Sean Whittle *Editor*

Irish and British Reflections on Catholic Education

Foundations, Identity, Leadership Issues and Religious Education in Catholic Schools

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Foreword

This volume, with its twenty-one contributors from a wide range of Universities and Schools in Britain and Ireland, reflects the quite remarkable resurgence, over a very brief period of research and critical thinking concerned with Catholic education. Going back ten or fifteen years, there was, by contrast, very little. Now, stimulated and supported by the *Network for Research in Catholic Education,* which encourages and provides research co-operation across a range of Universities and Faculties (many being Catholic) in Britain and Ireland, many are the important, indeed vital, issues which are explored and researched, but which until recently had not been so.

The importance of such research is significant for several reasons.

First, philosophically, there is a need to explain and to justify the distinctively religious nature of, or element within, primary and secondary schooling. Religious understanding, developed within a distinctive tradition, is surely one of the 'voices' in what Michael Oakeshott referred to as the introduction to the 'conversation' between the voices of mankind'. Catholic Schools embody a rich tradition which enables them to contribute to that 'conversation'. The urgency of such a responsibility (one might say, the challenge for Catholic Schools) arises particularly at a time when a secular culture shapes the perceptions and lives of so many young people.

Second, given that there are Faith Schools within the otherwise secular system (for example, there are nearly 7.000 Faith Schools in England and Wales, including 35% of all state-funded primary schools), then their distinctive contribution to the quality of State Education needs to be demonstrated. But this is also the case in Ireland, where there is, according to Sean O'Connell, writing in *The Furrow,* the need 'to confront the challenge of faith formation in what is now a post-Christian society'.

Third, the maintenance of such a distinctive and justified Catholic contribution needs consistently to be pursued in both Ireland and Britain. Indeed, much is to be learnt in the Catholic Universities in Britain, from the excellent work (illustrated in the contributions to research and teaching, portrayed in this book) undertaken at the

Universities of Trinity Dublin, Dublin City and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

Fourth, there is a close collaboration in much of the research between the Universities and the classroom teachers in the Schools, reflected in the involvement of the professionals in the Schools undertaking research, often through opportunities provided for higher degrees and leadership courses at their respective Universities.

As stated in the Editor's Introduction,

> Researchers from Ireland and Britain, are now regularly collaborating and together sparking off fresh lines of inquiry about research into Catholic education. In many respects the contributions to this volume provide a rich illustration of this fruitful collaboration and academic fellowship.

I hope that this book will be read by all the various tiers of responsibility for Catholic Education both in Britain and Ireland. This volume also deserves a wide circulation amongst those who work in Catholic Schools, not least as a way of encouraging them to engage with research about Catholic education. Hopefully, it will prompt many more to participate in research and educational thinking about Catholic education.

Oxford, UK   Richard Pring

Preface

Since 2016, I have been able to serve as the Organising Secretary for the *Network for Researchers in Catholic Education* (NfRCE). When the NfRCE was formally launched, under the auspices of the *Heythrop Institute of Religion and Society* (HIRS), three primary goals were identified. First, to promote research and support researchers who work in the field of Catholic education. Second, to welcome all types of 'research' in Catholic education (formal and informal approaches to the disciplined thinking through/study of) in order to be a forum for dialogue and critical thinking about the issues related to Catholic education. Third, to convene an annual conference. This volume of edited contributions needs to be recognised as an embodiment of these goals. To begin with, almost all the chapters initially appeared as conference papers from the annual conference of the NfRCE held at Dublin City University (DCU), in October 2019. This was a highly successful conference bringing together a very large number of established and emerging researchers. This volume is an exciting way of continuing the dialogue and critical thinking about Catholic education that took place at DCU and other NfRCE gatherings. It is also a volume which embodies the ways in which the NfCRE supports and is inclusive of a very wide range of research into Catholic education.

Words of thanks need to be extended to Dr. Gareth Byrne and his team at the *Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education* at DCU, for hosting and making possible the 2019 conference. This volume is an important tangible fruit to have come from this event. Thanks also need to be given to the steering group of the NfRCE because collectively this body has sustained it despite the closure of HIRS along with the rest of Heythrop College, University of London. The steering group for the NfRCE is comprised of Prof. Stephen McKinney (Glasgow University), Prof. John Sullivan (emeritus of Hope University), Dr. Ros Stuart-Buttle (Hope University), Dr. Gareth Byrne (Dublin City University), Dr. John Lydon (St. Mary's University, Twickenham), Dr. Maureen Glackin (CISC) and Dr. Sean Whittle (Research Associate at the CRDCE, St. Mary's University, Twickenham). Thanks to their collective efforts the NfRCE has continued to grow and has been able to nurture an emerging research community as it comes into existence. This volume can also be

seen as solid evidence of the contribution that the NfRCE is making to furthering and supporting research in Catholic education.

I am very grateful to all the contributors of this volume for giving so generously of their time and skill to produce such high-quality chapters. I would also like to thank the four anonymous reviewers used by Springer for their constructive criticism of the book proposal and from Nick Melchior, Editorial Director at Springer, for his firm support in bringing this book to publication.

The most important words of thanks need to go to my wife, Bernie Whittle. It is only through having her constant love and support that I have been able to bring this volume and my work for the NfRCE to fruition. Thank you so much for this and for all you do for me.

Twickenham, London   Sean Whittle

Introduction

The field of Catholic Education Studies is now an established and growing arena of scholarship and research. This volume brings together leading authorities in Catholic education from Ireland and Britain, alongside established and emerging researchers, to present an interdisciplinary and systematic review of the current situation across this region. It is particularly pleasing to bring together this rich and wide-ranging collection of twenty-one chapters because they are an impressive set of reflections on the central facets of Catholic education in Ireland and Britain. Taken together, the chapters drill down to the foundations, identity and leadership matters in Catholic education and schools. In addition, many of the issues pertaining to Religious Education in contemporary Catholic schools are scrutinised. As such, this volume stands as a striking testament to what has been unfolding globally about research into Catholic education. Less than two decades ago the Springer *International Handbook of Catholic Education* (Grace and O'Keefe 2007), contained a combined total of just four contributions from Ireland and Britain. However, the amount of research into Catholic education and schools in these countries has now risen to such a level that there is at this time a genuine abundance of scholarship from which to draw together a dedicated volume focusing exclusively on the Irish and British context. In fact, many more contributions could have been included in this collection, if only space had permitted.

There are many reasons for this abundance, but perhaps the biggest driver is the increased academic interest in this research at many universities. For example, in Ireland, two centres of excellence stand out as places where research into Catholic education is heavily promoted and celebrated. The first is the pivotal role played by the *Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education*, Dublin City University. A team of leading experts under the helm of Dr. Gareth Byrne has built on the legacy of Dr. Dermot Lane and brought to fruition a plethora of doctoral level research into Religious Education in Catholic schools and broader issues in Catholic education and faith development. Second is the *Irish Institute for Catholic Studies*, at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Here, another strong team of researchers in Catholic education work under the leadership of Dr. Patricia Kieran. Both these centres have successfully enabled and opened up rich seams of research and scholarship in the

central areas of Catholic Education Studies. In Britain, Glasgow University under the oversight of Prof. Stephen McKinney, has maintained its leading role in researching Catholic education. South of the Scottish border, Liverpool Hope University, Newman University and St. Mary's University (Twickenham) have continued to foster and support scholarship into Catholic education. Particular praise should go to the ongoing success of the Masters Level course operated by St. Mary's which specialises in *Catholic Education Leadership: Principles and Practices*. This popular MA was originally devised by Prof. John Sullivan over two decades ago and as such, has provided an ongoing way of opening up the relevance of research into Catholic education to a significant number of those who aspire to lead Catholic schools. St. Mary's has now become a centre which specialises in supporting Catholic school leadership.

Another important development has been the emergence of the *Network for Researchers in Catholic Education* (NfRCE). Originally established under the auspices of Heythrop College, University of London, in 2016, this Network has been an active forum for bringing together British and Irish researchers in Catholic education. The annual conferences have quickly become a firm fixture. Crucially, these conferences have been an important catalyst in allowing a wide range of researchers to share or discuss their current projects with each other. More importantly, these and other regular gatherings of members of the NfRCE have made possible and nurtured an emerging research community which is actively working in the field of Catholic Education Studies. Researchers from Ireland and Britain, are now regularly collaborating and through working together they are sparking off fresh lines of inquiry and about research into Catholic education. In many respects, the contributions to this volume provide a rich illustration of this fruitful collaboration and academic fellowship. Almost all of the chapters in this volume have their origins in the annual conference of the NfRCE held at Dublin City University in October 2019.

The Complex Nature of Catholic Education

There are many facets to the field of Catholic Educations Studies, and thus, in presenting this introductory overview it is neither appropriate nor really possible to present just one unifying theme or organising motif that runs throughout the entire volume—other than it being a contemporary snapshot of Catholic education in relation to Catholic schools in Ireland and Britain. In the earlier days of research and scholarship into Catholic education, three or four decades ago (see Whittle 2018), the emphasis was on more general matters. However, over the past two decades, attention has been able to move onto more distinct areas or issues within the broader field of research about Catholic education. There is an emerging consensus that alongside the more foundational questions about the aims or even the legitimacy of Catholic education, there are other overlapping but distinct matters that now need to be researched. These are threefold.

First, questions about identity have crystalised as a central issue within Catholic Education scholarship. One set of identity issues that is being researched is around the ways in which a Catholic schooling might be able to foster a 'Catholic identity'. Part-and-parcel of this is constructing a narrative or history of how Catholic education has developed and become integral to the State's provision of schooling. Part of the research into identity matters is being attentive to the voice of both students and teachers who belong to Catholic schools. In recent decades, the proportion of those involved in Catholic schools, both staff and students, who are not baptised Catholic Christians has increased substantially. In the not so distant past, it would have taken as a given or defining characteristic of Catholic schools in Ireland (and to a lesser extent in the UK), that the overwhelming majority of students and staff would be Catholic Christians. However, major socio-political changes in the last couple of decades in Ireland, have resulted in changes in the religious make-up of Catholic schools there, so that it now reflects a broadly similar pattern to the situation in England and Wales. This changing composition of Catholic schools is triggering fresh questions about identity issues in relation to Catholic education. In the past, both in Ireland and in Britain, it used to be assumed that the overwhelming majority of both students and staff at Catholic schools were Catholic. Inevitably, this fuelled an unexamined set of correlations between creating a child's Catholic identity, belonging to a Catholic school, the staffing of Catholic schools and what are often taken to be the primary aims of Catholic education. Examining the overlapping assumptions at play has become an increasingly important part of research into Catholic education.

The second area which has fallen into sharper focus is around the leadership of Catholic schools. Much of this is rooted in the pioneering research undertaken over two decades ago by Gerald Grace (2002), which listened attentively to the concerns of serving headteachers in Catholic schools in England. The pressures of 'market values' in education settings is causing mission drift and triggering worries about the loss of spiritual capital, particularly amongst the leaders and managers of Catholic schools. These issues have continued to dominate the unique challenges faced by the leaders of Catholic schools. In many respects, they have helped to fuel the self-fulfilling prophecy that there is a serious shortfall in suitable candidates willing and able to take on the mantle of leading Catholic schools. Addressing this practical matter has emerged as a dominant issue for advocates of Catholic education.

The third facet of research into Catholic education involves issues connected with Religious Education. At one level, the place of Religious Education goes back to the foundational questions about what is at the heart of Catholic education. There has been a deep-seated tendency to regard Religious Education as *the* defining characteristic of Catholic education. This has made issues about the nature, scope, content and pedagogy of Religious Education in Catholic schools be regarded as somehow central to the whole endeavour or project of Catholic education. One line of argument is to equate the notion of a specific Catholic curriculum with Religious Education. In effect, this is to emphasise the significance of this one subject within the entire curriculum of a Catholic school. Often this involves asserting that

Religious Education is the heart or the core of the entire curriculum in a Catholic school. This is, of course, a bold and controversial assertion which stands in need of a solid and coherent set of supporting arguments. Unfortunately, these have yet to be articulated—or perhaps even to be devised. At another level, a strong case can be made for putting the focus primarily on Catholic education as a whole, rather than on one subject within the curriculum of a Catholic school. Within the field of Catholic education scholarship, one of the dominant tensions that has opened up is around the place and significance of Religious Education. An ongoing and increasingly polarised debate has now opened up about just how important Religious Education ought to be to the entire enterprise of Catholic education.

In light of the complex nature of scholarship and research about Catholic education, this volume is presenting the twenty-one chapters in four distinct parts, representing the four areas of overlapping scholarship and research in the field of Catholic Education Studies. Thus, the four parts of this volume are categorised into *Foundations, Identity*, Catholic school *Leadership* and issues in *Religious Education in Catholic schools*. Each of these four parts will be introduced separately. Rather than here in the introduction, the contributors will be described and discussed at the start of each of the four parts. This will allow the contributions to be introduced and set in their more precise context within the field of Catholic education scholarship and research. This will help signpost the coherence between the chapters within each of these parts. Before introducing the first set of contributions, some generic points about the importance of this volume need to be drawn out.

Why this Volume Matters

Almost inevitably when faced with a volume with over twenty chapters, the temptation is that one reads a selection of the contributions which on first impressions look most appealing and others are looked at more superficially. However, there is a real need to take the volume as a whole. It is in reading the complete volume that a more precise picture of Catholic education in Ireland and Britain, develops into sharper focus. This is important because it reflects and crystalises the complexity which has almost organically developed in the field of Catholic Education Studies. It is also important because it provides a powerful antidote to the naïve reductionism that would boil Catholic education down to just one or two fundamental issues or principles. Contemporary Catholic education, perhaps globally but certainly in Ireland and Britain, is best depicted in terms of being a colourful kaleidoscope of differing perspectives. However, this diversity is ultimately grounded in the underlying unity of purpose, because each of the contributors to this volume is a committed advocate of Catholic education.

One of the strengths of this volume is that it brings together a number of leading scholars, such as Prof. Stephen McKinney and Dr. John Lydon, alongside other established researchers. This includes high-quality contributions from Dr. Patricia

Kieran, Dr. Michael Kirwan, Dr. Paddy Walsh and Dr. Brendan Carmody. These are blended with a plethora of other voices who are emerging to become the next generation of leading researchers in Catholic education. These include the contributions from Dr. Amalee Meehan, Dr. Gillian Sullivan, Dr. Fiona Dineen, Dr. Sean Henry, Dr. David Fincham, Dr. Mary Mihovilovic, Dr. Maurice Harmon, Dr. Daniel O'Connell and Dr. Caroline Healey. In addition, this volume introduces a number of newer voices to the academic context, which include Dr. Margaret Buck, Peter Ward, John Moffatt and Louise McGowan. They present fresh perspectives and thinking about matters relating to Catholic education and each of them confidently stands alongside the other contributors. This volume has the strength of bringing this rich range of scholars into one place so that these voices can be listened to as a whole.

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About the Editor

Sean Whittle is a Visiting Research Fellow at St. Mary's University in Twickenham and a Research Associate with the CRDCE, with Prof.r Gerald Grace. He also held a Fellowship at Heythrop College, University of London, for four years. Alongside these academic roles, he works part-time as a secondary school RE teacher at Gumley House FCJ Catholic School in West London. He completed his doctoral studies at the Institute of Education—UCL, defending a thesis on the theory or philosophy of Catholic education. His book, *A Theory of Catholic Education* (Bloomsbury 2014), presents a robust philosophy of Catholic education that draws heavily on insights from Karl Rahner. Sean Whittle controversially argues in support of a non-confessional theory of Catholic education. He has edited four books on Catholic Education (*Vatican II and New Thinking about Catholic Education 2016*; *Researching Catholic Education 2018*; *Religious Education in Catholic schools in the UK and Ireland 2018*; *New Thinking, New Scholarship and New Research in Catholic Education: Responses to the Work of Professor Gerald Grace 2021*). In recent years he has been collaborating with other academics working in the field of Catholic education in order to create the Network for Researchers in Catholic Education (NfRCE). He has also worked as a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at Brunel University on a Religious Literacy project and is a visiting lecturer at Newman University. He is secretary for the NfRCE and also serves as vice-chair of the academic association AULRE. e-mail: sean.whittle@stmarys.ac.uk

Part I
Reflections on the Foundations of Catholic Education

Introduction

Sean Whittle

It is now approaching the centenary since the only papal encyclical devoted to Catholic education was first promulgated in 1929, by Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri.* This encyclical on the *Christian Education of the Youth* is a firm assertion of the right and prerogatives of the Catholic community to be involved in the provision of state education. As such, this papal teaching was marking out one of the key foundational issues for scholarship in Catholic education—namely about the justification of Catholic education in terms of the provision of Catholic schools in the context of state education. The debate at play has rumbled on under various guises in both Ireland and Britain, in more recent decades. In Britain, this has often been couched in terms of the 'faith school debate' and in Ireland it has been around the role of the Catholic Church in being a patron for state-funded schools. In Ireland, in only a few decades, there has been a radical reappraisal of the Catholic Church's involvement in the provision of all state-funded services, including education and the schooling of children. The political issues at stake have pivoted on assumptions about what the goals of Catholic education are or ought to be. Thus, for almost a century, the foundational issues for Catholic education have been around the aims, goals and justifications of Catholic schooling within a largely secular state. Part I offers a set of five chapters that wrestle with many of the foundational issues facing Catholic education and Catholic schooling in Ireland and Britain. The reflections in these five chapters raise questions and observations about the philosophy and theology of Catholic education. Collectively, they demonstrate the close connections that this has to socio-political issues.

In the opening chapter, Sean Whittle revisits the concerns he and others have raised about the dangers of using vague slogans when it comes to the theology and/or philosophy of Catholic education. This chapter argues that much of the current discourse surrounding Catholic education operates with a naïve and often simplistic use and interpretation of the theological metaphors and themes that are used to guide

and underpin it. Attention is given to what is wrong with the use of theologically inspired slogans and metaphors to frame Catholic education. The issues at stake are drawn out through a critical assessment of the inherent problems with applying the theological metaphor of vocation to teaching in or leading a Catholic school. It is concluded that the real challenge facing the philosophy and/or theology of Catholic education is moving beyond slogans and pious theological metaphors to frame the goals of Catholic education.

In the Chap. 2, Michael Kirwan S. J. considers the contemporary challenges to the Catholic educational vision, through the work of two twentieth century Jesuit theologians. Michael Kirwan, an expert in political theology, who has first-hand experience of teaching in Higher Education in both Ireland and Britain, draws out insights from Juan Luis Segundo and Karl Rahner. Both these theologians are highly influential, though neither are educational theorists as such. The Uruguayan Juan Luis Segundo (1925–1996), was a distinctive but contrarian voice amongst Latin American liberationists. Karl Rahner (1904–1984), from Germany, taught for many years at the Jesuit faculty in Innsbruck, and is unmistakeably one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. Both offer a theological context from which to reframe the foundational issues of Catholic education.

In the Chap. 3, Stephen McKinney returns again to a theme which he has repeatedly argued is central to the project of Catholic education, namely social justice and the relevance of liberation theology to grounding the philosophy of Catholic education. According to McKinney, the rapid spread of Covid-19 and the consequent lockdowns in different parts of the world have exacerbated the effects of poverty and child poverty. This chapter argues that the levels of poverty and child poverty in the United Kingdom, were alarmingly high before Covid-19 and they have risen further as a result of the pandemic. The increase in poverty has impacted the effectiveness of homeschooling for disadvantaged families due to a lack of resources and there has been a greater uptake at foodbanks. Catholic communities and Catholic schools have responded to this crisis situation and there are examples of enhanced support for vulnerable families. This current situation could be understood as an '*irruption of the poor'* in the United Kingdom, and McKinney draws on the theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez to arrive at a Christian perspective and response to the situation.

In the Chap. 4, Dr. Margaret Buck homes in on the centrally important issue of the Church-state partnership in matters of Catholic schooling. This chapter focuses specifically on the political reality of education policy and practice in English schools. This well presented analysis demonstrates the challenges of trying to renew the reality of a partnership between the Church and state when it comes to Catholic education. The chapter opens by recalling the ten years since the *Academies Act 2010,* was swiftly processed through Parliament by Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education in England and Wales, at the beginning of his political career serving in the Coalition Cabinet. Motivated by his childhood experiences, Gove was determined to drive forward the structural reform of education at a pace, removing state-funded schools from Local Authority control through the mechanism of academy conversion. However, Prime Minister David Cameron removed Gove from his post after only two years allegedly because his ambitions for education reform proved unpopular with

the teaching profession. Then, the roll out of government policy was unexpectedly interrupted by the Brexit referendum in 2016, and virtually halted by the period of unprecedented political upheaval, uncertainty and instability that followed. The outcome of the Brexit referendum means that at some point in the future the Catholic Church will face doing business with a government that must return its full attention to the state of play in public services, education in particular. In this chapter, Dr. Buck extends her reflection on what the normative relationship between the Catholic Church and the state should be in the provision of education.

In the final chapter in Part I, Dr. Paddy Walsh, a seasoned and philosophically astute scholar from the field of Catholic Education Studies, reconsiders the implications of a discourse analysis of the 'practice' of (Catholic) education. He considers examples of how philosophy *with* theology of education can deepen the theory and practice of Catholic Christian schools. It is proposed that this is a way to offset narrowing trends in depicting what counts as a Catholic education. Walsh concludes by drawing together his earlier writings on education and 'love of the world' with Karl Rahner's analysis of the place of mystery in fundamental theology.

Taken as a whole, these five chapters offer important reflections on the foundational issues facing Catholic education and schooling in Ireland and Britain.

Reference

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Chapter 1
Moving Beyond Slogan and Piety: The Real Challenge Facing Researchers Developing the Philosophy and Theology of Catholic Education

Sean Whittle

Abstract This chapter revisits the concerns about the dangers of using vague slogans when it comes to the theology and/or philosophy of Catholic education. Attention will be given to what is wrong with the use of theologically inspired slogans and metaphors to frame Catholic education. The full force of McLaughlin's concerns are reviewed by scrutinising the problems by asserting that 'Christ is at the centre of Catholic education'. It is argued that much of the current discourse surrounding Catholic education operates with a naïve and often simplistic use and interpretation of the theological metaphors and themes that are used to guide and underpin it. The issues at stake are drawn out through a critical assessment of the inherent problems with applying the theological metaphor of vocation to teaching in or leading a Catholic school. It is concluded that the real challenge facing the philosophy and/or theology of Catholic education is moving beyond slogans and pious theological metaphors to frame Catholic education.

Keywords Philosophy of Catholic education · Catholic *edu-babble* · Christ at the centre · Gospel values · Vocation · Formation

Introduction

In this chapter, I want to revisit the concerns raised previously (Whittle 2014; McLaughlin 1996), about the dangers of the use of vague slogans and theological clichés when it comes to getting more than a fleeting grasp of the theology and/or philosophy of Catholic education. In addition to drawing attention to the ongoing nature of these concerns, the focus of this chapter will shift onto the need for researchers and advocates of Catholic education to recognise the complexity and nuances of theological language and to go beyond the unreflective use of pious theological metaphors. It will be argued that much of the current discourse surrounding

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Catholic education operates with a naïve and often simplistic use and interpretation of the theological metaphors and themes that are used to guide and underpin it. Thus, it will be concluded that the real challenge facing the philosophy and/or theology of Catholic education is moving beyond slogans and pious theological metaphors to frame Catholic education.

What is Wrong with the Use of Theologically Inspired Slogans and Metaphors?

Originally it was Professor Terence McLaughlin (v), who drew attention to the tendency to use phrases such as *Gospel values* as a proxy for a properly developed philosophy or theory of Catholic education. The problem with them is two-fold. First, such theological slogans give the false impression that there is a clearly worked out account of what they actually involve or refer to. Second, they have stifled the task of developing a robust theory of Catholic education because they are repeatedly not recognised for what they actually are. As McLaughlin observes, 'such phrases are primarily useful as spurs to a deeper discussion, not a substitute for it' (p 138). Far too often these, often biblically inspired, slogans or expressions of piety are treated as if they summarise all that needs to be said to frame and justify Catholic education.

It is important to hammer home the force of McLaughlin's argument with reference to some typical examples. Both in school *Mission Statements* and popular works on Catholic education (see, for example, Friel 2017) reference is made to *Gospel values*. The problem is that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are packed full of different values which do not always cohere with each other, nor on how they ought to be prioritised. Pinning down the relevant or appropriate *Gospel value(s)* is actually much trickier than it appears. Some *Gospel values* are very general, such as 'love one another', others are deeply entrenched in biblical theology such as the values implicit in the Kingdom of God blessings depicted in the *Beatitudes* or the call to a radical *metanoia* explored in the parables and allegories of Jesus. Moreover, the reversal of typical human values, whether this be a rejection of the rigid piety of the Pharisees or the need for leadership to be lived out in terms of humble and menial service rather than status and power, are emblematic of the disruptive message and value system Jesus sought to bring about. In essence, the problem with the phrase *Gospel values* is that it uncritically lumps together all of the differing values embodied in each of the Gospels. There would appear to be an overly simplistic assumption that each of the differing values in the Gospels can be harmoniously synthesised. What is missing is a hermeneutical key for unlocking which of the *Gospel values* are being used to inform or underpin aspects of Catholic education or the curriculum in Catholic schools. Without this sort of key, the phrase *Gospel values* will inevitably remain at the level of slogan or vague theological metaphor. It is interesting to observe the ways in which Catholic schools founded by religious congregations have frequently used the charism or spirituality of their

respective founders as an interpretive set of filters for unpacking or making sense of the *Gospel values*. There are a plethora of examples, including Ignatian values (Jesuit schools), Benedictine values, Salesian values, FCJ values and Loretto values, to name just a selection. An intriguing question is whether or not this way of filtering and interpreting *Gospel values* helpfully opens them up or merely adds a further layer of complexity and ambiguity.

Another widely employed example is the use of the phrase 'Christ at the centre' of Catholic education (Stock 2012), or the Catholic school or even that Christ is at the heart of the curriculum in the Catholic school. On first impressions, it appears to make intuitive sense to depict Christ as being at the very heart of Catholic education, just as following Christ is considered central to baptism and belonging to the Church. This chimes harmoniously with the liturgical ritual, piety and spiritual devotion of Catholic Christianity, in which Christ can be likened to the source and summit of the faith. However, to move from this devotional or faith stance to begin to make more concrete claims about the place of Christ in the curriculum or wider purpose of the school is in effect to make a category mistake. Even a cursory analysis indicates the difficulty of unpacking what it might mean for *Christ to be the centre* of everything in Catholic education, let alone in the day-to-day reality of a Catholic school. In the typical subject-based curriculum, it quickly becomes apparent that it makes little or no sense to describe Christ as the centre of every subject or activity in the school. It involves glossing over or sliding from a devotional or pious stance and morphing into practical or quasi-factual claims about the place of Christ in the whole of Catholic education. In terms of mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages and perhaps even Religious Education, it is hardly possible to tease out how in any theoretical or practical sense that Christ could in a meaningful way be at the *centre* of these subjects. It does not take long to realise that even in Religious Education lessons in a Catholic school Christ is not the answer to every question being posed or central to the educational task being completed. Moreover, in terms of the pastoral curriculum or the leadership and management of the school, it is very difficult to see the senses, beyond those of piety or motivational slogan, with which Christ is or ought to be central to what is going on. It is, of course, possible that the practices of individual teachers (of mathematics or geography) or school leaders are deeply inspired or informed by their faith in Jesus. For these teachers, Christ has a central role in their life, and this faith and devotional stance will be reflected in how they view the work of a Catholic school. Moreover, some teachers might skillfully weave numerous Christian themes into the content of their lessons.[1] However, to go beyond this devotional way of viewing Catholic education in order to maintain other, perhaps more literal senses, in which Christ *is* at the centre of Catholic education needs to be recognised as akin to a significant category mistake. Theological metaphors that are founded in liturgy, piety and Christian spirituality[2] risk the danger of becoming inappropriately conflated or blurred when applied as descriptors for the aims and practices of Catholic education and the Catholic school.

McLaughlin likened the issues here to what he pejoratively refers to as *edu-babble*. These are the phrases and slogans that pepper educational discourse, many of which have ceased to be recognised as striking metaphors or informative slogans. Thus, we

have grown accustomed to referring to the education 'of the whole person', or that teaching and learning needs to be 'child centred', or that we need to be committed to 'inclusive education'. It is important to appreciate that in describing these as examples of *edu-babble* that McLaughlin, as a philosopher of education, is certainly not taking a stance against educational theory. It is rather the over reliance on slogans and vague statements which have polythemic or even systematically ambiguous meanings that he is calling attention to. These instances of *edu-babble* repeatedly arrest attempts to take educational theory seriously enough. The goal is certainly not to dismiss educational theory but rather to point out how instances of *edu-babble* undermine it or keep it at the merely superficial level. They are treated as if they are conclusions rather than the starting points in teasing out and developing sound and coherent educational theory. McLaughlin maintains that 'There is a distinctive Catholic variant of *edu-babble* which is typically forged out of phrases drawn from the various educational documents of the Church. Often the documents are 'mined' for such phrases in a rather eclectic way. Like *edu-babble* in general, such phrases are primarily useful as spurs to a deeper discussion, not a substitute for it' (McLaughlin 1996, p. 138).

Building on McLaughlin's lead, I have argued elsewhere (Whittle 2014), that such *Catholic edu-babble* is a serious issue for two main reasons. First, it clouds and makes ambiguous the meaning of statements about Catholic education. It tends to appear as theologically loaded slogans and clichés that are used in the descriptions of the central features of Catholic education. However, these polythemic theological phrases are not unpacked or explained even in minimal terms. Second, is the widespread prevalence of *Catholic edu-babble*. Indeed many advocates and researchers in Catholic education appear unable to recognise the ubiquitous presence of it. Too often there is a failure to appreciate just how deeply embedded it has become,[3] and as such, it is now almost impossible to spot-the-wood-for-the-trees when it comes to identifying the unreflective reliance on *Catholic edu-babble*.

An obvious but illustrative example is to be found on the web pages for the *Catholic Education Service for England and Wales* (CES). In the section on 'Why is Religious Education in Catholic schools important' it is declared that 'Religious Education is the "core of the core curriculum" in a Catholic school' (2020). Indeed the paragraph continues, 'Placing RE at the core of the curriculum in Catholic schools helps the school to fulfil its mission to educate the whole person in discerning the meaning of their existence, since "Religious Education is concerned not only with intellectual knowledge, but also includes emotional and affective learning" (CES 2020). Leaving aside the overly complex nature of the second sentence, it is evident that the instance of *Catholic edu-babble* in the former sentence is just not regarded as even remotely problematic or in need of any further explanation or clarification, let alone any justification. Yet the statement that 'Religious Education in a Catholic school is the core of the core curriculum' is a striking claim that conflates educational arguments about there being both a core *and* a common curriculum, and that it is Religious Education that *is* the most central, and thus most important subject within the entire curriculum. To assert that Religious Education plays this central and foundational role in the whole curriculum is one that is deeply difficult to both

explain and to even remotely justify. Any attempt to make one particular subject, whether it be English, mathematics, science or even Religious Education, the core of a core curriculum is fraught with difficult and complex issues within curriculum design and with contested debates in the philosophy of education about the aims of education and the way knowledge is organised in the curriculum. The metaphor about there being a 'core curriculum' is made even more problematic because it is simply asserted that in a Catholic school Religious Education just is the core or central subject. Presumably, the implicit argument is that Religious Education in a Catholic school is in some sense broadly synonymous with Catholic theology, and in Catholic theology, God-revealed-in-Christ is the central belief. Thus, within a Catholic worldview, this implicitly gives Religious Education a trumping ability within the entire curriculum. This argument is not even presented, let alone remotely defended. Ultimately, what is deeply intriguing about the CES statement is that there is no recognition that it is using and relying on instances of *Catholic edu-babble* to underpin the place it gives to Religious Education.

Having restated the case about the ongoing presence and danger of *Catholic edu-babble*, I want to draw attention to other facets of the inter-relationship between theological language and large swathes of the current discourse about Catholic education.

Theology and Educational Discourse About Catholic Education

As research has grown in Catholic Educational Studies (Whittle 2018), the use of theological themes and metaphors has mushroomed, particularly in the discourse surrounding leadership in Catholic schools. Alongside the use of theologically rich concepts such as 'vocation', 'charism' and 'spiritual capital', increasing use has been made of 'discipleship' and even 'formation'. However, bringing theological reflection to bear on educational theory about Catholic education requires being attentive to the intrinsic complexity and nuances of theological language. It is important to recall that there is a long tradition of reflection and divided opinion when it comes to theological language. It is not simply that there is a 'logical oddness' (Ramsey 1957), to theological language, but rather the profound difficulty of speaking (theologising) about God. Given God's 'otherness', as summed up in the traditional listing of divine attributes (from omnipotence to omnibenevolence), language about God cannot be used univocally, without avoiding the very serious dangers of anthropomorphism or profound equivocation.

During the Middle Ages, a considerable theological debate was conducted by those who insisted that the via *negative* or the apophatic way of characterising theological discourse could be the only coherent and appropriate way of speaking about God and matters of theology. It was Aquinas' insight that recognised how theological language must, in its most technical senses, *always* be understood as fundamentally

'analogical', rather than relying on negation and ultimate silence. In the twentieth century, fresh ideas were added to the via *analogia* from the insights of both the later-Wittgenstein about *language games* and Tillich about the place of symbolism in religious or theological language. These ideas focus on how the context and setting across a wider web of meaning must inevitably guide and inform how theological language is to be used and how it needs to be interpreted. Thus, theological themes and metaphors, such as 'vocation' or 'formation' or 'charism', do not exist in a free-floating form that can be easily uncoupled from the theological norms which govern their meaning and use. For example, drawing upon the theological theme of vocation and applying this to the leaders of a Catholic school or even to all who teach Religious Education in a Catholic school, is actually far more complex than first impressions might suggest. This is because at the fundamental level these are analogical utterances rather than univocal ones. Moreover, there is a wider *language game*, which is the living faith and practice of Catholic Christianity, against which the meanings need to be worked out. It is important to appreciate that the range of meanings might not always be positive, because there may well be shadow sides or negative connotations built into theological metaphors.

The Example of 'Vocation' and Catholic Education

To draw out the issues here, it is helpful to take 'vocation' as an illustrative example that is frequently applied to various discourses within Catholic education research (for example see Lydon 2011; Jamison 2013a). At the positive end 'vocation' is a deeply inspiring theological metaphor which helps to give a sense of purpose and direction to life. Moreover, in our everyday common usage, talk of vocation has a broad non-theological set of meanings about a job or career which involves sustained service that is not primarily about financial reward or not necessarily regarded as a high status occupation. Jobs which require considerable commitment and serve the needs of others are often described as vocational, where the desire to be of practical help takes priority over levels of pay or physical reward. Thus, nursing and caring professions are often described as vocational. When applied to the aspects of Catholic education, the metaphor of vocation draws more formally on the theological meanings and usage. Within theological reflection, a vocation is intimately linked with a divine calling and mission. According to Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium,* there is a universal vocation, the Call to Holiness, as well as callings from God to other sets of relationships and ministries (such as to marriage, religious life, or holy orders) within the Church. Moreover, there is within the theology of vocation both a broader stance, more akin to common usage, and a more specific or personal calling from God to perform or live out certain roles within the Church and for the common good of society. There has been a very strong tendency to equate 'vocation' with the more specific sense of those who elect to enter religious congregations or seek ordination. Thus, Sisters, Nuns, Monks, Brothers and Priests are regarded as having a vocation

and they are routinely regarded as providing Catholic education with the paradigm examples of what it involves. However, a strong case has been made by Jamison (2013b), that there are competing theologies of vocation and that currently there is no shared language of vocation amongst Catholic Christians.

It is at this point that applying the theological metaphor of vocation to the aspects of Catholic education becomes more complicated. At one level, it is clear that for educators working in Catholic schools to see themselves as having a vocation in which what they are doing is part of God's plan is highly affirming—and it can certainly foster resilience when situations get tough. It can allow you to integrate your working life with your faith. However, there are some very clear senses in which the layperson as a teacher or senior leader in a school does not have a vocation in the more specific sense of having a personal calling from God, akin to those who join a religious congregation or seek ordination. Any attempt to push a comparison between the call to religious life or ordained ministry and the training and appointment of someone into the teaching profession will quickly become problematic. Whilst many entrants to the teaching profession will have been motivated by a deep sense of conviction, the reality is that typically the reason why people become teachers is wrapped up with finding gainful employment rather than responding to a personal calling (from God). If opportunities allow, people can subsequently secure senior leadership positions in Catholic schools, however, the sense in which this is a personal God-given vocation is not at all obvious. Moving from a sense of wellbeing about how things have worked out in your career, to maintaining or describing that your success at appointments and promotions in a Catholic school is down to God's specific calling is a challenging idea.

This is because within the theology of vocation there are a number of difficulties (Watkins 2018), most significantly the 'Lay/Religious Tension' (p. 162). This relates to an ongoing debate between the 'lay' state and being part of a 'religious congregation' or in ordained ministry. There has been a long held assumption that the latter is a higher or more ideal way of following Jesus. This is, of course, a distortion of the theology of vocation expressed in Vatican II's universal call to holiness (*Lumen Gentium* 1964). It is interesting to speculate on the causes of this distortion in the theology of vocation. Perhaps the historical roots of it lie in the emergence of the priesthood in the early church and the effects of the Peace of Constantine a few centuries later. This would have helped to fuel the disturbing idea that when there are no longer any persecutions, there is a higher or more serious way of following Jesus and belonging to the Church. In the fifth and sixth centuries, monasticism flowered as the ideal pattern for Christian life and this began to influence ideas about ordained members of the Church. There emerged a widely held conviction that some men have been specifically called to the ordained priesthood. Even today, those seeking ordination couch their decision in terms of a personal vocation or calling. We are accustomed to candidates for ordination using the theological metaphor of 'vocation' to express and perhaps justify their deeply held desire and longing to be a priest. Of course, for the overwhelming majority of priests, this desire or a deep need to be a priest is rooted in many noble reasons. Unfortunately, the idea of a divine personal

calling to ordained ministry fuels, tacitly and explicitly,the sort of elitism or arrogance that is symptomatic of the disease of clericalism. This is an issue which Pope Francis has repeatedly called to.[4]

Thus, on closer examination, there are some negative connotations within the theology of vocation, whether this be applied to either those seeking ordination or teachers and school leaders working in Catholic schools. Recently, Watkins (2018), has drawn attention to some of the more negative interpretations when the theological metaphor of vocation is routinely used within Catholic education. The qualitative interview data in Dr. Watkin's research reveals that the language of 'vocation' is used to justify extreme working practices, where leaders in Catholic schools routinely work excessively long hours and undertake additional duties without any remuneration. These deeply unjust practices tend to be frequently excused as part-and-parcel of the vocation of teaching in, and leading a Catholic school. Moreover, it becomes difficult to raise concerns or object to these practices precisely because they get quickly wrapped up with what God is calling to be done as part of the vocation of teaching in, or leading a Catholic school. It is one thing to complain about this to a chair of Governors, but quite another to complain about the demands of a God-given vocation to teaching or leading a Catholic school. Watkins is suggesting there is a more negative sense in which seeing teaching or leading a Catholic school as a vocation could be regarded as harmful—because it leaves an individual at serious risk of exploitation.

It is also worth dwelling on just how disconcerting it would be to seriously maintain that someone has become the headteacher of a particular Catholic school because it is their personal vocation from God. A person who sees their role at school in these terms could easily develop a warped sense of their own importance. No doubt this is an aspect of what Pope Francis calls the disease of clericalism. For those who believe that they have been personally called by God to specific roles, there is an inherent susceptibility to this disease. Just because someone has not been ordained does not mean that they are immune from the disease of clericalism. Pope Francis has explained that clericalism is a Church-wide disease that all leaders, including those who work in Catholic schools, are susceptical to.

Another danger with using the language of vocation in relation to Catholic education is that it could potentially lead research on Catholic education down some blind alleys or unhelpful distractions. Much of this is because of the difficulties of untangling the language of vocation from its associations with vocations to Religious Congregations or to ordained ministry. If this is taken as the paradigm example of vocation, rather than the universal call to holiness, then it becomes relatively easy to gloss over and glide onto other theological metaphors that share a family resemblance with the discourse about vocation. Thus, if teaching in, or leading a Catholic school is depicted in terms of the theology of vocation, it becomes an appealing move to speculate about the need for the formation of these teachers or school leaders. It is important to note that it is understood as 'formation' rather than 'Continuing Professional Development' or additional training in management or leadership skills. This is because the preparation for ordained ministry is routinely described as a process of

formation. Typically, up to five years are spent in seminaries by those seeking ordination. They are not simply following courses in wide-ranging aspects of theology but are said to be in a process of formation in which spiritual development and character training are central. Similarly, those who join a Religious Congregation spend an extended period of years as a postulate or in temporary vows before finally committing to the rule of the order, society or congregation. This is described as a period of discernment and formation. Against this custom of practice, it can appear as an intuitive step to ask about how those with the vocation of teaching in, and/or leading a Catholic school are to be adequately formed, and thus guided and aided in the pursuit of their (God-given) vocation.

However, perhaps this ought to be seen as a questionable step, based on a distorted understanding of vocation. The gloss or glide from the interconnections between priestly vocation and their need for formation with preparing someone for leadership in a Catholic school might be flawed in a number of respects. First, drawing any serious comparison between the two is a gross oversimplification. Second, given the negative aspects inherent within the theology of vocation there is a real need to be cautious about going on to apply the theological metaphor of formation to teaching or leadership preparation in Catholic schools. Moreover, there are actually inherent dangers associated when it comes to the formation of those who seek ordination. Questions about the appropriateness of formation programmes can be coupled with the very significant declines in the numbers of those exercising ordained ministry throughout the Catholic Church over the past six decades. It is possible to speculate about the adequacy of the seminary model and more general attempts at formation for ordained ministry. The current approach to formation of ordinands has not mitigated the steep decline. If there is something flawed or questionable about the current formation process of those seeking ordained ministry, then there might well be very little value in framing research around 'formation programmes' for teachers and leaders in Catholic schools. This might ultimately be a blind alley for researchers in Catholic education.

Conclusion: The Implications for Researchers in Catholic Education

Bringing theological reflection to bear on the educational theory of Catholic education requires that researchers be attentive to the complexity and nuances of theological language. Church documents such as *Gravissimus Educationis* (1965) or the *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic school* (1988) or biblical texts cannot be simply mined for appropriate slogans or theological metaphors. Apart from the danger of stifling the development of the philosophy and/or theology of Catholic education, there is a failure to engage with the richer theological contexts. To tease out the issue here, it might be useful to draw on two ideas within *Ordinary*

Language Philosophy, namely 'speech-acts' and *language games*. Thus, the discussion of teaching as a vocation or the need for school leader formation should be analysed in terms of being a theologically rich speech-act, one embodying a range of relationships. Alternatively, the meaning of these theological metaphors might need to be understood as part-and-parcel of the *language game* surrounding discourse on the theology of vocation. Both of these overlapping ways of analysing these theological metaphors would indicate that they are best understood as expressions of piety and devotion within the living faith of Catholic Christianity. In many respects, they share in the genre of a reflective and motivating homily. As such, researchers in Catholic education need to be able to recognise them for what they are, and thus not be misguided into keeping the relationship with theological language and theological themes at a merely superficial level or inadvertently slipping into category mistakes that lead them down potentially blind alleys.

Notes

1. Cooling (2010) and Smith (1999) have repeatedly demonstrated how this is both possible and highly desirable.
2. Such as the concluding doxology in the Eucharistic Prayer or the Pauline injunction of 'doing all things in Christ' Philippians 4:13.
3. Currently one of the few researchers in Catholic education who appreciates its significance is Professor Graham McDonough (see for example 2019).
4. Pope Francis has repeatedly named clericalism as a serious disease afflicting the entire Catholic church. For example see: Francis 1, bishop of Rome (2016). Homily in Casa Santa Marta. Vatican website, and Francis 1, bishop of Rome (2017). Meeting with executive committee of CELAM during apostolic journey to Colombia. Vatican website.

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Chapter 2
Catholic Faith Education: A Jesuit Theological Critique

Michael Kirwan SJ

Abstract This chapter will consider challenges to the Catholic educational vision, through the work of two twentieth-century Jesuit theologians; each highly influential, though neither an educational theorist as such. The Uruguayan Juan Luis Segundo (1925–1996) was a distinctive but contrarian voice among Latin American liberationists. Karl Rahner (1904–1984), from Germany, taught for many years at the Jesuit faculty in Innsbruck, and is unmistakeably one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the twentieth century.

Keywords Jesuit education · Blondel · Rahner · Segundo

Introduction: Part 1: The Dilemma

This chapter will consider challenges to the Catholic educational vision, through the work of two twentieth-century Jesuit theologians; each highly influential, though neither an educational theorist as such. The Uruguayan Juan Luis Segundo (1925–1996) was a distinctive but contrarian voice among Latin American liberationists. Karl Rahner (1904–1984), from Germany, taught for many years at the Jesuit faculty in Innsbruck, and is unmistakeably one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the twentieth century.

Alongside these two figures, and in some respects contrapuntal to them, we will consider the French philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861–1949). Blondel's account of human action is championed by John Milbank in his important work *Theology and Social Theory*, as the most adequate account of the 'supernatural' available to contemporary theology. For Blondel, every human action is prophetic of Christ, or secretly refers to him. Milbank points to what he regards as serious inadequacies in the theology of both Rahner and the liberation theologians (including Segundo)—hence Blondel as a 'contrapuntal' voice.

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Here I will seek neither to support nor to refute Milbank's judgment, but simply to identify convergent themes in the three authors. These will help us to address the critical challenges for Catholic faith formation within a formal educational setting. There is, of course, no shortage of such challenges. Sean Whittle has identified three deficiencies: firstly, the use of 'Catholic edu-babble' and vague sloganising; secondly, the inability to think of Catholic education in other than catechetical or confessional terms; thirdly, the underdeveloped relation between theology and education theory (2015, p. 117).

These are related, and will be addressed in various ways in this chapter. However, the central dilemma to be considered here is Segundo's striking argument that Christianity is not, and was not intended to be, a 'mass movement'. Its message is directed, not at people *en masse*, but at a smaller, intentional 'elite'.

Naturally, democratic Anglo-Saxon sensibilities recoil from the terms 'elite' or 'elitist'. The Hispanic mindset, however, seems to less worried about their pejorative implications. Segundo is describing the phenomenon of a minority of persons, characterised by the difficult skills they have acquired, such as doctors. They are 'elitist' in a negative sense, only if they use their expertise to bolster their own prestige and privilege, rather than place it at the service of all.

Nevertheless, this anomaly lies at the heart of any educational project. Given the essentially elitist dynamic of schooling, and especially of tertiary level formation, with its centripetal concentration of resources to the benefit of the few, can there ever be such a thing as a universally liberative education? This is, after all, the perpetual crisis of the liberal conscience, the inability to make its freedoms available to all.

The challenge of 'mass' versus 'elite' aspiration is not merely sociological or political. It lies at the heart of the gospel message, which asserts God's universal saving will, while at the same time presenting the Christian ideal as one of concentrated, intentional discipleship. There is the *massa damnata*, and there are those who enter by the 'narrow gate'.[1] At the heart of the Christian scheme of things is a perplexing numerical asymmetry. 'Masses and minorities: is this a basic constant in humanity? If it is, which processes are proper to Christianity—those akin to literacy training or those akin to conscientization?' (Segundo 1976, p. 211).

The dilemma is especially contorted for faith schools, which do not complete their mission simply by enabling academic attainment. They are also expected to be vehicles for the transmission of Christian tradition, and for a deepening of religious commitment. Students and *alumnae* are to be 'women and men for God', as well as for others. And yet, the levels of practice and allegiance during and after Catholic schooling in secular western societies are depressingly low. Even the best Catholic faith schools seem, sadly, to have an inoculating effect against Catholic faith.

Given this stark reality, of 'mass' versus 'elite', as what Segundo assumes to be an 'anthropological constant', how are we to assess the situation of Christian Catholic education? An aspiration to form 'men and women for others' can look like a scaling-down of ambition; is it a tacit, resigned admission that the best our schools and colleges can realistically aspire to is the nurturing of what Karl Rahner called 'anonymous Christians'?

Part 2: The Response: 'Faith' and 'Ideology'

Segundo's 'liberation of theology' may help us to reframe this challenge as a properly theological possibility, rather than a counsel of realism or despair. Specifically, as Gerard I. Capaldi suggests, he may assist us in breaking down an *impasse* between 'confessional' and 'non-confessional' approaches to Religious Education (Capaldi 1990, p. 60). The fact of *pluralism* in Christian faith requires differentiation of what is of absolute and of relative value. Hence the importance of Segundo's distinction between 'faith' and 'ideology', and to Gregory Bateson's concept of 'deutero-learning'.

Segundo's scepticism with regard to Paolo Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' (i.e. that there is a parallel or affinity between literacy training and conscientisation) underpins a third theme to be explored here: his argument for a re-calibration of gospel strategy as a working with, and toward, an 'elite'.[2]

'Faith' and 'ideologies' for Segundo are two universal anthropological dimensions (2006, pp. 15–16). Despite popular usage, these do not point to the oppositional realms of 'religion' and 'non-religion'. Rather, they are complementary: 'faith' is aligned with (subjective) value or meaning, and 'ideology' with (objective) efficacy or instrumentality. For Segundo, 'faith, understood in the broadest, secular sense, is an *indispensible component*, a dimension, of every human life. It is an anthropological dimension' (2006, p. 25; emphasis in original). Faith shapes and structures meaning-making in three different phases (childhood, adolescence, and adulthood), according to the structure of freedom; the limits of the experience of satisfaction, and so on. It refers to a conscious decision in favour of 'pro-life' or 'pro-existence'—akin to, but stronger than 'trust', insofar as faith involves a conscious decision.

But this decision issues in a change of conduct, not a religious conversion as such. In other words, 'religion' is to be located in the realm of instrumentality—ideology—rather than value structure. This is the force of Jesus' polemic against the religiosity of his opponents, who have elevated religious observance to the level of 'faith'. 'Faith' corresponds to the *goal* of a revolutionary process, 'ideology' to the proper *means* to be used to achieve it.

The terms are loaded with preconceptions, of course; negative ones especially, in the case of 'ideology'. Segundo argues for an essentially complementary relationship between faith and ideology. The adolescent may be disposed to be 'pro-life', or 'pro-existence'. However, only a few mature individuals go beyond the level of this basic commitment, and follow it through to its ultimate consequences. In other words, for most people, faith does not find expression in ideology: and 'faith without ideology', as without 'good works' (see 1 James), is dead. Of itself, faith has no content. It has sense and meaning only insofar as it serves as the foundation stone for ideologies '… Christians cannot evade the necessity of inserting something to fill the void between their faith and their options in history. In short, they cannot evade the risk of ideologies' (Segundo 1976, p. 109).

The significance of this for the present discussion, is that it urges a re-alignment of our understanding of what 'faith formation' might involve. Segundo argues, in short,

that we should overcome the tendency to identify 'faith' with explicitly Christian, or even religious commitment, in a way which renders it superior to—and independent of—'ideology'. What if we break this connection, and place 'religion'—understood as religious practice, observance, etc. —in the category of 'ideology'? That is, as a means or instrument for a humanly liberative process, rather than an end in itself?

Part 3: The 'Elite' Verses the 'Masses'

The second major theme in Segundo is the notion of 'deutero-learning'. He explores this biblically, pointing to the *density* of the scriptural accounts of encounters with God. Each is relativised in history, and yet each is an encounter with the objective font of absolute truth. The particular circumstances and context of each meeting are 'ideological', but through these ideological moments the people of Israel *learned how to learn.* The formal doctrines about Christ are an example of a secondary stage or level of learning, arising out of the primacy of the first. Segundo finds in Gregory Bateson's 'deutero-learning' a better alignment of the complementary poles of faith and ideology than Freirean pedagogy. The capacity for 'learning how to learn' points us once again toward the notion of conscientisation as a minority pursuit.

His becomes clear in the provocative final chapter of *The Liberation of Theology*, where Segundo argues for the Church as a committed 'elitist' minority movement. He draws analogies from revolutionary politics, from the sociology of kinship groups, and even from the laws of thermodynamics. Something like the law of conservation of energy is at work: in normal human living, people 'channel' their energy into love, marriage, familiy life, professional work, with more general activities having to perform at a lower ebb (Segundo 1976, p. 225).

His argument is, ultimately, ecclesiological. Jesus himself gathered and formed a select group of disciples, yet Christianity has understood its imperative to be all-inclusive. But this imperative only makes sense if the Church is mistakenly identified as the 'community of salvation', as in the notorious adage, *extra ecclesia nulla salus.* Membership of the church is essential for salvation—so Christianity becomes a 'mass project'.

But if we move beyond this understanding, regarding the church instead as a 'light to the nations' *Lumen Gentium*, then the need to draw people *en masse*—to 'compel them in'—is removed.

The Church exists to be at the service of human beings, who seek and attain salvation in the world, with lives of love and justice. It is an instrument of the liberative process, a means and not the goal of salvation. The Church is a lighthouse, as it were, rather than a lifeboat. The world, not the Church, is the theatre of God's saving activity.

As we have seen, Segundo resists the analogy of literacy training proposed by Freire. The skill being described in the process of consciousness-raising is not one that is 'possessed' once and for all, like the ability to read and write. Discipleship is a much more complex capability, one which becomes more difficult to use, not (as with most

habits) easier: 'literacy training can be a mass process, but conscientization cannot. To push people towards situations that are more complex, difficult, and intermediate is to create minorities' (Segundo 1976, p. 210).

What might be the implications for a theory of Religious Education? A school might reasonably aspire to a set of measurable, attainable goals, such as a minimum level of academic qualifications, which all students are expected to achieve. But does it make sense to anticipate comparable results for 'conversion' to the cause of the poor and the service of others? 'Faith',as Segundo understands it, requires not simply a general orientation toward the good, but a conscious and mature embrace of the meansthat is, the ideology—which will make it concrete and sustainable. The 'skill' to be acquired remains difficult, no matter how much it is practised. And the evidence suggests that only a minority of human beings manage to acquire it.

We should add to this that, according to Segundo's typology, the 'faith', even of this minority, may not take explicitly religious or Christian form. So the expectation that the *alumnae* of faith schools and colleges should emerge *en masse* from their schooling as fully-rounded, devout, and committed Catholics would be fundamentally unrealistic. It would be unfair to regard low church commitment of students as a sign of failure or crisis—in the way, for example, that a wholesale collapse of academic grades certainly would be.

Part 4: Karl Rahner: Engaging With Mystery

There is much, in spirit, that Segundo shares with the Innsbruck theologian Karl Rahner. For Rahner, the human being is nothing less than 'the event of God's free self-communication'. This event is independent of the person's ecclesial commitment-independent, possibly, of any explicit religious commitment.

Rahner's controversial category of the 'anonymous Christian' is his attempt to consider how a human subject may have an authentic relationship with God, without being aware of it; indeed, perhaps while being actively hostile and resistant. The idea is beautifully rendered in his alleged response to a questioner who claimed never to have had a religious experience: 'I don't believe you!' Rahner understands human subjectivity as such to be oriented towards transcendence. In our reaching out in intellect and love, in our receptiveness to the transcendent, we know ourselves to be 'God-shaped', like a keyhole shaped to receive the key.

The pastoral imperative of Rahner's work—helping the Christian of today to believe with intellectual honesty—is undeniable, and of urgent relevance to contemporary faith education. The Rahnerian educational theorist Sean Whittle makes this connection, asserting that proper attention to philosophy in the curriculum—a philosophy shaped, that is, according to Rahner's theological anthropological presuppositions—can 'inspire and support the development of a robust theory of Catholic education' (2015, p. 99). Philosophy is, so to speak, 'an inner moment of theology'. The two disciplines converge, with practically every aspect of traditional theology capable of being approached in an anthropological key.

For Rahner, our everyday experience of the world and of ourselves is already 'graced', and is as such a doorway to the transcendent. One does not have to begin with the 'religious'; the human desire and capacity for asking honest questions provides a starting-point. One thinks of the child forever asking 'why' questions. If we only continue this chain of questioning, more complex inquiries emerge, even ultimate ones. There is a link between questioning and transcendence (IBID, p. 106).

Related to this general characteristic of human beings—our capacity for transcendence—two other 'existentials' are significant for Rahner: freedom and history. These are often experienced as a tension, insofar as human freedom is often curtailed or limited by historical context. Sustained reflection upon this tension, says Rahner, upon the fact that human freedom unfolds in and through world, time and history, will bring us to the heart of the human condition.

A taxonomy of 'mystery' includes mysteries which are solvable or unsolvable, in principle or in practice, all underpinned by one underlying mystery. Certain issues come into focus where rationality appears to reach an *impasse*. The task of the educator at such points is to foster a sense of humility; to enable students to acknowledge reason's limit in the face of 'unsolvable in principle' mysteries. Examples of such can be found, argues Whittle, within the curriculum for mathematics, physics, history and above all philosophy. With this question-and-answer format, discussion of ultimate meaning is opened up to every person, not just the believer. Rahner's approach provides a 'theological justification of a non-confessional account of Catholic education' (Whittle 2015, p. 115).

Part 5: Critique: The French and German 'Styles'

Even within a movement which has been an 'irritant' for the Church, few liberation theologians have been quite as provocative as Juan Luis Segundo. Karl Rahner, the better known and more influential theologian, has also left an important but controversial legacy. By way of a critique of both of these approaches, I wish to draw attention to John Milbank's identification of two streams of 'integral' theology. In so doing, I will bring in—courtesy of Milbank's analysis—another conversation partner, Maurice Blondel.

Theology and Social Theory is an important but challenging work, in which Milbank offers a trenchant critique of liberation theology, as too beholden to the secular presuppositions of sociological analysis, especially Marxism. He expresses appreciation for the liberationists' attempt to overcome theology's disastrous rupture between nature and grace. Unfortunately, their ability to do this effectively, according to Milbank, has been hampered by their choice of philosophical method. Instead of opting for the (French) trajectory, which derives ultimately from the philosophy of Maurice Blondel, the main liberationists have been formed—'without exception'—in the transcendental anthropological approach of Karl Rahner. Milbank's concern is that Rahner's approach, in seeking to explore how a Christian in the modern world might believe with integrity, conceded too much to the Enlightenment spirit.

The 'French' option, Milbank describes as 'supernaturalising the natural', while the second—less adequate—alternative, derived from the Germanic tradition, 'naturalises the supernatural'. What is the difference? A Blondel-inspired approach enables us to move 'beyond secular reason', by recovering a pre-modern sense of the Christianised person as the fully real person. The Rahnerian trajectory, on the other hand, remains hostage to a spurious and bankrupted Enlightenment myth of secular 'autonomy'—the very myth which Milbank's postmodern theology is seeking to unmask and dismantle.

The point here is not to get too involved in complex late-twentieth-century discussions of nature and grace; much less to adjudicate between the two trajectories, as Milbank does.[3] What interests us is Milbank's positive appraisal of Blondel, who—possibly—may complement or enrich Juan Luis Segundo's project, rather than rival it.[4]

Blondel asserts that action, not contemplation, is the point of entry into the supernatural life (hence the title of his 1893 book, *L'Action*). The will is 'never equal to itself': desire always demands a completion which is beyond its own resources. We are as it were, forever playing 'catch-up' with ourselves.

The argument is similar to Rahner's; but for Blondel it is in action, rather than intellectual appraisal or contemplation, that this truth becomes evident. Openness is not something which accompanies our action, it occurs *as* the action, as something which occurs to us and is offered to us. For Blondel, 'the logic of action, of every action, demands the supernatural'. Milbank parses this to mean that in every action there is an implicit faith, that the action will produce a new, 'correct', and satisfying synthesis. What holds our disparate actions together is an intuited harmony of unity or combination.

Both Blondel and liberation theologians reject the idealist misapprehension that action is only the expression of a prior, 'original', fully formed thought. Rather, the completed thought *is* the completed action: 'God acts in this action, and that is why the thought that follows the act is richer by an infinity than that which precedes it' (Blondel 1984, p. 211).

As indicated above, Milbank argues that Blondel's account of the supernatural is more adequate than Rahner's, and that liberation and political theologians have gone astray in following the German rather than the Frenchman. Here, however, we need only note the similarity of their endeavours, rather than the divergences. Karl Rahner and Juan Luis Segundo, and before them Maurice Blondel, are seeking to re-calibrate our account of the grace-nature relation (put simply: how we are to understand what it is to be human before God?). Whatever the merits of these respective attempts, it seems that some version of this re-calibration is needed, if we are to construct an adequate account of Catholic education.

Part V: Concluding Discussion

Milbank's criticism of Rahner, and of the liberationist approaches which derive from him, presents a choice between two 'integral' accounts of the nature/grace relation. Perhaps we do not need to follow Milbank in his strict distinction between the French (Blondelian) and German (Rahnerian) approaches. What these styles have in common with the liberation and political theologians whom they have inspired is their shared commitment to overcoming the ruptures which have disfigured Christianity: the gaps between 'nature' and 'grace', between theory and practice and- ultimately, between faith and life.[5]

Here are three possible 'takeaways' from Karl Rahner (via Sean Whittle's utilization of his doctrine); from Maurice Blondel (as situated by John Milbank in the contemporary theological debate concerning the supernatural); and from Juan Luis Segundo.

Firstly, Sean Whittle draws on an adaptation of Rahner's account of mystery to propose a curriculum oriented toward 'unsolvable in principle mysteries'. This 'non-confessional' activity would bring students to a point of threshold—the threshold of theology. He notes the positive connotations of this image—a point of *entry* into something beyond. The purpose of the whole curriculum would be to bring the student to this point, where he/she has now been enabled to engage properly with religious meaning.

Above all, such an approach is respectful of the student's decision not to cross the threshold, or to reject what he or she finds there: 'To ensure that pupils are in a position to accept, reject, or ignore theological answers to the presence of unsolvable in principle mysteries they need to be at the point where this is a viable choice.' (Whittle 2015, pp. 130–131). Whittle identifies practical examples, such as the concept of infinity in mathematics, or the cosmological questions which emerge in the 'new physics'. Another example would be the tensions relating to freedom embedded in causality, as revealed in the study of history. I would add that the study of literature can provide similar examples, such as the 'mystery' of freedom and fate at the heart of great tragedy.

