual path to this reality is acknowledged and respected, the vision itself is a non-negotiable touchstone for all those choosing to be involved in the educational mission of the church. It is founded on a sacramental view of the world, nurtured in the cradle of community, strengthened by pathways of prayer, challenged in the world to do what must be done for justice sake, and reflected in the compassionate hospitality that is the hallmark of all followers of Jesus.

While the vision remains constant, the journeys to the place where the heart catches fire are as different and sacred as each individual. Our challenge and responsibility is to facilitate formation that allows the spark to catch; the flame to spread. It is the tending of this kind of fire that kindles Catholic ‘Schools with Spirit.’