JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION is a refereed publication for the academic exploration of the task of religious education in modern society. The journal helps disseminate original writings and research in religious education and catechesis -- and in related areas such as spirituality, theology, moral and faith development, cultural contexts, ministry and schooling. It includes a variety of feature sections -- on contemporary educational issues, book reviews, conferences, resources and practical hints for teachers. Articles for publication on religious education in various contexts and on the related areas noted above, as well as on any of the feature sections are welcome. See the inside back cover for details.

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# JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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### IDEAS FOR PRACTITIONERS

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This issue of the journal, once again, contains articles that reflect the changes and challenges that face the discipline of Catholic Religious Education and discusses pertinent issues that may assist and offer insights for classroom practitioners. As well, they reveal the nature of the subject with its changing dynamics and shifting perspectives, depending on the different aspects that become the focus for study and analysis. For instance, scholars and practitioners working in the field have continued to write about the issues related to religious education that are generated by the highly charged secular climate that contextualizes students’ lives and this issue of the journal provides some interesting articles around the same theme. I have been reminded of the impact of a secular culture on Catholic religious education in this past week as I have been marking the end-of-semester tests and am forced to recognize how so many students from Catholic backgrounds, who are pre-service Religious Education teachers, continue to have quite limited knowledge of their faith tradition and many are unchurched. The impact of secularism on the faith traditions in Australian society has been significant and raises ongoing issues that require study and research in order to improve policy direction, curriculum planning and classroom practice in religious education in Catholic schools.

And so to the first article. Brien and Hack discuss the role of charism in Australian Catholic education which, they claim, was foundational for the development of Catholic schools and they examine its potential for schools today. Following this are two articles that present a careful examination of Church documents to raise relevant and useful issues for religious educators in early childhood and primary education. Grajczonek argues in the first part of a two-part article that traditional constructs of the child are being challenged by contemporary notions and she identifies related issues. Suart’s article is the second part of a two-part article where she notes that despite the teaching of Vatican II which identified parents as the primary educators of children in their faith, the Catholic Church still maintained the dominant role until very recent times. Accordingly, this shifting stance has raised the need for strategies to be developed to support families in this important task.

Rossiter, in the next article, offers an interpretation of the ways in which notions of spirituality have changed and offers a framework which may be more persuasive in promoting a view of religious education that will enhance and resource the basic human spirituality of young people. The next article introduces us to the Scottish context where Luby presents a detailed analysis of a new curriculum guideline which has been designed to teach Catholic religious education to students in secular schools. The next two articles focus on specific aspects of classroom teaching. Collins writes a piece on Richard Bauckham’s prize-winning book of 2006 Jesus and the Eyewitnesses and discusses its implications for the teaching of scripture in classroom RE and Chambers identifies the use of memory and rote learning as two elements which are not given as much attention in today’s learning process. He presents a case to support their use in contemporary classrooms. Finally, Tullio and Rossiter’s article on retreats follows an earlier one and offers new and insightful thoughts about their uses and inclusion in religious education programs. This is a timely study given some of the discussion that has been taking place about the inclusion of retreats in RE programs.

Marian de Souza
Editor
Abstract

Catholic education in Australia has been enriched by the charisms on which Catholic schools are founded. Charisms are God’s way of letting educators know that there are many ways of seeing, understanding and coming to know God who gifts us with both graced promise and endless possibilities. Charism allows educational leaders to address the many demands confronting them. This paper explores why charism in the context of twenty-first century Catholic education allows those responsible for leadership to build on the tradition of the Church and form enduring understandings for the future. This is a paper in two parts. Part one of the paper explores some of the practical concerns of Catholic education today in areas such as spiritual capital, values education and meaning making. It is our position that these practical concerns can be most appropriately addressed by deepening our understanding of the vision of God that charism invites and demands.

Beginnings

At this point in time Catholic educational authorities and institutions are coming to terms with a complex pluralistic society and the reality that young people are making their own decisions about their ongoing connections and commitment to the institutional church. The census statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; The Spirit of Generation Y Report (Mason, Webber, Singleton & Hughes, 2006) and the National Church Life Survey (NCLS, n.d.) provide data to indicate what is happening with regard to the religious affiliation of young people.

In this modern age young people understand that there is more than one worldview, more than one way of answering life’s questions and, it seems, a variety of options open to them. In this context it has become paramount to explore Catholic identity, Catholic worldview and Catholic character (Greeley, 2000, p. 133; Walker 2002; Miller, 2006; Lickona, n.d.; Australian Catholic University, 2008; Hack, 2008, pp. 109-115). In the twenty-first century there is an intellectual contest for the minds and hearts of young people in what some see as a battle for the future of the Church. Catholic identity has become a significant issue (Bishops of NSW & ACT, 2007, p. 10; Pascoe, 2007; Bezzina, 2008; Engebretson, 2008; Bruguès, 2009). At diocesan levels authorities are strategically planning to explore the nature of Catholic identity, sponsoring research projects, writing position papers and presenting Pentecost messages (Catholic Education Office, Sydney [CEOS], 2009) in the hope of grounding young people and claiming their hearts for the future. (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Catholic Schools Office Diocese of Broken Bay, 2007, p. 2; Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn, 2009; Catholic Education Office Diocese of Sale, n.d.).

There is a certain amount of energy focused on this “crisis” in the Church where it seems young people are rejecting the tradition. There is a measure of systemic anxiety around the choices young people appear to be making (Doyle, 2009, pp. 215-216). On some levels Institutional authorities are trying to control these realities. There are attempts to tell young people what Catholics believe and to present the Catholic position in black and white terms (CEOS, 2009; Archdiocese of Sydney, 2010).

In 2005, in an attempt to address some of these concerns in a manner suited to practical application for educators working in Australian Catholic schools we published an article on charism (Brien & Hack, 2005). It offered suggestions as to how charism in the school situation could be a tool to address administrative,
pastoral, curriculum and religious concerns and to engender in young people a desire for a life long relationship with God.

As we near the end of the first decade of the new millennium the institutional concerns remain and the call to address these has become more urgent. It is our view that the meaningful answers to address these concerns are still to be found within school communities. We contend that a lasting love for the tradition grows out of communal experiences grounded in the numerous rich charisms which have sustained and nourished the Church over the last two thousand years. A charism, any charism, is a gift of the Spirit. As such, any charism can provide an entry point for appreciation of the broader Catholic tradition. Charisms are not founded in particular people but are ways of understanding the Christian story. These provide particular lenses through which to understand the lasting truths of the Gospel. The possibility of embracing the Church as a life choice comes out of life experience, through connecting and falling in love with particular stories and finding those stories echoing the truths of the founders of the great charisms of the Church.

While position papers, frameworks and research are useful tools to assist educators in addressing school issues, at the heart of Christianity, people, and particularly young people, need to hear, understand and embrace their stories. Faith which sustains people is not an intellectual pursuit but something which takes hold of their hearts. The experiential element is the key to both present and future realities.

If Catholic schools return to their founding charisms they can bring them alive for the twenty-first century. The story of the founder or the foundational story grounds the charism.

Stories and rituals are not only necessary personal resources for growth and stability; they are ways that faith communities frame our journeys to God (Anderson & Foley, 1998, p. X).

This is a different age. Those responsible for leading Catholic school communities can not allow themselves to become irrelevant Church archivists. If charism is to be a freeing, expansive life giving reality for the twenty first century the original stories need to provide the catalysts for exploration of the fundamental aspects of the charism in a third millennium context.

Part of the power of narrative is that it enables us to make deep human connections that transcend unfamiliarity in locale and experience. Stories transport us to times and places we do not know. Through narrative, we become spiritual travellers undaunted by time, distance, or new landscapes. It is as if stories have mystical power to invite us, willingly or unwillingly, to enter unknown worlds (Anderson & Foley, 1998, p. 4).

In our earlier paper, Charism in the Catholic School: A Workable Twenty-first Century Model (Brien & Hack, 2005) we cited Claude Maréchal who listed specific ways in which charism invites communities to understand their common faith. We share his contention that charism gives communities:

- a story to enter
- a language to speak
- a group to which to belong
- a way to pray
- a work to undertake

Maréchal’s work still grounds the effective exploration of charism in Catholic school communities enabling authentic and timely responses to founders and foundational stories. Even in the few years since the writing of the first article the religious landscape has shifted. There is an imperative at this point in time to explore, in new ways, the potential charism holds to open up the tradition.
By their very nature Catholic schools address the dimensions identified by Maréchal. Mission statements and strategic plans ensure that the religious dimension of Catholic schools is at the forefront. The crucial issue at this point in time is how effectively and purposefully these elements are addressed. This paper explores the possibilities if these key areas are approached with serious reflection and intent. Maréchal’s key components of charism, if addressed with intent, go to the heart of the broader Catholic tradition. This paper examines what might be possible in a Catholic school with a clear focus on strategic planning, reflection, exploration and exploration of Maréchal’s elements with a view to identifying the significant enduring understandings and essential questions for young people in the twenty-first century.

**Strategic Planning**

Strategic planning allows educators to state their intentions in a clear and public way. This process specifies the steps to achieve the goals, the allocation of resources and the possible indicators of success. Within strategic plans issues of commitment to the Church and the faith have at times become a “burden” for schools that needs to be dealt with rather than an opportunity for considered reflection and an opportunity to move confidently towards the future. The burden mentality needs to be eliminated from the thinking of Catholic educators. Mission statements are idealistic hopeful documents which remind communities and individuals of their purpose and direction. In contrast strategic planning makes educators task oriented rather than dream oriented. With committees, meetings, goals, strategies, time-lines, progress reports and indicators of success, communities can metaphorically tick the box and move on. Once the goals have been addressed the activity becomes operational, added to the growing list of tasks and dot points on a school’s annual plan. At times communities address charism strategically with guest speakers from founding religious orders, staff spirituality days, which are only loosely connected to the idea of charism or by creating charism committees. These ways of addressing spiritual formation are business models and processes. Communities diminish the spiritual foundation of the school when they relegate charism, mission and the religious dimension of a community to a series of processes. Charism is about building community and understanding story in the current context and finding a space to inhabit. It is never an achievable goal and always a work in process. It is, and can never be, work that is complete.

The primary unspoken objective of our storytelling, however is to provide an appropriate interpretation of our own life. The goal is not just to discover a world or provide an interpretation of the world that allows us to live in it but rather to discover and interpret a world that allows us to live with ourselves (Anderson & Foley, 1998, p. 5).

Our forebears gave educators heroic beginnings, inspirational and extraordinary visions. These foundations need twenty first century extensions constructed with Australian building blocks. Communities should seek connections between the strong foundations of the past and the promise of the future which will challenge young people to embrace the gift of a particular charism now.

Sadly charisms have often been taken for granted. In the past the charism was frequently vested in the religious order and the focus of feast days and religious iconography. Our current time is the first generation of Catholic education in Australia where schools are predominantly led by lay people and the presence of members of founding religious orders is the exception rather than the rule (Catholic Education Commission NSW, 2007, p. 56). In this generation too we have the first wave of schools founded not by a particular religious order but rather grounded in a Gospel story. (Lutterall & Lourey, 2006) Some claim that with the loss of religious to staff schools, the charisms have been lost and that this second group of schools have no charism because they lack the foundation of a religious order. Both these positions lack validity because the gifts of the Spirit will always give life to faith filled and faithful communities.

In order to engage in meaningful approaches so that the charism permeates the community there is a need for intentionality. Approaches cannot be haphazard or fragmented where communities “dip into” charism on feast days, tick the box and move on. Strategic planning has the potential to be a rich resource. Those responsible for leadership could consider how every aspect of school life provides countless valuable
opportunities to explore the richness of a particular charism. Planning at every level can address questions about what a community is building for the future and how each process is grounded in the original charism and gift of the Spirit.

If communities want to successfully build for the future there should be intentionality about creating an environment where charism permeates every dimension of school life; pastoral care, academic pursuits, spirituality, professional development, cocurricular activities, and organisational and administrative structures. Planning can address both what is being done now and what is being built for the future. The crucial questions for every aspect of school life become not what are we doing; but rather, why are we making this choice? Where is this choice leading us? How will this choice keep us faithful to our charism as the defining element which makes this community unique?

The issue of charismatic identity is not so much one of “Who founded us?” as “What have we become together by the grace of God? (Schneiders, 2000, p. 75).

Maréchal’s (2000) grounding principles should not be underestimated. Elements of story, language, community, prayer, work and an understanding of God form individual and community identity. Questions arising from these principles are ongoing and life giving. Searching for the answers require courage; the courage to do things differently and to approach the ministry of teaching believing in the joyful promise that may be uncovered.

If the Church is to be witness to the joy of the resurrection then we must be liberated from fear. There is too much fear in the Church – fear of modernity, of the complexity of human experience, of saying what we truly believe, fear of each other, fear of making mistakes, of not winning approval (Radcliffe, 2005, p. 68).

**Enduring Understandings**

In the curriculum dimension one of the current methods of intentional curriculum design is Wiggins and McTighe’s (2004) use of *enduring understandings*. This model addresses the art of teaching and learning through the exploration of *big questions* to equip students with enduring understandings about particular aspects of the curriculum. Enduring understandings are not however a recent idea.

The Church has always understood enduring understandings. They are found within Scripture and the tradition; in the many gifts of Spirit, within the charisms, mottos and, stories of the founders of religious orders. They provide a rich resource of wisdom, which tells the ongoing story of the Church.

We weave many stories together into a life narrative that conveys what we believe to be essential truths about ourselves and the world (Anderson & Foley, 1998, p. 5).

Maréchal (2000) offers a beginning point to uncover the truths and enduring understandings within a particular charism for a particular community. It is then up to individual educational leaders to identify the elements that are relevant in the educational environment and those things that will endure. The responsibility is to find the connections to the beginning stories of the Gospel, the heroic aspects of the experience and the insights these offer about the nature of God. Charisms endure. They were gifted to the founders for the Church. Each charism breathes life into the Church. They continue in our present circumstances and endure because they are renewed as life-giving possibilities for each successive generation.

Modern people are searching, travelling, not quite sure what is at the end of the journey but at least intermittently on the way. We must be with them, helping people to discover the freedom of the road and glimpse the goal of all our journeying. The Church must offer a pedagogy of freedom which is about more than making the right choices. It is becoming a moral agent whose life is
discovered to have shape and meaning. We will only be able to do this if we are with people where they are, not telling them where they ought to be (Radcliffe, 2005, p. 42).

This ‘pedagogy of freedom’ is a gift enabling meaning to be uncovered and lives to be shaped. Charism offers communities the freedom to embrace the enduring gifts of the Spirit in a twenty-first century context.

Charism provides ways for each community to find its own identity and be an agent for learning and change in its own context. Part one has examined the philosophical and educational underpinnings of charism in the school context. Part two of the paper which will be published in a future issue will go on to examine specific school examples in light of Maréchal’s dimensions demonstrating how a strategic approach to charism in the school context can enhance an appreciation of the rich tradition of the Church and better equip school communities to address the demands of twenty-first century learning and living.

References


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HOW SHALL WE KNOW THEM? PART 1 - THE CONSTRUCTION OF ‘CHILD’ AND ‘CHILDHOOD’ IN OFFICIAL CHURCH EDUCATIONAL DOCUMENTS

Abstract

Historically, childhood has been viewed and constructed in a variety of ways, including as: a blank slate, on the way to becoming, innocent, miniature adults and so on. All of these constructs suggest the notion of a universal childhood, that is, all children are the same. Contemporary views of childhood challenge this view of universal childhood suggesting that children’s socio-cultural backgrounds directly impact on who they are. Early childhood educators recognise the diversity of childhoods and their classroom practice reflects this deep knowledge and understanding of a contemporary view of childhood. However, pertinent to early childhood teachers in the Catholic school setting is the view of the child according to the Church. How is childhood constructed by the Church? This paper presents the first part of an investigation that analyses key Church educational documents to determine the official view of childhood as constructed by the Church. (A follow-up paper, Part 2, explores the implications such constructions might have for classroom teachers.)

Introduction

A contemporary view of childhood is one that sees children as strong and capable and acknowledges ‘multiple childhoods’ rejecting the notion of the ‘universal’ child (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Malagazzi, 1993; Qvortrup, 1994). Early childhood teachers recognise the diversity of childhoods and their classroom practice reflects this deep knowledge and understanding. However, pertinent to early childhood teachers in the Catholic school setting is the view of the child according to the Church. How is childhood constructed by the Church? This paper presents the first part of an investigation that analyses key Church educational documents to determine some insights into the official view of childhood as constructed by the Church. (A follow-up paper, Part 2, explores the implications such constructions might have for classroom teachers.)

An historical development of the construction of childhood

Images of children that have been promoted over time include: Hobbes’ image of the child as naturally wild and untamed who required socialising, Rousseau’s *Emile*, the image of the innocent child who innately seeks out virtue, truth and beauty, and Locke’s image of child as a blank slate or *tabula rasa* who starts life with and from nothing (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Woodhead, 2005). Even in biblical times children were understood and constructed in various ways (Bunge, 2008). Some of these included children as needing to be taught or disciplined, such as “train a child in the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6); or bringing up children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). In other passages children were constructed as active agents or as models for adults, such as God calling young Samuel, (1 Sam. 3-4), or David slaying Goliath, (1 Sam. 17) (Bunge, 2008, p. xxxiii).

Until more recent times, developmental psychology has had a significant influence on our understandings of childhood. The starting point for such theory has been the universal child, that is, the one child who represents *all* children and develops through a series of stages including physical, cognitive, social and moral as advanced by Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erickson (Arthur et al., 2005). Such developmental theories have also influenced theories regarding the religious development of children as proposed by Fowler.
Reconceptualised views of childhood are emerging (Arthur et al., 2005; Soto & Swadener, 2002) including Vygotsky’s (1967) sociocultural theory, Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological theory, the new sociology of childhood (James & James, 2004; Mayall, 2002), poststructuralism influenced by the work of Foucault (1972), and postmodernity (MacNaughton, 2003). The reconceptualised view of childhood criticises the universal child construct for its emphasis on progression, rather than valuing the present for what it is. In other words, when the focus of childhood as a stage in the life course is on becoming, maturing, wanting, and so on, childhood is constructed as a journey towards adulthood, that is, children are constructed as becoming rather than being (Qvortrup, 1994). It is as if this stage is not significant in its own right; it is simply a means to an end.

The view of childhood as a stage in the life course is criticised by Allison James and Adrian James (2004) who contend that whilst “a developmental stage of life characterised by basic physical and developmental patterns is common to all children”, the ways in which this is interpreted, understood and socially institutionalised for children by adults “varies considerably across and between cultures and generations, and in relation to their engagement with children’s everyday lives and actions” (p. 13).

A further significant element of the reconceptualisation of childhood is its focus on the child as participant (Mayall, 2002; Skelton, 2007). Skelton (2007) and others connect this focus on participation with the introduction of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) ratified by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20th November, 1989. Whilst the UNCRC maintained the two previous ‘P’s, provision and protection of the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, it introduced a third ‘P’, participation, which emphasises participation of children in decisions that affect their own lives (Skelton, 2007, p. 167).

Childhood then, is not a universal stage experienced in the same way by all children. The child is not representative of all children who are passive recipients, rather than active agents. A contemporary, reconceptualised view of childhood is understood to be a social construct constructed by many social structures, and historical, political, cultural, and economic contexts (James & James, 2004; Skelton, 2007). Within these structures and contexts, the Church also must be considered as a valid constructor of childhood.

A reconceptualisation of childhood also requires that we clarify and distinguish amongst the terms, ‘childhood’, ‘child’ and ‘children’. James and James (2004) argue that too often these terms are used interchangeably and criticise the common practice of using ‘the child’ in social science literature and government policy to represent ‘children’ as misleading and “would never occur in relation to adults, except ironically, in other politically marginalised groups such as ‘the elderly’” (p. 14).

Policy and practice in the Catholic school is to a large extent shaped and determined by key Church educational documents in which a number of references are made to ‘childhood’, ‘children’ as well as to ‘the child’. Critical insights regarding the Church’s construction of these terms can be gained by analysing these policy documents.

The study reported in this paper builds upon and extends research conducted thus far into the construction of ‘childhood’, and the image of children conveyed by such constructions, specifically in the context of educational Church documents.
The present study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate how childhood is constructed specifically in key Church educational documents. The following sections analyse key Church educational documents in order to ascertain how Church educational documents construct ‘childhood’, ‘children’ and ‘the child’.

Methodology

The key documents chosen to analyse for this study, are those that are specific to Catholic Education and include: Gravissimum Educationis, Declaration on Christian Education (Vatican Council II, 1965), The Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977), The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988), and finally The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997). These documents are formal communications written by the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome.

Extracts that directly focus on the specific characteristics and constructions of the terms ‘child’, ‘childhood’, and ‘children’ were selected from the documents. It is important to note that these terms appear at other times throughout the documents but not in significant ways relevant to this analysis with its specific focus on: who they are, what they do, what is done to them, and how they are categorised, and therefore other references were not included in this analysis. The documents also refer to young people but this term was omitted from the study as it was associated with the activities of adolescents. Further, whilst it is acknowledged that such terms as ‘student’, ‘students’, ‘pupil’ and ‘pupils’, are also present in these documents, these terms also have been omitted, as they raise a range of other issues not specifically relevant to the focus of this present study. For the purposes of this study then, childhood is understood to include children between birth and twelve years.

The document extracts were analysed using Systemic Functional Linguistics and Membership Categorisation Analysis. Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth, SFL) as proposed by Halliday (1975) is a way into analysing text through focusing on the function of grammar that affords insights into how language functions in crafted texts; it is concerned with how people use language to produce meaning (Freebody, 2003). Membership Categorisation Analysis, (henceforth, MCA) is a discourse analysis tool that looks at the particular categories generated in text, the category bound activities and attributions which are either assigned to them specifically or can be implied (Baker, 2004; Freebody, 2003; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Silverman, 1993).

The analysis of the selected extracts involved an integrated investigative process, which applied SFL to determine how the language functions, and MCA in order to gain deeper insights into the nature of childhood as described in the specific and implied category bound activities assigned to children. SFL was applied using the process proposed by Freebody (2003, pp. 188-189). First, the analysis focused on the specific nouns/participants and nominal functions, ‘child’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ in terms of where they were positioned in the text: as foregrounded active agents or as passive recipients. It then focused on the verbal processes associated with these participants: what did they ‘do’; what was done to them; what was getting done. This initial step explores how the text builds its field around these three terms. Along with the SFL analysis, MCA was then utilised as a means to reveal how identities, social relationships and even institutions were produced (Baker, 2004) in each of the extracts. MCA’s specific focus was to investigate how the categories ‘child’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ were produced by the specific attributes and characteristics assigned to them in the documents. By examining these documents in terms of the activities and/or attributions assigned to the three categories, “their functions and roles and the ways childhood is constructed within the text is revealed” (Freebody, 2003, p. 181).

Analysis and findings


Gravissimum Educationis one of the Second Vatican Council documents published in 1965, specifically
focused on Christian education.

Table 1: Relevant extracts from the document: *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration on Christian Education
(Vatican Council II, 1965)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The rights of men to an education, particularly the primary rights of children and parents, are being proclaimed and recognized in public documents. ...Mighty attempts are being made to obtain education for all, even though vast numbers of children and young people are still deprived of even rudimentary training and so many others lack a suitable education in which truth and love are developed together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The Meaning of the Universal Right of Education

Therefore children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy. Let them be given also, as they advance in years, a positive and prudent sexual education. Moreover they should be so trained to take their part in social life that properly instructed in the necessary and opportune skills they can become actively involved in various community organizations, open to discourse with others and willing to do their best to promote the common good.