Secondly, we have seen that Blondel's phenomenology of action is theologically inflected. The logic of *every* action 'demands the supernatural', and *every* such action is 'prophetic of Christ, or secretly refers to him'. Reflection upon action- or more precisely, *through* and *after* action- is therefore a form of faith reflection.

> To act, therefore, or to think at all, may be to create, to assert oneself, but it is equally to lose oneself, to place what is most ours—much more so than any inviolable inwardness—at a total risk. … Blondel associates all action with self-immolation and sacrifice: by acting/thinking we grope toward a synthesis which seems 'right' to us, and yet is not originally intended by us, but only 'occurs' to us out of the future plenitude of being, and has implications that we cannot contain. (Milbank 2006, p. 214)

Could such a perspective on acting/thinking be incorporated into a school curriculum? What, in any given discipline, would count as 'successful action', to be analysed in this way? Again, one can see how the study of literature could be

enriched by such a hermeneutic. But the description of Blondel's approach as a 'supernatural pragmatic' suggests a further application. A successfully completed action is an 'experiment': something endowed with a relative power of endurance. It 'works', in the way that a statue which endures, and which can be replicated, 'works'. (Milbank IBID).

Is it possible for us to 'sell' Christianity as something which 'works', which endures as successful action? The excitement in the chemistry or physics lab is in seeing science *working*, insofar as it has predictive power, and can be replicated, etc. The dreadful and unnecessary rift between 'faith' and 'science' is surely due in part to our inability or unwillingness to draw attention to faith, like science, as 'successful technique'.

Oliver Davies speaks of Christianity as 'spiritual technology'. We need criteria to back up the claim that 'Christianity works'. This should be possible, given our new awareness of the 'fine-tuning' of the universe, above all through advances in neurobiology (Davies 2013, pp. 247–248). He cites the example of St. Paul, whose revolutionary upheaval of the great edifices of as law, ethnicity, culture, and empire, etc. is only comprehensible because, in some mysterious sense, history was on his side. To cite Stanley Hauerwas, he lived 'with the grain of the universe'. In Paul—who is 'in Christ'—the basic elements of his humanity come into a new configuration. A configuration of the human, which can be observed, imitated, and passed on to others.

Just as Whittle's Rahnerian vision sees the potential for faith formation in the use of selected topics as 'triggers' for confronting 'unsolvable in principle' mystery, so a Blondelian reflection upon the phenomenology of human action might form a much needed bridge between the burgeoning scientific imagination of the young student, and his or her faith understood as 'spiritual technology'.

The third 'takeaway' is to return to Segundo, for whom Christian faith is concerned with an educative process of 'advocating and enhancing learning to learn in and through the appropriation of ideologies' (Capaldi 1990, p. 69).Capaldi identifies a number of implications for the Christian religious educator, of which I will mention four: firstly, that speaking of education as 'induction' into a culture, tradition or believing community is too vague to be helpful (we need to ask harder questions about what kind of culture or community); secondly, that the teacher needs to make clear the *ideological* structure of all Christian faith expressions; thirdly, that he or she should express a certain reserve toward his or her expressions of faith (so as not to foreclose new and unexpected expressions); fourthly, for a faith which is rooted in Israel's God-directed educative process, no 'neatly packaged' pattern of belief and action can be presented as 'absolute' (IBID, pp. 69–71).

Segundo addresses the intimation that gospel commitment may be attainable only for a minority 'elite'. An honest admission of this should shape the aspirations of our educational vision. This requires a clearer identification of means and ends. What if integral human liberation is the absolute goal of human life and action, to which religious belief and praxis are ancillary instruments? A startling reversal, in other words, of our accepted way of looking at things. We have come to think of religiously-observant pupils as the 'gold standard' end-product. When they turn out

to be generous atheists or agnostics, we too often resign ourselves, unspokenly, to winning the silver.

Segundo's distinction reverses this value-judgement. A reframing of the goals of education according to his 'faith-ideology' scheme might enable more honesty and realism about these goals; or at least an admission that they might be in tension with one another. A school might provide an excellent context for nurturing faith awareness—the orientation toward 'pro-existence'—and yet be a poor and inefficient vehicle for transmitting the Catholic tradition (and vice versa).

Here is the opportunity to relativise a Christianity which has sadly become self-referential, to the point of idolatry. This has been one task of liberation theology: an '*ecclesiogenesis*', restoring authenticity to the Christian faith which has too often been turned into infantilism and abject submission to the established order. Pope Francis' programme of breaking the habits of clerical self-protection and defensiveness has struck a chord with many (even as it has encountered stern resistance). Segundo and his liberationist confreres called for an even more radical decentring, for the Church to make way, unambiguously, for the advent of the Kingdom.

By placing 'religion' and 'Christianity' in the 'ideology' scale, rather than in the category of 'faith', we are reminded again of the Church's ancillary vocation. The Christian 'ideology'—expressed in worship, sacraments, etc.—is only ever a sign of, and instrument for, the accomplishment of something other than itself. Its function is not to impose elitist demands upon the masses, nor to water the gospel demands to a minimalist level. Rather, its purpose is to create new forms of energy which will serve as the basis for new and more creative possibilities.

And yet without such a crystallisation into instrumental form, the values associated with 'faith' are in danger of vaporous dispersal.

Faith without ideology is dead.

Notes

1. There is a paradox in Paul's Adam/Christ typology: *all* human beings have fallen and are in need of salvation; and yet, only a minority of human beings come to an explicit commitment to Christ.
2. See Chap. 8 of *The Liberation of Theology*, entitled 'Mass Man- Minority Elite-Gospel Message' (Segundo 1976: 208–240). A condensed version of the 'faith and ideology' distinction occurs in Chap. 4 of the same volume (101–124).
3. Even if his strictures against a Rahnerian approach are valid, it is not all clear that Segundo is guilty as charged. After all, his own studies were in Louvain and Paris, rather than Innsbruck, and Rahner is not a significant presence in Segundo's writings. This refutes Milbank's claim that 'without exception' (207) liberation theologians have chosen the Rahnerian rather than the French route.
4. Milbank (2006: 207); see the chapter entitled 'Founding the Supernatural: Political and Liberation Theology in the Context of Modern Catholic Thought' (pp. 206–256). The three theologians taken as representative of liberation theology are Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo, and Clodovis Boff.
   The following summary of Blondel is largely taken from Milbank's 'excursus' on him (Milbank 2006: 2010–2020).

5. Worth noting, however, is the interest Pope Francis has shown in the *nouvelle theologie* of Henri de Lubac (following Blondel), and in the French intellectual tradition generally. https://onepeterfive.com/pope-francis-reveals-his-mind-to-private-audience/ (accessed 5th November 2019).

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Chapter 3
Covid-19, Child Poverty, Catholic Schools and the Insights of Gustavo Gutiérrez

Stephen J. McKinney

Abstract The quick spread of Covid-19 and the consequent lockdowns in different parts of the world have exacerbated the effects of poverty and child poverty. This chapter will argue that the levels of poverty and child poverty in the United Kingdom were alarmingly high before Covid-19 and that they have risen further as a result of the pandemic. The increase in poverty has impacted on the effectiveness of home-schooling for disadvantaged families due to a lack of resources and there has been a greater uptake at foodbanks. Catholic communities and Catholic schools have responded to this crisis situation and there are examples of enhanced support for vulnerable families. This current situation could be understood as an '*irruption of the poor*' in the United Kingdom and the chapter draws on the theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez to arrive at a Christian perspective and response to the situation.

Keywords Catholic schools · Gustavo Gutiérrez · Covid-19 child poverty

Introduction

This chapter explores the relationships between Covid-19, Child Poverty and Catholic Schools by drawing on the insights of Gustavo Gutiérrez. The focus of this chapter is the effects of the lockdown, caused by Covid-19, on children and young people who come from backgrounds of poverty and deprivation. These children already suffered disadvantage in school and this disadvantage has worsened as many have not had sufficient access to learning materials, resources and Internet access in the home. There has also been a sharp rise in food poverty or food insecurity. Many Catholic schools and communities are helping to support these families and while there are sociological, economic and educational lenses to help people make sense of the effects of the crisis, this chapter offers a Christian lens informed by the theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez. The chapter begins with an overview of the effects of the lockdown in the United Kingdom on schooling and on the education of children

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in poverty. The next section examines the rise of food poverty, or food insecurity, and provides some examples of Catholic communities and Catholic schools supporting vulnerable families. The chapter continues by outlining the evolution of the theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and some of the critiques of his work. The subsequent sections on Gutiérrez look at poverty, sacred scripture and the poverty of Jesus; the preferential option for the poor and the *irruption of the poor*. This last section argues that we are now experiencing an *irruption of the poor* in the United Kingdom and that preferential option for the poor and solidarity with the poor are the demands of discipleship of Jesus Christ and this ought to be reflected in Catholic schools.

The Effects of Covid-19 on Schooling in the United Kingdom

The coronavirus (Covid-19) led to lockdowns throughout the world in the early to middle part of 2020. At the time of writing, different parts of the world are negotiating different phases of the lockdown process: the continuation of lockdown; emerging from lockdown or the end of lockdown. There are anxieties that there may be a second spike in some parts of the world and the possibility of an immediate return to lockdown. There has been a great deal of discussion about the unprecedented effects of the lockdown on the social structures and routines of what was considered 'normal' life. The lockdown has affected business, employment, recreation, medical treatment, religious practice, eating habits and formal education. It has affected the ways in which people communicate and access information in the United Kingdom and in many parts of the world. The move to virtual communication as a new 'norm', albeit temporary, for many working practices has been accomplished with alacrity and with the development of existing skills and the acquisition of new skills.

In this context, schooling in the UK has been the focus of considerable attention as the majority of children of primary and secondary school age remain at home or prepare for a phased return to school. The children of key workers had the opportunity to continue at school under strict protective measures. The timescale for the phased return in the different nations is not synchronous. The return to school for the majority of children across the UK involves physical distancing measures, increased sanitation and the possibility of attending the school part-time. While acknowledging the heroic efforts of schools and teachers in providing support and resources, and parents engaging in home education, there have been serious concerns about the disruption in the formal education of the children. There were further specific challenges for Catholic schools as the children and staff of Catholic schools have been unable to maintain links with local parishes, physically participate in the Eucharist and it has been harder to maintain the sense of the partnership between the school and the parents in the Christian community of the school (Vatican News 2020).

There have been serious concerns about the effects of the lockdown on the most vulnerable children, those living in poverty. Before the outbreak of the virus, there were signs that child poverty was increasing as a result of factors such as changes in Government benefits and low-paid or insecure employment (Child Poverty Action

Group 2020a). The children and young people are dependents and they share in the poverty of their households. The number of children living in poverty in the UK in 2018–19 was 4.2 million after housing costs had been deducted. This figure represents 30% of the children in the UK (Child Poverty Action Group 2020b). Poverty has an impact on the health and well-being of children and young people and on attainment and progress to Higher Education (Wickham et al. 2016). Disadvantaged young people face barriers to accessing Higher Education, including limited financial support and they may lack the necessary social and cultural capital (Wilson et al. 2014; McKendrick 2015). Further, disadvantaged young people are less likely to gain entrance to the more selective Universities and are more likely to drop-out of University (Social Mobility Commission 2019).

The disruption in schooling caused by the lockdown has highlighted that the disadvantages experienced by children living in poverty have become significantly worse (Blundell et al. 2020). This is expected to have a serious effect on their progress in school and their attainment. This situation impacts on Catholic schools as they engage with children suffering from these disadvantages. There are a series of issues that have come to the fore in the discussion on child poverty during the lockdown. These include digital poverty or digital exclusion as children are unable to engage or fully engage in the virtual learning environment (Holmes and Burgess 2020). In some cases, the family may have the equipment but cannot afford to pay for the wi-fi. Some families lack access to reading materials and have limited resources for home learning or even an absence of these resources. The lack of early years provision is expected to widen the attainment gap (Unicef UK 2020). There are serious concerns about the mental health and well-being of some of these children and young people. One of the most prominent and pressing issues is food poverty, or food insecurity.

Food Poverty and the Response to Food Poverty Under Covid-19

Food poverty, or food insecurity, means that people do not have enough to eat or do not have enough of the right kinds of food for a healthy lifestyle. This is because they do not have sufficient income, or they cannot access appropriate food shops. Low-income families with children are particularly vulnerable (Douglas et al. 2015). Prior to Covid-19, increasing numbers of children were being affected by food poverty as their families struggled to provide food. The provision of free school meals was under threat during Covid-19 and the UK government introduced a number of measures in England including meals, food parcels and a voucher system (Department of Education 2020). The voucher system was introduced to enable eligible families with children to obtain £15 of food per week per child. The system encountered unexpected difficulties with some families experiencing delays in the receipt of the vouchers and some parents were not able to redeem vouchers at supermarkets (Burns 2020a, b). Prior to Covid-19, many families in the UK used foodbanks and this increased

dramatically during Covid-19 as families struggled with decreased or negligible incomes. The figures for the uptake at many of the foodbanks throughout the United Kingdom indicate that double the number of families with children received food parcels in March 2020 compared to March 2019 (The Trussell Trust 2020). The families that were vulnerable before Covid-19 have become more vulnerable and, since the beginning of Covid-19, more families have become vulnerable.

Catholic communities and Catholic schools were very active in their response to food insecurity before Covid-19 and many parishes and Catholic schools have provided food for vulnerable families during the period of lockdown (Burns 2020c; O'Toole 2020). Brentwood Catholic Children's Society provided supermarket vouchers before Covid-19 and faced increased demand as the lockdown ensued. St Thomas More RC Academy, North Tyneside has provided supermarket vouchers since the closure of the school caused by the Covid-19 lockdown and, by the 5 May 2020, had assisted 200 hundred children from 160 vulnerable families (Teague 2020). The Catholic Children's Society in the South East of England has helped over 2300 children from 1400 families by providing funding for food and essentials by the same date. In Scotland, the St. Nicholas Care Fund of the Archdiocese of Glasgow has provided funding for parishes and Catholic schools to support vulnerable families (Swanson 2020). The June 2020 edition of the Archdiocesan newspaper, *Flourish*, reports that St. Paul's primary in Shettleston received funding for kitchen utensils and food and Lourdes Secondary received funding for food parcels.

The next sections examine the theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez to use as a Christian lens to understand the current crisis of child poverty in the UK and the impact on Catholic schools.

Gustavo Gutiérrez: The Evolution of his Thinking

Gustavo Gutiérrez is one of the best known of the Liberation Theologians to emerge from Latin America. His theological journey is fascinating and his theological engagement with the Catholic Church was not always particularly easy, as his work was challenging, at times misunderstood, and prone to very serious criticism (as will be discussed below). Nevertheless, he has provided some very penetrating insights into poverty and a Catholic Christian response to poverty that extends beyond the context of Latin America and the Caribbean. Some of his theology has been influential on the contemporary thinking on poverty that is articulated by the Catholic Church. For example, he has undertaken an extensive examination of the idea of the preferential option, or option, for the poor in his writings and this idea has been used by Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis and the United States Conference of Bishops (2017).

He was born in Lima, Peru in 1928. When he began his training for the priesthood, he was sent to study in Europe between 1951 and 1959. He studied philosophy, psychology and theology at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, University of Lyons in France and the Gregorian in Italy (Groody 2011). When he returned

to Peru he was confronted by the poverty of the people and the systemic social injustice that prevailed in Peru. He did not feel that his extensive academic training had equipped him for this challenge. He was influenced by the powerful example of Bartolomé de las Casas who condemned the unjust treatment of the indigenous peoples in the Spanish colonies in the sixteenth century and re-read the scriptures from the perspective of poverty and the biblical commitment to the poor. De Las Casas preached and wrote that the indigenous people were part of the body of Christ and were to be treated as brothers and sisters, not people to be exploited (Gutiérrez 1992). De Las Casas argues in *Memorial de Remedios* (1516) that the only possible justification for Christians being in the Indies is to proclaim the Gospel and to emphasise the love of God and the love of neighbour. Similarly, Gutiérrez began to re-read history and re-read the scriptures in the context of the concrete poverty of the people in Peru and he began to develop his theology that espoused a commitment to the poor (Siker 1997).

The theology of Gutiérrez has been subjected to close scrutiny and a number of serious concerns have been expressed about issues such as his theological method, his reading and use of history, the balance in his theology between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, his adoption of some aspects of Marxist analysis and the way in which he has interpreted scripture (Berbusse 1975). There is only sufficient space to address two key concerns: The use of Marxist analysis and the use of scripture. Gutiérrez initially drew on the theory of dependence that adopted some ideas from Marxist analysis (Groody 2011). This led to some sharp criticism of the authenticity and orthodoxy of his theology (Swathwood 2014). However, Gutiérrez was not a Marxist, nor did he reach Marxist conclusions. His ideas are contradictory to Marxism. Marx had a more complex view of religion beyond the oft quoted, 'religion of the opiate of the masses', but he did view religion as illusory happiness and if people gave up this illusion, they could pursue real happiness (Raines 2002, p. 8). In contrast, Gutiérrez understands following Jesus Christ in the Christian religion as liberating not illusory (Groody 2011, p. 25).

The critics focus on his use of Marxism early in his career and often ignore the facts that he used scripture extensively and that he was influenced by a long list of thinkers and prominent Catholic theologians. For example, he was influenced by Bartolomé de las Casas, Paulo Freire, Dom Helder Camara, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Henri De Lubac, Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx (Horn 2008; Kirylo 2011). There were two documents issued by the Church on Liberation Theology: *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1984) and *Instruction of Christian Freedom and Liberation* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1986). The first addressed 'the deviations, and risks of deviation' in certain forms of liberation theology and the second, while less critical, positioned the concept of liberation in a wider Church context and theology. It is important to recognise that these documents were aimed at 'Liberation Theology' and did not identify individuals. To expand on this point, Groody rightly advises that, 'at no time was Gustavo or his writings ever reproved by the Vatican' (Groody 2011, p. 25). It is instructive to consider the major work on Bartolomé de las Casas by Gutiérrez that was published after these documents

in 1993. This book works on a number of levels: It provides a historical account and also provides a platform for Gutiérrez to expound his Liberation Theology. This book has no mention of dependence theory nor any Marxist analysis but focusses on the profound implications of the Christian call to love of one's neighbour for contemporary theology (Smith 2002 p. 70).

As has been stated, his re-reading of scripture and his continued use of scripture are an extremely important foundation for his theology (Siker 1996). While he is not a formal exegete, he is a theologian with strong scriptural basis. He and other Liberation Theologians are criticised for their use of scripture in a number of ways. It is argued that scripture is used in a selective way to serve a specific purpose (Burchell 1991, p. 15). It is claimed that scripture is used to support a form of advocacy, the 'proponents advocate that the results be used to change today's social, political or religious situation' (Brown 1997, pp. 27–28). A counter argument to this is that the biblical writers themselves could be considered to have practiced a form of advocacy. They were writing in specific social, political and religious situations. The prophets were calling for a return to the Lord and the Covenant. The four gospel writers wrote in different contexts and addressed different situations. Luke's gospel has a strong focus on the ministry of Jesus for the poor, the excluded and marginalised and the right use of material possessions (Luke 4:16–22, 6:20–26, 12:33–34; 14:16–24, 14:33, 16:19–31; Bovon 2002; McKinney 2018a). This latter point can also be discerned in the Luke's Acts of Apostles. The representation of the very early Christian community in Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35 is one where the members sell their possessions and goods, and everything was held in common and shared according to individual needs.

I will now examine and discuss three themes in the theology and thinking of Gutiérrez: (1) poverty, sacred scripture and the poverty of Jesus; (2) the preferential option for the poor and (3) the *irruption of the poor*.

Poverty, Sacred Scripture and the Poverty of Jesus

Siker (1996) points out that Gutiérrez draws on many passages from scripture that highlight poverty and some of the most frequently used are passages from Psalms, Exodus and Is: 40–66, Matthew 25:31–46 and Luke 4:16–20. Gutiérrez provides insights into why poverty, and the condition of the poor, are highlighted in scriptures in *A Theology of Liberation* (1971). First, poverty is a scandalous condition and those who impoverish others are to be condemned, according to the scriptures. Poverty and marginalisation of the other are contradictory to the demands placed on the people who have been freed from slavery in Egypt. They were called to follow the holiness code to strive to be holy like God and to follow God's example of care and concern for the poor and defenceless (McKinney 2018b). Second, poverty is not coherent with the Genesis account of God telling men and women to be fruitful, to flourish (Genesis 1:28). We can add that they have been blessed by God and are part of a creation that God saw as very good (Genesis 1: 28, 31). Finally, Gutiérrez adds that the impoverishment of people is an offense to God and to the fact that we are created

in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Poverty was not God's intention for humanity. Gutiérrez is concerned about exclusion and marginalisation, including discrimination towards women and emphasised the equality and complementarity of men and women in *The God of Life*. He states that 'man and woman alike are created in the image of God and for God', they are created together in the image of God (Gutiérrez 1991, p. 167).

Jesus chose to be born into poverty, the irruption of God as a member of a people in an occupied land.

> To the eyes of Christians the incarnation is the irruption of God into human history: an incarnation into littleness and service in the midst of the overbearing power exercised by the mighty of this world; an irruption that smells of the stable (IBID, p. 85).

This irruption that 'smells of the stable' is in contrast to the domination by a great Empire. Gutiérrez points to the poverty of Jesus and the mission of Jesus to the poor (though not exclusively). The focus on the poor is prefigured before the ministry of Jesus in this gospel in the events around the birth of Jesus, the Magnificat of Mary and the preaching of John the Baptist (McKinney 2018c). Jesus proclaimed that he was anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach the Good News to the poor in Luke 4: 18 (Green 1994 p. 61). He was an itinerant preacher and he does not appear to have a permanent dwelling once he begins his ministry. Gutiérrez (1983) comments that Jesus has pitched his tent among us. He lived in solidarity with the poor, preached the right use of possessions and the just treatment of the poor.

The Preferential Option for the Poor

Gutiérrez draws a distinction between three types of poverty: real or material poverty, voluntary poverty and spiritual poverty (Gutiérrez, 2010 in Groody 2011 pp. 190–192). Real or material poverty is not simply about being deprived or material needs, it is also about other forms of disadvantage that affect the poor in Latin America and the Caribbean. These include social insignificance, marginalisation, non-recognition of human rights. People can be deemed to be insignificant because of 'economics, race, gender, culture, ethnicity, or other reasons'. Voluntary poverty is to live life with the poor, following the example of Jesus who chose to live a life of poverty. Spiritual poverty is to place our lives in the hands of God, to follow the will of God, and this will mean, like the first disciples, a detachment and freedom from material goods. One of the driving principles of solidarity of the poor is a commitment to the eradication of poverty by tackling the root causes.

Gutiérrez explains that the term *preferential option for the poor* has to be properly understood (Hartnett 2003). God has a preferential option for the poor because they are 'living in a situation that is contrary to God's will' not because they are morally or religiously better than other people (Gutiérrez 1989 p. 93). Poverty refers to the real poor, the material poor, not the spiritual poor. These are people who are deemed to be non-persons, people considered to be insignificant from the perspectives of

economics, politics and culture. The word *preferential* does not denote preference for the poor to the exclusion of others. God's love does not exclude anybody. The word *option* might seem to suggest a choice in the English language, but in Spanish it means more than this and evokes the idea of commitment. The option of the poor cannot be conceived as an option, a choice, it is integral to Christian life, a commitment. Gutiérrez references Gregory Baum who described the option for the poor as 'the contemporary form of discipleship' (Gutiérrez 2009). In a discussion of Mark 10: 35–45, Gutiérrez comments that following Jesus Christ is not simply about a profession of faith but about following the example of Jesus (1983).

The Irruption of the Poor

Gutiérrez and the other Liberation theologians were reacting to the poverty and marginalisation of people in Latin America and the Caribbean. They described the situation as the *irruption of the poor*, the voices of the poor could no longer be ignored; they were irrupting into space and time. This irruption can be understood to be a moment in time, an event. It was also the culmination, but not the end point, of a process. It would not have occurred without the popular movement and the base Christian communities (Nickoloff 1993; Humphrey 2011). The poverty of the people is a scandal, an affront to Christianity; it is evident from the scriptures that God does not want poverty but justice. The irruption of the poor in Latin America and the Caribbean provided a voice for the voiceless and a hope that there could be no turning back, no reverting to the previous regimes and injustices. The progress has been slow and, at times, painful (Comblin 2009).

The Catholic community and Catholic schools and the rest of the United Kingdom are arguably now experiencing their own *irruption of the poor*. Like the irruption in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is an event and the culmination of a process, and not an end point. There is a growing body of sociological, medical and educational research evidence and theory to provide insights into poverty, the effects of poverty and child poverty. The levels of child poverty were increasing before the Covid-19 and are unlikely to improve in the short term, or even long term, after the threat to physical health posed by Covid-19 has waned. The word 'vulnerable' has been used frequently during the time of the virus to identify those at most risk from the virus or from the effects of the virus on society. The irruption of the poor includes the most vulnerable: the elderly, the disabled and the children and young people who experience poverty.

The messages of the scriptures on poverty, announced to each generation, seem particularly applicable to the present time. Many Catholic schools in the United Kingdom were founded to educate the children of the poor and have a long history of care for the poor (Grace 2002). Catholic schools provided free meals and clothing for children in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to encourage them to attend school (McLaughlin et al. 1996; McKinney 2017, 2020). The current context in society means that Catholic schools are returning to these practices or intensifying

these practices. Catholic schools are addressing the poverty of the children and young people as best they can, often with limited resources. The response of the Catholic schools is inspirational, and, at the same time, it is deeply disturbing and dispiriting that this should be the situation in the twenty-first century.

Concluding Remarks

If we are witnessing our own *irruption of the poor* in the United Kingdom, then, progress may be slow and painful. As has been stated earlier in this chapter, there are very many ways to understand the complexity of poverty, the effects of poverty and the impact on the education of children. Gutiérrez argues that poverty cannot be reduced to a social issue or an economic issue (Gutiérrez 2009). Poverty is 'inhumane and antievangelical' and has become a global human problem. This global problem of the *irruption of the poor* must be understood in concrete situations in local contexts and that is why the specific examples from Brentwood, North Tyneside and Glasgow are so important. These are different from situations in Latin America and the Caribbean but the reality of poverty for families and children is equally challenging. Many Catholic schools encounter the effects of child poverty on a daily basis. The theology of Gutiérrez provides a Christian lens to understand and respond to poverty and child poverty from a Christian perspective. It is scandalous and counter to God's intentions for humanity. This is very clear from the scriptures that highlight the God-given dignity bestowed on women and men when they were made in the image and likeness of God. Jesus provided an example when he chose poverty, lived a poor life and preached the Good news to the poor. One of the striking aspects of the theology of Gutiérrez is his focus on discipleship, the call to discipleship and the demands of discipleship. These demands may be difficult at times, but Gutiérrez advises that they are necessary to live life as disciples according to the teaching of Jesus and the tradition of care for the poor repeatedly found in the scriptures (Gutiérrez 2009).

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Chapter 4
Eyes on the Preferred Future: Renewing the Church State–Partnership for Catholic Education

Margaret Buck

Abstract It is nearly ten years since the Academies Act 2010 was swiftly processed through Parliament by Michael Gove, the new Secretary of State for Education, at the beginning of his political career serving in the Coalition Cabinet. Motivated by his childhood experiences, he was determined to drive forward the structural reform of education at a pace, removing state-funded schools from local authority control through the mechanism of academy conversion. However, Prime Minister David Cameron removed Gove from his post after only two years allegedly because his ambitions for education reform proved unpopular with the teaching profession. Then, the roll out of government policy was unexpectedly interrupted by the Brexit referendum in 2016, and virtually halted by the period of unprecedented political upheaval, uncertainty and instability that followed. The outcome of the Brexit referendum is coming to a head. At some point in the future, the Catholic Church will face doing business with a government that must return its full attention to the state of play in public services, education in particular. In this chapter, I extend my reflection on the normative question that underpinned my doctoral thesis: in light of changes to the national educational policy context since 2010, what should be the relationship between the Catholic Church and the State in the provision of education?

Keywords Academisation · Church–state relationship · Local authorities and Catholic education

Introduction: Setting the Scene

First, I consider how the local diocesan construct of a Catholic education may affect diocesan attitudes towards removing schools from local authority control to create state-funded independent academies. Second, I reference the English national scene in 2019 as Brexit comes to a head. Third, I summarise *some* features that are vital to a vibrant partnership between church and state.

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Infrastructure

Catholic academies are normally created by removing voluntary-aided schools from local authority control. When local authorities cease to maintain schools that become academies, they are no longer obliged to provide the support and challenge that stems from their statutory powers and duties to maintained schools. In line with statutory obligations, this infrastructure of monitoring, support, warning and intervention is necessary to support the accountability of governors of schools for the use of public funds, in order to provide children with an education. I appreciate that local authority services to schools vary, for a whole variety of reasons. However, it is the work of their officers, who execute the statutory powers and duties of local authorities in relation to schools, that supports Catholic school governors in holding the management to account in the interests of all children on roll.

Depending on their position on a continuum related to their construct of education in a Catholic school, dioceses appreciate to a greater or lesser degree the importance of the functions associated with local authority maintenance of their schools. At one end of the scale, dioceses may separate the sacred from the secular, with a construct of Catholic education that is heavily weighted towards the teaching of Religious Education and Catholic life, seeing performance as a secular concern of the local authority and of lesser importance in promoting and sustaining a Catholic ethos. This approach may cause dioceses to undervalue the impact of the legal monitoring and accountability framework embedded in the work of local authorities with schools. This attitude may lead dioceses to believe that in the face of change, and the prevailing government policy, they can best protect the Catholic character of their schools by removing them from local authority maintenance and bring them solely under diocesan control. However, the decision to convert all diocesan schools to academies may also be accompanied by an underdeveloped appreciation of how Catholic education in the diocese would then need to be organised and function to ensure there was a mechanism to hold academies to account for policy, provision, practice, performance, standards and finance, *as well as* RE and Catholic life.

At the other end of the scale, dioceses may hold in tension the pole positions of demands for performance and progress in learning with the needs for formation and spiritual growth, in order to promote an integrated holistic view of an education in the faith. In summary, their construct of Catholic education is comprehensive, deeply immersed in the person of Christ, the values of the Gospel, the church's teaching on education and a distinctive curriculum that enables all children to experience life to the full. This viewpoint requires a theological foundation that sees a Catholic education as the context for unifying the emerging and expanding experience of life lived in the world, with the educative and enhancing experience of a life lived in faith. An integrated understanding of education in the faith enables children to develop a strong sense of self, a principled commitment to family, society and the environment, and a personal response to Christ. Seeing education through this lens may better position and equip dioceses to appreciate the enormous complexity that underpins simultaneously taking their schools out of local authority control and establishing a

robust in-diocese infrastructure to replace the scope and scale of the critical functions of local authority maintenance. If dioceses are going to pursue academisation, they need to deeply appreciate the implications of the level of change.

The Situation in 2019

For nine unsettled years, dioceses have navigated national education policy with varying degrees of enthusiasm or reluctance, confidence or concern, like participants in an unpredictable game of snakes and ladders. Based on the 2018 *Catholic Education Service* (CES) Census Data, the proportion of academies in dioceses ranges between 1 and 95% (see Appendix 1) (CES 2018). In 2019, English Catholic education is underpinned by a permissive national ecclesial policy that defers to canonical authority, resulting in considerable variation in local diocesan policy and practice (McMahon 2011). Policies may be adopted that underpin wide-ranging local decisions about permanent, structural change, without the assurance of evidence from reputable research that academies are more successful than voluntary-aided schools. Policies may be adopted that promote organisational practices that are unproven in terms of shaping the nature and functions of an effective diocesan education service, as it takes on more unregulated responsibilities with less support from the local authorities within its ecclesial district.

The uncertainties around academisation are part of the political mayhem surrounding Brexit, which in 2019 has culminated in the appointment of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, with Michael Gove as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster advising on government policy and implementation, Gavin Williamson as Johnson's education secretary and Dominic Cummings as his senior special adviser. (The latter was first Director of Strategy to Conservative party leader, Iain Duncan Smith, then he became adviser to Michael Gove when he was education secretary, and then provided the strategic force behind the Vote Leave Campaign.) If anything should persuade the Catholic Church to seize the day and take the lead on articulating its preferred future for Catholic education, decision-making in the hands of this quartet should be the catalyst. Consider the potential juxtaposition of ideology, action and consequence in the next round of education policy-making. Imagine the Gove-Cummings partnership, drawing on their prior experience, dictating the script for education to Gavin Williamson. Reflect on this evaluation of Cummings' impact on education thus far:

> [Cummings] moves fast and breaks things. Can he build them too? He has certainly proved himself a brilliant destroyer. As adviser to Michael Gove … Cummings took aim at what he believed was a cosy agreement between Whitehall bureaucrats and local councillors to make life easy for themselves at the expense of the nation's children. He broke the grip of local authorities over schools, but left behind a fragmented non-system of independent state academies, with opaque rules and accountabilities, and no mechanism for scaling up or replicating instances of excellence. (Leslie 2019)

What does it suggest about the possible motivations driving education policy if the Conservatives win the impending election? The government's obsession with getting Brexit done and moved on, together with Cummings potentially 'taking a wrecking ball to Whitehall' and focusing on 'NHS, crime and immigration' (Wright 2019), may provide an opportunity for the Catholic Church. Basically, there could be the opportunity to propose innovative models for collaboration that meet ministerial expectations regarding governance, performance and standards. Bishops, diocesan officers, school leaders and governors, academics and researchers, in other words those who have internal power, control or influence over Catholic schools, should work together and seize the day. The need for a permanent state of preparedness to deal with government should be the norm, to harness the possibility of securing a renewed partnership for Catholic education, while it may still be possible.

I propose that there is a need for a blue-print of layered national and local visions of the preferred future for Catholic education. A robust strategy that enables Catholic educators to turn visions of a renewed Catholic education system into reality, which demands principled leadership at all levels, characterised by the capacity to exercise good judgement, with an appreciation of the human context and relational nature of change. I am mindful that it would be unrealistic to suggest the route to renewal for Catholic education rests on an off-the-peg, template paper plan that can be applied unilaterally in single dioceses in a transactional manner, accompanied by an episcopal directive, irrespective of the national context, the actions of other dioceses or the nature of engagement of all working in support of Catholic schools. Change is a messy business, generated from the transformational dynamic at the interface of visions, values, leadership, relationships, climate, culture, engagement and dialogue. And of course, grace; grace that enables us to live and work daily according to the mind of Jesus and his Gospel (Sullivan 2019).

Vibrant Partnership

My doctoral thesis and subsequent book deal with the 'why' and the 'what', and in principle the 'how' of renewing the church–state partnership for Catholic education. Essentially, I argue that there is a need to reframe the basic church–state partnership that underpins Catholic education to include the Catholic school. The prevailing professional context of educational provision in the twenty-first century requires that the church re-imagines the future of Catholic education as dependent on a three-way partnership between church, school and state. This view gives full recognition to the authority, autonomy and accountability of the three distinctive, specialist and complementary voices who are the main contributors to the enterprise that is Catholic education. The partnership should be grounded in a shared, explicit Catholic philosophy of education that has been commissioned and approved by the English Catholic bishops, informed by those best fitted to speak with authority. By this I mean, authority that is rooted in credible theological and educational expertise

in order to produce good guidance for schools on the beliefs, values and understandings that direct the aims and purposes of Catholic education, so as to inspire and inform the planning to achieve the intended outcomes of provision (Buck 2019).

The management of the strategy for education in the Catholic sector should be delegated to a professional, permanent, full-time, national executive. This body, headed by a well-qualified, experienced leader with a proven-track record of managing change and operating with devolved responsibility, should be accountable to the English Catholic bishops, for implementing, monitoring and keeping under review a national education strategy and supporting English dioceses in aligning their local strategies with the same, in order to sustain a flexible approach to national Catholic educational provision that is implemented locally. This arrangement would require clarification of the authority, autonomy and accountability of the episcopal, diocesan, professional, governance and academic voices, in the work of Catholic education and schools. There would be a need to make clear their particular responsibilities, their powers and duties, to whom they must give an account, their arenas of consultation and decision-making, their spheres of influence, and where they should defer to the other as expert (Buck 2019).

The national executive would disseminate and propagate the strategic intent through the framework of a national Catholic education alliance, which would form the back-bone of a self-improving Catholic educational network with automatic membership of all Catholic schools funded by or independent of the state, together with the four English Catholic universities. This manner of functioning would depend on embedding cultural norms of school-level partnership working at diocesan level and in and between schools. The emphasis would be on creating local families of voluntary-aided schools and/or academies in clusters. These clusters would be bound by memorandums of understanding, underpinned by deeply collaborative relationships and effective networks that understand the need for engagement that is transformational and not simply transactional. The principle of solidarity should be rooted in the agreements and arrangements for governance. The principle of subsidiarity should ensure that the responsibilities and contributions of each school would be exercised in the interest of the common good. School-level communities of practice would be required to be outward-facing, with each school retaining responsibility for their own performance and standards but committed to collective responsibility for improving and sustaining the quality of education provided by all members. Collectively, the aim should be to transform cultures in schools giving cause for concern, and be ambitious for children and young people to experience the fullness of life in the way of Christ. The emphasis would be on putting children first and understanding how to achieve and sustain a holistic approach to school improvement that sustains a nourishing and nurturing educational experience for all. Staff formation and development would have a high priority and use secondments, peer review, moderation, 'joint-practice' development and research to strengthen professional dialogue and exchange (Buck 2019).

The demands on the capacity and capability of diocesan directors should be recognised and addressed by promoting an expectation of a raised level of theological

framing, professional knowledge, legal understanding, creativity, political astuteness, negotiation skills, strategic thinking and operational capacity, which has implications for the recruitment, appointment, induction, training, development, coaching and mentoring of aspiring diocesan leaders. There needs to be an explicit professional framework for the leadership of diocesan education services (akin to the formal frameworks used to support other professional educators), which enables aspiring and serving diocesan officers to take responsibility for their own personal, professional and spiritual development and growth and be supported by their employer (Buck 2019).

A co-ordinated national strategy for research into Catholic education to provide a sound, evidenced–based foundation for its future development is a must. The importance of research should be owned and valued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference as engagement in activity that is vital to underpin strategy and policy, as well as practice. Quality research-based evidence provides the best way to challenge political ideology. Research should encompass regular audits of priorities, linking with external agencies and organisations prepared to provide funding. Catholic researchers should be able to access this information on a unifying national website for Catholic education. Research outcomes should be publicised to inform the strategic thinking of all professional groups supporting Catholic education, as well as the Catholic bishops. There should be a central register of work undertaken in the name of the Catholic Bishops' Conference and dioceses, so that any future researchers or project leaders may retrieve the historical evidence and outcomes of what has been attempted, and how, and by whom and when, and with what success (Buck 2019).

Conclusion

These are but some of the features that working in tandem could strengthen Catholic education for the future. In conclusion, it is important to add that it is vital to sustain communication publicly, well beyond the confines of the church itself, about the mission, work and outcomes of the Catholic educational community as 'attractive'. The public narrative should celebrate that many Catholic schools and academies are quantitatively 'good' in terms of standards, but far more importantly, the explanation for 'effectiveness' is because they reveal God's 'goodness' in the ethos, values, principles and behaviours that contribute to the schools' distinctively Catholic character and success. Just as Jesus attracted his disciples, and his Spirit continues to attract people to him, so should Catholic schools be attractive as communities that take Jesus as their example, and live the values of the Gospel by promoting virtuous behaviour at the heart of moral goodness that provides the soil to grow the best in people, the best in relationships and the best in educational outcomes for children and young people (Buck 2019).

Appendix 1

Catholic Education Service Digest of 2018 Census Data for Schools and Colleges in England

Source   https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/images/CensusDigestEngland2018.pdf

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Dr. Margaret Buck has worked in primary, secondary and special education. Amongst other roles, she has been a headteacher, both a local authorityinspector and an Ofsted inspector, and the Diocesan Director for the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham. In parallel, she worked for the National College for School Leadership for many years as a tutor, assessor and writer of leadership programmes for Catholic and Church of England schools. She has provided support to the *Catholic EducationService*, as well as to a variety of Catholic schools and academies at their request. In 2019, she was awarded a Ph.D. from Liverpool Hope University. Her book, *Renewing the Church-State Partnership for Catholic Education: Engaging with the Challenge of Academisation,* was published in 2020 by Peter Lang. She remains deeply interested in the future for Catholic schools and academies, and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people.

Chapter 5
Discourses in the Practice of [Catholic] Education—And Theology

Paddy Walsh

Abstract This chapter considers the particular context of education as a practice, and four 'discourses' are identified and examined. *Deliberation* and *evaluation*, complementing each other at the 'action heart' of the practice, are also points of departure for two more 'theoretical' or 'outer' discourses, *ideal-utopian* thinking that sets feasibility aside, and *explanatory-scientific* analysis that stands back from practice the better to view it from outside. It is argued that these discourses form a 'cluster'. In regard to research, it is supposed that each discourse has its own characteristic *research agenda*, though it may usefully draw 'adaptively' from the methods and findings of others. In the chapter, a one-by-one analysis of the discourses and their several inter-relationships raises the question whether a (forced) neglect of 'outer' discourses may have *narrowed* our practice and conception of education and teacher education. Examples of how philosophy-cum-theology of education can deepen the theory and practice of Catholic/Christian schools, and thereby offset narrowing trends bring the chapter to a close.

Keywords Practice · Discourse · Deliberation-evaluation · Ideal-utopian · Scientific · Fundamental theology

Introduction

In mature practices generally, and a fortiori in the fundamental practice of education, *deliberation* (policy and planning) and *evaluation* (reviewing) are two interdependent but still distinguishable discourses. It will be argued that these 'inner' discourses also

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serve as points of departure for two more 'theoretical' ('outer') discourses, one that may be called *ideal* or even *utopian* because it side-lines feasibility issues and another that can be called *explanatory* or *scientific* because it serves education, mainly, by standing back from it. Together, these four discourses constitute a logically symbiotic set, what the chapter calls *a cluster*.

Discourses will be shown to have their own characteristic *research agendas*, though each may usefully draw 'adaptively' from the methods and findings of others. More often than not, probably, discourse boundaries are crossed in that way, but a coherent research programme keeps overall order—a steady pulse will be sounding through the borrowed beats.

This discourse analysis will serve as a health check for narrowing trends in some educational systems. So it can link the problematic levels of 'teaching to the test' in schools to loss of energy in 'outer' discourses, changes in teacher education, and track all three back to excessive government control. It is, thus, a way of articulating drifts towards *narrowness* in educational practice, enquiry and research. A final discussion, with illustrations, of how *fundamental theology* might be brought more firmly to the theory and practice of Catholic and Christian schools will bring the chapter to an end on a positive note.

Education as a Mature Practice of Practical Reason

We can start from the fact that education, an exercise primarily of practical reason, is a mature—indeed very mature—social practice involving action that is thoughtful, sustained and recurring. This saddles it with four methodical discourses: ideal-utopian, deliberative, evaluative and explanatory-scientific. Some might prefer to say it saddles the *study* of education with these discourses. I think there is also much to be said for a large conception of the practice of education as *including* the ongoing study of education at different levels.

The discourses can be presented in diagram form as

P2 Ideal-Utopian

P1 Deliberative

Action------------ *past, present and future*

D1 Evaluative

D2 Explanatory-Scientific
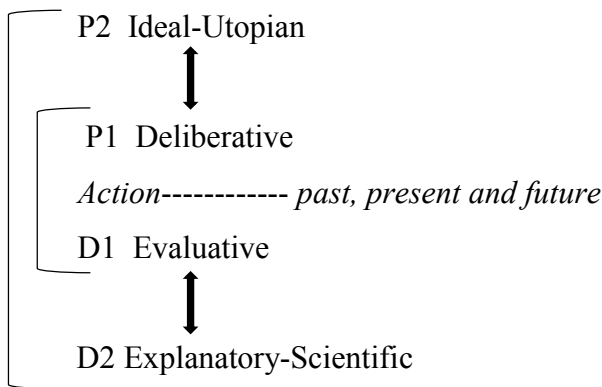
The middle two, deliberative and evaluative, *focus* on some 'here and now' practical situation, while the first and fourth more or less intensively *abstract from* that kind of particularity. From another angle, the upper two, ideal-utopian and deliberative, are prescriptive ('action-guiding') in different ways, while the lower two, evaluative and explanatory-scientific, are descriptive ('how things are') in different ways. It should be noted that this prescriptive/descriptive distinction in no way commits one to David Hume's deeply mischievous thesis of a 'naturalistic fact/value fallacy'. Indeed, it might persuade one to simply dismiss that thesis inasmuch as the deliberative '*What to do?*' and the evaluative '*How are things?*' quite obviously *must* feed off each other.

A '*discourse*' can now be generally defined as 'a sustained and disciplined form of enquiry, discussion and judgement that is logically unique in some significant way.

More generally, while the four discourses are distinguishable by virtue of their different relationships to educational action (and so, we shall observe, vary in their virtues), they *co-exist symbiotically* in that they depend ultimately on each other for their various individual *raison d'etres*. Beyond or below some adaptive pilfering from each other, they constitute 'a set'. A *dialectic* between connectivity and distinctiveness will emerge across the set.

There are parallel discourse distinctions in other mature practices (and in the study thereof), for example, social work, politics, home-building, the arts, nursing—but the *foundational* role of education in other practices gives special depth and breadth to its discourses. As one leading example, in education ideal-utopian discourse extends not only to *aspects* of the good life but to its nature *as a whole*.

Deliberation and Evaluation

These are the 'here and now' situated discourses. Education, as a more or less formal practical enterprise extended over time (much time!) constantly involves the twin thoughts of how far one has come and how far one still has to go. Those are the bases, respectively, for *review* on the one hand and *deliberation (policy and planning)* on the other hand, and each derives its significance from the importance of education itself: because, and in the measure that, education is important, it has to be both planned wisely and regularly reviewed.

Of course in school practice teachers switch easily, almost seamlessly, between the two, as when updating the school's *Development Plan* (an important annual exercise in English schools), or when evaluative 'learning-walks' by some teachers quickly turn into deliberated feedback for other teachers, or indeed when teachers self-monitor their own classroom teaching-in-action as good teachers do, or, come to that, when students monitor their own learning as it happens. Yet, at the levels

of sophistication required by modern, mass education systems, these two correlative processes develop large lives of their own, each with its own elaborate procedures, methodologies of enquiry, forms of research and distinctive values. So, *deliberation and planning* come to include pilot studies and action research, consultation exercises—possibly involving government *green* and *white* papers—and simulations such as intensively imagined social and educational 'scenarios' ten years forward (the educational planner's equivalent of the Pentagon's famous war-games). But these exercises, however, recondite and methodologically 'scientific', remain fundamentally *components* of deliberation, judgement and decision-making.

At the same time, *the review function* develops along different, though equally complex, lines. An independent inspectorate, and perhaps other forms of professional evaluator, may have come into being to serve it. At different levels of the system, methodical evaluations will be helping to assess the need for change, and these may be followed later by impact studies of the resulting innovations. The evaluations may be in-house, or commissioned from independent evaluators, or—in democratic societies—initiated from somewhere outside the responsible agency, such as a university, while still perhaps drawing on public funds. They may involve standard survey techniques, or intensive case studies of individual schools, or both strategies in combination. They may be designed for rapid feedback to the responsible agency, or be longitudinal in character and sustained over a long period of time, like the not-so-long-ago National Foundation for Educational Research study of the implementation of citizenship education in England. And, though they all hope to *serve* educational deliberation and decision-making, none of them are actual components of it.

So, though deliberation and review remain symbiotically related at bottom, the stretches over which they are 'out of immediate contact' have become quite long. It makes good sense, then, to speak of two distinct 'discourses'. They can be defined:

> *Deliberative discourse* that directs the art of achieving the best that is possible in a given situation of educational practice and development. (Its special virtues are perhaps creativity, courage and judgement.)

> *Evaluative discourse* that analyses and judges educational practices and contexts with a view to their maintenance and development, and educational proposals with a view to their adoption. (Its special virtues are more nearly empathy, fairness and 'truth'—in the particular sense of 'honesty'.)

It remains that in many or most everyday contexts deliberation and evaluation almost disappear into each other. So either way—apart or together—these two discourses exist *in relation* to each other.

Idealist and Explanatory Discourses

The next task is to illustrate how deliberation and evaluation serve as platforms for two further discourses that abstract from their practical 'here and now' foci—and from which they draw sustenance in turn. First, we can go back to the annual

revision of the school's Development Plan and now imagine the teachers taking time-out from that task to rail against some frustratingly insoluble dilemmas. *'In the great scheme of things, how much does it matter that good pedagogy has to be sacrificed to examination success'?* seems to hope against hope that the correct answer is 'not very much'! *'Should "standards" really be a higher priority than equality and social solidarity'?* could be the beginning of a radical discussion, if only there were time. But *'what would a system look like that avoided such invidious choices'?* flirts with out-and-out utopianism. Philosophers, having generally more time on their hands than teachers, have engaged at length in utopian thinking about education and society, Plato, Thomas More, Rousseau, John Dewey, among them. Actually, whatever about full-blown utopias, the standard philosophical question of the proper aims of education can hardly avoid being idealistic. A third definition:

> *Idealist-Utopian discourse* like deliberative discourse operates under a commitment to the flourishing of education as a vital part of wider human flourishing and unlike deliberative discourse it methodically eschews issues of feasibility. (Vision, wisdom, analytic clarity are high among its special virtues.)

This does not have to be dreamy escapism from the hard choices of actual practice in an imperfect world. It can very well be giving something back to those choices, which anyway can hardly be wise and right if not influenced by *some* ideals. Indeed it is well here to attend to the logic of deliberative discourse itself. Meeting its requirement of a search for the '*best* possible/available' option has to include some spill-over consideration of options that would have been 'better still' or even 'best of all', if only they had been available. For sure, then, 'school improvement' has to draw deeply on both these discourses.

So whether together or apart, the two action-oriented discourses also live of each other—'dialectically', one might say. As also do the two descriptive discourses, evaluation and science. Rather as we've seen 'deliberation' pushing itself over one border into a discourse that *considers ideals*, so 'evaluation' can cross a different border into one that *works towards explanations*—its characteristic mode of expression is by *explanation*—with particular reference to structural and systemic factors. This warrants a longer discussion.

Pause: To Refine, Consolidate and Prepare

Like discourse generally, *all* practice-related discourse involves a combination of understanding and judging, but it is precisely the different *modes* of this combination that have been distinguishing our different practice-related educational discourses. Consider the various modes (meanings) of 'a good judgement' across discourses! In deliberative discourse it actually means '*a good choice*', i.e. 'best or near-best *choice* in the circumstances', which itself, we have noticed, also entails a capacity for regretful *genuflection to (worthy) ideals* that the circumstances could not accommodate. Next, a 'good evaluation' (when retrospective) means an illuminating, honest

and accurate *assessment* of the costs and results, intended and unintended, of the initiative or policy in question. And now, finally, what makes a 'good explanatory judgement'? Presumably, as for any good explanation, that it is *adequate to the situation and true.*

We may still want to ask, however, what 'situation' this is that requires a whole other discourse! Could the Ideal, Deliberative, and Evaluative discourses not stand on their own feet and explain themselves. The correct answer to that question, I now submit,[1] is that (a) they *do* explain themselves and (b) they use the Explanatory discourse to do this.[2] This paradox is just another example—though perhaps the most impressive one—of the 'distinct-connect' dialectic of symbiotic discourses.

A feature of the Explanatory discourse, then, is to *articulate particular* educational dreams, choices, and evaluations along with the further references and commentaries that may ensue. However it is by no means restricted to the present particular. It also enables and articulates the *study* of the past, the future and—most important—*the general*, thus making a case, if not a fully accepted case, for 'science' status for some branches of educational study. This is what finally distinguishes it as a discourse in its own right.

One last definition:

> *Explanatory-Scientific discourse*, over and above its co-involvement in the 'here and now', works towards understanding, theorising and explaining education in the round, in its relationships with other universal institutions and practices (families, nations, governments, cultures, sciences, arts, farming etc.) and other relevant disciplines, as well as problems, crises, possibilities and developments in the education world at large. (Openness, Intelligence, Objectivity would be important assets, especially if coupled with Maslow's famous 'sheer fascination with the human mystery and enjoyment of it' (Maslow 1943, p. 396).

Describing the Practice of Education

(a) *Multi-faceted*: As practices go, 'education' is marked by relentless articulation (talkativeness); a characteristic though not exclusive orientation to children and young people; tension between professional ownership and public interest; the deepest imaginable complicity with other practices; and variability to context (e.g. stages of life) balanced by some view of life as a whole or an aspiration to such a view. Even if none of these marks were unique to education, they would still add up to a powerful and highly distinctive profile. (Walsh 1993, pp. 46–50) Education matters!

(b) *Large*: In its broadest sense of 'bringing up the young', education is a human universal. But even in its formal sense it is a practice that looms extraordinarily

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[1] I failed to notice the *full* force of this question in my earlier work on the discourses (Walsh 1992, 1993).

[2] And thus to knit the complex of discourses together? One might also hazard that every deliberate course of action—*whichever is its governing discourse-dynamism:* the ideal, the good/better/best available, the right, or the explained—true—draws power from each of the other three discourse-dynamisms. (If so, of course, it would be true for practices generally, not just for education.)

large in the modern world (even in war-torn countries, by its absence), in every nation, city, county and parish, in virtually every family, and in every individual's life. A flourishing democracy of educational comment can be found in all but the most rigidly totalitarian states. Most people have some of what it takes to be 'an educationist'! Education matters!

(c) *Contested*: And yet as to what education, and particularly *good* education, is, we know to expect a variety of answers reflecting differences of nationality, tradition, ideology, philosophy and new (or 'new-old') ideas from the social, psychological, and economic 'sciences'. It is a prime example of a *contested concept*, though the differences vary from the superficial to the deep. But people care—to differ. Education matters!

Describing the Study of Education

(a) The importance of education carries over to 'Education' as a field of study, inasmuch as its enrichment of the practice of education far outweighs its occasional export of confusion. In broad historical terms, from the mid-nineteenth century, especially in Anglophone countries, new school systems and this new field of study kept pace with each other, one might say challenging each other (often brusquely) to constantly widening horizons.

(b) We may distinguish among Education 'disciplines',[3] the *social-scientific* (psychology, sociology and economics) from the *cultural* (history, comparative studies and politics). The former have landed education with some philosophically significant paradigm headaches, but have also gifted it with a plethora of insights and theories about learning, human development, intelligence, special needs, language and a *fuller* view of the less obvious ways in which poverty, and class, gender and race differences are allowed to diminish and undermine the education of so many. The cultural disciplines have offered a deepened appreciation of education's extraordinary presence and importance in the modern world. Philosophy of education, assuming some license to police the others, has intervened from time to time on their business, sometimes creatively, other times sceptically.

(c) The usual title format, ***psychology/sociology, etc. … of education*** represents education as the client in the relationship. In truth, however, education has been a serious *contributor* to the development of human sciences from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (and to philosophy for very much longer). One could easily show this for each discipline. A more accurate title format would be ***psychology/sociology, etc. … and education***.

(d) The cognitive nature and standing of these new 'sciences' vis-à-vis the natural sciences divided their founders. Durkheim (1895) ruled that they had to be essentially the same, which handed them over to the then dominant *positivist*

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[3]As opposed to the disciplines of education itself, the disciplines of (the study of) Education.

philosophy. (Luckily for sociology, his great classic works tended to stray beyond this rule.) Max Weber saw them all as cultural sciences alongside other hermeneutic (interpretive) sciences, like history, law, and literature—and therefore profoundly different. The crunch, as he saw it is that

> We cannot discover… what is meaningful to us by means of a 'presuppositionless' investigation of empirical reality. Rather perception of its meaningfulness to us is the presupposition of its becoming an object of investigation. (Weber 1904, p. 76)[4]

This stand-off led to the practical, but ultimately nonsensical, dichotomising of quantitative and qualitative, 'hard' and 'understanding' (*verstehen*), approaches. Generations of researchers, including hosts of students in initial and in-service courses, would plump for one or the other, or for both while keeping them separate, or for a confessedly pragmatic synthesis of the two, which may have concealed a perceptive question as to whether the split was anyway justified. The matter is of course epistemological and its resolution was unlikely in the heavy shadow over philosophy of Kant and his signature phenomenalism. However, the 'Critical Realist' movement associated with the late Roy Bhaskar has broken free of that shadowland.[5] The Preface to his *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1998) is very much to the point here. In it he describes his book as 'a philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences…..their metatheoretical and methodological underpinnings, provided most notably by positivism and hermeneutics' (1988 preface). I am tempted to describe it as much like Aquinas would have written it had social science existed in the thirteenth century!

(e) A different problem for many researchers and students in education was to find their own way in the internal disputes, the range and the overlaps among these disciplinary encounters of education with human sciences. On a personal note: having worked in philosophy and philosophy of education, I finally settled in a department of curriculum studies that had been set up as multi-disciplinary, but was rapidly becoming *inter-disciplinary*. In developing our courses, in much of our teaching, and—particularly—in our thesis supervision, we staff learnt to work across the disciplines, and even across the different theories and views within disciplines. And in the process, we gradually acquired a quite sophisticated eclecticism, almost matching Schwab's definition as 'the arts by which unsystematic, uneasy, but usable focus on a body of problems is effected among diverse theories, each relevant to the problems in a different way' (1970, p. 10).

(f) We have now reached the role of the human sciences in initial and continuing *teacher education*. Let us start by supposing senior staff are evaluating their secondary school's readiness for an inspection that could be imminent. If this is still England, they will have the revised OFSTED criteria in hand for this essentially practical self-evaluation—wishful thinking and doom and gloom being

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[4]H.G. Gadamer's formidable *Truth and Method* re-articulated this tradition in the mid-twentieth century. *Tr. 1975.*

[5]This movement also reinstates Marx, the third of the generally recognised founders of social science.

alike unhelpful. All the same, they are critical professionals, quite likely to have comments to offer on the criteria, for example, if they find the changes, puzzling, objectionable, or just interesting. OFSTED may have included a rationale for the changes, perhaps even for school inspection itself, which some are finding unconvincing. What was the reasoning behind them? What was the science? The pros and the cons of it? The conversation may now visit the ball-parks of social science, psychology and philosophy. A Bourdieu, Vygotsky, Howard Gardner, Lawrence Stenhouse, or Richard Peters, household names at one time or another, may be referenced by some older staff. The meeting might be induced actually to *engage* with the relevant science, if only as interested amateurs and learners. And shouldn't professional teachers expect no less of themselves? This 'distraction' from business is making its own contribution to the school's educational ethos. It should 'belong', as truly as the careful preparation for OFSTED.

Furthermore, teachers of science, social science and humanities, which includes virtually all primary teachers, are well-versed in this disinterested sort of discourse and, indeed, with getting students to engage in it over time. Why then should they not join in it here? Could it be that the system has stolen the time and the energy needed for it, or even to think about it?

This description of the study of education, (a) to (f) above, was designed as a reminder of what has been at stake, the intellectual 'capital' that may be lost—to the additional detriment of education's own prospects.

When the National Curriculum was introduced to England and Wales in 1988 teachers on the whole welcomed it, on the promise and assumption that government would then keep its distance, e.g. from the small print of curriculum and from pedagogy. Perhaps David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education who introduced the Bill, actually meant to keep that distance, even as he inserted extra powers for himself and his successors into the same Bill! Using those powers over time, however, his successors would come to realise that control of high-stakes assessment and examinations was tantamount to control of everything.

So are the two 'outer' discourses in fact neglected nowadays? Now that the potential of the original National Curriculum has been dribbled away, might teachers be self-censoring their doubts about the dominant values in educational policy and planning, even to the point that they finally forget what is outside the more or less immediately practical box? Do even those in charge of 'the box' think outside it much? How limiting is this when it comes to commissioning and funding research? Might philosophy, sociology and psychology of education gradually wither from neglect? Most important perhaps: have deliberation and evaluation in educational practice become progressively narrower, for lack of 'oxygen' from the ideal-utopian and explanatory-scientific discourses?[6]

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[6]Given that my involvement is now reduced to just a school governorship and occasional thesis supervising and examining, I can no longer answer these final questions with confidence.

A Philosophical-Cum-Theological Dimension

While schools might consult any of the traditional branches of theology (even Canon Law!) in special circumstances, it is 'fundamental theology', a relatively new branch, that would be most likely to fire up those outlying Ideal-Utopian and Explanatory-Scientific discourses, and thereby put new life into all the discourses.

What then is fundamental theology? Cherry-picking from different descriptions, it is (a) an introduction expressing what holds theology as a whole together; (b) oriented towards making belief credible (apologetics), though focussed more on the structure of the case for faith—its nature, elements and links; (c) situating Christianity within the horizons of people today; (d) giving an account of our hope.

In the Preface and Introduction of his massive *Foundations of Christian Faith—an Introduction to the Idea*, Karl Rahner also offers a communication by a specialist theologian of 'a first level of understanding' as to what the faith involves, as to what a Christian is and why one can live this existence with intellectual honesty.

He goes on to observe that 'the first object must be a better integration of philosophy and theology' (previously recommended by The Vatican II's decree on priestly formation (on which Rahner had served) (see 1976, p. 3). However, at the basic 'first level' course itself, the unity of the two disciplines is already given. For it is there a matter, simultaneously, of reflecting upon 'the concrete whole of the human self-realisation' (really philosophy!) *and* 'the intellectual foundation of a Christian self-realisation' (really theology!) of a Christian person (IBID, pp. 10–11).

More concretely, the theologian allows the understanding to grow with and emerge from a range of philosophical lines of enquiry and reflection, including anthropology-ontology, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics (Lane 2017; Walsh 2017).

Of course teachers are not generally, nor are they required to be, trained theologians or philosophers—perhaps other than Religious Education specialists and even they may need some further training to lead others. However, what now follows below are possible items for a fundamental theology course *geared specifically* to Catholic and Christian teachers.

(a) *Incarnation* I have often found this a good place to begin. It heartens one for the journey. It is a theological principle that everything in our lives which Jesus lived through has been blessed, redeemed and divinised by that very fact: our births and our deaths and, among the many things between those points, our growth towards adulthood, our learning, our natural desire for achievement, our teaching, our love of the young and our concern for their development and achievement. All of these are now affirmed and transformed. So we might sum up Catholic education and Catholic schools as 'having one foot in the secular world and the other in the world of faith, but both feet in God', since the Incarnation makes holy ground of the secular too, discreetly and almost anonymously. The dignity of learning, teaching and curriculum, all struggling to be the best they can *in their own secular terms* (while also properly keeping those terms under secular review) is powerfully affirmed. But these processes are now all the time

also caught up in another dimension—the world of faith—where they can be additionally identified as the service of God in Christ. (Walsh 1983, 2017).

(b) What can the Catholic/Christian school do to promote the **character and personal identity** of its students—and to head off 'buffered selves', disengaged from natural and supernatural worlds, dis-embedded from society, and just profoundly 'cheesed off' with life and the universe (Taylor 1989, cited in Lane 2017). The school's *responsibility* is obvious, it being the young people's *workplace* with a semi-monopoly of their time and, also, of their access to peers and extra-familial adults. Despair is no option, so a good school will work hard at supporting their students' free identity development, overtly through the curriculum, more discreetly through 'ethos'. The end to be sought may reasonably include an updated version of '(re?)enchantment' with the world, plus some 'self-servicing' strategies for tough times ahead. Now Catholic and Christian schools would seem to have the advantage over others here, in that they can invoke the Holy Spirit explicitly to such ends, can draw down grace consciously, and can name and deliberately promote the '*theological virtues*' of *faith, hope and charity* (which includes forgiveness). I believe these must be the specific 'ethos-virtues', and therefore an early 'chapter', in a 'fundamental theology' for schools'. (One supposes, of course, that Heaven has ways to make these gifts also available to other schools, if more 'anonymously'.)

(c) **Shoring up confidence in the possibility of truth.** One may start from everyday *judgements* i.e. propositions that are *asserted*, not just considered, are a nearly continuous element of our experience of ourselves and they implicitly affirm the independence of the relevant state of affairs *from themselves.* That is precisely what they are for, and that is just the kind of 'experience' they give us, an experience, we might say, of the world's 'indifference' to our view of it! Therefore, to 'elevate' our experience, as many do, to the status of *end-object* of our enquiry and knowledge[7] is actually to falsify it.

Supervising teachers' dissertations and theses over many years, I saw how perfunctory forays into equally perfunctory chapters on epistemology in standard methodology texts got most of them opting cheerfully for something on the subjectivist side of epistemological agnosticism. Fortunately, this rarely carried over into doubting the significance of their findings! But had they perhaps missed an opportunity to savour nature's greatest miracle and God's greatest creation?[8]

(d) *Love of the World*: I have long been associated with a *philosophical* argument for taking the fundamental aim of education and curriculum to be '*love of the*

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[7]This is Kant's legacy to most modern philosophy continuing, it seems, into much of postmodern philosophy!

[8]Some judgements are considered and deliberate enough for us easily to notice or to recall, (*try it out!*) their *culminating* role in a four-fold questioning and thinking process: from (1) 'what/who/why is this…?', to (2) 'it could be/because "x"', to (3) 'but is it really (because) "x"?', finally to (4) 'it is/is not/could be/could not be/probably is/probably is not/"x"', or 'the evidence permits no judgement'. Note that this defence of realism does not depend on the 'chase-your-tail' correspondence theory of truth.

world' (Walsh 1993).[9] Its simple strategy is to hoover up and absorb the main competitor claims, the better to put them back down in their properly subordinate roles. Its bare bones:

- Education is and ought to be an *economic investment* for societies and governments as well as for individuals and families. But the real value of 'possessions' is in their use. Which directs us straight on to the next claim.
- The *enrichment of experience* (quality of life)—in the pupils' childhood present as well as in their adult future—brings us much nearer to the beating heart of the education ideal. John Dewey was the most brilliant and influential champion of this 'progressive' idea. But he inherited a constricted theory of knowledge from the mainstream of modern philosophy (and quite pervasive in culture generally). It disallows any appeal to the more or less *intrinsic* interest and value of the 'people, events and things' that are being experienced and their associated contexts and worlds. Against this, we should insist that, of their very nature, experiences cannot 'stand up' on their own.
- Pause to consider the *ethical responsibility* that education also undoubtedly has, but then raise the question: *from where* does its regulative harness derive its special authority to constrain and restrain our pursuit of possessions and of experiences, and to require us to respect—if not also to cultivate and look after—persons, evidence, languages and discourses, heritages, equality, justice and democracy, and the environment? Is it not also from the *worth in themselves* of 'people, events and things'?
- Rationally speaking, then, *love of the world* underpins and makes proper sense of other educational aims. We may even speak of a habitual '*ecstatic*' attitude to a (re-)enchanted world to be cultivated in and with students, provided we are careful to stress that this 'standing out of oneself' is no stream of 'peak experiences'. It is rather an everyday combination of grace and hard work.

The argument continues by working at the pedagogical and curriculum implications of prioritising this 'inward-outwardness' of love in its two modes of contemplative communing and caring (Walsh 1993, 2013, 2017).

(e) And here now, to finish, is Karl Rahner again, knitting the themes of the last two sections together in the right order (while writing magisterially about the concept of mystery in Catholic theology):

> More generally, mystery is the goal where reason arrives when it attains its perfection by becoming love. Knowledge, the dynamism that comes to be by passing over into something else, the known, is called to the further self-transcendence of becoming freely given love. A properly thought-out Thomism acknowledges the ultimate unity of the human spirit, to reflect which 'there must be one last key-word which conjures up the essence of man, not two or three…and in Christianity the last word is with love and not knowledge. For we are not saved by knowledge but by love…… If one really

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[9]Originally—and most fully—in *Education and Meaning: philosophy in practice* (London: Cassell 1993), parts 3 and 4. Also Walsh (2013, 2017).

wishes to be true to Thomist intellectualism, one must understand the intellect in such a way that love is the perfection of knowledge itself (Rahner 1966, p. 44).

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Part II
Reflections on Identity Issues Within Catholic Education

Introduction

Sean Whittle

In Part II, the focus shifts away from the more foundational issues about the aims and justification of Catholic education to offer a set of studies which consider issues of identity in relation to Catholic schools in both Ireland and Britain. In both countries, the changing composition of Catholic schools is triggering fresh questions about the way Catholic schools seek to foster a Catholic identity. The days of assuming that the overwhelming majority of those at a Catholic school are Catholic Christians (even nominally) is beginning to wane. The identity issues at play are examined through a range of lenses. The first of these is historical, and include the chapters by Patricia Kieran and Peter Ward. The second lens is on the changing composition of Catholic schools amongst both students and staff. Two chapters seek to listen carefully to the voice of children and teachers, with Maurice Harmon attending to the voice of Irish primary school children and Mary Mihovilovic drawing attention to the important role played by non-Catholic teachers in English Catholic secondary schools. The next lens is on that of queerness, presented by Sean Henry. The final lens is more literary, drawing out the ways in which a Catholic education might, despite our secular or non-believing context, be able to furnish some insight into 'a meaningful life'.

Chapter 6 presents a well researched and neatly argued historical overview of some of the main developments impacting upon Catholic education in Ireland. Beginning with the penal laws (1695–1829), and the founding of the national system of schooling in 1831, it charts the rise and reach of Catholic education in Ireland, from the founding of the Free State in 1922, up to and including the contemporary context. Attention is paid to the growth of the Church's influence in primary and secondary education in the early decades of the twentieth century after the State ceded management of the vast majority of primary schools to religious bodies. In outlining the special relationship between the Catholic church and the state in the twentieth century, the author, Patricia Kieran, charts the growth of Catholic schooling as the major power-broker in Irish education. In recent years, in the face of persistent criticism of a

Catholic monopoly of education, and in light of the multiple abuses of power, most horrifically manifested in child-sex abuse scandals and industrial schools, Catholic education continues to undergo a period of soul-searching and repositioning.

The historical analysis is maintained in Chap. 7, where Peter Ward reviews the origins and development of Catholic denominational inspection in England and Wales. In narrating this historical journey, important insight is shone on how a Catholic education and RE, in particular, has been depicted as a way of fostering a Catholic identity around the religious instruction promoted in schools. The chapter outlines how the state and the Catholic Church first sought to collaborate 170 years ago. This was the point when the state began to contribute to the provision of and then consider the subsequent introduction of diocesan inspection, which, unlike the state, included inspection of Religious Instruction. The evolving roles and responsibilities of diocesan inspectors in different dioceses are explored. In the battle to preserve the Catholic identity of schools, it is important to have an appreciation of the complexity of the legislation that introduced the contemporary inspection system and the steps taken by Church leaders to work within it.

In Chap. 8, Mary Mihovilovic seeks to give voice to teachers in Catholic secondary schools who are not Catholics. This is important because the majority of teachers in English Catholic secondary schools are non-Catholics, and their experience and contribution have not been attended to by Church leaders or researchers working in the field of Catholic Education Studies. This chapter gives an important insight into an intriguing situation in many catholic schools in the UK, which depend on the commitment and support of large numbers of non-Catholic teachers and colleagues to communicate and foster the wider aims of Catholic education. Mihovilovic argues that the experiences of non-Catholic colleagues present a challenge to Church leaders to recognise their essential contribution, particularly to Catholic secondary schools. There is a need to provide for their formation and pastoral support.

In contrast, Chap. 9 shifts attention to exploring the voice of children in Ireland's Catholic primary schools. Maurice Harmon explains how Catholic education in Ireland, finds itself in a contested space at this time. Much of the current research and argument is based on adult and minority group perspectives of Catholic education. This chapter explores how the voice of children can be accessed in an inclusive manner promoting democracy and so add to the discourse on Catholic education. Central to creating inclusive environments is the value that is placed on cultivating an atmosphere where children know that their voices are valued, listened and responded to, and can make a difference. The chapter concludes by considering the implications emerging from recent research concerning aspects of the religious identity of a child in a Catholic school in Ireland, which found that children live in blended-belief families and that the majority of children cite their grandparents as the main influence on their religious identity.

In Chap. 10, the issue of identity is given a thought-provoking critique, through a discussion of the relationship between being queer and being religious. Sean Henry argues that Catholic education in formalised settings such as schools is often tied to the preservation of multiple modes of Catholic identities, from more tradition-alist conceptions of what it means to 'be' Catholic, to more plural and open-ended

perspectives. The association of Catholic schooling with Catholic identities is often appealed to in responding to the supposed tensions that exist between religion and queerness—what it means to 'be' Catholic is often seen as the reason for either solidifying or disrupting the religious/queer divide as it plays out in school. In this chapter, Dr. Henry takes issue with both approaches on the grounds that both continue to tie Catholic schooling with Catholic identity. Ultimately, what needs to be foregrounded in discussions around religion, queerness and Catholic schooling is the queerness of education itself, that is, education's role in transforming existent social and religious structures by providing opportunities for students to disidentify from the current state of things.

In Chap. 11, the identity issues of Catholic schooling are approached from a more literary perspective, using Miller's classic twentieth century American text, *Death of a Salesman,* as helpful in understanding our western contemporary culture when belief in God is no longer axiomatic. David Torevell takes Charles Taylor's notion of the 'middle-ground'—that space between an acknowledgment of the fullness of life through religious means and a condition where anxiety, melancholy and even nihilism predominate. Coming from a Jewish background, Miller understood this ground very well since he no longer held any overt religious beliefs and yet maintained an ethical vision worthy of a Rabbi. Catholic educators might use such texts to invigorate the spiritual and moral core of their students' lives, with particular reference to the theme of self-worth and those aspects which give meaning and significance to people in an increasingly Western secular age.

Taken as a whole, all six chapters in Part II raise an intriguing set of reflections on identity issues within Catholic Education in Ireland and Britain.

Chapter 6
A Brief History of Catholic Education in Ireland from the Penal Laws to Founding of the Free State (1922) and Beyond

Patricia Kieran

Abstract This chapter provides a brief historical overview of some of the main developments impacting upon Catholic education in Ireland. Beginning with the penal laws (1695–1829) and the founding of the national system of schooling in 1831, it charts the rise and reach of Catholic education from the founding of the Free State in 1922 up to and including the contemporary context. It outlines the growth of the Church's influence in primary and secondary education in the early decades of the twentieth century after the State ceded management of the vast majority of primary schools to religious bodies. In outlining the special relationship between the Catholic church and the state in the twentieth century, it charts the growth of Catholic education as the major power-broker in Irish education. In recent years, in the face of persistent criticism of a Catholic monopoly of education and in light of the multiple abuses of power, most horrifically manifested in child-sex abuse scandals and industrial schools, Catholic education continues to undergo a period of soul searching and repositioning.

Keywords Ireland · Penal laws · Catholic education · Religious orders · Irish bishops

Introduction

The historical legacy and enduring influence of Catholic education has shaped educational policy and practice in Ireland over centuries. Today 96% of all primary schools are managed by churches with more than 89% of primary schools under the patronage of the Catholic Church. At post-primary level Catholic pupils account for almost 50% of the entire school population (O'Brien 2019). However, the contemporary situation is changing rapidly and there are new challenges and exciting opportunities. In the past decade, over 100 Catholic primary schools have closed as other school types,

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notably equality-based and multidenominational schools, increase in popularity. In order to understand more fully the complex challenges and contemporary context for Catholic education in Ireland, it is vital to trace its origins in the preceding centuries. This chapter provides a brief historical overview of some of the main developments impacting upon Catholic education in Ireland. Beginning with the penal laws (1695–1829) and the founding of the national system of schooling in 1831, it charts the rise and reach of Catholic education from the founding of the Free State in 1922 up to and including the contemporary context.

From Penal Law to Expansion and Consolidation

For centuries, Catholics in Ireland tried to survive in the face of a discriminatory and oppressive environment. From the reign of Henry V111 (1491–1547) until the gradual abolition of the penal laws relating to education in 1782 and 1793, those who were not members of the Established Church, including Catholics and Presbyterian dissenters, were unable to promote or teach their faith (Rogan 1987). These laws placed severe restrictions on Catholics who constituted almost 75% of the entire population. Edmund Burke famously described the penal laws as 'well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man' (Mitchel 1854, p. 10). Designed to 'degrade the character and to blast the prosperity of a nation' (Kirwan 1908), they were finally dismantled with Catholic Emancipation in 1829 (Fleming and Harford 2016).

What followed was an incredibly innovative and fertile period of growth for Catholic education in Ireland. By 1829, Catholic educators in charitable schools, some fee-paying, some free, provided an education, of variable quality, for up to 300,000 Catholic children (King 1970). Newly founded Irish and established continental religious orders set about founding denominational schools. Presentation Sisters (1775), Presentation Brothers (1802), Christian Brothers (1802), Sisters of Loretto (1822) and the Sisters of Mercy (1827), amongst others, had a mission to provide Catholic education for the poor in Ireland and many primary and second-level Catholic schools waived fees or provided scholarships (Darmody and Smyth 2013). By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a flourishing of Catholic cultural, social and religious life, in what Emmet Larkin termed a 'devotional revolution' (Larkin 1972). Many were attracted to religious life and between 1841 and 1901 the number of nuns in Ireland grew eightfold (Darmody and Smyth 2013).

Catholic Education and the Founding of the National Schools System (1831)

In 1831, the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Edward G. Stanley (1799–1869), wrote a letter founding an experimental national system of education in Ireland (Durcan 1972). This was designed to reproduce 'colonial values with a view to making Ireland more governable' (Walsh 2016, p. 9). Westminster initially intended national schools to be religiously mixed or interdenominational. However, Catholic authorities wanted denominationally specific Catholic education and strenuously resisted interdenominational schooling. At the Synod of Thurles (1850), the bishops condemned denominationally mixed education and warned that 'the separate education of Catholic youth is, in every way, to be preferred to it' (Coolahan 1981, p. 18). By the early 1880s, just over 55% of national schools were attended by both Catholic and Protestant children whereas this figure reduced to 28% by 1912 (Durcan 1972, p. 21).

In the nineteenth century, emigration reduced the Catholic population of Ireland drastically as almost half of the people born in Ireland emigrated (Whelan 2012). However, despite widespread abject poverty, mass emigration and the Great Famine (1845–9), which resulted in the death of one million people and the emigration of a million more, Catholic education managed to survive and grow. As the Church expanded its influence on the educational system it grew in power. By 1860, the Catholic bishops banned all Catholic children and teachers from attending interdenominational schools and training colleges (Coolahan 1981). Bishops emerged as natural community leaders and exhibited what O'Donoghue and Harford refer to as a form of 'militant' Catholicism as they lobbied for full 'civil rights for Catholics' within the United Kingdom (O'Donoghue and Harford 2012, p. 338). The bishops had a policy of resisting state involvement in education (DE 1926, p. 18) and especially in the area of Religious Instruction (RI). As the number of Catholic national schools grew, the Church benefitted financially from a system that served the Church's interests as well as 'the middle classes of Irish Catholic farmers, merchants and business people' (O'Donoghue and Harford 2012, p. 318).

Catholic Education in the Irish Free State

By the end of the nineteenth century, Ireland had a de facto denominational system of education. Catholic education had been constrained under colonial rule but it also exhibited incredible resilience. When the Irish Free State came into being on 6 December 1922, following the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921), it did not initiate any wholescale radical review or dismantling and restructuring of the pre-existing colonial educational arrangements. Playwright Brendan Behan wittily noted that the major change brought about by Irish independence simply involved replacing 'the crown with the harp on the jailor's cap' suggesting the wholescale maintenance of the pre-existing colonial structures (1956). In the last years of colonial occupation, the

revolutionary Proclamation of Independence, in 1916, signalled a radical republican intent to guarantee 'religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities' to citizens while 'cherishing all the children of the nation equally' (Proclamation of Independence gov.ie). These words were particularly potent when placed against the historical background of religious oppression, poverty and emigration in preceding centuries. As the Catholic Church had assumed a leadership role in education during colonial times, it seemed natural for it, during the turbulent transitionary period, to become involved in public dialogue about shaping the future system of education in the Free State.

In the final stages of direct rule from Westminster, the McPherson *Education Bill* (1919) proposed the establishment of a separate *Department of Education* in Ireland taking responsibility for primary, secondary and vocational education. The Catholic bishops objected strenuously and stressed that the educational concerns of the Church would be in safer hands under Irish authorities than under the government of the United Kingdom (Dudley-Edwards 1982, p. 22). The Standing Committee of Irish Bishops in 1919 stated 'After religion and its immediate requirements no interest of the people so deeply concerns their pastors as does the interest of education' (Akenson 2012a, b, p. 20). As a mark of education's importance to the Church the Archbishop of Armagh denounced the McPherson Bill in a pastoral letter (O'Buachalla 1988, p. 54).

In 1921, the Association of Catholic Clerical School Managers stressed that 'in view of pending changes in Irish Education, we wish to assert that the only satisfactory system of education for Catholics is one wherein Catholic children are taught in Catholic schools by Catholic teachers under Catholic control' (Fitzgerald 2013, p. 5; Walsh 2016, p. 12). Between 1922 and 1924 there was no *Department of Education.* When it was established in 1924, it co-ordinated primary, secondary and technical education under the auspices of the Minister for Education. In effect the State ceded management of the vast majority of primary schools to religious bodies. This meant that at primary level, Ireland subsequently developed a publicly funded system of faith schools rather than a nation-wide system of state schools.

From 1924 onwards voluntary-aided secondary schools were given an annual capitation grant for students in a 'results fees' scheme (Darmody and Smyth 2013, p. 37). Since there was no state provision of secondary education in Ireland until 1967, this provided a very modest source of additional revenue for Catholic secondary schools which were funded by a combination of funding from religious orders, fundraising and tuition fees. In 1926, the *Department of Education* emphasised in a report that the programme for primary schools from 1922 onwards embodied 'a new departure' (DE 1926, p. 21). This could be disputed as the position of 'parochially organised, denominationally segregated and clerically managed' schools continued largely unchanged in the Free State (Walsh 2016, pp. 11–12). However, schools placed greater emphasis on the Irish language and culture allied to a positioning of Catholicism as the religion of nationalism (O'Donoghue 1999). Gaelic Catechism programmes (*An Teagasc Críostaidhe* National Archive Collection) were adopted for schools in Irish-speaking Gaeltacht areas (Coolahan 1981) and from Saint Patrick's Day 1922, Irish became an obligatory subject in all national schools.

Church–State Relations in the Free State's Educational System

In 1924–25 there were 5,636 National Schools in the Free State with an enrolment of 493,382 pupils (DE 1926, p. 13). Most of these were Catholic and despite suggestions that Church involvement in education at this time was a cynical exercise of power (O'Toole 2009), Catholic and other denominational schools performed a crucial and positive role.

Without them there would have been no national educational system. When the *Vocational Education Act* (1930) founded vocational schools at secondary level, the government assured the Catholic bishops, as the main players in education, that they would not interfere with existing educational provision in primary and secondary schools. Catholic schools gained the support, not only of successive governments, but of the public also. For example, at primary level, apart from parish schools, in 1954–55 there were 89 Monastery schools run by De la Salle, Christian Brothers, Franciscan, Marist, Orders of Charity, Patricians and Presentations.

A further 23 Religious Congregations ran 339 convent national schools (DE 1955, p. 55). At post-primary level there were 458 secondary schools with 56,411 pupils (DE 1955, p. 77). A perceived harmonious interconnection between the state and the Church's educational vision and mission is evident in the 1942 Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) directive stating 'the education in the schools should reflect... the loyalty to Our Divine Lord which is expressed in the Prologue and Articles of the Constitution' (*Department of Education*, Technical Branch 1942, p. 2).

Special Relationship

A 'special relationship' between the Catholic Church and the State was celebrated in what Mescal terms a 'rebirth and a fine flowering of Irish education, hindered only on the material side by the very limited economic development of the country' (Mescal 1957). In 1937, this was officially acknowledged by Article 44.2 of the *Constitution* which recognised 'the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens' (Mescal 1957; Government of Ireland 1937). While Article 44.2 was repealed by referendum in 1973, it had epitomised the Catholic Church's central place in Irish society. Drudy and Lynch (1993) argue that the Churches benefited significantly from their involvement in education and had autonomy in the design, delivery and assessment of the syllabus for RI in primary schools. The 1937 *Constitution* pledged to 'endeavour to support and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative' (Article 42.4). For voluntary secondary schools this was significant as, in the absence of a state system, they provided second-level education. Indeed Catholic and other voluntary secondary schools received no grants for buildings until 1964,

just three years before the state system of free second-level education was introduced by Minister Donough O'Malley in September 1967.

Influential Thinkers: Professor Timothy Corcoran S.J.

From the establishment of the Free State in 1922 to that of the Republic in 1937, Catholic educators were enormously influential in shaping educational policy and practice at all levels in Ireland, with many holding key positions. For example, Fr. Timothy Corcoran S.J. (1871–1943) was the first professor of education at University College Dublin (UCD). At the centenary celebrations for the founding of his chair (2009), Prof. Sheila Drudy suggested that Corcoran 'began the important work of professionalising teacher education in Ireland' and 'developed education in UCD within a very short time as a full, genuine university discipline with a profile of programmes bearing a similarity to that in university schools of education today' (Jesuit News 2009). The impact of Corcoran's work and his legacy is subject to contestation. He is acknowledged as having championed an 'extremely conservative Catholic view of education' and being a 'watchdog of the Church on educational matters' (Titley 1983a, p. 138). As advisor to the *Dáil Commission* (1921–1922) and the State on educational matters, Corcoran shaped the direction of education in Ireland for decades (Walsh 2016, p. 12). O'Toole remarks that in the reconstruction of the Irish State, he was from the beginning the master builder in education (O'Toole 2019). Corcoran was a great proponent of the revival of the Irish language and was influential in the use of Irish as the medium for infant education in the 1922 National Programme of Primary Instruction (O'Connor 2008). He promoted Catholic doctrine and proposed that religion should permeate all curricular areas. From a contemporary perspective his promotion of authoritarian teaching and rejection of 'soft', modern educational theories and child-centred approaches espoused by Froebel, Montessori, Pestalozzi, Dewey and many others (Titley 1983b; O'Connor 2008) seems regressive and ill judged. He favoured a version of Catholic schooling that was teacher-centred, text-book based, prioritising rote learning, repetition, knowledge acquisition and competitive testing. His rhetoric and educational pronouncements tended to be forthright and binary and he undoubtedly influenced Catholic schools in promoting teacher-centred authoritarian approaches in the early decades of the Free State. In a number of publications including the influential journal *Studies* which he founded, he rejected what he viewed as 'false philosophies of education, capable of deforming, denaturing, perverting the whole professional mentality and action of teachers' (Corcoran 1930, p. 202). Historian Sean Farren notes that loyal Catholics frequently assented unquestioningly to the Church's directives and those who criticised church teachings were perceived as belonging to the enemy camp (Farren 2008).

Kevin Williams wisely remarks that there is a need for nuance and contextual sensitivity in any exploration of the Catholic Church's role in education in Ireland

(Williams 2010). While not ignoring the deeply harmful consequences of many so-called 'educational' practices in previous eras it is also important to contextualise and critique approaches taken almost a century ago. In the mid-twentieth century, as the Catholic population increased, the number of Protestant children enrolled in national schools declined from 5% in 1924 to 2.5% of the total school-going population in 1965 (Walsh 2016, p. 12). At this time, there was a blurring of lines between the Church's educational endeavours and the State's policy and practice in its programme of education resulting in an abuse of power. The *Department of Education's Report on Primary Education* (1954) outlined the twin aims of primary school as nurturing faithfulness to God as well as linguistic fluency in the Irish language (DE 1955). In the long term, this unquestioned exercise of power in promoting one religous tradition was detrimental to all concerned. In recent years, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin commented that 'The Catholic Church in Ireland had for far too long felt that it was safely ensconced in a 'Catholic country'. The Church had become conformist and controlling not just with its faithful, but in society in general' (Martin 2013, p. 326). The Church saw little need for accountability and as later reports on child abuse would show, abused its power in the most grievous manner (CICA 2009). The State for its part abdicated responsibility to monitor and provide educational services.

Teacher formation and Patronage of Schools Many national schools were managed by boards which were chaired *ex officio* by clergy and whose membership was determined largely by clerical influence. In addition, the legal trustees of school properties tended to come from the ranks of senior diocesan clergy and Church parochial officers (O'Buachalla 1988). At a time when 'there was a priest, nun and brother in every corner of society', Catholic educators influenced successive curricula, embodying a strong religious ethos (Inglis 1998, p. 211; O'Donoghue and Harford 2011). This continued a practice that emerged originally in the early decades of the nineteenth century onwards, where religious personnel or patronal bodies, and not the state, had responsibility for RI in national schools. In the absence of a formal state curriculum for RI (DE 1971; DE 1999). Patrons were given freedom to manage schools and design curricula.

The Primacy of Religious Instruction (RI)

The Department of Education's 1965 *Rules for National Schools* acknowledged the superior place of RI within the school curriculum. Rule 68 stated: 'Of all the parts of a school curriculum Religious Instruction is by far the most important, as its subject matter, God's honour and service, includes the proper use of all man's faculties, and affords the most powerful inducements to their proper use. Religious Instruction is, therefore, a fundamental part of the school course and a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school'. When the state generated a 'new curriculum' or *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971) in an extraordinary statement it reiterated that RI was the most important curricular subject but 'felt that the statement needs no further elaboration' (DE 1971). From a general educational as opposed to

a RI perspective, the 1971 Curriculum represented a 'radical departure in ideological position, content and methodology' and a 'seismic shift in state policy' introducing child-centred, discovery approaches to learning with a far greater range of subject areas (Walsh 2016; Titley). However, when it came to RI the 1971 Curriculum continued a long-held tradition of handing responsibility for RI to school patrons. This curriculum reiterates that the prescription of a 'syllabus' for RI, the examination of its subject matter and the supervision of its delivery was 'outside the competence of the Department of Education' (DES 1971).

Catholic Education Post-Vatican 11

After the reforms of Vatican 11 (1962–65), especially *Gravissimum Educationis* with its emphasis on education as a universal right, as well as the primary rights of parents, the importance of teachers, and Catholic education in service of the common good, Catholic schools in Ireland began to respond to this call for renewal. Catholic education became more Christ-centred, scripturally based and experiential. In 1966, the Mater Dei Institute was founded in Dublin to form secondary school teachers of Religion. In 1969, a new Catechetical and Diocesan Centre was formed in Mount Oliver in Dundalk. With theological, liturgical and catechetical renewal came educational renewal and an increasing number of lay teachers working in primary and secondary Catholic schools took up leadership roles as the numbers of religious personnel declined. Some voluntary secondary schools operated under diocesan, religious or lay trustees and teachers began to use more concrete materials and child-centred methodologies in their teaching. Dioceses began to provide visual aids and professional support for teachers. In the 1960s, the diocese of Ossory and Limerick provided library collections of visual aids, film strips and concrete materials for teachers (King 1970).

   In the 1960s, second-level Catholic Comprehensive co-educational schools were established with a broader curriculum and in the 1970s co-educational Community Schools provided new models of joint patronship involving the Catholic Church and local VEC's (Education and Training Boards). Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973 and with free secondary education (1967), there was greater internationalisation and economic prosperity. With a growing awareness of child-centred approaches to education and the rights of the child, in 1982 corporal punishment was prohibited in all schools. The *1998 Education Act*, recognised 'the rights of the different Church authorities to design curricula in religious education at primary level and to supervise their teaching and implementation' (Department for Education 1999, p. 58). In the last decades of the twentieth century there were growing calls for more diverse types of schools to address the learning needs of a more religiously and belief diverse society. In the *1999 Primary School Curriculum* the term Religious Education (RE) replaced the term RI as schools were required to make 'alternative organisational arrangements for those who do not wish to avail of the particular Religious Education it offers'.

The Twenty-First Century: The Legacy of Abuse and Contesting Identities

Twenty-first Century Ireland has witnessed the economic boom of the Celtic tiger and the bust of the economic downturn. Over the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in immigration resulting in greater linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in Ireland. In the 2016 Census, 10% of the population nominated themselves as non-religious. The social, cultural and educational landscape changed as a consequence of internationalisation, economic prosperity, diversity of religions and beliefs and increasing secularisation (Darmody and Smyth 2011) challenging the traditional white, Irish, Catholic and Gaelic (Parker-Jenkins and Masterson 2013, Heinz et al. 2018) markers of identity. Public debate about Catholic education tended to focus on public funding of Catholic schools and colleges, admissions policies that were perceived as discriminatory, and an overprovision of Catholic schools with insufficient choice of school type for pupils, parents and teachers of minority faiths or no faith (Hyland and Bocking 2015).

History has unveiled the many imperfect and shameful aspects of Catholic involvement in education resulting from the abuse of power by individuals and institutions. The horrific reality of clerical child-sex abuse, including the Magdalen laundries, industrial schools (CICA 2009; Littleton and Maher 2008), the Tuam baby scandals and others have led to national outrage and a sense of betrayal. Countless lives have been ruined by appalling abuses carried out in Catholic schools. In May 1999, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, formally apologised to victims of child abuse, on behalf of the State. Controversy developed after it was revealed that in 2002 the *Department of Education*, on behalf of the Government, signed a deal with 18 religious organisations without public scrutiny or parliamentary vote, giving them indemnity against subsequent legal claims. Taxpayers subsequently became liable for over 1.5 billion in legal claims against religious orders who only paid the state 128 million in cash and property.

In 2009, the *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (CICA) commonly known as the *Ryan report* outlined the physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children by over 800 perpetrators in more than 200 residential settings run by Catholic Congregations and funded by the *Department of Education* between 1914 and 2000. These institutions included reformatory and industrial schools and national and secondary schools as well as day and residential special school settings. The report concluded that 'The deferential and submissive attitude of the Department of Education towards the Religious Congregations compromised its ability to carry out its statutory duty of inspection and monitoring of the schools' (CICA 2009, p. 603). There was deep shock and public outcry. In 2010, Pope Benedict XV1 wrote a pastoral letter of apology for abuse carried out by Catholic clergy in Ireland. A public backlash to the unrestricted power of the Church was a point of no return for many.

Further resistance to Catholic involvement in education has been fuelled by calls for secular schooling such as Atheist Ireland's 'Teach don't Preach' campaign. In a

radical move away from the 'special relationship' between the Catholic Church and the state in the early decades of the Free State (Maher and O'Brien 2017; Fuller et al. 2006; Tuohy 2013) a series of referenda removed the constitutional ban on divorce (1995) and legalised same sex marriage (2015) and abortion (2018) in Ireland. In 2018, the Irish government passed legislation to remove religion as a factor in schools' admissions policies.

The Contribution of Catholic Schools to Education in Ireland

It is important to remember that over centuries Catholic educators have provided high quality educational opportunity to millions of people. Frequently this occurred at a time when there was little alternative. The Catholic community contributed financially to the building costs and maintenance of Catholic schools. Religious orders founded by charismatic leaders had a radical mission to respond to the educational needs of impoverished uneducated communities. Religiously professed sisters, brothers and priests 'staffed these schools and their presence provided a professional and human resource base on which secure foundations were laid' (Griffin 2019, p. 17). For centuries lay leaders and teachers provided remarkable educational leadership in Catholic schools. Many Catholic schools provided education for the poor, often waiving or reducing fees at a time of widespread poverty and before the arrival of free national (1831) and secondary (1967) education. Religious orders (e.g. Jesuit, Benedictine, Dominican, etc.) originally with a mission to educate the wealthy have an evolving ethos and ministry with a commitment to social justice and inclusive practice.

In the recent restructuring of the curriculum at primary (NCCA 2020) and post-primary levels (2015–2022), the Catholic Church is also reviewing and renewing its commitment to education. Despite critical voices, people are supportive of Catholic education. The 2013 *Inspector General's Report* stressed that Catholic schools were welcoming of parents and the overwhelming majority of parents were happy with their children's schools. The 2012 ESRI report showed that Catholic schools in Ireland were more socio-economically diverse, with greater numbers of Traveller pupils and pupils from lone-parent families than minority faith or multidenominational schools. Department of Education figures for 2016–17 identify that a higher percentage of Catholic primary schools serve socio-economically disadvantaged communities and are 'delivering equality of opportunity schools' (DEIS). Vibrant signs of life in Catholic education include the production of the *National Catechetical Directory* (2010), a Catechism for Adults (2014), the development of a Preschool and Primary RE Curriculum (Irish Episcopal Conference 2015; Hession 2015), and the generation of a well-received confessional child-centred Religious Education *Grow in Love* programme for Catholic Schools (Irish Episcopal Conference 2015, 2019). The Catholic Church has welcomed the introduction of RE as a State examination subject at Junior (2003) and Leaving Cert levels (2005). It has prioritised an openness to other cultures and traditions in Catholic schools in a way that does not cause

conflict, or annul or relativise belief difference (Catholic Schools Partnership 2015; Irish Episcopal Conference 2015, p. 37). Catholic guidelines on inclusive practice have been generated for primary (2015) and post-primary (2019) schools. There is an increasing emphasis on quality leadership in Catholic schools, a prioritising of robust child-protection procedures, and a commitment to environmental awareness and social justice. Widespread child-centred inclusive educational practice has enabled Catholic schools to embrace a more religiously plural and non-religious base of pupils.

Catholic schools are embracing change. Voluntary secondary schools operating under diocesan, religious or lay trustees have adapted their structures to respond to new contexts. With declining religious personnel there has been 'less direct involvement of religious orders in school governance and the emergence of new structures in the form of lay Education Trust Companies responsible for the education enterprise and properties' (Darmody and Smyth 2013). Many congregations have transferred their schools to new trustee bodies such as ERST, Le Chéile and CEIST, giving contemporary expression to their founding charism. Further, in recent years a range of respected Catholic organisations such as the *Conference of Religious of Ireland* (CORI), the *Catholic Schools Partnership* (CSP) and others, have engaged dialogically with the State and the public to promote holistic, respectful, justice-oriented Catholic education in the service of marginal groups.

Past, Present and Future

While there are many challenges facing Catholic education in Ireland (O'Connell 2018), there are also incredible opportunities. A more humble Church now sees 'There is no divine right to a Catholic near-monopoly in education in Ireland' (Martin 2013, p. 328). In the wake of the *Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism* (Coolahan et al. 2012) there is acknowledgement by Catholic authorities that there is an overprovision of Catholic schools at primary level. At third level as part of a restructuring of higher education a number of Catholic colleges and seminaries have closed or merged with larger institutions. In Dublin alone these include Milltown Institute, All Hallows, St Patrick's, and Mater Dei Institute amongst others. Catholic authorities are slowly engaging in the process of rethinking and reconfiguring Catholic education.

Conclusion

Like a pendulum swinging back and forth, Catholic education has moved from a period of persecution and prohibition under penal legislation, to a time when Catholic education became the major power-broker in Irish education (Kieran and Hession 2005). In recent years, in the face of persistent criticism of a Catholic monopoly of

education and in light of the multiple abuses of power, most horrifically manifested in child-sex abuse scandals and industrial schools, Catholic education continues to undergo a period of soul searching and repositioning. It is beginning to relinquish institutional roles and is moving away from a theological narcissism (Martin 2013, p. 328) into a new terrain. This more self-aware, modest Catholic educational sector, is attempting to re-focus on the mission of Christ. Through initiatives like the annual *Catholic Schools Week*, and its scaffolding of conversations around school ethos (CSP 2019), it is beginning to develop a new sense of identity as it dialogues with stakeholder groups. Perhaps this more vibrant, pared-down Catholic system of education which is open to engagement in public dialogue will become more self-conscious of its prophetic mission. Contemporary Catholic education in Ireland is challenged to face up to and learn from its past. Only then can it nurture real strength by refocusing on its evangelical mission to provide high-quality education based on Christ's gospel of justice and love, in service of all, especially the marginal and the poor, while addressing the needs of a more secular and multi-belief society.

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Chapter 7
Step by Step: An Introduction to the History of Catholic Denominational Inspection in England and Wales

Peter Ward

Abstract This chapter will review the origins and development of Catholic denominational inspection. It will outline how the state and the Catholic Church first sought to collaborate 170 years ago when the state began to contribute to the provision of Catholic schools and then consider the subsequent introduction of diocesan inspection which, unlike the state, included inspection of religious instruction. The evolving roles and responsibilities of diocesan inspectors in different dioceses will be outlined along with the significance of their annual meetings. It concludes with a review of the complexity of the legislation that introduced the contemporary inspection system and the steps taken by the Church to work within it.

Keywords Denominational inspections · Ofsted and catholic schools · Church and state

Introduction

The present system of diocesan inspection of Catholic schools in England and Wales has been in place since 1993, following the passing of the *1992 Education (Schools) Act* and subsequent legislation that revised the whole system of inspection of state-funded schools. Since then there has been a regular programme of reviews of Catholic denominational inspection; that initiated in 2018 is the most thorough going to date. Thus it is appropriate after some 25 years of the present pattern of inspection to review, if briefly, the development of the Catholic Church's denominational inspection since its inception in the nineteenth century.

The history will be reviewed under four distinct phases: the beginning of Catholic school inspection undertaken by *Her Majesty's Inspectors* (HMI)[1]; the origins of denominational Catholic school inspection; 100 years of denominational inspection; statutory denominational inspection since 1993.

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The Beginning of Catholic School Inspection Undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectors

State school inspection goes back to 1839 when the *Committee in Council for Education*—earliest predecessor of the *Department for Education*—resolved to oversee the financial grants introduced in 1833 to support school building. The first steps in state inspection had begun. At that time all schools were religious foundations—overwhelmingly Anglican—so the expanded remit of state aid in 1839 to 'the purpose of promoting public education' (Adamson 1930) led to a conflict with the Church of England. Many Anglican bishops and others argued that the state had no competence to inspect Church schools, including their curriculum which included religious instruction. Eventually a solution was found in what is called a *concordat* with the Church of England: the government agreed that only Anglican clergymen, approved and retaining the confidence of the Church of England, would inspect Church of England school (Bishop 1971).

When grants were finally extended to Catholic schools, a similar *concordat* was agreed with the Catholic Church, Religious Instruction being specifically excluded from inspection.

The first Catholic inspector, Thomas William Marshall, examined his first pupil–teacher apprentice on 6 February 1849 and inspected St Cuthbert's school Durham 16 days later. Two months later the first examinations for teachers' *Certificate of Merit* and associated state grants for augmentation of salaries were held in London and Sunderland.

It is interesting to note that from the outset inspections included both teachers and pupil–teacher apprentices—the normal entry route into school teaching at the time—as well as school inspection itself. Similar tasks were to be undertaken by diocesan denominational inspectors in the future.

Also of note is his background: Marshall was a former Anglican clergyman converting to Catholicism in only 1845 but with a key role within four years. His extensive remit—all aided Catholic schools throughout Great Britain—was such that he sought assistance in 1851 but it was not until April 1853 that Scott Nasmyth Stokes was appointed as HMI for Catholic schools in North Wales, much of the North of England and also Scotland. Stokes is an interesting appointment. He also converted in 1845 and, apparently at the suggestion of Dr Wiseman, was offered the post of secretary of the Catholic Poor School Committee when it was established in 1847 and arranged grants for Catholic schools from the government (Tablet 1889) prior to his appointment. John Reynell Morell—another convert—became the third Catholic inspector in 1857. Thus initially Her Majesty's Inspectorate was established on denominational lines, only becoming non-denominational under the 1870 Education Act.

The Origins of Denominational Catholic School Inspection

Chapter 3 of session 24 of the Council of Trent required bishops to undertake an annual or bi-annual visitation of their diocese (Council of Trent 1563)[2]. In France (a Catholic country at this time) evidence shows that this included inspecting schools (Carter 2011). In England, following the Reformation there were no Catholic diocese for approximately 300 years and no Catholic schools in the conventional sense. The recusant community struggled, experiencing periods of respite such as under James II when some Catholic schools opened briefly, only to close under the succeeding sovereign. Circumstances only started to improve late in the eighteenth century.

Following the restoration of the hierarchy, the bishops first met formally in 1852 at Oscott for the first Synod of Westminster—famous in Catholic education for the injunction to 'build schools before churches'. They responded positively to the suggestion of the Catholic Poor School Committee that they undertake the inspection of Religious Education. In the words of the official statement, the *Acta et decreta primi concilii provincialis westmonasteriensis* of 6 July 1852.

> we have gladly adopted, for this purpose, the excellent suggestions made to us in Synod, by the Poor School Committee, through its worthy chairman. We propose, therefore to appoint in our respective dioceses, ecclesiastical inspectors of Schools, whose duty it will be to examine the scholars in the religious portion of their education, [and] to grant certificates and award prizes, for proficiency in it… (Migne 1853; Beale 1950; Whitehead 1999)

It was four years before the first inspectors—all clerics as they would be for over a century[3]—were appointed. In 1854, the Poor School Committee publication *The Catholic School* noted that the Catholic Church had no officers of her own 'especially charged in each diocese to visit and examine schools and teachers' for 'this part of the episcopal office has not hitherto been delegated to anyone' (Edmonds 1962, p. 60). Initially only four of the dioceses appointed inspectors in 1856: Westminster, Southwark, Liverpool and Salford (Tablet 1856). On 12 May 1856 Bishop Goss of Liverpool (Doyle 2014) informed the *Poor School Committee* that he had appointed six inspectors and the first evidence of an inspection I have found is a report in *The Tablet* (Tablet 1857) of inspections in St Augustine's deanery, Preston in March 1857. By 1868, only 8 of the 15 dioceses had appointed diocesan inspectors, according to the Secretary of the *Poor School Committee* (Tablet 1870).

The Church was particularly concerned that the substantial *1870 Education Act* would result in large numbers of Catholic children attending the new *Board schools* where religious instruction, if any, would be non-denominational and based on Protestant translations of the bible. Its response was to fund a large school building programme to provide a place for every Catholic child in a Catholic school, and recruit many more Catholic teachers, well qualified to undertake Catholic religious instruction; hence there was a renewed emphasis on denominational inspectors. To finance the expanded ecclesiastical inspection system, together with prizes and rewards for noteworthy pupil–teachers and their teachers observed by inspectors, the bishops at their annual meeting in April 1875 approved the *Poor School Committee* discontinuing support grants to schools in seven of the largest dioceses and diverting the

funds to finance inspectors (Tablet 1875; Bland 1976). The following month diocesan inspectors convened for the first of what would be annual overnight meetings to develop a uniform course of religious doctrine and sacred history for pupil–teachers, agree on recommended texts and on the timing and questions for the annual exams which pupil–teachers needed to pass in order to attend the three Catholic teacher training colleges.[4] Initially these meetings were attended by inspectors from Scotland as well as England and Wales; as late as 1887 the meeting was held in Glasgow.[5] Thus, they established in effect the first British—wide scheme of Catholic Religious Education, albeit for a very small but potentially significant group of students. An anonymous commentator remarked,

> For the next 80 years the Inspectors tried to be faithful to this original commission. They did this both by the course they proposed and by religious inspection of schools. (NBRIA archive commentary)[6]

100 Years of Denominational Inspection

The work of inspectors was soon to expand from inspecting schools and examining potential pupil–teachers, depending on the wishes of the diocesan bishop. School inspections usually resulted in a written report and contributed to an annual diocesan report that included a wide range of educational statistics. For example, Herbert Vaughan, Bishop of Salford,[7] increased the scope of inspections to include *Industrial and Poor Law schools* and workhouses attended by Catholic children and to Sunday schools in addition to parochial schools. Around the turn of the twentieth century, inspection reports show an increasing similarity with our contemporary Section 48 reports, commenting on the interest of students, concern at the failure to build on earlier work when moving between phases, displays in classrooms and the presence, or not, of crucifixes and statues around the building.

Collectively inspectors were sensitive to the manner in which the substantial *1902 Education Act* was being implemented. Besides meeting the newly appointed Secretary to the *Board of Education*, Robert Morant, in 1903 to secure the training of Catholic pupil–teacher (NBRIA archive commentary), they expressed concern that some newly established local education authorities were seeking to reduce the time available for religious instruction (Lannon 2003) or restrict opportunities for pupils to attend church (IBID; Tablet 1904a, b).

'The disturbed state of the times' (NBRIA archive commentary) is the recorded explanation of why the annual meetings of inspectors were suspended during the Great War. At least two post-war inspectors were military chaplains who experienced at first hand the faith of soldiers who had been educated in Catholic schools with their emphasis on the catechism together with hymns and prayers. Fr Drinkwater, diocesan inspector for Birmingham from 1922 to 1954, noted how in times of the greatest stress, hymns and religious practices were recalled but not the catechism. He wrote about this and how best to pass on the Catholic faith in a magazine he founded called *The Sower*. In this, he developed what Archbishop Williams[8] adopted in 1929

as the official scheme of religious instruction for Birmingham, at a time when dioceses generally followed the national syllabus.

Drinkwater was well regarded by his fellow inspectors, serving as the Secretary of the *Board of Inspectors* from 1924 to 1945. At the time same diocesan lead inspectors served for many years: Salford had two between 1918 and 1957 while in Westminster Canon Sutcliffe served from at least 1893, initially as assistant and later as chief inspector, until 1935, also serving as chair of the *Board of Inspectors* for some of this time.

Canon Norris served from 1902 as assistant to Sutcliffe and inspector for the county of Essex. On the formation of the Diocese of Brentwood in 1917 Norris became its chief inspector until succeeded in 1928 by his assistant inspector Canon Cameron. Fr Heenan, ordained in 1930 soon joined him as assistant inspector. Heenan observed in his autobiography that the canon was not well qualified for the post. He goes on to describe the work

> In those days a religious inspector was an external examiner. A school was warned two or three months in advance that the examiners were coming and from that moment the children were subjected to intense pressure to make them word perfect in the answers to the catechism. (Heenan 1971, p. 87)

He continued 'I was never able to see much value in the old style religious examination', before explaining how he visited one of *His Majesty's Inspectors* of religious knowledge to explore the best focus for an inspector. 'The good inspector should gather ideas and carry them from one school and teacher to another… As a result of this and other meetings with government inspectors my examinations gradually became inspections.' Here the now Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster[9] concludes the page devoted to the subject by noting '[s]ometimes we had a staff meeting to discuss methods of religious instruction. This routine is commonplace today [writing in 1971] but in the 1930s it was new' (IBID).

During the Second World War, the significant *1944 Education Act* strengthened the position of Catholic schools. Post-war, inspectors were involved in setting standards for newly trained teachers graduating from the expanded teacher training programme. In the 1950s, increasing interest in catechetics resulted in the opening in 1959 of the *National Catechetical Centre* and increasing discussion of the respective roles of catechetics and classroom religious instruction. The deliberations of the *Second Vatican Council* raised further the level of debate.

At the October 1969 meeting of the *Board of Inspectors and Religious Advisers*, the Minutes record

> The main problem was seen to be that the Inspectorate of schools in the way in which it had been envisaged when the Board was convened in 1876 seemed to have given way to a far more broadly based religious advisory service with the coming of the new look in R.E. under the name Catechetics (NBRIA archive commentary).

To meet the contemporary development of dioceses appointing Directors of Catechetics—notwithstanding that two-thirds of dioceses appointed their Religious Inspectors to the new role—it was decided to co-opt Directors of Catechetics onto

NBRIA, giving them a corporate status as well as providing an official channel of communication to the Hierarchy.

Henceforth the role of inspector gradually morphed into that of advisor and the appointment in 1974 of Fr Kevin Nichols as *National Advisor for Catechesis*, and subsequently Religious Education, led to members of NBRIA being increasingly drawn into national discussions about the appropriate place and form of both activities. In some dioceses, former inspectors took on the title and role of advisers and inspections seldom occurred. Elsewhere diocesan inspections continued as before, with diocesan staff also undertaking an advisory role. Thus the national picture was mixed and some would not completely agree with John Sullivan when he wrote

> [F]or many years prior to the present arrangements, religious inspections of Catholic schools were carried out in a patchy way, with little evidence of regularity, consistency or rigour. Reports were not published. Criteria for inspections were unclear. No training for this kind of inspection was provided. (Sullivan 2001, p. 57)

When government moved to reform statutory school inspection, having introduced the National Curriculum in 1988, it recognised that it had to make specific arrangements for denominational inspection and entered into discussions with the three principal providers, the Church of England, the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. The Catholic Church explained clearly that inspection of its schools was an established practice in line with Church discipline, most recently stated in the revised *Code of Canon Law* (1983).This sets out as a specific duty that 'The diocesan Bishop has the right to watch over and inspect Catholic schools situated in his territory….' (Canon 806).

Statutory Denominational Inspection Since 1993

Specific provision for denominational inspection was included in Section 13 of the *Education (Schools) Act 1992* but in ambiguous terms. Section 13(2) explained that *denominational education* means Religious Education given 'otherwise than in accordance with an agreed syllabus', thus confining it to classroom Religious Education. The inspection remit was broadened in of the *1993 Act* 'to secure that the content of the school's collective worship is inspected' (Section 259) and that the denominational inspector 'may report on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school'. It is noteworthy that under Section 13(4) of the *1992 Education (Schools) Act*, unchanged in 1993, that the inspection shall be conducted by a person chosen by the governing body of a Catholic school, whereas in Canon Law an inspection is undertaken by or on behalf of the bishop so the inspector would be an episcopal appointment.

This was one of the many issues addressed by a working party of representative diocesan inspectors and *Catholic Education Service* (CES) staff who met regularly to devise an inspection framework that respected both the canonical and evolving statutory requirements because the expectation was that one inspection would fulfil

both functions. The CES issued interim guidelines in October 1993 ahead of a formal report that complemented the working party *Handbook for the Inspection of Religious Education in a Catholic school* published in July 1994. This was adopted by every diocese, some in its entirety but some making minor adjustments, recognising the autonomy of the diocesan bishop and the principle of subsidiarity. Subsequently the *1996 School Inspection Act* addressed denominational inspection under Section 23 of the Act prompting NBRIA to revise its documentation and published *Guidelines for the Inspection of Religious Education in a Catholic school—second cycle* in 1998.

Under Canon Law, dioceses have responsibility for appointing and training denominational inspectors. The number needed to inspect every maintained Catholic school regularly required a new approach to recruitment and appointment. Dioceses ran training courses that explained the statutory and canonical roles and explored the reality of school inspection, appointing those who successfully completed the course. Many were drawn from serving senior staff in schools while others were diocesan advisers and, a few, independent consultants. The conflicting statutory and canonical responsibilities of appointing the denominational inspector was soon addressed by governors accepting the inspector nominated by the diocese except where there was a possible conflict of interest. However, there is at least one occasion when a governing body insisted on its own choice of inspector and the diocese responded by holding a separate canonical inspection with its own appointed inspector: the two inspections were held collaboratively and concurrently.

When Catholic Sixth Form Colleges[10] became subject to statutory inspection under the *Learning and Skills Act 2000*, the legislation did not provide for denominational inspection. However, a protocol was agreed by Ofsted and the CES for the inspection of Catholic ethos, mission and general Religious Education in Catholic Sixth Form Colleges. This protocol explained that the inspection team for Catholic colleges would include one qualified Ofsted inspector who was also an accredited diocesan inspector. This 'nominated inspector' was responsible for co-ordinating relevant findings regarding the ethos, mission and general Religious Education, and also GCSE and GCE Religious Studies where these were included in the inspection of the humanities area of the curriculum. Their findings were to contribute to all appropriate sections of an Ofsted inspection of a Catholic Sixth Form College, and so constitute the denominational inspection as part of the statutory inspection.

The inspection framework of denominational education in joint church schools[11] has always been determined locally by the respective Anglican and Catholic dioceses to reflect local circumstances. Some pairs of dioceses have developed school-specific frameworks while others have simply alternated inspections between diocesan frameworks; the Anglican diocese usually using the national Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAS) framework. From 2013, this has been renamed as the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools framework (SIAMS).

Diocesan staff responsible for inspection meet regularly and periodically review the inspection framework to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Whenever a new national framework is developed, each diocese is expected to adopt it to ensure commonality across the country but may make adaptations, recognising the canonical

autonomy of each diocesan bishop. National legislation also changed in 2005 when a new *Education Act* placed denominational inspection in England in Section 48 of the Act and for Wales in Section 50.

Initially denominational inspections were linked to the scheduling of Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)[12] inspections, some dioceses undertaking inspection coincidentally with Ofsted. This generally worked well, with both sets of inspectors usually operating separately yet harmoniously. The Church was and remains anxious to protect the autonomy of denominational inspections; it wanted Ofsted to avoid commenting on anything relating to denominational education. Ofsted's remit included whole-school topics such as behaviour and support for disadvantaged children so boundaries could be problematic but operational protocols were developed and there are regular meetings between Ofsted and the CES that seek to provide clarity.

In 2012, Ofsted ceased to inspect 'outstanding' schools. Consequently denominational inspection for these schools also ceased. In the ensuing scheduling hiatus, CES successfully convinced the government that it would not be possible to undertake remote monitoring of the quality of denominational education in the way that Ofsted planned to monitor 'outstanding' schools. This led, in turn, to the 'de-coupling' of denominational inspection from the Ofsted cycle, to be replaced by a separate five-year cycle. One consequence of the way in which 'outstanding' school inspections ceased was and remains a bunching of Catholic denominational school inspections occasioned by the new scheduling timetable.

There are 122 Catholic independent schools in England (Catholic Education Service 2018a, b) and one in Wales (Catholic Education Service 2018b), distributed unevenly across dioceses, each of which is subject to the oversight under Canon 806. When combined statutory denominational and canonical inspection was introduced, it was decided that Catholic independent schools would be inspected under the same framework. Those dioceses with few independent schools had little difficulty in incorporating them into the overall diocesan inspection programme but it has been more problematic in some others. The inspection framework has been considered a challenge by some independent schools who regard parts of the framework as inappropriate to their particular circumstances.

A similar charge has recently been made by the small number of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges (just thirteen across England and Wales). The distinct system worked for some years but gradually the number of 'nominated inspectors' declined and inspections of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges occurred without a denominational inspector participating and consequently there was no denominational inspection. When dioceses recognised the situation, they instituted separate canonical inspections using their diocesan inspection frameworks but conversations have been held nationally with the *Association of Catholic Sixth Form Colleges* to reflect upon their particular concerns in future inspection frameworks.

In Wales, the NBRIA framework continues to guide diocesan inspection frameworks but the curriculum and the statutory inspection frameworks in the Principality have been diverging from England for some years. The new *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government 2020) and related *Estyn inspection framework* (Donaldson 2018)

are significantly different, raising the possibility that the existing NBRIA framework, strongly influenced as it is by Ofsted thinking and practice, may not be well suited to the Welsh context going forward.

Much has changed since the tentative beginnings in 1856 and the commencement of regular meetings of diocesan inspectors in 1875. There is a clear national inspection framework but it remains locally determined by each diocese. There are regular inspections every five years and the reports are published online for all to see. The inspectorate and its relationship with the diocese have certainly changed. The nineteenth century diocesan inspector became the twentieth century Director of Religious Education and latterly Diocesan Schools Commissioner. Their contemporary job descriptions are probably broadly similar to that of a century ago. However, today's denominational school inspector is generally lay, not clerical; a current or recently retired senior school leader or diocesan adviser, not a parish priest. They inspect against published criteria and their reports are rigorously checked for quality assurance by specialist staff. This is all expected to be carried forward into the new framework which is likely to be implemented across all dioceses.[13] The present system has certainly ensured that the provisions of Canon 806 have been fulfilled efficiently. Catholic schools will affirm the impact of denominational inspection. The new framework provides the opportunity for greater diocesan and national evaluation of denominational inspection reports that will enable regular summative reviews of schools and of inspections that can inform a realistic appreciation of Catholic denominational education.

Notes

1. *Her (His) Majesty's Inspector*. Their independence from the government of the day is signalled through their distinct status as Crown appointments, approved by the monarch in the Privy Council.

2. "…the principal object of these visitations shall be to lead to sound and orthodox doctrine…and to establish such other things as….shall seem for the profit of the faithful…" (The Council of Trent).

3. With the exception of Mr Howell Blood MA, assistant inspector of schools, Archdiocese of Westminster; died 19 September 1911 (Venn 1922).

4. St Mary's Hammersmith established 1850; Notre Dame, Liverpool established 1856; Sacred Heart, Wandsworth 1874.

5. It is interesting to note that this is nine years after the restoration of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Scotland in 1878 (Tablet 1887).

6. Commentary in the archive of *National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers* (NBRIA) which is the successor to the *Board of Inspectors.* https://nbria.org.uk/history.

7. Herbert Vaughan, Bishop of Salford 1872–1892; Archbishop of Westminster 1892–1903; Cardinal 1893–1903.

8. Thomas Williams, Archbishop of Birmingham 1929–1946. In World War One he served in the Royal Army Chaplains' Department and was mentioned in despatches.

9. John Carmel Heenan, Bishop of Leeds 1951–1957, Archbishop of Liverpool 1957–1963, Archbishop of Westminster 1963–1975; Cardinal 1965–1975.

10. The Catholic Church was and remains the only Christian denomination in England to establish Sixth Form Colleges.

11. There are 27 'joint church schools', a collaboration between Catholic and other Christian denominations across 11 of the 22 Catholic dioceses in England (with an additional one in Wales).(CES website).

12. Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) undertakes state inspection in England. A separate state inspection service—Estyn since 1999—inspects in Wales.

13. See Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Autumn 2019 Meeting Resolutions retrieved from https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/the-church/catholic-bishops-conference-of-england-and-wales/plenary-meetings/plenary-november-2019/november-2019-plenary-short-resolutions/ last accessed 21.4.2020.

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Chapter 8
Sustaining the System: Non-Catholic Teachers in Catholic Secondary Schools

Mary Mihovilović

Abstract This chapter gives voice to teachers in Catholic secondary schools who are not Catholics, drawing on the findings of a qualitative study that employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Although the majority of teachers in English Catholic secondary schools are non-Catholics, their experience and contribution have not been attended to by the Church or research. Through in-depth interviews, participants articulated their commitment to Catholic education and desire to support the school ethos, a strong sense of belonging to the school community, an appreciation of the school's prayer life and celebrations and of the unique role of the chaplain. They also emphasised the support they received both pastorally and spiritually and the importance of their induction into the school. Some participants expressed concern about the reservation of headteacher and deputy headteacher posts to Catholics' experience and discomfort with aspects of Catholic spirituality. The participants' experiences of Catholic education challenge the Church to recognise the essential contribution of non-Catholic teachers to Catholic secondary schools and the importance of providing for their formation and pastoral support. Catholic school leaders are challenged to recognise the presence and experience of non-Catholic teachers in Catholic schools and to be attentive to their experiences and needs.

Keywords Non-Catholic teacher · Catholic school · Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

Introduction

The shortage of Catholic teachers in England has long been of concern to school leaders and the Church. As the proportion of Catholic teachers in Catholic schools diminishes, 'the relatively small size of the potential and actual number of Catholic teachers in comparison to the size of the sector' means that 'the difficulties facing the dioceses and governors are more acute than for the nation generally' (Morris 2008,

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p. 164). According to the *Catholic Education Service* (CES) Annual Census for 2019, 59.5% of the 23,184 teachers in state funded English Catholic primary schools and 40% of the 25,156 teachers in state funded English Catholic secondary schools identify as Catholic. Overall '49% of teachers in Catholic state funded schools are Catholic' (CES 2019, p. 3), thus without the 51% that are not Catholic the current system is unsustainable. Yet, surprisingly, their experience and its implications for Catholic schools is an under-researched area.

Despite a wealth of Church teaching on the Catholic School and the vocation of the teacher, the specific role of Catholic school teacher who does not identify as Catholic has received scant attention from both the Church and researchers. This chapter argues for the presence of non-Catholic teachers in Catholic schools to be attended to and for the implications of this for the teachers themselves, their schools and the system to be explored. I will firstly consider the place of non-Catholic teachers within Church teaching and research before discussing the first phase of research into this phenomenon, which focuses on Catholic maintained secondary schools. Finally, I will suggest ways forward.

The Contemporary Situation

The tables below show the increase in the percentage of non-Catholic teachers in the primary phase from 34.3% to 40.5% and in the secondary phase from 56.55% to 60% within six years. The trajectory is one of declining numbers of Catholic teachers within the Catholic system. The first CES Annual Census which received a 100% response rate was that taken in 2014. However, earlier censuses, though not representing all Catholic schools, recorded a similar pattern; in 2011, 55.1% secondary Catholic schoolteachers and 31.4% primary teachers were reported as non-Catholic (CES 2011).

'*[T]he shortage of younger, practising Catholic teachers*' [sic] is a significant fragility which needs to be attended to if the future of Catholic education is to be secure (Holman 2017, p. 187). This does not only have an immediate effect on the leadership and staffing of Catholic schools but also long-term implications for the sustainability of the Catholic school system.