This sacred synod likewise declares that children and young people have a right to be motivated to appraise moral values with a right conscience, to embrace them with a personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God.

2. Christian Education

Since all Christians have become by rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit a new creature so that they should be called and should be children of God, they have a right to a Christian education.

3. The Authors of Education

Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. ... It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbour. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church.

The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human.

The first point to note is that neither ‘child’ nor ‘childhood’ is specifically referred to in the document. The term ‘children’ and various pronouns for it, occurred a total of 15 times in the relevant paragraphs and statements, as highlighted in Table 1. Key insights are afforded into how ‘childhood’, ‘child’, and ‘children’ are constructed when attention is paid to whether they are placed into the active or passive position. It is only placed in the foregrounded active agent position once in this document, “as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy” (see in section 1). However, such agency comes with conditions which are morally defined in slightly pessimistic circumstances.

In all other statements in this document, children are constructed as agentless passives: that is, they are being acted upon by an unnamed agent, “... vast numbers of children are still deprived from even rudimentary training”. Who or what is preventing them from receiving an education is not explicitly revealed (Collerson, 1994, pp. 51-51). In this statement then, the focus is on children being deprived an education, rather than who is responsible for this deprivation. In the same statement, others (children) “lack a suitable education in which truth and love are developed together” implying that whilst many of types of education are available, only a Christian education “offers truth and love.” In this statement the term ‘children’ is constructed in two ways: (i) is referred to as “vast numbers” so it does not represent all children; and (ii) is referred to as “so many others” and so another separate cohort of children is established. In both instances they are representing many children, but not all children.

In the next section of this document, “Children must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and sciences of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments...” The persons who must help children are implied to be teachers. Here ‘children’ is used to represent all children and further, the language functions to construct all children as first, needy, unable to take agency themselves, and second, as becoming rather than being. This statement
continues “so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy”. Here children are constructed again as passive participants who may be on their way to maturity. As the section moves on, children continue to be constructed as agentless passives, representing all children and as becoming rather than being. The focus and emphasis here is on the need for children’s training, particularly in sexual education.

Section 2 expresses a new construction of the term ‘children’ as “children of God”. Two key insights regarding the language construction here are important to note. First, children are not the only ones in this cohort; adult Christians are also “children of God”. What can be implied here is that God makes no distinction between childhood and adulthood, all are God’s children. Second, the tone of this construction is authoritative, as it is issued as an imperative, a command modified by the adjunct modal, “should” signifying the processes of being called and being children of God, as proposals of obligation issued by a high authority (Derewianka, 2000, p. 66; Halliday, 1985, p. 50). This is not an invitation nor a declarative statement, all Christians whether they are children or adults, should be called children of God, and be children of God. In Section 3 which focuses on the authors of education, whilst children are still positioned as passive recipients, the agents acting upon them are now explicitly named: the family and the Church.

In this document, Gravissimum Educationis (Vatican Council II, 1965), children do not have agency and are constructed as needy and wanting, becoming, rather than being, as they require help to mature physically, morally, intellectually and sexually in a responsible way. During this time as children, they are to be given appropriate and prudent training in order to be able to face life’s challenges, and become productive members of society. Childhood is a time for learning to be a good Christian. Within this site of childhood, children are constructed at different times, in four cohorts including as: all children, children of God (along with adults), many children who have no education, and others who lack quality education. In these various cohorts, as they mature they are to be trained how to live responsibly and morally, imbued with the spirit of Christ.

**Document II: The Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977)**

The Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977) was published some twenty-two years after Gravissimum Educationis (Vatican Council II, 1965) and describes yet another context in terms of our views on children. During this time developmental psychology was having significant influence on our understandings of how children developed their cognitive, behavioural and moral capabilities. The concept of the universal child was implicitly advanced in educational circles. The specific extracts that focus on the construction of ‘child’ and ‘children’ are highlighted in Table 2. The term ‘childhood’ is not used in this document. Both terms ‘child’ and ‘children’ are placed into the passive position, that is, they are acted upon throughout the document.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Relevant Extracts from the document: The Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Evangelisation is, therefore, the mission of the Church; that is she must proclaim the good news of salvation to all, generate new creatures in Christ through Baptism, and train them to live knowingly as children of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. ...the Church fulfills (sic) her obligation to foster in her children a full awareness of their rebirth to a new life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. ...Her children, then, will be capable both of resisting the debilitating influence of relativism and of living up to the demands made on them by their Baptism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Without entering into the whole problem of teaching religion in schools, it must be emphasised that, while such teaching is not merely confined to &quot;religious classes&quot; within the school curriculum, it must, nevertheless, also be imparted explicitly and in a systematic manner to prevent a distortion in the child’s mind between general and religious culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73. This responsibility applies chiefly to Christian parents who confide their children to the school. Having chosen it does not relieve them of a personal duty to give their children a Christian upbringing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82. ...These Catholics need to be assured, as they strive to regularise the frequent injustices in their school situation, that they are not only helping to provide every child with an education that respects his complete development...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘Children’ in paragraph 7 are again constructed as “children of God” but in this document these children are the newly baptised. They require training “to live knowingly as children of God”. ‘Children’ in paragraph 9 refers to those children being educated in the Catholic school. The focus on baptised children continues in paragraph 12 in which the specific context of a secular culture is considered, “will be capable both of resisting the debilitating influence of relativism and of living up to the demands made on them by their Baptism.” In this statement ‘children’ is placed in the foregrounded position but are not as active agents, as the processes ‘will be capable’ is a behavioural one and it is not stated that children will actually resist such influences.

A further attribute is assigned to the child’s developing intellectual ability in paragraph 50 wherein the school is charged “to prevent a distortion in the child’s mind between general and religious culture”. Again, the child is constructed as on his/her way to becoming and therefore unable to distinguish between their secular and religious lives. In paragraph 73, responsibility is assigned to the parents to ensure their children’s Christian upbringing, whilst in paragraph 82 this responsibility, which must respect the child’s development, is directed to the school “to provide every child with an education that respects his (sic) complete development...”. In this statement three salient points need to be noted: first, exclusivist language, specifically ‘his’ is used to describe ‘child’, signifying that the individual child is not the focus here, and second, this child’s (in the sense of individual and unique) complete development is not respected as all are presumed to be male. Third, this universal child is constructed as becoming, on ‘his’ way to adulthood, not yet complete.

Some key insights are afforded in this document about the ways ‘children’ and ‘child’ are constructed. In the first instance nowhere in this document are ‘children’ and ‘child’ active agents. Second, the concept of universal children in terms that ‘children’ represents all children is not the construction here. Rather, ‘children’ is specifically those children who are baptised and belong to the “children of God”, although some as newly baptised are wanting and therefore require further training. As baptised children they will be able to resist the temptations of the secular culture and the male child’s complete development is to be respected by the Catholic school.


In 1988 the Congregation of Catholic Education published the educational document, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*. In this document the three terms, ‘child’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ are explicitly referred to, as highlighted in Table 3, but never in the foregrounded active agent position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Relevant Extracts from the document: The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 Catholic schools are spread throughout the world and enroll literally millions of students. These students are children of their own race, nationality, traditions, and family. They are also the children of our age. Each student has a distinct origin and is a unique individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56. ...A human being has a dignity and a greatness exceeding that of all other creatures: a work of God that has been elevated to the supernatural order as a child of God, and therefore having both a divine origin and an eternal destiny which transcend this physical universe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83. ...The virtues of faith and religion, thus rooted and cultivated, are enabled to develop during childhood, youth, and in all the years that follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84 The human person is present in all the truths of faith; created in “the image and likeness” of God; elevated by God to the dignity of a child of God; unfaithful to God in original sin, but redeemed by Christ; a temple of the Holy Spirit; a member of the Church; destined to eternal life.</td>
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A significant point acknowledged for the first time in paragraph 22 is that children are “of their own race, nationality, traditions, and family. They are also the children of our age. Each student has a distinct origin
and is a unique individual.” For the first time children’s individuality is recognised in terms of their race, nationality, traditions and family. These children have not been cast as one single cohort of all children.

In paragraph 56, the child is a human being and is assigned elevation above all other creatures and named as “a child of God”. The child is constructed as being the work of God and therefore possesses, “both a divine origin and an eternal destiny.” Such assigned attributions to ‘the child’ imply all children because the child has been categorised as a human being. Further, this assigned category also implies that all humans are created by God. The concept of childhood being a stage in the life course is once again constructed in paragraph 83, but in this construction it is a time during which the virtues of faith and religion are to be developed. However, this development continues along the life course so childhood is not the only time of becoming. Paragraph 84 elaborates further on the construct of the human person as a “child of God” as created in the “image and likeness of God”.

Whilst children’s individual uniqueness and diversity are acknowledged, whether religious diversity is part of that acknowledgement is not clear. In terms of their religious contexts, on the one hand, children as human beings are all constructed as made in the image and likeness of God. Further on in the document, “children of God” is then qualified as members of the Church. Childhood is the time in which the virtues of faith and religion begin to be developed, but this development continues along the life course, implying that adults also require further development in these virtues.

**Document IV: The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997)**

The document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997) published at the end of the last century presents a different construction of childhood than its predecessors. Only one paragraph in this document is explicitly focused on children, in terms of who they are, what they do and what is done to them. As in the previous documents, throughout this paragraph, children are placed into the passive position. However, in this document children have been assigned the attribute of gender: the terms, ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ have been used, albeit as constructions of times past, as highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4: Relevant Extracts from the document: *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997)

15. ... It is no novelty to affirm that Catholic schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling. In many parts of the world even today material poverty prevents many youths and children from having access to formal education and adequate human and Christian formation. ...The girls from poor families that were taught by the Ursuline nuns in the 15th Century, the boys that Saint Joseph of Calasanz saw running and shouting through the streets of Rome, those that De la Salle came across in the villages of France, or those that were offered shelter by Don Bosco, can be found again among those who have lost all sense of meaning in life and lack any type of inspiring ideal, those to whom no values are proposed and who do not know the beauty of faith, who come from families which are broken and incapable of love, often living in situations of material and spiritual poverty, slaves to the new idols of a society, which, not infrequently, promises them only a future of unemployment and marginalization. To these new poor the Catholic school turns in a spirit of love.

Paragraph 15 begins by positioning children as agentless passives, “left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling.” The origin of Catholic schools was founded on their (Catholic schools’) deep concern for such children and young people’s education. ‘Children’ in this statement does not represent all children, only those who are poor. The concern is with their lack of formal education, as well as their human and Christian formation. Concern for such children continues as explicit links are made between on the one hand, past images of “girls from poor families”, “boys running and shouting in the streets of Rome”, “those in the villages of France” “those offered shelter by Don Bosco” and on the other, images of today’s children, “who have lost all sense of meaning in life...” Children in the cohort, “these new poor” are assigned the following attributes and characteristics: lost all sense of meaning in life; lack any type of
inspiring ideal; to whom no values are proposed; do not know the beauty of faith; come from families which are broken and incapable of love; often living in situations of material and spiritual poverty; slaves to a new society; a society which not infrequently, promises them only a future of unemployment and marginalization. Throughout this bleak indictment of the contemporary world, children or ‘these new poor’ as they are now constructed, have no agency. The assigned attributions to children in this document construct them as vulnerable, disheartened and hopeless. No positive attributions are assigned to children in their lives outside of the Catholic school.

Childhood as a structural site is not a happy or hope-filled state. This document focuses on a particular cohort of children for whom its only hope is the Catholic school. Implied here is that no other institution, including the children’s own families, can offer any hope. Because no other cohorts of children have been described, an overall view of childhood as hopeless is implied. The prospects of childhood in the new millennium, in which we are now living, are not optimistic. Children are indeed deficient and vulnerable.

Discussion

Childhood as constructed in these educational documents does not align with the contemporary construction of childhood as a social construct. Children are not viewed as active agents in their own experiences of childhood and participants in decisions that affect their own lives. In all but one statement (Vatican Council II, 1965, section 1), children are agentless passives; it was made clear what was to be done to them and for them, but those responsible were not always named. At times these were implied to be teachers or parents. At other times though, the family, Church and Catholic school were explicitly named as responsible for children’s training and actions. Children need to be trained and educated as they mature physically, intellectually and morally. Such training is to be prudent, particularly with regards to sexual education. Children are becoming, rather than being. Overall the training of children is to both provide for, and protect, children (two of the ‘Ps’ in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989).

Children are constructed as vulnerable in terms of their inability to cope with secular culture which is implied to be harmful and pessimistic in three of the documents (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 12; 1997, para. 15; Vatican Council II, 1965, section 1). This was particularly evident in the final document, The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997) which placed children into a bleak world (para. 15) from which children seem to have no escape save through the Catholic school. This construction more than any other, constructs children as lacking any ability to initiate or enact change themselves. Children are deficient and vulnerable rather than capable and strong (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Malagazzi, 1993).

Throughout these documents, children have been cohorted (Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003) in several ways, mostly as the universal child, representing all children, which disregards the sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1967), bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and new sociology of childhood (James & James, 2004) theories. Only in one document are children acknowledged as unique individuals (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 22). Other cohorts into which children are placed include: vast numbers denied an education; many others denied a Christian education; and finally, in most cases as “children of God”. It is this construction, “children of God” which is particularly remarkable in that it places children alongside and equal with adults. From this theological point of view, Dillen (2007) cites the construction “created in the image and likeness of God” as grounds to claim that the child is a ‘competent subject’” (p. 41). As each person - both adults and children - is a child of God, Dillen argues that “it is not necessarily true that adults can be seen as more like God than children” (p. 41), and in addition, both children and adults have the task to strive for likeness with God.

So in these documents, on the one hand, children are deficient, on their way to becoming and therefore require prudent training. In this construction, they are not in the same cohort as adults who are responsible for them and their training. On the other hand, as children of God, they are equal with adults and both require further development in faith and religion. This view that all humans are “children of God” is problematic as not all humans see themselves as “children of God”. A contemporary view of childhood...
would reject the images of childhood as constructed in these documents.

Conclusion

This study investigated the construction of childhood in key Church educational documents and found that children are constructed at different times as: all children, some children or individual children. It also found that children are constructed as becoming, needy and vulnerable. However, they are also, along with adults, constructed as children of God created in the image and likeness of God. In this latter construction children are afforded human dignity and their uniqueness and individuality are acknowledged and respected. These particular images indicate some ambiguity within the documents, as they are not aligned with other constructed images of children as becoming, needy and vulnerable. So not only does a tension exist between the view of childhood as constructed in these Church educational documents and the contemporary view of childhood, but also within the documents themselves. It is important that teachers in Catholic schools are explicitly aware of how children are constructed and positioned in texts, and further that they are cognisant of implications such constructions might have for their classroom practice. Part 2 of this investigation (to be published in a later issue of the journal) explores the implications this investigation might have for classroom teachers.

References


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THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE FAITH DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (PART TWO)

Abstract

Throughout its history the Church has assumed a diversity of positions regarding the role of parents as the prime educators of the faith of their children. This article is part two of The Evolving Role of the Family in the Faith Development of Children: A Historical perspective. Part one presented an historical context of the shift in understandings of the role of parents in the faith education of their children from the early Church to the most recent documents written by Pope John Paul II. Part two will address the historical context of the Australian Church on this matter from its establishment as a British colony to the renewal of the Second Vatican Council.

Introduction

Dolores Curran (1978) in her book, In the beginning there were parents, shares her perspective as to why Catholic Americans have lost their confidence and ability to pass on their faith to their children. She comments that in the past, one’s faith was not a private matter but one that was embedded in daily life. “They spread the Good News from generation to generation as easily as they planted and harvested the seed” (Curran, 1978, p. 5). She points out that these people were not highly educated and had no formal faith education yet they lived their faith and were able to pass the faith traditions to their children. The whole culture was centred on the life of the Church community and this went unchanged for many centuries. As immigration was opened, many of these people moved out of the villages of Europe to a new world. Being able to adapt to a new land was at times difficult because it was counter to the culture that once was so sacred to them. Now they had to embrace a new culture in order to belong. For many the Church was a place to make sense of this new culture and at the same time preserve some of their faith traditions. The Catholic Church took it upon itself to preserve the faith in the new culture by providing Catholic schools for the religious education of Catholic children (Curran, 1978, p. 5). As a result the Catholic school became the centre for faith development of children and not the home.

Curran (1978, p. 6) proposes that with the development of Catholic schools, what began to emerge unintentionally, no doubt, was the belief that the religious sisters and brothers were the experts in teaching about the faith. Faith was no longer seen as a lived experience which was modelled firstly in the home as it had been for the previous generation. Faith quickly became associated with doctrines and teachings of the Church, and parents no longer saw themselves as the primary educators of faith of their children, as that was now the responsibility of the Catholic school and of the parish. As a result, “eventually parents forgot how to pass on the Word to their children. They forgot how to pray together as a family. They became embarrassed to sing together. They no longer spoke about God or religion comfortably” (Curran, 1978, p. 6). In other words the “tribal culture” where once religious beliefs were expressed as part of the overall social group was now slowly becoming extinct (Doherty 1997; Drane & Drane 1995; Finely & Finley 1995). Australia, even though more recent in foundation as a country, has a similar history to that of the American experience as described by Curran (1978).

This paper concentrates on issues pertinent to the historical development of the role of the family in the faith education of children within the Catholic Church in Australia. It examines the influence of the
movements by the Church within Europe and America highlighting its affect on the Australian Church. Finally, the response by the Church in Australia to the call of the Second Vatican Council to reclaim the understanding that the family is the first and foremost educator of their children is discussed.

**History of Faith Education in Australia**

Faith education in Australia was heavily influenced by the trends which arose in both Europe (1600–1800) and the USA (1800). Australia was being establishing as a British colony when Europe was experiencing rapid change, revolutions, and unrest. In early Australian homes “the only provision for religious education for Catholic children was that which was provided by the parents. Some Catholic families met in each others’ homes to pray, sing and sustain each other in the faith” (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p. 31). These Catholics were poor and had to fight hard to keep their religion alive in a predominantly Protestant culture. Yet some new fears arose; “one of the greatest perceived threats was the new secular school system which, they [Australian bishops] believed, was designed to undermine the religious ethos of the Catholic people” (Dwyer, 1996, p. 1).

In Australia, as was true of most of Europe and America at this time, the purpose of the Catholic school was to “preserve the religious culture of the Catholic people [and] also to be a means of their rising from poverty in which so many of them found themselves” (Dwyer, 1996, p. 2). The Catholic schools in Australia had a closeness with the poor and were successful due to the hard work of both the members of religious congregations and of parents. Parents “in turn were promised a preservation of faith and, where possible, social mobility” (Dwyer, 1996, p. 2).

**Education in Australia 1788–1900**

As State run schools began to surface, funding from the governments for Church run schools was slowly withdrawn. In 1872, in Victoria, an Act of Parliament abolished aid to Church schools. In 1880, in New South Wales, aid to Church schools was abolished through the Public Instruction Act. Eventually government aid to Church schools was withdrawn in all Australian colonies. Bishops within the Colony became concerned about the secular influence on the moral education of Catholic children and became more persistent in preserving the faith. To deal with this concern of the secular influence on Catholic children, the Catholic bishops issued a statement in 1869 making it clear to parents that Catholic children were to attend Catholic schools.

The only schooling acceptable to Catholics... was one which be conducted in a religious atmosphere that nourished the Catholic faith. Secular education of the kind offered in state schools was unacceptable. (Dwyer & English, 1988, p. 57)

With the elimination of government aid, the Catholic community was not able to pay the teachers a just salary, buildings were in need of repair and “there was not a great deal of parental interest in education” (Dwyer & English, 1990, p. 77). One way to cope with the financial burden was to replace teachers with religious sisters and brothers.

The decision was made to persevere with a Catholic system. In order to keep Catholic schools open enrolments were crucial. In 1885 in the First Plenary Council of Australian bishops relied on such documents as the Instruction of the Holy Office to the Bishops of the United States, November 24, 1875, to threaten parents with refusal of Holy Communion if they chose to send their children to schools run by the State system. “Catholic parents were obliged to send their children to Catholic schools and those who sent their children to State schools without cause were to be denied absolution in the confessional” (Dixon, 1996, p. 6).
In some dioceses, bishops gained from the Pope the right to offer rewards to the obedient Catholic laity, the elite, who could seek out those parents and whose children did not attend Catholic schools and urge them to see the error of their ways. (Turner 1992, p. 162)

Furthermore, it was made explicit as a principle of the Provincial Council of 1844 that a primary or elementary school was to be established in every mission where there was a Priest (Fogarty, 1959, p.309). The Second Plenary Council 1905 adopted the Penny Catechism as the religious syllabus for primary schools.

In some Australian colonies the bishop forbade Priests from visiting State schools as a protest to State school education. This meant that those children who for whatever reason were attending State schools and children who lived in isolated areas were not receiving any form of religious instruction outside the home. As it became more evident that these children were not being instructed in the faith some Priests and lay Catholics arranged a suitable place for these children to be instructed. Priests were asked to provide catechists to undertake this responsibility. In isolated areas children were instructed after Sunday Mass or at another suitable time.

Progress of Catholic Education in Australia 1900–1930s

The twentieth century was a time of rapid expansion for the Australian Church. At the First Australian Catholic Congress 1900 the cardinal and bishops of the colonies continued to push for Catholic children to be educated in Catholic schools. The cardinal and bishops clearly stated that the “Christian education of a people cannot be accomplished at home and that therefore it must be accomplished in the school” (cited in Turner, 1992, p. 230). At this point, “parishes offered catechism classes in Sunday schools [for adults as well as children]. The aim was to have a common form of religious instruction between home, school and parish” (Ryan, 1997, p. 23). The use of the catechism meant that parents were able to participate in the education of their children and at the same time they too were being educated in the faith. “The simple catechism gave parents confidence that the interpretation of the faith was orthodox, answers were clear and accessible” (Ryan, 1997, p. 3).

The 1905 Victorian Education Act decreed that all teachers in Victoria had to be trained. In response to this decree a number of the teaching congregations established their own training colleges. At the same time the bishop ordered that Catholic schools conform to the standards laid down for the State. The Third Plenary Council 1905 repeated the injunction that the religious syllabus for primary schools was the Penny Catechism and this was reinforced again at the Fourth Plenary Council in 1937.

The population of the Catholic schools in the early to middle 20th century increased rapidly and many more Catholic schools were built throughout the country. Primary schools became the core of parish life. The Fourth Plenary Council made reference to the encyclical Divini Ilius Magistri (1929). Pius XI reminded parents that they were the first teachers and education would be efficacious in proportion to their teaching and example. This point about the influence of the home was taken up by the Australian bishops. It became a priority to educate girls for “the proper education of our females depends the spiritual and temporal welfare of the family and, by consequent necessity, that of society” (Bishop Shiel cited in Fogarty, 1959, p. 386). Consequently, the Fourth Plenary Council retained the 1869 prohibition of the sacraments against Catholic parents who sent their children to the State school to ensure that children were properly educated in the faith.