Terminology

Catholic Teacher: Within this chapter, the term Catholic refers to Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic Church or particular Churches in communion with it (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993 par. 834, 836–837). At the point of application for a post in a Catholic school teachers are asked to give their religious affiliation (CES 2019). This is not a statement of their religious commitment or participation in

the Church. The numbers of teachers who self-identify as Catholic does not indicate whether they are Church attending.

Non-Catholic Teacher: Here, the term non-Catholic refers to all teachers who do not self-identify as Catholic. It includes those who belong to other Christian denominations or religions or hold other life stances. The term itself is problematic and can be understood as pejorative by defining a teacher as *other* in this negative way. Having given the terminology a great deal of thought, I have been unable to find an unambiguous adjective for a Catholic school teacher who is not a Catholic. I have, therefore, chosen to use negative language sparingly and only for the purpose of concision.

The Role of the Non-Catholic Teacher in the Catholic School

The Catholic School Teacher: Church documents on Catholic education promulgated by the *Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education* (SCCE) are based on an assumption that teachers in Catholic schools are Catholics, religious or lay, and as such 'witnesses' to faith (SCCE 2007 par. 38). Teachers are expected 'by their lives and their teaching as much as by their instruction [to] bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher' (*Gravissimum Educationis* 1965 par. 28) with an 'evangelical identity' (SCCE 2014 par. 1.j). The portrayal of the teacher's role as a 'witness to the Gospel', and 'model of the ideal person' (SCCE 1982 par. 9 & 32) assumes a shared understanding of, and commitment to, a 'specific Christian vocation' participating 'in the mission of the Church' (SCCE 1997 par. 19). This is made clear in Pope John Paul II's address to Canadian Catholic educators, '[t]o teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe' (1984 par. 3).

Such statements are common (SCCE 1977 and 1997) and typified by John Paul II who, when speaking to Australian Catholic educators, described the profession of teachers in Catholic schools as involving 'tasks that are linked to your baptism and to your own commitment in faith … you share in the mission of the Church. No matter what subject you teach, it is part of your responsibility to lead your pupils more fully into the mystery of Christ and the living tradition of the Church' (1986 par. 3).

By proclaiming that in a Catholic school '[t]he nobility of the task to which teachers are called demands that, in imitation of Christ, the only Teacher, they reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behaviour' (SCCE 1977 par. 43) the Church fails to address the experience and needs of teachers who are not Catholics. Neither does it address their vital contribution to the viability of the Catholic school system.

The Catholic School Teacher who is not a Catholic

'The absence of the Catholic school is portrayed as a great loss for civilisation and for the natural and supernatural destiny of [humanity]' (SCCE 1977 par. 15) and the Church recognises the problem of the 'provision of adequate staff' (SCCE 1977 par. 23). Yet, the lack of attention to the substantial proportion of non-Catholic teachers in Catholic schools in England is perplexing. SCCE (1977 par. 91) acknowledging 'the value of the witness and work of the many Catholics who teach in State schools throughout the world' ignores non-Catholic teachers in Catholic schools. They are for the most part invisible.

The understanding of the Catholic school teacher explored above is in direct contrast to the Pope John Paul II's understanding that not all teachers in Catholic universities are Catholics 'Christians among the teachers are called to be witnesses and educators of authentic Christian life, which evidences attained integration between faith and life, and between professional competence and Christian wisdom' (1990 par. 22).

However, the risks of employing non-Catholic teachers are recognised. 'In order not to endanger the Catholic identity of the University …, the number of non-Catholic teachers should not be allowed to constitute a majority within the Institution, which is and must remain Catholic'. (John Paul II 1990 par 4.4)

Recognising that 'it is the lay teachers … believers or not, who will substantially determine whether or not a school realizes its aims and accomplishes its objectives' SCCE (1982 par.1) is exceptional. Disappointingly, there is no subsequent discussion of the implications for recruitment and professional development. More recently, SCCE (2013) acknowledged the presence of non-Catholic teachers without addressing their particular experience and needs.

On the occasion of the Bishops of England and Wales' 1988 *ad limina* visit to Rome, as 'a radical revision of the educational system [was] under consideration', John Paul II stated, 'the *Catholic school* is of outstanding importance to the Church's mission' (1988 par. 2). He went on to emphasise that because Catholic teachers 'need their Bishops' support and encouragement … a relationship must be fostered which promotes the teachers' understanding of Catholic education, ensures their appropriate pastoral care, and perfects their knowledge of the faith' (John Paul II 1988 par. 4). Whilst the first two priorities clearly have relevance to all teachers in Catholic schools, the third demonstrates the lacuna in papal understanding in assuming that all Catholic school teachers share this faith.

More recently, the Archdiocese of Westminster recognising that '[t]he success of the Catholic school depends on the quality and dedication of the staff … whatever their role' sees them as 'witnesses to the vision and philosophy of Catholic education' (2010 p. 18). Whilst acknowledging that 'the appointment of Catholic staff is paramount to the development of the shared experience of living the faith in the school context' it welcomes 'staff from other Christian denominations and other faiths who are able and willing to accept responsibility for supporting the Catholic life of the school'. Despite celebrating their 'tremendous witness in our pluralistic

and richly diverse society' (Ibid) this fails to recognise those Catholic school teachers who have no religious affiliation, contradicting the affirmative statement that '[a]ll who value and respect a faith orientated life are welcome' (Ibid). Similarly, in arguing that 'the contribution of faculty and staff who are not Catholic, but are still religious, is often equal, and even, in some cases, superior to that of the Catholic faculty'; Heft (2011, p. 213) fails to acknowledge the presence and contribution of teachers of no religious faith. In contrast, Stuart-Buttle (2017, p. 87) drawing attention to the diverse 'academic, cultural and faith backgrounds' from which teachers who are not Catholic come, more accurately reflects the contemporary situation.

Absent from the Research

There are numerous studies focussing on various aspects of teachers' professional identity (Mantei and Kervin 2011; Coleman 2012; Jenlink 2014; Beijaard and Meijer 2017; Beijaard 2019); however, there is very limited research into the professional identity and experience of Catholic school teachers who are not Catholic (Convey 2014). If a teacher's sense of identity (professional and personal) is key to their motivation (Palmer 2007; Day et al. 2007; Day and Gu 2014) then an exploration of how non-Catholic teachers in Catholic schools make sense of their experience is overdue.

As has been argued, the Church's teaching about Catholic teachers' professional life draws heavily on the language of vocation and much of the research in Catholic education echoes this (Grace 2016; Buijis 2005; Lydon 2011). Such literature pays very limited attention to non-Catholic teachers in Catholic schools, usually in relation to teacher recruitment and school leadership (Glackin and Lydon 2018). Acknowledging the contribution of non-Catholic teachers to the mission of Catholic schools, Morris (2008) recognises the difficulties in recruiting sufficient staff to the evangelistic and catechetical vocation of teaching. The presence of a significant proportion of teachers who are not Catholic in Catholic schools in countries such as Hong Kong (Ching Mok 2007) and Ethiopia where 'in almost all primary and secondary schools the majority of the staff is made up of non-Catholic teachers'. Chernet (2007, p. 647) highlights the need for research into the impact and implications of this reality beyond England.

The Experience of Catholic School Teachers Who Are not Catholic

I will now turn to the experiences of non-Catholic teachers in Catholic schools drawing on empirical research. The teachers' experience cannot be observed or quantified but accessed only through their articulation of, and reflection on, it, therefore

this study employed *interpretative phenomenological analysis* (IPA). As an 'idiographic qualitative methodology' (Osborn and Smith 1998, p. 67), it allows for an exploration of the participants' 'personal lived experiences' alongside 'a close examination of how [they] make sense of them' (Smith and Eatough 2012, p. 442). Although '[t]he truth claims of an IPA analysis are always tentative and analysis is subjective' (Smith et al. 2009, p. 80), its use has enabled me to explore the unique experiences of Catholic school teachers who are not Catholic from their own perspectives whilst recognising my interpretive influence on the findings.

Interviews

In-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out with 15 non-Catholic teachers in six Catholic secondary schools in the southeast of England. Access to the teachers was facilitated by the headteachers who shared my invitation with non-Catholic teachers who had taught in a Catholic school for at least three years. The teachers had 3-18 years of experience and included classroom teachers, middle leaders, academic and pastoral, and three assistant headteachers. Their specialisms included Arts, English, history, mathematics, PE, science, SEND and sociology. In terms of religious faith they self-identified as agnostic, Anglican, atheist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Lutheran, Methodist, Muslim and Pentecostal; two-thirds were actively involved in their religion.[1]

Findings

The following themes emerged from the teachers' articulation of their ideographic experiences:

1. Being at 'home'

The teachers articulated a strong sense of being welcome and at home in their Catholic school (Alex and Pat), 'part of the fabric' (Jo and Hilary) appreciating a sense of family (Alex). Val further developed this, 'the school sits so well with my soul, I can be unapologetically the teacher that I want to'. Charlie claims, 'I don't feel different'; in a similar vein, Jo comments 'I don't think I've ever been in a situation where I don't feel comfortable'. Alex links this to 'there [being] a different feeling here—unity between staff' whilst Sam points out 'good relationships with SLT, respect and we work together'.

Although all the teachers voiced an alignment between their values and the school's, only Chris used the language of vocation to a particular school 'The Lord brought me here. From a strict Christian background I felt comfortable. I realised how people who follow Christ work with each other, values are explicitly shared'. In the

two schools founded, but no longer staffed, by religious orders, two thirds of the interviewees demonstrated familiarity with the founder and their charism. Commenting on what they found attractive about the founder Sam focused on 'encouraging teachers to show affection and love for pupils' whilst Mel prized the 'continuity' of the founder's mission. Others mentioned their role in promoting the Founder's values, which were integral to lessons and extracurricular activities.

2. The Teachers and Religion

The teachers' relationship to religion varied substantially describing themselves as being on the threshold: 'an outsider looking in' (Val) to one teacher wanting 'to become a Catholic' because of the welcome (Alex). The majority had a connection with a religion but were not necessarily active within a faith community. Some, like Mel, committed to their own tradition appreciate being in a religiously affiliated school: 'It's nice to be a Christian in a Christian school not having to apologise about sharing a message'. Charlie commented that they were 'able to be authentically Hindu here'. Asked whether they felt their own religion was respected, Sam stated that it was 'not just respected but we are encouraged to talk about common ground'. Fran is clear that 'the general ethos is accepting and happy not just tolerant'. Hilary enjoys 'being in a Catholic school, calmness, not pushing Catholicism'. For Pat 'the ethos runs through the school … no pressure on non-Catholics'.

Alex 'knew nothing about religion—it was not present at home … when applied I thought "I need to learn about Catholicism quickly"… it's not forced upon me'. With hindsight they see how 'It's opened my eyes to what being a Catholic is … not just about belief in God but everything that goes with it' (Alex). For Chris the 'freedom to be a Christian is respected, encouraging faith, all religions accepted [is] what keep me here'. Others appreciate the freedom not necessarily to be religious, yet 'we go to mass, we pray, use assembly/mass theme in class … 'I'm not a Catholic don't do the cross' (Charlie). As with others, Chris appreciates denominational differences, 'I take part in all religious activities but don't take communion'.

3. Chaplaincy

The majority of teachers saw school chaplaincy as significant for both staff and students. This is typified by Jo's comment that 'when so and so has a bad day they need to go to the chaplain … because they're not a member of staff they can go anywhere and talk to a student'. A Head of Year talking about the death of a parent reflected that 'religion plays a big part [at times of bereavement] and they would 'set up meetings with the chaplain' (Sam). Chris' statement, 'any questions I go to the chaplain' was echoed by several interviewees in relation to the Catholic tradition or dealing with difficult issues.

4. Prior experience knowledge of Catholic schools

The majority of the teachers had no previous experience of or knowledge about Catholic schools although four had spent part of their training in one. In two cases they had been appointed to the placement school and remained for 18 years and 6 years respectively: 'I'd had nothing to do with a Catholic school until PGCE placement in

a Catholic school … got on really well, confident to apply, I'd already experienced mass' (Nik). Only one teacher had experienced Catholic education personally as a student and only one had any theoretical knowledge of Catholicism explaining that 'I studied the reformation so knew before coming here mass would be important' (Sam). However, Mel recognised there are similar values [here] to those I grew up with'. Val and others 'didn't appreciate the difference at the point of application' yet now sees 'crosses, chapel, assembly at the heart of what school does [and] prayer as a normal part of the day.

5. Prayer and Liturgy

Prayer and liturgy presented challenges for all the teachers as Nik commented '[i]f you've never experienced mass before it's quite an eye-opener', aware that: the strangeness of liturgy and ceremony were not explained: 'I went into mass and didn't know the responses, sitting down and standing … I felt uncomfortable as the students knew what they're doing I didn't'. This teacher is now comfortable to attend liturgies and join in prayer. Similarly Ashley looking back to their 'first INSET day [which] started with mass, I thought "Oh what do we do?" I didn't know whether we were supposed to pretend to get involved', later coming to the view that you can very much be what you believe in as long as you can respect what the school is'.

Jo appreciates everyone' right to reflect but is uneasy about the choice of prayers, in particular those which express Catholic beliefs about Mary and sin. 'This year we started doing the Hail Mary but there are better prayers out there not making anyone feel their religion is less valued … I don't like saying a prayer about punishing the sinner for their sins. Some teachers are ambivalent towards the sacrament of reconciliation, '[c]onfession, I'm not sure how I sit with it, in Lourdes there was an opportunity for the students, I found it hard to justify it to them' (Alex). Despite an awareness of not always understanding aspects of Catholicism and an initial nervousness about getting it right they echoed Sam's view that 'as a non-Catholic I feel I can ask for help when it's needed' frequently referring to the chaplain, RE teachers and headteacher. Several participants described becoming familiar with the Catholic tradition as a process of osmosis, 'I picked it up by listening, I learnt it' (Jo).

6. Contribution

The teachers spoke in depth about their contribution to the school and the challenge of living its mission. For Jo 'it's hard to be the smile that students need' whilst providing 'daily support for students, treating others as you would like to be treated'. Mel identified the demand on teachers to 'be able to embrace' the mission being 'willing to learn about it and push it forward for the kids'. Chris uncompromisingly understands their contribution as 'working with disadvantaged pupils, seeing them as individuals, making a difference in pupils' lives'. Others focused on 'bringing people together across the school' (Ashley); daily upholding values, being a role model (Hilary) 'fostering the ethos as Head of Year (Sam). Similarly, a Head of Department described their contribution as teaching a subject 'in a way that understands other perspectives' (Val). Jo has a different perspective on this 'connecting religion with

life is my contribution: 'it doesn't matter whether you're religious, Jesus is a good person'.

7. The Aspects of a Catholic School that the Teachers valued most

Teachers' comments on what they valued most about the school fell into three categories. Firstly, they appreciated the school's response to crises. Jo commented 'things happen in the world [such as the bombing in Sri Lanka] here it doesn't matter were or who is afflicted we take a moment to think about it'. Others reflected on occasions when members of the community had been bereaved. Hilary described the death of a 15 year old student by suicide and the importance of 'telling the whole school, prayer and bereavement counselling as well as a memorial garden'. One school provides 'funeral representatives … a guard of honour for past students and staff' (Alex). This concern for the bereaved, and readiness to talk about death and mark such times with prayer and liturgy were valued.

Secondly, the interviewees highlighted the schools 'charity work, nurturing giving' (Charlie), and 'campaigns for justice' (Hilary) both within the formal curriculum and fundraising summed up by Val as highlighting a distinct 'perspective [lending] itself beautifully to social justice. Thirdly, care for disadvantaged students was emphasised. Reflecting on the school's support for children with challenging behaviour, Jo commented, 'here it's a lot more caring … when we talk things through we get to know what's going on in [their] lives. 'I tell students I really enjoy teaching you or you're an amazing human being' (Sam).

Career Progression

Nine of the 12 teachers had been promoted internally to pastoral or academic posts. Sam, speaking of her appreciation of the school and relationship with the Senior Leadership Team, expressed a hope to join it, seemingly unaware that posts beyond Assistant Headteacher are reserved posts requiring the appointee to be a practising Catholic. The three Assistant Headteachers all commented on the impact of this policy on themselves 'I knew the rules when I was appointed but I don't want to leave−would like to be Deputy Headteacher here' (Pat) whilst Hilary described themselves as '16 years here and stuck as an Assistant Headteacher'.

Implications

If 'an equally important role belongs to the teachers [as to parents] in safeguarding and developing the distinctive mission of the Catholic school', (SCCE 1977 par. 73) the implications of the fact that the majority of teachers in English Catholic secondary schools are not Catholic must be attended to. The teaching of the Church

with regard to teachers in Catholic schools and the reality in English Catholic maintained Secondary Schools appear to be unaligned. This raises a series of issues in relation to their employment that are yet to be fully explored.

1. The recruitment and selection of teachers

Ensuring a strategic approach to the appointment of teachers 'who are not Catholic but who support and contribute to the mission of a Catholic school' (Heft 2011, p. 132) is vital. Thus 'Catholic schools require people not only to know how to teach or direct an organisation; they also require them, using the skills of their profession, to know how to bear authentic witness to the school's values, as well as to their own continuing efforts to live out ever more deeply, in thought and deed, the ideals that are stated publicly in words (SCCE 2013 par. 80).

2. The induction and continuing support and professional development of teachers

This priority is echoed in SCCE, 'the presence both of students and of teachers from different cultural and religious backgrounds requires an increased commitment of discernment and accompaniment'(2007 par. 5). '[I]f adequate professional preparation is required in order to transmit knowledge, then adequate professional preparation is even more necessary in order to fulfil the role of a genuine teacher [in a Catholic school]' (SCCE 1982 par. 16). Resources must be made available to enable all teachers to understand and appreciate this distinctive mission, which they carry out on behalf of the Church, including 'sound induction processes, on-going opportunities for reflection and study of the Catholic vision of education and professional development … opportunities for retreat days and reflection on their own spiritual journey' (Westminster 2010, p. 18).

3. Career progression of non-Catholic teachers

The career progression of non-Catholic teachers within senior leadership is often the elephant in the room in discussions about the difficulties in appointing Catholic school leaders. Teachers with a longstanding commitment to a Catholic school whose mission they clearly articulate and try to live understandably find it hard to accept that they will not be promoted to Deputy Headteacher or Headteacher posts. '[S]chool leadership succession is a growing problem in Catholic schools internationally' (Gleeson et al. 2018, p. 102) and the data (see Tables 1 and 2) indicate it is set to become increasingly more problematic in England. Church teaching and research present a vision of Catholic school headteachers being subject to more numerous and complex expectations than their counterparts in secular schools including the 'religious purpose and mission and … the quality of the school's overall participation in the educational mission of the Catholic Church' (Nuzzi and Frabutt 2013, p. 2). The '*formation of future Catholic school leaders'* [sic] is pivotal to the future of Catholic schools (Holman 2017, p. 192). Notwithstanding the desirability of appointing Catholic school leaders in good standing with the Church, the reality of the situation suggests than an examination of alternatives that would ensure the Catholicity of the school is unavoidable.

Table 1 Catholic teachers in english state funded catholic primary schools (Annual Survey, CES 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019)

Year	Catholic Teachers (%)	Non-Catholic Teachers (%)
2014	65.7	34.3
2015	63.9	36.1
2016	62.3	37.7
2017	61.4	38.6
2018	60.6	39.4
2019	59.5	40.5

Table 2 Catholic teachers in english state funded catholic secondary schools (Annual Survey, CES 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019)

Year	Catholic Teachers (%)	Non-Catholic Teachers (%)
2014	43.5	56.5
2015	43.1	56.9
2016	41.9	58.1
2017	41.4	58.6
2018	40.7	59.3
2019	40	60

Conclusion

This exploration of the experiences of Catholic school teachers who are not Catholic is best summed up by their responses to being asked what advice they would give to a non-Catholic interested in teaching in a Catholic school. The interviewees were agreed that preparation was necessary, reading up on the mission statement, ethos or founder. A teacher belonging to another world religion should 'go with an open mind it's not a militant religion' (Charlie) whilst Chris would encourage them 'because it is a school where you know where you stand what we believe in is so clear … freedom to be what you are'. 'You'd be very welcome in a Catholic school'. Thus the challenge for Catholic schools is to respond to the SCCE's question, 'what does it mean to be a teacher … in a Catholic school?' (2013 par. 81) in their particular context in a way that includes all their teachers be they Catholic or not.

Notes

1. For the purposes of anonymity the teachers are referred to by non-gender specific pseudonyms and the plural is used.

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Chapter 9
Exploring the Voice of Children in Catholic Education in an Irish Primary School

Maurice Harmon

Abstract Catholic education in Ireland finds itself in a contested space at this time. Much of the current research and argument is based on adult and minority group perspectives of Catholic education. This chapter explores how the voice of children can be accessed in an inclusive manner promoting democracy and so add to the discourse on Catholic education. Central to creating inclusive environments is the value that is placed on cultivating an atmosphere where children know that their voices are valued, listened and responded to and can make a difference. Arguing that young people should not be seen merely as objects of research but as active participants therein, it offers a rights-based approach to research with children, based on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, article 12 and 14 (1989). It explores the Lundy Model of Participation (2007) framework for research with children, ensuring all children's views are valued and respected. The chapter concludes by considering the implications emerging from recent research concerning aspects of the religious identity of a child in a Catholic school in Ireland, which found that children live in blended-belief families and that 68% of children cite their grandparents as the main influence on their religious identity.

Keywords Religious identity · Student voice · Participation religious education

Introduction

Catholic education currently finds itself in a contested space in Ireland. Much of the recent and contemporary research is based on adult and minority group perspectives of Catholic education. This chapter explores how the voice of children can be accessed in an inclusive manner, offering another lens through which to explore the conversation. It is widely recognised that children not only have their own views (de Sousa 2019; Harmon, 2018; O'Farrell 2016; Ipgrave 2004), but that their voices must be heard and respected (UN 1989). Arguing that young people should not be

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seen merely as objects of research, but as active participants therein, this chapter presents a rights-based approach to research with children, based on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Articles 12 and 14 (UN 1989). It explores the Lundy Model for Participation (2007) framework for research with children, ensuring that all children's views are valued and respected. The chapter concludes by considering the implications emerging from recent research concerning aspects of the religious identity of a child in a Catholic school in Ireland.

Context of Student Voice

Children must be active participants in, not merely objects of, their education. This moves from schooling that is determined traditionally by adult concerns to education focused more on the life of the child (Fleming 2015; Dillen 2014). Qvortup (1994) states that children should be seen as 'beings', rather than 'becomings', and as active participants in their own lives. This is also true when it comes to conducting research with children. Accepting that children must be active participants influences how the research views the children and childhood influences, and how the children engage in the research process. It prompts a move from a view of children as objects of research to a group with views and perspectives that are valid and are worth hearing; and as rights-holders in society, entitled to having their views on their own lives heard (Christensen and James 2017). Fielding and McGregor (2005) highlight the importance of the voice being both dialogue and action, with discussion on issues that are relevant to all parties involved. In the present study, this refers to the children and their views on religion and Religious Education (RE).

Recent Irish policy and legislation support the rights of children: the passing of the *Education act* (1998) and the *Children's act 2001*; the establishment of the National Children's Office in 2001; the appointment of a Children's Minister in 2008; and the *Thirty-first amendment of the Constitution (children) act 2012*—a constitutional imperative to strengthen the rights of the child in Ireland. Children are taking their place as valued members of society, with rights that must be listened to, considered and respected. The journey to this place where children's voices are heard has been a long one and is well documented by Ruddock and Flutter (2000). Dewey's *Democracy and education* (1916) applies the principle of democratic society to education, stating that education should have both an individual and societal purpose. He seeks to transform child voice, hitherto virtually silent, so that the role of the child as a co-constructor of knowledge becomes central to the progressive educational practice that he advocates (Dewey 1916). The twentieth century has been identified as the century of the child, with child-centred ideologies underpinning and informing legal, welfare, medical and educational policy.

The first formal *Declaration on the rights of the child* was in 1924. This, along with other significant movements, led to the UNCRC in 1989 (UN 1989). The UNCRC is composed of 41 articles, which seek to improve the life experiences of children throughout the world, including their living conditions and education. The UNCRC

states, in Article 12, that children have the right to have their opinions considered and their views respected in decision-making that affects them (UN 1989). However, while inclusion of the voice of the child is articulated as a key principle in international education policy and practice contexts today, ensuring that the child's voice is meaningfully included and, moreover, responded to continues to be a challenge in educational systems (Deegan 2015). Deegan questions whether educators are truly convinced of the value in their practice of the child's voice. A democratic educational system acknowledges the importance of the child's voice and recognises that prioritising 'participation' enhances children's self-esteem and confidence, promotes their overall development, and develops their sense of autonomy, independence, social competence and resilience (Whitebread and O'Sullivan 2012). Deegan's concern is addressed by Ring et al. (2016). Their study entitled *An examination of concepts of school readiness among parents and educators in Ireland* found that

> 'young children can provide valuable insights into how they perceive their early years' education experiences and underline the importance of embedding a pedagogy of voice and a pedagogy of listening for children from the beginning' (Ring and O'Sullivan 2018 p. 6).

The principles of democracy and child voice are key focuses of the pedagogy of listening, articulated and embraced in the view of the children. The present study is particularly interested in the child's opinions (UN 1989 Article 12) and their freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion (UN 1989 Articles 13 and 14). Morrison (2007) notes that some schools use pupil or student voice, as it suits, to the advantage of their own agenda, and at other times, ignore it. This is mirrored by Fielding and Rudduck, who state that the 'key issue is whose voice can be heard in the acoustic of the school, and by whom. Moreover, how what is said gets heard depends not only on who says it, but also on style and language' (Fielding and Rudduck 2002 p. 2). Echoing Fielding and Rudduck, one of the criticisms of the UNCRC is the fact that children themselves were not involved in drafting it (Hill and Tisdall 1997). Notwithstanding this, the UNCRC endeavours to ensure that children are heard on issues that are relevant to them.

Methodology

A model to access this voice is offered by Laura Lundy at the School of Education, Queen's University, Belfast. Lundy has developed a rights-based model of child participation that is beneficial to all education settings. It is therefore germane to the present study. Lundy's model focuses on ensuring that all children's views are valued and respected (Lundy 2007) (Fig. 1).

The Lundy Model of Participation, as above, highlights four components that are necessary to ensure that Article 12 of the UNCRC is achieved. The components are space, voice, audience and influence. Lundy (2007) suggests that children should be given space through the provision of safe and familiar location, in which they are

Fig. 1 The Lundy Model of Participation (*Source* Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DYCA 2015 p. 21)

(1) encouraged to express their views and are given opportunities to both form and express their views on what matters to them;
(2) allocated a voice through being facilitated in expressing their views freely (this is not dependant only on their ability to form their position, whether it be mature or not);
(3) assured of their voices being heard by an audience and given due weight, as they have a right to be heard by those who have power to make decisions;
(4) assured of having their views responded to in order that they understand that their views have influence in their environment (Lundy 2007).

The children in the present study were co-researchers and not just data gathers—they were central to the analysis of the data and in shaping the finding. Three age-appropriate methodologies were used to access the voice of the children: namely, photovoice (photovoice is a powerful participatory action research method where individuals are given the opportunity to take photographs, discuss them collectively, and use them to create opportunities for personal and/or community change), scrapbooking and focus groups. All children, regardless of religious or belief tradition, were invited to participate. Thirty-five children, between the ages of 10 and 13, comprising of both girls and boy, and a variety of belief traditions engaged in the study. To protect anonymity and privacy of the children, the author has changed all first names and every effort was made to match these names with the cultural and religious backgrounds of the children.

Findings

The study report was presented narratively, according to three main themes that emerged during data analysis. One of the main themes that emerged was that of Religious Identity. The next section explores this theme in detail and its implications for Catholic education in a classroom setting.

Religious Identity

Religious identity is, by its nature, complex. *Religious Education in a multicultural society REMC* suggests that children's religious identity can be quite fluid, since they can hold views similar to, or different from, those of their parents or other significant adults in their lives. It can also be influenced by the environment around them (ESRI 2010). It emerged that the religious identity of the young co-researchers of the present study was developed through the people they engaged with, and the places in their environment that they knew and frequented.

Religious Identity not a Priority

At the beginning of the semi-structured group interviews (focus groups), each child was asked to use five words to describe him/herself. No child referred to their religious identity or religious or belief tradition in their description. This was noted by the researcher and relayed to the children. Anne responded by saying, "Like it wouldn't be the first thing that we would think of if we were describing ourselves." Most of the participants agreed with this statement. Each child then identifies their religious or belief system (Fig. 2). All the children involved in this study professed to be part of a religious tradition. Interestingly, 2.8% of the school's entire population described themselves as not following any religious belief system. The majority of respondents identified as Catholic. At 71%, this percentage is slightly higher than the 68% of the whole school population, who identified themselves as Catholic.

While all the children were aware of their traditions, some stated that they were uncomfortable talking about this aspect of their lives. Anne said she saw it as a personal matter and not something she would talk about publicly: "You can be judged if you say you're some religion and some people don't like you. A lot of people kind of shy away from it." In contrast, Tijana informed the group that she was comfortable talking about her faith within the Christian Orthodox tradition. During the conversation on whether religion is, or should be, a public or private aspect of a person's life, Doyle pointed out that in the past, people in Ireland could not always talk about their religious identity. Looking through the photographs from the earlier photovoice session, he showed the group the photo of the inscription on the statue

Fig. 2 Self-identification of Religious and Belief Systems

SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF RELIGIOUS AND BELIEF SYSTEMS

■ Catholic 71%   ■ Russian Orthodox 4%

■ Christian Orthodox 8%   ■ Muslim 7%

■ Evangelical Christian 10%

7%

8%

10%

4%

71%
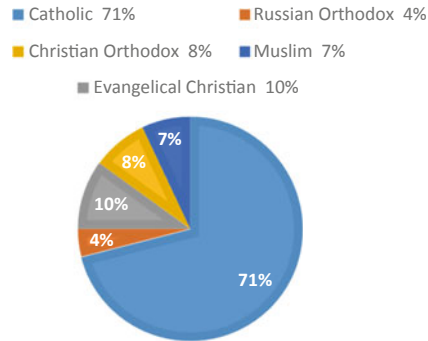
of Daniel O'Connell in the town, reminding them that people in the past could not always practise their religion freely, or even speak openly of their religious identity.

Doyle stated that the statue is there to remind people of how O'Connell fought and won Catholic Emancipation in 1829. This gave Catholics the freedom to speak about their faith. He went on to emphasise that people should always feel free to talk about their religion and that they should respect the religious tradition of others. The children concurred with Doyle, highlighting the importance of respect for diversity.

Children Live in Blended-Faith or Blended-Belief Family

When the self-identification was further explored, the children began to move from one tradition to multiple traditions to describe themselves. Doyle described himself as a *Catholic atheist* and Hannah described herself as a *Catholic Buddhist*. When these new classifications were investigated, the children said that while they were Catholic, they wanted to respect the religious tradition of one or both of their parents. For example, as Hannah's mother is a Buddhist, she tried to mix both faiths to describe herself: "I am a *Catholic Buddhist*." It is not just parents in a family who can have differing beliefs systems. The children tried to navigate their own sense of religious identity: Ronald: "My parents … well, my dad's atheist, my sister is Christian, my mother is Catholic, 'cause they're Armenian, so they're really religious. Um, my brother I think he's atheist as well. There's a few atheists in my family but a lot of them are Russian Orthodox and Christian. I am Catholic, I think!"

Anne lamented the fact that her mother is an atheist, with no religious beliefs, and that she is judged on that by some people. Anne: "Like my mother, she don't [*sic*] believe in anything. Her mother was Christian, and her sister is Christian, but she just doesn't believe in anything. Just sometimes people are kind of like… and she is shunned by some people, like judged for not believing in anything." This statement

by Anne gives meaning to her earlier comment, that religion is private, and people are judged when they share their belief system. She is in fact speaking from the experiences of her own family. Noah was the only child who explicitly identified his male parent as religious. He spoke of how he liked to read and study religious materials with his father. The children who identified with religious traditions outside Catholicism did not report other belief traditions within their families. The majority of the children taking part in this research project (60%) lived in blended-faith families.

Influence of Grandparents on Catholic Religious Identity

It was revealed that grandparents were the most important group shaping and influencing the religious identity of most of the Catholic children involved in this study. Over 68% of the Catholic children cited their grandparents' influence in the religious lives. Rose: "I go to Mass with my gran, she is very religious, she is the sacristan in the church;" Mia: "My nana has lots of lovely holy pictures and statues and we pray together; we do not pray at home, so I like that about my nana." Those within the Orthodox tradition who were separated from their grandparents because they lived in different countries reflected on their influence. Tijana: "When I go to [Serbia] sometimes I go and visit my granny and I help out in the church there with the others and pray with her." This is in comparison on only 20% citing their parents as their main influence.

Faith Practice and Family

Bradford (1995) emphasises the importance of allowing children to have an opportunity to link into and experience their faith communities. The findings of the current research suggest that not all children who took part in the study, especially those of the Catholic tradition, were afforded the chance to be in regular contact with their faith communities.

Catholic Children's Minimal Connection with the Wider Faith Community

It was shown that most of the children taking part in the study from within the Catholic tradition (84%) had minimal contact with their faith community. They attested to attending only for major religious events. Ronald: "We especially go like the festival days of the religion like on Christmas, Easter, etc." Mia: "We sometimes go to the Cathedral on Sunday for Mass—not all the time." Interestingly, the Catholic children

did not return any photographs of community gatherings as part of the photovoice session. Children from the Catholic tradition who spoke of attending events at their faith community appeared to attend mainly with their grandparents. Anne: "I go to Mass all the time with my granny; she is very religious."

Importance of Community Worship for Orthodox and Evangelical Christian Children

The research revealed that the Christian Orthodox children who took part in the study did not have a local community with which to attend worship. Some recorded travelling up to 100 km to join with others of their tradition. Tjiana: "We just, like, book a spot in Ireland, because there's like none of our churches here, and when we're in Serbia, we go to our churches that we have." The Christian Orthodox children spoke of the joy of the community and the amount of preparation that is done before they attend Mass. The children highlighted the making of the bread to be used for Eucharist in the community gathering as something very special in the home. These children contributed a variety of images from their faith community gatherings to the photovoice session.

The member of the Evangelical Christian community who took part in this research spoke of, and depicted, his faith community gatherings as part of the photovoice session. He talked about the importance of sharing his faith with the others when they gathered, and of praising Jesus in song. The community he described, and in which he took a very active part, was, according to him, vibrant and interactive. Noah: "Our community sings a lot and we praise Jesus, people sit around and are very happy, after about a half hour we move to Bible reading and people share their views and then more community worship". In both cases, community gatherings were central to the lives of the children and gave them a definite sense of religious identity.

Religious Imagery in Granny's House

Children from the Catholic faith tradition who took part in this study recorded few religious images in their homes. During the photovoice session, these children contributed many pictures of religious objects and practices within what appeared to be their home environment. However, some were quick to point out that the images were mainly from their grandparents' homes, and it was in this environment, rather than in their own homes, that they most often engaged in prayer. Indeed, the presence of this imagery in their grandparents' homes appeared to lead to shared moments of prayer with them.

Anna: "This is a picture at my granny's house, it is of Mary and Jesus."

Rose: "Well when I'm at my gran's, I would [pray], and there's like pictures everywhere of Jesus and stuff so you kind of are just like there like. Um, she has like a magnet with a prayer on it and it's just on the fridge so like you know just eating your dinner or something, you'd casually be reading the prayer. I sometime say the Rosary with her in the evening.

The children identify a number of pictures of religious saints and altars in their environments and compare them within the different traditions.

Rose: "This is the statue of St Anthony at my nana's house – she prays to him and I join her at times." This once again demonstrates the influence that some grandparents have on the faith development of children within the Catholic tradition. In contrast, the children from the Orthodox tradition who took part in this research brought images of the altars that were in their own homes, and they spoke about prayer as part of their home lives. They attested to the traditional religious iconography in their homes and the prayer moments they experienced there.

Amy: "This is our altar at home. We are Christian Orthodox. We pray at home and sometimes study about our religion."

Discussion on Religious Identity

The children highlighted the complexity of religious or belief identity in their lives. Some children demonstrated a very fluid understanding of their religious identity, which chimes in with *REMC* (ESRI 2010). Many identified their religious identity as being different from that of their parents and other members within their family. This further illustrates that in Ireland and within families, religious identity is no longer homogeneous (ESRI 2010 p. 40). By comparison with children in Flanders (Kuusisto et al. 2017; ESRI 2010), who struggled to describe the religious identity of their parents, all the children who took part in the present study were able to identify their parents' religious identity or worldview. However, some of them were unable to explain what that identity or worldview really meant. Those who did not identify as Catholic were more definite about their religious tradition. This was most evident among the children of the Orthodox Christian and Evangelical Christian belief systems, which concurs with Mawhinney et al. (2010).

It is worth noting the diversity of faith present in 71% of the group who initially identified themselves as Catholic. Their responses and contributions suggest a fluid belief system, influenced in part by the heterogeneity of religious affiliation within their family units. While younger children are usually guided by adults and parents on the matters of religious identity (Kitching and Shanneik 2015), those of the age group involved in this research typically moved between Stages 2 and 3 of Fowler's (1981) phases of faith development.

Documents prepared by the Catholic Church, for example, in the Irish context, *Share the good news* (2010), and researchers such as Darmody et al. (2014, 2012), claim that the parents and the home are the primary influences on the development of children's religious identity. This situation is changing, as can be observed from

the experience of this group of children, who, in many cases, came from multi-faith, multi-belief homes, and whose grandparents appeared to be the main influence in their religious lives. This concurs with Copen and Silverstein's (2007) American study, which highlights the importance of grandparents (especially grandmothers) in the transmission of religious beliefs. While Francis et al. (2016) do not cite grandparents as the primary influence, they find that 90% of Irish Catholic girls recognise the importance of religion for their grandparents. In the Irish context, it appears that the place of parents is being replaced by that of grandparents in the development of children's Catholic religious identity. While formerly they were simply regarded as "religious", it appears that grandparents are now becoming the primary influence on Catholic religious identity.

The development of the community aspect of the tradition, where people gather to celebrate their faith, appears to be on the decline for Catholics in Ireland (Cragun 2017; Quinn 2017). The present study concurs with this. Bradford emphasises the importance of community practice as a way of developing religious identity, and outlines what should be on offer in a healthy community of faith (1999 p. 8). His idea of community practice concurs with Rolheiser's (1998) *non-negotiable* contention that community participation must be part of Christian spirituality. Interestingly, Hay and Nye (2006) consider that the nurturing of a child's religious identity is the responsibility of the teacher. They posit that it is their task to keep the mind of the child open to all possibilities and to encourage personal awareness and the development of a social spirituality, rather than placing it within a particular community. In many ways, Hay and Nye (2006) contest the importance of community participation as outlined by Rolheiser and Bradford. However, Hyde (2006) does not attribute the same level of importance to the community. He claims that children, given their ordinary and natural openness to religion, experience spirituality in many ways. Some simply describe an experience (Hart 2003), others express it through questioning (Hyde 2008), through wonder and awe, and these experiences are so profound within their development that they are carried into adulthood.

Literature emphasises the importance of children being free to express their thoughts and ideas and so to come to a safe place where their sense of the religious identity can be articulated and appreciated in a confident way. The idea of children finding their own way within a safe environment was something that was happening for some of the Catholic children involved in this study. Though they might not have attended faith community gatherings, they did find time to visit places of worship on their own, and in private. Doyle: "Um, I rarely go to the church, but I do pray at home, but I do sometimes do it at the church. But the last day when we had like this optional half day, me and a few friends, we weren't busy, but we came back to school to see what's going on, and I was like 'Do you want to go to church to see what's going on?' We went in and it got serious all of a sudden, and then we all went to different parts of church lighting candles, thinking about people that we know and all that. And then like praying, kneeling down on the … the chairs and all that."

Conclusion

The present study was about (a) giving children the opportunity to exercise their rights in having their voice heard in relation to issues of conscience and religion, as set out in Article 14 of the UNCRC (UN 1989), and (b) identifying their needs, in particular those of their religious lives. Coles also gives children an opportunity to exercise these rights (1990). He describes the children as pilgrims, who understood that life was a journey, and are anxious to make sense of it. He claims that they are interested in the meaning of life and questions of ultimate concerns. This study concurs with Coles, as we see children trying to make meaning of life and struggling to answer questions of ultimate concern to them and the people around them.

   This voice of the children concurs with others (Darmody et al. 2012; ESRI 2010 p. 40) in affirming that their sense of religious identity is fluid, and that those who are living in blended-faith families have views that can be in conflict with what is being presented in school (ESRI 2010 p. 43). It also affirms that community practice of faith is absent for much of the time among Catholic children (Kitching and Shanneik 2015). This research accepts that some Catholics in Ireland are so-called 'cultural Catholics', who only attend the local Catholic Church for major feasts and events in their lives; and that these are in contrast with those of other faith traditions, who regularly gather as communities to pray and celebrate. Notwithstanding this, Catholic children enjoy certain parts of the faith practice and highlight private prayer with their grandparents and private non-directive prayer in a church setting. The children in this study attest to a clear sense of 'being' religious or having a belief system that is valued. Through using a rights-based approach, as articulated by Lundy (2007), and appropriate participator-based methodologies, the children were able to share their religious world view and learn from others in their class.

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Chapter 10
The Queerness of Education: Rethinking Catholic Schooling Beyond Identity

Seán Henry

Abstract Catholic education in formalised settings such as schools is often tied to the preservation of multiple modes of Catholic identities, from more traditionalist conceptions of what it means to 'be' Catholic to more plural and open-ended perspectives. The association of Catholic schooling with Catholic identities is often appealed to in responding to the supposed tensions that exist between religion and queerness: what it means to 'be' Catholic is often seen as the reason for either solidifying or disrupting the religious/queer divide as it plays out in school. The purpose of this paper is to take issue with both approaches on the grounds that both continue to tie Catholic schooling with Catholic identity, something which I argue risks sustaining the religious/queer divide through identity's dependence on already existing modes of (religious and queer) identification. With the view to responding to this trend, I argue that what needs to be foregrounded in discussions around religion, queerness, and Catholic schooling is the queerness of education itself, that is, education's role in transforming extant social and religious structures by providing opportunities for students to disidentify from the current state of things. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of this for understanding the 'distinctiveness' of the Catholic school, and the role of 'faith formation' therein.

Keywords Catholic identity · Queerness and catholic schooling · Disidentification · Queer theologies

Introduction

Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the only fruit* is a novel that often comes to me when reflecting on the relationship between Christianity and queerness and its relevance to questions of Catholic schooling. The story centres on the semi-fictionalised childhood experiences of the author, who is destined for life as a Christian missionary before falling in love with Melanie, another girl at church. Winterson likens the

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punishments she endures because of her affections (which include having to undergo an exorcism) to a 'kind of numbness, me in ecclesiastical quarantine, them in a state of fear and anticipation' (2001 p. 171). Winterson's use of the word 'quarantine' is noteworthy: the image brings with it associations of entrapment, evoking a sense of closure, confinement, separateness. This, combined with the fact that the quarantine subtends the space between 'me' and 'them' in a manner that is both isolating and abusive, frames the relation between queerness and Christianity in antagonistic terms, in ways that are incommensurable and incongruent.

Understanding the relationship between queerness and Christianity in this oppositional register has been a longstanding feature of Catholic education. In 1983, for instance, the *Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education* explicitly framed sex education in Catholic schools in heteronormative terms, that is, in terms that valorised (marital) forms of heterosexual sexual expression as normative over same-sex sexual acts and relationships. Furthermore, in 2019 the *Congregation for Catholic Education* responded to the increasing recognition of transgender identities in education in negative ways, arguing that Catholic education ought to be grounded in a 'traditional' theological anthropology that frames gender in purely biological (rather than, say, in socially constructed or affective) terms. Crucially, such claims are rooted in the taken-for-granted assumption that Catholic education (and the Catholic school in particular) ought to exist as a site for preserving a narrowly-construed understanding of Catholic identity, one that is immutable in its deference to institutional orthodoxies, and their attendant expressions of homophobia and transphobia.

Problematising this taken-for-granted assumption is at the heart of this chapter's purpose. To provide context, such a task becomes necessary if we consider, as one example, the 2016 revelation in the Irish context of the use of the gay dating and sex app 'Grindr' by Catholic seminarians. The revelations brought about a great deal of commentary, much of which, to my mind, relied on a discourse similar to that sustaining the quarantine of Jeanette's childhood abuses. Una Mullally, journalist for the *Irish Times* and well-known contributor to queer commentary and politics, wrote the following in response to the story: 'Another question the Church and society needs to ask itself, is why a gay man would enter the priesthood, when the organisation preaches against homosexuality. It certainly is something of a paradox …' (Mullally 2016). Characterising the entry of a gay man to the Catholic priesthood as a 'paradox' rests, as I see it, on a lens that reifies gay identities and Catholic identities as necessarily antithetical to one another: in such instances, the separateness between 'me' and 'them', the essentialised dichotomy that sustains the quarantine of Jeanette's childhood, is preserved.

Of course, given the position of the Catholic Church in relation to homosexuality and gender identity detailed above, Mullally's comments are valuable in their commitment to challenging the hetero- and cisnormativity at the heart of the Church's institutional structures. They become less helpful, though, in their inability to offer productive ways forward that move away from generalisations disconnected from the complexities, contradictions, and uncertainties of religious and queer lives, lives that often can and do include Catholic priests who engage in consensual sexual

activity with other men. Indeed, in increasingly polarising times, is it not necessary for Catholic education to begin imagining alternative ways of relating to questions of sexuality and gender that avoid granting legitimacy to ossifying and divisive dichotomies? In this vein, in thinking about the place and purpose of Catholic schooling, has the time not come for us to avoid bracketing off Catholic and queer identities as inevitably this or that? Indeed, is framing these realities in terms of identity helpful at all?

The orientation of this chapter arises out of sympathy with these questions. I suggest that the opposition often set up between Catholicism and queerness is left uninterrupted in Catholic education scholarship when the purpose of Catholic schooling is tied presumptively to the preservation of Catholic identity. I challenge the work of those who seek to bridge the gap between queerness and religious schooling more generally (including Christian schooling in particular), arguing that this work risks being undermined insofar as religious schooling continues to be tied to already existing modes of religious identity.

In this regard, I suggest that in order to radically progress how we conceptualise the relation between Catholic schooling and queerness, what is needed is a move away from matrices of identity in how we think about Catholic education, and a move towards embracing what it might mean to speak of education as a queer political praxis, one that opens up the possibility for transforming extant social and religious structures by providing opportunities for students to disidentify from the current state of things. I conclude by briefly reflecting on the implications of this queer reading of Catholic schooling for understanding the 'distinctiveness' of the Catholic school, the role of 'faith formation' therein, as well as on the degree to which such a thesis speaks to, or undermines, the theological quest for the sacred that many Catholic school communities hold dear.

Queerness and the Religious School: Resisting the Antagonism

At variance to the perspectives offered by the *Congregation of Catholic Education* above, there have been a small number of voices within educational scholarship that have sought to reimagine the religious school beyond the opposition between religion and queerness. Michael Merry (2005), for example, argues for a view of Muslim schooling capable of a liberal engagement with issues around homosexuality. He sets up his argument as a challenge to the work on homosexuality and Islamic education by Halstead and Lewicka (1998), which Merry believes is limited in its reliance on a logic that assumes the inevitable opposition between 'Islam, as a religion, against homosexuality' (2005 p. 23). For Merry, this logic sanctions an 'extremely static view' of Muslim identity that fails to acknowledge 'highly differentiated manifestations of Islam throughout the world'. Merry is resistant to views that 'foist a monolithic reading of homosexuality onto Islam' (2005 p. 25) as such

a tendency is both inaccurate and inimical to the possibility of liberal dialogue in Muslim schools. Merry's view of Muslim schooling, then, is one that has echoes with Stephen Macedo's point that what is crucial about teaching and schooling from a liberal standpoint 'is that no one educational authority should totally dominate; that children acquire a measure of distance on all claims to truth in order to think critically' (2000 p. 238). In this way, Merry proposes a vision of Muslim schooling grounded in a 'critical distance' capable of bringing the fluid religious identities of Muslim schooling in harmony with an encounter with those of gays and lesbians.

In a similar manner to Merry, Clarence Joldersma argues that Christian identities are far less uniform than is often suggested, and that it is possible to utilise resources from the Christian tradition to make the case for Christian schools adopting 'a welcoming embrace of LGBT students' (2016 p. 33), an embrace that moves away from a language of 'them' to a language of 'us' (2016, p. 44). Drawing on Nicholas Wolterstorff's (2004) reading of the Hebrew Bible (in particular the image of God as a redeemer for the oppressed and marginalised) Joldersma argues that a Christian school is characteristically Christian when it creates safe and secure spaces for queer students, spaces where students' sexual and spiritual journeys can develop in 'intertwined and fluid' ways (2016 p. 43).

Reiterating his previous work on the emergence of Gay-Straight Alliances in Canadian Catholic schools, Graham McDonough (in a similar move to Joldersma) also claims that there is scope within the resources of the Christian tradition to justify Catholic schools taking affirmative stances where queer staff and students are concerned. Drawing on the 'People of God' ecclesiology characteristic of the papal exhortations of the Second Vatican Council, McDonough envisions the Catholic school as a 'public ecclesial space' diverse enough to grant queer identities constitutive weight in understanding what it might mean to identify a Catholic school as 'Catholic' (2016 p. 174).

While valuable in terms of disrupting the immediate association of the religious school with, say, deference to hetero- and cisnormative theologies and dogmas, the writers nonetheless build their arguments on the taken-for-granted assumption that the religious school and religious identity are necessarily aligned. The focus on identity underpinning their arguments comes to the fore in the unchallenged assumption that the religious school is somehow invested in the production of religious identities, however diversely affirmative of queerness those identities might be. Indeed, Merry, Joldersma and McDonough all implicitly frame the religious school as somehow connected to developing the religious identities of students, and that it simply needs to do so in a way that is receptive to the spaciousness that already exists within certain understandings of religious identity in order to be queer-inclusive. In calling attention to this, I do not seek to suggest that the *incidental* preservation of religious identity through schooling is problematic for society in and of itself (indeed, in many religious school contexts this will most likely happen). I simply question the alignment of the religious school's purpose with the *intentional* preservation of religious identity (however, diversely conceived) for such an impulse, to my mind, risks losing sight of what is distinctively *educational* about the school by setting certain structural and religious limits upon the school's work.

In expanding on this last point, let us follow Joldersma and McDonough for a moment, and imagine that the Catholic school were to hypothetically re-orient its activities towards the production of queer-positive forms of Catholic identity. While the divide between Catholicism and queerness would, on one level, be overcome in understanding the Catholic school in these terms, what would happen to the opposition set up between religious and atheist identities, for example, or to the oft-cited divide between more traditional and progressive religious identities? By aligning the work of religious schools to preserving and expanding certain (queer-positive) identities, do we not invariably close down possibilities and experiences that lie beyond those factors that inform the religious/queer divide to begin with?

I make this claim on the grounds that identities are always reflective of already existing social and religious structures, and are therefore incapable of tapping into forms of experience and relationship that lie outside the current state of things. In disrupting the dichotomy between Catholicism and queerness, then, would it not be more helpful for us to disentangle Catholic schooling from extant modes of Catholic identity altogether? In thinking about how we might go about this task, I unpack what it might mean to speak of education more generally, and Catholic schooling in particular, as a queer political praxis.

Education as a Queer Political Praxis

Understanding what I mean when I speak of education as a queer political praxis firstly entails developing what I mean by 'queer' itself. Queer theologian Susannah Cornwall points to the difficulty of utilising definitions in relation to queer, emphasising how 'the very concept of queer has built into it from the start an idea of elusiveness, uncertainty, non-fixity, and a resistance to closed definitions' (2011 p. 9). For Cornwall, 'queer' is a term that is necessarily uncontainable, evoking an important sense of unknowability that subverts the neatness of static classifications. In spite of this, there still exists for Cornwall the possibility of us attending to some of the enduring features that have become associated with 'queer', and she sets about this task by indicating queer's 'treble function of noun, verb and adjective' (2011 p. 9). I borrow her threefold understanding of queer in this way as I think it offers a useful route for coming to grips with what queer might mean, without losing its conceptual slipperiness.

First, queer as noun. It is difficult to determine exactly when queer began to be used as a signifier for identity. Indeed, right up to the 1960s queer was typically used as a derogatory insult directed towards those who allied themselves with non-heterosexual forms of sexual and/or gender identity and their expressions. By the 1980s and early 1990s onwards, however, queer positively entered the lexicon of lesbian, gay and bisexual activism. Activist groups such as *Queer Nation* famously sported slogans like 'We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!' in their political work, for instance (Pickett 2009 p. 157). The use of the noun queer in this way became

allied with a deviant form of self-identity (typically along sexual and/or gender-based lines) that refused to comply to the conformities of heterosexual and cisgender society, which many queer activist groups saw as relying on an overly deterministic and essentialist understanding of what it meant to espouse a sexual and/or gender identity to begin with. Queer, in short, was turned on its head from homophobic slur to a positive form of identity that gained its significance in its very refusal to grant heterosexual and cisgender identities a character of an unyielding and inflexible sort.

The paradox of the term as noun is perhaps self-evident: it signifies a dissident form of sexual and/or gender identity that gains its identity in embracing the more general futility of *identitarian* logics. It is because of this that in more recent times a further distinction has been drawn between lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex identities and queer identities: the latter is seen as far more fluid and subversive than the former, specifically in the formers' credence to more fixed or static forms of self-identification (Neary 2017). Up till now in this chapter, queer has been used in this nominal fashion to signal any person who identifies in non-heterosexual and/or cisgender ways. However, as I have been questioning the helpfulness of allying education with identity altogether, it is with a priority to queer as verb and adjective that I frame what follows.

Second, queer as *verb*. Given its roots in the sixteenth century German word *quer* meaning strange or oblique (Bevir 2010 p. 1131), it is perhaps unsurprising that queer has also come to encapsulate a particular style of *doing* something, specifically in a way that characterises the action with a sense of oddness and perplexity. To utilise a queer lens is to interrogate something with a sensitivity to unearthing and/or building upon moments, practices, behaviours, and gestures that disorient how that subject of critique is typically understood, related to, and/or oriented towards (Ahmed 2006). In this sense, queer as a verb signifies a way of relating in the world that gravitates towards the creation of new and untold futures, futures beyond the currently identifiable or permissible. While appearing apparently limitless, this commitment is grounded in a very specific focus: namely, the interruption of hetero- and cisnormativity. Queering something in an interrogative fashion (as an enactment of queer as verb) involves getting under its skin and turning it on its head, making it strange, in order to expose and disrupt the tools of homophobia, biphobia, and/or transphobia that might inform the subject of critique.

It is in this vein that José Estaban Munoz calls for a '*disidentificatory*' politics in queer theorising, where the self is enacted 'at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short-circuit' (1999 p. 6): on this meaning, queer as verb actively destabilises hetero- and cisnormative logics that seek to reduce people to how they might be socially identified by others. This is not to suggest that I seek to dismiss the positive effects that the discourses of social constructivism and identity politics have had on queer lives and experiences: after all, these have necessitated and galvanised queer activism in many ways. While not denying their influence and significance, I am nonetheless resistant at granting social constructivist discourses of identity ultimacy over our lives in relationship with others. Indeed, my alignment of queer as verb with disidentification arises precisely from a desire to expose and

sustain the possibilities that can arise when we tap into the irreducible complexities of life, an irreducibility that escapes social constructivism, identity politics, and their discursive and structural limits.

Finally, queer as *adjective*. To describe something as queer is to describe that which allies itself with the kinds of political and theoretical practices I have just explored. In this spirit, queer as adjective is often used within academic discourse to draw attention to the disruptiveness of the intellectual work being engaged in. For instance, there are scholars in fields as diverse as queer literary studies, queer hermeneutics, queer legal theories, queer sports studies, queer geographies, queer media studies, queer phenomenologies and queer theologies, as well as in sub-disciplines like queer curriculum studies in the context of educational research.

The types of concepts academics engage with can also be described as queer: from conceptualising autobiography as a queer curriculum practice to the concept of a queer pedagogy itself. Importantly though, in spite of (or, indeed, because of) its disruptive quality, queer as adjective suggests a degree of preservation around that which is being queered, even while the subject of critique is undergoing potentially radical forms of reimagining. Take, for instance, the queer understanding of Catholic schooling that I seek to offer here. Thinking about Catholic schooling in queer, *disidentificatory* terms diverges significantly from how Catholic schooling has been typically theorised up till now: indeed, many might see it as almost entirely antithetical to what Catholic schooling is or ought to be for. And yet, this chapter nonetheless positions itself as engaging with, and reconstructing, Catholic schooling, rather than merely discarding or discrediting it.

Having tentatively explored what it might mean to utilise the word 'queer', it now becomes necessary for us to think about its relationship to education. In what ways does education enact a queer political praxis? Following the work of Gert Biesta, I argue that the transformative quality of education comes to the fore when individualised notion of the self are put 'at risk'. In other words, I see education as a praxis that entails an 'interruption' of the stability and security of the ego, and the structures and discourses we often use to sustain this security (for example, by aligning human endeavour to already existing structures such as religious institutions and/or discourses). In framing education in these terms, Biesta writes 'I am, however, avoiding certain other words and concepts, most notably the notion of identity—which for me has more to do with the ways in which we identify with existing orders and traditions than with ways of acting and being that are "outside" this' (Biesta 2013 p. 18). By separating his analysis from notions of identity, Biesta preserves education's concern for transforming 'what is desired into what is desirable' (2013 p. 4): through engagement with who or what is other, education becomes capable of opening up alternative possibilities to what the status quo might currently permit or determine.

By transcending the limits of identification, education renders the impossible possible: through the dialogue engendered by our exposure to others, education grants us access to different kinds of relationships that would otherwise escape the limits of how people understand themselves in connection with extant realities. It is on these educational grounds that I also distance myself from logics of identity in

this chapter. What I seek to offer is a view of Catholic schooling that goes beyond the production of identity, for it is in doing so that the limits of religious identities (and their attendant exclusions) can be exposed and interrupted as a matter of educational necessity.

However, an important question to consider at this point is the degree to which queerness truly features within my thesis, for Biesta does not engage with the task of queering education at all. Indeed, does Biesta's dissociation of education from identity hold specifically queer potential? I respond to this question in the affirmative by drawing from Claudia Ruitenberg's (2010) work, who engages with Jacques Rancière in expounding on what it might mean for a school to be engaged in queer politics. She grounds her argument in Rancière's reading of politics, which is distinct from more general understandings of politics as linked, say, to the workings and goals of existing political parties and/or institutions.

Central to Rancière's understanding of politics is his emphasis on 'the distribution of the sensible', that is, those 'self-evident facts' that constitute who or what can legitimately exist as perceptible and intelligible within the fabric of the social order (2004 p. 12). For Rancière, shifting the distribution of the sensible is at the heart of political action, for politics entails opening up spaces where the supposed naturalness of what can be legitimately sensed and perceived in this world is called into question, disrupting in the process the inegalitarianism often created by such logics. In this way, shifting the distribution of the sensible rests on the view that, through such practices, 'any order or distribution of bodies into functions corresponding to their "nature" and places … is undermined, thrown back on its own contingency' (Rancière 1999 p.101). Political work, in short, is committed to exposing and undermining the taken-for-grantedness through which the equality of certain political subjects can be otherwise denied. For Ruitenberg, queer praxis can be read as political in this Rancièrian sense 'when it exposes the contingency of sex, gender, and sexual categories and designations, and challenges the social norm that the proper place of queerness is the private sphere' (2010 p. 623). This echoes my understanding of queer as verb: queer politics enacts its queerness by actively exposing, interrogating, and reimagining those assumptions that confer hetero- and cisnormative conceptions of sex and gender political, economic, cultural, social, and religious dominance.

Importantly, in framing how a queer conception of politics can actively go about shifting the distribution of the sensible, Ruitenberg (much like Biesta) draws a necessary distinction between identification and subjectivity. For Ruitenberg, the latter has political effects, for 'politics is a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of subjectification' rather than of identities and of modes of identification. As Ruitenberg succinctly observes the 'crucial distinction between identity and subjectivity, as Rancière uses the terms, is that subjectivity questions the apparent naturalness of the rank and order implied in identities' (2010 p. 622). Subjectification is inherently disruptive of the fixed limits imposed by identity, as it is in our relationships with others that the limits of the existing order of things collapse, and alternative possibilities (beyond what is currently perceptible or intelligible) emerge.

Significantly, Ruitenberg writes of how this work opens up a subject space 'where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted'

(Rancière 1999 p. 36). Queer politics shifts the distribution of the sensible when it enacts forms of human togetherness that disidentify from the limits of extant (hetero- and cisnormative) social structures and discourses, and for Ruitenberg it is this that characterises the work of the school. Ruitenberg argues that in order for the school to live out a 'sharply political' praxis, it needs to sustain, rather than conflate or downplay, the gap between identity and subjectivity, for it is precisely through this gap that the queering of hetero- and cisnormative modes of identity can be enacted.

In this respect, what I offer in this chapter, then, is an invitation for Catholic education to embark on what some might read to be a very radical departure from how Catholic schooling has been typically understood. I do this out of a commitment to disrupting the divide between Catholicism and queerness, but in ways that fundamentally shift the *identitarian* terms of reference that are typically used in engaging in this kind of work. In light of what I have argued for, faith formation in the Catholic school, for instance, would become less about confirming or assuming alliance to religious identity on the part of our students, and more about exposing the traditions of Catholicism to the formative possibilities created by their own potential self-effacement. What would make the Catholic school distinctively 'Catholic', then, would be less about identifying the school's students, staff or activities *with* Catholicism, per se, and more about creating spaces for both the beauty and the ugliness of Catholicism and its heritage to be exposed to the multiple queer futurities engendered by the 'disidentificatory' quality of the educational encounter.

Of course, many might argue that what I am suggesting risks disrespecting the quest for the sacred that many Catholic school communities hold dear. Indeed, is my argument, in its resistance to identity, fundamentally anti-theological? Or, alternatively, are there theological and religious resources at our disposal that speak to my refigured alignment of the Catholic school with queer, 'disidentificatory' praxes? To my mind, there are. I am thinking, for instance, of the ever-expanding field of queer theologies, which can be understood as particular styles of thinking and feeling theology that have as their aim the interrogation, reconstruction, and reimagination of theological tropes, images, arguments, and traditions with the view to overcoming the damaging legacies of religiously-inspired hetero- and cisnormativity. Queer theologies, being queer, are necessarily unorthodox in the sense that they deliberately move away from traditional and/or canonical conceptions of God-talk, conceptions which have (for the queer theologian) been framed for too long in terms of a heterosexual and/or cisgender take on divine-human experience.

Jeremy Carette and James Bernauer's take on what it means to queer religion (in the sense of queer as verb) goes some way to illustrating the affinities between recent trends in theological scholarship and the praxis argued for in this chapter

> 'Religion becomes queer when it breaks up the desiring self, when it refuses to confess an identity, when it refuses to say who we are, and acknowledges a plural self with polymorphous desires. To queer religion is to queer the foundations of theology, its monotheism, its monosexuality and its monopoly of truth.' (2004 p. 225)

Queer theologies, in other words, expand our understanding of what religion means, in ways that destabilise those fixed notions of identity and belonging that

sustain the oppositional relation between religion and queerness. On this meaning, queer theologies disrupt 'unified' conceptions of God and religion, serving, as Catholic Latin American queer theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid argues, as 'an example of high theological doubting or queering, irreverent in the sense that [they tend] to desacralize what has been made sacred for the sake of ideological interests' (Althaus-Reid 2001, p. 58). Can this not be a purpose of Catholic education and schooling? To desacralize what has been traditionally made 'sacred' in order to understand the very idea of sacredness more fully? To disrupt, rather than solidify, our sexual, gendered and theological imaginations?

For me, if education is interested in changing lives and futures, in creating opportunities for personal and social transformation to occur, then this demands cultivating a greater degree of theological spaciousness at the interface between religion and queerness in the Catholic school, a spaciousness that transcends the strictures of identity and its limits (Henry 2019). For Jeanette's sake, it is my hope that this chapter opens up some queer possibilities for beginning this work.

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Chapter 11
Living with Meaning at a Time When Believing in God Is an Option: An Investigation into Arthur Miller's *Death of a* Salesman and Its Implications for Catholic Education

David Torevell

Abstract This chapter suggests that Miller's classic twentieth-century American text, *Death of a Salesman* can be helpful in understanding our Western contemporary culture when belief in God is no longer axiomatic. I take Charles Taylor's notion of the 'middle-ground'—that space between an acknowledgement of the fullness of life through religious means and a condition where anxiety, melancholy and even nihilism predominate. Coming from a Jewish background, Miller understood this ground very well, since he no longer held any overt religious beliefs and yet maintained an ethical vision worthy of a Rabbi. His text dramatically demonstrates some of the dilemmas involved when periods of recognition *(anagnorisis)* emerge about oneself and the social context in which one is living. I contend that his play adds significantly to the literary genre of 'tragedy' in representing the 'common man' as a 'hero' worthy of our respect and pity. Catholic educators might use such texts to invigorate the spiritual and moral core of their students' lives, with particular reference to the theme of self-worth and those aspects which give meaning and significance to people in an increasingly Western secular age.

Keywords Self-worth · Imago dei · Employment · Middle-ground · Miller

Introduction: The Dramatist in a 'Secular' Age—The Exploration of the 'Middle-Ground'

In order to present my case about Miller's *Death of a Salesman,* I first need to clarify Taylor's contention about forms of living in a Western secular age (Taylor 2007, p. 3).[1] I use the word 'secular' in agreement with his estimation that we now live at a time where belief in God is challenged and holding religious beliefs and engaging in spiritual practices is one option among many. As he writes, 'Belief in

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God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives' (2007, p. 3). But I wish to focus on Taylor's particular point about the 'middle ground' of human experience, the space or category between having a strong religious sense of the 'fullness' of life to which we orient ourselves spiritually and morally and its opposite, feelings of absence and alienation, characterised by periods of melancholy and *ennui*. On this 'middle-ground', 'we have escaped the forms of negation, exile, emptiness, without having reached fullness' (p. 6). We come to terms with this experience 'by the stable routine and order of life in which we do things which have some meaning, often witnessed in striving to live happily with our spouse and children while, at the same time, practising a profession which we find fulfilling and which contributes to human welfare' (p. 6). There is no clear sense of the transcendent *other* here, but a strong inclination to keep at bay feelings of exile and estrangement. Taylor's notion contextualises my argument about Miller's *Death of a Salesman* well and I wish to show how he dramatises effectively this condition in his celebrated play. Perhaps this is why it is still produced, still admired and still has relevance 70 years after its first performance and why it is an Advanced Level qualification set text in the UK for thousands of teenage students.

Scope

The scope of this chapter centres on an examination of the 'tragic' in Miller's play in relation to the moral and spiritual negotiations which were taking place among ordinary people in post-war 1950s America. This era was one of considerable religious and social change, a culture characterised by an old set of beliefs—the strong faith of the Puritan Fathers and the Catholic Irish and Italian immigrant population—and one where new ideas and a different identity in light of the myth of the American Dream were being forged (Wallace 2007, pp. 75–81; Esslin 2001). Miller's theatrical explorations into self-worth and meaningfulness re-construct the 'tragic hero' out of 'common man's' experience, to highlight the ongoing 'tragic' in ordinary experience and to hint at how, in the character of Willy Loman, the audience witnesses, on one level, a person of spiritual strength and dignity, but on another, someone who lost hope, which would eventually lead him to believe that there was no alternative but to end his own life; he lost the 'middle-ground' on which he had secured his existence for many years and succumbed to despair.

Faith, (Post) Modernity and Tragedy

The spiritual battle Willy finds himself in is largely *internalised.* Note, for example, Miller's original title for his play *The Inside of His Head.* Willy, early on in the play, admits, 'I have such thoughts, I have such strange thoughts' (Act One line 9). Miller bucks any trend that the tragic is no longer a vital, literary force in the

modern age by this much-admired text alone (Cunningham 2011; Steiner 1974). Postulating symbolic systems and meanings without a widely accepted theology to underpin them is a challenge (Bentley Hart 2003; Torevell 2000). Poole writes about the tragic dimensions in the drama when he refers to the 'gods' (social context) of the play as being 'no less powerful in their effects upon individuals than any tribal law administered by gods with names' (1988, p. 98; 2005). Less personal maybe, but just as real and just as bloody and just as vengeful. Indeed, their nebulous blandness makes them all the more dangerous and threatening—one cannot get a hold of them as a definitive force in the same way as the names and shapes of the gods.

To heighten this sense of the tragic, Miller's play revolves round his understanding of the dignity and inherent spirituality of the 'common man', the ordinary everyday American who has little political power and just gets by on his mediocre wages, in trying to support his family (Eagleton 2003). For Miller, quotidian experience is the stuff of tragedy. Human beings are capable of heroic feats of resilience and courage, qualities which ought not to be forgotten when they suffer from occasional and disabling bouts of self-doubt and anxiety. As Linda comments, 'A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man' (Miller 2015 Act One line 44). In February 1949 Miller wrote in *Tragedy and the Common Man* , 'I believe the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy as kings are'. The corner grocer can be just as tragic as the President of the United States if he 'engages the issues, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationship of man to God … the questions, in short, whose answers define humanity and the right way to live' (Miller 1949, 1988, p. 32). Talking of Lee Cobb's performance as Willy in the first 1949 New York production which one critic hailed as 'a high plain of tragic', Page comments, 'There was undoubtedly something appealing in the elevation of an ordinary American to heroic status' (2003, p. 91). Although America was experiencing a post-war boom at the time Miller wrote his play and on the cusp of unprecedented prosperity (Churchwell 2018), the play raises the spectre of what happens when consumerism takes hold in a society where there are winners and losers. Miller sees in Willy an ability to 'throw everything he has into the context−the battle to secure his rightful place in the world' (1949, unpaginated). This amounts to an internalised spiritual struggle to defy the consequences of oppressive forces. Willy responds to a traditional value system and ideals just as strong as any pre-modern tragic hero. His wife, Linda, alerts her sons to this grandeur: 'Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person' (Act One line 44). As Miller comments, 'Had Willy been unaware of his separation from values that endure he would have died contentedly while polishing his car … but he was agonised by his awareness of being in a false position, so constantly haunted by the hollowness of all he had placed his faith in' (1988, p. 34). But, in spite of this, Miller believes he also suffered from a severe limitation of self-awareness which added to his fall.

Anagnorisis

The notion of *anagnorisis* (recognition) is central in Aristotle's *Poetics* and is a dominant motif in much literature, while also having a significant role to play in the genre of tragedy (Aristotle 1996, 2000; Botani 2009; Cave 1988; Pappas 2002). It usually entails a shift from ignorance to knowledge (*peripeteia*) and reflects the moment or moments when characters become deeply and consciously aware of their own predicament and the social context in which they find themselves. It is thus indelibly linked to self-recognition and self-knowledge. It is witnessed in Biff's moving, confessional scene about whom he and his father really are. He insists on revealing the truth about these matters when he tells his father 'No, you're going to hear the truth—what you are and what I am!' (2015 Act Two line 104). And then, as the stage directions add, at the *peak of his fury* and having collapsed into tears he adds, 'Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop. Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it anymore. I'm just what I am. That's all' (Act Two line 105). Willy's dignified rebuff, '… you are Biff Loman!' (line 106) is also accurate—humanity *is* both dignified and noble *and* can be squashed to nothingness under free-market capitalism. Miller's left-wing politics are clearly evident here. As Eagleton comments, although capitalism has done some good 'it has done so at a staggering cost' (2018, p. 15). The second, more material recognition is seen, for example, in the symbolic exposure of the hose pipe, raising the question of *disturbing* knowledge or *unsettling* revelation (Cave 1988, p. 7).

The 'Jewishness' of the drama is associated with the suffering of the family. Wallace argues that it was within the *family* that battles were fought to clarify what any 'new' values might signify and this became the *mise-en-scene* for Miller and other American playwrights at this time, for example, Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams. Bloom suggests that Miller has captured in this text an ancient Jewish paradigm, which is also a universal one: 'Willy Loman is hardly a biblical figure, and he is not supposed to be Jewish, yet something crucial in him is Jewish, and the play does belong to that undefined entity we can call Jewish literature …' (2007, p. 3). It is true that in Willy we witness someone who seems permanently in exile and that the pain he suffers, like Jewish identity, is made sense of in the meaning it bears. Miller was asked by an interviewer if he was influenced by the Jewish tradition. He replied, 'Jews can't afford to revel too much in the tragic because it might overwhelm them. Consequently, in most Jewish writing there's always the caution, "Don't push too far toward the abyss, because you're liable to fall in"' (quoted in Bloom 2007, p. 148). Bloom's contention that the coherence and strength of the play resides in its portrayal of a cosmos informed by Jewish memory, is a significant one. Miller originally conceived the Lomans as a Jewish family. He writes, 'As Jews light years away from religion or community that might have fostered Jewish identity, {the Lomans] exist in a spot most Americans feel they inhabit—on the side-walk side of the glass, looking in at a well-lighted place'(2012, p. 46). That is why Bial can add, 'In terms of the play's narrative then, it is the lack of connection to his Jewish

roots that causes Willy Loman's downfall. Having tried too hard to assimilate, to be well-liked, to be American, he is left with no core values or beliefs to call his own' (2005, p. 58).

Moral and Spiritual Resistance

Who or what is largely to blame for the tragic fall of Willy Loman, his slide into anxiety and depression and his dark thoughts of suicide resulting in the final taking of his own life? The hero/protagonist? Forces or agencies with irresistible power beyond human control? Fate, fortune, chance, the stars, history, heredity, loss of religious identity? Usually in tragedy, it is a combination of human weakness coupled with a pressing social order.

Critchley argues that Greek tragedy 'slows things down by confronting us with what we do not know about ourselves' (2019, p. 3; Nussbaum 1986) and the same is true of modern tragedy. Audiences, post-Freud, will be alert to the fact that absolute self-knowledge is never possible. The set design for the first production of the play was by Jo Meilziner, who constructed many-levelled stages, intending to reflect Willy's mental state and which served to blur the past, the present and the possible future as well as indicating the deep layers of Willy's sub-conscious. Despite the plaintive sound of a flute and evocative stage lighting to signal temporal transition (Brater 2010, p. xviii), the audience becomes as bemused as Willy about the action and whether it is taking place in the present or in the past, as the play conjures up a dream-like remembering of past events, including repressed guilt about an adulterous affair. Indeed, Miller from the very start gives advice to any director and set designer: 'An air of dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality' (Miller 2015, p. 7). It is also seen early on in the first scene of the play when Willy tells his wife that while driving, '… I absolutely forgot I was driving … five minutes later I'm dreaming again …' (Act One line 9). And finally, at the end, we are told, 'He had the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong' (*Requiem* 110). The audience enters the befuddled space of Willy's mind and identify with his confusions and bewilderments, as if they were their own. These feelings are enhanced by the claustrophobic looming apartments that rob the sunlight from Willy's garden.

Recognition might entail the discovery of hypocrisy in others—note Willy's intense quarrels with his boss. It could reflect bitter battles with perceived failures—observe Willy's fight with his own feelings of worthlessness. In relation to his employers he says to his wife, 'I don't know the reason for it, but they just pass me by. I'm not noticed' (Act One line 28); or it might consist in an audience's gradual awareness of a protagonist's lack of self-awareness—seen in Willy's desperate attempts to justify his thinking and actions by the use of hackneyed phrases like, 'Be liked and you will never want' (Act One lines 25–26). Despite all this, there is a *degree* of *anagnorisis* as self-knowledge in Willy, witnessed by his planning for the future, symbolically portrayed by his sowing of new seeds in his enclosed garden, although

this ray of hope is never communicated as life-changing or absolute. But the downside of the American Dream and the nullifying, debilitating pressure of employment which has little regard for personhood is never fully realised by him. As we are told in the *Requiem* by Biff, his father 'never knew who he was' (2015 *Requiem* p. 111) One can only retaliate against the forces bearing down on human well-being when one is aware of their insidious manipulation and their lethal potential. The audience starts to *recognise* that Willy is dangerously close to self-destruction, a recognition to which he himself becomes attuned. Frye contends that what becomes recognised is seldom new; it is something which has been there all along, and which, by its ongoing reappearances and manifestations, brings the end in line with the beginning (1957, p. 193). For example, we are gradually introduced to Willy's dangerous driving at early moments in the drama and to the ominous presence of the hose pipe. The audience begins to wonder, as these cumulative dramatic devices take hold of their consciousness, did Willy attempt suicide much earlier before his last, definitive act? In one sense, then, Miller prepares his audience for this final, dreadful disclosure off stage, even, paradoxically, if it comes as a shock—such dying is never accepted sanguinely, even when it is half expected. The title is the 'before the action' notification to the audience that death is unavoidable, but of course, they do not know the means of Willy's death beforehand.

The *recognition* of overwhelming social forces one is up against is a key constituent of tragedy. Miller's tragic hero presents the audience with someone who has to endure the reality that he is no longer valued as an employer by a company he has worked for over a lifetime. The creeping despair which leads to his eventual suicide begins to appear once he becomes exhausted with his job and is no longer able to sell things as he once did. But as the play unfolds, the audience becomes aware that his own self-respect and identity are tied up very closely with his employment. Who Willy is, is never far removed from the salesman he has been all his life, despite having a loving wife and two sons. Once his dignity as an employee begins to collapse, his own feelings of self-worth begin to cave in too.

When Biff exclaims, with some accuracy, according to the social laws and terms of capitalism, that he and his father are '… a dime a dozen …' (Act Two line 105), Willy defiantly retorts, 'I am Willy Loman…' (line 106). Here, we see a heroic defiance of fate and it seems that Willy is able to mount his own moral attack against those forces which reduce human beings to numbers and faceless anonymity. Miller claims that what Willy wanted 'was to excel, to win out over anonymity and meaninglessness, to love and be loved, and above all, perhaps, to *count*' (quoted by Centola p. 33). A tragic hero embodies and represents a challenge to a grim determinism by the choices she makes. Unfortunately, what Willy is unable to do, is construct a personal identity of moral worth not associated with his employment. The final word of the play's title and the iconic image of Willy walking onto the stage at the start of the play with his burdensome suitcase in hand, endorse this equivalency. Why can Willy not accept that his working life is over and why can he not finally submit himself to a different future and find peace in this way? Miller partly answers these questions when he writes in 1949 that the genre 'derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who

we are in this world. … today the fear is as strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best' (unpaginated). Certainly, Willy has a deep sense of displacement, economically and existentially. Miller dramatises the moral challenge—is it possible to rise up against and transcend the forces of necessity and live in freedom? Since there is some spiritual resoluteness shown by Willy during the play, the audience might be tempted to say 'yes'. But he also seems a long way off the recognition that the 'gods' of capitalism are not really 'gods' at all, but mere idols.

Miller was not against people's aspirations to secure some form of material comfort for their families; what he opposed was the rampant materialism a distorted view of the *American Dream* that is produced. Churchwell writes that the play is not a story 'opposed to personal success or upward social mobility; indeed, it recognises how human such ambitions are. But it condemns the deterioration of that ideal into the superficial fetishization of objects and the rationalization of selfishness and greed' (2018 unpaginated). Karl Marx believed that human self-realisation was an end in itself and that human beings, as free agents, had every right to collectively determine their own destinies and not be controlled by those in executive power. The kind of 'production' that mattered to Marx was the creation of an authentic self, and he advocated a *spiritual understanding* of a person's nature and how that could be fostered. The irony for Willy is that out of a sincere love for his sons, he capitulates to the dark side of a capitalist system and to a warped *American Dream* which claims that economic motivations are legitimate motors of human endeavour and should dominate all others (Fukuyama 2018).

Self-worth, Employment and Vocation

Miller's drama echoes central concerns in Catholic education as he explores what a legitimate anthropology might entail. Although not explicitly religious, the play offers audiences the opportunity to reflect on the nature of the self by exposing its decline. Barker's (2007) estimation that its central theme is self-worth is an accurate one, and in this, it situates itself in relation to Genesis' teaching of humanity created in the *imago Dei*. Peachey is also right when he claims that 'What it means to be man or woman, and how we should live in a society that challenges our fundamental beliefs about humanity are the key questions of our time' (2018, p. 95). Linda has the clearest understanding of who her husband is, when she tells her son 'he's a *human being,* and a terrible thing is happening to him' (Act 1 pp. 44–45). Her words of warning, 'He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog' (Act 1 pp.44–45) have a shilling, ironic ring to them. The former 'culture' of brotherly employment has now disappeared: 'He drives seven hundred miles, and when he gets there no-one knows him anymore, no-one welcomes him' (Act I p. 45).

Emphasising the virtues of love, wisdom and the common good, Jacques Maritain's (1882–1973) contribution to Catholic educational thinking (Torevell 2019), like Sack's (2020), offers a countervailing voice to the discourse which sees paid

employment as the primary aim of education (Maritain 1943, 1946, 1962). Willy's dilemma is that he places too much store on his employment. He experiences a bitter sense of loss and alienation when he can no longer do his job as efficiently as he used to do. He has nothing left of worth, so decides to sell his own life for the vestiges of an assumed dignity which will be given to him and his family after his death. The self becomes another commodity to be sold, a part of the practice of capitalist exchange. Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, in an address to young people in (2010), echoing an Augustinian vein, said that the key to happiness was simple—it is to be found in God: 'We need to have the courage to place our deepest hopes in God alone, not in money, in a career, in worldly success … Only He can satisfy the deepest needs of our hearts'. I wrote in 2019 that Catholic institutions 'must not capitulate to the anti-Catholic reductionist ideology of education which claims that monetary success and employment necessarily lead to happiness and well-being …' (20). Griffiths argues that we live in an age where the proper *telos* of learning is not virtue or contemplation, but material success and the attainment of power (2011, pp. 102–122). In contrast, a Christian approach recognises that all knowledge is a route into the goodness of God's creation. The Augustinian distinction between *curiosita,* a debased form of learning centred around the establishment of dominance and *studiositas,* which emphasises a cognitive intimacy and love for what is learned, is an important one for Catholic educators to recognise.

This is interlinked with an emphasis on *vocation*, not ambition. Jamison argues that Catholic education is about encouraging students to discern what God is calling them to do. Using St. John Newman's sentence, 'God has created me to do him some definite service', he suggests that vocation should be at the heart of the Catholic curriculum: 'With such a vision … this would be a vocational curriculum in the profoundest meaning of the word vocation' (2013, p. 15). The issue Willy has to confront is to see that his 'vocation' does not rest entirely on his employment. Why is he unable to submit himself to a different future and find peace outside his role as a salesman? Miller writes that the genre of tragedy 'derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. … today the fear is as strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best' (1949 unpaginated). The dark underbelly of the American Dream and the nullifying pressure of working in a capitalist system is still with us globally, but in a different form, I think. Here, we recognise that Taylor's 'middle-ground' can be a dangerous one to inhabit, highly susceptible to harmful cultural and economic forces.

Conclusion

Death of a Salesman thus offers vivid glimpses of how those living in Taylor's 'middle-ground' might be sustained in their existence or be catapulted down into his third category—anger, depression and despair. It does this by dramatising the painful, spiritual and moral endeavours of its central characters. This is the only 'resolution'

the play offers. It might not be as definitively comforting as a religious one, but it serves to assuage fears that without religion there is only nihilism. Modern tragedies like Miller's, still have an important role to play in world where believing in a loving God is an option, and seemingly not possible for many. My hope is that it is a play which Catholic educators might wish to share with their students and to return to again and again.

Note

1. The secularisation debate has raged for a considerable time now from writers who claim, on the one hand, that belief in God in the West at the present time, has finally disappeared in the light of soaring consumerism (Eagleton 2015) and those like Ward (2019) who argue new forms of religious sensibility and spirituality are daily emerging at a rapid rate.

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Part III
Reflections on the Emerging Research About Catholic School Leadership

Introduction

Sean Whittle

In many respects, the reflections described in Parts I and II, about the Foundations and Identity issues in Catholic education have an inevitable impact on leadership in Catholic schools. Pinning down what leadership of Catholic schools involves has become more complicated because of the competing goals of Catholic education. In Part III, there are important contributions, two from those heavily involved in educating and preparing current and aspiring leaders in Catholic schools, and a third from a serving headteacher working in a Catholic secondary school in London. Together, all three offer an intriguing snapshot of the current directions of research surrounding leadership of Catholic schools.

In Chap. 12, David Fincham focuses on the issue of 'spiritual capital' and the Catholic headteacher. It was Grace's highly influential work from 2002 (*Catholic Schools: Missions, Markets and Morality*), which brought to the fore the often torturous situation that Catholic school headteachers find themselves in when maintaining the balance between the primary mission of Catholic schools and the educational market place that has become normal. The key to achieving this is having a sufficient supply of 'spiritual capital'. Grace's study raised the serious concern about the urgent need to renew spiritual capital if Catholic education is to avoid being swamped by the dubious values of the educational market created by policymakers and central government ideology. David Fincham works within Grace's analysis to investigate the needs of Catholic headteachers when it comes to maintaining spiritual capital. The chapter describes how Fincham has researched the issues at stake. His analysis shows that for the headteachers in his study, it was evident that the nurturing and transmission of spiritual capital continues to represent one of the critical challenges that headteachers in Catholic schools face today. There is a need to encourage more headteachers and leaders in Catholic schools to engage in the debate over spiritual capital

In Chap. 13, Caroline Healy and John Lydon offer one way in which the much needed spiritual capital can be nurtured and developed. The focus is on describing the positive features of the informal formation programme for aspiring Catholic school leaders known as *Shepherding Talent*. The content of this programme is based around the imperative for all Catholic schools to maintain a balance between school improvement and Catholic distinctiveness. Through seminars and workshops, the aspiring school leaders are encouraged to think in terms of their personal vocation and not simply professional standards as teachers, managers and leaders.

In Chap. 14, a serving Catholic headteacher brings into focus something which is shaping many aspects of leadership in a Catholic schools in England. This is around the policy of Academisation, in which schools are funded directly by central government rather than through the traditional route of the Local Authority. What might appear a relatively minor issue has had some very significant repercussions for many of those who lead Catholic schools. In this chapter, Louise McGowan shares her research and experience. It is offered as a set of reflections on Catholic Education both in England and other countries, which might be tempted to follow this way of funding and organising Catholic schools. As a Vice-Principal, Acting Principal, Headteacher and now Headmistress, Louise McGowan has a story to tell about the many years that she has been part of the Academies programme. It involves sharing and theorising the experiences of working as a senior leader in a non-denominational sponsored city Academy, a stand-alone converter Academy and most recently a converter Catholic Academy within a Multi Academy Trust. It is a compelling story that documents a leadership journey out of which emerge key themes of power, ideology, strength, vocation, suffering and loss, and finally, detachment and healing. As a redemptive narrative, it is a personal story that McGowan hopes will offer the Catholic education community a perspective that leads to a reflection on and understanding of some of the practices that are bound within the Academies programme and its legislative powers. Moreover, it a perspective from lived experience that will encourage a deeper discernment about whether the Academies programme can be shaped to fit with the mission of Catholic education. Ultimately, are Multi Academy Trusts and Academisation a threat to Catholic education?

Taken together, these three chapters offer a fascinating snapshot of the current reflections on the emerging research about Catholic school leadership , particularly in Britain.

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Chapter 12
Toward the Renewal of Spiritual Capital: A Contemporary Challenge for Headteachers in Catholic Schools in England

David Fincham

Abstract In 2017, I conducted the first phase of research in which I set out to explore the most pressing challenges faced by headteachers of Catholic primary and secondary schools in England. Twenty-one headteachers at a diocesan conference were invited to respond to a written question, and it emerged that one of the prevalent themes—or 'categories of discourse'—was that of the maintenance of 'spiritual capital' in Catholic schools. The concept of 'spiritual capital' was identified and explored by Grace (2002), who indicated that it would be unlikely that sources of spiritual capital would continue to be of ongoing benefit if they were not actively preserved and sustained by the present generation of Catholic school leaders. In the context of Catholic education, this, therefore, provides a significant line of enquiry. In the light of this, I pursued a second phase of research, in which I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine of the headteachers who had taken part in the first phase of the research. The aim was to explore underlying reasons that lay behind the responses from the first phase of the enquiry and to engage in an in-depth examination of the discourse. In an analysis of the results, it was evident that, from the perspective of these headteachers, the nurturing and transmission of spiritual capital continues to represent one of the critical challenges that headteachers in Catholic schools face today. This chapter presents an examination of the responses provided by the headteachers who took part in the second phase of the investigation and to propose potential approaches toward the renewal of spiritual capital in Catholic schools in the future. Whilst the sample was small, my hope is that the findings of the research and the contributions made by the headteachers who took part will encourage more headteachers and leaders in Catholic schools to engage in the debate.

Keywords Catholic education · Leadership · Mission · Spiritual capital

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Introduction: Context

In 2017, I began a research investigation, the first phase of which comprised an open question presented to twenty-one headteachers of Catholic primary and secondary maintained schools at a diocesan conference in England. They were invited to indicate the three most pressing challenges of their role as a headteacher in a Catholic school. Nineteen of headteachers responded to the question.

Having elicited responses from this first phase of the enquiry, through a process of Thematic Analysis (Clarke and Braun 2017), I identified prevalent themes—or, what Grace (2002, p. 120–121) calls, 'categories of discourse'. With this valuable information to hand, I decided to embark on a second phase, which would involve interviewing a selection of the headteachers who had participated in the first phase. The aim was to explore underlying reasons that lay behind the responses from the first phase of the enquiry and to engage in a greater in-depth examination of the discourse.

In advance of the interviews with headteachers, in which I wished to gain an insight into the pressures and tensions they were experiencing, and making a judgement from the evidence of the first phase of the enquiry, I chose headteachers in a purposive sample (Cohen et al. 2007: p. 156–157) from five primary and four secondary Catholic schools, who had responded to the question in the first phase of the enquiry. Whilst the sample was small, my hope was that the findings of the research would encourage more headteachers and leaders in Catholic schools to join the debate.

Five major themes were identified from the process of Thematic Analysis, but it is proposed here to select and to reflect upon one of the categories of discourse in particular that was identified in the interviews, i.e., the discourse of 'spiritual capital'.[1] Grace first proposed this concept of spiritual capital—which is derived from the extensive work of Bourdieu[2]—in his book *Catholic schools : Mission, markets and morality* (Grace 2002). Subsequently, he elaborates a theoretical interpretation of spiritual capital (Grace 2010), which provided a line of enquiry that I proposed to explore further for the purpose of my research.

Thematic Analysis

As indicated above, following the conduct of the first phase of the enquiry, it had been possible to examine the responses of participants to the question: *what are the contemporary challenges and opportunities for Catholic headteachers?* In order to achieve an understanding of the responses elicited from the question that was posed, a phenomenological approach was adopted.[3] Thus, various strategies for analysing the data were considered, including Discourse Analysis (DA).

However, I subsequently decided to subject the responses to close and careful scrutiny through a process of Thematic Analysis (TA). Clarke and Braun (2017)

define TA as 'a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ("themes") within qualitative data.' TA would, therefore, provide a method through which patterns within and across the data could be discerned. I had the opportunity, too, to share results in confidence with the Qualitative Research Forum at St Mary's University, which was made up of a group of colleague researchers and academics from various disciplines. The discussion helped me to identify several prevalent themes that arose from the headteachers' responses to the open question.

As a result of a close examination of the responses through the process of Thematic Analysis (TA), therefore, it was possible to discern significant and prominent themes. In the course of this process, it became evident that five themes in particular were dominant. Following Grace (2002, p. 120–121), I refer to these salient themes that were discerned from the written responses of the headteachers who had responded to the question as 'categories of discourse'. One of the categories of discourse that was identified was that of the need to develop and renew spiritual capital in Catholic schools.

Method

The research was located within an ethnographic framework, which, within a constructivist paradigm, by definition, is an interpretation of reality (Hammersley 1992, p. 49). In order to enable the reader to be aware of any bias, it would be appropriate first to clarify my ontological perspective. I would define myself as a practising Catholic in full communion with the Church. I have had experience of working in Catholic education since 1975, initially as an English teacher in a Catholic secondary school and subsequently as Head of Year, Head of House, First Deputy and Acting Headteacher. Currently, I am employed as part of the MA in Catholic School Leadership team at St Mary's University, having been the Programme Director from 2009 to 2014. Whilst participants would have regarded me as a colleague and fellow professional, I aimed, as a researcher, to adopt the stance of an observer who would examine data in a disinterested way.

As far as semi-structured interviews are concerned, Kvale states that '…if you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them…' (1996, p. 1). This highlights the benefit of conducting semi-structured interviews as part of an investigation that sets out to articulate the lived experiences of respondents. The aim was that the interviews would last about an hour and, with the permission of interviewees, would be audio-recorded and transcribed.

The purpose of the investigation was explicitly to give voice to the personal experiences of headteachers working in Catholic schools. Intrinsically, ethical implications were involved in presenting individual perspectives publicly and, therefore, it was important that their views would be recorded with discretion. It was paramount to protect the privacy of the people who volunteered to share their experiences and opinions and to ensure that the identification of participants remained anonymous. It was, therefore, essential that issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity were secure.

In presenting transcriptions of their responses, therefore, the participants in this study have all been anonymised and pseudonyms have been used for ethical reasons. With ethical considerations in mind, too, each of the headteachers was invited to sign a consent form before the interviews took place. My main concern in the second phase was that, in making arrangements to meet headteachers in order to conduct face-to-face interviews, I was not imposing on their valuable time.[4]

Spiritual Capital

It is relevant, in this context, to explain the concept of 'spiritual capital'. Professor Gerald Grace defines spiritual capital as '… resources of faith and values derived from a commitment to a religious tradition' (2002, p. 236).

The implication is that, in previous generations, Catholic schools were run by clergy and members of religious orders, who, by their vows, conduct and commitment to a way of life, dedicated themselves to following their faith in imitation of Christ. However, Grace argues that one of the most critical questions facing Catholic schools today is the decline in resources of spiritual capital 'The renewal of its spiritual capital thus becomes the crucial question for the continuance of its *distinctive* mission in the future' (2002, p. 236–240).

Grace (2002) argues that down the generations Catholic schools have been led by priests and members of religious orders who handed on resources of faith and values derived from a commitment to a religious tradition. With the decline in the number of religious working in Catholic schools, however, it becomes more difficult to transmit this tradition (or ethos) in this way. So nowadays for laypeople working in Catholic schools the sustaining of spiritual capital is of much greater significance than it was previously.

It should be added, incidentally, that, compared with twenty per cent of the school leaders in Grace's (ibid) study who acknowledged that they were vowed religious; there were none in this current study. This is noteworthy. When I first started teaching in the 1970s, there were two priests and two nuns on the teaching staff. They were, as it were, religious role models. In their outward appearance and behaviour; they were living witnesses to the faith, emulating Christ's ministry and mission. Modelled on Jesus the Good Shepherd, they were visible signs of the presence of Christ.

As long ago as (1982), the Congregation for Catholic Education, in *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, recognised the potential challenges posed by declining numbers of priests and religious teaching in Catholic schools. It was acknowledged that lay teachers would need to take a greater responsibility in the leadership of those schools. Concomitantly, there is an onus on laypeople currently teaching in Catholic schools to develop not only their professional formation but also their faith formation, whereby they are enabled to serve their communities both as professionals and as witnesses.

Phase	Number of Teachers		% Catholic teachers		Number of staff with CCRS		% with CCRS	
Primary	23,370	(20,699)	60.6	(68.6)	5,301	(5,970)	22.7	(28.8)
Secondary	23,146	(22,503)	40.7	(44.9)	1,160	(1,610)	5.0	(7.2)
Tertiary	1,553	(1,489)	33.9	(38.2)	56	(54)	3.6	(3.6)
Independent	5,169	(4,815)	32.1	(37.5)	196	(307)	3.8	(6.4)
Total	**53,241**	**(49,506)**	**48.4**	**(47.3)**	**6,713**	**(7,941)**	**12.6**	**(11.5)**

Fig. 12.1 From the Catholic Education Service Annual Census 2018

A key concern identified by commentators on Catholic school education today, then, which is also reflected by practitioners, is whether or not reserves of spiritual capital can be sustained, renewed and deepened. According to the most recent statistics provided by the Catholic Education Service (2018, p. 30), fewer than half (48.4%) of the teachers teaching in Catholic schools in England identify themselves as Catholic (Fig. 12.1).

Comparative figures for 2011 are shown in brackets. The figures show that, currently, whilst there are more teachers working in Catholic schools since 2011, there has been a decline in all sectors in the proportion of teachers who are Catholic. Added to this there is evidently a decline in the numbers of teachers holding a Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS).

Given that its distinctive ethos is an essential element of the Catholic school, it is important that staff receive consistent and ongoing input and nourishment regarding the Catholic ethos, the Catholic faith and the teachings of the Catholic Church. In this way, all teachers in Catholic schools can be helped to understand their role as educators in a Catholic school. Furthermore, Weeks and Grace (2007, p. 1) advocate that teachers acquire 'the faith-based knowledge and skills needed to maintain and develop the Catholic identity of the school', which they characterise as 'theological literacy'.[5]

Significantly, St Mary's University provides a programme, *Master of Arts in Catholic School Leadership*, which offers opportunities for teachers and others who work—or aspire to work—in Catholic schools, not only to familiarise themselves with the principles of Catholic education, but also to conduct research in Catholic school leadership (see also Gallagher 2007, p. 264). For the last five years, a centre based in the north of Ireland in the Catholic diocese of Derry has been established, in which ten students, having completed the MA programme, graduated in 2019.

It should also be noted that there have been two further initiatives, specifically for the formation of headteachers in England and Wales, namely the *National Retreat for Catholic Headteachers* and the *National School of Formation*. Raymond Friel (2018) has presented the findings of research into the impact of these initiatives, which was conducted with the headteachers who participated.

Results

Within the interviews that I conducted with headteachers in Catholic schools in the context of contemporary challenges that they face, I explored, amongst other things, what they thought about the concept of 'renewing spiritual capital' (Grace p. 2010). This proved to be a fruitful line of enquiry within the study. As one headteacher acknowledged 'I think it's vital … spiritually, headteachers and … school staff generally need to renew their mission, their spiritual development…' (Primary Head 1). Another headteacher stated that there has to be a commitment to 'making sure that staff who teach in Catholic schools really understand what Christ at the centre means, … I explain [this] to parents when I show them round … obviously we address it in our interviews and things [like that], so we're very clear that being a Catholic you have to be 100% willing and [to] work at contributing to the faith life of the school' (Primary Head 3).

It was evident from the results of the investigation that headteachers working in Catholic schools acknowledged that the renewal of spiritual capital in Catholic schools is a significant challenge. However, whilst they identified a need to take up opportunities for themselves and for their staff to deepen their personal faith, they admitted that it was not given sufficient priority. As one headteacher pointed out, there is a concern about the priority given to promoting the faith and values that are associated with a commitment to a religious tradition '

> … spiritual capital, yeah, I think hand on heart, I don't think we give ourselves enough time for that' (Secondary Head 4).

There was a general feeling that more opportunities needed to be provided for headteachers to sustain and enhance the development of spiritual capital 'I think [headteachers] would be happy to absorb more and to build more and to develop their own capital and to have their spiritual capital developed' (Secondary Head 6). The same headteacher reflected that, historically, headteachers had benefited from a relationship with spiritual advisors and with former headteachers, who would provide guidance and direction '… heads who are given spiritual advisors … or … they're given heads as guides—former heads, former leadership team—as guides to help them in the spiritual [aspects of their role] … and they look for the points of consolation in their career…' (Secondary Head 6).

A critical contemporary challenge for Catholic schools is the recruitment, retention and formation of future leaders. In this context, Fr. Jim Gallagher has asserted that in England 'The recruitment of suitable candidates for … leadership posts is major concern at national and diocesan levels' (2007, p. 264). This view was supported by a comment by one of the headteachers in this enquiry, who, reflecting on a recent experience during an interview with a candidate for a senior leadership post in the school, indicated that they were perplexed at the lack of appreciation of the distinctive nature of Catholic education that was displayed 'We had a senior leadership post come up recently and one of the candidates was asked to say why is a Catholic school different to a school down the road and they couldn't answer it, and I thought that

was extraordinary for someone to turn up to a senior leadership role and not be able to nail that question…' (Secondary Head 6).

It should be observed, too, that, as faith leaders, headteachers in Catholic schools have a responsibility to encourage staff to take up opportunities to develop their professional formation. As one headteacher intimated 'I am trying to encourage people, that they need that—spiritual renewal doesn't have to be sitting in a prayer garden or something, it can be academic … something different to make you think differently' (Primary Head 1). This was reinforced by another headteacher who asserted 'An opportunity yeah for some sort of intellectual nourishment as well as spiritual−something that just reminds you why you're doing it, but isn't kind of a fluffy … you need something with a bit of depth, a bit of meat. You want meat not candy' (Secondary Head 9).

Other headteachers indicated that they had taken the initiative in developing their own theological formation within their role. Evidence of this was presented in the interviews. For example, headteachers informed me 'I've done the CCRS and I've done the MA; now I've just signed up for the National School of Formation' (Primary Head 1). Another observed '… my governors paid for me to do the MA in Catholic School Leadership … we can identify [potential leaders] and put them in the right places at the right time, give them the right CPD so that they are ready when the time comes…' (Primary Head 2).

Another headteacher, though, disclosed that, with all the other, more pragmatic, demands made on teachers in schools, there were often few opportunities to place an emphasis on renewing spiritual capital '… hand on heart, I don't think we give ourselves enough time for that' (Primary Head 4). It has to be admitted, of course, that headteachers are very busy people, who are facing increasing demands on their time '…my concern about formation is [that] this Catholic teacher who's the head of school isn't seeing anything beyond the day-to-day running of the school so you can't see beyond that' (Primary Head 4).

Another headteacher concurred with this perspective, articulating concerns about workload and day-to-day pressures experienced by headteachers '… things are just so busy, the whole landscape has become a lot more focussed on you know performance and recruitment and all that kind of mundane stuff…' (Secondary Head 6). However, though drawing attention to difficulties that teachers and headteachers experience in finding opportunities, all respondents emphasised their commitment to encourage formation amongst their staff.

Notwithstanding these evident pressures on headteachers and staff, it should be emphasised that, without the renewal of spiritual capital, there will, potentially, be an existential threat to the continuation of the distinctive mission of Catholic schools. Indeed, whilst it is appreciated that there are time constraints in providing opportunities to sustain spiritual capital, in examining the responses of headteachers who participated in the research, it seemed that there is still a long way to go for headteachers and staff in nurturing spiritual and religious formation in Catholic schools and for the building up of spiritual capital.

If spiritual capital can be defined as 'resources of faith and values derived from a commitment to a religious tradition' (Grace 2002, p. 236), then Catholic schools have

an obligation to renew their commitment to the values of the common good and to the preferential option for the poor. It was evident from the interviews that headteachers recognised these fundamental principles of the Catholic faith and sought to sustain the moral values of Catholic education. In this respect, one headteacher confided that one student had been '… involved in this County Lines thing, [a student] has been sucked into a gang who he's been used to take class A drugs around the area, absolutely horrendous situation. We've slowly … we've been working with mum and social care and we've got him to come into school for the first time today and we talked about how much we wanted him to make a success, and all the rest of it' (Secondary Head 9).

Equally, the Catholic school can play a distinctive role of support when members of the school community face a crisis 'Lots of things have happened in the life of the school that every now and again remind you of how important it is that we're a Catholic school. So the summer before last one of our teachers died of cancer … it was very sudden, mid 40 s, had a young family …' (Secondary Head 9). In these circumstances, students can observe Christian attitudes and behaviours in their headteachers and teachers that may not be evident in a secular environment.

It was evident, too, that, whilst traditional resources of spiritual capital are in decline, the contribution made by parish priests and the bishop in sustaining these assets, not only for headteachers themselves, but also throughout the school community, continues to have an important impact 'Personally, I'm very lucky that my parish priest who's not local to here is very very good at making sure that spiritually I'm renewed…' (Primary Head 1). 'And really I think it comes down to the spirituality of the bishop' (Secondary Head 6). One headteacher, moreover, commended the leadership of the diocese in providing opportunities for headteachers to renew their spiritual commitment 'I think that's one of the things that our diocese does quite well is that they do put on sort of conferences which always have a spiritual basis, so I think they do that quite well really, so at least once a year we have something that's at our own level' (Primary Head 5).

The results clearly present a complex situation. Whilst headteachers in Catholic schools appear to be committed to the principle of renewing reserves of spiritual capital and strive to sustain their Catholic ethos, the limited take up of opportunities that would enhance the spiritual formation of themselves and their staff would indicate that they are currently surviving on a declining asset. Attention will now turn to addressing this question.

Discussion: Renewing Spiritual Capital

Pope Paul VI wrote that young people nowadays do not listen to teachers because they are teachers; they listen to them because they are witnesses (1975 par. 464). It is not what you teach but whether you practise what you teach that matters. The question of integrity is determined by the relationship between what is taught and what is practised. It is our relationships with our colleagues and with the students

that are crucial and relationships need to be nourished and developed over time. This can be characterised as mission integrity.

This idea is elaborated well by Andrew Morris who explains that '… the more completely the Catholic teacher gives concrete witness to Christ, the more this ideal will be accepted as an appropriate model and imitated by children because they will see the … precepts of Christian life … acted out in the school's normal daily routines' (2008, p. 4). It is our personal witness to faith in practice, in action and in relationships in the day-to-day life of the school that is the sustaining resource for Christian living and working.

Jesus is the model for teachers working in Catholic schools. This idea is taken up by an American Quaker educationalist, Parker J. Palmer, who says 'Teachers are, in effect, signs of the presence of Christ within their educational community. They 'teach who they are' (1998, p. 1). So the Christian story is about witness. If we are to renew our Catholic ethos, ultimately, we will be judged not only by our academic achievements but also by the kind of people we are. Relating this to mission leadership, my colleague at St Mary's University, John Lydon says that 'By engaging in the ministry of teaching, the individual Christian is responding to his or her primary call to be a disciple of Jesus in a distinctive manner' (2010, p. 52).

Unlike their secular counterparts, headteachers in Catholic schools must also consider the faith dimension of their role and of the communities they serve. They are faith leaders who must model and nurture the distinctive values of Catholic education. In exploring implications for the recruitment, retention and formation of leaders, the issue of continuing professional formation[6] needs to be considered. At one time, there may have been confidence that all teachers who were appointed in Catholic schools had a Christian vocation and that a programme of formation would help them to deepen that vocation. The reality today is that there can no longer be certainty that all teachers in Catholic schools will be Catholics, let alone appreciate the implications of vocation. Young people from Catholic families, who may have been educated in a Catholic primary school, might not have attended a Catholic secondary school, or a Catholic university, before applying for a post as a teacher in a Catholic school. The likelihood is that, at the beginning of their professional career, their understanding of their faith will still be undeveloped.

Whether or not teachers in Catholic schools are practising Catholics, they all enjoy the opportunity to bring gifts from which the Catholic school can benefit. This applies to those who are members of other Christian traditions, as well as other faiths, who may not fully appreciate the distinctive mission of the Catholic school. A challenge—and an opportunity—for leadership in a Catholic school is how to empower all those who have committed themselves to its development and how to coordinate their gifts in contributing to the distinctive mission of the school. There are many teachers of other faiths and none who contribute to the success of Catholic schools. These teachers, too, would benefit from opportunities through which they would be able to appreciate more fully the distinctive Catholic ethos of the schools in which they work.[7]

In a rapidly changing world, teachers need to continue their spiritual and theological formation in order to develop their relationship with Jesus in the interests of the community as a whole. As the *Congregation for Catholic Education* explains

> Apart from their theological formation, educators need also to cultivate their spiritual formation in order to develop their relationship with Jesus Christ and become a Master like Him. In this sense, the formational journey of both lay and consecrated educators must be combined with the moulding of the person towards greater conformity with Christ (cf. Romans 8: 29) and of the educational community around Christ the Master. (2007 par. 26)

Whilst a variety of implications arise from the findings of this enquiry, it was not possible to cover all within the parameters of this Chapter. However, the recruitment and retention of teachers who are committed to sustaining the distinctive nature of Catholic schools in England is seen as a major challenge for all the headteachers who were interviewed. A question of critical concern, therefore, is that of maintaining the mission integrity of Catholic schools by renewing their spiritual capital.

Summary

It is the religious character of the Catholic school that distinguishes it from its secular counterpart. In order to secure its distinctive ethos, the Catholic school needs to ensure that it has a 'critical mass' of teachers who are committed to realising its religious purpose. If Catholic education in England is to be maintained into the future, there is a need to appoint teachers who not only have the appropriate teaching qualities but also appreciate the value of the religious life of the school. Where Catholic schools have Sixth Forms, for example, there might be opportunities to identify and, critically, to support students who show an inclination toward taking up a career in teaching.

For those teachers who have already been recruited, it would be appropriate to consider the provision of carefully planned and focused Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as part of their ongoing professional development. Catholic schools nowadays are diverse communities. Whilst this can be a strength, teachers who are not themselves practising Catholics, or Catholics who have drifted away from the practice of their faith, or who did not attend a Catholic school, or who did train as a teacher in a Catholic College of Education, would also benefit from formal opportunities to acquaint them with the distinctive mission of the Catholic school.

For lay Catholics working in Catholic schools, there should be opportunities for them to develop on their faith journey. It is recommended that provision for the formation for staff be considered with a view to developing their vocation to teach in a Catholic school. This could be addressed by providing Continuing Professional Formation (CPF) as well as CPD within Catholic schools. This would, moreover, apply to teachers in Catholic schools who are members of other Christian traditions or of other faiths or none. This could take the shape, for example, of offering formal courses provided by a diocese, or study at an institute of Higher Education.

Whilst, in many respects, Catholic schools in England have never been more successful, particularly with regard to the academic achievement of students, paradoxically, there emerged from the interviews implicit, and sometimes overt, questions about the continued survival of Catholic education within a publicly funded system. There has long been a tension between 'rendering to Caesar' and 'rendering to God'. This tension would be exacerbated, too, by headteachers themselves, should they concede to the growing secular pressures they face.

There will be a problem in a school if colleagues do not understand the values of Catholic education or what these values mean in practice for them individually—whether as teacher, support colleague, curriculum or pastoral leader or caretaker or cleaners. If they are not clear as to what they need to do to sustain the mission, they are unlikely to be proactive in support of it.

A residual thought—and recommendation—is that there is a responsibility for headteachers themselves, as stewards of Catholic schools, to be vigilant in their commitment to the continued development and maintenance of Catholic education by encouraging and actively supporting the formation of the next generation of Catholic school leaders. From the interviews, it was evident that whilst the development of spiritual capital across the Catholic school community is not easy, it needs be given serious priority, and not a matter to be paid lip service. In particular, there must be a greater practical emphasis on staff INSET, continuing professional development and formation and an active advocacy for staff to engage in courses such as the CCRS and Masters level courses such as the MA in Catholic School Leadership (Fincham 2010, p. 76). Too few staff working in Catholic schools—whether Catholic, of other faiths or of no faith—are availing themselves of these opportunities.

Notes

1. Spiritual capital relates to 'resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition' (Grace 2002, p. 236) and implies that Catholic school leaders need to experience opportunities for their own religious development, for example, by attendance at retreats and study courses.
2. Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) identifies three forms of capital—economic capital, social capital and cultural capital—as a means of interpreting any educational system. The concept of spiritual capital is derived from this framework.
3. The philosophy of phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who argued that conscious experience can be studied from a subjective or first-person point of view. Epistemologically, a phenomenological approach draws on a qualitative paradigm, which emphasises the significance of personal experiences. Interpretive researchers emphasise phenomenological perspectives. A phenomenological approach would offer insights into how individual headteachers interpreted their experiences of leading schools in a Catholic context. As a form of interpretive methodology, therefore, the experience of headteachers is central to the research, and their perceptions, though subjective, provide valid perspectives for critical consideration. The focus is on the experiences and observations of individual headteachers.

4. It was evident during the conduct of the research that headteachers are under considerable pressure to fulfil the responsibilities of their role. One school was organising Mission Week; in another, the headteacher was conducting appraisals; there were meetings with governors, classroom observations, meetings with parents. Headteachers in secondary schools invariably employ a PA (Personal Assistant), who acts as a 'gatekeeper', to shield and protect the headteacher by screening calls. The Personal Assistant of one head teacher in the study, for example, related that the headteacher was 'too busy with other commitments' to have the time to take part.

5. 'Theological literacy' is defined as 'the ability to communicate knowledgeably how the faith of the church relates to contemporary everyday experiences' (Weeks and Grace 2007, p. 8).

6. In the Catholic Church, the concept of formation is well known. It refers to an educational process that engages the whole person with God's intended purpose. Formation is characterised as the ongoing human development of people who have a specific mission, such as the priesthood or membership of a religious order. Such formation involves programmes for active life commitment in the service of the Church.

7. As stated by the Congregation for Catholic Education 'By its very nature, the Catholic school requires the presence and involvement of educators that are not only culturally and spiritually formed, but also intentionally directed at developing their community educational commitment in an authentic spirit of ecclesial communion. In the same way, too, Catholic schools can be instrumental in supporting spiritual transformation for individuals and for the community as a whole' (2007 par. 34).

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Chapter 13
Shepherding Talent—An Informal Formation Programme for Aspiring Catholic School Leaders

Check for updates

Caroline Healy and John Lydon

Abstract *Shepherding Talent* is a pioneering informal formation programme in which teachers identified as having potential for leadership are challenged to explore their vocation to lead. The content of the programme is based around the imperative for all Catholic schools to maintain a balance between school improvement and Catholic distinctiveness. The integrity of vocation and profession in the context of discipleship figures prominently and defines the nature of the seminars. Through workshops, the mission of the Catholic educator is elucidated alongside a consideration of personal disposition and values, inviting a critically reflective response to leadership. This interplay and its impact will be discussed in this chapter alongside the key concepts and ideas embedded within the five constituent modules of the Shepherding Talent programme.

Keywords Catholic leadership · Model · Standards · Formation of school leaders · Vocation

Introduction

The programme consists of five seminars. The first, entitled *The Catholicity of Leadership*, explores the characteristics of Catholic distinctiveness, the distinctive nature of the Christian leader and the integrity of academic standards and Catholic distinctiveness. The second, entitled *Evaluating a Catholic School*, outlines the history and structure of Section 48 denominational inspections and the proposed new national Section 48 inspection framework in England and Wales. The interrelationship between Ofsted Section 5 and Section 48 inspections is signposted. In a seminar *Aspiring Catholic Leadership for the 21st Century—Servant and Christ-Centred*

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Leadership, the changing demographic being experienced by Catholic schools both in terms of staff and students and its potential impact on the distinctive nature of a Catholic school is explored. Mission Integrity is defined and the centrality of servant leadership is discussed alongside contemporary challenges. The fourth seminar, the *Professional Paradigm* focuses on values, skills and knowledge in the context of the DfE Teaching Standards. The extent to which the relationship between Catholic distinctiveness and the teaching standards are mutually enriching is explored in some depth. Finally, in *Revisiting the nature of Catholic Identity and the Professional Paradigm,* the implications of the statement that 'there is no distinction between having a vocation and being a professional', which encapsulates the nature of the programme, is reflected upon, signposting the belief that all teachers, irrespective of religious affiliation, can commit to the principles of Catholic identity because of their inclusive and holistic perspective, underpinned by a profound belief in the dignity of every person made in the image and likeness of God.

The Catholicity of Leadership

In 2014[1] the *Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales* (CBCEW) outlined the five characteristics of the distinctiveness of Catholic education. These are the dignity of the individual, the search for excellence, the education of the whole person, the education of all and moral principles. The perennial nature of this document is reflected in the fact that these key principles reflect those outlined by the same Bishops' Conference in 1996.[2] That the principles resonate with key themes of the documents published by the *Congregation for Catholic Education* (CCE) afford an additional level of authority, documents which, in the words of Cardinal Grocholewsky 'deepen the principles of the Second Vatican Council'.[3] The key concept of holistic approach to education, integrating both religious and human formation, enabling each individual to fulfil their unique calling as children of God, underpins the characteristics. Each student should 'experience his/her dignity as a person before he/she knows its definition' (CCE 1977, par 55). The Bishops' Conference documents then go on to insist that 'Both through religious education and in the general life of the school young people are prepared to serve as witnesses to moral and spiritual values in the wider world' (CBCEW 2014, p. 3).

The term 'witnesses' is particularly significant, evoking the iconic statement of Pope Paul VI that 'modern man listens to teachers when they are witnesses' (1975, par. 41). The *Congregation for Catholic Education* documents are replete with references to the centrality of the witness of teachers in the context of forming young people to *serve as witnesses*. In our view modelling ministry on Christ, a sacramental vision, is *the* most important formative metier rather than such concepts as 'imparting' or 'transmitting', reflected in the Congregation's 1977 document which maintains that

Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school… The fact
that in their own individual ways all members of the school community share this Christian
vision, makes the school "Catholic". (par. 34)

In Chap. 8 of his 2011 book *Sharing Faith*, Thomas Groome explores five aspects
of what 'modelling ministry on Christ' might mean: invitation; inclusion, building
community, respecting an individual's discernment and challenge. Each aspect is
rooted in the ministry of Jesus, for example, Jesus' calling of the Twelve to 'be with
him'. (Mark 3:14–20), and the pastoral implications of each aspect are discussed
with the aspirant leaders. The commitment of Catholic schools to inclusion, partic-
ularly in the context of students with special education needs and disabilities, is
regarded by most participants is axiomatic. Other aspects, for example, the lens
through which performance of staff is viewed and the extent to which it 'respects an
individual's discernment' educes wide-ranging discussion. Similar in-depth discus-
sions take place around building community, The word community is referred to 24
times alone in the CCE's 1988 document *The Religious Dimension of Education in
a Catholic School* alone. In wider literature on Catholic school leadership speaks
about a *community of leaders* (Grace 1995) while others Anthony Bryk suggests that
'solidarity around the school mission' (Bryk 1993, p. 58) is the key factor in the
inspirational ideology of Catholic schools. Edwin McDermott notes that Catholic
schools are religious communities within an academic community suggesting that
'to form community in a school is to teach as Jesus did…His whole public ministry
was aimed at forming people into a unity' (1997, p. 33).

A great deal of discussion takes place around the nature of challenge, encapsulated
in the response to the call of Jesus by the first four disciples (Mark 1:16-20) and
summed up by the Greek word *Aphentes* representing a radical break with the past
leading to a new beginning. One of the challenges discussed pivots on the centrality
of standards in the context of maintaining a balance between school improvement
and Catholic distinctiveness. It can be argued that if students do not achieve their
potential at least two of the characteristics of Catholic distinctiveness referenced
earlier are not being achieved

1. Search for excellence
2. Uniqueness (Dignity) of the individual.

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales in their Plenary Meeting in 2011
emphasised the importance of high academic standards achieved in so many Catholic
schools while recognising their awareness that some schools fall short of the standard
expected by both Government and Church, citing the Code of Canon Law (806 §2) in
support of their position (cf. Can. 806 §2). Andrew Morris' assertion that 'the Catholic
sector schools seem able to generate and sustain a positive school culture that can
mitigate the effects of deprivation more easily than the generality of other schools'
(2009, p. 94) is particularly germane in the context of academic standards. His further
contention that 'the suggestion that Catholic schools enhance socio-economic divi-
sions because they fail to serve the educational needs of disadvantaged youngsters
is unfounded. The empirical evidence suggests exactly the opposite' (Morris 2009,
p. 239) is equally significant.

Evaluating a Catholic School

Discussions begin by outlining a brief history of the inspection of Catholic schools. Catholic schools in England have been inspected since the establishment of education for all following the creation of the Catholic Poor School Committee in 1847. In *A View from the Bridge: The Catholic School* Maurice Whitehead quotes the Acts and Decrees of the First Council of the Province of Westminster which insisted that Catholic schools had to be 'up to the mark of modern demand and yet…solid in faith and piety' (1999, p. 233).[4] This statement is particularly prescient in that it reflects the challenge for all Catholic schools currently to maintain a balance between school improvement issues and Catholic distinctiveness, a principle canonised in contemporary literature.

Such early inspections were carried out alongside meticulous inspections by the Government Board of Education an example of which is chronicled in the archives of the Sisters of Mercy in Handsworth dated 1854 following an inspection of their school:

> There are above four hundred children on the school roll, of whom many of the most desti-
> tute are supplied with clothing. The schools are connected with the Government Board of
> Education. Her Majesty's Inspector, Mr. Marshall, visited them officially…and he passed
> a very high and flattering eulogium on the efficiency and complete success of the system
> carried out in the schools. (1856 *Annals of St Mary's Convent* Archive 10)

Whitehead (1999) notes that Cardinal Manning could claim with some justifi-cation in 1871 that high standards in Catholic schools were being maintained. He was particularly vigilant in relation to the quality of teaching, insisting that 'there is nothing falser and more mischievous than the notion that anyone is fit to teach in a poor school' (p. 233). Inspections were carried out routinely in Catholic schools across England and Wales with inspectors meeting together for the first time in 1875, the date traditionally associated with the founding of the National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisors, the body charged by the Bishops Conference of England and Wales with the responsibility for formulating the Section 48 inspection framework.

While a detailed account of inspections from 1875 to the *Education Act 1992* and the introduction of Ofsted is beyond the scope of this chapter, the resonances between Cardinal Manning's references to quality of teaching and the current inspection mechanisms are illuminative. The focus of Section 48 inspections on the Catholic life of the school, Religious Education, prayer and worship are discussed, highlighting the holistic perspective that permeates this framework. In this context, the 2017 guidance of the *National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers* (NBRIA) is especially apposite. There is an increased emphasis on the extent to which pupils are involved in the planning and preparation of acts of collective worship. The descriptor used by NIBRIA for *Outstanding* maintains that almost all pupils have an excellent understanding of the Church's liturgical year, seasons and feast. Appropriate to their age and ability, they are able to prepare acts of Collective Worship, which fully reflects this understanding.

This is followed by a further descriptor which links with interreligious dialogue and the development of spiritual capital among pupils:

> The experience of living and working in a faithful, praying community has a profound and visible effect on the spiritual and moral development of all pupils, irrespective of ability or faith background. They have a deep sense of respect for those of other faiths and this is reflected in the manner in which pupils prepare and participate in prayer and liturgy. (2017 NBRIA p. 23)

Discussion around the challenges to the Section 48 inspection mechanism by the *National Secular Society* (NSS) and the introduction by the Bishops Conference of England and Wales of a *National Inspection Framework* generate a great deal of discussion. The National Secular Society submitted a 'Freedom of Information Request' regarding the amount of money being paid in grants for Section 48 inspections of schools with a religious character. Their request was cited on grounds of accountability for the effective use of public money. The response of the *Catholic Education Service* has been particularly positive, reflected in a consistency audit commissioned in 2018. This has led to discussions around quality assurance mechanisms that would guarantee security of judgements across dioceses, prominent among which is the formulation of a National Inspection Framework. The Bishops Conference of England and Wales confirmed their commitment to this in the following statement:

> The Bishops' Conference approved the introduction of the National Framework for Inspection of all Catholic schools, colleges and academies. The National Framework for Inspection will be approved and revised from time to time by the Department for Education and Formation. This will include national recruitment, training and accreditation of inspectors. Training and accreditation of existing inspectors will begin in 2020 and the National Framework will have replaced existing diocesan frameworks in all dioceses by September 2021 (Autumn 2019 Meeting, London, CBCEW)

Such a framework will address current discrepancies between Dioceses in respect of judgement grades, notice periods, limiting judgements (for example, the Bishops Conference requirement of 10% curriculum time for Religious Education at Key Stages 2–4) and the weight given to each section in arriving at overall judgements. It is worth noting that the students were exercised in this context since most aspiring middle leaders believed that Section 48 was analogous to Section 5 in regard to homogeneity of framework.