Religious Education of Children in Isolated Areas

Despite all efforts made by the bishops, two large groups of Catholic children were not receiving any form of religious instruction. These were children who for whatever reason were attending the State schools and those who lived in isolated areas. Priests were asked by the bishops to provide catechists to undertake
the religious instruction of these children. As this catechesis became difficult some bishops suggested that the families take on the role of catechist and educate their own children.

In Western Australia in 1923 Fr J.T. McMahon initiated a correspondence course known as ‘Religion by Post’ for children living in isolated areas. Fr McMahon (1936, p. 77) states that the main objective of the correspondence course “is communication with each child”. His idea was to bring to Catholic parents and children some support and to assure them that the Church had not forgotten them. The scheme was carried out by the religious congregations. They would send a personal letter to each child monthly with an instruction. These instructions included ordinary prayers for the children to learn and the truths of the faith. Other Australian States began to run similar courses. By the end of 1935 in New South Wales, a year after it had been introduced in that State, 14,000 children had enrolled (Turner, 1992, p. 246).

In 1925 Fr McMahon introduced another initiative, the Religious Holiday Camps. The aim of the camps was “to provide a Catholic atmosphere for the children (Turner, 1992, p. 246). The camps occurred during the holidays when “children board in Convent Schools in country districts for two or three weeks, during which they are instructed and prepared for the reception of the Sacraments” (McMahon, 1936, p. 5). The Sacrament of Confirmation was also made available for those who were of age. The camps were a mixture of organised sport activities and time for instruction and prayer.

**The Influx of Post War Immigration 1940–1962**

With the influx of immigration after the Second World War there was a notable increase in the Catholic population. In only a few years many Catholic schools had a larger number of immigrant children than children who were Australian born. This placed stresses on Catholic schools. Many parishes took it on themselves to build new classrooms and even new schools without government assistance. The aim was to provide for every Catholic child a place in a Catholic school. A further problem noted by Dwyer and English (1990, p. 82) was that the number of people entering the religious life was beginning to decline, especially in the late 1960s, and thus once again the Catholic schools relied on lay teachers to staff the schools. The catechism continued to be the main tool for religious instruction. During this time the Catholic school was still the main educator of the faith for children and the Church still lamented that parents were not taking seriously their fundamental duty and obligation of educating their children.

**Outcomes from the Second Vatican Council for the Australian Church**

With the renewed spirit of the Second Vatican Council, discussed in part one, it became obvious that the Church recognised that most of the faith development of a person did not take place in the school or the parish but rather in the home (Ryan, 1997; Flynn, 1979). For countries such as Australia and the United States of America this was a new way of being Church. Until this point Australia and the United States of America had poured money and effort into Catholic schools in order to preserve the faith. After the renewed call by the Church to reclaim the right of parents as the first and primary educators of the faith, the Catholic Church in the United States took note of the influence of the family on the faith development of the child. The bishops chose to redirect the resources of the Church from the Catholic schools into parish-based catechetical programs, appointing Directors of Religious Education (DRE) to oversee the programs. These programs were catechetical in nature, addressing not only the needs of the children but also the needs of the parents as suggested in the documents on education and catechesis of the Second Vatican Council. With this redirection of energy came a decline in the numbers of new Catholic schools in America. “No new Catholic schools have been established in the past twenty years ... there has been no serious attempt to re-establish US Catholic Schools to the same extent as before” (Ryan, 1997, p. 149).

The bishops in Australia, on the other hand, chose to keep the Catholic schools as the prime source of religious education. Graham observes “the Australian Church kept improving its Catholic schools and only recently returned to the family question in earnest” (1994, p. 4). He also argues strongly that because most of the resources of the Australian Church are being poured into the Catholic school system little time and
few resources are being made available “to provide support and infrastructure for family religious education.” Ryan concludes, “this neglect of family education [in Australia] ignored the official Church directives which gave primacy to families in education” (1997, p. 147). The Church in Australia did not relinquish the dominant role of educating children in the faith from the Catholic schools. It was not until 1970s that the Catholic Church in Australia recognised a variety of family concerns pertaining to family life, one of which was family catechesis.

During the 1970’s in response to changing pastoral patterns, social changes in the family, refining of the parental role in religious education, family ministry, as it was called, grew in significance. (Treston, 1982, p. 20)

Different styles of family catechesis were initiated, resources were developed, and the focus of sacrament programmes became family–based giving an impetus to family catechesis. However, the Church in Australia was not successful in sustaining such an initiative. Many dioceses made some attempts but family catechesis did not become an established ministry.

In the early 1990’s the Archdiocese of Melbourne and the Archdiocese of Adelaide made a concerted effort to support family catechesis. A number of resources such as A Family for all Seasons, GodStart, Cornerstone and Family Time were being developed by various groups who were linked with family life. The resources were aimed at supporting family faith both at sacramental preparation time and at times other than sacraments. In the late 1990’s the Archdiocese of Brisbane developed 2020 Children, young people and their families a comprehensive resource for parishes, which engaged in an overall approach to meet the needs of faith education within the context of the home. The resource aimed to “promote faith learning that is life-long and life giving and to nourish and cooperatively support through education the faith life of families” (Church 2020, p. 10). Again this resource was not used to its full capability as parishes were not able to sustain the process it at the parish level.

It is heartening to observe that in recent years again the Catholic Church has explored new ways of supporting parishes to establish a model of family catechesis that is more effective and sustainable for our time. One of the most significant moves has been a renewal in the understanding of sacramental preparation. Across a number of dioceses a family based approach for the preparation and celebration of sacraments has been adopted. A “family centred/family focused, parish based and school supported” model for the preparation of sacraments acknowledges that the family has a key role in the faith development of their children. At the same time energy has been place in developing new style publications and resources which again offer parents support in sharing aspects of faith within the home. Such publications and resources include Living, Loving Learning from Archdiocese of Perth, Family Prayer Time from the Archdiocese of Brisbane, and a wealth of web resources for parents and families offered by sites such as Cathfamily. At the same time a growing amount of dioceses including the Archdiocese of Perth, the Diocese of Broken Bay, the Diocese of Darwin and sectors of the Church in Victoria are in the midst of developing more holistic approach to family catechesis that extent beyond the sacramental preparation years of children with the understanding that families need to be supported at all stages along the cycle of life. These movements within the various dioceses are an indication that the Catholic Church in Australia is growing in its support for family catechesis.

Conclusion

Throughout its history the Catholic Church in Australia has taken it upon itself to preserve the faith in the new culture by providing Catholic schools for the religious education of Catholic children. As a result the Catholic school became the centre for faith development of children and not the home. While the call of the Second Vatican Council urged the Church to reclaim the role of parents as the primary educators of the faith of their children, the Australian Church did not let go the dominant role of educating children in the faith from the Catholic schools. It has not been until recent years, the Church has once again recognised
the role of the family in the faith development of their children and the need to support families in their task to nurture the faith within the home.

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Graham Rossiter*

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF SPIRITUALITY:
THROUGH THE LENS OF CHANGE IN CULTURAL MEANINGS

Abstract

A number of constructs like secularisation, privatisation of religion etc. have been used to describe the significant change in spirituality of many of the young people in Australian Catholic schools over the last 50 years from a more traditional religious spirituality to something that is more secular, eclectic and individualistic. To some extent, this change has been acknowledged; but the religion curricula in Catholic schools still give the impression that all of the students are, or should be, regular church goers – as if Sunday mass attendance was to be the end point of their education in spirituality. An interpretation of change in spirituality in terms of change in cultural meanings has been developed for the purpose of understanding contemporary spiritualities in other than a deficit model. Such an interpretation may be more persuasive in promoting a view of religious education that will enhance and resource the basic human spirituality of young people – whether or not they ever become active members of a local community of faith. The argument, that provides a useful framework for interpreting how and why spirituality has changed, has relevance to education in spirituality in other contexts.

Introduction: Problematic expectations of Catholic schools to increase young people’s religiosity

This article is related specifically to education in spirituality in Australian Catholic schools. Nevertheless, much of the discussion implies generalisations that should be relevant to other contexts, while acknowledging that what counts as ‘traditional’ spirituality would vary according to context.

In the document Catholic schools at a crossroads, the Catholic bishops of NSW and ACT (2007) expressed concern that despite the high level of resources invested in Catholic schools, they were not successful in inclining young Catholics to become regular church goers. Among their recommendations, they called for a ‘new’ evangelisation (Pope John Paul II, 1990, Redemptoris Missio) that would help ‘reignite’ young people’s spirituality and improve their engagement with the Church. Similar concerns were also evident in diocesan reviews of the Catholic identity of schools. From the perspective of maintaining the continuing health of the Catholic Church, this response is understandable. But the issue runs more deeply than religiosity (measure of religious behaviour) – it involves fundamental changes in the landscape of spirituality. This thinking underestimates the complexity of the spirituality of contemporary youth – and of adults as well. In addition, it seems to presume that the educational activity of a Catholic school can, by itself, change young people’s spirituality significantly – proposing a simplistic solution to a complex problem.

What the Crossroads document seeks is some formula that will reverse the substantial drift away from participation in the Church. Both the problem as the document’s authors understand it, and the proposed solution, make sense within a particular framework of cultural-religious meanings. For those who share this outlook, the problem is about how to stop the decline in religiosity and traditional spirituality. But many young people and adult Catholics have no identification with this framework – as if it no longer existed; or it has little influence on their thinking; or, because of their involvement in a Catholic school, they may acknowledge it respectfully, but it has low plausibility and little credibility. As one young teacher said “They’re on a different mental planet from the one I live on” – suggesting a clerical naivety about how the links between religion and spirituality have changed significantly over the past 50 years.
If Catholic schools are to offer an education in spirituality that is relevant to the lives of pupils, then there is a need to understand and acknowledge their changed spiritual situation: for many, but not all, it is relatively secular, eclectic, subjective, individualistic and self reliant; there is a strong interest in achieving a desirable lifestyle but little interest in connection with the church (Hughes, 2007; Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). Religious education needs to focus more on resourcing and enhancing the basic human spirituality of young people – helping them learn how to better negotiate the spiritual and moral complexities of modern life; this should be offered unconditionally – whether or not they will ever participate in church life; and this will be helpful both for those who are involved in a parish and those who are not. Giving attention to religious traditions will always remain an important part of the religious educational process. But to focus relatively exclusively on such teaching is both too narrow and counterproductive – even if institutional maintenance were a principal purpose. It is considered that helping young people learn how to identify, interpret and evaluate contemporary spiritual/moral issues needs to become a more prominent part of religious education, especially in the senior years; and this has implications for both content and pedagogy. To do this is not ‘secularising’ the process but it is trying to be faithful to the Catholic school’s religious mission to contemporary youth.

But if this proposed agenda is to be advanced, it will require some level of educational consensus that transcends the particular spiritualities of the educators themselves – whether this be ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’ etc. In other words, those whose principal concern is promoting church participation as well as those who do not accord this aim the same priority, need to see that the landscape of spirituality has changed so much that a traditional religious education, linked with a religious spirituality, is no longer adequate in Catholic schools. For this reason, this article will give special attention to charting change in spirituality. It seeks to develop an interpretation that will be more cogent in persuading Catholic education authorities and religion teachers to see the need for a different pattern of emphasis in religious education. It will propose that a relatively secular spirituality has become ‘normal’ for many Catholics, both young and old, and therefore it needs to be understood and addressed positively, and not negatively in terms of a deficit model that employs words like secular, un-churched, non-practising, non-traditional or non-religious. Rather than persist with a single unrealistic purpose of trying to re-establish a traditional Catholic religious spirituality for all, Catholic school religious education needs to offer a broader approach as suggested in the previous paragraph.

The new ‘mental planet’, or the cultural meanings that affect contemporary spiritualities, needs a more systematic exploration. Such investigation should not presume that either the traditional or the new is right and the other wrong. All sets of cultural meanings have both healthy and unhealthy elements that need to be identified and evaluated; this is one of the roles of an education in spirituality. While not comprehensive, the following will highlight prominent changes in cultural meanings that need to be taken into account in any relevant education in spirituality.

**Change in cultural meanings: A scheme for interpreting how and why spirituality has changed**

The understanding of spirituality assumed here has been outlined in detail in Crawford and Rossiter (2006). What follows will extend that view of how spirituality has evolved.

A range of constructs can be used for interpreting change in spirituality. All of them have some explanatory power; but none by themselves seems to provide an adequate interpretation because change in spirituality is multidimensional. The change is mediated by a complex tapestry of influences that plays out differently for individuals. Table 1 lists a range of sociological constructs that have been used to interpret social change and which in turn can be applied to spirituality. The table signposts the different constructs without attempting to analyse them in any detail. Only a few references are noted as examples; and a number of them touch on the application of the construct to spirituality.
Table 1  Range of sociological constructs that can be used for interpreting change in spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociological construct</th>
<th>Notes on the focus of the constructs</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructs related to religion &amp; change</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>Measure of religious behaviour such as attendance at church/synagogue etc., frequency of prayer, engagement in a local community of faith.</td>
<td>Glock &amp; Stark, (1965); Flynn (1985, 1993); Smith &amp; Denton (2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secularisation</td>
<td>Decline in the prominence of religion in personal, social and political life; less reference to the idea of god in spirituality.</td>
<td>Mascall (1965); Bonhoeffer (1966); Fenn (2001); Norman (2002); Wright (2004); Crawford &amp; Rossiter (1996, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reality of religion</td>
<td>People construct a view of what they think religion is; religious knowledge is socially constructed.</td>
<td>Berger and Luckmann (1966), Berger, (1969, 1973)</td>
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<tr>
<td>World views</td>
<td>A scheme of meaning through which people make sense of the world and life. A collective world view may function like a religion.</td>
<td>Jackson (1997); Olthius (1985); Naugle (2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Constructs related to social change</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural postmodernity</td>
<td>The cultural situation characterised by: uncertainty about personal knowledge, which is socially constructed and contextual; disbelief in meta-narratives; extreme individualism; scepticism; existentialism.</td>
<td>Bauman (1997); Bridger (2001); Crawford &amp; Rossiter (2006).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pluralism</td>
<td>Diversity of cultures and religions making a pluralistic society.</td>
<td>Jackson (2004); Baum (2007).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relativism</td>
<td>Arises from the capacity to make multiple comparisons. Tendency to see religions and world views as much the same in principle; hence a decline in sense of religious uniqueness and in religious authority.</td>
<td>Baum (1987, 2007); Crawford &amp; Rossiter (2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-traditionalisation</td>
<td>Decline in the sense of family, religious and cultural traditions; life lived more independently of cultural traditions.</td>
<td>Hermans (2004);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>The value basis to a particular way of thinking, or of a cultural group. The set of values that motivates and drives particular political groups. Ideology may be somewhat covert.</td>
<td>Durder et al (2003); de Botton (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-cultural communication</td>
<td>The process of promoting mutual understanding and conversation between cultural groups. Learning from different cultures.</td>
<td>Gallagher (1992); English (1998).</td>
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<td>Constructs related to institutional change</td>
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<th>Social psychological constructs</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning and purpose</strong></td>
<td>The thinking that helps individuals interpret their experience and the world. It helps justify and motivate behaviour. It can help give coherence to one’s explanations of what is happening in the world. Inner resources that are developed through interaction with cultural meanings.</td>
<td>Baumeister (1993); Crawford &amp; Rossiter (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td>How individuals draw on both cultural and inner resources for their self-understanding and self-expression. May be multidimensional including moral, spiritual, religious, cultural, identity elements.</td>
<td>Taylor (1989); Crawford &amp; Rossiter (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wellbeing</strong></td>
<td>The general feeling of wholesomeness in the individual’s self-understanding and life. Includes physical, social, spiritual and economic dimensions.</td>
<td>Eckersley et al (2005, 2006); Fisher (2000, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resilience</strong></td>
<td>Capacity to function well as a person despite difficulties and problems. Capacity to cope with setbacks in life.</td>
<td>Brown (2001); Witham (2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character</strong></td>
<td>The moral ‘fibre’ of the individual. The set of virtues that gives the individual moral integrity. The values and commitments that help make a healthy, contributing citizen.</td>
<td>Bohlin (2005); Nucci &amp; Narvaez (2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Virtues</strong></td>
<td>The moral qualities that are embedded in the individual like ‘habits’ of mind and good behaviour. Has a long history within thinking about religious virtues.</td>
<td>Swanton (2003); Koertge (2005).</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Cultural meanings:* The construct or conceptual scheme that will be used here is change in cultural meanings (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, pp. 46-59). Cultural meanings are understood as the sets of socially constructed ideas, values, assumptions and emotions that inform people’s thinking and behaviour. Cultural meanings are distinctive of particular social and ethnic groups and religions; but they also operate across the social context from family to nation state, and increasingly at a global level. While there are many cultural meanings in a society, it is possible to identify the sets of meanings with which individuals or groups identify. They are like the background ideas about life (thinking and assumptions) that people draw on to explain or justify their behaviour. They condition the way people think about their lives. Trying to identify the active cultural meanings for individuals tries to interpret their ‘self interpretations’.

Cultural meanings are often a blend of social, cultural, religious, spiritual and political ideas that are in turn meshed with feelings and values that reinforce the ideas. People draw on and interact with these cultural meanings when forming their own personal ideas about life. It is like the ‘atmosphere of meaning’ that people are continuously ‘breathing in’; and it is like the immediate ‘thinking/feeling environment’ they inhabit which affects how they interpret reality and what they do. These meanings are associated with various sources – family, social and cultural groups, religion, nation state and the wider popular culture. Individuals may draw on particular sources or reference groups while shunning others, and they may also draw from a wide range of meanings in an eclectic fashion. There will be a diversity of responses to the same perceived cultural meanings; for example, what is ‘liberal’ to some will be regarded as ‘harmful’ and ‘deviant’ by others. Whatever the idiosyncratic personal meaning they construct, it cannot be fully understood apart from the particular landscape of meaning within which it developed. Some will be both conscious and articulate about the cultural meanings they have adopted; others may be relatively unaware of their social conditioning – as if it was just ‘natural reality’ which is not usually questioned.
Religion can be prominent and influential in people’s accepted cultural meanings. Others can identify with religion nominally while their behaviour suggests that they are really operating more out of the common cultural meanings in their society. Still others would see their key meanings, and hence their spirituality, as unrelated to religion.

The notion of cultural meanings is a composite scheme that draws on a number of the constructs listed in table 1 – especially Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) understanding of social reality where people’s knowledge and behaviour are interpreted as closely related to what they construe to be reality, together with the recognition that social reality is constructed by individuals and groups; also there is some similarity with symbolic interactionist theory (Blumer, 1969). Investigating cultural meanings tries to identify and evaluate what appear to be the important, driving ideas and assumptions behind people’s thinking and behaviour. It is essentially interpretive and hypothetical in process; it acknowledges that individuals may or may not advert to the cultural meanings that affect their behaviour, because these meanings can be taken for granted parts of their social world that do not need articulation, let alone evaluation. If cultural meanings are not brought into the open for appraisal, they can remain deviously influential because they are then regarded as a natural, but hidden part of the normal fabric of life (c/f the work of sociologist Raymond Williams as discussed in Warren (1992)). Williams proposed that by starting with the identification and appraisal of cultural meanings, individuals can take up cultural agency, where they can avoid being just passive ‘consumers’ of culture by actively contributing to the creation of cultural meanings within their own sphere of influence. This approach is consistent with much of the thinking in critical theory and critical pedagogy (Darder et al., 2003).

Cultural meanings serve as communal frames of reference that are available to people in the working out of their own personal frame of reference or personal meaning. They usually act in ways that are more or less consistent with their personal meanings. Both personal frame of reference (difficult to characterise) and cultural meanings (more easily identified) are keys to interpreting behaviour. Hence, identifying cultural meanings and showing how they have changed is a useful way of interpreting change in spirituality.

It is difficult to estimate with accuracy the way in which cultural meanings affect individuals. It seems to be a natural part of the human condition to have difficulty in determining the extent to which various cultural meanings affect us. It is often appears easier to see how they may have affected others – even though such interpretations may be incomplete. But by identifying the range of factors that influence people’s cultural and personal frames of reference, we are in a better position to understand personal and social change as it is manifested in spirituality. And in turn, this interpretation can be useful educationally for helping people look more critically at the cultural meanings that have had a shaping influence on them. These factors can be life enhancing as well as life inhibiting. They can extend freedom just as they can limit it. The educational hope is that individuals become better educated with respect to the social forces that may have a conditioning influence on the way they live their lives. By interrogating the cultural meanings that affect society and individuals, people are in a better position to make informed choices and to address contemporary spiritual and moral issues (Hill, 1993). This provides a potentially valuable contribution to religious education (and education generally) both in content and pedagogy; students could be engaged in a research-oriented process of appraising cultural meanings; at a personal level, they would have the opportunity to reflect on where their personal frame of reference related, if at all, to the cultural meanings being evaluated.

Change in cultural meanings: There are two main aspects to change in cultural meanings:-

- Firstly, there is the emergence and dissemination of new cultural meanings;
- Secondly, individuals change the cultural meanings to which they are subscribing; they switch their allegiance to new meanings available in the culture; this change may be gradual and sometimes almost imperceptible.

Individuals and groups are forever inventing and disseminating cultural meanings – new ways of
interpreting life. The religious cultural meanings associated with any group will evolve and change over time in response to new circumstances. Sometimes the ‘new’ meanings are really ‘recycled’ ‘old’ meanings. It could be expected that very traditional, mono-cultural societies would have less variety in cultural meanings than pluralistic, multi-cultural societies. Being able to make multiple comparisons between diverse religions, world views and lifestyles could also be expected to be a catalyst for people to change their cultural meanings; dissatisfaction with old meanings and the allure of the new could prompt change. However, if individuals were secure in their reference group, and if they felt it had a strong identity and self-sufficient plausibility, then they could be unmoved by the variety of meaning systems on offer; they could feel relatively impervious to inroads from competing meanings, particularly those that might call their own system into question. Some who are anxious about the multiplicity of competitive meaning systems, retreat defensively into the security of their own reference group. For minority groups, particularly when oppressed, their meaning system is important in group identity and perhaps even for cultural survival; it provided inner strength.

A variety of life experiences could trigger change in the personal meanings of individuals – including education. The new personal meanings usually resulted from a shift in their favoured cultural meanings. It is not that they created new meanings as such, but they moved towards meanings that made more sense of their experience and with which they felt more comfortable. It may have been a response to perceived dissonance – where their experience was increasingly being felt to be inconsistent with the explanations offered by their old meaning system (Festinger, 1962).

If the old reference group appeared to be losing its plausibility (Berger, 1969, 1973) – where its value was no longer self-evident – individuals tended to look elsewhere for more meaningful ideas to motivate and explain their lives. This prompted a migration in reference groups. During this process, individuals may pay more attention to the critiques of their old reference group which were available in the wider community. The credibility of the old system declined; its meanings appeared to lose their relevance and explanatory power, and consequently their capacity to retain people’s allegiance failed. Sometimes the change was led by action; individuals behaved in new ways; they may have changed the emphases in their lifestyle; then because they felt comfortable with this new behaviour, they eventually made adjustments to their personal meaning system – they changed their ‘subscription’ to new cultural meanings that better accommodated their behaviour and interests. It may have been a relatively imperceptible drift into new ways of thinking.

Change in cultural meanings is inevitably connected with how they are constructed and communicated. Human history shows that story-telling and its preservation in writing have been important in the handing on of cultural meanings from generation to generation; stories are meaning-embedded narratives. New media for communication have helped maintain and conserve cultural meanings, as well promote the spread of new meanings. Print, telephony, radio, film and television have contributed, and now there are emails, texting and the internet – together with its social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace and Twitter, and individual blogging. More will be said about the influence of electronic communication later.

Change in spirituality is not only affected by theological development within religion but also by changes in the background cultural meanings about life. In a text on modern European thought, Boumer (1977, p. 439) wrote about the process of secularisation in a chapter entitled ‘The Eclipse of God’. He began with the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing from prison in 1944.

The secular movement which I think had begun in the 13th century has in our time reached a certain completion. People have learnt to cope with all the questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis. In questions concerning science, art and even ethics this has become an understood thing which one scarcely dares to tilt at anymore (Bonhoeffer, 1967, p. 194).

Amongst other things this suggests two key points for understanding change in spirituality. Firstly, the
centrality of ideas about god; and secondly, that the origins of change need to be traced back to medieval times.

**Cultural meanings in a traditional Christian religious spirituality**

Consider the situation of people in 12th century Christian Europe. For an illiterate peasant leaving his small wooden or mud house, with no windows, and entering a massive cathedral – for example, in Ely, Salisbury or Chartres – the contrast would have been awe inspiring; the physical ‘house of God’ reflected a sense of the divine on earth. The size and height of the vaulting, the stained glass windows and the frescoes and paintings would have helped communicate a sense of the transcendence and power of god who presided over the world. Apart from the castles and houses of the nobles, the cathedrals would have dominated the city skyline, symbolic of the dominance of god and religion. In the small villages, this was replicated in miniature with the local church spire often the most prominent landmark. The dominance of Christian cultural meanings in 12th century France was evident in one estimate that there was one ecclesiastical structure of some kind for about every 200 people. A comparable situation exists today in some places – for example, across the hundreds of square kilometres of villages along the Nile near Luxor in Egypt; the spires of the local mosques are particularly prominent at night because they are lit with blue fluorescent lights; they dot the landscape about every kilometre or two from horizon to horizon. This religious domination of the landscape was symbolic of the overwhelming dominance of cultural religious meanings that regulated the lives of people in such contexts.

The authority of god, the spiritual/moral power of the church (religion) and the political power were usually amalgamated into a single network of cultural religious meanings. It covered all aspects of life and was relatively inescapable. It gave people a sense of their own ‘station in life’ within a system that was usually accepted without question; it gave them meaning and purpose and a sense of personal dignity; and it regulated their activity in minute detail. Within this system, it would be difficult to find meanings and practices that did not have a religious overlay. And all of this helped ensure (and enforce?) social stability. It would have been difficult to contemplate cultural meanings outside the prevailing system – there appeared to be few if any alternatives; if there were other religious groups present, they would have been in a minority and not likely to challenge the status quo. Born into this system, individuals simply absorbed its meanings as reality – there was no sense that it was socially constructed; any questioning of the system was likely to be judged as a deficiency in faith.

Six key meanings permeated the common spirituality in this context:

- The **centrality of god** who was perceived as the creator and end of the human race as well as its judge.
- Life and religion were focused on **heaven as the ‘true’ life** for which life on earth was a preparation; this tended to make religious meanings the compelling spiritual and moral reference points for thinking and behaviour.
- The **power of the church (religion)** over individuals, usually in concert with political power, was absolute; authorities were supreme; deviants or heretics could be put to death; many religious cultural rituals set the pattern for daily life in an annual cycle.
- **Obedience** was a prominent aspect of most human interactions. Obedience to god was aligned with obedience to the church (religion). Authorities, both religious and political, were respected without much question.
- **Fear** was a strong motivating factor; fear of god merged into fear of religious and political authorities; the idea of reward for the good and punishment of evil was a prominent moral motivation; the ultimate fear was of eternal punishment in hell.
- **Evil** in the world was personalised in the form of the devil; the devil – the ‘tempter’ – was held responsible for much of went wrong in personal and social life.

There was a strong feeling of tight control over people’s lives and spirituality. The meanings underpinning their spirituality were a mix of belief, theology, opinion, fears and superstition. One could speculate that
the extent to which this profile varied for individuals was limited, even though it may have been likely to be different for the ruling class, clergy and the educated.

The unquestioning acceptance of religious meanings as reality reinforced a literal interpretation of sacred writings. For example, the Genesis and Gospel stories were historicised.

**Changes away from a traditional Christian religious spirituality understood in terms of change in cultural meanings**

This section will consider only some of the changes in cultural meanings that have contributed to a move away from traditional spirituality, while not referring in any detail to the processes outlined in table 1. The pattern of change since the middle ages needs to be identified even in broad outline because it not only describes historical, cultural change in spirituality, but also because a similar pattern is often evident at a psychological level in individuals when their traditional spirituality morphs into something that is more secular and individualistic.

A change from traditional religious spirituality was particularly evident in three areas of cultural meanings:-

1. Understanding of god and of the creator’s role of the universe.
2. The power that religious authorities had over the lives and thinking of individuals; less fear of religious authorities.
3. Decline in the prominence of religious ritual and religious references in social life.

The following, among many factors, contributed to the secularisation of spirituality in Europe (and later in the Americas) since the middle ages. (There is not space to elaborate on each)

- Movement of people into the developing cities
- Separation of church (religion) and state
- Change away from the predominantly religious subject matter of art
- The rise of science, scientific thought and the enlightenment
- Interpretation of human behaviour through the human sciences
- Education
- Technologies for the communication of cultural meanings.

All these examples of change factors worked in favour of the emergence of two new cultural meanings that would drive the development of secular individualistic spiritualities.

Firstly, there was the sense of an *alternative set of popular cultural meanings about life* that was more or less independent of the traditional religious view; individuals could now compare what was expected formerly with what was encouraged, allowed or tolerated within the popular culture. There were options for thinking about life that were not there before. Whereas there had been one pervasive, monocultural, religious system that dominated cultural meanings, people were now becoming accustomed to multiple frames of reference for life's meaning.

Secondly, more attention and power were being given to the *individual’s own autonomous, personal frame of reference* for providing the ultimate criteria for judging spiritual/moral matters. The traditional cultural reference point in religion and religious authorities declined in plausibility and power; it was becoming perceived as having more of an ‘advisory’ role than a ‘normative’ one. While many would be inclined towards this more individualistic approach, others remained attached to the external authority as their prime frame of reference.

**Cultural meanings associated with a relatively secular, eclectic, individualistic spirituality**

This section extends the interpretation of the development of contemporary spiritualities by contrasting the cultural meanings that informed spirituality in traditional and modern settings. Table 2 summarises the
changes in cultural meanings that appear to be associated with the development of contemporary, relatively secular spiritualities in Westernised societies; while not all individuals will fit perfectly with these descriptions, the contrasting indicators provide a useful picture of the polarities that developed in the cultural change process. This summary has drawn significantly on the ideas of Eckersley (2005, pp. 2-15) and to a lesser extent on Crawford & Rossiter (2006) and Schweitzer (2004, 2007).

Table 2 Contrasts between the cultural meanings underpinning traditional and contemporary spiritualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trends in cultural meanings in a relatively traditional society, and to some extent in individuals with a traditional religious spirituality</th>
<th>Trends in cultural meanings in contemporary Westernised societies, and in individuals with a secular, individualistic spirituality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Personal meaning**: was usually a social given. A religious meaning system was received like a set package; it was ‘taken-for-granted’ and internalised.  
- There was security in having a relatively ‘black and white’ meaning system and moral code.  
- Individuals did not have to ‘search’ for meaning; they had a ready made package.  
- The religious meaning system may have been experienced as somewhat harsh and oppressive, but it helped people make sense of their lives at several levels, answering the fundamental questions: Who am I? Where have I come from? Why am I here? | **Meaning in life** was now less a social given and more a matter of personal choice: personal meaning was ‘constructed’ by individuals for themselves, or chosen from a proliferation of options.  
- There was a challenge to individuals in constructing their own DIY (Do It Yourself) spirituality.  
- ‘Searching’ for meaning and taking responsibility for developing one’s own personal meaning system could be stressful.  
- The speed, scope and scale of economic, social and cultural change have made the past seemingly irrelevant and the future uncertain for many. This seems to have created more ‘cultural agnosticism’ about meaning, purpose and certainty in life.  
- Even if life’s meaning was less clear, life itself became more comfortable, more varied, safer, healthier and longer. |
| **Religious belief**: Beyond the mortal realm, people had a religious faith that not only provided them with a road map for life, but it gave them a sense of place in the cosmic scheme of things. | While many retained some form of religious belief, this was not nearly as absolute and binding as it once was. The individual’s own experience tended to became the touchstone for authenticity, and even for what was regarded as the ‘truth’. While nominally linked with religion, some see a clear distinction between their own personal faith and the faith taught by traditional religious institutions (Schweitzer, 2004). |
| **Religious authority**: Religious spirituality (in the West) was sustained and validated by church authority. Its plausibility depended on high regard for the church; the notion of the authority of god underpinned church authority.  
- An emphasis on obedience to religious authorities and to god. | **Authority of the individual**: The plausibility of religious authorities tended to be low. Increasingly, individuals became their own spiritual authority, deciding for themselves on the basis of their own judgment about particular aspects of spirituality. “People assumed that their lives are not predetermined by birth and social origin, and that every one has the right and also the responsibility to shape his or her life according to their own wishes and life plans.”(Schweitzer, 2009, p.90) It is taken for granted that everyone has the right to choose their own faith and that no-one should interfere with their choices.  
- Little if any regard for religious authorities.  
- What suited the individual became the ultimate criteria for the utility of spirituality. |
<p>| <strong>The existence and image of God</strong>: There was a strong belief in the existence of god. The image of god included the notions of:- creator, all-powerful, benevolent, loving and caring for each individual, judge of good and bad, rewarder of the good and punisher of the evil, listens to people’s prayers and requests for help. | <strong>A natural uncertainty about the existence of god</strong> became more prevalent. Belief in a benevolent god was attractive and comforting, but not something that many individuals counted on or thought much about. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family and community ties:</th>
<th>Family and community ties were loosened. Consequently individuals appeared more open to various life options available in the wider culture, together with more individualism in their choices.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children usually grew up in a close network of family and community relationships that largely defined their world – their values, beliefs, identity and station in life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world outside:</td>
<td>People know much more of the rest of the world and how differently others lived and thought. Information about what was happening around the world was available instantaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people knew relatively little of what lay outside their world, and of other ways of living (in pre-television times).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social change and the predictability of life:</td>
<td>Rapid social change resulted in much more uncertainty about life and the future. Many accommodated to the uncertainty as ‘natural’. (Others could not cope with the uncertainty so well, and identified with communities where meanings were more definite and authoritarian – a move back towards a more traditional setting).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much of life was predictable and what was not was explained in terms of the supernatural and religious belief.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion: A foot in both camps?**

Many religion teachers in Catholic schools have more personal affinity with thinking in the right column than the left in table 2. But in religious education, they feel their normative curriculum context sits mainly within the thinking in the left column, while most of their students are at home with that of the right column (even if the description of a traditional spirituality today does not fit perfectly within the left column). And if their prescribed purpose in religious education is understood primarily as persuading young people that they need to engage with the church, this can be perceived by their students as wanting to shift their thinking and spirituality towards that of the left column; and students (and hopefully their teachers) know that there is no educational (or any other) formula that will make this happen. The change, at least in Westernised countries in the long term, is not reversible.

Hence, it is proposed that the starting point for a more relevant religious education is to accept that the situation depicted in the right hand column is the normal one for most young people. If this was accepted in normative Catholic curriculum documents, it would help change the focus from trying to eliminate the right hand column as a problem towards trying to diagnose and address its needs constructively – responding to the opportunity to enhance young people's spirituality whether it is religious or not (this purpose has currency in non-denominational and state based religion studies courses). And while access to the traditional religious heritage remains a valuable part of education in spirituality for secular youth, more specific attention needs to be given to content and pedagogy that take into account the healthy possibilities as well as the problems within the thinking described in the right hand column. While the introduction suggested the critical interpretation and evaluation of culture as one valuable strategy, limits of space require that spelling out what such an education in spirituality would entail is taken up elsewhere (c/f Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). In any case, the framework developed in this article provides a useful starting point for interpreting change in spirituality which would have a prominent place in such an education.

**References**


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Antony Luby*

THIS IS OUR FAITH: EVANGELIZATION, CONFESSIONALISM AND CRITICALITY

Abstract

Under the auspices of the Curriculum for Excellence initiative the Scottish Catholic Education Service has published *This Is Our Faith*. This is a set of authoritative guidelines outlining a new approach to the teaching of Catholic religious education in Scottish schools. The document is analyzed from the perspective of teaching Catholic religious education - not in Catholic schools but in state secondary schools that have no religious affiliation. The greatest need for Catholic students in such a secular environment is to develop rudimentary skills for evangelization. The confessional and theological pedagogy advocated by the authors of *This Is Our Faith* is found to be inadequate for developing such skills: rather, a critical and evidential pedagogy is preferred. This critical religious education pedagogy draws upon recent developments in religious and moral education as it seeks to identify common ground within the secular environment of state secondary schooling. Such a critical pedagogy may enable young Catholics to begin evangelization within an environment that is often inimical to their faith.

Introduction

Scottish education from the early years through to the age of fourteen is to be renewed through the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). On its webpage the main sponsor of the CfE initiative, a Scottish Government agency, Learning Teaching Scotland, makes the bold claim that it will provide ‘relevant, inspiring, engaging education for every child and young person in Scotland’ ([http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/index.asp)). As with any initiative there is a discrepancy between rhetoric and reality and this paper will analyze the rhetoric and reality with regard to two areas:

- Firstly, a brief examination of the role of teacher autonomy; and
- Secondly, an in-depth analysis of the underpinning pedagogy with reference to the provision of Roman Catholic religious education (RCRE) for young persons aged 11-14 who attend non-denominational secondary schools in Scotland.¹

At the outset I should like to state the author’s background. The author is a chartered teacher with the responsibility for the delivery of the RCRE curriculum to one hundred and twenty Catholic students in ten non-denominational secondary schools in the city of Aberdeen. Chartered teachers were introduced into Scottish education in 2005 and recently (February 2010) reached a significant milestone with the 1,000th teacher being awarded chartered teacher status. Of particular relevance for readers is that one of the criteria for the Scottish standard for chartered teachers is that they consistently ‘articulate a personal, independent and critical stance in relation to contrasting perspectives on educational issues, policies and developments’ (GTCS, 2009, p11). At some risk the author will offer a critique of RCRE provision as envisaged under the auspices of CfE.

There is a degree of risk in that it is not unknown for chartered teachers to be disciplined by their local authority for publicly voicing concerns about educational issues (Hepburn 2010). And yet, paradoxically, the current Skills Minister, speaking on behalf of the Education Secretary at the 2010 winter conference of the Association of Chartered Teachers Scotland urges chartered teachers to “…stand up for themselves…” (Hepburn 2010). Indeed, the Scottish standard for chartered teacher reinforces this mandate from the Education Secretary as it gives two illustrations of this critical stance, namely:
“The chartered teacher...

- critically evaluates educational policy and research publications in relation to the current debates in the educational and wider community; and

- engages with others in the critical discussion of educational policy and practice” (GTCS, 2009, p11).

The wording implies that a chartered teacher’s criticisms should be offered to a wider audience and so the author takes courage from three sources. Firstly, the aforementioned support of the Education Secretary for chartered teachers to voice their criticisms. Secondly, the writings of the Australian educationalist, Sachs (2003a) whose concept of an ‘activist teaching professional’ underpins part of the Scottish standard for chartered teacher. Sachs wishes to see teachers moving from ‘old professionalism,’ whereby they rest content with querying how best to implement initiatives mooted by influential others; to ‘transformative professionalism,’ whereby teachers take prime responsibility for innovation. Thirdly, the rallying call of Humes (2005) a renowned critic of Scotland’s educational establishment, who argues that “Teachers need to be encouraged to interrogate the dominant policy discourses more critically...We all need to show greater courage in addressing the big issues of our time.”

This Is Our Faith

So, what is ‘the big issue of our time that requires courage to be addressed’? It is this: following on from the publication of Curriculum for Excellence: religious education in Roman Catholic schools by some of the leading agencies in Scottish education, the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) has published This Is Our Faith (November, 2009) on behalf of the Catholic Education Commission. As stated on its cover page, This Is Our Faith offers guidance on the teaching of religious education although a footnote points out that such guidance is provisional as it awaits formal recognition from the Church authorities: nevertheless, it is an authoritative document. These documents are intended to supplement each other as both advocate a curriculum for RCRE in secondary school for students aged 11-14 that is founded on eight topics. However, what if a teacher of RCRE is allocated only 1/8th of the time deemed necessary to teach these eight topics? This is the dilemma confronting the author teaching RCRE in non-denominational secondary schools. A simple solution may be that a “Curriculum for Excellence is supposed to encourage schools to move away from the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach” (Munro, 2010). This would suggest that what the authors of This Is Our Faith propose for students in Catholic secondary schools may not be relevant for those in non-denominational secondary schools. Unfortunately, this view is not shared by the director of SCES who has made it clear that he expects the RCRE curriculum in non-denominational schools to mirror that in Catholic schools, with some allowance being made for the lack of time allocated to the subject.

Such an interpretation by SCES affords limited autonomy to the teacher who is regarded as an ‘old professional’ and who should be concerned with Sachs’ “…traditional technical notions of professional development...” (2003b, p11) such as:

- ascertaining how to access in-service training that will assist with the implementation of these eight topics; and

- deciding whether to teach in-depth one of the eight topics over a three year period or scratching the surface of several of the topics.

From the perspective of ‘old professionalism,’ though, the prognosis is bleak. With regard to the first point, the CfE in-service training is designed for those who teach RCRE in Catholic schools and its delivery is remote from Aberdeen city. With respect to the second point, neither teaching one full topic nor parts of several topics is attractive; as the former would lead to boredom for both students and teacher and the latter to fragmentation of the curriculum. What is the solution?
According to Sachs (2003b, p11) the solution is to regard teachers as ‘transformative professionals’ who

...engage in public critical dialogues and debates about the nature of practice, how it can be communicated with others and how it can be continually improved. All parties move from peripheral involvements in the individual and collective projects to full participation. Dialogue is initiated about education in all of its contexts and dimensions, and about how people can learn from the experiences and the collective wisdom of each other.

This resonates with the criteria for the Scottish standard for chartered teacher and so, through this paper, the author hopes to initiate a ‘public critical dialogue’ by ‘engaging with others in the critical discussion of educational policy and practice’ as outlined in This Is Our Faith. Moving from the ‘peripheral involvement’ of an ‘old professional’ to that of a ‘transformative professional,’ the aim is to more fully participate by initiating a dialogue with SCES, Learning Teaching Scotland and the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland about how we can learn from the experience of teaching RCRE in the different context of non-denominational secondary schools.

A starting point for such a dialogue presents itself in the first footnote within the document This Is Our Faith i.e. “It is hoped that this guidance will also be useful for the religious education of Catholic children who are attending non-denominational schools and do not have access to the provision of Catholic education” (p1). This is a pious hope that this authoritative guidance, based on the experience of teaching RCRE in Catholic schools, will have direct relevance for those teaching RCRE in non-denominational schools. As stated in the opening paragraph: relevance is a key feature of the CfE initiative.

Drawing upon twenty years experience of teaching religious and moral education (RME) in non-denominational schools and six years experience of teaching RCRE in the same type of schools: I would contend that the most relevant feature for students is evangelization. As soon as they are removed from RME classes to participate in RCRE the students are identified as Catholic and are prone to questioning from their peers. And so the most relevant feature of the document This Is Our Faith to analyze is that of evangelization.

Evangelization

Basically, there are two different approaches to evangelization:

- evangelizing those within the community of believers; and
- evangelizing those out with the community of believers.

Within the community of believers

With the first approach, evangelization is perceived as a ‘halfway-house’ between catechesis and mission. Drawing on the rich tradition of the Church’s history with regard to catechesis, evangelisation and mission I argued recently that (Luby, 2008, p41): 5

...in the post-Reformation era the Catholic Church employed all three of these strategies. Firstly, the Church endeavoured to better catechise those people whom the Church held to be her own. Secondly, the Church evangelised those people “...in areas of Europe that were nominally Catholic but were in many ways cut off from orthodox Tridentine Catholicism.” Thirdly, the Church sent missions to those people who had another faith.

The position of Catholic students in non-denominational schools resembles those ‘cut off from orthodox Catholicism’ i.e. they need evangelization. Although the Catholic Church in Scotland has three hundred and thirty-one primary schools and fifty-six secondary schools, comprising more than twenty percent of the
Scottish school population; in the Diocese of Aberdeen there are but a handful of primary schools and there is no secondary school. Geographically, this is a large diocese covering no less than one-third the land mass of Scotland; but its Catholic population is sparse and widely spread over seventy parishes throughout Aberdeenshire, Moray, the Highlands, and the Northern Isles. Typically, a Catholic student attending a non-denominational secondary will also have attended a non-denominational primary school.

The Diocese of Aberdeen is not alone in having no secondary schools within a widespread geographical area as the neighbouring Diocese of Argyll and the Isles also suffers from such a lack of provision. Additionally, there are many other regions of Scotland with no secondary school provision, such as the Scottish Borders; or with limited provision, such as one secondary school in Dumfries and Galloway. Perhaps, then, the experience of teaching RCRE in non-denominational secondary schools in Aberdeen city may have some relevance for Catholic students elsewhere in Scotland.

It is notable that the large majority of Scotland’s Catholic population is located in or near to the industrialised ‘Central Belt.’ The lot of Catholic secondary school pupils in the more remote and rural areas is a relatively deprived one. Not only do they have no Catholic secondary school but they are likely to receive little in the way of either parish catechesis or youth group activities. At present, it appears that we have a three tier system of Catholic secondary education in Scotland:

- In the top tier are the majority of Catholic students who live in or near to the Central Belt; and the Church ‘holds these to be her own.’ These students are to be offered a rich programme of catechetical RCRE as outlined in the eight topics of This Is Our Faith.
- The middle tier comprises some one hundred and fifty students who live in Aberdeen city. These students are to be offered a much diluted form of catechetical RCRE through a programme comprising 1/8th of This Is Our Faith.
- The bottom tier comprises an unknown number of Catholic students who live in the more remote and rural areas. These students will receive no formal RCRE other than a patchwork parish catechetical provision.

This is unsatisfactory. Moreover, the remoteness of the middle and bottom tiers from the ‘Central Belt’ of Catholicism and their lack of primary school RCRE are indicators that evangelisation rather than catechesis is a more appropriate approach.

Out with the community of believers
And this leads us to the second approach to evangelization: “Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 1975, Para. 14)

How are young Catholics to be enabled to evangelize those who have a different faith or who have no faith? Worryingly, there is only one page in the forty-three page This Is Our Faith document in which the authors discuss evangelization and this is primarily in the context of the first approach to evangelization. The proposed curriculum does make provision for students to learn about the content of other Christian denominations and the religions of Judaism and Islam: but not how to evangelize them. Indeed, other than encouraging teachers to inculcate a deep respect in their students for people of faith, especially those of the Abrahamic religions (e.g. see pp3-4 and p9) there is little practical guidance as to how young Catholics might be enabled to evangelize.