'Believing Without Belonging' Servant and Christ-Centred Leadership

By way of introduction the contrasting nature of Catholic school communities in England and Wales in the pre- and post-Vatican II eras is described by Abbot Christopher Jamison who speaks of

a "not wholly mythical golden era" when "every Catholic boy and every Catholic girl would, at some stage of their education, consider becoming a priest or a nun." He describes this era as a totally Catholic culture which, in the context of Catholic education, was strengthened by the 1944 Education Act Building on previous legislation, this Act enabled every Catholic child to attend a Catholic school free of charge. Jamison suggests that this total Catholic culture embracing Church Youth Clubs, sports teams as well as Catholic schools underpinned by strong family [cultural] support began to die in the 1960s and disappeared by the 1980s. He cites the statistics for Mass attendance which halved between 1980 and 2000 to around 1 million as evidence of this disappearance. (2010, p. 224)

This exponential decline in Mass attendance is reflected in a study by Stephen Bullivant (2016) which reveals that 25% of the total self-declared Catholic population of 5.2 million attend Mass weekly which may appear relatively positive. Drilling down into the statistics demonstrates, however, that among 25–34 year olds 9% attend regularly while the figure is 29% among 35–44 year olds, the age ranges of the majority of parents of students in Catholic Primary and Secondary schools.

It came as a surprise to some of the prospective middle and senior leaders, therefore, to find that a study by Casson (2014) revealed that the Catholic ethos of primary schools was one of the key reasons for parental choice. In contrast to Richard Rymarz's study (2012) in Australia, who found that religious considerations are often parents' lowest priority when choosing a Catholic school, Ann Casson's research demonstrated that 'The reasons why baptised Catholic parents choose a Catholic primary school when they do not actively participate in the Catholic Church are complex. However, many Catholic parents in this research sample maintained that the prime reason for the choice of a Catholic school was the Catholic nature of the primary school' (Rymarz 2012, p. 109).

Dr. Casson's findings reflect the concept of *believing without belonging*, a concept canonised in the writings of the Catholic sociologist Grace Davie. In her seminal work *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, (1994), Davie argues that Europe is marked by a culture of *believing without belonging*, characterised by a profound mismatch between religious values that people profess (believing), and actual churchgoing and religious practice (belonging).

Davie was writing around the time of major European values surveys (for example that undertaken by Jan Kerfhofs in 1993). Kerkhofs spoke of a shift away from the tradition as the yardstick by which to interpret the meaning of life and to define moral rules with identity being found through flexible adaptation.

In *Religion in Modern Europe—A Memory Mutates* (Davie 2000), Davie starts from her 'convenient shorthand, [that] Europe believes but it does not belong' (p. 33) and finds it significant that 'churches remain, however, significant players' within society (p. 38), performing a moral, spiritual and social role on behalf of the population, i.e. *vicariously*. It is interesting to note that this is a term used by Rymarz in the title of his book referenced earlier. Davie herself defines vicarious religion as 'the willingness of the population to delegate the religious sphere to the professional ministries of the state churches' and, moreover, Europeans are grateful that 'churches perform, vicariously, a number of tasks on behalf of the population as a whole' (p. 59). At specific times, Churches—or Church leaders or Church members—are 'asked to

articulate the sacred' on behalf of individuals, families or society as a whole. Whilst ordinary European citizens may not practise religion on a daily basis, they recognise its worth, and are 'more than half aware that they might need to draw on [it] at crucial times in their individual or collective lives' (p. 60).

In 2005, David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, partly in response to Grace Davie, published *Religion in Britain: Neither Believing without Belonging*. In essence Voas and Crocker concluded, based on relatively extensive sampling, that Davie painted too positive a picture in regard to religion in Britain. They suggest, *inter alia*, that

> Everyone agrees that religion has lost ground; the key dispute concerns why. How much, in what way and with what prospects. We suggest that the only form of BWB that is as pervasive as Davie suggests is a value willingness to suppose that 'there is something out there' accompanied by an unsurprising disinclination to spend any time and effort worshipping whatever that might be. (2005, p. 24)

Davie developed the notion of vicarious religion in her 2015 work *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Davie 2015). In summary, the argument is

- Davie repeats definition of vicarious religion which underpins this book
- a move from obligation to consumption
- an exploration of the persistent paradox that the decrease in religious activity measured over a wide range of variables alongside the growing significance of religion in public debate.

In this context of 'vicarious religion', when many Catholic express their Catholicity by sending their children to Catholic schools, the adoption of servant leadership as the dominant leadership paradigm within Catholic schools has taken on an increased importance. While Religious Education programmes and collective worship remain key constituents of the spiritual and moral development shared by students, the modelling of ministry on Christ by all members of staff is equally, if not more, significant. This sacramental vision, alluded to earlier, is demonstrated with greatest acuity when, 'in imitation of Christ, the only Teacher, they [teachers and leaders] reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behaviour' (CCE 1977, par 43).

The Professional Paradigm

This seminar begins with a discussion around the way in which values, skills and knowledge are embedded within the DFE Teaching Standards. In respect of values concepts such as empathy, quest for learning and collaborative learning and practice are related to specific teaching standards while a variety of skills and knowledge, including reflective and thinking skills, pedagogic skills and multicultural literacy are mapped against other standards. The significance of developing such values in the context of the centrality of academic standards in the context of Catholic distinctiveness is explored and the tenet investigated earlier that vocation and profession in

relation to teaching are simply two aspects of discipleship is seen to be particularly relevant in relation to the teaching standards.

Six challenges, as identified by a variety of educationists, for example, Laur (2011) and Susannah Dimond (2007) are then investigated in relation to the standards: authentic challenge, enquiry, pragmatic rehearsal, feedback, metacognition and progress. Relatively contemporary paradigms such as *learning to learn* and *differentiation* permeate the literature alongside personalised learning. The concept of *metacognition*, in particular, exercised the participants in the programme and there were discussions around the definition posited by the guidance report of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF):

> Metacognitive regulation is about planning how to undertake a task, working on it while monitoring the strategy to check progress, then evaluating the overall success. This is not a one-off process of discreet steps, but an ongoing cycle. As you progress through the task applying your metacognitive and cognitive skills, you update your metacognitive knowledge (of yourself, strategies and tasks) as well as updating your subject knowledge and skills. (2018, p. 1)

This definition, with its cyclical notion of planning, monitoring and evaluation was regarded as an apposite summing up of the teaching standards generally. The assertion by the report that younger children do typically develop metacognitive knowledge even at a very early age, based on the evidence of Whitebread and Coltman (2019). The report was insistent that teachers should acquire the professional understanding and skills to develop their pupils metacognitive knowledge.

Participants were interested to note that, while concepts such as research-enhanced teaching feature in the report, there was no explicit reference to building teams or feedback from peers. There is, however, one reference in the teaching standards to 'responding to advice and feedback from colleagues' (Standard 8), reflecting 'active engagement through independent, or collaborative, research and problem solving' embedded within the second challenge, 'enquiry'. Such collaborative research has been championed by Donohoo (2016) in her work on collective teacher efficacy, which she defines as teachers in a given school making an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities. Through their collective action, teachers can positively influence student outcomes, including those who are disengaged, unmotivated and/or disadvantaged (Donohoo 2016).

Donohoo's work resonates with that of the EEF Report in terms of the cyclical nature of planning, monitoring and evaluation while there is a greater emphasis on Donohoo's work on the reciprocal nature of the 'collective' and its impact on student achievement. This was regarded by our students to be evocative of a solidarity around the school mission referenced earlier in the programme alongside the several references to the efficacy of building a community of teachers called for in CCE documents.

While the current UK teacher standards, at face value, appear to lack resonance with the principles of Catholic distinctiveness, a closer examination reveals a greater degree of congruence reflecting that between vocation and profession. This can be seen across all five aspects of modelling ministry on Christ signposted earlier (see

page 3). The inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry, particularly in relation to the primacy of the Church's mission to the poor, is reflected in the teacher standards, for example, …to 'set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of *all* backgrounds, abilities and dispositions' (2011 Standard 1). The reference to *all* is especially significant in its resonance with the fourth of the five characteristics of Catholic distinctiveness, 'the duty to care for the poor and to educate those who are socially, academically, physically or emotionally disadvantaged' (CBCEW 1996, par. 1). This broad range of poor, reflected in the mind of Jesus and the Church, finds an [1]echo in Standard 5 which insists that teachers have a 'clear understanding of the needs of *all* pupils, including *those with special educational needs*; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able *to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them.* The concept of "challenge", central to Jesus' leadership style, is also reflected in Standard 2, which introduces the theme of accountability for "pupils" attainment, progress and outcomes'.

Revisiting the Nature of Catholic Identity and the Professional Paradigm

Teacher Standard 8, which calls on teachers to 'make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the school', provides an appropriate segue into the core of the Shepherding Talent programme. This emphasis is on the imperative for all leaders in Catholic schools to maintain a balance between school improvement and Catholic distinctive. Such a balance is easy to exhort in theological and pastoral reflections, however, it is not so easy to achieve in the daily business of running schools and meeting expectations of the key stakeholders. It is essential, however, to maintain such a balance in order to secure the future of Catholic schools otherwise there is a danger, on the part both of schools and individual teachers, of being seduced by measurable indicators of approval.

Such a seduction by indicators which, in the context of the holistic perspective articulated previously, could be both deemed shallow and lead to what Grace (1998) describes as *mission reductionism* which involves abstracting examination performance indicators from the integrated matrix of school outcomes which constitute the educational mission of a Catholic school. Participants on the programme were, however, convinced that academic excellence represented a central feature of Catholic distinctiveness that could be aligned with the mandate that pupils and students are given every opportunity to develop their talents to the full. This is the definition of excellence outlined in the Catholic Bishops Conference 1996 document that was discussed in the first seminar.

In this context, a discussion ensued about the way in which teachers demonstrated servant leadership in creating a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities

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[1]See Lydon (2010).

in response to the challenge to develop the talents of students, particularly for the more disadvantaged members of the student community. St Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:5–11) with its description of Jesus as 'emptying himself (*Greek ekenosen*) taking the form of a slave' proved to be illuminative.[2] The concept *ekenosen* is particularly significant in the educational philosophy of St John Bosco in the context of his holistic approach to education. By being familiarly present to young people, as opposed to maintaining an institutional superior-inferior style of imposition, the teacher reflects the *ekenosen,* the self-emptying, of Christ himself. Bosco, then, interprets the teachers participation or entry into young people's recreation as an act of loving condescension, going beyond mere utilitarianism or paternalism. It involved adults leaving the lofty heights of their power over' or even 'power on behalf of' positions in order to engage in a genuine sharing of the bread of life. This engaging familiarity reflects the *I-Thou* relationship described by Buber (1974), who explained that '…every human person looks bashfully yet longingly in the eyes of another for the yes that allows him to be. It is from one human person to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed' (p. 73).

Concluding Comments

This holistic approach to the search for excellence featured prominently in the evaluations completed by participants as one of *the* most significant positive features of the programme. The responses of the mainly middle leaders reflected a genuine idealism that Catholic identity featured strongly within their school communities, summed up in this response:

> The programme allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the distinctiveness of Catholic leadership and education. It has also enabled me to identify positive traits of our school community and suggest ways and strategies for us to increase the Catholic identity of the school to allow us to offer a high quality education alongside an opportunity for pupils to act in the way Jesus has taught us. (Participant 1, written response).

While the responses of most participants reflected this affirmatory comment about the programme and the school community, challenging comments were made. These were in the context of the motivation for the servant leadership modelled by the leadership team and realised in practice in the outstanding commitment demonstrated by the majority of staff. This is encapsulated in the following remark:

> As much as this is a form of service to the poor, I do question the intentions behind it. School league tables and progress 8 figures are an increasing pressure for school leaders, although the implementation of this academic support benefits the target group I do feel that the line blurs in terms of if the primary intention is service to the poor by modelling ministry on Christ or if it is to keep up with the "competitive market culture". (Participant 2, written response).

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[2]See Lydon (2019, 2.14).

In conclusion, there is unanimity around the positive impact of the programme. It empowered participants to engage with the language of Catholic school distinctiveness whilst also impacting positively on the life of their school community. This summed up in the following course evaluation:

> I have been able to talk to senior members of SLT regarding the benefits of the programme and I was often asked after each session what was covered. I have also been provided with an array of readings that can be incorporated into everyday practice in my school community. Furthermore, I am currently studying for my MA in Catholic School Leadership as a result of the programme. The support and sessions delivered by the programme leaders was extremely valuable. (Participant 3, written response).

Notes

1. Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales (2014).
2. CBCEW (1996).
3. Grocholewsky (2007).
4. See Chap. 11 (above) *Step by Step: an introduction to the history of Catholic denominational inspection in the UK*, which provides a detailed assessment of these matter.

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Chapter 14
Are MATS and Academies a Threat to Catholic Education?

Check for updates

Louise McGowan

Abstract Autoethnography as both method and methodology has enabled me to write a life; and my life in leadership since first joining the Academies programme in 2007 could be described as somewhat professionally tumultuous. As a Vice Principal, Acting Principal, Headteacher and now Headmistress, I have a story to tell about the 12+ years that I have been part of the Academies programme, sharing and theorising my experiences of working as a senior leader in a non-denominational sponsored city Academy, a stand-alone converter Academy and most recently a converter Catholic Academy within a Multi Academy Trust. It is a compelling story that documents a leadership journey out of which emerge key themes of power, ideology, strength, vocation, suffering and loss, and finally, detachment and healing. As a redemptive narrative, it is a personal story that I hope will offer the Catholic education community a perspective that leads to reflection and understanding of some of the practices that are bound within the Academies programme and its legislative powers; a perspective from lived experience that will encourage a deeper discernment of whether the Academies programme can be shaped to fit with the mission of Catholic education and whether this pathway will either secure and strengthen, or inhibit its future growth, strength and stability.

Keywords Autoethnography · Academisation · Mission integrity

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Introduction

I open this chapter with a few snapshots; momentary glimpses into my early life. As someone who has, via the process of undertaking an education doctorate, emerged as a self-confessed autoethnographer, I believe that to understand and really connect with the work of an autoethnographer is to first understand the person of the researcher. Autoethnography[1] allows a researcher to tell stories; and stories are a powerful tool of pedagogy. Stories have been told for centuries by human beings across multitudes of cultures and have provided a vehicle not only to teach, but to transmit knowledge and a wisdom that is borne out of lived experience (Muncey 2010). I have a story to tell. And this story needs to be told.

The Beginnings of My Story

I begin my story with snapshots of childhood. It is 1970s suburbia in south east London and a child is lost in a world of imaginative play; it is a scene played over and over, a prophetic scene. School has been re-enacted in the child's playroom within a household that depicts the very essence of 1970s middle-class life. My parents knew I would end up being a teacher. My default game was always 'schools'. My teddy bears and dolls must have been the most educated toys in London. I kept their names on a register; I listened to them read; I think I even rang their parents! I loved school and I loved my life. One day an opportunity arose at my primary school to sign up for piano lessons. I begged my parents to let me try. I was never a demanding child. My beloved Granny would always describe me as 'agreeable'. I think my first experience of properly falling in love was with the piano. And so began what was to become my very own lifelong trinity: faith, school and music. Music weaved itself into my life from the age of six and has remained a foundation upon which this now middle aged, not-far-from-50-year-old adult stands before you now.

It was music that led me into teaching and I started to teach piano from the age of 16. My own piano instructor believed I would become a better pianist if I had to teach others to master technique and repertoire. By the time I was studying music at University in London, I had 25 pupils a week visiting my parents' home for piano lessons. Journeying alongside my pupils in their progress gave me far more pleasure and joy than actually playing the piano myself.

I tell this story of early life to underpin how much teaching has become the definition of who I was and who I am now as a person, an educator and, more recently, an early-career researching practitioner. People asked me as a child what I wanted to do for a job when I grew up. I replied that I never wanted a job; I wanted to be a teacher. Those who think that teaching is a job have a lot to understand! For me, like many others, teaching is as close to vocation as one can get.

I started school teaching fresh from university and spent my training year on placements in some of the most challenging, poverty-stricken and deprived wards

of south London. And it was here that I found my vocation. I forgot my privileged life, my private education, my piano lessons, and I followed where our Lord led me. To this day he has led me to some of the most difficult and challenging secondary schools in areas with some of the highest deprivation indexes.

I rose up the ranks fairly quickly. I was a Head of Department at 24; an Assistant Headteacher at 29 and experienced my first taste of headship ten years later. It was whilst I was working as an Assistant Head in a large secondary modern school that people started to talk and write about a new kind of school emerging into the state sector. There weren't many of them at first but, where they were located, they seemed to be causing quite a stir! In the county where I was teaching, the first Academy was built just after the turn of the millennium in a tired, run-down, neglected and forgotten coastal town. It replaced a school that had been struggling for many years, that was always named in the bottom three schools in the country for results, where less than 5% of children finished with five GCSEs graded C or above. A billionaire sponsor had donated £2 m of his own fortune and that, in conjunction with the £38 m of government and Local Authority funding, paid for the county's first sponsored City Academy. The building was incredible. It did not look like a school. It looked more like a futuristic building that would grace the skyline of any modern capital city or metropolis. And it stood out, almost brazenly, announcing itself as the postmodern future of education and schooling, set against a landscape filled with grey blocks of social housing flats, dark green cabbage fields, broken shop windows, graphited concrete walls and a dark, swirling, murky sea. Berger (2003) observed that you can always tell what a society values in any given age by the kinds of buildings it creates. This and the new-build Academies that rose up in other parts of the county appeared to pay architectural homage to business and a perceived commodification of education (Youdell 2011; Strom 2010; Grace 2002; Chitty 1997).

My working life was not touched by the Academies programme until a few years later when I felt my work was done as an Assistant Headteacher and it was time to move on. An advert for a Vice Principal to work with a newly appointed Principal, to plan and set up a brand new school that was not yet built, had caught my eye. That it was an Academy didn't really figure with me that the time. I was drawn to the vision for this school, again located in another neglected and run-down coastal town, again replacing a school that had been brought to its knees by a mix of economic and social factors and the punishing expectations of the ever-increasing performance measures. The school was to be closed and the students transferred into the new Academy.

The Academy was located in the home town of the same billionaire sponsor. I later learned that he had struck a deal with the Local Authority that if he agreed to sponsor the first coastal Academy, the next Academy to be built *had* to be in his home town where he had committed to large scale philanthropic regeneration projects. Another £2 m of his own money and £40 m this time of government and Local Authority funding and the second award-winning, architect-designed Academy, built to resemble a ship's stern (a nod to its coastal and harbour heritage), was opened.

Like the first Academy, this one also had a 'Super-head', recruited by reputation alone from a top-performing school elsewhere in the country. His vision to give secondary modern children from deprived backgrounds and many living in poverty,

the same educational opportunities as children who attended the top public schools, appealed to me and my own sense of mission through teaching. For nine months I worked desk-to-desk next to the Principal in a tiny office in a backstreet of the coastal harbour town, planning and designing, creating an innovative curriculum offer that had not been done before in state education. Academies were billed as all about innovation in the early years of their formation. The children in this particular Academy would be taught to cook by a French-speaking chef; they would even have their music lessons delivered in French. They would be in school from 8.30 am until 5 pm and each day would end with two hours of Prep or Games and Activities. Money was no object and I was instructed to recruit the best teachers to staff this new curriculum whilst the Principal took care of the marketing and publicity, and chose the furniture. The coloured glass meeting table in the Boardroom that seated 18 cost just short of £20,000 alone.

But it was all for the children. At least that was the script. I was thankful to be part of what I saw as a once-in-a-lifetime transformational project. I delighted in the faces of the children, wide-eyed and gasping in amazement when they set their first footsteps into their new school. They were so smart and polished in their new uniforms. Their wool blazers that retailed at £60 a piece could have graced the cover of any top independent school prospectus.

But tragedy struck. Just seven months after the Academy opened, the Principal died. Numb with grief and shock, I took a call from the billionaire sponsor. I was instructed to take over. There was no one else who knew the school well enough and he would not risk destabilising 'the project' at this early stage by bringing in a new leader to take the helm. I was tasked with keeping *everything* and *everyone* going. For me, there was no other option. I was committed to the school and I loved the children dearly. I owed it to the staff to take care of them too, as best I could.

I spent a year as Acting Principal of a £42 m City Academy. By the time the headhunting firm had found a new Super-head, I had been a Headteacher for longer than I had ever been a Deputy. I realised that I had learned far more about politics and the business of education in that year than I had ever known existed. I stayed another year to support the new Principal but, more importantly, to help the children settle and get used to having a new figurehead. But I couldn't stay any longer. The air was changing. People were changing. It is astonishing how quickly people can change their behaviour to fit in with a new regime. The vision of the late Principal that had drawn me and many others into the Academy was slowly dismantled. It was no longer the air that I wished to breathe.

I took a leap of faith and moved to my first substantive headship far away on the other side of the county. This was not a sponsored City Academy but a middle ground, average all girls High School that, like many other 'Good' secondary schools, after the coalition government took office in 2010, had taken up the Secretary of State's offer and the £50,000 grant, to convert to Academy status (Department for Education 2010). No one would really know it was an Academy though. It still operated by the title of 'School', it still had a governing body; I was the new Headteacher, not a Principal. But it had severed its ties with the Local Authority and was now standing alone as a registered company.

In retrospect, I do not believe that the Governors and the out-going retiring Head-teacher had realised what they were signing up to and signing over when the *Funding Agreement* to become a *Converter Academy* was made a year before I joined the school. In signing *up* to the Academies programme they were in fact signing the school *over* to the Academies legislation governed by the DfE (Newsam 2013), and what was soon after delegated to a group of appointed, not elected, officials known as *Regional Schools Commissioners.*

When I was appointed to the post of Headteacher, the school had not been touched by the politics of the Academies programme. But that was all about to change. It was 2012 and the coalition had been in power for nearly two years. There were many changes in what was termed as a 'policy frenzy' in education over a short space of time as the Education Secretary (Michael Gove) set about instructing major reform of curriculum and accountability measures for state schools (Education Act 2011). A particular curriculum known as the *English Baccalaureate* (Ebacc) had been identified, but not all schools had embraced the compulsory pathway in GCSE where all students would take a humanities subject and a language on top of their core of English, mathematics and science. But when the methodology for calculating the performance measure of each school was radically changed from judging the percentage of students who achieved 5 GCSES at grade A* to C to a new measure of calculating progress made over a prescribed set of subjects, this came to be viewed, certainly by many Headteachers, as enforced Ebacc by the back door.

In order to score highly or above average, a school had to put *all* its students through the same curriculum pathway. To not do this was to render a school as performing poorly even when, at face value, it may not have been. In the three sets of subjects that formed the overall measure, if one set was empty of any of the prescribed Ebacc subjects the overall progress measure for the school decreased and fell below the zero average. To be viewed as below average is to be at risk.

Pfeffer (1994) in his critique of power, suggested that where there is a vacuum there is a space for power to be exercised. The schools that had not made the Ebacc curriculum compulsory but had given students free choice over their curriculum options, were suddenly portrayed as failing to provide the required standard of education. Where a school is portrayed as failing, then that creates the vacuum, the space where power can be wielded to legitimately move in and enforce change (Thompson 2008).

The Impact on My School

My school was an Arts College. The arts were privileged and whilst the Ebacc pathway was offered, not many of our students chose it. Children chose to come to the school purely because it was an arts college and it offered them curriculum choices that they might not be awarded elsewhere. There were no restrictions on what they chose to study alongside their core programme. Musicians could study music, performance and music technology; theatre students could study drama, music and

dance; visual artists could study fine art, textiles and photography. In the second year of my headship, Ofsted visited and judged the school to be good with outstanding features. It was a fair judgement. But less than two years later the school, or standalone Academy as it was, appeared on the radar of the Regional Schools Commissioner who believed that it was failing to provide the expected standard of education.

I did not really know what a *Regional Schools Commissioner* was until I was faced with one. I was so busy running my Arts College and taking delight in the achievements of the girls who accomplished the most outstanding results in their chosen option pathways. Not many followed an Ebacc pathway and the overall progress score of the school was negatively affected because points were then missing from many of the students' results. When I started to receive communications from the Commissioner's office I soon realised that this was a new layer, or was it a new lever in the system (Harris et al. 2006)?

My school was located in an area in which the Unitary Local Authority was deemed to be failing; therefore it was assumed that all the schools in the authority were failing. The Academies were, however, prospering, especially those secondary schools that had taken the opportunity to set up as a lead Academy in a *Multi-Academy Trust*. One by one, over three years, many of the primary schools were judged to be 'requiring improvement' or 'inadequate' and then a mandate was issued to force them to join the *Multi-Academy Trust* decreed by the Commissioner. The large scale failure of the Local Authority created the space to legitimise the full scale academisation of an entire region.

Soon my Arts College was the only Academy standing alone—and standing out. It didn't fit with the vision of the Commissioner who had decreed all schools must become Academies in this region and all Academies must belong to a *Multi-Academy Trust*. One by one the MAT Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) came calling. They either wanted to take me to lunch or to give me a sales pitch of what they could offer the school if we joined their MAT. One CEO brought his entire team of Directors with him to each take turns in pitching. I had never felt so popular!

Despite the many offers from MATs, none of them seemed to understand my school. In discussion and periods of deep reflection over time with my Governing Body, we discerned that we were fine continuing to stand alone; our budget was balanced with a little left over each year, we were fully staffed and stable, our outcomes in English and Maths and our arts curriculum were good and exceptional; our school was a popular choice for girls and their parents in the area. We could not accept any of the reasons the CEOs gave us to hand over our school to a larger corporation. So we politely declined their offers and carried on alone. What happened next is perhaps the most critical part of this story. I pause to re-visit the title of this chapter: *Are* Academies and MATs a threat to Catholic education?

Soon after we had turned down the multiple offers from the CEOs it seemed that the niceties suddenly ceased. The business lunches, the persuasive sales pitches and the spin all stopped. But they were replaced with an approach that began to feel more coercive, darker and in many ways rather sinister. I was notified by the Commissioner that he wished to learn more about my school and therefore would be sending in a team of officials to spend a day in the school on a given date. The

object was to see how we were doing and whether we needed any support. The team arrived on the agreed date; one of the members was an Ofsted inspector and the others were civil servants from the Commissioner's office. They spent the day observing lessons, meeting with middle leaders, interviewing children and the SLT. I had been required to send them performance data, the *Self Evaluation Form* (SEF) and the *School Improvement Plan* (SIP) a week ahead of the visit. It didn't feel like a visit to find out about the school; it felt more like a shadow Ofsted inspection (George 2018; Dunford 2016)!

At the end of the day I met with the visitors and they fed back to me their findings. They liked much of what they saw—good quality teaching, good behaviour, happy children. They also conceded that the arts results and outcomes were among the best in the county. But the problem was the curriculum. Not all children studied humanities and a language for GCSE therefore we were failing to provide a good quality education. The solution they offered: we should join a MAT.

It didn't stop there. The first visit was only the beginning. I had to draw up an action plan to send to the team; I was asked to re-draft my SIP and send to them for feedback and approval. This then triggered another visit; the second one very much framed within an Ofsted style. Letters, phone calls, emails; the pressure was increasing.

So caught up and consumed by what felt like a fight to retain the standalone status for my school was I, that I didn't even notice at first how unwell I was becoming. I was so busy dealing with what was happening *around* me that I didn't notice what was happening *to* me. A blanket of political power was being slowly pulled over my school, enveloping it, suffocating it, rendering it helpless, demanding submission. At the same time, a blanket of aggressive, debilitating, critical life-threatening and life-limiting illness took over my fragile humanness, smothered my strength and left me completely broken. At the time I did not connect the two; but now in recovery, I can.

I see now that there is a *living connection* between the Head and the school he or she leads. In deeply committing to the school, I felt its takeover as a personal takeover; the takeover of the professional self at the same time as the personal self. But the attacks did not cease. Whilst I was critically ill in hospital, weak, fed alternately first by a glucose then by a morphine drip, emaciated, more than half my body weight gone, so weak that I could not even stand up, the Deputy Head who had taken the helm in my absence, received a call from one of the officials. They had heard that I was ill and wanted to know what was wrong with me; how long would I be away? It was my absence now that created the space where power could be applied—the space where a rhetoric of failure could be further enforced. As a Headteacher I was experiencing in congruence two different forms of what I can only describe as violence: my physical self was being attacked by an illness that carried me to the space between this life and the next whilst my professional self was being forced into a space where I could no longer be the authentic leader that I had signed up to be. I was being asked to pledge allegiance to what I experienced as a sinister practice that had infiltrated the profession that I loved. But I simply could not comply with what I did not believe in.

I returned, months later, to resume my place at the helm of my Arts College. But I returned as a very different person. I could see with far more clarity and detachment now. I had received my calling when our Lord gave me new life and I knew that my work there was done. I left the school that I had loved, lived and breathed for five years. Within six months the school had been taken over by a MAT. I still keep a distant eye on the school and how it is faring. I note with interest that since it was taken over, its results have gone down, its popularity has decreased, its Ofsted grade was reduced from 'Good with outstanding features' to 'requires improvement'. And the Headteacher has suddenly 'disappeared' (Lepowska 2015; Waters 2013).

Academies and Catholic Education

I tell this story not to speak out or against the Academies programme. I believed wholeheartedly in it when it was first conceived as its transformational mission to address engrained underachievement in some of the poorest parts of the country had appealed to me. But I do not believe in what it has become anymore. I have deep concerns and fears that the practices that I experienced will at some point both find their way into, and impact upon, Catholic education.

I came into Catholic education in some ways to find refuge from what was a terrible, frightening and debilitating experience in the non-denominational Academies sector. But I am concerned. If the Academies programme and its common-place associated practices are embraced by the Catholic sector, my question is one of preservation and protection of the mission; and raises a question of mission integrity (Grace 2002).

I contend that the Academies programme was conceived out of an ideology. A government that formulates policy and sets about reform based on ideology is not a wise government (Apple 1996). Our Catholic Christian faith is *not* an ideology. I submit that our faith will be at risk if it aligns itself with the ideology of education which is now implicit in Academisation. It is still, as yet, under-researched (Chapman and Salokangas 2012). Our faith may well find that it is incompatible with an ideology that appears to privilege finance, data, executive structures and managerialism over and above its people.

I question why, if there is no longer a call for compulsory academisation coming from central government, is there an increasing pressure on Catholic schools to academise and then be organised into Catholic Academy Trusts? What benefit; what gain; what deepening of Catholic practice and strengthening of Catholic education can be gained from entering into a lifelong legal agreement with a government that is then enabled to dictate policy and practice that will directly impact upon our mission (Newsam 2013)?

We are living in uncertain times, and we are surrounded by a deepening sense of what could be described as existential doubt (Ellis and Bochner 2016; Merrill and West 2009). My call to the Catholic education community is simply to wait; listen,

watch, read the research and the body of literature that *will* start to grow. Separate the truth from the spin (Gewirtz et al. 2004). Ask for God's guidance. And be patient.

Wise decisions can only emerge from discernment (Nouwen 2013). Before we go stumbling forth into a place from which we might never be able to return, let us consider other ways, the possible alternative ways of securing our future. Let us guard against an unconscious participation in legitimising practices such as the stripping away of professional and human dignity of our school leaders and teachers, of placing the value of assets above the value we place on the mission, before we stop seeing the child and in their place see just data (Sharratt and Fullan 2012).

Conclusion

Are MATs and Academies a threat to Catholic education? I maintain that as educators in England, we are currently divided on this issue. But as the Gospel warns us: 'if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot last' (Mark 3: 26). Now is not the time to divide and fragment. Now is the time to apply our deeply Catholic practice of discerning wisdom from prayer, from scripture and perhaps from the auto- and ethnographic stories of those who have lived and worked in the Academies programme; from those who have certainly suffered but, above all, survived.

Notes

1. Autoethnography has roots in anthropology and ethnography. As a methodology it places the self (auto) in the writer's specific field (ethno) and enables the writer to tell the story (graphy) of their experience within that field. It was first championed as a qualitative research methodology in the 1980s as a reaction to the so-called 'crisis of representation' in the field of social science research that questioned how positivist approaches to research could present truths of lived reality; autoethnography accounts for the role of personal experience in research and offers an approach for studying cultural experience. It privileges personal voice and lived experiences and developed in the work of prominent researchers specialising in the field such as Laurel Richardson, Arthur Bochner, Deborah Reed-Danahay and Carolyn Ellis. Although a contentious and questioned methodology within the field of academia, it has grown in prominence and popularity in both the USA, Canada and, in more recent decades, in the UK.

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Louise McGowan studied music at Goldsmith's University in London and enjoyed an early career teaching music and drama in schools in south east London and Kent. After gaining a Masters in Business Management from Canterbury Christ Church University, she moved into senior leadership at a large mixed secondary modern school as Head of 6th Form before moving to a Vice Principal then Acting Principal post in one of Kent's first sponsored city academies. Her first substantive headship was in an all girls' creative and performing arts school in Kent; a stand-alone converter academy. Louise is currently in her second headship, in post as Headmistress at the all girls' Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College in north west London, a founding member of the Diocese of Westminster MAT, a high performing Trust, established in 2012 and regularly named within the top four performing Trusts in the country. Louise's doctoral thesis uses *autoethnography* as both method and methodology to examine faith leadership within the academies programme.

Part IV
Reflections on Emerging Research About Religious Education in Catholic Schools

Introduction

Sean Whittle

In 1988, the *Congregation for Catholic Education*, which is in effect the 'education' department based in the Vatican, issued a guidance document which described the central place of religion within Catholic schools. This text is intended to be a set of general guidelines to aid reflection and encourage renewal. The 1988 document is important because it seeks to frame the whole of Catholic schooling within a religious dimension. It is vital to appreciate that this is distinct from prioritising the place of Religious Education within the Catholic school. Getting the balance right between what happens in Religious Education lessons and the wider religious dimension of a Catholic school is not easy to achieve. In the years since 1988, there has been an ongoing debate about the relationship between the two. In fact, in Britain, and perhaps to a growing extent in Ireland, a deepening tendency has opened up. This is to view the Religious Education curriculum as somehow central to the whole endeavour or project of Catholic education.

This has firmly put the research spotlight on questions and debates about the nature, scope, content and pedagogy of Religious Education in Catholic schools. The eight chapters in Part IV reflect the diversity of current research and provide a fascinating indication of the range of research questions and some differing views about the unique challenges facing Religious Education in Catholic schools. The contributions to Part IV should be read as a continuation of the analysis which appeared in the recently published edited volume *Religious Education in Catholic Schools: Perspectives from Ireland and the UK* (Whittle 2018).

In Chap. 15, Fiona Dineen engages with the provocative question of whether or not Religious Education in Catholic schools is experiencing genuinely troubling times or just the routine ructions of contemporary educational ebb and flow. In asking if Religious Education in Catholic schools has a future, it could be argued that in the Irish context of today the future for the subject looks precarious. Globally, debating the nature and purpose of Religious Education has received significant

attention, with a key debate being on its educational value. However, in Ireland, the proposals for the redrafting of the primary school curriculum has sharpened the focus on Religious Education in a State designed and funded curriculum. Traditionally, Religious Education in Catholic schools has been regarded in benign terms as a positive part of the whole curriculum. However, attitudes in the wider Irish society are changing, and Religious Education in Catholic schools has become a contested space. In this chapter, Fiona Dineen explores many emerging challenges and implications for Religious Education in Irish Catholic schools at primary level and possible pathways for navigating future directions. Many of these issues are picked up in Chap. 16, in the analysis of the situation in Irish primary schools, offered by Amalee Meehan and Daniel O'Connell. The authors explain that in Catholic schools in the Republic of Ireland, historically the principal education provider in the country, are coming under increasing pressure. This chapter outlines five recent developments which put pressure on Catholic primary schools, in particular, on Religious Education. Some of these are state driven, such as new curricular proposals and policy changes. Other pressures include changing popular attitudes and the need for school divestment. Cumulatively, these developments pose challenges but also opportunities for the Catholic schools, and Meehan and O'Connell offer a discussion of what these involve.

In Chap. 17, Brendan Carmody ponders on the future of Religious Education in Irish secondary schools. He describes how Religious Education has space in the school curriculum as an academic subject but faces some key challenges. In particular, the challenge of being an attractive option for students. In this chapter, Carmody argues that in planning ahead, secondary Religious Education clearly needs to have high appeal not only for its religious content, but also for its academic exchange value. To achieve a satisfactory balance between being academic and faith forming, it is argued that Religious Education should be philosophically grounded through a distinctive branch of critical realism. In Chap. 18, Patricia Kiernan proposes one possible way ahead for framing Religious Education in Catholic schools. The chapter outlines contemporary approaches to dialogue in Catholic schools and suggests that *interreligious dialogue* and learning are key aspects of strengthening Catholic identity. The argument presented by Kiernan draws on a steady flow of recent Vatican documents which have guided, supported and encouraged Catholic Christians to engage in respectful dialogue. The term *inter-belief dialogue* is used to describe the dialogue between people from different religions and philosophical convictions. While arguing that dialogue is a pivotal and not a peripheral part of Catholic education, this chapter provides an overview of three experimental methodologies (Belief Circles, Origami Moments and Inter-belief Dialogue Cafés) inspired by *The Enquiring Classroom*. These can be used to facilitate *inter-belief dialogue* in Religious Education in Catholic and other types of school.

In Chap. 19, Gillian Sullivan picks up on the theme of dialogue in relation to listening to the different voices to be found in the Religious Education classroom in Irish secondary schools. This chapter draws on recent research from an Irish post-primary context which investigates the capacity of Religious Education within a denominational, Roman Catholic, setting to contribute to an authentic inclusion. The understanding of an authentic inclusion that underpins this study recognises and

engages with the complexities of pluralism, in which there are often incompatible and contested worldviews on the nature of the ultimate order-of-things, by providing opportunities and encounters for true communication and dialogue. The differing, and at times, conflicting expectations regarding the purpose, nature and scope of Religious Education in secondary schools, as held by the Irish State, the Catholic Church, the Religion teachers and students are briefly explored in this chapter. The research found that where these different perceptions collide, it is students with minority religious and non-religious worldviews who experience the greatest impact. The chapter recognises the role of dialogue as an important pedagogical approach in Religious Education. This chapter attempts to bring the voices of the Church, state, teachers and students into conversation.

In Chap. 20, John Moffatt puts the spotlight on the British context and homes in on developments in Religious Education in England and Wales. This is an important contribution because John Moffatt has been part of the advisory team of experts who have informed the planning and development of a substantive review of the Religious Education curriculum for all Catholic schools in England and Wales. The Religious Education content is specified in a document known as the *Curriculum Directory* (2012). In this chapter, Moffatt considers how Religious Education in a Catholic school can be seen as a discipline in a knowledge-rich curriculum. He argues that the new school inspection framework in England, devised by the school inspectorate OFSTED, actually gives an apt opportunity to re-evaluate what it means to learn a discipline like Religious Education and why that might be important and helpful for young people. Although the 'powerful knowledge' thesis developed by Michael Young has been criticised by some, it can be given a benign reading. This would allow deep subject learning to be both liberating and something for life. There may be an opportunity at hand to rethink Catholic education and Religious Education in Catholic schools in terms of a new Christian humanism. Moffatt concludes with an exploration of what humanistic 'deep learning' might mean for Religious Education in Catholic schools today.

Finally, in Chap. 21, an alternate line of analysis of the current challenges facing Religious Education in Catholic schools in Ireland, is adopted by John Murray. This chapter has an unusual starting place focusing on one of *Vatican I*'s theological teachings. John Murray suggests that this teaching has been neglected in Religious Education in Catholic schools. It is speculated that this possible neglect is to the detriment of Religious Education in several ways, and thus perhaps deserves some attention. The focus is shone on *Dei Filius*, with its deep roots in Aquinas, on human reason being capable of demonstrating the existence of God. In this chapter, Murray maintains that this theological insight has tended to be overlooked, and this has impacted the way 'faith' and 'faith-development' are often approached in contemporary Catholic schools. It is proposed that in order to avoid a narrow conception of faith-development, it would be helpful to frame Religious Education in Catholic schools as theism built on faith *and* reason. The priority is to have a richer theologically informed account of Religious Education in Catholic schools, and in particular, of faith-development that might be part-and-parcel of it.

Taken as a whole, these seven chapters offer a rich set of reflections on emerging research about Religious Education in Catholic Schools, and thus deserve a careful analysis.

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Chapter 15
Religious Education in Catholic Schools: Troubling Times or Routine Ructions?

Fiona Dineen

Abstract Does Religious Education have a future? It could be argued that in the contemporary Irish context, Religious Education in Catholic schools faces a most precarious future. Globally, debating the nature and purpose of Religious Education has received significant attention, with a key debate being on its educational value. Proposals for the redrafting of the Primary School Curriculum has sharpened the focus on Religious Education in a State designed and funded curriculum. Religious Education, up until recently, 'has been understood in Ireland, generally, as a presumed, necessary and helpful part of the curriculum at both primary and second-level schools' by Byrne (in Religious education in catholic schools: perspectives from Ireland and the UK, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2018). In the contemporary climate, however, it occupies a much contested space. This chapter explores some of the subsequent emerging challenges and implications for Religious Education in Irish Catholic schools at primary level and possible pathways for navigating future directions.

Keywords Religious education · Curriculum · Teacher identity · Catholic schools

Introduction: Setting the Scene

In the past decade, Ireland has experienced an intense debate about the suitability of the structure of the primary education sector to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse, multi-faith society. The primary system is currently denominational and diverse, with schools under Catholic patronage occupying the largest sector (88.9%). It should be acknowledged that the system evolved from the historical development of the country, and reflects the unique Church/State relations that previously existed. It is also important to note that Ireland is still largely a Christian country, with the majority of the population identifying as Catholic in the most recent census.

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The challenges facing Catholic education globally are well documented, as evidenced in the increased interest in scholarship and research in the field. Ireland is not immune to these challenges, with an ongoing questioning of the role and value of faith schools in a secular society. Notably, there is an intensified focus on the subject area of Religious Education in these schools due to high number of Catholic schools at primary level. It could be argued that it is this unique structural and patronage context that makes the critique about Catholic schooling in Ireland different to the experiences of other countries.

The ongoing debate is fuelled by a number of recent landmark educational developments, such as the Report from the *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (2012) and the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (2020), which signal significant implications for Religious Education in Catholic primary schools. This chapter will explore these developments in relation to Religious Education and the State, the educator, and the Church.

Religious Education and the State

One of the most significant milestones for Catholic schooling in Ireland was the Report from the *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (2012). This landmark Report initially looked at the process of divesting so that there could be greater diversity and choice with regard to the patronage of primary schools. Although not in its initial terms of reference, it also made a number of recommendations that could potentially impact on the ethos or characteristic spirit and Religious Education in these schools. The process of the *Forum*, and subsequent recommendations, was broadly welcomed by all education stakeholders. An area that proved to be contentious, however, was the proposal to introduce the subject of *Education about Religions and Beliefs* (ERB) and *Ethics* on the curriculum of all schools, in addition to the subject area of Religious Education. Perhaps one of the reasons why this proposed new subject ERB and Ethics met with contention, was the uncertainty that surrounded its purposes, namely who had oversight of this subject, who was it for, and how it related to the Patron's Religious Education programme.

A State body, the *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment* (NCCA), would have responsibility for designing ERB and Ethics, its apparent purpose was to provide a neutral subject for students opting out of a Patron's Religious Education programme. There appeared to be a lack of clarity when questions were raised about the implications for Catholic schools potentially offering two subject pathways in Religious Education. Some advocates for Catholic education who, at the time, proposed that ERB and Ethics was a 'Trojan Horse' (Connolly 2014, p. 206) for imploding the curriculum with an implicit secularist agenda and designed to eventually 'remove sacramental preparation and confessional Religious Education', may well believe that their prophesy was justified when the subject was included as mandatory for all in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2020).

Some would contend that the inclusion of ERB and Ethics is a progressive step forward and required to meet the needs of a changing Ireland. Indeed, the NCCA (2020) in the opening rationale of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* states that the 'schools and curriculum are a critical site for responding to national priorities or needs and addressing societal problems' (p. 2). This suggests that the introduction of this subject is a matter of national priority to address a societal issue. The document goes on say 'there are demands to include new aspects of learning in the curriculum such as Education and Religions and Beliefs and Ethics'. While in some sense it is positive that the State encourages a space for ERB and Ethics on the national curriculum, questions must be raised with regard to the implications of this development for the Patron's Religious Education programme, how ERB and Ethics will manifest itself on the curriculum and its relationship with current Religious Education programmes.

In responding to these questions, it would suggest some troubling times ahead for Religious Education in its current embodiment in Catholic schools. Firstly, ERB and Ethics is a distinct entity on the new curriculum, it is proposed to sit in the areas of Wellbeing and Social and Environmental Education in core curriculum time, all developed, supported and inspected by the State. Secondly, Religious Education as a subject area has a proposed reduction in time allocation, a renaming to be referred to as the Patron's programme, a cover all term for the different types of Religious Education programmes (for example, ethical, multi-faith) offered by the various patron bodies, and placed in 'flexible curriculum time'. From a brief examination of the 2020 curriculum proposals, it could be argued that Religious Education is being somewhat relegated—facing considerable impact to its time, title and positioning within the curriculum.

Should these changes to Religious Education be a cause for concern? Given that the educational arena is always a contested and evolving space, with a myriad of agendas competing for inclusion, perhaps it is no surprise that changes to time allocations and subject titles occur, it may seem like routine ructions, with certain subjects always having to fight their corner for survival. As such, some curricula evolvements can appear subtle and even superficial.

In this instance, however, when one situates the changes to Religious Education in the context of the development of ERB and Ethics, the rationale for the broader curriculum framework, and other changes in educational policy, it is apparent that it is more than a subtle or superficial change. From the perspective of Catholic schools, it could be argued that it is what is 'missing' from the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* that is a significant cause for concern. There is little said about the view of the child with regard to their holistic and spiritual development, and this raises questions about the understanding of the child implicit in the proposed curriculum. Furthermore, there is possibly a missed opportunity in not having any engagement and dialogue between the areas of Religious Education and ERB and Ethics, and this raises questions surrounding the philosophy and practicalities of implementing both subjects in Catholic schools. Indeed, a consultation process raised many of these contextual issues notably the rights of patron bodies, questions re the impact on ethos, concerns about time pressures and curriculum overload (Byrne 2018, p. 40).

It would appear that these voiced concerns were not considered in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

It is important to be cognisant of the broader cultural context in which schools operate in Ireland, particularly how this context impacts on educational policy and curriculum design. There is also a need to recognise the reality of how the cultural change can impact on the understanding of education. As Murray cautions

> During a dramatic cultural transformation such as ours, the understanding of education changes almost imperceptibly, but very profoundly, as it seeks to align itself with the changed cultural outlook. The educational transformation is especially deep as the changes ignore what is central to education. If education were really understood as the preparation of people for life, it would stand to reason that education would be founded on what is means to be a person and on seeking to understand the goal and purpose of human life. (2019, p. 85)

A core issue being raised in the proposed curriculum is the question of what is the understanding of education, who is responsible for setting the agenda for education and the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved in education, particularly the future redefined relationship between Church and State.

The past relationship between Church and State has frequently been critiqued. Some would argue, with regard to educational policy, that the State 'preferred to delegate educational responsibility to the main Christian Churches, limiting the state to a "subsidiary", and often effectively subordinate role' (Fischer 2011, p. 140). As such, if the State is to embrace the demand of pluralism and diversity in contemporary society, the argument follows that the preferred model of schooling would be a single common school system with no reference to a particular religious ethos. This view, as Cooling (2010, p. 18) highlights, suggests that 'religious belief is a private matter that should not impinge on the objective, educational task of promoting rationality' and therefore marginalises the place of religion in education. This proposal raises the question about the significant impact if the State had sole responsibility to educate and whether the Constitution should continue to read, as it currently does, that the State *provides for* education?

Engaging further with this element of the debate is beyond the scope of this chapter, however, it highlights the need for alertness with regard to the politicising of education. Watson (2009), for example, outlines the impact that positivist and utilitarian agendas have had on Western education. Furthermore, it creates an awareness of the arduous task in trying to reconcile tensions that exist in relation to place of religion in education, and how singular approaches to education to address diversity may not be without some shortcomings.

Reflecting on the proposed changes point to it being serious in creating uncertainty for the future of Religious Education, while uncovering a deeper complexity of issues at the heart of this curricular reform. Proposing two distinct pathways for Religious Education perhaps misses an opportunity for developing a rich, dialogical approach that could have challenged the Church to address the issue of diversity in a more robust way in its programme. It could be argued that classroom experiences of Religious Education to date have led to a narrow perspective on what the subject entails and how it addresses the needs of contemporary society. Sullivan, however, illuminates the potential of Religious Education, asserting.

> Religious Education (RE) provides a rich and complex space for learning, one that is significant, necessary and *sui generis*… RE offers a space like no other: for encounter, explanation, and empathy; for expression, interpretation, and imagination; for interrogation, questioning, and reflection. It protects a space that equips students to interrogate, negotiate, and dialogue with conflicting interpretations *within* a particular faith tradition. It facilitates encounter *between* faith traditions. (2017, p. 7)

This is an ambitious vision for Religious Education, and one that could and should be engaged and developed further in classroom practice. Furthermore, considering the full potential of Religious Education may enable a revised pathway for ERB and Ethics in a redeveloped curriculum.

Interestingly, in the broader context, the phrase 'post-secular' has been suggested for reframing existing debates about religion in education. It could be argued that in Ireland, while there is acknowledgement of changing religious diversity and plurality, it has not yet arrived at a post-secular understanding of religion in education, 'where new religious movements, new traditional religions, and contemporary secular sensibilities mix' (Bowie et al. 2012, p. 140).

It may be concluded that the proposed curriculum changes will significantly impact Religious Education in Catholic schools. This impact is both implicit and explicit, notably with regard to the underlying philosophy and understanding of education. In many respects, in the Irish context, Religious Education at primary level is only emerging on an inevitable journey of evolution. Investigating the development of Religious Education in other countries charts a more robust engagement with this contested area, for example, a recent report *Religious Literacy: A way forward for Religious Education?* (Biesta et al. 2019) illustrates the myriad of complexities that exist when unravelling the implications of different positions and understandings in relation to the nature and purpose of education, religion and Religious Education. Perhaps there should be further reflection on these issues prior to creating a situation in the Irish context that loads Religious Education with too many competing and unsuccessful imperatives.

Religious Education and the Educator

While changes to Religious Education are certainly on the horizon, the importance of the role of the educator in implementing these changes cannot be underestimated. Little research exists in relation to the perspectives of teachers regarding their involvement in Religious Education at primary level. Yet, teachers face on a daily basis the task of negotiating the issues and challenges that confront Religious Education. Coll highlights the impact of the 'doublethink' that religious educators experience in the contemporary landscape:

> Few would deny that religious educators in Western Europe find themselves working in a most challenging context, buffeted simultaneously by contradictory currents which encourage a type of doublethink on the relevance and importance of religion in contemporary society. On the one hand, the pervasive liberal view that human life is more free and better off

without a transcendental vision is loudly championed in the public square…On the other hand, religious educators are aware, too, that the changing demographics…has a growing presence of generations of migrants and their families who, on the contrary, tend to prioritise faith and its commitments.' (Coll 2019 p. 248)

This context creates a myriad of issues around Religious Education, with teachers receiving mixed messages about the place and value of religion. It raises questions about how teachers will negotiate the challenges arising from the proposed delivery of two Religious Education programmes in the classroom. Furthermore, the issue is compounded by the fact that, to date, there has been an absence of a systematic approach to the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers in this area. Indeed, this is not a shortcoming of the State, but of the Church, for not taking responsibility to adequately resource this CPD.

Sullivan explores how Religious Education in Catholic schools 'operates at the crossroads of Church, home and educational communities'. This requires the teacher to exercise a balancing act of bridge-building, 'mediating between persons and traditions, between classrooms and faith cultures, between the school and the Church'. He provocatively asserts that despite the rhetoric of Catholic education being central to the mission of the Church, the ministry of teaching has been somewhat insufficiently recognised to date. Again, this raises questions around roles, responsibilities and accountability. If teachers constantly face the challenge of the 'contradictory currents' and 'doublethink' that exists in relation to Religious Education, and do so without sufficient support and professional development, there are likely to become 'despondent, disappointed, desperately tired and burnt out—perhaps even cynical and bitter' (Sullivan 2018, p. 30).

In the Irish context, there is an urgent need to review the models of support for those engaged in Religious Education in Catholic schools, and critically appraise its suitability for both the contemporary and future contexts. It is not enough to lament the situation, there needs to be accountability and responsibility for initialising this review and resourcing, in so far as possible, the emerging issues. Greater consideration must be taken of how the hope, energy and resilience of educators is sustained in these times, particularly if Religious Education in Catholic schools is to remain an option in the future.

The importance of supporting the educator in Religious Education can be delineated from the findings of some recent studies. The *Does Religious Education Work?* Project (Conroy, Lundie et al. 2011–2017) provides a helpful analysis of the complexity of the myriad of issues facing teachers with regards to Religious Education and in shaping their professional identity. Findings were evidenced (Baumfield et al. 2012) at a Delphi seminar for senior figures in Religious Education demonstrated that there was much uncertainty 'as to the *modus vivendi and modus operandi* of Religious Education'. Kuusisto and Gearon (2017) explored the impact of teaching in a pedagogically and politically contested space, and the subsequent tensions, uncertainty and tentativeness that emerge for teachers in relation to their professional identity. Interestingly, this uncertainty was also experienced by teachers in Higher Education settings.

Addressing some of the challenges and uncertainty created by Religious Education for the identity of the teacher, Conroy proposes that some of the issues lie in the nature of the profession of teaching itself, quoting Carr (2003) who suggests that teaching is at best a '*para* profession' arguing that it falls between 'a number of definitions and lacks clarity of what one needs to know' (Conroy 2016, p. 165). With regard to Religious Education, these ambiguities are compounded as 'religion itself is considered a liminal activity'. Therefore, the

> …nested identity of RE renders yet more complicated professional identity, subjecting it to the myriad of claims of religious/believing communities and local demography in addition to government and legislative considerations. Consciously or unconsciously, teachers are then caught up in the conflicted thinking that governs the subject. In addition to being subjected to the perceptions and language that bathes the role of the teacher in the tincture of an economic–managerial discourse, they are also subject to the shaping discourse of religious practice itself.' (Conroy 2016, p. 168)

The findings suggest that the challenges and conflicts faced by teachers, coupled with resourcing issues and the lack of subject esteem in which Religious Education is held, has led many teachers to turn to philosophy and Ethics to reinvigorate their 'professional standing' (IBID, p. 174). This study again highlights the acute need for ongoing support to teachers to assist them in charting an increasing complex landscape for Religious Education.

There is scope for more research with regard to the teacher and Religious Education in the Irish context. A number of small scale studies have been conducted to date, and the findings echo similar sentiments to the aforementioned studies, namely that there is considerable anxiety and confidence lacking for some teachers who engage in Religious Education. There is also a tentativeness around the subject due to concerns regarding parental attitudes (Dineen and Lundie 2017).

There is an immediacy in the need to look forward and be cognisant of how the future context and understandings of Religious Education are going to compact and compound the challenges for the teacher, and indeed school leadership. The learning from studies to date suggest that the more imperatives that are placed upon Religious Education, in its many approaches and understandings, the more exponential the growth of uncertainty and confusion for the teacher. Furthermore, as Conroy asserts the issue of teacher professional identity is complex, and this complexity is compounded in the area of Religious Education. In the Irish context, however, this issue is accentuated given the cultural transformation and spectrum of teacher profiles that exist in Catholic primary school at a time of immense transitions (Dineen 2018). It raises questions bigger than solely providing support for ongoing CPD, this is just one piece of the picture. Those with responsibility for Religious Education and Catholic schooling need to consider more fundamentally the 'why' of their involvement in education and how questions of 'value' are confidently communicated to educators.

Religious Education and the Church: Does It Matter?

In many respects, the discussion about Religious Education, the impact of curricular reform, and the role of the teacher begs the further question of does it matter and to whom does it matter? One could, of course, find an eloquent and affirmative answer to this in the aspirational rhetoric about Catholic education, extrapolated from Church documents and position statements. Nevertheless, if one views the question from the perspective of the educator, where does one see concrete expression given to the value of Religious Education at a local level in the school community and by those in leadership?

In recent decades, Ireland saw a number of positive developments for Religious Education in Catholic schools include the launch of *Share the Good News: A National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (2010), the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum* (2015) and *Grow in Love* (2015), a Religious Education programme to resource the new curriculum. While these developments were welcome, warmly received, and to be commended in redefining and reenergising the role of Religious Education in an evolving educational landscape, are there further ways that the momentum inspired by the vision of these documents could be kept on track? The following are some possible proposals to reinvigorate Religious Education and the broader educational endeavour of Catholic schooling in Ireland at this time.

Firstly, it may be helpful to proactively redraw the landscape of primary level school provision. Many agree, both inside and outside Church perspectives, that it would serve all parties well should there be a smaller number of Catholic schools at primary level. While providing greater school choice, it would also enable Catholic schools to consider their ethos and mission in a more authentic manner. This is not suggesting that Catholic schools become closed and less dialogical, rather the current system is not conducive, for some schools, to appropriately reflect on their ethos or characteristic spirit in a meaningful manner, or indeed at all. The divesting process, as recommended by the Forum Report, has not significantly changed provision at primary level. Perhaps it is time for more concrete action to be taken by the Church around this issue. The need for a plurality of patronages is acknowledged and encouraged by the Church (Congregation for Catholic Education 1977). Moving forward on the divesting issue is not an easy task, however, a proactive engagement in the process may be a more fruitful endeavour for Catholic schooling in the longer term.

Secondly, there is a need to reflect critically on Catholic education as a lifelong enterprise of the Church and identify the stages that offer signs of hope and those that are neglected or stagnating. Serious consideration of how these areas might be addressed through embracing the vision of *Share the Good News* would perhaps renew an appreciation of the many formal and informal approaches to Catholic education. It could be argued that Catholic education in Ireland is mostly conceived as Catholic schooling. This could be seen as a 'double-edged sword' as schools are laden with many expectations when it comes to children's religious formation.

Furthermore, it has led to other avenues of Catholic education being underdeveloped. This is a considerable stumbling block now that the model of schooling is under strain and alternative approaches are lacking.

Another key issue is that sacramental preparation is situated within the Religious Education programme for primary schools, thus the pastoral reality of the Church has a significant impact in this regard. Given the uncertainty facing Religious Education in Catholic schools, and the potential changes in the provision of these schools, urgently necessitates the exploration of alternative models of Religious Education and sacramental preparation. In this context, a 'lifelong' approach to Catholic education is critical. Byrne (2018), however, suggests that there is some evidence to be hopeful that a more 'coherent reflection on behalf of the Church, in seeking to establish a unified pastoral approach, encouraging its members to continue to educate themselves in their faith' (p. 48) is leading to greater appreciation of the lifelong nature of Catholic education.

Thirdly, it may be timely to review and restructure the support services offered to Catholic schools. The focus of the supports to date has largely been on operational matters, particularly managerial and legal issues. This is absolutely necessary and should continue. One could argue, however, that the same level of support has been somewhat lacking with respect to understanding the school ethos/characteristic spirit and the area of Religious Education. Perhaps this imbalance is a historical legacy as Tuohy (2006) observes that the Church developed a philosophy of schooling as opposed to a philosophy of education. Indeed, this is a point that is not just an issue for schools with a religious ethos. It appears to resonate across other patronage structures. In a recent study to establish staff understanding of the characteristic spirit in publicly managed schools in Ireland, it emerged that there was uncertainty, a lack of understanding and a questioning of relevance and applicability of 'characteristic spirit' in the sector. Liddy et al. assert that it is 'indicative of the broader critique of Irish education as focused on operational and functional aspects, where what gets discussed is 'what we do' rather than 'why we are doing something' or 'why certain forms of knowledge are selected over others' (2019, p. 113).

Furthermore, it reflects the 'reluctance within Ireland to discuss the philosophical purpose and value of schooling' (IBID, p. 114). This is a critical point in the contemporary context. Some of the key issues for Religious Education in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* are raised in the underlying, implicit philosophy. A robust discussion on its purpose and understanding of education would serve to benefit education generally, and clarify some of the implications for educators in Catholic schools. Adequate supports should be provided to schools to assist them in navigating this new landscape, particularly with regard to mediating the mission and ethos of the school in a space occupied by conflicting values.

The challenges outlined earlier, for example, teacher confidence, anxiety and uncertainty require a different type of strategic support, along with the bigger issue of communicating an understanding of Catholic education to school communities. This reframing of approaches will require leadership that is creative and courageous,

however, there is little point in discussing the future of Religious Education in its absence. Some Irish dioceses have shown initiative in how this task might be engaged with. It would be helpful to report their journeys in adopting different approaches to support schools and educators in changing times.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that Religious Education in Catholic schools in Ireland faces an uncertain future. There remains a significant interest in Catholic education, yet there is also a strong political agenda to restructure denominational education. Some of the proposals meet the needs of a changing society, however, there also appears, in policy developments, an unrelenting motivation to disestablish and somewhat eradicate Religious Education in Catholic schools. Some who promote this approach argue that it is justified and borne out of frustration with the failure to expedite the divestment process. For others, it is explicitly about championing a non-denominational State system of primary level education.

What is essential in this context, is the need for an open and robust dialogue about the philosophy that inspires the Primary Curriculum in general, and the place of Religious Education in particular. A deeper reflection on the relationship between these areas in the context of the characteristic spirit of the school, and religion in the public sphere is also required. Careful consideration of findings from experiences in other countries where Religious Education is laden with many competing imperatives would be prudent.

Given that it is the educator that mediates the challenges posed by the contemporary context, it is critical that they are supported and encouraged in their role. There is an opportunity in this uncertainty for a review of current approaches to Catholic education. The challenges could be providential in prompting the Church to be creative and courageous in redrawing the landscape and restructuring its support to schools, in a way that meaningfully communicates why it matters. This, of course, is premised on their being a real commitment and understanding of the value of education and the educator, and being open to change and engaging differently. It may well be that, despite the persistent challenges, such a reframing and adaptation of current approaches will sustain Catholic education as a vibrant option in the future.

Perhaps there is some hope to be garnered from the Covid-19 crisis that began in 2020. It has been an opportunity for pause and, for many, brought to the fore questions of meaning and values. Interestingly, some initial reports highlight that during the pandemic period there was an increase in prayer and online religious practice across the island of Ireland (Ganiel 2020). The changes in practice prompted by the crisis and the resulting engagement, for example, around sacramental preparation, may be a stimulus for the Church to approach some areas differently in the future, particularly Catholic schooling. It may also prompt a deeper reflection on the vision for education in Irish society. Religious Education, and indeed the existence of faith schools, will always be contested. It is the response that matters. These troubling times necessitate a

response characterised by hope, heart, understanding, commitment and confidence. A reframing and renewal of approaches to chart a future pathway for Catholic schooling in Ireland.