There are hints within the document such as:

- Discussing how “the Church has always employed a great range of catechetical methods according
to the circumstances of their hearers,” the authors note that “In Athens, Paul observes the culture and philosophy of the Athenians and seeks to build upon it...” (p31); and

- Just as God has adapted his message to the human condition so that we might be able to receive it, so this implies for teachers the constant task “of finding a language capable of communicating the word of God and the Creed of the Church, which is its development, in the various circumstances of those who hear it” GDC No. 149, (p32).

Nowhere, though, is this fleshed out in terms of pedagogy. It can only be hoped that when the authors complete section 4 of This Is Our Faith which deals with teaching strategies then this will be addressed. The omens, though, are not propitious as they declare that “...study of stances for living which may be independent of religious belief will not form part of the content of religious education in Catholic schools” (p10). This does not sit well with the claims above to build upon the prevailing culture or to find a suitable language capable of communicating the word of God; especially given the secular nature of much of Scottish society.

The challenge of secularisation

It appears that the authors of This Is Our Faith hold an ‘Augustinian Thomist’ approach to secular society. They believe that secular society is permeated with a liberal, modern culture that is “...at odds with Christian teaching and practice” (Beer 2004). Given this context the authors argue that Catholic schooling should focus on catechesis and this seems to be their approach in the discussion of the faith community and “...the handing-on of faith within the community of believers” (p6). In terms of evangelizing the surrounding culture this may be achieved in a fashion akin to the parable of a ‘light for the world’ in Matthew 5:14 – “You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden.” With this mode of evangelization Catholic schools are light for a secular world. Given the concentration of the Scottish Catholic population within the Central Belt then, at first glance, this may be a feasible stance. However, the lesson from history is a somewhat brutal one: as a means of evangelization it has failed. Scottish society has become less religious and more secular throughout the time of Catholic secondary schooling in the twentieth century.

The authors of This Is Our Faith argue for an approach to RCRE that is characterized by:

... structured opportunities of encounter with Jesus, opportunities to learn about His life, to understand His teaching, to develop the virtues and values which He promotes and to follow His witness in service to others. Such opportunities... will promote genuine human growth not only for Catholic pupils but for those of other Christian denominations, other faiths or stances for living which may be independent of religious belief. (pp 3-4)

It could be said that this statement represents ‘the triumph of hope over experience.’ Scottish Catholic educational literature is replete with such pious statements but whilst such an approach may have successfully catechized generations of young Catholics it is clear that it has failed with regard to evangelizing the prevailing secular, Scottish society. Another approach is required and the experience of students in Aberdeen city suggests that it should be ‘Whig Thomist.’

The early identification of the Catholic students as Catholic (as discussed above) promotes a need for them to develop rudimentary skills in evangelization so that they can engage with their fellow students. However, the language of their peers is evidential rather than theological. There is little likelihood that a Catholic student in an Aberdeen city secondary school will become engaged in a conversation about their research “...into the social, political and religious life in Jesus’ land 2000 years ago” and their “understanding of Jewish expectations of the Messiah” (CFE, p5). Rather, they are more likely to be asked “Prove that God became man 2000 years ago.” Their peers are more interested in evidences concerning the authenticity and accuracy of Biblical stories than they are in the underlying Biblical teaching. This has been
my experience and it is similar to the experience of the Dean of Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome, who emphasizes the need for teaching “…where the young people are ‘at’… (and) starting further back, not jumping into doctrinal language too early…” (Gallagher, 2001, p3).

But how might Catholic students in non-denominational schools develop skills in evangelization such that they can communicate in the language of their peers? I would contend not through the confessional approach advocated by the authors of This Is Our Faith (p9). Because, rightly or wrongly, within Scottish and UK contexts, a confessional approach in religious education has a poor reputation. As a leading religious educator Wright (2000, p184) describes it: this is an approach which “imposes a particular truth on children” and such an approach is not well received within the secular environment of a non-denominational school. Rather, I would advocate a critical approach to religious education that is founded on a Whig Thomist understanding of secular society.

Broadly speaking, Whig Thomists embrace the liberal, modern culture of secular society and, while recognizing its faults, seek to imbue it with Christian values. Within the context of teaching RCRE in a secular environment I would argue that a Whig Thomist approach entails an examination of developments in religious education within non-denominational secondary schools. Furthermore, such an examination should heed the advice of the Dominican Order to “…constantly be true to its vocation as the organ of popularizing truth... borrow from the spirit of the age to supply the wants of the age” (Drane, 1988, p71).

That is to say, the teaching of RCRE with a view to the development of skills in evangelization requires a ‘popularizing of truth.’ It is fundamentally important that Catholic students in non-denominational secondary schools are able to proclaim the truth. But how is this to be achieved? Applying Drane’s comments to the teaching of RCRE it would seem that we should ‘borrow from the spirit of the age to supply the wants of the age.’

The ‘wants of our age’ are that Catholic students in non-denominational secondary schools are evangelized and their faith strengthened such that they develop basic skills in evangelization. What can we ‘borrow from the spirit of our age’ in RME that may better enable us to supply these wants? First of all, we need to determine the ‘spirit of our age’ in RME.

The spirit of our age in RME

In terms of RME in Scottish and UK contexts it is possible to track a five-fold development since the late 1960s.

A. World Religions Approach.

As a reaction against the dominance of Christianity within the prevailing religious education syllabi, the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education was set up in 1969. The teaching of world religions has since become widespread and from a Catholic perspective it occupies an appropriate place in both the Curriculum for Excellence11 and This Is Our Faith documents. However, it should be noted that not only was there a desire that other world religions should be taught within the domain of religious education but that Christianity itself should be perceived as one among many world religions.12 Quite correctly, This Is Our Faith (p9) points out that “there should be no question of taking a phenomenological approach whereby all denominations or faiths are presented as equally true.”

So, borrowing from the ‘spirit of the age in RME,’ teachers of RCRE in non-denominational secondary schools need to be aware that the Catholic faith is presented in RME as but one option amongst many: this needs to be redressed. The Catholic Church is “…the Church of the living God, pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15) and this truth must underpin RCRE.

The presentation of this truth, though, is a sensitive issue for Catholic students in non-denominational secondary schools. Given the secular environment how does one respond to those of other faiths and
none? Again, *This Is Our Faith* (p8) sums up well the Catholic position: “In the context of today’s multi-cultural and multi-faith society the Church is mindful of the need to develop in young people both a deep respect for people of faith and recognition of the religious freedom of all.” So, the teaching of RCRE in non-denominational secondary schools requires that some time be found to address the issue of those of a different faith and those of none. The teaching of the Church in *Lumen Gentium* (1964) is that eternal salvation may be achieved by “…those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life” (Section 16, *Constitution on the Church*, Vatican II). Given the tender ages of the young people in non-denominational secondary schools and the divine commandment not to judge others (Matthew 7:1, Luke 6:37) then we should proceed on the assumption that all non-Christians fall into this category.\(^\text{13}\)

In summation: in RME the Catholic faith is presented as but one truth amongst many. When teaching RCRE in a non-denominational secondary school this error must be corrected; but in a fashion that is sensitive to the ages and backgrounds of the Catholic students’ peers.

B. *Curriculum Development Approaches.*

The next major development in RME pedagogy arose in the early 1980s with the Westhill Project which drew upon a variety of sources ranging from the educational theories of Bruner, Piaget and Goldman to the practical classroom experiences of RME teachers. According to Rudge (2000, p89) this project “…focused on the principles of curriculum development and pedagogy, rather than on the more detached world of religious studies or theology.” In a sense, it was a counter-reaction to the academically-oriented World Religions approach but, more positively, it can be viewed as a project that aimed to ground RME pedagogy in the realities of classroom practice. Even a cursory reading of ‘Section 3: religious education - a divine pedagogy’ will soon reveal that the authors of *This Is Our Faith* have not only taken this on board but write eloquently about it.

For teachers of RCRE in non-denominational secondary schools a lesson to be drawn here is the importance of a variety of learning and teaching approaches. That said; the experience of Aberdeen city is that this is difficult to achieve given the constraints of small class numbers, limited resources and the need to go online to accommodate a geographical spread of students.

The next decade witnessed growth of an approach to religious education that drew upon knowledge gleaned from ethnographic studies as advocated by Jackson’s *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach*. This approach was embedded within the Warwick Religious Education Project and emphasises the importance of listening to and learning from the ‘lived experiences’ of believers. It acknowledges the fragmentation and diversity of religious belief and practice and aims to develop the students’ skills in interpreting and making sense of the way religions are lived today. From a Catholic perspective this seems to fit well with an inductive teaching approach as outlined in *This Is Our Faith* (p31). The experience of Aberdeen city suggests that given the wide background of students particular attention must be paid to this. Given the emphasis on evangelization then those teaching in non-denominational schools also “…need to be aware of the spectrum of faith commitment among learners…” (*This Is Our Faith*, p6).\(^\text{14}\)

In summation: teachers of RCRE in non-denominational secondary schools need to be aware of the varied commitments to the practice of the faith from their young charges. This requires a varied menu of learning and teaching approaches but these can be constrained by physical and geographical considerations.

C. *Spiritual Experientialist Approach.*

From the late 1980s, sandwiched between the two approaches discussed above, came the Religious Experience and Education Project that heralded the advent of such as guided fantasy and meditation within RME classrooms. This approach is unlike any other in that it is (i) founded on the ‘spiritual experiences’ of those who claim no religious affiliation and (ii) based on a wealth of research undertaken by the Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford (Hay and Morisy, 1985). Soon almost no RME classroom was without a copy of Hammond and Hay’s *New Methods in RE Teaching* textbook: although the extent to which it was used is a matter of conjecture.
For those teaching religious education in a Catholic school then this is relatively straightforward to Christianize. In fact, it sits very well with the inductive ‘Emmaus Approach’ discussed in This Is Our Faith (p37). As it is already used successfully in non-denominational schools then there is little reason to suppose that this approach cannot be a successful strategy for the teaching of RCRE.

D. Narrative & Critical Pedagogies.
From the corridors of higher education in the early 1990s was born the Children and Worldviews Project. The authors of this project readily acknowledge that RME pedagogy “…had been considerably changed and enhanced by employing a phenomenological model…” as discussed above (Erricker and Erricker, 2000, p188). However, as with the Westhill Project they recognised that much of secondary RME ‘mirrored’ religious studies in higher education and, likewise, they ‘grounded’ their narrative pedagogy in the experiences of the learners. Theoretically, their work is more sophisticated than that of their predecessors but in terms of classroom practice, as measured by output of publications, this narrative pedagogy has had less of an impact.

However, in terms of relevance for RCRE Blaylock (2004) puts this approach to the sword with a tongue-in-cheek but, nonetheless, coruscating attack on it as ‘RE as the vehicle for constructing your own free floating meaning for the spiritual life of the future.’ Inherently, it is suspicious of teaching facts and concepts as a form of mind control and it places too much emphasis on the students’ own perceptual narratives.

But now let us turn to the pedagogies that not only best capture the ‘spirit of the age’ in RME but also offer the best means to ‘supply the wants of the age’ i.e. evangelizing Catholic students in non-denominational schools such that they develop rudimentary skills in evangelization.

The first of these pedagogies is a fruit of the Spiritual Education Project. This project set out to critique liberal religious education (RE) because liberal RE regarded religious doctrines as ‘expressions of religious piety’ and failed to recognise them as ‘cognitive truth claims.’ For religious educators such as Wright (2000, p172) an alternative to the liberal mind-set is “…a theology concerned with questions of ultimate truth…” In the stead of liberal RE such a critical pedagogy envisages an intelligent conversation between the horizon of the pupils and the horizons of religion. The critical engagement between these horizons i.e. what the pupils initially understand and believe as compared with conflicting religious and secular perspectives should enable the pupils to re-articulate their beliefs and understandings. Notably, such critical engagement takes place within the context of spiritual nurture. This critical pedagogy aims to “…provide future generations with the skills, insight, wisdom and literacy to enable them to make a better job of flourishing in a plural society…” (Wright, 2000, pp84-85). And, of course, we wish this for our Catholic students who are being taught in the plural society that is a non-denominational secondary school.

E. Christian Pedagogy.
According to Brown (2000, p56) the aforementioned World Religions approach had a serious flaw in that it avoided introducing pupils to “…serious reflection on the evidence upon which Christian claims are based” as this proved to be ‘controversial.’ The mantle for analysing the truth claims of Christianity was picked up, though, in the late 1980s and early 1990s by the Stapleford Project. As Blaylock (2004, p15) points out, the ‘concept cracking’ methodology advocated by this project has an “emphasis on taking belief statements seriously as truth claims and analysing evidence and arguments around them…”

In summation: we are now beginning to develop a picture of how to ‘supply the wants of the age’ i.e. a course in evangelization for Catholic students in non-denominational secondary schools. Drawing from the ‘spirit of the age in RME’ such a course should structure an ‘intelligent conversation’ between the horizon of the students and the horizon of religion; and the latter horizon should be concerned with questions of ultimate truth. Said intelligent conversation should involve analysis of the evidence and arguments surrounding religious truth claims. What else may we learn from the ‘spirit of the age in RME’?
F. **Humanist Pedagogy.**

It is fair to say that the Humanist pedagogy mooted in Grimmitt’s classic *RE and Human Development* has had the greatest influence on RME practitioners. With this approach “...the aim of religious education... is about developing learners’ ability to respond for themselves to questions about the meaning and purpose of human life” (Blaylock, 2004, p.14). Certainly, if one judges by the language of Agreed Syllabi in England and national guidelines in Scotland then this ‘humanist’ concern for meaning, value and purpose permeates the religious education world of today e.g.

The importance of religious education is not confined to appreciating the historical and social role of religion. There is also a personal dimension, linked to the individual's search for answers to questions about meaning, value and purpose in life (emphasis added) (SEED, 1992, Section 1, Rationale).

This is a relativist understanding of religion that results in students’ forming their own opinions and beliefs about religious and moral issues and as long as these can be justified, to some extent, then they are held to be educationally acceptable. These opinions and beliefs are subjective truths and as such they run counter to Catholic belief in objective truth: and so this Humanist approach must be rejected. Catholic religious educators should be aware that mixed in with this relativist, humanist approach is hostility to Catholicism. This is exemplified in the writings of a RME teacher and regular columnist in The Times Educational Supplement Scotland who warns that with regard to teaching religious education “any desire to convert the heathen must be firmly smacked down…” (Adams, 2000). She has since been moved to complain that:

...all too often, RE is taught by a miscellaneous selection of biased individuals who promulgate their particular prejudices. This is especially so in denominational schools which expect their charges to swallow, without question, whatever religious drivel is on offer (Adams, 2006).

So, not only do I teach religious drivel, but if I encourage my students to evangelize then I will be firmly smacked down! Thankfully, Adams is an extreme example but there are some who are suspicious of Catholic religious educators in non-denominational secondary schools. Thus, it makes sense to move cautiously and to seek common ground with the values of non-denominational schools. Fortunately, in a Scottish context this can be found in CfE whereby one of the four main capacities is that we develop confident individuals who “...have secure values and beliefs and are able to develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world” (http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/curriculumoverview/aims/fourcapacities.asp).

In summation: the prevailing humanist approach within RME suggests that Catholic religious educators in non-denominational secondary schools should seek common ground with the values being promoted in said schools. And this is very much in line with the Whig Thomist approach outlined above.

G. **Philosophical Pedagogy.**

A radical, new pedagogy that is impacting upon classroom practice is the ‘philosophical’ approach supported by the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (Ord 2002). One teacher adopting this philosophical approach with Year 9 pupils at an Oxfordshire school reported that “Far from leading away from the study of religion... this approach actually offers a way in. I’m beginning to see this as the best way to unlock the deeper religious questions (Hinds, 2005, p.7).

Indeed the study of Higher Philosophy in Scottish secondary schools has often supplanted that of Higher Religious Studies as it is a more popular option with the students. Some RME departments have been renamed Religious Moral and Philosophical (RMPS) and this phenomenon has provoked an empirical study in Scotland (Nixon, 2009). Such a philosophical approach to the study of religion sits well with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 39:
In defending the ability of human reason to know God, the Church is expressing her confidence in the possibility of speaking about him to all men and with all men, and therefore of dialogue with other religions, with philosophy and science, as well as with unbelievers and atheists.

In summation: a philosophical approach to religious education chimes well with the prevailing spirit in RME and offers common ground between Catholic and secular educators. Again, this accords with Whig Thomism.

H. Summary
The last forty years has witnessed a move in the ‘spirit of the age in RME’ from confessional to critical religious education. Christianity is now but one of a number of world religions to be studied and the emphasis on learning has moved from immersing the students in religious truth to developing their critical abilities. Catholic educators working in a secular environment need to be sensitive with regard to their surroundings and seek out common ground where possible. In order to ‘supply the wants of the age,’ evangelized and evangelizing Catholics, consideration should be given to a critical pedagogy that concerns itself with the study of evidence and arguments surrounding religious truth claims.

Conclusion

This Is Our Faith is a well written document from an Augustinian Thomist perspective. It details an approach to Catholic religious education that aims to produce virtuous and knowledgeable young Christians. However, the lesson from history is that such an approach to religious education has limited impact upon the prevailing secular culture. The experience of teaching Catholic religious education within the secular environments that pertain within non-denominational secondary schools in Aberdeen city suggests that consideration should now be given to an approach based upon Whig Thomism. Drawing upon recent developments in RME pedagogies such an approach would be critical and not confessional in nature; and it would be concerned with the language of evidence rather than theology. Such a critical religious education that analyses the evidence for truth claims made by the Catholic Church should deepen the faith of young Catholics; and help them to develop a language with which they can begin to evangelize their peers.

References


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1 Non-denominational secondary schools are state comprehensive in which the large majority of Scottish pupils are taught. Approximately 5% of pupils attend independent fee paying schools and 20% attend Catholic schools funded by the state.

2 Scottish Government, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Learning Teaching Scotland.


4 Email correspondence. January 2010.

5 This drew heavily upon or quoted the works of Bireley (1999), Gentilcore (1994) & Po-Chia Hsia (1998).


7 Primary for pupils aged 5 – 11 years; secondary for students aged 11-17 years.

8 A corridor between the two major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh and nearby counties such as Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire, Lothians, Renfrewshire, etc.

9 E.g. at present the Diocese of Aberdeen has been without the professional services of a Youth Leader for over a year.

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e.g. see Rationale and Faith & Learning sections of the 1994 Religious Education: Roman Catholic Schools 5-14 Guidelines http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/5to14/htmlunrevisedguidelines/Pages/re_rc/main/erc1001.htm and http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/5to14/htmlunrevisedguidelines/Pages/re_rc/main/erc2004.htm.


The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the Chichester Project setting Christianity within the context of a World Religions approach.

Indeed, This Is Our Faith (p6) asserts that “…God’s grace is at work in all people’s lives…” See also ‘All Salvation Comes Through Christ,’ Pope John Paul II, General Audience, 31 May, 1995. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/alpha/data/aud19950531en.html

To illustrate: at a meeting of the Aberdeen deanery of priests and deacons it came to light that three pupils in one particular school year group were being taught RCRE. No-one in the Church was aware of these families as they did not attend services.

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Abstract

Richard Bauckham’s prize-winning book of 2006 Jesus and the Eyewitnesses has directed thinking about the creation of the gospels away from the model of community-based theological literature towards authored histories of Jesus. His work has given a strong impetus to reactions against the priority long enjoyed by historical-critical methodology. At one point, this shift turns on the ‘eyewitnesses’ mentioned in Luke’s preface. Bauckham’s neglect of a closer analysis of what underlies Luke’s advocacy of ‘eyewitnesses’ (autoptai) leaves an opening for a more precise reckoning of the authorial intention. A short investigation opens a view upon a Christian community that has long been engaged in literary processes. This is in contrast to the sustained process of orality argued by Bauckham. Such Christian literary activity has prompted Luke to extend and enrich the earlier initiatives by the creation of his own theological narrative about Jesus.

Context

In attempting on an earlier occasion to clarify the correlation between Luke’s preface and the character of his gospel, I offered a critique of aspects of Richard Bauckham’s treatment of Luke’s preface in Jesus and the Eyewitnesses (Collins, 2007, pp. 61, 64). That occasion was the Fifth National Symposium on Religious Education. By the time the Sixth National Symposium was due, Bauckham’s study had attracted acclaim and notoriety. In May 2009 its author was the recipient of the 2009 Michael Ramsey Prize, a biennial award for ‘theological writing which ... somehow changes the theological landscape, and also serves the needs of the Church....’ (Ramsey Prize citation).

Eighteen months previously Jesus and the Eyewitnesses had already been selected as Book of the Month by the revered Scottish journal The Expository Times (Foster, 2007), and was warmly received by the prominent New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington (2009). The latter distinguished the book from those that are merely ‘important’ to include it among ‘seminal studies that serve as road markers for the field, pointing the way forward.’ Similarly, in introducing his recent book Jesus: A Portrait, the widely read Jesuit theologian, Gerald O’Collins, went out of his way to devote two pages to the role of ‘Eyewitness Testimony’ as conceptualised by Richard Bauckham, in the process naming the book ‘remarkable’ and a ‘landmark volume’ (2008, pp. x, xii). Reviewing O’Collins, and commending him for once again demonstrating his ‘longstanding commitment to a hermeneutics of trust in the Gospel accounts’, Robert Imbelli noted O’Collins’ indebtedness to Bauckham, upon whose study he ‘liberally draws’ (Imbelli, 2008).

The historical-critical method

Imbelli’s comment about ‘trust in the Gospel accounts’ opens up the hermeneutical workplace to which Bauckham is applying a new cutting edge. Over a number of decades such trust has been widely undermined through a higher public awareness of the application to the study of the gospels of what is known as the historical-critical method of interpretation. Previously I had noted that Pope Benedict XVI himself expressed concern about the ‘dramatic situation for faith’ created by ‘the impression that we have very little certain knowledge of Jesus’ (Collins, 2007, p. 62).

Beyond the theologically informed academe which Pope Benedict XVI inhabits, however, concerns about the damaging potential of a historical-critical interpretation of the gospels readily find quite virulent expression. A quarter of an hour on the web illustrates this. ‘I am convinced that the historical-critical
method of Scripture interpretation is the greatest of all the enemies of the Christian faith’, asserted one guardian of the tradition (Martin, 1993) under the title ‘The Bible’s Deadly Enemy’. A Roman Catholic version of this antipathy is to attack the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s commendation of the method (1993) on the grounds that it is *neither scientific nor historical*, and its constant use of rationalist presuppositions *rules out any real objectivity* in its conclusions’ (McCarthy, 2008).

Richard Bauckham had the method clearly in his sights when he chose the title and sub-title of his study. The presence of the term ‘eyewitnesses’ in each title alerts us to the importance he is attributing to the connection between Jesus and people who are understood to have been contemporaries of Jesus and eyewitnesses of his career. Instead of ‘historical-critical’, however, Bauckham labelled the interpretative method by the older English phrase stemming from biblical scholarship of the early 20th century: form criticism.

As a technical term, form criticism derives in turn from the German word *Formgeschichte* (genre history). The latter designated the process by which Hermann Gunkel and his contemporaries, working at the opening of the 20th century, identified small literary units within larger sections of biblical text, examining the units more closely then to discern the social environment in which the units may have arisen. (This environment was named the *Sitz im Leben* or situation within the life of a particular community.) After the First World War other German scholars, most famously Rudolf Bultmann, applied the method to the analysis of the gospels, and subsequently all scholarly comment upon gospels has been based on or reflects this critical methodology.