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Chapter 16
Religious Education in Irish Catholic Primary Schools: Recent Developments, Challenges and Opportunities

Amalee Meehan and Daniel O'Connell

Abstract Catholic schools in the Republic of Ireland, historically the principal education provider in that country, are coming under increasing pressure. This article outlines five recent developments which put pressure on primary Catholic education, in particular Religious Education in Catholic schools. Some of these are state driven, such as new curricular proposals and policy changes. Other pressures include changing popular attitudes and the need for school divestment. Cumulatively these developments pose challenges but also opportunities for the Catholic sector. The concluding section of the article offers a brief discussion of those challenges and opportunities.

Keywords Catholic primary schools · Curriculum review · Religious education · Republic of Ireland

Introduction

Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), the national public broadcaster in Ireland, recently ran a piece on its website entitled *'Parents need to make informed choices of school patronage'*. It states

> There are problems… there's the issue of Catholic Church control. More than 90% of state funded primary schools here have a Catholic ethos. This makes Ireland unique among developed countries. It means that Catholic beliefs play a central role in the formation of the vast majority of Irish citizens. The church authorities decide who gets to be a teacher, or a principal. Children are indoctrinated in the Catholic faith (O'Kelly 2019).

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The imbalance in school patronage is an issue recognised by both the Irish State and the Catholic Church. However, O'Kelly's deduction regarding Church authority over staffing decisions is disputed by the legal entity that is the school Board of Management (Government of Ireland 1998, Part IV); her claim of indoctrination is contraindicated by the reality of Religious Education today.[1] However, the piece is indicative of a mood in some quarters of Irish society regarding Catholic education in general and Religious Education at primary level in particular. Headlines such as 'What's next?: Breaking religious influence over education with a Citizens Assembly model' (Ó Ríordáin 2018) and 'The Irish Times view on the religious control of education: time for more radical change' (The Irish Times View 2018) communicate a desire for change with regard to Catholic education.

This article outlines five recent developments in the Republic of Ireland (henceforth Ireland) which put pressure on primary Catholic education, in particular Religious Education in Catholic schools; some of these are state driven, others are the result of popular attitudinal and demographic change. Cumulatively they pose challenges but also opportunities for the Catholic sector. The concluding section of the article offers a brief discussion of those challenges and opportunities.

Education About Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics

The school patronage landscape at primary level is problematic; approximately 89% of primary schools in Ireland have a Catholic patron. Both the Catholic Church and State agree that this historical actuality no longer serves the need for parental choice or the diversity of Irish society. It is a model that needs change. To that end in 2012, the Forum *for Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (henceforth the Forum*)* was established. One significant recommendation of the Forum report was the widespread divestment of Catholic schools (Coolahan et al. 2012). While recent times have seen the introduction of new forms of patronage such as *Educate Together*[2] and the state-run *Community National Schools*, a host of difficulties dogged the process, not least the marked reluctance to divest on the part of individual schools. The result is that the reality of divestment has been minimal.[3]

The Forum also advised that a state curriculum on religious beliefs and ethics should be introduced for children in denominational schools who do not wish to participate in Religious Education. Thus, in 2015, the Irish *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment* (NCCA),[4] proposed a curriculum in *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics* (henceforth ERB & Ethics). However, the NCCA intended this as something that *all* children would be required to study, regardless of school or patron. Somehow, without consultation, the Forum proposal had morphed into a state curriculum to be taught in all schools, including those with a religious ethos and Religious Education programme. A two-year public consultation on the possible introduction of ERB & Ethics with teachers, parents and children followed. It highlighted a number of concerns such as

- The pressure on the timetable: where would the new curriculum fit, how would time be found for it in an already overcrowded timetable?
- How would it correspond with the (legally protected) ethos of a school and a school's Religious Education programme?[5]
- The false separation between religions and ethics (as the name ERB & Ethics implies), as if religions have little to do with ethics. Further, what sort and source of ethics would be operative in the curriculum? (NCCA 2015).

In the absence of clear or convincing answers to such questions, the introduction of the subject ERB and Ethics stalled.

Review of the Curriculum (1999): Religious Education

The current primary school curriculum dates from 1999. Presently, the NCCA is reviewing that curriculum in order 'to ensure that the curriculum can continue to provide children with relevant and engaging experiences' (NCCA 2019a, p. 2). To date, proposals for change deal only with two curricular aspects: Structure and Time.

The current situation is that Religious Education is one of seven curricular subjects (NCCA 1999, p. 40), taught for 2.5 h every week (p. 70). While the content for all 11 other subjects is set by the state, Religious Education is the responsibility of the school patron (henceforth patron). As the patron of the majority of primary schools in the state, the Catholic community takes this responsibility seriously. Since 2015 it has been incrementally introducing a contemporary new Religious Education programme, *Grow in Love*, to replace the *Alive-0* programme operational since 1999.

However, the *Structure and Time* proposals remove Religious Education altogether from the curriculum. The NCCA offers no explanation for this removal nor any research to justify this change.

Figure 16.1 indicates the proposed new curricular arrangement for primary schools throughout the country. While Religious Education has been removed, something called the 'Patron's Programme' has been inserted under the new division of 'Flexible Time'. It seems that the Patron's Programme refers to a discretionary subject to satisfy the legal requirement that 'a reasonable amount of time is set aside in each school day for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the

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Minimum state curriculum time (60% of school time)

Including language, mathematics, social personal and health education, social environmental and scientific education, arts education and physical education

Flexible time (40% of school time)

Including discretionary curriculum time, patron's programme, recreation, assemblies and roll call

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Fig. 16.1 (From NCCA 2018, p. 19)

school' (*Education Act 1998* 30 (2) (d)). Initially this appears benign: while Religious Education as a subject will be removed, Catholic schools can continue to teach its own Religious Education programme (*Grow in Love)* as an expression of the Patron's Programme. However, while the practice in some Catholic schools may remain the same, the implications for Religious Education in Catholic schools are potentially grave when we consider (a) the importance of the integrated curriculum and (b) the attempted imposition of ERB & Ethics.

(a) At the moment, the primary school curriculum (1999) is an integrated one, where the different subjects interact with one another. For instance, it is possible to learn literacy, geography and history from studying Religious Education. But the new curricular proposals gather all subjects together in one integrative section (see Fig. 1), with the exception of Religious Education. The Patron's Programme appears as a discrete subject, cut off from interaction with other subjects. Uncoupling the Patron's Programme from the rest of the curriculum undermines the role of Religious Education in an integrated curriculum and life of a Catholic school.

(b) As a discretionary subject, the patron is not obliged to use this time to teach Religious Education, in any form; it can decide to use this time as it sees fit. With such a move, the state has absolved itself from the responsibility for the religious literacy of its citizens. This is at odds with recognised good practice across Europe where the vast majority of countries accept the necessity of Religious Education in schools (Schreiner 2013). Over the last two decades, in light of increasing social, cultural and religious tensions in many European countries, the Council of Europe has increasingly looked to Religious Education as a means of promoting intercultural understanding and respect for diverse beliefs as well as competences such as religious literacy and understanding. Research findings also show that young people value the place of Religious Education and want a safe space to learn and talk about their own and others' religions, beliefs and truth claims in schools (Smyth et al. 2013; NCCA 2017).

The removal of religious literacy from primary school education is also at odds with the state's acknowledgement that 'it is widely accepted that knowledge of religions and beliefs is an important part of a quality education and that it can foster democratic citizenship and mutual respect' (NCCA 2015, p. 9). Yet it proposes, without any explanation or research basis, to remove the provision for Religious Education from the revised primary curriculum. Indeed, this proposal potentially removes a subject that can realise many of the aims of ERB & Ethics. The rationale for ERB & Ethics acknowledges the importance of religious knowledge in enhancing religious freedom and promoting an understanding of diversity. It goes on to state 'it has been highlighted by a number of scholars, and in light of the resurgence of religious conflict, that the need to learn "from" religion is a key aspect of Religious Education' (NCCA 2015, p. 9). So why now remove Religious Education as a subject from the forthcoming curriculum? In the absence of explanation or rationale, this is difficult to understand: has the state decided that religious literacy is no longer necessary or even valuable, or

is this a first step in a 'back door' approach towards the introduction of ERB & Ethics? In other words, in a number of years when Religious Education has been considerably undermined, and Irish primary schools are at odds with the recognised international good practice of providing formal Religious Education, will the state then seek to insert ERB & Ethics as a compulsory subject on the curriculum?

Review of the Curriculum: Anthropology of the Person

The current primary school curriculum 'takes cognisance of the affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious dimensions of the child's experience and development. For most people in Ireland, the totality of the human condition cannot be understood or explained merely in terms of physical and social experience' (NCCA 1999, p. 27). While much has changed in Ireland since this curriculum was published, it is important to note that almost all members of the population still consider themselves to be religious or spiritual or both. In the most recent census, 85% of people self-identify as Christian, 1.3% as Muslim (CSO 2016). That census revealed that 9.8% of the population in Ireland identify as having no religion (CSO 2016). However, we must be careful not to equate that figure with atheism, which currently stands at 0.15%.[6] The category of 'no religion' does not necessarily imply lack of belief in God or lack of spirituality. In fact, an RTE poll (RTE/Behaviour and Attitudes 2016) found that while 14% of the population put themselves in the 'no religion' category, only 1% identified as agnostic and 4% as atheist. 9% of people in this category considered themselves spiritual. So, despite all the changes in Irish society, there is still a very large percentage of the population that identifies with a religion denomination and/or considers themselves spiritual.

The current curriculum reflects this understanding in its view of the child. It states:

> In seeking to develop the full potential of the individual, the curriculum takes into account the child's affective, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and religious needs…The spiritual dimension is a fundamental aspect of individual experience, and its religious and cultural expression is an inextricable part of Irish culture and history…Religious education specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God (NCCA 1999, p. 58).

This type of understanding is absent from the language and anthropology in the recent state documents regarding the new curriculum (NCCA 2018). These documents make no mention of the spiritual, moral or religious dimension of children. Indeed, they lack any stated anthropology of the child. This is at odds with other curricular programmes published by the NCCA. For instance, the *Aistear*[7] curriculum states, under the theme Well-being (Aim 3), 'Children will be creative and spiritual, they will develop and nurture their sense of wonder and awe and understand that others may have beliefs and values different to their own' (NCCA 2009, p. 17). The *Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification* (NCCA 2019) also articulates an holistic identity of the person and acknowledges the role of Religious Education in

holistic development: 'Religious Education promotes the holistic development of the person. It facilitates the intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual and moral development of students' (p. 6). This anthropology, which allows for the spiritual life of the young child and young adult, is absent from the emerging documentation for the new primary school curriculum. Again, there is no explanation for this omission.

The 'Baptism Barrier' and Policy Changes to Admissions to Schools

For the past number of years, there has been much debate about the 'baptism barrier' in Catholic primary schools in Ireland. This refers to the legal position that denominational schools could, where oversubscribed, prioritise admission of children of their own faith. This became a national issue in 2017 with newspaper front page headlines such as 'School Baptism barrier is unfair on parents, says Bruton: Minister announces plans to remove religious criteria in Catholic school admissions' (Clarke and O'Brien 2017), and 'Now school baptism barrier to be scrapped' (Donnelly 2017). It is important to note that while the impression was created that this was a nationwide issue, in reality it applied to a handful of schools in urban Dublin. The vast majority of Catholic schools did not (and do not) require a baptismal certificate to admit a pupil. The Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) confirmed this at the time, stating that 'Only 1.2 pc of those turned down a place in a Dublin school had no baptism certificate' (CPSMA 2017, p. 2). They pointed out that of the 384 Catholic primary schools in Dublin, 369 accepted children without reference to a baptismal certificate. The 17 schools which asked for a baptismal certificate were located in areas where the demand for places far outstripped availability. As a result, 96 children (of over 500,000 applicants to Catholic primary schools nationally) did not get a place in a Catholic school.

The reality is that this is a resource rather than a religious issue: there are simply not enough primary school places in some large urban areas. Despite this, in 2018 the government legislated for a new *Education (Admissions to Schools) Act* (Government of Ireland 2018). Consequently, Catholic schools can no longer prioritise enrolment of children of its religious ethos in oversubscribed schools. Of course, this move did not address the substantive issue—it did not create any more places for pupils. There are still children in these urban areas on school waiting lists.

Cumulatively, the push for universal ERB & Ethics, the removal of Religious Education and the absence of an holistic anthropology of the child in the new curriculum proposals, and the recent Admissions to Schools Bill, demonstrate quite a lot of state-driven pressure on Catholic school ethos and Religious Education in Catholic schools in particular. But there are also demographic and societal pressures, and it is to these we now turn.

Changing Popular Attitudes and Demographics

Changes in religious belief and practice among people in Ireland give rise to concerns about the supply of teachers equipped for and interested in Catholic education. For instance, beliefs and practises of preservice teachers indicate that many are ambiguous about the Catholic Church and the role it in can play in society and in their lives. A survey among first-year preservice teachers (also known as Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students) found that:

94% identify as Roman Catholic
84% believe in God[8]
30.5% believe in a personal God
50% pray at least once a week
54% go to mass at least once a month
70% get comfort from religion
55% attend a religious service at least once a month

When asked if they thought that the Catholic Church gives adequate answers to

- the moral problems and needs of the individual, 74% said no;
- the problems of family life, 79% said no;
- the social problems facing our country, 87% said no (O'Connell et al. 2018, p. 80).

These data reveal that many student teachers believe in God: God is important in their lives, they participate in liturgy and pray quite often. Many self-identify as religious and get comfort and strength from religion. However, while the research appears to show a general openness to God and some engagement with the Catholic religious tradition, it indicates that the vast majority of preservice teachers do not think the Catholic Church gives adequate answers to the problems and needs of the country, the individual, or family life.

It is important to remember that these figures arise from a quantitative piece of research which is by nature broad in its claims. However, they do appear to indicate a lack of confidence on the part of preservice teachers in what the Catholic Church can offer in matters of personal and public concern. They certainly give pause for thought when we remember that 89% of primary schools are under Catholic patronage. Current preservice teachers will very likely find employment in Catholic schools, whether or not they understand or care for that religious tradition, because of the predominance of that form of patronage. When this reality is put into the mix with the recommendations from the Forum, the process of divestment of Catholic schools takes on a certain urgency. While there are a range of difficulties involved in the process of divestment, the prolonged delay is eroding the credibility of Catholic providers.

Blessings in Disguise: An Opportunity for the Catholic Community

Given these changes and differences in approach, an opportunity arises for the Catholic community in Ireland to re-visit its commitment to education and in particular, Religious Education.

Historically, the Irish state relied on the Catholic Church to prepare teachers for its schools. The great 'teacher training colleges' of the nineteenth century which became the cornerstone of the Irish education system, were founded and to a large extend funded by Catholic religious orders. This system worked well because Church and state shared a similar vision of education. For instance, much of the anthropology of the child revealed in the principles and aims of the 1999 curriculum correspond to the Catholic anthropology of the person. This meant that there was no great distinction between the values underpinning the curriculum and the Catholic mission and vision of education. However, over the last three decades, the pendulum has increasingly swung towards Church reliance on state. The colleges of education still form teachers for all primary schools, but they are now funded largely by the state and subject to government rules and regulations. With the apparent parting of philosophies, perhaps it is time for the Catholic community to clearly commit to its schools, for instance by providing support for Catholic Religious Education in sustained and life-giving ways, by taking seriously the governance of its schools, and by engaging meaningfully with stakeholders around the ethos of Catholic education.

(a) Support for Religious Education in Catholic schools

If the Catholic community wants to involve itself in the provision of education into the future, it cannot rely exclusively on the state to in-service teachers and resource school culture. For instance, whether deemed Religious Education or the Patron's Programme, it is incumbent on the patron of Catholic schools to build on initial teacher education so that teachers and schools can offer the *Grow in Love* programme to a high standard. This requires ongoing, high quality Continual Professional Development (CPD). A preservice teacher's introduction to teaching any subject is not sufficient to carry and sustain them throughout their professional lives. CPD of Religious Education in Catholic schools can occur at parish, diocese and/or national level, and by means of online/face-to-face/blended learning. However, regardless of the approach, the teaching and learning of Religious Education requires systematic evaluation.

Research carried out in one Irish diocese shows that only 17% of schools were meeting the curricular requirement for 5 periods per week (of 30 min each) of Religious Education (Curran 2019, p. 76). In other words, 83% of Catholic schools in this diocese teach Religious Education less than the required 2.5 h per week, while Religious Education is still a mandatory subject on the curriculum. Without support and evaluation, it will be interesting to see the effect on that statistic if a revised curriculum less supportive of RE is introduced.

The pedagogy and appeal of *Grow in Love* and its warm reception among teachers and students demonstrate the potential for high quality Religious Education. Catholic families in Catholic schools have a right to expect good Religious Education. In a Catholic school, the extent or quality of Religious Education cannot be at the discretion of an individual teacher or leader. Whereas the Catholic school, like all schools, is subject to government rules and regulations regarding many educational issues, the patronage model allows for rights and responsibilities around ethos. Religious Education falls into this category.

The teaching and learning of Religious Education in a school is a matter for the patron (usually the bishop of the local diocese), delegated to the Board of Management (*Education Act* 1998). As things stand, the patron still has the right and responsibility to ensure that its own programme is taught, and taught well. The Catholic community has been to the forefront in the design of high quality RE programmes such as *Grow in Love*; it is time now to ensure their implementation. This will involve a greater role for the Board of Management and the Diocesan Advisor (on behalf of the local bishop): the Board of Management of a school is responsible for matters of teaching and learning; Diocesan Advisors have an episcopal role in the support of Religious Education. It cannot be the case that the extent or quality of Religious Education in a Catholic school is decided by any other body than the patron. If Catholic Religious Education is not something that a particular school community values, it may indicate that divestment should be a realistic option.

(b) Support for Catholic School Ethos

Finally, there is an opportunity for the Catholic community to re-imagine the ethos of its schools, and articulate the anthropology and the philosophy underpinning that ethos with all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, staff and pupils. There is now a clear distinction between the ethos of the Catholic school and the stated aims of the new curriculum, particularly with regard to the anthropology of the child. Catholic schools have a particular way of making sense of the world and vision of education; this needs to be made explicit and supported to help that vision into reality.

Conclusion

The cumulative developments outlined in this article pose challenges for the Catholic primary school sector, but also opportunities. If the Catholic community decides to continue as a provider of education it will need to

- Re-articulate Catholic educational ethos in ways that are persuasive, appropriate and engaging, while systematically checking false interpretations and misrepresentations (such as those cited in the introduction);
- Support teachers and leaders of Catholic schools with regard to the Catholic identity of their school, especially around the teaching and learning of Religious Education in Catholic schools;
- Commit in a real way to the process of divestment.

Without this commitment there is a real risk that Catholic schools will drift from their characteristic spirit to the point where they are Catholic only in name.

Notes

1. The aim of Religious Education is 'to help children mature in relation to their spiritual, moral and religious lives, through their encounter with, exploration and celebration of the Catholic faith' (Irish Episcopal Conference 2015, p. 31). A partnership between home, school and parish, Catholic Religious Education today in no way satisfies the definition of indoctrination: 'the process of teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs uncritically' (Lexico 2019 https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/indoctrination); 'to imbue with a usually partisan or sectarian opinion, point of view, or principle' (Merriam-Webster 2019 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/indoctrinate).
2. Educate Together is a patron body without religious affiliation.
3. Of the 2,800 Catholic primary schools in the state, only 11 have been divested. In 2019 the Minister for Education stated: 'In this regard, from 2013 to 2018, 11 multi-denominational schools have opened under the patronage divesting process and a twelfth school has been announced to be established under this process for September 2019', 30th January 2019 available: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-01-30/114/ [accessed 14th January 2020].
4. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is the statutory body of the state charged with curriculum development, implementation and assessment.
5. In Ireland, school ethos or 'characteristic spirit' is enshrined in the Education Act, 1998.
6. This figure is derived from the amount of people who identify as atheists in Ireland which stands at 7,477 and the national population of 4,761,865, giving a percentage of 0.157—figures obtained in correspondence with the Central Statistics Office, 2019.
7. *Aistear* is the curriculum framework for children from birth to six years.
8. Interesting to note that while 94% identify as Catholic, only 84% say they believe in God.

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Chapter 17
Religious Education in Irish Secondary Schools: A Future?

Brendan Carmody

Abstract Religious Education has space in the school curriculum as an academic subject but faces the challenge of being an attractive option for students. In planning ahead, it thus needs to have high appeal not only for its religious content, but also for its academic exchange value. To achieve a satisfactory balance between being academic and faith forming, it is argued that Religious Education should be philosophically grounded through a distinctive branch of critical realism.

Keywords Catholic Religious Education · Critical realism · Intellectual conversion · Faith formation · Self-knowledge · Non-confessional

Introduction

How can the Irish secondary school provide a Catholic education and Catholic Religious Education mainly but not exclusively in Catholic government-aided schools? [1] This question is being addressed largely because of what has evolved, whereby the setting of the Catholic school has shifted from when it had a predominantly Catholic population to where it can no longer assume that a major part of its students or staff is even nominally Catholic. [2]

Context

In the past, Catholic Religious Education operated within the school setting where Catholic faith could be presumed. [3] Catholic Religious Education was included as an intrinsic part of the Catholic school where it could be conceptualised in terms of James Arthur's holistic model. [4] As time marched on, especially in the 1970s and beyond, this cultural background changed as a commitment to Catholicism declined. [5]

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In response, Religious Education has been re-conceptualised, particularly through the introduction of the National Council for Academic Awards (NCCA) publicly examinable syllabi in the early days of the century.[6]

What emerged is that in Catholic schools Religious Education was often composed by the school's Religious Education staff, while adoption of the NCCA syllabi as publicly examined remained low.[7] In the light of changes in the overall secondary school curriculum, Religious Education is now challenged to compete for students' choice of subjects.[8]

Aim of Chapter

That Religious Education continues to feature in the educational agenda of the *Department of Education* is an achievement. However, the Catholic Church is concerned that its schools should not only provide Religious Education in what has become a market-focused setting, but also that it should be evangelical. By looking at the present situation and applying what can be learned from the past, this chapter proposes a way forward.

Current Situation

The Catholic school and others face the challenge of placing Religious Education on the curriculum as a subject like others even though, as noted, few schools adopted the NCCA courses as an examination subject over the past fifteen years. Reasons for this varied but perhaps a significant perspective was that these syllabi were perceived to weakly include 'faith formation.' They were rather seen to be abstract, resembling a form of Religious Studies. In addition, teachers claimed that non-examinable Religious Education opens the door to greater freedom for the students to reflect on personal matters. This could mean that there was little or no space even for reflection on the so-called big questions whose presence is seen by students to be desirable.[9] This perceived blemish of the NCCA syllabus was not universally acknowledged. However, it draws attention to the need to clearly include 'faith formation,' though the meaning of this can be ambiguous.[10]

Continuing to operate a programme that is more suited to 'faith formation' in a narrow sense of Catholic instruction but non-publicly examinable (if feasible), while attractive from the point of view of the church, could mean that the study of religion would remain in danger of being viewed as a kind of 'doss' subject. This had often been thought to be true before the introduction of the NCCA syllabi. Indeed, the catechetical and apologetic approach historically to the study of religion for Catholics still tends to tarnish how Religious Education even as an academic offering is perceived.[11] By inheriting this kind of perspective, Religious Education has had a hard task in being accepted by students as a truly academic option.

It is, of course, true that as non-examinable, Religious Education retains a *sui-generis* flavour which means it can follow its own pathway but this tends to marginalise it from the main academic flow of the school. The Catholic school then resembles what Arthur described as dualistic.[12] While this can have advantages in being able to give more attention to personal issues, it weakens religion's perceived value in what is an increasingly secular environment, where school subjects have a high exchange value.

In such a setting, it is suggested that anything which detracts from its image of being respectably academic seems unwise. Leaving its catechetical moorings of the past, in so far as this has been done, is generally seen to have been a positive step. This has been enhanced through bringing Catholic theology to the university, as well as by relocating teacher education largely done formerly in denominational colleges to university. It could be argued that, overall, the study of religion has entered the publicly examinable domain which needs to be treasured as it continues to struggle to compete with other subjects on the curriculum in the eyes of students and parents.

Looking to the Future

Having RE in public space in line with other subjects, while a major achievement, needs support. Within this context, in looking ahead, it might be useful to learn from the past by reviewing those schools which followed an NCCA programme for examination and profit from their experience of how 'faith formation' featured. Theoretically, NCCA syllabi were seen to make space for 'faith formation'. How was this seen to be achieved?

Religious Education in Catholic Schools

Looking ahead, Amelee Meehan proposes, in the light of the new secondary school 'well-being' curriculum, to have Catholic Religious Education in Catholic schools as an academic offering. She argues that the NCCA will not do this, judging from what will be permitted in *Education and Training Board* (ETB) schools. These schools may offer Religious Education in the classroom but without 'religious instruction or worship of any religion forming any part of class activity.' This signals that this is how Religious Education needs to be presented academically from the official Education Department's point of view.[13] Does this necessarily exclude 'faith formation'?

Meehan's proposal thus adopts an alternative model within the new well-being context which might do justice to the concern of the Catholic Church. It could include worship and allied practices.[14] One might ask how this proposed model resembles what we have referred to above when schools combined the NCCA examinable course and viewed themselves to have contributed to 'faith formation'? Admittedly, then it could have included the aspects of 'faith formation,' that is 'religious instruction or

worship of any religion forming any part of class activity' as identified by Meehan. Now, these are clipped. Nonetheless, could Meehan's model not build on that experience and consider if 'religious instruction or worship of any religion forming any part of class activity' excludes 'faith formation.'?[15]

More precisely, Dr. Meehan's proposed model has two dimensions where it first deals with teachings and values of the Catholic Church and then advances to 'faith formation.' This she proposes could be crafted as a Christian/Catholic lens on well-being.[16] The proposal builds on the approach to Christian Religious Education which Thomas Groome developed.

From the viewpoint of this discussion, Meehan's suggestion underlines the opportunity to provide a Religious Education that is academic but at the same time meets denominational concerns. This appears to be promising as it is generally accepted that the study of religion needs to be more than academic.[17] In supporting this issue, Thomas Groome contends that the academic should enhance 'faith formation'—the informative should be a prelude to the formative, which he claims to be intrinsic to his approach.[18]

Professor Groome, a teacher for many years in Catholic educational settings of the United States, outlined a pedagogy which he developed over his lifetime, namely shared praxis.[19] Building on the thought of the Catholic philosopher of education, Paulo Freire, this approach engages the learner existentially but advocates engagement with tradition, and thereby makes the study of the Catholic/Christian faith both academic and personal.[20] While the approach had wide appeal, would adoption of Meehan's version of it be right for Catholic schools in Ireland?

In considering this, we note that Catholic schools and colleges in the United States are private. Students are thus often required to take modules on Catholicism. The courses have an assured captive audience. They do not necessarily include liturgy and adjunct Catholic programmes. This is normally the domain of chaplaincy. It is not clear how much, if any, content they include from non-Catholic sources. The Irish schools which we are concerned about are in large part state-aided. They may, according to Meehan, be regarded as semi-private and so permitted to make Christian/Catholic Religious Education a required course. If so, they would closely resemble what happens in Catholic colleges in the United States, though such colleges, as noted, do not necessarily require worship.

It would seem in the context of the well-being framework that like other subjects, Religious Education would be an academic option. For Meehan, this could be Christian/Catholic Religious Education. In such a setting, Religious Education or Christian/Catholic Religious Education has to compete with a range of subjects. Even though the NCCA examinable Religious Education programme was academic like the other subjects, its uptake as non-denominational was weak. Would a Christian/Catholic Religious Education offering be likely to pick up significant numbers of students?[21] This needs market research in terms of what parents and students want. A potentially useful perspective might emerge from the experience of Loyola's undergraduate programme at Trinity College where Catholic theology had little attraction. Though at a higher level, it may help identify possible trends. It might also be worth recalling that when teaching the NCCA programme, teachers reported that they were

sometimes led to begin with religions other than Christianity because of what they perceived to be a sense of *deja-vu* among the students if they started with Christianity.[22] Others went further to suggest that it might be more helpful to change the name of the subject so as to steer clear of its catechetical vestiges. What I am concerned to highlight is that offering Christian/Catholic Religious Education as an academic option risks, if optional, being something of a white elephant. On the other hand, if it were permitted to be compulsory, it would appear to work against the well-being framework which appears to be underpinned by highlighting student's freedom of choice.

Similarly, one might also wonder if Groome's approach to the study of Christianity/Catholicism, given the setting of a private institution requiring courses in Catholic theology, adequately respects the learner's freedom? Could Groome's approach not face the kind of criticism which Michael Grimmitt's 'learning from' religion faces, which essentially is that it is overly subjective and so fails to do justice to the authenticity of tradition or traditions.[23] By extension, this could mean a subjectivist student's view of Catholicism. Though Groome's movement three and four may be seen to address this, it is not clear that they do.

Non-confessional Religious Education

In an attempt to provide Religious Education which avoids any ambiguous fore-grounding of Catholicism, Sean Whittle proposed to approach it philosophically. He speaks of non-confessional Religious Education by adopting the philosophy of the Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner. It is true that Rahner's focus is existential and purports to be inclusive as it speaks of the human experience of mystery or limit situations. For Whittle, this has the advantage of being open to various traditions and is Catholic in the sense that Rahner's philosophy keeps the student within the orbit of Catholicism.[24]

Whittle's approach holds promise if it can be established that the philosophy in question leads openly and impartially to Catholic and other traditions. It does not seem that it can do this.[25] The philosophy in question may be satisfactory in a Catholic seminary or even a Catholic college which is where Rahner did much of his teaching but it is hardly right in a government-aided Catholic school where Catholicism needs to be addressed impartially in a context of other denominations and faiths.

Critical Realism

Philosophy may nonetheless provide a good prelude to Catholic or other Religious Education but it needs to be the kind of philosophy that empowers the student to be truly critical. It requires not only to inspire reflection on deep-rooted universal questions, evoking human mystery, which much philosophy and literature do, but

it needs to go further. It needs to provide the learners with tools by which they are enabled to free themselves from enslavement within their interpretive mind-sets. We are thus seeking a type of Religious Education that is non-confessional in the sense of being non-colonising. This means that the learner needs to become adequately secure in him/herself to be truly open to the other.[26] It brings us to the perennial challenge of acquiring a proper balance between subjectivity and objectivity.

In his discussion of Religious Education, Andrew Wright speaks of moving from what he calls comprehensive to political liberalism, that is, Religious Education that is largely subjective, which in his view, is widespread in England to religious literacy that enables one to engage with truth.[27] For him, this entails the development of what he calls critical realism.[28] He observes that such capacity does not come easily when dealing with differing worldviews. Yet, he argues that one can move beyond seeing traditions as equally true; one can reach more truthful positions, which is of high value in the Religious Education classroom.

Intellectual Conversion

Addressing this concern with objectivity, the Catholic philosopher-theologian, Bernard Lonergan also spoke of critical realism, indicating the subtlety of what realism can mean.[29] Like Wright, he argues for the importance of truth, particularly when dealing with different religious or other viewpoints. His route to evaluating truth claims, clearer and more sure-footed than Wright's, entails a distinctive critical awareness which emerges from what he calls intellectual conversion.[30]

To be intellectually converted, the learner needs to move through what Lonergan calls dialectic which entails growing in appreciation of conflicting viewpoints on what is real and emerging with a capacity to identify for oneself what in truth constitutes reality.[31] This process has been likened by Lonergan to what takes place in psychotherapy.[32] It entails a focus on one's self as operating emotionally, intellectually, morally and religiously. Without this, the danger of remaining overly subjective persists when interpreting tradition.[33] What such intellectual conversion enables the learner to do is to discover a basis within him/herself for true knowledge and from there he/she is ready for an authentic choice of worldview. For Lonergan, this is not achieved simply by reading even a treatise on philosophy, Catholic or other. One needs to identify what is being expressed in one's consciousness which is a foundational pattern of how we come to know and decide.[34]

While Lonergan's initial focus, like Rahner's, is also on the universal experience of mystery, the philosophy with which he operates leads to critical self-knowledge from which free commitment to a form of religion, Catholic or other, is possible.[35]

Lonergan's approach to the study of religion thus calls primarily for intellectual conversion which is a philosophical tool, opening the way to developing the learner's capacity to move towards but beyond the threshold of theology and objectively interpret religion in its various manifestations. Without this, Religious Education may be informative, even deeply moving, but not sufficiently self-critical to enable the learner to choose the worldview that he/she has reason to value.

Implications

What we have been concerned to argue is that, while as Meehan says, there is a unique opportunity to place Catholic Religious Education on the curriculum, it needs to be both academic and open to the other denominations and faiths. In what is an increasingly secular setting, it is suggested that any Religious Education might be better perceived and approached, where potential pupils are more likely to be nominally Catholic or non-Catholic, by presenting it more impartially even calling it by a different name.[36]

To capitalise on what has been achieved where the NCCA syllabi have helped raise the status of the subject, Religious Education that is open to the Catholic tradition seems to have the best chance of succeeding by being unambiguously academic and non-partisan. At the same time, within this, it needs to accommodate 'faith formation', more clearly defined, which was seen to be weak in the NCCA syllabi.

To effectively include both, we looked at Groome's approach in line with Meehan's which concurs generally with the phenomenological and anthropological study of religion represented by Robert Jackson in England, and now widely adopted in Europe.[37] Groome's work, however, incorporates a more political and public dimension, in that, it employs the framework of Freire and use of praxis.'[38] Approaching the issue non-confessionally, Whittle's perspective is seen to be in need of a better philosophical basis.

Though all of this scholarship is enriching, it is contended that when encountering religious traditions more is needed. It is argued that Religious Education needs to be more critical. While the use, particularly of existentialist philosophy, may have pedagogic value in touching the deeper dimension of the person in terms of the kind of fundamental questions we all ask, it needs to be critical in a way that enables the learner to be able to judge the truth value of how traditions respond.

To achieve this, we have noted the development of critical realism described by Wright but more clearly mapped out by Lonergan needs to be included. The pupil-centered focus needs to lead to addressing traditions objectively. For this, an emphasis on the promotion of intellectual conversion is required. In this way, the student is gradually enabled to be ready to assume responsibility for his/her worldview whether that is to be religious, Catholic, or not.

Conclusion

It has been argued that, while specific religious traditions (including Catholicism) can be presented to the student, he/she needs to be prepared to interpret them in a way that is not overly subjective. When this is achieved to some level of satisfaction in accordance with the learner's age and background, the Catholic perspective, as one among others, can be offered in whatever detail time permits. Within the Catholic school, this could be enhanced through ethos and practice as educational rather

than as catechetical. It should also be appropriate for the many schools that are not directly Catholic. In their case, enhancement, helpful but questionably essential, of specifically denominational programmes may not be acceptable. Given the present Irish situation with its secularist undertow, much of what the NCCA syllabi and material linked to them had crafted could be edited for inclusion in the development that has been outlined. It has been argued here, however, that any such review needs a critical realist methodology and a clear conception of 'faith formation.'

Notes

1. There are 720 secondary schools in all of which 320 are voluntary aided (Catholic owned) which means that they are free to have a Catholic programme. The remainder are under the patronage of other religious groups. Numbers fluctuate: See Browne 2018.
2. Grace (2018), Coll (2019).
3. Gallagher (2008).
4. Arthur 1995, pp. 231ff.
5. P. Share et al. (2012), pp. 330–339, Mullen (2015), Walsh (2020).
6. NCCA (2001a, b), Carmody (2019).
7. NCCA Background Paper for the review of Junior Cycle Religious Education (NCCA 2017), p. 15.
8. Meehan (2019a).
9. NCCA Background Paper, p. 21.
10. Byrne (2018).
11. McCourt (2006), pp. 158–161.
12. Arthur (1995), pp. 227–228, Lonergan (1973), pp. 366–367.
13. Meehan (2019b).
14. A. Meehan, "Is there a Future …?" p. 87.
15. Meehan, "Is there a Future…?" p.87.
16. Meehan, "Is there a Future…?" p. 90.
17. Gallagher (2010), p.113.
18. Groome (2012).
19. Groome (2006).
20. Bonnett and Cuypers (2003).
21. Byrne (2018b), English (2018), p. 10.
22. NCCA Background Paper, p. 22; Byrne and Devine (2018).
23. Teece (2010).
24. Whittle (2014, pp. 104–155, 2015).
25. Carmody (2017).
26. Carmody (2015).
27. Wright (2007), pp. 3, 8–9, 47–49, 116, 126, 203 ff.
28. Wright (2017); See also: Go (2019), pp. 21–57, Pring (2019), pp. 16–26.
29. Walker (2017).
30. Lonergan (1973), p. 84.
31. Giddy (2011).

32. Lonergan (1974), p. 269.
33. Bonnett and Cuypers (2003).
34. Walker (2019).
35. Carmody (1988, 2015).
36. This was suggested in my interviews. It is also something that has been proposed in England.
37. Jackson (2019).
38. Freire (1993), Noddings (2013).

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Chapter 18
Inter-Belief Dialogue in Catholic Schools Viewed Through the Lens of the Enquiring Classroom

Patricia Kieran

Abstract The chapter outlines contemporary approaches to inter-belief dialogue in Catholic schools. It suggests that interreligious dialogue and learning are key aspects of strengthening Catholic identity in schools. It draws on a number of recent Vatican documents which have guided, supported and encouraged Catholics to engage in respectful dialogue. The term inter-belief dialogue is used to describe the dialogue between people from different religions and philosophical convictions. While arguing that dialogue is a pivotal part of Catholic education, the chapter provides an overview of three experimental methodologies (Belief Circles, Origami Moments and Inter-belief Dialogue Cafés) inspired by *The Enquiring Classroom* (O'Donnell et al. 2019). These can be used to facilitate inter-belief dialogue in Religious Education in Catholic and other types of school.

Keywords The enquiring classroom · Inter-belief dialogue · Catholic schools · Belief circles · Dialogue cafes

Introduction

This chapter focuses on inter-belief dialogue, as a form of positive communication, cooperation and collaboration among people from a range of religious traditions, as well as secular, humanist, agnostic and atheist convictional belief stances. Dialogue about religions and beliefs is something of a buzzword in contemporary Religious Education (Byrne and Kieran 2013). At a global and international level, there have been multiple initiatives, organisations, research centres, resources and developments supporting interreligious and inter-belief dialogue. Some of these initiatives include: the World Parliament of Religions; the Harvard Pluralism Project; UNESCO's Inter-religious Dialogue Programme; the United Nations General Assembly on Interreligious Dialogue; the World Conference on Religion and Peace; the European Council of Religious Leaders; and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, among others.

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In tandem with this increased awareness of growing religious and belief diversity, is a greater recognition that religion and belief cannot be relegated to the private sphere. Baumann's (1999) work describes religion's deep importance in relation to ethnic and cultural identity, and other research has outlined the complex interplay between religious identity, ethnicity, citizenship and faith (Baumfield 2002; Barnes 2012). The chapter introduces three experimental methodologies (Belief Circles, Origami Moments and Inter-belief Dialogue Cafés) inspired by *The Enquiring Classroom* (O'Donnell et al. 2019), which might be used to facilitate inter-belief dialogue in Religious Education in Catholic and other school types.

Dialogue in Catholic Schools

Dialogue is a form of engagement which resists stereotypical or simplistic notions of the 'other'. From a Catholic perspective, inter-belief dialogue involves constructive Christian relations with people of other religious and non-religious worldviews (Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue). In Catholic schools, nurturing this form of dialogue among participants from a variety of religious and philosophical worldviews is particularly significant (Hession 2015). Dialogue can be incredibly challenging and complex and educators are sometimes hesitant to engage in it. However, the benefits of such dialogue have been richly acclaimed and Dermot Lane notes that interreligious 'dialogue looks set to be a defining feature of the first century of the third millennium' (Lane 2012). Hans Kung succinctly articulates why dialogue is a necessity, not an option when he says 'There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions' (Musser and Sutherland 2005). A steady flow of landmark Vatican documents: *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964); *Nostra Aetate* (1965); *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975); *Dialogue and Mission* (1984); *Redemptoris Missio* (1990); *Dialogue and Proclamation (1991)* and Dominus Iesus (2000) have guided, supported and encouraged Catholics to engage in respectful dialogue.

The *Congregation for Catholic Education's* document *Education to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love (2013)*, reinforces this message that dialogue is a pivotal and not a peripheral part of Catholic education. Here interreligious learning involves an openness to other cultures and religions without the loss of one's own. In *Educating to Fraternal Humanism* (*Congregation for Catholic Education* 2017), Catholics are called to begin to understand themselves and others in a way that does not cause conflict, or annul or relativise or exoticise belief difference. In short, a key part of strengthening Catholic identity is a commitment to evangelisation, interreligious dialogue and learning. Drawing on interreligious dialogue and extending it to include non-religious participants the term inter-belief dialogue means promoting dialogue between people from different religions and philosophical convictions as a source of fraternal humanism, mutual enrichment, overcoming prejudice and fostering mutual understanding and peace.

'In global societies, citizens of different traditions, cultures, religions and world views co-exist every day, often resulting in misunderstandings and conflicts. In such circumstances, religions are often seen as monolithic and uncompromising structures of principles and values, incapable of guiding humanity towards the global society. The Catholic Church, on the contrary, "rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions", and it is her duty to "proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God as the source of all grace". She is also convinced that such difficulties are often the result of a lacking education to fraternal humanism, based on the development of a culture of dialogue' (*Congregation for Catholic Education* 2017).

From 1986 onwards, the multiple interreligious meetings in Assisi and elsewhere have inspired educators to continue this dialogical work. When Pope Francis visited Rabat in Morocco, in 2019, he spoke of an 'ecumenism of peace' and of the importance of Christians engaging in dialogue and cooperation with all people of goodwill. Pope Francis famously said '…I consider essential for facing the present moment: constructive dialogue…When leaders in various fields ask me for advice, my response is always the same: dialogue, dialogue, dialogue' (Sherman 2015).

For Catholics dialogue is becoming more important in the contemporary world and dialogue is the attitude with which the Church must face every situation (Congregation for Catholic Education 2013 par. 13):

Dialogue, starting from an awareness of one's own faith identity, can help people to enter into contact with other religions. Dialogue means not just talking, but includes all beneficial and constructive interreligious relationships, with both individuals and communities of other beliefs, thus arriving at mutual understanding…it is fundamental that the Catholic religion, for its part, be an inspiring sign of dialogue…

Through dialogue, Catholics are called to begin to understand themselves and others in a way that does not cause conflict, or annul or relativise or exoticise belief difference (Kieran 2019). Inter-belief dialogue means promoting dialogue between different religions and convictional worldviews as a source of mutual enrichment, overcoming prejudice and fostering mutual understanding and peace (Byrne and Kieran 2013). This approach has inspired *Catholic Dialogue Schools* in Belgium (Boeve 2016, 2019) and the *Australian Dialogue School* model (Luby 2019).

The Enquiring Classroom and Dialogue

The Enquiring Classroom (TEC) was a two-year (2017–2019), international *Erasmus + Project*, with partners in Ireland, Sweden and Greece. TEC sought to develop an innovative model of inquiry-based learning to enable teachers to support students (ages 8–18) as they engaged in difficult discussions around a range of topics including religions and beliefs and values. As an interdisciplinary international project TEC worked closely with educators, sharing ideas, knowledge and practices in peer groups. It generated methodologies that could help to foster educational environments that allow for the careful and sensitive exploration of ideas, questions and values that matter to teachers and students. TEC's (O'Donnell et al. 2019) range

of innovative pedagogies and resources (on religions and beliefs, philosophy for children, living values, etc.) were designed to support educators and students in a wide range of disciplines, including Religious Education. Its broad array of arts-based, practical and experimental methodologies are divided into key areas including the sacred, the ethical, the political, the aesthetic, and the historical. Educators are invited to consider adapting non-prescriptive methodologies to suit their learners' specific needs and contexts. While each interdisciplinary area within the free to download TEC Handbook is closely interconnected, the '*Rough Guide to the Sacred*' section may be particularly relevant for teachers of Religious Education. Dialogue features as a key theme in the Handbook and multiple methodologies could be drawn on to support diverse forms of inter-belief dialogue with students in primary and secondary schools.

Beyond Binaries: The Framework Guiding the Enquiring Classroom (TEC)

TEC set out to foster dialogue and develop critical thinking skills, refine moral perception and imagination and develop belief-diverse students' abilities to engage with conflict and disagreement. To achieve this it recognised that students (ages 8–18) needed to be given opportunities to discuss and critically examine complex issues in safe educational contexts with trusted educators. The project set out to facilitate critical dialogue and explore approaches from a broad open-ended perspective that refused to begin with binary oppositions.

In the contemporary world, people are sometimes presented with stark contrasting oppositions where what is perceived as 'the religious' can be pitted against the perceived 'secular'. Students might self-describe in binary religious or secular terms. They might be categorised according to whether they attend either faith-based or State schools.

They may be classified according to either theistic or non-theistic worldviews. TEC wished to move beyond such binaries by exploring the nuances and complexity of human existence in a way that defied neat simplistic categorisation. It was not interested in perpetuating bi-polar visions that bleach the world of the religious or the sacred (O'Donnell 2016; O'Donnell 2018). Instead, it perceived that it is impossible to understand the history of Europe without having a sense of the complex faith traditions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, (as well as many others) in its interconnected and evolving stories. Richard Pring speaks of tradition as 'shared background' which may take the form of a 'tacit knowledge, not usually made explicit, which has evolved over time but which can too easily be taken for granted' (Pring 2018). Humans live within traditions and they live in us. Sometimes in ways that we have never acknowledged or cannot understand fully. A danger emerges when we try to 'reify' traditions and invoke a return to the 'past', or teach religions and beliefs in a neutral or so-called decontextualized objective manner. In Religious Education in

particular, this risks failing to connect with the living nature of religious traditions and beliefs, as well as the existential needs of students (Arweck 2016).

European Policy and Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

Modood (2010) argues that religion is part of humanity at all levels—personal, social and civilisational—and that respect for the religion of others (Fanning 2012), even while not requiring participation (Faas et al. 2016), is based on a sense that religion is a good in itself. He also sees that religious identity is linked to political identity, even if negatively, for if political equality means merely ignoring religious identities then we are favouring religious identities that are purely private and *not* treating all religious identities equally. We are preferring a particular kind of religious identity. *Post-Brexit*, it is worth remembering that religions and beliefs are also present in the preamble of the European Union's first Constitution ratified by the *Treaty of Lisbon* (2009). This describes how member states have drawn 'inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe' (Morris 2018), as well as the universal values expressed in the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, including a commitment to democracy, equality, freedom and the rule of law.

Within European policy, the framing of questions of religions and beliefs has tended to occur (post 9/11) within the field of intercultural education (Council of Europe 2008; de Kock 2010). The Council of Europe focused on the religious dimension of intercultural education and produced its reference book for schools (Keast 2007). Religions and beliefs were no longer viewed as belonging to the student's private world outside the school walls, but rather were seen as something that needed to be engaged with sensitively and competently in an educationally appropriate manner inside the school. Their place in the curriculum was often seen to be a key aspect of intercultural education and citizenship education (Jackson and McKenna 2005) where religions and beliefs were to be taught through sensitive, appropriate and inclusive methodologies, including interpretive and dialogical approaches.

In 2008, the Council of Europe, published a white paper on *Intercultural Dialogue Living Together as Equals in Dignity* (2008), and its Committee Ministers published a series of recommendations on the place of religious and non-religious convictions within intercultural education (Recommendation CM/Rec (2008) 12). Teachers and schools were viewed as facilitators for dialogue about religions and beliefs and values in Europe. Post-9/11 a number of research projects were designed to promote inter-belief dialogue. These included the Oslo Coalition project on *School Education, Tolerance, and Freedom of Religion or Belief* (Lindholm 2004); *Religion in Education: A contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of conflict in transforming societies of European Countries* (REDCo 2006–2009); and *the E-Bridges Project* (2008). The overall tenor of the research was a commitment to the idea that schools and educators

have both the capacity and the responsibility to promote interreligious understanding and dialogue and tolerance (Council of Europe, 2005).

The *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools* made a significant impact on the way teachers approached the teaching of religion and beliefs. Toledo was founded on the two interrelated principles that 'there is a positive value in teaching that emphasizes respect for everyone's right to freedom of religion and belief, and second, that teaching about religions and beliefs can reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes' (ODHIR 2007). Toledo emphasises the need for a variety of pedagogic approaches, as well as the cultivation of multi-perspectivity and sensitivity to different interpretations of reality and local manifestations of religious and secular plurality. Interestingly *Toledo* states that there should be no opt-out to teaching or learning about diverse religions and beliefs. 'An individual's personal religious (or non-religious) beliefs do not provide sufficient reason to exclude that person from teaching about religions and beliefs. The most important considerations in this regard relate to professional expertise, as well as to basic attitudes towards or commitment to human rights, in general, and freedom of religion or belief in particular' (2007 p. 14).

Ipgrave's Dialogical Approach

TEC's experimental belief circles, origami moments and interbelief dialogue cafés were influenced and informed by Robert Jackson's interpretative (Jackson 2014, 2019) and Julia Ipgrave's dialogical approaches (Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady 2009). Building upon her own experience as a primary school teacher, Ipgrave's pioneering research revealed that children were ready to engage actively with religious questions and to negotiate their way through different viewpoints and understandings (Ipgrave 2004). 'One class of 9 and 10 year olds, for example, identified three key ideas: respect for each other's religion; talking and thinking seriously about differences; being ready to learn new things including about their own religion' (McKenna et al. 2008). Ipgrave perceived that certain conditions needed to be present for dialogue to take place, as dialogue is not just a 'random' spoken exchange between children.

'The elements of collaboration and search for meaning need to be present. Dialogical RE is not just an exchange of differing points of view ('alternating monologues'), but requires an interplay between them; does child A agree with what child B has said; does child C develop any of her ideas in the light of what she has heard from child D; or is it possible to draw child E and child F's thoughts together?' (Ipgrave 2001)

The hallmarks of a dialogical approach are personal engagement and active interchange, higher order thinking through questioning, discussion and revision of ideas, as well as the interconnection of lived committed belief and a community of critical thinking. The teacher becomes the 'prompter, chair, interviewer and questioner, as well as providing information when required' (McKenna et al. 2008), and the children are active collaborators in the community of learning. The process of dialogue can lead to refining and clarifying a child's beliefs, while simultaneously fostering a greater confidence in the expression of personal beliefs.

1. **TEC Dialogical Methodology: Belief Circles**

It is important to recognise that there are countless forms and ways of entering into dialogue. That is why TEC simply presented a non-prescriptive repertoire of methodologies that may or may not be educationally meaningful and relevant for students in a particular context. TEC relied on the judgement and skill of the educator to evaluate when, if and how they might use its dialogical methodologies. In its *Rough Guide to the Sacred* TEC acknowledged that it is important that students do not feel that they need to step away from their own religious commitments or philosophical beliefs in the classroom. So TEC developed a range of pedagogical strategies to scaffold inter-belief dialogue where students were invited to move beyond a monologue of 'my opinions'. It wanted to give students an opportunity to think and talk confidently about what really mattered to them, while being simultaneously open to listening to and learning from radically different voices. Taking refuge in a well-meaning religious or belief relativism was not an option. Suggesting that everyone's opinion is equally valid (e.g. racist, neo-Nazi, homophobic, misogynistic) can be patronising, hazardous and counter-productive. TEC's Belief Circles took into consideration that often in dialogue there is no neat consensus and little mutual understanding. Sometimes dialogue involves simply getting students to engage in the process of listening to each other without any agreement.

In a small group context (4–6 students), Belief Circles give students the spaciousness to think and talk about what really matters to them. While every student is invited to speak, nobody is forced to, so that silence and listening are valuable forms of participation and communication. Teachers might adapt an on-line randomiser wheel (for example, see https://wheeldecide.com/) to make a belief circle by filling in topics for discussion. The belief circle is simply a circle segmented into 6 or 8 sections each containing a topic for discussion. They can be made by students using a paper plate, a clip and an arrow dial almost like a one-handed clock. A different topic for discussion is written on each segment (e.g. animals, death, love, prayer, climate change, money, God, children) and the dial is spun to land randomly on a topic for discussion. Potential topics for discussion are endless. They can be harvested from students' suggestions, popular culture, current affairs, textbooks, religious teachings, units of learning, etc. In its downloadable guide to Belief Circles TEC deliberately tries to move beyond binaries and place side by side a range of what may be seen as more conventionally 'religious' topics (e.g. prayer, miracles, Jesus) alongside everyday issues (e.g. fashion, old age, gender).

This methodology works best if groups of students (4–6) in a class sit in small circles. The educator remains outside the belief circles and operates the randomiser wheel and timer. Prior to playing the game participants are invited to agree the rules of the game.

Rules of the Belief Circles Game

- Students invited to speak about their own views… "I think" or "I believe" or "I feel" or "For me…"
- Students talk (clockwise rotation) for an equal amount of time (e.g. initially 30 s)
- Everybody agrees to listen actively and not to interrupt
- Nobody criticises or ridicules another person's beliefs (e.g. "you're wrong"…" that's ridiculous"…)
- Nobody tries to convert other people to their personal beliefs or to share with anyone outside the circle what somebody has said
- Initially, everybody speaks for 30 s extending in subsequent rounds, using a timer or speaking object if desired
- Second, go around the circle inviting students to speak and listen for longer (extending time to 1–2 min with each spin of the wheel) on the existing topic
- Alternatively, spin the wheel so the dial lands on a new topic.
- Teacher does not join any group and gives general feedback to groups encouraging them to listen actively to each other.

Dialogue is not a free for all and belief circles attempt to structure moments of dialogue, of thinking, silence, listening and talking. The harvesting of topics from a variety of sources and the use of a randomizer gives a more flexible feel to the activity. By discussing and agreeing the ground rules of the game students become aware that they have responsibility in dialogue. This is why they are invited to speak by taking responsibility to express their own beliefs without criticizing others' beliefs. This methodology is invitational and respectful of different ways of contributing. Student responses are never extracted and silence is a valid form of participation.

Belief Circles have the potential to give students an opportunity to talk on a host of topics while drawing on their lived experience and belief commitments. Sometimes students' underlying religious and secular world emerge spontaneously in the course of this activity. Occasionally, their personal perspectives are self-consciously informed by their own religious commitment, sacred texts or philosophical convictions. Often, there is no awareness of where their worldview comes from. The main emphasis is on getting participants to think deeply about their beliefs and to feel comfortable in expressing them. All the while, they are also encouraged to listen attentively and respectfully to others as they express radically different beliefs. Through the process, students are challenged to see the one topic from a variety of perspectives.

Before the game ends, students are invited to think about and/or identify:

- Something they liked about somebody else's belief
- Something they heard that made them think differently about their own belief
- An aspect of their own belief that is really important to them.

In the course of the activity, students sometimes note how difficult it is to articulate their beliefs and how messy, complex and contested they are. A belief that appears as true, good or reasonable to one (e.g. vegetarianism) may be viewed very differently by another. Before the game ends students are invited to answer key questions:

- Does what really matters to you really matter to everyone else?
- Did any beliefs surprise you?
- What does it feel like to agree/disagree with somebody else?

2. TEC Methodology Inter-belief Dialogue Café

This dialogical TEC methodology gives students an opportunity to think about their own beliefs and ideas while engaging in dialogue with members of diverse religious and belief traditions. An inter-belief dialogue café can be designed specifically for students or school staff or parents. Ideally, it should take place in a large classroom or space (e.g. hall) with four to six tables (depending on the number of religious traditions present), each designated to a different religion and covered in paper tablecloths. The dialogue café takes roughly one hour. The number of chairs around each table (ideally five or six) varies depending on the number of participants. Coloured markers are left on each table so students can draw, doodle, write questions or comments on the paper tablecloths. Four to six members of different religious traditions, ideally from the local community, familiar with inter-belief dialogue and briefed by the teacher, are invited to 'host' the students at the table designated to explore their faith or belief's teaching. Faith and belief members put sacred artefacts from their tradition on the table for students to explore. Students spend an identical amount of time (e.g. eight to nine minutes) in dialogue with the faith or belief member at each table.

The dialogue café facilitator (teacher) acts as time-keeper and explains how the café works. The students arrive and sit randomly at the tables. Dialogue begins when the visiting members of the different faiths who host the various dialogue tables stand together on-front of the students, introduce themselves by name, and the facilitator welcomes them and explains how the inter-belief dialogue café works. The faith and belief members may read a simple inter-belief text to show solidarity and unity in their diversity. It is important that the facilitator emphasises that this is a great opportunity to ask questions and there is no such thing as a silly question. It is key that participants understand that in the dialogue café nobody is forced to talk. There are many ways of participating in the dialogue. Listening to others, drawing, writing, doodling on the paper tablecloth, talking and handling the sacred objects are just a few.

Stages of the Inter-belief Dialogue Café

1. Faith/belief members return to the table they are hosting to welcome everyone
2. Looking at the objects on the table they invite students to guess what tradition they come from
3. Invite spontaneous questions relating to their faith/belief tradition—giving students thinking time and inviting them to write down any questions, draw or doodle.
4. Optional use of talking objects to stimulate dialogue. Bank of sample questions are provided, if students are hesitant to begin. Faith/belief members respond to participants' questions but also expand them to include broader questions "Does anybody else here believe anything similar? Different?"
5. When time is up the facilitator concludes the event by asking the students: "Could you tell us one thing you learned?"; "One interesting question?"; "One thing that surprised you"; "One way you might act differently"; "One thing you'd like to know more about?" etc.

After the allocated time at the table the facilitator invites students to rotate in a clockwise direction and sit at the next table while the hosts remain in situ. Students are encouraged to ask questions about each faith/belief. An optional bank of laminated questions may be used. The bank of questions could be adapted to suit different circumstance but might include:

- Do you pray?
- Where do you pray?
- When do you pray?
- Do you celebrate any festivals?
- Have you a holy book?
- What do you think happens when you die?
- Have you religious leaders?
- What does your religion teach about God?
- What happens in your tradition when a baby is born?
- How does your tradition view other religions?
- What is the most important teaching of your religion/belief?
- What do you like most about your tradition?

In the course of an hour, students get to visit a range of tables to engage in relaxed, informal, spontaneous dialogue with members of different faiths and beliefs. In general, students have a great openness to dialogue. From my previous experience as a host at a Catholic table I noted that even the youngest have the capacity to ask incredibly complex and perceptive questions, e.g. "Why did Jesus save me when I didn't ask him to?" "If God made everything where does evil come from?" "What difference does Catholicism make in your life?" "Is there any difference between being Catholic and being Christian?" "What do you not like about being Catholic?" As I responded to the children's questions, other children at the table spontaneously shared their thoughts, their religious or secular traditions, their favourite prayers and

words, and gestures. Children spoke about their incredibly rich and complex belief lives. Children also communicated not knowing what they or their families believed. The dialogue was enriched by these perspectives.

3. **TEC Methodology: Origami moment**

This dialogical methodology encourages teachers to pause momentarily in the middle of an exercise and invite students to play an origami game in paired or small group settings. This playful origami moment is designed to foster dialogue drawing on students' imaginative and critical thinking. Students are invited to create their own origami piece (sometimes known as the paper fortune-teller or origami finger game). Not all participants will be familiar with how to make the origami piece or play the origami game. Teachers may need to give additional time for this. A downloadable origami piece template and instructions are available from the TEC website.

Some students will be familiar with the origami game from childhood. Students fold a square of paper diagonally from each corner. Then fold it in half. Next, they bring the four corners into the centre of the paper. They flip this folded paper over and fold the corners into the centre of the square and fold it in half. It opens up revealing eight segments. A dialogue topic or question can be written in each segment. One player places their fingers into the origami piece and asks their partner to select a number before reading the question and listening to their response

In the middle of a teaching exercise, this simple origami activity creates opportunities for playful dialogue. It provides opportunities for sustained thinking and dialogue among small groups. Students may enjoy creating and making their own themed origami pieces and asking each other questions that can range from the silly to the theological and philosophical or historical etc. The benefits of origami moments are that they capitalise on spontaneous opportunities for higher order thinking and imaginative dialogue. On any given topic students can contribute their own questions by making their own origami pieces. Alternatively, the teacher may generate topics for discussion. One origami piece can extend from paired to squared dialogue involving four students in intimate dialogue and listening.

Method

At the beginning of a unit of learning, the teacher provides each pair of participants with an origami template and invites them to make the origami piece (TEC Origami). As students engage in learning, the teacher decides when it would be appropriate to punctuate the learning with paired/ small group dialogue scaffolded by the origami pieces. The students are invited at intervals to open their origami figures and play the game and read the question or quotation. Suggested Questions below

- 'For me prayer is……'
- 'It would be good to live forever' Do you agree?
- Is it ever OK to tell a lie?

- 'All religions are the same.' What do you think?
- If you could ask God one question what would it be?
- Are animals less important than humans?
- I think Jesus is….. (finish the sentence)
- Some say 'Religion does more harm than good'. What do you say?

Conclusion

The Enquiring Classroom is committed to fostering dialogue among students in classrooms. Its methodologies scaffold different kinds of dialogical moments. These can range from the contemplative, existential, experiential, theological and personal to the lighthearted and playful. TEC's dialogical methodologies are an experiment in bringing students' diverse religious and philosophical traditions, values and ideas into a common space, without necessarily seeking mutual understanding, consensus, or agreement. These dialogical methods attempt to resist falling into a monologue of 'my opinions' and 'my beliefs' that is closed off from listening to and learning from the other. Educational norms can ask of students that they engage in practices of listening and dialogue, without imposing or requiring consensus or agreement. Belief Circles give a space and a place for students (in small groups of four to six) to talk about their personal beliefs relating to a range of topics while listening to other students' belief perspectives. Dialogue occurs through the listening and the speaking, in what is said and what is not said, in noticing what is common and what is different and in learning to negotiate points of disagreement. The methodologies are designed to create a respectful, safe, space and place for students to speak personally about their own commitments and worldviews in small group contexts. TEC does not attempt to ignore sacred texts and teachings or to replace them with students' own opinions. It is not an all-encompassing approach to dialogue. It simply provides a range of experimental methodologies that may be of use.