**The historical quest**

The PBC document of 1993 headed its account of interpretative approaches to the Bible with a strong commendation of the historical-critical method. The method has ‘an importance of the highest order’, allows ‘a better grasp of the content of divine revelation’ (p. 38), and ‘remains indispensable for making known the historical dynamism which animates Sacred Scripture... ‘(p. 42). This commendation came in spite of the fact that within the Roman Catholic tradition – although not only there, as has been illustrated – the method ‘stirred up serious reservations’ (p. 37). The most notorious expression of these, because of its publication as late as 1961 by the then Holy Office, was the Monitum directed against ‘bringing into doubt the genuine historical and objective truth ... even [in regard] to the sayings and deeds of Christ Jesus’ (Steinmueller, 1962, p. 586).

At the source of such reserve lay the starting supposition described in the PBC document:

> one of the results of this method has been to demonstrate more clearly that the tradition recorded in the New Testament had its origin and found its basic shape within Christian community, or early Church, passing from the preaching of Jesus himself to that which proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ (p. 37).

And this supposition – or more radical versions of it – is what Richard Bauckham has set himself to contest. He does not welcome a state of affairs in which we have so many ‘current historical Jesuses on offer’, among them the Jesus according to Dominic Crossan, Gerd Theissen, J. P. Meier... (p. 3). The critical methodology common to these writers has generated diverse outcomes as individual scholars and schools of thought have discerned ‘traditions [that] were freely created and modified according to the needs of the community’ (p. 245). Bauckham elaborates:

> Such communities ... had no reason to attempt to preserve historical accounts for their historical value. [...] The Jesus who mattered ... was Jesus the risen and exalted Lord, who was in direct relationship with the community. This contemporary Jesus addressed the community through the Christian prophets, whose words were often incorporated in the Gospel traditions and came to be attributed in the Gospels to the pre-Easter Jesus.
The one outcome common to the modern ‘historical quest’ Bauckham describes as follows:

in all cases the result is a Jesus reconstructed by the historian, a Jesus attained by the attempt to go back behind the Gospels and, in effect, to provide an alternative to the Gospels’ constructions of Jesus (p. 3).

The process, he concludes, has led to a seemingly unbearable ‘dilemma’: ‘Must history and theology part company at this point where Christian faith’s investment in history is at its most vital?’ (p. 4) Accordingly, he proceeds to forge ‘a better way forward, a way in which theology and history may meet in the historical Jesus instead of parting company there’ (p. 5). And the key into this ‘better way’ is, as his subtitle announces, ‘testimony’. The historical values attaching to testimony Bauckham explores at length in several sections of the book, but its process he states concisely:

...the period between the ‘historical’ Jesus and the Gospels was actually spanned, not by anonymous community transmission, but by the continuing presence and testimony of the eyewitnesses, who remained the authoritative sources of their traditions until their deaths... (p. 8).

Equally concisely, the relevance of testimony to the resolution of ‘the dilemma’ confronting contemporary Christian faith:

Understanding the Gospels as testimony, we can recognise [the] theological meaning of the history not as an arbitrary imposition on the objective facts, but as the way the witnesses perceived the history... observable event and perceptible meaning. Testimony ... is where history and theology meet (p. 5).

A historicist ally

The scholars, readers and students who have encountered Bauckham’s enthusiasm for ‘the “historical” Jesus’ – either in Jesus and the Eyewitnesses or in live interviews with him on the internet – may well be drawn to return to a closer analysis of Luke’s narrative. In this quest they are likely to find themselves attracted to the even more recent major study of The Historical Jesus of the Gospels by Craig S. Keener. Here, in the first pages they will find gracious acknowledgements of Bauckham (pp. xxvi, xxviii), and then they will read how Bauckham was one of two scholars who urged Keener to direct his interests and extensive resources in Jesus research towards ‘a “historical Jesus” book’ (p. xxix). In such circumstances, could the resultant book ever have admitted to not having found its quarry?

We need to note this development. Keener’s book, too, aims to insulate students of gospel literature against approaches taken by ‘some more sceptical scholars’ (p. 138) whom the author associates with the historical critical approach to gospels (e. g., pp.126-61). Keener could not have made clearer his intention in this regard than by the translation of Luke 1:1-2 with which he headlines chapter 10 on ‘The Gospels’ Oral Sources’: ‘many have sought to compile a narrative of the acts fulfilled in our midst, just as those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the message have from the beginning transmitted them orally to us’ (p. 139, emphasis added).

Plainly as this signals the aim of his enquiry, the intimidating statistics generated in the course of familiarising oneself with the book’s 860 pages appear designed to assure the reader of the uncompromising nature of the methodology adopted by the author. 349 of the 860 pages are the main text, 32 pages are introductory, 44 are appendices, 210 provide notes in a minor font, 110 present a bibliography of some 2500 items, and 118 pages present a series of indices. This is numbing scholarship and inevitably impresses. But is the scholarship definitive in the cause of the orality by force of which Keener seeks to establish the historical reliability of the gospels?

In the face of such a daunting apparatus, however, the student raised on a different methodology is not to be deterred from closer inspection of the argument. In fact the student will soon enough recognise that
the argument advances along paths of repeating probabilities, likelihoods, and approximations to ancient literary sources and that this argument is only dubiously supported by exponentially expanding reference to secondary literature of a mainly recent provenance.

Re-schooling for R. E. teachers?

Given the prominence attained by Bauckham’s book and its increasing sphere of influence within gospel studies, it would come as no surprise to see religious educators taking note of it, perhaps more immediately those with responsibilities for curriculum development, especially as practised within systemic schools. But not only there: for example, within the Victorian Certificate of Education Study Design Texts and Traditions (accredited 2010–2014), students whose course includes the study of a gospel are expected to develop and practise skills relating to ‘critical methods’ that include among others ‘source criticism, form criticism, sociocultural criticism, historical criticism, literary criticism, redaction criticism’ (p.33). Elucidations (pp. 33-35) confirm the priority of such methodologies in the approach to biblical text. Indeed, the whole gospel study is designed upon the premise of the academic validity of the historical-critical method.

Students themselves of course are highly unlikely to become aware of tensions which a passing familiarity with Bauckham’s critique of the historical-critical method could introduce into their own study of gospel narrative. The situation for their teachers, however, is entirely different. The nature of Bauckham’s critique could be a cause of confusion and possibly of anxiety for those who attempt to treat gospel text with a sensitivity developed through resources that are informed by, now, conventional scholarly attitudes to the nature of this material.

In addition, RECs within the schools may or may not be in a position to support and advise such teachers. But when writers of the calibre of Gerald O’Collins and scholarly publications like Craig Keener’s make appreciative comments, as already noted, about Bauckham’s line of argument favouring ‘trust in the Gospel accounts’ as historical narrative, it is altogether possible that RECs and school principals could one day find themselves in a tight corner. Perhaps a local pastor or bishop, having encountered or been informed about Bauckham’s revisionism, will see reason to intervene for the purpose of ensuring certain teaching outcomes. One could also envisage embarrassing scenes at parent interviews or public meetings with objections being voiced against this or that teacher by advocates of Bauckham’s study waving its 500 pages aloft and calling for a return to the Catholic orthodoxy of their youth.

The ‘eyewitness’ factor

Fortunately, addressing the problematic that Bauckham’s study could give rise to is not as complex as a 500-page book would seem to suggest. While it is true that Bauckham brings to his thesis an impressive array of scholarship across several challenging disciplines, the thesis takes its rise from a particular and narrowly based presupposition concerning the existence of ‘eyewitnesses’ whose accounts of the activities and teachings of Jesus remain the basis of the written gospels – synoptics as well as the Gospel According to John. Conveniently for the critic, the Greek term underlying this talk about ‘eyewitnesses’ occurs only once in the whole of the New Testament.

The term translated as ‘eyewitnesses’ is transliterated as autoptai, and it occurs only in the preface to Luke’s gospel (1:2). English-language New Testaments usually include one other instance of the term ‘eyewitnesses’ at 2 Peter 1:16, but the Greek term in this passage is different (epoptai), and has a technical character relating to witnessing preternatural occurrences, as in ancient Greek mystery rites, and occurs here in relation to the vision of the Transfiguration. It has no bearing on the discussion to follow.

Luke’s preface is a particularly interesting document in its own right mainly because here we see an early Christian author speaking his own mind as he makes a brief considered statement (38 words) about what he is writing in a gospel, what he hopes to achieve, and what his starting point is. The statement is unique,

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telling us far more than the only other authorial comments by the writer of a gospel in John 20:30-31 and 21:24.

Since Luke’s brief passage is the locale for a reconsideration of ‘eyewitnesses’ in the light of Richard Bauckham’s claims concerning the connection between ‘eyewitnesses’ and the development of the gospels, we are obliged to examine Luke’s text carefully. Obviously, the English translation alone will not suffice for this task. Indeed, the variations of meaning among the scores of English translations of the preface lead only to a cul-de-sac of strongly conflicting opinion as to what the author is up to. Frequently, then, we will need to introduce transliterated Greek words into the discussion. This makes the discussion diffuse, but the issue is serious and has oddly disturbing potential to disrupt not only the course of scholarly reflection on gospel texts but the harmony within Christian communities, be that schools, parishes – or indeed families.

The schooling of Theophilus

Bauckham is in no doubt that the individuals designated ‘eyewitnesses’ in virtually all our translations of Luke 1:2 were those who were, as he puts it, ‘qualified to tell the whole gospel story by virtue of participation in it from beginning to end’ (p. 124); they were ‘simply firsthand observers of the events’ (p. 117). In my earlier paper on Luke’s preface, I contested this understanding of the Greek term autoptai in Luke’s text (Collins, 2007, p. 63). There, however, this point formed just one element in an overview of the meaning and significance of the preface as a whole. Given, now, the more recent developments around Bauckham’s vigorously developed proposal, I would like to expand on my contention that in Luke’s preface the autoptai are not eyewitnesses in the sense proposed by Bauckham but are officers of long standing within the community whose role we will proceed to determine. Of course if this process eliminates from Bauckham’s argumentation the availability of ‘eyewitnesses’ who might provide testimonies, it would also undermine the remaining arguments for the presence of testimonies in the gospel narratives.

The almost uniform understanding has been that autoptai denotes ‘firsthand observers of the events’. Even the Latin Vulgate Bible reads the term this way: qui ab initio ipsi viderunt: ‘those who from the beginning themselves saw’. Moreover this understanding appears to be supported by other aspects of the preface as provided in our translations. Thus, on reading of matters having been ‘handed down’, we readily think of word of mouth. The expression ‘servants of the word’ (NRSV) reinforces this impression. Even the idea of the author ‘investigating everything carefully’ (1:3 NRSV) can throw up the image of a reporter doing the rounds of his sources. Indeed, Bauckham (pp. 29-30) comes close to saying this, while Keener (pp. 91-92) explicitly identifies such a process on the part of an evangelist. Further support comes from the author’s stated objective, which would appear to be to provide the reader with ‘the truth’ (1:4) of all these reports. CEV rounds out these impressions with the author deciding to ‘tell you exactly what took place [... in order] to let you know the truth about what you have heard’. This theme of orality overrides any reference to a literary dimension that is actually also in evidence. Thus Good News notes that the author’s precursors ‘wrote what we have been told [emphasis added] by those who saw these things’ (1:2).

The emphasis on orality in the translations would seem to be almost entirely due to the assumption that the tradition was dependent on ‘eyewitnesses’. To the contrary, closer inspection of the Greek text reveals the preface as a statement about a community with a long-standing involvement in a literary endeavour. In looking for signs of this involvement we will set aside for separate treatment the central phrase ‘eyewitnesses and servants of the word’. Independently of the significance of this phrase, the preface opens by pointing immediately to a pre-existing literary tradition associated with ‘many’ who had put their hand to the task of composing ‘narrative’ (1:1 RSV). Those narratives were characterised by the attempt to interpret certain events within the context of a biblical foreshadowing of them (‘fulfilled’, 1:1 NRSV). Any engagement with such a protracted undertaking supposes sophisticated literary skills. Although not all commentators recognise the notion of fulfilment in the Greek term used here, its reality as a factor in gospel narrative emerges from the first lines of Luke’s own narrative to its last. The rich referencing to biblical parallels and precedent is by no means all of Luke’s doing. It was the fruit of profound earlier
Christian examination of the Scripture. This evidences the biblical literacy of this community well before their method became part of Luke’s theological heritage and characterised his narrative so strongly.

The second half of the preface is more explicit in its reference to literary activity. The author’s own composition has been constructed as ‘an orderly account’ and is designed to complement the earlier documentation. Those documents were part of what Theophilus had been exposed to during the prior period when he was being ‘instructed’ (1:4 NRSV). The present author’s objective in drawing up a new account is, according to virtually all translations, that Theophilus might ‘know the truth’.

We ought to note in passing that, according to the Greek, this is not a matter of historical veracity or of getting the facts right. Had Luke wanted Theophilus to attain historical certitude, he would have written alētheia, a term designating the kind of ‘truth’ Pontius Pilate was cynical about (John 18:38). The term Luke uses, however, is asphaleia. Interestingly, this is the word flashing in neon lights atop insurance buildings from Athens to Thessaloniki and Alexandroupoli in Greece today, assuring the public that they can have every confidence in the insurance industry. Luke’s hope for Theophilus was that by reading the gospel narrative he would attain to an inner conviction: an assurance and deeper appreciation in regard to the matters in which he had already received instruction.

In addition to these evidences of literary activities, the preface provides also a keen sense of community involvement in the processes. This is a community already living out of the inner convictions the author urges Theophilus to aspire to. It is a community to which the author belongs, and all in it share a sense of the long work of God in having brought them together into a Messianic age (‘fulfilled among us’). The community is equally aware of innate linkages with predecessors in faith (‘handed on to us’). Theophilus has already been ushered into this rarefied social environment, and is already well schooled in its rationale. What place in it did ‘the eyewitnesses and servants of the word’ hold?

The logos factor

Each of these three terms (in Greek, in order, autoptai; hypēretai; logos) contributes further to our understanding of the community and its works. They also convey ideas at some remove from what our translations mostly suggest. My earlier article has given indications of the range of these ideas. (Collins, 2007, pp. 62-63). To appreciate the relevance of the ideas to the discussion about ‘eyewitnesses’, we will need to examine these three words closely.

Firstly, the third word, which is logos. This term is familiar to many in its theological dimension of the Word of God (John 1:1,14). In relation to its meaning in Luke 1:2, in the middle of the third century the great Greek scholar, Origen, interestingly asked whether there might be a reference to Jesus as the Word of God. He was not overly confident, however, and suggested alternatively that logos here could be the ‘message’ that disciples must teach (2042.078, 34-35). If the great scholar admits the possibility of such broadly different meanings here, perhaps there is room to draw upon another of the many meanings logos can carry in Greek

One of the standard meanings logos conveys is simply ‘book’. Thus Luke calls his gospel his ‘first book’ or ‘first treatise’ (Acts 1:1). Two centuries later Eusebius similarly refers to his Ecclesiastical History as a logos (1.2.2). He also opens that book with a reference to those who had proclaimed the logos of God ‘by speech or by pen’ (1.1.1), that is, the written logos or book. In the context of literacy which Luke establishes in the preface, ‘servants of the [written] word’ could well be engaged with those books which ‘many’ had already published (1:1).

The likelihood of logos here designating such books or documents increases with the knowledge that ‘servants’ is wholly inadequate as a translation of hypēretai. This is a well known term with a plainly bureaucratic background (Collins, 1990/2009, p. 362). Elsewhere Luke used it to designate authorised missionaries. This he does in regard to Paul in a passage where the heavenly Christ appoints Paul as ‘a
in the preface, then, we are being told of the existence of community officers with responsibilities in connection with the *logos* as read and taught in the community’s schooling programme.

**The semantic profile of *autoptai***

The first term, *autoptai*, is our main interest, but it too needs to be evaluated within the same context. Bauckham is correct to point out the inadequacy of ‘eyewitnesses’ as a translation (p. 117); in our minds, the term has too much of a forensic colour carrying over from law courts and TV dramas. Nonetheless, the term remains important to him because in his view it represents what the Greek means here, namely, ‘simply firsthand observers of the events’. The claim, however, cannot be so easily established.

As well as ‘firsthand observers of the events’, the term also – and very commonly - designates people who *go to see for themselves after* the events. In such a situation the *autoptai* are acting more in the role of an assessor. Galen, the medical writer of third century Pergamum, illustrated this use in reporting what he learnt as an *autoptēs* in the course of his autopsies.

In addition to events, then, one can also *see for oneself* an object or a situation. This usage occurs in Greek sources. A short list of examples includes the course of a river (Herodotus 2.29.3); the texture of the lotus fruit (Polybius 12.2.1); impiety against the Gods (Polybius 12.4d.2); a treasure horde (Polybius 18.35.5); a decadent culture (Polybius 29.21.8); a woman’s beauty (Josephus, *AJ* 18.342.2); an enemy’s corpse (Josephus, *AJ* 19.125.2). There is absolutely no reason why Luke cannot be writing about *autoptai* of documents: community officers who authenticate the documents that have accumulated from the ‘many’ literary initiatives Luke reports at 1:1.

Of course, in the phrase ‘the eyewitnesses and servants of the word’ scholars normally understand ‘of the word’ as applying only to ‘servants’. This then suggests to some that these ‘servants of the word’ are a group of individuals separate from the ‘eyewitnesses’. Against this, others draw attention to a Greek word applying only to ‘servants’. This extra Greek word is *genomenoi* and normally means ‘being’ but can also have the sense of ‘becoming’. Choosing the latter sense, these scholars claim that the whole phrase really means ‘eyewitnesses who later became servants of the word’.

Fitzmyer had questioned the likelihood of such an understanding of the Greek, and used an instance from the writings of Josephus to show that *genomenoi* really goes with *autoptai* as ‘an ordinary Greek phrase’ (p. 295). Thirty years later, access to the TLG database of all ancient Greek literature reveals how right Fitzmyer was. The use of the word *genomenoi* in conjunction with *autoptai* is idiomatic.

Of 57 instances of *autoptai* in Greek sources prior to 100 CE, 54 instances occur in conjunction with some form of the verb *genomenoi* in the sense ‘being an eyewitness’. The usage very much suggests that *genomenoi* lends an emphasis to the word ‘eyewitness’, as in a phrase like ‘being *myself* an eyewitness’. The same idiomatic pattern occurs in another 200 instances (not including citations of Luke’s phrase) over the following four centuries. In striking contrast, however, not once does the TLG database display such an idiomatic connection between *genomenoi* and *hypēretai* (except in citations of Luke’s phrase in works by Christian writers).

**Inserting the missing link**

Although *genomenoi* does not appear in our translations, it nonetheless plays a crucial role in how we are to read the Greek phrase *‘[the] eyewitnesses and servants [being] of the word’*. The term occurs in the phrase solely because of its idiomatic connection with *autoptai*. Further, the two Greek terms for ‘the’ and

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‘being’, although not appearing in our translations, form a set of brackets around the two terms ‘eyewitnesses’ and ‘servants’. This can only mean that the ‘eyewitnesses’ are also ‘servants’ and, of course, the ‘servants’ are also ‘eyewitnesses’. The same group of individuals, in other words, have two functions, one as *autoptai* and another as *hypēretai*. (There were probably more generations of this group than just one.)

More importantly, the bracketing of the terms also means that both terms have a grammatical connection with the last term in the phrase, the term that lies outside the brackets. This term is *logos*. This means that Luke is referring to ‘*autoptai* of the *logos*’ as well as to ‘*hypēretai* of the *logos*’. In other words, a connection with *logos* is not exclusive to the *hypēretai*. This could surprise today’s reader. It was no surprise, however, to Origen. Commenting on the phrasing here, Origen made an immediate connection between *autoptai* and *logos* (2042.078, 14–20).

In our reading of *logos* in a documentary sense, which is the sense elicited by the literary context established by the author, we thus end up with community officers who, in one capacity (*autoptai*), authenticate the community’s records of their religious history and experience and, in another but related capacity (*hypēretai*), make authoritative use of the documents in the community’s schooling processes. Such use includes explicating the documents and teaching to them.

One final aspect of the phrasing not yet mentioned or accounted for is the italicised English expression in the phrase ‘those who from the beginning were *autoptai* and *hypēretai* of the *logos*’ (1:2). Since scholars have largely understood *autoptai* as ‘eyewitnesses’, they have tended to read ‘from the beginning’ as referring to the beginning of the gospel story in the appearance of John the Baptist, as at Acts 1:22. Within Luke’s context of the community’s faithful dedication to the tradition, however, ‘from the beginning’ refers to the beginning of the community’s formation as a group of Christian believers under the guidance and tutelage of their own officers.

To this one might usefully add that the expression at the end of the long phrase (‘*hypēretai* of the *logos*’) would make no sense as applied to contemporary disciples of the historical Jesus. This fact of itself requires that ‘the beginning’ dates from the formation of the community: only in a community living without the visible presence of the Master is there room for ‘officers of the word’.

**Conclusion**

We are not to be surprised that in his preface Luke should exhibit a sustained interest in the literary endeavours of the community to which he and Theophilus belonged. His gospel narrative witnesses to his keen literary sense. Indeed, the rhetoric within the brief preface, consisting as it does of a well wrought single Greek period sentence, itself advertises Luke’s literary sensibilities. And throughout the narrative, of course, we observe the unmistakable authorial control which Luke exercises over both its structure and telling detail.

Both these features are expertly managed to clarify and richly enhance the dramatic theological scenario envisaged by Luke. How much of the design was his own and how much part of his Christian heritage is not for discussion here, but certainly Luke was indebted to an industrious tradition that had been building across a few short generations. The driving force here and the creative religious instinct characterising it we owe to the literary artifices of unnamed ‘guarantors and teachers of the Word’.

If such a conclusion would appear to have dispensed with ‘eyewitnesses’ as an observable factor in the formation of the gospel genre, it does little to exacerbate the unease Richard Bauckham evidences at the point where ‘history and theology part company’ (p. 4). As early as Christian literary activity is traceable, namely in Paul, we are plunged deep into theology. Today we may struggle there. But the fact remains that we know of no Christianity outside of a theological context.
Those who developed the context and those who simply lived within it did not experience it as a theology in the sense of a discipline or of a dogmatic confession but as an extension of the age-old conversation with the God of Judaism, now, in their re-reading of the Septuagint Greek Bible, continuing to manifest heavenly outbreaks of saving, shepherdng, enlivening, empowering, creative forces. The conduit was Jesus and the Spirit. Christian faith needs no ‘investment in history’, as Bauckham would have it. It does need, however, what he also describes as ‘The Jesus who mattered ... who was in direct relationship with the community’ (p. 245). Having faith in that, communities needed only to sustain it through the reassurances provided by stories of bent women, lost sons, dropped coins, burgeoning fields.

References


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MEMORY IN THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSROOM
(PART 1: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES, CONSTRUCTIVISM
AND FOUNDATIONAL CONTENT)

Abstract

This paper is about memory, its place in the religious education classroom and the way it might inform the practice of religious education. The paper is in two parts. Part 2 will be published in a later issue of this journal in 2010.

In Part 1, the argument is put forward that memory and rote learning are under-utilised in the religious education classroom. Further, Part 1 appeals for a balance between constructivist educational models and models of teaching that incorporate memory and rote learning so that student knowledge of foundational content is enhanced. Part 2 will offer a perspective that the arts, namely music performance, may be a source of inspiration to religious educators for embracing memory.

Introduction

This is the first part of a paper about memory, its place in the religious education classroom and the way it might inform the practice of religious education. Memory and rote learning are considered in historical context and in relation to constructivist educational models. Engagement with memory may offer ways to improve student knowledge of foundational content in religious education. Knowledge of foundational content is critical in educational design. Bloom’s taxonomy suggests that foundational content knowledge needs to be addressed before other cognitive objectives. The second part of this paper (to be published in a later issue) will offer a discussion of the arts, namely music performance, as a source of inspiration to religious educators for embracing memory. For instance, in piano performance and in other disciplines that utilise motor skills, memory is applauded and approved. Memory should be met with similar approval in the religious education classroom.

Memory and Rote Learning

Memory and one of its pedagogical derivatives, rote learning, continue to be under-utilised in religious education. Engaging memory in the classroom is considered unrefined, unimaginative and, simply, outdated (Kuhlthau, 2001, p. 27; Manning & Bucher, 2001, p. 162). It is rare for students in contemporary Australian religious education classrooms to be explicitly required to commit discipline content to memory. On the development of memory, Australian religious educator Maurice Ryan (2007) claims that “while later approaches to classroom religion teaching and learning abandoned this intellectual capacity, consideration of the desirability of memorisation has been lost in the reaction against, even revulsion towards, the over-reliance on memorisation and rote recall” (p. 50). A consequence of this is that religious education students tend to encounter learning activities that more frequently address higher order processing skills at the expense of activities that seek to develop declarative memory.

Likewise, rote learning is not utilised in the classroom as often as it once was. One of the reasons for this is discipline-historical. The nineteenth century catechism approach to religious education employed rote learning and is notorious for its crude and coercive pedagogy (O’Farrell, 1985, p. 146). That approach withstood well into the twentieth century but began to be seriously challenged in the 1960s. At that time, “many teachers were moving away from or had moved away from instructional learning in their other
teaching. Now they were doing it in religious education. Many were aware of the weaknesses in their own religious education, especially the drawbacks of rote learning and the lack of congruence that much [of it]...had with their own lives” (English, 2005, pp. 43-44). As the life experience catechesis approach to religious education flourished and developed, the use of rote learning decreased. Rymarz (2009) argues that by the mid to late-1970s “the old model of RE...was now well and truly abandoned” (p. 16). Rote learning in classroom religious education, it seems, was dead. Ryan (2007) has noted that rote recall has been “almost completely ignored in subsequent approaches [after the catechism approach] to religious education” (p. 31). Although many religious educators are not sure what exactly to do in their classroom, they do know not to adopt the question and answer method: “Who made the world? God made the world” is a no-no.

**Bloom’s Taxonomy and the Rise of Higher Order Processes**

Another reason why memory and rote learning continue to be under-utilised can be related to the reception of Bloom’s (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* which is based on a process-content distinction. This taxonomy has received wide acceptance (Curtis, Edwards, Holbert, & Bishop, 2004, p. 21; McGrath & Noble, 2005, p. 22; Pasch, Langer, Gardner, Starko, & Moody, 1995, pp. 51-56), but not universal acceptance (Killen, 2005, pp. 180-181; Ormell, 1991, pp. 15, 35-36) since its publication in 1956. It has undergone revision (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) and has been adopted by many schools and school systems in Australia (Green, 2003; Maher, 2009; Slattery, 2004).

Bloom claimed in 1956 that “many teachers and educators prize knowledge to some extent because of the simplicity with which it can be taught or learned” (p. 34). Further, he claimed that “the layman frequently regards knowledge and education as being synonymous. The great emphasis on radio quiz programs and tests of either historical or contemporary information which appear in newspapers and magazines further reflects (sic) the status of knowledge in our culture” (p. 34). In 1956 Western education was dominated by the pursuit of knowledge and a lack of emphasis on what has come to be known as the higher order processes. Bloom and his colleagues saw their taxonomy as one means in which educational objectives (predominantly in schools) could be refined and explored. They sought to further refine the understanding of the development of cognitive (and affective and psychomotor) skills and appropriate pedagogies to match.

Subsequently, contemporary educators, including religious educators, have become more concerned, and sometimes preoccupied, with the higher order processes at the expense of foundational and formative content. Memory and foundational content have much less credence in the contemporary classroom than do the behavioural processes of creating, evaluating and analysing. Bloom and his colleagues published the taxonomy, in part, to break the dominance of raw knowledge in the curriculum. To a large extent, they succeeded. In Australian schools these days the pursuit of the higher order thinking skills is common fare. Rossiter (1999) made this point at the 1998 *National Symposium on Critical Issues in Religious Education and Ministry* identifying two factors, amongst others, that have had a shaping influence on Catholic religious education in Australia since the 1950s: an emphasis on process by contrast with content, and the rise of critical education which has seen “more emphasis on analysis, evaluation and interpretation rather than on learning facts” (p. 7). These days, it seems that assessment has less validity if students are not synthesising or evaluating. To ask students to simply recall information in a test does not cut the educational mustard.

This paper is not proposing that contemporary religious educators return wholesale to the Penny Catechism (Archbishops and Bishops of Australia, n.d.) and the nineteenth century pedagogy that accompanied it. However, it does suggest that there is benefit in developing students’ declarative memory and that rote learning may have a place in the contemporary religious education classroom. The development of students’ declarative memory and the use of rote learning need not be crude or coercive. Nor do they need to shame the student or the teacher (Moran, 1997, p. 26). And, of course, it must be noted that rote learning is not the only way to develop student memory. In early childhood, for example, “games like peek-a-boo, search and find, and hide and seek nurture abilities to retrieve information from memory” (Roskos & Christie, 2007, p. 96).
There is, however, some resistance to the idea that memory and rote learning might have a place in contemporary schooling. This resistance deserves to be challenged. To do so requires consideration of the constructivist context of schooling in Australia. On face value, rote learning is the antithesis of constructivist educational models. But, as I suggest later in this paper, they need not be mutually exclusive.

Constructivism and Schooling

At times, teachers are told what their job will be like in the future. They have been told that they will have to change their ways because their new-generation clients are from a different planet. Teachers have been reminded about the world of their students: their students don’t know a world without the internet, without ATMs, without mobile phones, without laptops. Students don’t know what a typewriter is, they have never seen a 33rpm record and they have never posted a letter in an envelope. Many education-futurists have forged a niche-market in being the grim reaper to the modern teacher. Religious educators have not been immune from the warnings.


Much of what Beare’s Angelica has to say seems reasonable or has come to pass. Angelica expects to live until she is over 80 (p. 11), in secondary school she will study the effect of human activity on the environment (p. 12), the sea will concern her generation (p. 14), she will have more than one employer in her lifetime (p. 15) and there is a greater-than-50-per-cent chance that her mother will work full-time (p. 16). This is reasonable enough, but hardly mind-blowing revelation even by the standards of 2001.

However, Beare makes a significant point that warrants some reflection-in-hindsight. Angelica says “Words like ‘subjects’, ‘classes’, ‘grades’ and ‘promotion’ do not make much sense to me. Schools will not be organized that way by the time I leave primary education” (p. 16). Nine years on in 2010, Angelica is 14 and she left primary school a few years ago. Virtually all primary schools in Australia continue to organise themselves around subjects, classes, grades and promotion. And there is little to indicate that this will soon change.

Whether teachers (or students) breathe a sigh of relief or not about this story is not important for this paper. The story of how Angelica’s primary education panned out is important here because it provides a snapshot of constructivist approaches to education. We were warned that Angelica would build her own world, her own knowledge. Her teachers were warned to get with her program or get out of her way. Warner (2006) suggests that “Professor Beare’s Angelica would argue, at the age of five, that she is starting school without the need for dependence on teachers, but with a desire to have teachers work with her to explore her world. She also does not want them controlling her or her search for her world view...” (p. 30).

Angelica and her generation would revolutionise education. It appears though, in hindsight, that Angelica and her friends progressed from Year 1 to Year 2 to Year 3 and so on. They progressed this way doing Maths, English, Science and, if they were in Catholic schools, Religious Education. Just as their teachers did when they were in school. The future, in schooling at least, may not be that much different from the past.

Constructivist models and Bloom’s taxonomy are evident in Rees’ (2006) view of contemporary education: “Today’s curriculum actively engages students in higher level processes through a carefully planned curriculum which melds content and process” (p. 12). In the new educational order, Rees goes on to say, “power and responsibility is [sic] returned to the students” because they are “empowered to explore different perspectives and develop their own perceptions, beliefs and attitudes” (p. 12). This allows students to “take advantage of their awareness and often challenge the statements, values and thinking processes of their teachers” (p. 12). One could be excused for thinking that this is the curriculum that Angelica had in mind for herself at the age of five. It is not unreasonable though, to ask what foundational content students are exposed to before they head off on these explorations and challenges. In this view of education one may even question the value of having the teacher in the room at all.
There is something odd about this return of power to students in their schooling years. Most credible texts on parenting to toddlers and infants extol the value and importance of setting boundaries. Yet, when young people enter the school gates the boundaries seem to be removed for a new order of free-wheeling power, exploration and challenge. The teacher seems to be more a hindrance than a help. On the contrary, the role of the teacher need not be obliterated or reduced to equal status with the student; the teacher has a distinct and critical role to play in the classroom (Moran, 1997, p. 162). In riposte to the constructivist idea that teachers be facilitators of learning, Hattie (in Lebihan, 2009, p. 30) has suggested that teachers be activators of learning. “Activators help children learn by giving extensive feedback, setting challenging goals, using direct instruction and helping them learn powerful strategies such as self-verbalisation and self-questioning” (Lebihan, 2009, p. 30).

There is certainly a place for the constructivist paradigm in schooling. Amongst other benefits, it promotes an active involvement in education, real-world contextual learning and an assent to the social nature of learning (Gordon, 1998, p. 391; Phillips, 1995, p. 11). However, when it is elevated to such a status that it disregards the important role of the teacher and dismisses the value of conventions it can result in an educational imbalance. For example, constructivist “educ-pop”, as Hattie (2005, p. 14) calls it, may not always best suit the task of improving student knowledge. It might even be stifling and detrimental because it has not been developed with “good consideration of the human mind” (Lebihan, 2009, p. 30) or, specifically, with consideration for the working memory capacities of young people (Woolfolk, 2004, pp. 258-259).

Reclaiming Foundational Content

In an opinion piece in the Australian press, Lebihan (2009) notes a “sea-change” (p. 30) against the constructivist approach to education. She suggests that the constructivist approach has resulted in an imbalance in contemporary classroom teaching. The imbalance consists of an over-emphasis on process and an under-emphasis on content. In the language of Bloom’s taxonomy, classroom educators have focused on analytical and evaluative processes to the detriment of foundational content.

In contemporary classrooms, there has been too much concern with what students can do and not enough concern with what they know. This point was also made as early as 1981 by Furst who argued that “by following a wholly process-oriented approach to the objectives of education, we have supposedly lost the essential characteristics of an educated person: that he or she possess a rational, connected view of the world. This is also to say that content is under-represented in the taxonomy” (p. 446). Constructivist approaches to education may not be the most effective approaches for improving student knowledge. Lebihan (2009) suggests that “one concept that goes against the grain of popular thinking is the idea that ‘discovery learning’ – discovering answers by working through problems for oneself – is counter-productive for novices because it overloads ‘working memory’, or short-term memory” (p. 30).

The importance of knowledge as a foundational objective is made by Bloom (1956) himself:

Such information (knowledge) represents the elements that the specialist must use in communicating about his [sic] field, in understanding it, and in organizing it systematically...[These specifics] become the basic elements the student or learner must know if he is to be acquainted with the field or to solve any of the problems in it. (p. 63)

In contemporary religious education terms, knowledge constitutes the elements that the student must use to communicate with religious literacy. That is, to develop a student’s religious literacy the religious educator must give consideration to the basic knowledge that a student will need to possess in order to process that knowledge in intellectual, creative and generative ways. Students will need to encounter this knowledge before they are able to critique it. Helping students construct this knowledge may lack efficacy and efficiency; there may be times when teachers have to rely on the traditional transmission approach in order to improve student knowledge. This transmission approach might include rote learning and other strategies that engage explicitly with memory.
Eisner (1995) advocates for the importance of the higher order skills in the classroom. But he also notes the importance of foundational content and the traditional ways in which it can be gained:

There are, we must acknowledge, a number of important tasks that students must learn in school in which innovation is not useful. Learning how to spell correctly means knowing how to replicate the known. The same holds true for much of what is taught in early arithmetic and in the language arts. There are many important tasks and skills that students need to learn – i.e. conventions – that are necessary for doing more important work that educational programs should help them learn. (p. 762)

With some ease, most religious educators could generate a long list of the foundational content that they would like their students to know at the end of each unit, the end of each academic year or upon graduation. In all probability, this content is already documented in their school work programs and their systemic syllabuses. Eisner (2002) talks of the use of technical skills in the arts and arts education as “not the mindless application of routine habits” (p. 109). At first, it may appear that that there is no correlative set of technical skills in religious education as there is in any of the arts. However, a little thought can generate a substantial list:

- Referencing books, chapters and verses in the Bible.
- Accessing data in an atlas of religions.
- Producing a list of popes in chronological order.
- Accessing a particular paragraph in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Naming the vessels, vestments and design features of a Church.
- Reading and recognising the Greek or Hebrew alphabet.
- Learning prayers, poems and biblical passages by heart.
- Remembering the names of the four gospels, the books of the Pentateuch or indeed, the books of the Old and/or New Testaments
- Knowing correct spelling of key names
- Sketching a map of the Holy Land and labelling it with places, waterways and geographical features.
- Recalling key dates in church history

Any task in this list does not need to be mindless either. For example, a sound grasp of the places, waterways and features of the Holy Land will better assist students in comprehending the geographical theology in Mark’s gospel (Painter, 1996, pp. 7-8). Likewise, before students can engage in textual criticism and understand the ambiguity in the meaning of a particular Greek text in the New Testament, they will need to be able to recognise (at least) some key Greek words. In order to recognise some key Greek words they will need to be familiar with the Greek alphabet. Recognising, remembering, knowing and applying the letters of the Greek alphabet require not mindless engagement, but focused, concentrating and mindful engagement.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the teaching of foundational content can be informed by constructivist ideas. Vygotskian theory of scientific concepts suggests that young people will better grasp external foundational content if it is exposed to them via familiar or known concepts (Panofsky, John-Steiner, & Blackwell, 1990, pp. 252-253). This idea aligns itself with the task of making religious education personal and relevant for students. Constructivist educational models and models of teaching that incorporate memory and rote learning need not be mutually exclusive. They can work together to enhance the educational experience.

Conclusion

It has been argued here that memory and rote learning have been under-utilised in contemporary religious education. They have been under-utilised for historical reasons and because they do not fit hand-in-glove with a constructivist view of knowledge. However, our contention is memory and rote learning may have a role to play in terms of students’ knowing and understanding foundational content. It is not uncommon for
religious educators, of any school year level, to have moments of despair or rueful reflection about their students’ knowledge before, during or after a unit of work. Politically incorrect though they may be, engagement with memory and rote learning may offer the religious educator some sound educational alternatives for improving student knowledge.

References


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Abstract

This is the second of two articles reporting the conclusions drawn from a doctoral research study on teachers’ understandings of the nature, purposes and conduct of live-in retreats for senior secondary students in Catholic schools (Tullio, 2009; Tullio & Rossiter, 2009). It discusses critical issues for the future of retreats, in both theory and practice, referenced to the psychological and spiritual issues raised by the sample of teachers in the study. Of special significance is the personal and community dimension, and how this in turn underpins the potential of retreats to enhance young people’s spirituality and personal faith. While the extent to which these issues are pertinent to Catholic school retreats across the country is yet to be determined, and while there will remain different estimates of retreats depending on the perspective taken on youth spirituality, the article should contribute as a stimulus to ongoing debate and research on school retreats.

Introduction

In his national review of religious education in Australian schools, Rossiter (1981, p. 110) considered that “the prominent place given to retreats or religious camps is a distinctive feature of religious education programs in Catholic secondary schools”. Since its relatively humble beginnings in Adelaide in 1964, the live-in communitarian retreat has developed from an isolated, grassroots teacher innovation to a valued fixture in the religious life and educational program of Catholic schools.

Research on the views of year 12 students has long shown that young people in Catholic schools have enjoyed their retreats and considered that they made a valued contribution to their spiritual development (Flynn, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Maroney, 2008). Nevertheless, despite their success, it is surprising that little is said about retreats in diocesan documents on Catholic schooling and religious education (Tullio, 2009). Similarly, apart from some retreat manuals produced in the United States, some small local Australian resources, and a few articles in journals, little has been published about the nature, purposes and practices of retreats (Firman, 1968; Rossiter, 1975, 1978, 1997; Harrison, 1989; Tullio & Rossiter, 2009).

Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of student views of retreats has been their popularity as enjoyable experiences. However, it is unlikely that Catholic schools could continue to justify the sacrifice of valuable year 12 class time, the retreat costs, as well as significant senior school staff resources, if the retreats were just about giving students a ‘good experience’. Explanations of the spiritual and religious dimension to retreats are not always convincing, especially for school staff not involved in retreats. In a crowded curriculum, with ever increasing pressure on schools to produce the best academic results they can, there is a looming crisis for the place of live-in retreats in Catholic secondary schools.

This is the second of two articles concerned with putting retreats into better perspective, highlighting their psychological and spiritual functions as well as identifying and trying to address problems that can compromise their value. Hopefully, this will stimulate further reflection, debate and research on retreats to help secure their future in Australian Catholic education. The issues considered here were identified by the sample of teachers interviewed in the doctoral research of Tullio (2009). How extensively these issues might apply at a national level is yet to be determined. Nevertheless, they remain significant potential problems for the conduct of retreats, and as such they could well be part of the agenda for any systematic
professional development program for the training of teachers as retreat leaders.

**Psychological dimensions to the retreat process**

**The place of personalism in the retreat:** For our purposes, the idea of ‘personalism’ in retreats is regarded as the intentional interest of educators in promoting a personal dimension to the retreat process. This includes a desirable place for the expression of emotion, good feelings and sense of community; it is particularly concerned with achieving a personal level in discussions and in interactions between students, and between students and teachers; it values personal sharing and personal disclosures.

The idea of promoting personalism has a long history in Catholic school religious education in Australia. It was considered to be a distinctive feature in the historical development of Catholic school religious education in the 1960s and 1970s, and especially in the live-in retreat movement (Rossiter, 1981; Rossiter, 1999). Rossiter (1999) considered that some of the attempts to make religious education personal, experiential and relevant to the lives of young people in those times were somewhat misdirected; but he judged that “relevance and personalism are the most important issues for Catholic religious education into the next Millennium – much more important now than they ever were in the 1970s.” (p. 9). He was referring specifically to the classroom component of religious education where he believed that an intellectually challenging, academic and content-rich study of religion provided the most favourable context for personal discussion as well for content that students felt had relevance to their search for meaning and purpose in life in a complex and confusing world (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 392-408). Developing the notions of content relevance and pedagogical relevance was central to this thinking.

But what was not clarified in this discourse was the place for personalism and relevance in retreats. The context of retreats differs significantly from that of the classroom — with different psychological potential for promoting personal and spiritual development. The latter was specifically geared to a student-centred, academic research-oriented study, with formal content in written, oral, audiovisual and Internet resources, together with specified knowledge/skills outcomes and assessment tasks; the classroom ‘channel’ to personalism and relevance was academic and subject-oriented. On the other hand, the live-in retreat had a different ‘channel’ to personalism and relevance because it was quite distant from the academic context; it was informal and was much more suited to experiential activities; also, the discussions on retreats naturally tended to be more personal and narrative in tone — contrasting with the ‘informed debate’ model that was appropriate for discussion in the religion classroom; the idea of sharing personal insights was at home in the discussions on retreats. And it was associated with personal reflection and review of life.

There is a literature in the philosophy of education that looks at the emotional dimension to learning (E.g. Carr, 2003; Damasio, 1994). But this is more concerned with learning in the formal classroom curriculum. Similarly, writings on what is called ‘Social, emotional and academic learning’ (SEAL) (E.g. Cefai & Cooper, 2009; Folsom, 2008; Zins et. al. 2004.) deal with socially oriented classroom pedagogies and not with the more psychological/spiritually focused learning that is the focus of retreats. The latter is better understood in terms of personal ‘learning’ as described in humanistic psychology (Tullio & Rossiter, 2009) and is explained in Crawford & Rossiter (2006, pp. 283-286).

Understanding the contrasting, yet valuably complementary, places for personalism / relevance in retreats and in classroom religion lessons is important for religious education. It helps show the different emphases and potentials in each context as regards psychological and spiritual dynamics. And it gives a broader picture of how a range of educative processes in schooling can be personal and relevant for pupils.

In his book on retreats, Rossiter (1978) claimed that developing the personal and community dimension to retreats was one of the key purposes of the retreat leaders who first conducted communitarian retreats since the mid-1960s. He considered that while having personal interactions was valuable, there was a need for caution because of the potential for misuse. The comments by teachers in this study confirmed that, 45 years after the introduction of communitarian retreats, the situation remains the same:- personal
interactions and discussions are thought to build a sense of community that enhances the spiritual impact of the retreat; but sometimes there are excesses in personal disclosures that cause emotional difficulties and / or problems with confidentiality.

The sections that follow will discuss some of the potentialities and problems for personalism identified in the study.

**Emotion and euphoria:** Enjoyment, emotion, good feelings and euphoria have long been known to be prominent in school retreats (Flynn, 1993; Rossiter, 1975, 1978). This can be evident in laughter, smiles and camaraderie with others; and in turn, euphoric feelings can flow into the celebration of liturgy, making it a more tangible expression of a caring, believing community. ‘Re-entry’ to ordinary life and making adjustments following the emotional high of a retreat have been taken into account by retreat leaders. For example: some students found it difficult to reconcile their happy retreat feelings with the reality of less than happy feelings in their life at home and school; if the retreat euphoria was not identified and explained to some extent, the students may have felt puzzled by it, and perhaps emotionally manipulated by the retreat leaders. But there is evidence that while retreat leaders valued young people’s enjoyment of live-in retreats, they did not show that they had a good functional theory for understanding and interpreting the natural place and the educational role of emotion and euphoria within retreat dynamics – and within the broader context of school education.

The scheme of Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 283-286) proposed a theory as to how emotion can be regarded as a useful, ethical and healthy part of students’ personal learning. Just having emotional experiences in themselves was not necessarily educational. Appropriate expressions of emotion by pupils in any educational context could be regarded as ‘healthy’ when they flow naturally out of educative experiences – as normal by-products – and not out of situations that were intentionally devised to stimulate their emotions. The presence of emotion often made a learning experience more holistic (E.g. in studying literature, drama, poetry, art, music, science etc.) One of the useful contributions that school education might make to the development of young people’s emotional maturity would be to help them learn how to identify emotional responses (as different from intellectual responses) and to be able to put their emotions into some sort of perspective. In other words, there needed to be the promotion of some understanding of emotion and of when and where different expressions of emotion would be acceptable in a community. Also needed would be some understanding of the positive contribution that emotions make to human expression, communication, behaviour and personal maturity. In addition, an educational scheme for healthy emotional education needs to have an accompanying code of teacher ethics to guide retreat leaders (and teachers) in the use of activities that can stimulate emotions (The recommended code of ethics is ‘committed impartiality’ developed by Hill, 1981, 1982; summarised in Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 295-298).