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Chapter 19
An Exploration of the Different Voices Within the Irish Catholic Post-primary Religious Education Classroom

Gillian Sullivan

Abstract This chapter draws on recent research from an Irish post-primary context which investigates the capacity of religious education within a denominational, Roman Catholic, setting to contribute to an authentic inclusion. The understanding of an authentic inclusion that underpins this study recognises and engages with the complexities of a pluralism, in which there are often incompatible and contested world views on the nature of the ultimate order of things, by providing opportunities and encounters for true communication and dialogue. The differing, and at times conflicting, expectations regarding the purpose, nature and scope of RE in post-primary schools, as held by the Irish State, the Roman Catholic Church, and indeed participating Religion teachers and students of this research are briefly explored in this chapter. The research found that where these different perceptions collide, it is students with minority religious and non-religious worldviews who are most impacted upon. A consensus, however, regarding the potential the subject has to provide a pluralist perspective is also evident. The research recognises the role of conversation as an important pedagogical approach which provides a way forward towards an authentically inclusive experience of religious education which necessitates a dialogical, reflexive and critically engaging experience for students and teachers of all religious and non-religious worldviews. This chapter attempts to bring the voices of the Church, State, Teacher and Student into conversation.

Keywords Religious diversity · Authentic inclusion · Religious education teacher voice · Student voice · Conversation

Introduction

This chapter offers a snapshot of formal Religious Education delivered within an Irish post-primary Roman Catholic school. It explores the student and teacher experience of Religious Education and investigates the subject's capacity to contribute

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to inclusion in a context growing in religious and non-religious diversity.[1] This case study is scaffolded by two key pillars: the voice of senior cycle students and the voice of Religion teachers. The motivation for this research came primarily from my experience as a Religion teacher within this specific context trying to respond to the growing religious diversity within my classroom. An important objective of this study is to examine the minority religious and non-religious voices within the classroom of a Catholic school. This chapter provides an insight into how written and unwritten policy pertaining to curricular choice, uniform and attendance at religious rituals during school can work to frustrate efforts of inclusion and in doing so undermine an inclusive Catholic ethos.

The concept of conversation and its central role to an authentically inclusive Religious Education is a significant component of the conceptual framework of this study. This extends to and engages with the broader conversation relating to religion's role in the public sphere more generally. It recognises the competing and often conflicting expectations relating to what the purpose, nature and scope of what Religious Education ought to be in contemporary Irish society.

Voices Through Policy

Cullen (2013) identifies Religious Education as a 'bruised term' given the plethora of divergent perceptions and expectations relating to its appropriate nature and purpose. These conflicting expectations have emerged from the historical and unique influence which the Catholic Church has had on Irish education as a whole and on the provision of Religious Education in particular, and the subsequent efforts of recent governments to align practice more closely with European educational policy.[2]

The national syllabus for Religious Education designed by the *National Council for Curriculum and Assessment* (NCCA) is intended for use in schools of both denominational and multi-denominational ethos. An aim of the syllabi at both junior and senior cycles is that Religious Education will 'contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student' (DES 2000, p. 5). In 2006, the Irish bishops issued *Guidelines for faith formation and the development of Catholic students*, as a support for the teaching of Religious Education in Roman Catholic schools. In line with the *1998 Education Act* Section 15, denominational schools are permitted to uphold the '*characteristic spirit*' of the school and so within these schools these syllabi are taught through a catechetical lens.

The intersection of the underlying principles of both the Church and State position on Religious Education can be brought into sharp relief in Catholic educational settings. Within the specific context of this research, Religion teachers are found to be heavily influenced by the Catholic Church's understanding of how their role should cater to the faith development of their students. These teachers take seriously this expectation from the Catholic Church while trying to prepare them for State examinations in Religious Education following the delivery of the national syllabus for Religious Education.

The Context of the Research

The context for this research is a large urban all-girls' *Presentation* school currently under the trusteeship of *Catholic Education, an Irish Schools.*

Trust (CEIST). There is a broad diversity in terms of the socio-economic status of the attending student population. Moreover, the school continues to grow in religious and cultural diversity, not least because it is situated close to a *Direct Provision* centre for refugees to the country. Students attending this vibrant and busy school must study the national Religious Education syllabus for examination in the junior cycle. Senior cycle students have the option of continuing their study of the subject for examination known informally within this setting as 'exam Religion' otherwise they study a 'non-exam Religion' three times a week.

As a *Presentation* school, a transformative vision of education with special attention to those marginalised by poverty is espoused. Nano Nagle founded the *Presentation Sisters*, as the religious congregation would come to be called, in 1775, amidst a time of great upheaval and suffering for Irish Catholics under the Penal Laws.[3] The *Presentation Sisters* are dedicated to educating the poor and marginalised in order to liberate them from the religious discrimination and oppression they were suffering. The work of the order is inspired by the universal message of Jesus Christ, who borrowed from the words of the prophet Isaiah when he said 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor' (Luke 4:18).

For the *Presentation* schools in Ireland today, the challenge of material poverty, although sadly not rare enough, is not as pressing or prevalent as it was when the religious congregation was established in the eighteenth century. However, one can interpret Nano Nagle's commitment to those 'made poor' as a reference to those suffering from a material and/or spiritual poverty. Indeed, it is not difficult to identify examples of this poverty in contemporary Irish society, with the prevalence of homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, and violence. Therefore, if schools inspired by the *Presentation Sisters*' vision want to honour Nano Nagle's commitment to those 'made poor', the following questions become important: 'Who within the school community is being "made poor?"', 'How are they being "made poor?"', and 'What can the school community do to change this'?

This research contends that students with different religious and non-religious identities are those 'made poor' within a denominational context, when it fails to recognise, respect and respond to the religious diversity within it. An aim of the research then was to initiate a conversation within the school community relating to the religious diversity within it. I intended to do this by first exploring student and teacher experience of Religious Education and what they perceived its role to be. What emerged as a major finding of the research is the dichotomy that exists between students and teachers concerning their understanding of what the purpose, nature and scope of Religious Education ought to be.

Discordant Voices on the Role of Religious Education

The influence of religious or non-religious identity on how participants understood what the role of Religious Education ought to be within the school community is significant. Exploring how the Religion teachers of the study understand their role illuminates this further. All participating teachers self-identified as Roman Catholic and placed a strong emphasis on how being a witness to the Catholic faith was a significant aspect of the self-understanding of their role. When asked if they considered faith formation an important part of their role as Religion teachers, all participants agreed that it was. Teacher 1 elaborates on this 'There never has been a distinction for me. To me, being a religious educator means that, but also means being a catechist … I think it's intrinsically linked with my role as a religious educator'.

This statement echoes Pope Benedict XVI's *Address to the Catholic Teacher*, which upholds the Church's position on the complementarity of catechesis and RE while simultaneously recognising their distinct natures. While the Religion teachers participating understand their personal religious identities as complementary to their role as Religions teachers, concerns were raised regarding the interplay between the subject's educational aims and the faith development expectations of the denominational school at the centre of this study. Teachers spoke of time constraints while preparing students for an examination and concerns were voiced regarding the lack of time to really engage in faith formation activities.

Challenges to what can be described as a teaching *into* the religion approach, along with the perceived duality of their role in terms of faith development and the fulfilling of the educational aim of the syllabus, were expressed. Teachers echoed the concerns that the 'religion curriculum [loses] its catechetical effect because of the constraints placed by the examination of the subject in limiting more explicit opportunities for faith formation' (Groome 2007, p. 12). Religion teachers feel comfortable in relation to the development of the Catholic faith, the main obstacle to this being time constrictions given the need to prepare students for the State Religious Education examination. Teachers did not reference the religious diversity within their classrooms as an influencing factor on their teaching of Religious Education.

They did not share the concern expressed by other Religion teachers participating in a 2014 study in the UK that the curriculum they teach is 'too Catholic' and therefore limited in responding to religious plurality and other worldviews.[4] Instead, Religion teachers of this study chose to deliver Christianity focused content from the syllabus to further ensure that they would fulfil their faith development obligations. The Religion Department of the school in this study developed a department plan at the time of the introduction of the exam syllabus for *Junior Certificate Religious Education* (JCRE) in 2000 which stipulates that teachers will omit Section C: 'Foundations of religions—major world religions' from the study. This was a significant omission as it is the only strand of the JCRE that provides opportunities to learn about other religions and beliefs in any depth. An informal agreement to cover this section, if time permitted, was alluded to during the interviews with teachers. This research found that such written school policy endorsed teaching *into* the religion approach

to Religious Education within this context which resulted in many students feeling excluded.

Here, we see the significance of curricular choice as the current syllabi at both junior and senior cycles offer the study of world religions as an optional area of study. Considering Ireland's increasing diversity in terms of religious and non-religious beliefs, this is inadequate and does not represent a progressive pluralist approach to the study. It has also facilitated schools, like this one, to legitimately omit the section with the greatest interreligious objective from the study. It is, however, important to note that a new specification for Religious Education was implemented in 2019 as part of the new junior cycle reform and is more interreligious in its focus. The syllabi at the senior cycle, however, remains unchanged.[5]

Voices from the Margins

It is important to note that irrespective of their religious or non-religious identity, all participating students reported a positive appraisal of the potential Religious Education has as a valuable subject to study in Ireland's pluralist society. However, these students perceive Religious Education's purpose and nature in terms of its potential to fulfil an interreligious objective. They consider the role Religious Education has in teaching about religions as critical for social cohesion in pluralist societies with competing worldviews. The student voices below cohere in how they perceive a learning *about* and *from* religions as central to Religious Education. This stands in sharp contrast to the perspective of the Religion teachers, all of whom placed such a strong emphasis on the faith formation objective of RE within a Catholic school. Students identify a Christ-normative bias in the approach to the RE they have received. For example, S4, 'We should study more about other religions in school. Not just Christianity' [S4 is a fifth-year student who self-identifies as a Muslim]. Similarly, S18 states 'The fact that we're going to go out into the world itself, and there's going to be people from a million different cultures. Surely, we should know something about it' [S18 is fifth-year student who self-identifies as an atheist]. Finally, S6 comments 'RE is very valuable, but I think it was very biased on Roman Catholic[ism] or Christianity. I think we should have [studied] each religion.' [S6 is a sixth-year student who identifies as a Roman Catholic].

These voices echo those of the participating students in the 2009 *REDCo* research project whose primary aim was to explore if Religious Education in Europe was a factor contributing positively to religious dialogue. Students of this European study irrespective of religious positions were also interested in learning *about* religion in school. They also believed that the main preconditions for peaceful coexistence between people of different religions were knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews, shared interest and joint activities.[6]

Students with non-religious worldviews were more vocal regarding the desire to learn about different religious worldviews and non-religious interpretations of life. This corresponds with findings from the *Growing Up Female and Catholic* research

project, which reported that young Irish females with no religious affiliation talk about religion to their friends more than their religiously affiliated peers (Francis et al. 2016). As *outsiders* of religious traditions, they see the value and potential of Religious Education to cater to the plurality of belief and none that exists. Indeed, the lack of opportunities to study non-religious worldviews in the current curricula was discussed during the student focus groups, where students remarked how their worldview was described as a 'challenge' to religious traditions in their textbooks. Considering the 2016 census findings which reported an increase of 73.6% in respondents in Irish society identifying as having *no religion* (Central Statistics Office 2017), the JCRE syllabus does not adequately engage with these non-religious interpretations of life and hence is in danger of negating the syllabus' aim of contributing 'to the spiritual and moral development of the student' (NCCA 2017, p. 19).

Throughout the focus group interview with students from minority religious traditions, numerous students recalled examples of what could be described as xenophobia that they encountered at primary school. As the only Muslim student in her primary school class, one female student found the sacramental preparation of the Catholic students to be a particularly painful time. She spoke of the exclusion she felt when her sixth-class teacher gave her a project to complete in class while the other children prepared for their Confirmation. However, well-meaning and necessary this approach was it served to 'other' Kadijah further in her classmates' eyes.[7] For the first time in her life as a primary school student, she had to formally identify as a Muslim as an explanation as to why she was not participating in the sacramental activities. This identification as a Muslim 11 years after the 9/11 atrocities led a fellow classmate to conclude, *So your dad's a terrorist?*

For this student, being a prepubescent girl and becoming more aware of the world around her, it was a formative experience of separation (and possible alienation) owing to her different religious identity. At the time of the focus group interview, this female student was a very active student within this post-primary school community, being both a member of the students' council and the most valuable player on the school's senior basketball team. However, it is her words that feature in the title of this research study, 'I think it's very difficult to be different' as she spoke of the challenges to feeling a stable sense of belonging in this school community owing to a lack of recognition of and engagement with her distinctive religious identity.

Following this student's sharing, other Muslim students in the focus group recalled similar encounters with their primary school peers and couched them in terms of Islamophobia. A Hindu student, originally from Mauritius, also spoke of how she was teased and bullied because she wore a *Bindi* when she first enrolled in primary school; she subsequently stopped wearing it as did her sister. These students understand that the xenophobia they have experienced resulted from a lack of knowledge regarding their religious identity and tradition. This makes their frustration at the lack of opportunity to study their religious tradition at the post-primary level all the more poignant.

Due to the limitation of the syllabi at both junior and senior cycles, it is possible for students of different minority religious and non-religious identities to study Religious Education for the 5 years at second level and never have their worldview engaged

within any robust or meaningful way. It must be noted that these curriculum issues have been identified more broadly in recent research undertaken by the NCCA in preparation for the redevelopment and redesign of Religious Education at the junior cycle. While participating teachers in the NCCA research identified the importance of a course flexible enough to facilitate schools which differ in terms of school ethos and diversity of students' backgrounds, they asserted the necessity of an increased interreligious objective as necessary in a pluralist society.

Listening to the students' voice within this context, it is clear they recognise Religious Education's potential in developing knowledge, skills and understanding of different religious traditions. They do not endorse a separationist approach to Religious Education, whereby students would be separated for the study of their own faith traditions or secular worldviews. On the contrary, students repeatedly asserted the potential benefits of studying world religions in their already religiously diverse classroom.[8] However, Religion teachers involved in this research did not express the same motivation and desire to utilise this diversity in the teaching and learning of different religions and thus more fully attain Religious Education's interreligious objective.

The school's *Religion Department Plan* (2000) is an example of a policy document which negates an inclusive approach to the study of RE while also undermining the religious dimension to intercultural education. While it is important to note that the student population was much less diverse back in 2000, the school's lack of conscientious policy review in the intervening years could be taken as highlighting an inertia and lack of meaningful engagement with religious diversity.

The negative effects of excluding the section with the greatest interreligious focus from the study at junior cycle are contributing to difficulties experienced in the teaching and learning of non-exam Religious Education at the senior cycle. Issues relating to lack of motivation and engagement in this subject were raised by both teachers and students. There is a danger that by the time students reach fifth-year, those studying the non-exam religion already feel disillusioned by a subject they expected to be much more interreligious in its focus and furthermore they no longer have potential exam success to motivate them.

Voicing the Unwritten Policy Within This Context

The role of unwritten school policy relating to the religious dimension to an intercultural education was also explored in this research. Previous research conducted on intercultural education in Irish schools finds that despite the 'rhetoric of multicultural and intercultural education schools often adopt an assimilationary approach' (Darmody et al. 2011, p. 127). Other research also identifies a downplaying of difference to be more commonplace than a more explicit engagement with cultural and religious diversity (Bryan 2010; Rougier and Honohan 2015; DES 2008). Within the context of this research, it is possible to speak of there being an unwritten rule forbidding the wearing of the hijab for Muslim students in this Catholic school. Indeed,

it was raised by students in every focus group discussion conducted and was cited as the main example of how students of minority faith backgrounds were inhibited from fully expressing their religious identity within their school community.

For example, Student 5 explained how the wearing of the hijab is integral to her Muslim identity, and the denial of the wearing of it during school hours consequentially harbours feelings of exclusion. Student 5 commenting 'I feel the hijab, it's like a symbol of Islam. It's such a great symbol and when you are … told don't wear that you feel like why shouldn't I wear [it]? Is it something bad? It's like shaming you to put it on. I feel like if we allow people to wear the headscarf like that we're opening up to accepting people. People will see that.' [S5 is a sixth-year student who self-identifies as a Muslim]. The following observation by a Catholic student illustrates the questions such practice raises; S7 observed 'I understand that this is a Catholic school, the school rules must be obeyed, but I think where does it stop being school rules and where does it become oppression of [their Muslim] religion?' [S7 is a sixth-year, student who self-identifies as a Roman Catholic].

It could be argued that these students consider allowing signs of religious diversity to be a way of enabling greater inclusivity in their school. By not allowing it, some students felt that their religious (or non-religious) identity was being discriminated against.

In 2008, the Department of Education and Skills issued government recommendations on school uniform policy, in an attempt to address public concerns regarding the wearing of religious symbols in Irish schools. The recommendations state that 'no school uniform policy should act in such a way that it, in effect, excludes students of a particular religious background from seeking enrolment or continuing their enrolment in a school'. Mullally notes that support for 'schools [to] decide their uniform policy at a local level, is reasonable, works and should be maintained was upheld' (2010, p. 15).

The *Guidelines on the inclusion of other faiths in Catholic secondary schools* developed and published first in 2010 by the *Joint Managerial Body for School Management in Voluntary Secondary Schools* (JMB) recently republished and sent to schools sought to support Roman Catholic schools in the inclusion of students from different religious traditions. This publication, along with the Irish Human Rights Commission (2011), explain state rather than explain that no pupil or staff member should be prevented from wearing a religious symbol or garment in accordance with their tradition, for example, the hijab for Muslim girls and the turban for Sikh boys. However, such guidelines remain at the discretion of individual schools to implement and are not subject to enforcement or inspection. The school's culture and its hidden curriculum, as influenced by the leadership of the school, is able to exert influence on the unwritten policies of a school. This might be intentional or otherwise, but it certainly impacts the identity and sense of belonging amongst specific groups of students.

Discordant Voices on the Role of Religious Practice During the School Day

Perhaps a further example of the school's unwritten policy (again part of the hidden curriculum) is the obligation to attend and observe religious ceremonies during the school day. This was regarded by students as another failure to recognise the religious diversity present in the school. However, these religious practices are perceived by Religion teachers to be significant in promoting the Catholic ethos of the school. Teacher 3 described what he considers to be the significance of these religious school gatherings. ' A challenge is just time, I suppose. But if it's a challenge you don't accept, the whole ethos of the school drift. You lose the whole identity of a Catholic school if you don't do it. They're [religious practices] so important. [The most important thing is] getting as many people involved as possible'.

The difference in the perception of the value of these gatherings is notable. Students with non-religious worldviews, along with their peers with minority religious identities, referred to the difficulty they encounter regarding their required attendance at liturgical celebrations. Student 18 spoke of the expectations she perceived the teachers to have of students to receive Holy Communion at these celebrations 'And there should even be an option, like, not to go to the religious practices, or if you do have to go to them, then, like, you know, you … [shouldn't be] expected to … go up for Communion'. [S18 is a fifth-year student who self-identifies as having a secular worldview].

When pursued further within the focus group interview it became clear that while this was never communicated explicitly to the students by teachers or school management, some students interpreted their obligatory attendance at these religious gatherings as requiring this level of participation. A human rights' perspective might deem that these students' right to freedom from religion is being compromised if they are obliged to attend and participate in Catholic liturgies (Kitching 2017). While these students acquiesce to Catholic rituals within the school, their participation can be interpreted as conformity based on obedience rather than voluntary participation.

Once again, we see perceptions between teachers and students collide with adverse effects for those with minority religious and non-religious worldviews. In their responses to the question of *What are the challenges presented by issues of diversity of belief and non-belief to the teaching of Religious Education at senior cycle?* what are the challenges presented by issues of diversity of belief and non-belief to the teaching of RE at the senior cycle, teachers spoke positively about the diversity of belief present in the school community. In what may be described as expected responses, they tended to interpret the 'challenges' mentioned in the question as problems; thus, they were quick to refute any problems posed by this diversity. Teachers spoke of how it is not an issue at all, but perhaps therein lies the problem. Within this context, there is inadequate attention and engagement given to the religious diversity present within the school community. The lack of evidence of interrogation of the school's hidden curriculum and the lack of evidence of student involvement or

consultation on these matters further validate the reported feelings of exclusion by some students with minority religious and non-religious worldviews.

Creating the Space for Conversation

Throughout this discussion, tension has been omnipresent regarding the differing expectations of the State, student, teacher and school patron relating to what the purpose, nature and scope of Religious Education ought to be. This tension manifested itself explicitly in this research in the dichotomous and conflicting perceptions held by students and teachers regarding the role of Religious Education, the non-permittance to the wearing of hijab for Muslim students, along with obligatory attendance at some religious rituals during the school day. As alluded to earlier in this chapter, an important aspect of this research is to draw on the *Presentation* ethos of the Catholic school and investigate who is being 'made poor' within it. The findings of the research indicate that due to the lack of robust engagement with religious diversity, the students with minority religious and non-religious worldviews are in danger of being marginalised. A gap exists between the intended ethos and the lived, operative ethos of the school. There is obvious misrecognition of the religious diversity which is impacting negatively the development of students' authentic selfhood.

This research shows the strong appetite and advocacy students have for interreligious knowledge and how they value Religious Education's role in bringing them into a deeper understanding of the religious and non-religious *other* amongst them. An important theme of the study is the role of conversation in promoting openness to religious diversity based on the argument of our shared humanity rather than on an argument of expedience for social cohesion. Classrooms should, as central learning spaces, invite students into a conversation with the texts, traditions and founding stories of students' own cultural and religious traditions, as well as into conversation with others (Cullen 2006, 2017). Cullen's understanding of Religious Education as conversation, the first step to 'life-giving dialogue', provides a way of thinking about Religious Education that emphasises the engagement of both the teachers and the students (2006, p. 999).

Accentuating the relational character of Catholic education offers a lens through which we can explore whether Religious Education in Catholic schools is a testament to the inclusion of all voices in the conversation. An important objective of this study, then, is to begin the conversation of how religious diversity can be engaged with and celebrated within this school and others like it, who are struggling to adequately engage with religious diversity. This would assist in promoting a more dialogical culture of learning and in fulfilling the syllabi aim of contributing to the moral and spiritual development of every student. This would also work to alleviate some of the pressures teachers feel regarding the duality of their role while mitigating among expectations of their students, their Catholic school patron and the State.

Conclusion

For those willing to commit to a more robust engagement with religious diversity, we can look to the Catholic tradition for inspiration. Theologian Dermot Lane identifies an important insight from the Vatican II's declaration *Nostra Aetate* on the reciprocal relationship of dialogical learning as 'an awareness that encounter with other religious traditions has the capacity to enrich the particularity of one's own Christian faith and so offers an opportunity to learn 'from' and 'with' the other in a way that can deepen Christian faith and the faith of the other from anthropological, soteriological and theological points of view.' (Lane 2011, p. 21). Indeed, the Gospel accounts of Jesus' interreligious dialogical encounters with the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:25–30), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7–26), and the Roman centurion (Luke 7:1–10) emphasise the transformative nature of the conversation for both participants. This approach advocates a learning *about* and *from* different religions, which will also enhance a learning *into* religion for Catholic students.

Notes

1. From here on the term 'religious diversity' will be used to refer to the diverse religious and non-religious worldviews present.
2. European documents which have influenced government educational policy in Ireland include the Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools (2007), The recommendation for intercultural education and the challenges of religious diversity in Europe (2008) and more recently Signposts: policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education (2014).
3. For a fuller discussion, see Raftery et al. (2018) 'The legacy of a pioneer of female education in Ireland: tercentennial consideration of Nano Nagle and Presentation schooling', History of Education, pp. 1–15.
4. See Stuart-Buttle (2017). 'Does religious education matter? What do teachers say?', in Shanahan, M. (ed.), Does religious education matter? New York: Routledge, pp. 51–65.
5. The initiation of the new junior cycle by the DES in 2015 incurs significant changes to teaching and learning in the post-primary context. The implementation of the new specification for RE was September 2019.
6. REDCo Research Project (2009). Religion in Education: Contribution to Dialogue Policy Recommendations of the REDCo Research Project. Available from https://etopetus.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/redco_policy_recommendations_eng.pdf [Accessed 9 October 2018].
7. Khadijah is not this student's real name. The wellbeing of all participating students was of primary concern and so students were invited to a session with the school's Guidance counsellor following our focus group interview owing to the sensitive and emotionally charged nature of our discussion.
8. This finding corresponds with international research in Arweck (ed.) (2017). Young people's attitudes to religious diversity. Oxon: Routledge.

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Chapter 20
Religious Education as a Discipline in the Knowledge-Rich Curriculum

John Moffatt SJ

Abstract The new OFSTED framework gives an opportunity to re-evaluate what it means to learn a discipline and why that might be important and helpful for young people. The 'powerful knowledge' thesis of Michael Young has been criticised, but can be given a benign reading. Deep subject learning is both liberating and something for life. There may be an opportunity at hand to rethink Catholic education in terms of a new Christian humanism. We conclude with an exploration of what humanistic 'deep learning' might mean for Religious Education in Catholic schools today.

Introduction

This chapter explores the implications for curriculum planning in Catholic schools in general and Religious Education in particular in relation to the new OFSTED framework and the 'powerful knowledge' hypothesis that lies behind it. It concludes with an outline of what a discipline-based Religious Education might look like across primary and secondary education in the UK and invites discussion of the suggestion.

The reflections and questions addressed in this chapter are personal and have been stirred by a number of different factors. Firstly, I am sitting on a local SACRE[1] committee, trying not to look too obtuse. There I have been made aware of the newly significant status that RE is being given in the latest OFSTED framework for inspecting all state schools in England.[2] Not only is it to be intellectually robust, but it is as likely to be inspected and evaluated for its place in a carefully constructed curriculum as any other subject. Though RE in Catholic schools has its own inspection procedure, the shift in OFSTED's valuation and its inspection priorities are likely, I would expect, to have a positive effect on its status in Catholic schools, and eventually to have an effect on the way it is evaluated in the Section 48 inspections. This may

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be overoptimistic. Other concerns have been identified (for example, Whittle 2018) for Religious Education due to pressure from EBacc subjects and the narrowing of the Sixth Form curriculum. Whether the new framework will mitigate that remains to be seen.[3] Secondly, Philip Robinson, the National Religious Education advisor of the *Catholic Education Service* in England, has throughout 2019 and 2020 been running a wide-ranging consultation exercise in the run-up to a detailed revision of the English and Welsh Bishops' *Curriculum Directory for Religious Education*[4]. In the two meetings I have been privileged to attend (the theological working group), a significant discussion has centred around Michael Young's notion of 'powerful knowledge' and the related question of how Religious Education fits in with the academic discipline of theology.[5] The value and meaning of the term 'powerful knowledge' and the soundness of the idea of 'disciplines' that goes with it has received some hefty challenges.[6] Nevertheless, I believe it can be given a benign reading, and it is this that gives the 'Religious Education as a discipline' in the title of this chapter. Finally, I have been fortunate enough to be able to visit a Multi-Academy Trust run by an old friend, where some of the ideas about curriculum, valuable knowledge and subject integrity that lie behind the new OFSTED framework (and potentially the evolving Curriculum Directory for Religious Education) are being put into practice in an area of England where social deprivation is high and educational standards have been historically dismal. I saw enough on my brief visit to catch a glimpse of what carefully structured learning, beginning at the primary level, could mean for giving educationally impoverished children real cultural capital and a sound basis for a deep understanding of subject disciplines.

When I read the new OFSTED framework, I almost began to think it might be worthwhile going back into secondary teaching. Things that I had found difficult to comprehend, let alone deliver (internal targets based on near-meaningless, and often dishonest micro-levelling), were now off the table. The structure of individual lessons and the methods used for pupil feedback were no longer prescribed. Teachers' lessons would no longer be graded. 'Different approaches to teaching can be effective'.[7] Hallelujah. The general approach to inspection seems to be pragmatic and evidence based. Though (inevitably with a government document) the menace of 'the highest possible standards' always lurks in the background, for a government document the following is not a bad educational aim, and does take us beyond the narrow focus on exam success.

> Our understanding of 'knowledge and cultural capital' is derived from the following wording in the national curriculum: 'it is the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said, and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement. (Ofsted Inspection Framework 2019 p. 4)[8]

Now I do have a fact-averse philosopher's wariness about the rather Gradgrindy obsessions of the historian and cultural conservative former Education Secretary Michael Gove, who drove the exam reforms and put 'powerful knowledge' and 'cultural capital' on the agenda. I am also anxious that a drive to master facts diminishes the space for the kind of exploratory learning that is both more enjoyable

for teacher and student, and potentially builds a much deeper relationship between student and subject than merely being told stuff to memorise.[9] However, Michael Young offers a more subtle and appealing account of what powerful knowledge might mean in state education that goes beyond the thousand facts you need to know in order to be a successful Englishman, and offers a fruitful way of interpreting those new criteria.

If I understand Young correctly, all students of whatever background should be given a soundly structured and pedagogically creative access to culturally crucial disciplines.[10] That access should grow within the (fluid) logic and the agreed factual basis specific to the discipline, preserving its integrity but acknowledging its openness to new developments from the community of experts. Offering weaker students skills-based courses, in which content and cohesion of ideas do not matter, in the end does them few favours, because it deprives them of the deep knowledge and understanding of crucial areas of human enquiry that will enable them to interpret their world as well as any of their contemporaries.

Now John White, a leading British philosopher of Education, raises real concerns about the coherence of the very idea of 'powerful knowledge'. He challenges the insistence on specialist vocabulary, the implicitly essentialist notion of disciplines, the idea that within them can be found a canonical set, constituting an educationally desirable 'cultural capital', and the assumption that knowing lots of things is of itself the most important goal in education.[11] It is worth remembering the importance both of the active engagement of the learner in investigating the world, and of ensuring that the view from below is acknowledged and included in a true, transformative Christian education. There are versions of a canonical 'cultural capital' and pursuit of the highest standards that would exclude both of those crucial goals.

In spite of this, I am still drawn to the notion of 'powerful knowledge' as at least a helpful heuristic concept. White objects that Young's notions of essentially discipline-specific vocabulary, and knowledge that cannot be derived simply from the student's own experience only really apply to the hard sciences and to mathematics. Great literature is most certainly accessible from experience and without a vast technical vocabulary. Indeed, if one were to exclude personal experience, you would exclude that 'see, judge, act' process described by Raymond Friel[12] and the sort of transformative readings of scripture, central to the Liberation Theology movement, which over the years has helped the Catholic hierarchy to re-evaluate its relationship with oppressive secular powers.

However, anyone who cares about their subject will recognise, even if it is difficult to formulate sometimes, that there are better and worse ways of going about it.[13] There are people who are really good at it, and there are those who don't really get it. There are those who think well and responsibly and creatively within a discipline, and those whose thinking is shallow or careless or narrow. It is the last, I think, that is really important for understanding what a benign version of '*disciplinarity*' might mean, and applies equally to liberal arts, metalwork, music and the hard sciences. A discipline has to recognise that it does not know everything, has not said everything, may have got things wrong, needs to be open to new information and can learn things from the way other disciplines operate. All disciplines have a family resemblance in

this respect (I am going for Wittgensteinian definition rather than Platonic definition) and though they will have their characteristic areas of enquiry and characteristic methods, many of these will overlap. Things that you need to know in chemistry will also be important if you are to really understand what you are doing when you work with resistant materials. Psychology, sociology and history provide a mutually enriching exploration of themes that also appear in Greek tragedy.

Learning to do things well is real and empowering. It takes you from where you are familiar with things, to new places where you have to learn to be at home. It is also often hard.[14] Practising times-tables, verb tables and musical scales is tedious at times, but it eventually pays dividends in the power to manipulate equations effortlessly, to communicate accurately and to make sweet melodies. My power to think well and deeply about literature increases when I am introduced to the professional language and work of thoughtful commentators. Mastering the syntax of a language is at once a struggle and liberating. In fact, if one wanted a model for a benign reading of what 'powerful knowledge' is about, it might be learning to speak a language well (including one's home language). The process of learning is never actually divorced from our experience but entails encountering tough, non-negotiable new things to remember and practise (it is a mistake to think of linguistic knowledge—and perhaps any knowledge—primarily as propositional data) but it ends with a suppleness of communication that enables us to say, and often see new things in a larger world. Because all learning is ultimately a human activity, it is made easier by teachers who are great communicators and good human beings who not only teach the discipline, but in some sense also model it.[15] The end product is someone who can work well within a discipline, has a deep understanding of it and cares about it.[16]

This model places huge demands on teachers in terms of subject knowledge and pedagogical imagination and skill—and on the pupils who will struggle with material which is genuinely hard to grasp. Nevertheless, such an approach that prioritises the integrity and value of each subject over generic skills will be attractive to any teacher who cares about their subject. Attractive too is the notion that the goal of teaching, say English, is not to give them an exam credit in a key subject, but to enable them to enjoy going to watch Macbeth when they are in their forties. That is entirely in accord with the humanist tradition of education, whether Christian or secular.

One of the striking features of the transformation in OFSTED's approach is a shift away from judgements based on the form and structure of individual lessons to judgments based on lessons understood as an element within the architecture of a whole curriculum. Instead of looking for a learning leap that has to happen for all pupils in these 50 min, the inspectors will be looking for activities (including standing in front of a blackboard with a bit of chalk) that have a clear place in the process of acquiring and reinforcing the facts and ideas essential to becoming masters of a subject. The emphasis is on long-term memory and deep connexion, rather than short-term, disconnected 'wow's (though these will obviously continue to have their place, as they always have).[17]

Among the implications for curriculum planning are that the process has to begin at primary school. Inequality in educational outcomes at the secondary level has much

to do with the huge divergence in language acquisition and vocabulary during those years that often depend on family background. That has to be intentionally compensated for across subjects. In some subjects (primarily maths, physics and chemistry), there are well-trodden and reliable paths that structure and reinforce learning. In others (languages, humanities), it is much less clear either because of ideologies of the method (in the case of languages and English) or because of problems of volume. Decisions have to be made about what is most worth knowing, or what is going to be most helpful in providing an interpretative framework for lifelong learning. These would fall under White's *ethical educational choices*, where enfleshing the bare heuristic concept of 'powerful knowledge' is subject to a judgment that may be interdisciplinary, but moves into a realm of value that goes beyond any one of them.

Towards a Catholic Curriculum?

There is a very interesting opportunity here for Catholic educational institutions to rethink the architecture of their whole curriculum, perhaps to create a new, open Christian humanism that helps their students—of a mixture of faith backgrounds— to live good, thoughtful and compassionate lives in the twenty-first century. But what might that mean specifically for the subject (or discipline) of Religious Education?

One attraction of the new inspection framework is that it offers 'intellectual rigour' and the possibility of introducing age-appropriate real theology, at the different key stages. This could be immensely helpful for students as they move from the early years of primary school, where religion is a given, through to older years where simply formulated religious ideas begin to run up against challenges from other subjects and from the wider world. What, however, is real theology? And what tools do we need to give people by way of induction into a (potentially) lifelong exploration of this particular craft?

Here, we run up against a fundamental problem of Catholic Theology (and perhaps theology in general) that it is not a single discipline, but a loose conglomeration of disciplines that do interrelate, but that have different criteria of evidence and truth. There is then, of course, the further problem that modern theological debate, which often brings those differences into relief, rarely makes an appearance in general Catholic discourse. This unevenness in the disciplines of theology (which certainly requires fairly sophisticated metacognition) is ironed out in the language of the Catechism, which, while providing the historical justifications for dogmatic conclusions is understandably coy about higher-level questions of method, interpretation and epistemology.

So one interpretation of 'real theology' for Catholics might be this flat spacetime theology of the Catechism, which aims to cover all bases and implies its own sufficiency. This is certainly what the current *Curriculum Directory for Religious Education* asks for, adding in John Paul II's 'Theology of the Body' as the basis for justifying Catholic teaching on sex and relationships, and including significant references to religious art. The current GCSE Religious Studies examination has

papers specifically marketed at Catholic schools and reflecting what is required by the current directory. The result is an exhaustingly wide-ranging course. In fact, an increasing number of schools opt to start the GCSE in Year 9, and thus devote three school years to gaining this qualification. The GCSE RS course introduces students to a large technical vocabulary, key names and ideas in the history of doctrine (such as Augustine, Irenaeus, and Aquinas) and the importance of magisterial teaching, as well as some tools to make sense of ecclesial architecture and sacred art. In the textbooks published since 2016 (such as the AQA course book by Towey and Robinson 2016), there is notional room for debate. However, any substantial critique of claims attributed to Catholicism would have to be provided by the teacher. In the crowded specification for RS GCSE, it is difficult to see if there is actually any time allowed for this debate. There is little hint in the text that there might be a reasonable diversity of views among Catholics.

It seems to me on the whole, though, that this is to an extent an admirable endeavour. It does offer students 'cultural capital' and a sound basis for reflecting on their faith (or for non-Catholic students to have a substantial idea of what Catholicism is about). However, is it intellectually rigorous? If you view it from a historical or merely descriptive perspective, it probably is. And here we can notice that the aims of a secular religious education that needs to present a set of commitment-neutral uncontroversial 'facts about' a given religious group chime in very nicely with a catechetical approach that would like to deliver, well, religious 'facts'. Here are key religious texts of this confessional group; these are their rules of interpretation and this is what the texts tell us. Now we have learned all the internal 'facts' of this faith that you need to know. No one gets hurt, or challenged to think more deeply.

This, then you might say, is intellectual rigour in the sense of 'learned'. Does it give the students powerful knowledge? I would suggest both yes and no. Anyone who has done such a course has much more ammunition for a discussion when a Jehovah's witness comes knocking on the door than *might* have been the case under previous exam regimes. Does it give them the intellectual tools for engaging fruitfully with sophisticated secular critiques or making sense of a multi-faith environment— or indeed for doing biblical hermeneutics and exploring modern Christologies? Not unless they have a teacher who takes them way beyond what the course demands.

I am reminded of the way my father was able to explain to me in enormous detail (when I was 10) and with great assurance the metaphysical framework for understanding transubstantiation in terms of substance and accidents. However, for me that language had no connection with anything else I was learning about the world. Even when I read Aristotle's physics in my twenties, I couldn't match it up with Aquinas—it is only 50 years later, after reading Avicenna that I finally understand where Aquinas is coming from. But still the gap between modern and ancient metaphysics remains, however ingenious the internal argument of the latter. The catechism-based course, for all that it is wide-ranging, apart from the occasional chink of light (such as the discussion of evolution) suffers from something of the same complaint.

Maybe this is an appropriate staging post for the Religious Education journey of 16-year-olds, but does it tell them that it is a staging post? That there is more to be

learned, that they should be inspired to go on seeking? Could not carefully selected elements of the fact-based material be delivered at an earlier stage, opening a way for a deeper reflection on fewer core elements at Key Stage 4 (for 15- and 16-year-olds)? Is there an appropriate architecture for those 12 years of RE that would deliver a different sort of intellectual rigour? Such a rigour might be perilous for a purely catechetical faith, but may be crucial for developing a faith with intellectual integrity in the modern world and one which, for the many who will abandon the catechetical faith anyway, would give a reason to continue to engage with the mysterious transcendence offered within this (or any other) faith tradition?

A Possible Way Forward

I conclude with a loose account (not especially original) of how to think about theology as a discipline and what that could mean for the architecture of a 12-year programme that would be a gradual induction into that discipline. It does not go into the pedagogical details.[18] First observation: theology is a human activity older than Christianity. This needs to be acknowledged. Second observation: theology has three main drivers.[19] To continue, in some way, any 'intellectually rigorous' approach needs first to make people aware of those drivers, and second to reflect on their power to convey the truth about the way things actually are:

Driver one: The experiences of individuals and communities in specific environments that are understood as encounters and communications with a transcendent other, and that are consolidated in standard explanatory narratives linking individuals, communities and the wider world. (Examples include the Exodus Story, the Gospels, and the *Iliad*)

Driver two: The awareness of inconsistencies in the body of received narratives or dissonances with wider experience, and the desire to find some resolution to those inconsistencies. The troubled believer seeks a version of the story with a deep internal logic underlying the superficially inconsistent narrative fragments. (Examples include Aristobulus the Jew on the manifestations at Sinai, Paul's letters to the Romans and to the Corinthians, the battles of Nicaea and Chalcedon, the hagiographical account of Joseph in the Quran, Rabbinic debates about the meaning of the sacrifice of Isaac, Aeschylus' Oresteia, and the Upanishads)

Driver three: The need to defend the stories of the tradition from detractors or competing narratives and thought systems (examples of this process: Aristotle and Plato, the book of Wisdom, Justin Martyr, Origen, the Kalam theologians, Aquinas, Luther, Chesterton, Lewis). Inevitably, the language of the challenger's argument becomes entangled with the home discourse. We can be more or less open to acknowledging such debts to others.

Here, then is my suggestion. In some way elements of these three approaches need to be rehearsed in an age-appropriate way throughout the years of primary

and secondary Religious Education. Maybe we can think of theology as a complex journey that leads us from narrative and community through apologetic analysis only to lead us back to a narrative and a community in a new intellectual peace with integrity. Sometimes this will be the same narrative and the same community as you started with—but not always.

So it is probably worth stating honestly (this is a big ask for bishops) that the outcomes of well-constructed Catholic RE allow for a thoughtful and (if done well) respectful departure from the Catholic tradition (accent on the thoughtful). By this reckoning, James Joyce and Voltaire are successful products of Catholic education.

The underlying framework should clearly not be catechetical apologetics whose end is assent to the propositions of whatever is the current Catechism. Firstly, that would be difficult for staff who do not share Catechism positions. Secondly, it would be to abandon at the outset a large part of what any reasonable person might regard as 'intellectual rigour'. Thirdly, the place for catechism is confirmation programmes. Rather, the framework should be a critical apologetics, which is honest about ambiguities and inconsistencies and is able to own up to the areas where answers are incomplete or inadequate. This will be particularly important in guiding the material prepared for many non-Catholic and non-specialist teachers, and will free them to answer the challenging questions thrown at them by pupils with integrity.

Such a course would begin (as currently, but perhaps more systematically) by building up a symbolic language for key notions like 'salvation' or 'redemption' through narrative, with increasing analytical sophistication as the years progress. With a little ingenuity, a sense of a historical arc and the place of Christianity and other world religions within it may be achievable for many students by the end of Key Stage 3 (when pupils are 14). Exploration of the sacraments, as the primary place where students will interact with official Catholicism, and a working understanding of 'Trinity' and 'Incarnation', 'Creation' may also be achievable by this stage. It would then be possible to take sample topics and deal with them in depth at Key Stage 4, rather than attempt to cover all bases. That depth would include more on the phenomenology of religious experience, and the relation of Catholicism to other faiths. It is crucial to reflect profoundly on the relationship between belief and lived experience, if RE is to be a life-enhancing rather than a hollow academic exercise. It would include a reflection on the interpretation not only of scripture, but of the magisterium, and would engage seriously with alternative non-religious world views—particularly when reflecting on ethical issues.

Broadly the movement of the curriculum would be from theological concepts rooted in narrative, through the puzzles and paradoxes these generate, to self-aware, or critical apologetics that is able to engage fruitfully with the wider world, and thus provides the basis for a lifelong search for understanding.

I would add that such an open Religious Education programme in a Catholic school presupposes a parallel retreat and a liturgical programme offering the sort of experiences that give some existential meaning to and material for the 'intellectual' pursuit of knowledge and understanding. We don't want to drive people out of the faith by the cold pursuit of reason, or by the death of a thousand facts. Ideally, we want to help young people find their way of making an ever more mature, credible sense

of their faith as something that already matters to them. But if this is not possible, at the very least we want to leave people with an understanding of and respect for the integrity of Catholic Christianity and of alternative world views that will help them to interpret and act in the world with responsibility and compassion.

Notes

1. A SACRE is a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, and in the United Kingdom, they are an independent body which considers the provision of religious education in the area under the jurisdiction of its Local Authority, advising it and empowered to require a review of the locally agreed syllabus for Religious Education.

2. See *School Inspection Handbook* at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif, §§ 33—38; in §§ 98—101 (on systematic lesson visits within a single subject area), the implication is that any subject (thus including RE) can be the object of such inspection (at least within non-faith schools); § 168 highlights spiritual and moral development as a decisive factor; § 174 insists on the 'basic curriculum' including RE and sex-and-relationships education; § 183 (implementation and quality of teaching) applies to all subjects equally; although much is made of the EBACC (which excludes RE) §§ 220—221 (spiritual and moral development) imply a robust RE programme and in § 226 RE is identified as an important area of inspection with pupil development; it should be noted that the Sect. 8 inspection document, more restricted in scope to monitoring schools on the edge, does not make specific remarks about RE or spiritual and moral development.

3. See Whittle, Religious Education in Catholic Schools: Contemporary Challenges (2019). Whittle does note a changing social and political context, which makes good RE teaching an important potential contributor to social cohesion. This is perhaps what lies behind its prominence in the new OFSTED framework, which no longer allows schools simply to ignore it in favour of EBacc subjects.

4. Robinson was also involved in helping produce specifications for the first wave of content-rich public exams after the Gove reforms introduced from 2016.

5. See Young and Lambert, *Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice* (Bloomsbury: London 2014).

6. See John White, "The Weakness of Powerful Knowledge" in *London Review of Education*, July, 2018.

7. For more information, see the *School Inspection Handbook* §88.

8. For more information, see the *School Inspection Handbook* §178. We also find a refreshing acknowledgement at §193 'National assessments and examinations are useful indicators of pupils' outcomes, but they only represent a sample of what pupils have learned'.

9. My reading of the OFSTED document is that it is actually much more subtle and thoughtful in its approach to what memory and knowledge are about than the rote-learning to which people like me are instinctively allergic. See *School Inspection Handbook* §183.

10. For more information, see the *Knowledge and the Future School*, 67–88.
11. See White's article cited above.
12. Unpublished paper from the annual conference for the Network for Researchers in Catholic Education at DCU in October 2020.
13. As a would-be philosopher, I have particular issues with the reduction of the subject in some exam boards to a series of 'for' and 'against' propositions that could as easily be generated by my laptop as by a student.
14. Willy Russell's *Educating Rita,* and *Stags and Hens* are an entertaining and thought-provoking reflection on the benefits and hardships of being taken beyond your local cultural identity into the wider world.
15. This is a real aspect of the teaching process that never seems to get discussed publicly.
16. Older readers might remember the discussion around quality in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.*
17. The danger of the Gove ideological flip-flop in favour of knowing lots of things is to lose the practice of creatively encouraging pupil engagement in their own learning. In the Jesuit tradition, we have always liked Ignatius' wise observation in *The Spiritual Exercises* §2: 'For it is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the intimate understanding and relish of the truth'.
18. I presented this proposal in a paper during the Network for Researchers in Catholic Education at DCU in October 2019 and received very positive feedback.
19. Obviously, this may simply reflect three things that I happen to have noticed, you may want to point out a lot more things that have not occurred to me.

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Chapter 21
A *De Fide* Case Against 'Faith Development'?

John Murray

Abstract This chapter focuses on one of Vatican I's theological teachings and suggests that it has been neglected in Religious Education in Catholic schools. It is maintained that this possible neglect is to the detriment of Religious Education in several ways and thus warrants our attention. The focus is shone on *Dei Filius*, with its deep roots in Aquinas, on human reason being capable of demonstrating the existence of God. This theological insight has tended to be overlooked, and this has impacted on the way 'faith' and 'faith development' are often approached in contemporary Catholic schools. It is argued that the challenge is not only to avoid a narrow conception of faith development but also to frame Catholic education as theism built on faith *and* reason. The priority is to have a richer theologically and ecclesially informed account of Religious Education in Catholic schools, and in particular, of faith development.

Keywords Theism · Rationalism · Vatican I · Faith development

Introduction

When we hear references to 'the Council', we probably think immediately of Vatican II, but there was also a Vatican I which, although it took place 150 years ago, is still important. The great Anglican apologist and fiction writer, C. S Lewis, once said that it is a very good idea to read an old book after reading a new one, so that one's understanding is never confined to the present moment with its own peculiar blindspots and errors. That is one reason why looking to Vatican I is useful. But another reason is even more significant for Catholics, and that is the fact that Vatican I taught dogmatically (and in doing so, it formed a basis for the teaching of Vatican II). This chapter focuses on one of Vatican I's dogmas and suggests that it has been neglected in Religious Education in Catholic schools and that this possible neglect is to the detriment of it in several ways. So it merits our attention.

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What We Can Learn from Vatican I

I begin with Canon 2.1 of The Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*: 'If anyone says that the one, true God, our Creator and Lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason: let him be anathema.' (Tanner trans., cited in Turner 2004 p. 4). As this is a language from another age, and expressed in a negative manner, one might be tempted to ignore it, as Catholics personally and also as professionals concerned about Religious Education in Catholic schools. But this would surely be a mistake. The Canon sets out a *de fide* teaching; it is 'of the faith', a dogma, an infallible teaching of an ecumenical council of the Catholic Church. It illuminates an important truth. It is definitively part of the Catholic faith, to be believed by divine and Catholic faith. If Catholics wish to know what is to be believed as an integral part of Catholicism, then this Canon tells them of one important dogma; if non-Catholics wish to know what is essential to Catholic beliefs, then this Canon informs them too.

As already stated, the negative tone and language of the Canon might put us off. It is quoted here because it is considered particularly authoritative when expressed in a negative form and as a conciliar canon. In any case, its message can be put also in a very positive form. In *Dei Filius* Chap. 2, 'Divine Revelation', the Council sets out the dogma positively and then quotes from a famous verse, Romans 1:20, as a basis for the teaching: 'The same Holy mother Church holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason: ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made' [Tanner trans.].

This dogma does not claim that people do in fact know God with certainty by reason, but states that God *can* be known. It does not teach that in order to have Catholic faith, one must first find or work out a sound and developed philosophical argument for God's existence as Creator and Lord. The philosophical argument for God's existence is not easy. Some people, perhaps even the majority, come to accept God's existence primarily by way of faith rather than reason alone. On this, Wahlberg (2014) is particularly good at the reasonableness of learning via an ethically responsible belief in testimony. Nevertheless, Vatican I does not present the natural knowledge of God through reason as something for the very few. God can be known with certainty through the things he has made, perhaps for many people only in a simple fashion, although still with certainty. Perhaps the point may be put another way: the existence of God, even though it can be and often is known by faith, is a kind of reality that can be known by human reason. God makes himself known through his creation.

St. Thomas Aquinas held famously that the existence of God—along with some knowledge of what God is and is not (primarily what he is not: see Turner 2004)—can be demonstrated 'scientifically'. Thomas was not speaking of what most today refer to as 'science', namely, the natural sciences such as physics and the social sciences such as sociology. He was referring to metaphysical knowledge (see Feser 2008).

He meant what Vatican I later defined as a dogma: God's existence as Creator and Lord *can be known with certainty* by unaided human reason. Like Vatican I, Thomas Aquinas too quotes Romans 1:20 to back up his approach (see ST 1, 2, 2 'on the contrary'). He goes on, in the *Summa Theologiae* 1, 2, 3, to outline his famous 'five ways' to prove that God exists. Then, in the next 24 Questions (which are sometimes overlooked by those, such as Richard Dawkins, who mistakenly assume that they know what Aquinas said about God's existence from the one famous article alone), he works out in detail what reason can know by analogy and negation about God: God's simplicity, perfection, infinity, omnipresence, immutability, eternity, unity, and more. Although *Dei Filius* does not 'canonise' St Thomas's approach as dogma (see Kerr 2016, and also Dubay 1985 on Newman's different approach to theism), it is clear that it is following the same line of thought based on scripture's witness. God has created the world and humans can know him as Creator and Lord, as our source and end, through our natural reason's understanding of the things that God has created as pointing towards their creator (see Levering 2016; Feser 2017; Fradd and Delfino 2018).

The First Vatican Council did not replace Catholic faith with human reason. *Dei Filius* says plenty about the importance of faith. We can know and love God so much more fully through responding with faith to divine revelation 'It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself and the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that a supernatural, way. This is how the Apostle puts it: In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son' [Chap. 2, quoting Hebrews 1:1–2: Tanner trans. In Turner 2004 p. 3]. God has revealed himself and his will to us by divine revelation in a supernatural way. Also, he has revealed to us that we are called to a supernatural end, which we could not know by reason alone. So clearly faith is extremely important and should not be replaced by reason alone. Vatican I clearly rejected *rationalism*. It does not allow us to reduce the Catholic religion to reason alone (nor to history or science or imagination alone—not, of course, that these are unimportant in their proper place).

Vatican I and the Rejection of Fideism

However, Vatican I also rejected *fideism*, namely the reduction of the Catholic religion to faith alone, divorced from reason. So, even whilst acknowledging fully the necessity and superiority of Catholic faith that the Council clearly taught, it is important not to pass over its teaching on reason. What can be known of God through reason is important, even if the reason does not reach the heights and depths of what Catholic faith can know (see Catechism of the Catholic Church pars. 31–43). And it is hugely important that we can know by reason, at least in principle, God as Creator and Lord[1].

It is the opinion of the present author that the teaching of Vatican I on the ability of human reason to know God, albeit in a limited fashion, seems to be seriously neglected today in Religious Education in Catholic schools, and this neglect of the

dogmatic truth set out so clearly by *Dei Filius*, and even at times Catholics' contradiction or rejection of it, has seriously negative consequences. One of these consequences is the way that our understanding of Catholic faith and 'faith development' can be impaired.

Consider first what Denys Turner has to say about theology: 'Within theological circles in our times, there can scarcely be a proposition less likely to meet with approval than that which, on 24 April 1870, the first Vatican Council decreed to be a matter of faith' (2004 p. 3), namely, what is in Canon 2.1 quoted above and in the more positive expression of the dogma. Turner is quite correct to note that in theology today, the dogma is highly unlikely to be approved and it could be argued this problem extends also into Catholic Catechetics and RE, into Catholic schooling, into Catholicism as it is understood and lived, and into modern culture generally. It is generally thought now that God's existence is purely a matter of faith, at best, and not at all a matter of reason. This idea is strong in some forms of Protestantism, but even many Catholics think it too, and in doing so, they reflect widely accepted ideas in modern society. Consider a 2018 article in the *Irish Times*. It was entitled 'A Scientist's view of the pope's visit' and it was written by Cormac O'Raifeartaigh, a lecturer in physics in Waterford DIT and also a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. In it, the author sees religion and science as being very different (to the detriment of religion): 'One obvious clash is the central issue of faith—the manner in which almost all religions assume the existence of a supernatural deity in the absence of any supporting evidence. Such a belief system may arise from an instinctive human need to believe in something larger than ourselves, but it is in marked contrast with the practice of modern science, where everything we assume about the world is based upon thousands of observations' [*Irish Times*, 30th August 2018 p. 10]. O'Raifeartaigh assumes that science is a matter of reason, and perhaps philosophy is too, but religion and theology are matters entirely of 'faith', and not of reason. Faith and reason are seen as very much separate and opposed. Faith is presented as thinking something is so without having any evidence for it. Faith happens perhaps because of some need to believe in something that has been caused by evolution and is now part of human instinct. Faith, in other words, is a kind of instinctive wishful thinking, and nothing more than that. This implies that it is only as a matter of 'faith' that someone might believe that there is a God who is the Creator and Lord.

O'Raifeartaigh's views and assumptions are that it could be argued are broadly representative of the views and assumptions of many people and institutions in Ireland and the West. But it should be noted how different his position is from that taught by Vatican I. This Council taught as a dogma that God's existence, as Creator and Lord, can be known by reason. A logical follow-on from this conciliar dogma is that *it is an error to consider the existence of God to be a matter exclusively of faith alone*. Following on from that, it would be wrong to consider Catholicism to be exclusively a matter of faith alone. Even though the Catholic faith (and Christian faith more generally) considers living faith to be essential for one's knowledge of God and one's salvation, that does not entail that religion is *exclusively* and entirely a matter of faith. This is particularly the case when 'faith' is defined inaccurately

and reductively, as O'Raifeartaigh defines it, as mere wishful thinking due to a brute instinct or a human need for comfort and meaning. But even if we define faith more adequately, following Vatican I's account of it, it is still the direct implication of the teaching of Vatican I that knowledge of God and his will is not a matter exclusively of faith. And so it is entailed by this council that religion is, albeit partially, a matter of reason. So too ought to be Catholic education and Religious Education in Catholic schools.

Though I do not present any empirical evidence here of the claim, it could be suggested that Vatican I's dogma and its implications contradict not only the views and assumptions of agnostic or atheistic scientists like O'Raifeartaigh, but also the views and assumptions of many Catholics, including many in delivering Religious Education in Catholic schools. Whilst it is possible to take a *benign* view of faith as wishful thinking and as human instinct or need, presumably most Catholics would hesitate to describe their understanding of faith as 'wishful thinking', but perhaps this is an accurate description of exactly how they understand it? If asked, 'Is there a God?', many people would reply, 'Well, I *believe* that there is a God, but you know of course that there's no real proof.' This kind of answer seems to suggest that theism is not a matter of confident human reason at all. It displays a rather negative attitude towards reason's role in theism, and thus in religion. It would be interesting to speculate if this kind of attitude is widespread even among Religious Education teachers in Catholic schools. These teachers might be very committed to 'faith development' as an important aspect of Religious Education in Catholic schools, but this approach is one that fails to consider that 'reason development', so to speak, is another important aspect of it, not excluding the foundational matter of our rational confidence in God's revealing his existence through his creation. And, given the close, mutually supportive relationship between faith and reason, the development of one necessarily goes hand in hand with the development of the other.[2]

The Implications for Religious Education in Catholic Schools

Given the truth of the *de fide* teaching of Vatican I, Religious Education in Catholic schools ought not consider 'religion', including the centrally important point about God's existence as Creator and Lord, as exclusively a matter of faith. It should also give due consideration to the role of reason in coming to know of God 'with certainty'. But perhaps it is these two final words, 'with certainty', that cause trouble for many in a modern liberal society. There is a widespread assumption that it is wrong, not only intellectually but morally, to be certain about God and religious matters. Religious certainty (or dogma or dogmatism) leads, according to this assumption, to religious fanaticism, and thus to intolerance, divisions, segregation, exclusion, oppression, hatred, and even to violence and killing. We are far better to extoll and promote the superiority of humble *un*certainty in religious matters, and to any matters of morality that depend on religion too, of course. If one is to be 'certain' about God, let it be

a purely personal and subjective 'certainty'. Or, if it has a social dimension, in that it is a 'faith' shared with others, in a church or congregation, for example, then let that 'faith' be a matter entirely for the private sphere of the individual believer and congregation. People should be free to engage in wishful thinking about God and religion, but only in private, only as private individuals and groups of private individuals gathered into private corporations. Such seems to be the logic of the liberal fear of religious certainty. One may be allowed to 'believe' in God, but only as long as it is not too strong or serious a belief. In fact, one very radical version of this liberal and modern approach (perhaps 'postmodern approach' is the better term here) is to claim that it is wrong to identify closely with any belief or belief system, or with a family or communal religious identity. Within this wider cultural context, it could be argued that Religious Education teachers in Catholic schools have a role to play in helping their students engage with a richer theologically informed understanding of faith in God.

An important insight from Vatican I is that it allows you to argue that one does not only 'believe' in God but one also holds God's existence as Creator and Lord to be a matter of reason, and to hold this idea as itself a matter of *de fide* belief directly and rather shockingly challenges the idea of faith being merely a private and subjective matter. Once you start to speak of God's existence as a matter of human reason, a 'tidy' privatisation of religion is no longer possible. Perhaps this is a reason why we would not want to overlook this aspect of Vatican I. It has the potential to help us challenge some widely held assumptions about the supposedly private or subjective character of faith.

So in Religious Education in Catholic schools, it is important to avoid the temptation of opting for a much 'safer', socially and politically, stance of considering God's existence to be a matter of faith *only*, a personal matter for each student (and one's 'private' community of faith). If Religious Education teachers in Catholic schools did give into this temptation, it would mean encouraging a distorted sort of faith development.

It is interesting to speculate how best to engage with the 'God question'. There is a danger with answering it with 'No one can really know, one just has to believe', because the question of the truth about God and life's purpose is bracketed off, and faith is restricted to the private sphere of the individual's life, family or congregation/parish. In contrast, school is considered to be the public sphere, and thus the sphere of science and reason, and not of faith as such. In schools, therefore, there is a risk of considering faith in essentially private and personal terms—even if expressed and celebrated socially. So pupils may discuss how they personally think and how this might affect their lives, and how other people's religious thinking has affected them and society, but these pupils may not discuss whether their thinking is metaphysically true, reflecting accurately an objective transcendent reality. Or, if they do discuss the existence of God and his will for us, this discussion will tend to see this matter as one of 'faith' (not reason), and thus merely a matter of personal preference, with no view to be judged as superior or inferior to other sincerely held views. Sincerity and clarity of expression, and perhaps also creativity, are the allowed standards of assessment; whereas the soundness of the arguments and conclusions is ignored—at least where

the existence and nature of the Transcendent is concerned. This is not to suggest that sincerity, clarity, and creativity are not important standards in education—of course they are. Nor is it to promote a Religious Education and faith development that is focused only on discursive reason(ing) and arguments—that would be too narrow. It is not necessary for Catholic teachers, not to mention students, to become professional philosophers. But there is surely a place for some serious attention to be given to the various ways that we can come to know of God's existence by reason, whilst not ignoring the importance of religious experience and the emotional aspects of our religious and spiritual development.

Conclusion

One of the strengths of Catholic education is that is grounded on theism. Crucially, it should consider this theism to not be exclusively a matter of faith, and of a narrowly conceived 'faith development', but a matter of reason too, and of reason development integrated with faith development. The challenge is to have a richer theologically and ecclesially informed account of Religious Education in Catholic schools, and in particular, of faith development. This would be an account that champions the complementary role of reason in our coming to know God as Creator and Lord, revealed naturally in God's creation. This knowledge of God can prepare us for the Father's invitation to a deeper relationship with him through faith in his further, supernatural revelation in Christ and his gospel, shared with us through the Spirit and the Church.

Notes

1. Note that although we cannot know God in his own nature, which is utter a mystery, we *can* know of him in his relationship to us, as Creator and Lord.
2. John Paul II is of course the author of the most recent authoritative Church document on the close relationship between faith and reason, and on how Catholic faith defends reason, in his (1998) encyclical *Fides et Ratio.*

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