When emotion and euphoria flow naturally from fun educative activities on retreats, this enhances the sense of community as individuals experience the joy and exhilaration in developing new friendships and in affirming old friendships; and this includes friendship with the responsible adults. Sometimes there can be valuable personal learnings, first experienced within the favourable and euphoric situation of the retreat, which can then gradually become more of a conviction and commitment after the initial euphoric feelings fade.

There is a need to acknowledge that there is value in students having healthy fun and enjoyment for their own sake. However, this in itself would hardly be a good justification for having a live-in retreat – hence the importance of having a scheme like that referred to above for interpreting emotional education and for informing the use of activities that have emotional potential. The ‘emotional potential’ of an activity on retreat needs to be appraised before it is tried out on students. If it is likely to trigger an excessive expression of emotion that cannot adequately be dealt with within the normal complement of staff resources at the retreat, then it should be judged inappropriate. Also important would be the skills of retreat leaders in dealing relatively comfortably with students’ emotions. Healthy emotional responses
could then be accepted as natural consequences of retreat activities; but it would be questionable to make specific emotional responses the intentional outcomes to be pursued.

This study showed that retreat leaders often associated emotions and euphoria with personal disclosure in group discussions. This question will now be considered in more detail.

**Personal sharing and personal disclosure in small group discussions:** Most of the retreat leaders who were interviewed considered that *telling your personal story* was a central theme in the dynamics of their retreats. It was expected that adult retreat leaders would disclose something of their own personal story (including beliefs and values) either in whole group inputs, or in small group discussions, as a principal stimulus for getting students to talk about their own personal lives. The idea of personal sharing was espoused as particularly valuable, and the success of small group discussions tended to be measured in terms of whether or not they resulted in personal disclosures from students. In turn, such disclosures could develop an ‘electric’ like atmosphere of emotion in the groups which could lead to strong feelings of empathy, group bonding and sense of group identity; this was not unlike the dynamics in counselling, ‘sensitivity’ or ‘encounter’ groups (Rogers, 1961, 1972), even though the retreat was basically an educational activity and not a therapy group. Sometimes this led to crying or even a level of hysteria – we considered this an indication of excessive or inappropriate personal disclosure. Some retreat leaders appeared to think that the revealing of personal issues by students would ease their problems. Underlying this practice was the presumption that this sort of personal disclosure was an important personal development mechanism. Rossiter (1978, pp. 69-71) proposed that the psychological processes of ‘personal identification’, emotional ‘scanning’ the group for feelings and ideas, as well as ‘rehearsal’ and ‘trying on’ of new ways of thinking and presenting the self were often involved.

Some retreat leaders explained their group leadership role in terms of creating a climate for intimate discussion and personal disclosure; they also used activities they knew would be likely to trigger students’ emotions. While group leaders may have felt this situation was desirable, it could be experienced by participants (including teachers) as ‘emotionally claustrophobic’, where there were few avenues of escape from the psychological pressure of having to contribute at a personal level.

While personal sharing was considered to contribute to a growing sense of community, it remained problematic to decide ‘how personal’ the discussion needed to be to achieve this. There was a need for criteria for determining what was the appropriate ‘depth’ for personal revelations by both teachers and students. The advice given to some teachers new to retreat work was to “share only what you feel comfortable with.” But this was vague and therefore unhelpful.

Other potential problems stemming from a strong focus on personal stories and disclosure included the following.

- Some personal stories, from teachers and students, were perceived as artificial or ‘manufactured for effect’ – that is constructed stereotypically to solicit empathy from others.
- Some felt pressure to ‘compete’ with the stories of others as a way of enhancing group intimacy and identity.
- At times, participants felt they were under unwanted psychological pressure to meet the ‘requirement’ of personal disclosure.
- The success of retreat discussions was judged in terms of how much of people’s personal lives were revealed and how much emotion was generated as a consequence.

What we considered another problem was the policy of telling students on retreat to call the retreat teachers by their first names. While this strategy may have been felt to help promote informality and community, we considered that it made little if any contribution in this direction while it opened up a ‘can of worms’ of potential problems such as:
The intended ‘friendship rationale’ of using first names was not likely to be understood and accepted by all the retreat teachers or students.

- The strategy could be perceived as artificial and perhaps even manipulative.
- Would the first-name basis be extended to the principal when he/she attended the retreat?
- It could give students the impression that their teachers wanted to be ‘one of them’ – compromising the normally accepted professional boundaries between students and teachers.
- The practice would create problems back at school. Would it be expected to continue there? How would non-retreat teachers view the practice and how would they be addressed by students? What would students who did not attend the retreat do?
- How would parents judge this practice?
- Would this strategy discourage some teachers from joining retreat teams?

Confidentiality in discussion groups: Often group leaders proposed a code of confidentiality for their discussion groups, suggesting that “what is said in the group, stays in the group.” But there is no guarantee that this would be respected. Also, stressing group confidentiality could be perceived by students (and teachers) not only as a protection of any confidences they may reveal, but also as a subtle type of invitation implying that self-disclosure was intended as a desirable part of group interaction. This can create unhealthy expectations of the role of small group discussion – as if there ought to be significant self-revelations, most probably about personal problems.

Sometimes retreat teachers may have regretted talking about their personal lives because it was not possible to predict how this information might be used by students either at the retreat or in other settings (such as in texting, emails and comments on FaceBook, MySpace etc.). As far as disclosing personal information is concerned, retreat leaders need to keep to the same standard of professional ethics that would govern their behaviour at school. Thus it is inappropriate for them to disclose personal information that goes beyond the expectations of professional conduct within a teacher-student relationship.

A more serious problem arises if there is conflict between maintaining confidentiality and mandatory legal reporting when a student discloses instances of personal abuse. Teacher mandatory reporting of those at risk is required under child protection laws; and this is clearly endorsed by diocesan and school authorities. While this law does not apply to individuals who are 18 years and older (Hugo, 2007), legal advice (De Ruvo, 2009) suggested that, irrespective of the legal age of a student, the courts would be interested in determining the ‘relationship between the school and the students’ and whether this gives rise to a duty of care and the nature and extent of that duty of care; if this were ‘active’, then the onus was on teachers to report students at risk. Some retreat leaders addressed this potential problem by making it clear to students that their small group discussion was not the place for making vulnerable disclosures of personal problems, and certainly not for revealing child abuse. If there were appropriate safeguards in place, and if there was a significant disclosure of a participant’s personal problems, then the staff member and students should acknowledge this revelation with respect, empathy and personal support; this would not preclude mandatory reporting by the teacher if the situation warranted it; and it would merit teacher comments about the need for group confidentiality to protect individuals. But, with a clearly stated purpose of the general educational function of group discussion (which should not be like that of a therapy group), and reinforced by the teacher/leader’s role, this situation where personal problems are revealed should be the rare exception to the normal rule.

Clarification of the role of small group discussion: On the question of personalism in group discussions on retreats, two things are needed. Firstly, an account of what is regarded as a ‘healthy’ sharing of personal insights and how this is educationally valuable for students; and secondly, clear policy and guidelines about personal disclosures and confidentiality. Students and parents need to know what the ground rules are.

Precautionary rules for group discussions are needed even where, as recommended, they are not intended to be principally concerned with personal disclosure. Within such a framework, when personal disclosures occur naturally without compulsion, as part of a more general discussion, they are more likely to be healthy
and appreciated by group members; and any resultant emotion would also feel healthy and not forced, and this could be accommodated within the group without problems.

We also think that an excessive emphasis on telling one’s personal story, both by retreat leaders and students, is unhealthy because it can be experienced as emotional manipulation; this sort of ‘engineering’ or ‘stage-managing’ of emotions fails to respect individuals.

The retreat leaders, as well as the students, have both a duty and a right to privacy. Some things they ought keep to themselves; and they should feel free from any pressure to reveal personal views. Such regulatory principles engender a sense of freedom and safety within group discussions and other retreat interactions; and they tend to promote and enhance authentic, healthy, personal sharing rather than inhibit it.

As noted earlier, it is natural that group discussions on retreat are usually at a more personal level than is the case in school religion lessons. This is in keeping with the idea that reflection on life and some healthy sharing of personal insights would be valuable for personal development. This can be affirmed as appropriate and desirable, as long as the cautions noted above were in place. The problem is not so much in having personal discussions as such in an educational setting, but in the ways they might be prompted and introduced. A healthy personal discussion requires a sense of freedom and comfort on the part of the participants where there is no psychological pressure to reveal personal views.

It is proposed that the best way of fostering an authentic, healthy level of personal sharing in groups is to avoid focusing directly on personal disclosure, and rather to operate with a more general educational focus on questions and issues that are judged to be relevant to young people’s lives. Whether or not this will lead to significant personal disclosures is then not relevant. The participants themselves have the power to participate at whatever level they feel comfortable with.

This approach is consistent with the guidelines for the place of personalism in religious education discussions proposed by Crawford and Rossiter (1985, pp. 18-19; 1988, pp. 58-59; 2006, pp. 286-291) – already referred to above in the section on personalism. This same scheme devised for the classroom could be applied in the retreat, together with recognition of the natural differences in context. But the same ethical guidelines and protection of individual freedom and privacy should apply in both contexts.

This approach, with more content (but not the same as ‘content’ for classroom study), is considered healthier than placing too great a reliance on ‘telling your personal story’ as the dominant theme for discussions. It is recommended that retreat leaders introduce more variety to the strategies that can be used as stimulus activities for group discussions, as appeared to be the case with the earliest communitarian retreats. A number of key issues in contemporary youth identity and spirituality could well figure more prominently as content on retreats for promoting reflection and discussion (c/f the range of issues considered in Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 131-169; 204-224.)

With criticisms and cautions stated, we consider it important to affirm that the sharing of personal insights and personal story has been, and will continue to be, a valuable dynamic within live-in retreats – as also in regular classroom discussions – when it is not the prime focus, but a healthy, natural ‘process by-product’ when participants freely choose to communicate at this level.

The spiritual / religious dimension to the retreat

Given that the basic idea of a retreat in Catholic tradition considers it to be primarily a religious experience that enhances the individual’s relationship with God, it is likely that both Catholic Church and Catholic education authorities would see the spiritual/religious dimension to retreats as fundamental. Similarly, from this religious perspective, the justification for the time, costs and investment of staff resources in live-in retreats would need to include a convincing account of how the retreat makes a distinctive contribution to the spiritual/religious aspects of young people’s lives. But, articulating the links between retreat
processes and young people’s specifically religious and moral development is more difficult today in a secularised, individualistic, consumer-oriented wider culture than would have been the case in the relatively religious culture of Australian Catholicism say in the 1950s – and even in the 1970s.

One of the central issues is the combination of religious experience with fun/community and enjoyment. It is difficult to differentiate the relative spiritual influence of each dimension to what is an holistic experience. However, there will usually be concerns by authorities if the latter appears to be disproportionate to the former, or if the latter seems to eclipse the former; if it is mainly a fun experience, is it justified? Also, there may be the additional question: does the activity promote increased engagement with the Church. Different appraisals of retreats will result from different positions on these questions.

It is proposed that an understanding of the spiritual and religious dynamics of retreats requires a prior understanding of the complexities in current relationships between the \textit{spiritual} and the \textit{religious} (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 179-200). Measures of religiosity more appropriate to an earlier time will not be useful in gauging the success of contemporary senior school retreats. The gradual cultural slide from regular Sunday Mass attendance by Catholics in the 1950s to its current low level is not likely to be reversed by any activities or programs like retreats, religious education, Catholic schooling or World Youth Days (Tullio & Rossiter, 2009). These structures and activities may well be affecting young people spiritually, but it is not possible to measure the results in the short term, and neither is it possible to find simple measures of religiosity that will give an adequate account of the complexity to this growth and development. Nevertheless, as noted in the introduction, studies of the views of Year 12 students over many years have shown that retreats were regarded as spiritually valuable.

Both Catholic schooling generally, and live-in retreats specifically, need to have religious purposes that take into account the contemporary situation where the ‘locus of the spiritual’ (that is, where the spiritual dimension is most readily encountered in life) seems to have shifted from a more \textit{formally religious position} within a clearly identifiable \textit{religious culture} to a more \textit{personal and individualistic} place within people’s \textit{daily life structure} (Rossiter, 2009). This would imply that the retreat should aim to promote the spiritual and moral development of young people in the way that is judged most appropriate to the live-in setting; this will mean focusing on activities that are more evidently identifiable as \textit{personal development oriented} than those that are \textit{formally religious}. This is exactly the same situation as that of the first communitarian retreats conducted during the mid-1960s. They were primarily personal development oriented, but they were conducted within an overarching religious structure, and they included a prominent place for key religious activities like the Eucharist, reconciliation and prayer. They also operated within a framework where spirituality was considered to be more than just the religious – that is, a spirituality that was relevant to:- the students’ everyday lives, the spiritual and moral issues that they were encountering, and personal reflection / review of life. In these terms, the purpose and function of communitarian retreats have not changed since their introduction in 1964, even if there have been different estimates of the relative influence of various retreat strategies and activities. However, the difficulty that schools now have in arranging for priests to be present for the celebration of mass, let alone the possibility of being key retreat leaders, means that adjustments have been required to address this change in the availability of ordained ministers. For example: if no priest can celebrate mass, a paraliturgy and/or a communion service may be programmed; students could be engaged in the preparation of the paraliturgy.

\textbf{Human/personal dimension to spirituality:} Those involved in school retreats often considered them to be ‘spiritual’ because they were perceived as enhancing the personal life of students through reflection on life experience and their interactions with others. In this sense, spirituality was embedded in a community experience that explored relationships with friends, family, the wider community and with God (and even relationships with the physical world and animals). The retreat provided a particularly favourable personal and social environment where community building experiences provided an experiential base for this sort of reflection. In this sense, the retreat was qualitatively different from religion lessons. On the retreat, there was much more scope and freedom to explore and discuss the complexities of relationships.
The retreat thus sought to enhance young people’s self-awareness and self-understanding; this was considered a ‘spiritual quest’ as it helped in the search for personal meaning and identity (Hughes, 2007). Educators who shared this understanding of spirituality would have no difficulty in seeing the retreat as engaging with, and fostering the development of, young people’s spirituality; according to this view, the personal and the spiritual were closely interlinked. However, for those who had a more formally religious understanding of spirituality, this could look like a ‘watering down’ of the religious dimension of the retreat.

We consider that the planning and conduct of retreats require an insightful understanding of contemporary youth spirituality as explained below.

**Spirituality: The core to retreat purposes and processes:** In the conduct of the first communitarian retreats in the 1960s, one of the driving forces of the movement was the exploration of an emerging, new type of Catholic, Christian spirituality that was in tune with the Second Vatican Council’s call for a “reading of the signs of the times” (Firman, 1968). This same quest for a relevant spirituality remains central to contemporary Catholic school retreats.

How Catholic spirituality is to be interpreted underpins the retreat purposes and processes. It is considered that their success ultimately depends on the quality and the perceived relevance of the spirituality that is brought into play during the retreats. Inevitably, questions about the value and the success of the retreats will be conditioned by different estimates of what an authentic modern Catholic spirituality looks like. Hence it is to be expected that there will remain divisions and ongoing debate about how the retreats should operate and about what they should be expected to achieve.

Four pertinent issues about spirituality on retreats raised by the teachers in this study will be signposted here, while there is insufficient space to discuss them in detail:-

- A concern that specific attention to the topic ‘God’ does not decline on retreats. While a central place for liturgy and prayer remained, it would be problematic to try to appraise how prominent God was in students’ reflections and spirituality.
- While the retreat was intended to enhance the spirituality of all students who attended, it could be a helpful experience for individuals who were uncertain about their belief in God and about their association with the church.
- The community dimension to retreats could help make religious rituals (especially formal prayer and liturgy) more relevant to young people’s spirituality. The retreat presented one of the best opportunities in the Catholic secondary school for the evangelisation of youth.

A sufficiently broad-based view of spirituality needs to inform discussion about the spiritual dimension to retreats. They will function best for young people if they are not used as vehicles for promoting either a specifically conservative or a progressive spirituality. To some extent, these divisions need to be transcended. The spiritual profiles of young people and of retreat staff will cut across these categories. A broad spectrum spirituality is required in the retreat so that it can be taken up differentially by participants according to their situation and needs.

If retreats are to promote both the personal religious faith and spirituality of young people, including those who were not Catholic, as well as those who were uncertain about belief in God and the relevance of religion, then retreat leaders need to take into account the relatively secular, individualistic, eclectic and self-reliant spirituality of many contemporary youth (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Mason et al. 2007; Maroney, 2008). This includes understanding the distinctions that have emerged between the spiritual and the religious, as well as the relationships between spiritual and personal development. While this thinking about spirituality is specifically concerned with relatively non-religious youth, making relevant adjustments in the conduct of retreats is considered to be equally beneficial to those who are religious and who participate in a local community of faith. In other words, this conception of a retreat does nothing that
would compromise the needs of religious youth who were described by Rymarz & Graham (2006a, 2006b) as “core Catholic youth.”

In the retreat, the spirituality of the adult leaders is usually more religious and clearly engaged with the church than that of the students. The purpose of the leaders is to offer unconditionally to the young retreat participants a combination religious/spiritual experience that will hopefully enhance and resource their spirituality – whether they are religious or not. Being attuned to contemporary youth spirituality does not require the elimination of religious elements. Rather, the retreat provides a special opportunity for young people to experience first hand some of the traditional religious spirituality that can be made more accessible to them in a favourable community setting.

Conclusion

The article has examined a range of psychological and spiritual/religious questions about the purposes and conduct of retreats that we consider need to be addressed as part of the ongoing enhancement of retreats and maintenance of their prominent position within Catholic secondary schooling.

While the original research study has given a voice to a small sample of teachers who conducted retreats, there is a need to see whether the issues raised by this group, as well as our interpretation of their significance, apply more extensively to the conduct of retreats in Catholic secondary schools around the country. But what is of even more importance would be research that gives young people a voice on the conduct of retreats. For many years, research and anecdotal evidence have indicated that young people enjoy retreats and see them as valuable spiritual experiences. But nothing systematic has yet been done to investigate their perceptions of the psychological and spiritual dynamics of retreats.

Also a particular concern of ours is the availability of professional development programs for retreat teachers. Hopefully, this and the earlier article will endorse the need for such programs as well as identify an agenda of content and issues that they could address. To complete our interpretation of the current state of retreats and of what needs to be done to promote their continuity and development, we intend to give further attention to contextual school factors that have a bearing on the success of retreats (c/f Tullio & Rossiter, 2010).

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This book is about theory and practice of secondary school religious education taught by government school teachers as a regular part of the curriculum -- the state school context in the United Kingdom. The extent to which it is also pertinent to those who teach religion in a religious context (said to be 'faith' schools) depends on the common ground in what it means to educate young people in religion. In his section on faith schools, Erricker argues that an open, critical, inquiring approach is just as relevant there as it is in public schools because it is an important safeguard against indoctrination by default. If state funded religious schools are to make a legitimate and accountable contribution to the general education of young citizens, then their religious education should never be insular, dogmatic, absolutist or exclusive of at least a good sample of alternative views.

Erricker contributes to the ongoing international debate about the nature and purposes of religious education, and its contribution to the school curriculum in a world which is increasingly pluralised and globalised. He takes account of the situation where a significant number of young people are no longer involved in any local community of faith; their spirituality is more individualised and secular. In addition, he represents one of some significant contributions from British scholars that try to 'move on' from the more traditional and influential phenomenological study of world religions (stemming from the work of Ninian Smart) towards more student centred content and pedagogy. His special focus is the way in which studying religions and world views can help young people construct a personal sense of meaning and purpose in life; and this is at the heart of a constructivist, student-centred pedagogy.

The book gives special attention to three areas:

1. **Contextualisation of religious education:** *Place of religious education in the curriculum; an interdisciplinary approach; student centred pedagogy and personal development.* Following a general, historical discussion of the place of religion and education in society, special attention is given to describing the development of religious education in the UK -- 'not everyone's 'cup of tea' from an international perspective, but clearly important for British readers. Nevertheless, the discussion of student centred pedagogy is certainly relevant to religious education internationally -- as is the historical / analytical chapter on various pedagogies used in religious education.

2. **Example of the Hampshire Living difference program:** *methodology and conceptual inquiry; planning, progression, assessment and delivery; case studies of good classroom practice; interpreting worldviews.* This section develops Erricker's own view of religious education. Prominent here is his attention to the 'children's voice' and to a scheme for conceptual inquiry that focuses on how it links with pupils' personal development. Then comes attention to the Hampshire program with much practical detail. The progression from theory to practice makes the whole package in the book more valuable. The case studies
are used as evidence for religious literacy studies while work on interpreting world views shows how the hermeneutic process is educative for the individual.

3. The future for religious education: *Worldview analysis, theoretical grounding and the future of religious education; the effects of globalisation, postmodernity and multiculturalism.* Following with a similar practical orientation, this section returns to some of the 'big issues' considered in part one, showing how religious education makes a valuable contribution to education in a liberal democracy.

At the heart of Erricker's view of religious education is his conviction that its purposes and intended educational value need to shift more in the direction of promoting the personal development of young people. And the pedagogy he proposes, and its use of religious content, flow consistently from this conviction. He considers that the legitimacy of religious education has for too long been based almost exclusively on studying religion as a unique aspect of social life and on giving students access to the values promoted by religion, together with encouraging ideas like mutual understanding, empathy and more recently interreligious dialogue.

This book strongly argues a case for a study of world views with a student-centred pedagogy. And for this it deserves attention in contemporary theory and practice of secondary religious education in state and religious schools.

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This is another timely and excellent piece of work from the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit head by Robert Jackson. It has great appeal to those interested in the micro RE curriculum, that is, what do teachers actually do in class with students. The focus of this study is a very powerful way of gaining insight into this area, namely, examining what materials RE teachers use.

The study consisted of three strands. The first involved a three phase review of materials, centering on an audit of books and other resources used in schools to teach RE. The second strand involved qualitative case studies that utilized interviews with teachers and pupils, observations of lessons and a review of school documents. The third strand was a quantitative study based on a postal and online survey of a random sample of 2,723 schools. The poor response rate to these surveys made it difficult to draw strong conclusions but some interesting areas for further work are opened up here.

Some of the key findings of the study include reliance by teachers on books as key items for authoritative text as well as visual images. Most teachers in the study were working within the established national curriculum framework which stipulates six major religions are areas of study. This places some strain on content knowledge and it not unexpected that teacher need to rely on external sources to support their own understanding of content areas. A general recommendation here was that books used in religious education should provide sufficient contextualizing information for stories and pictures so as to better engage the learner by providing adequate scaffolding. The best educational resources manage to integrate learning about religions with learning from religions, maintaining this balance is not easy especially in a culture where many students, and for that matter teachers and parents, are becoming more and more detached from traditional religious moorings.

Teachers also generated for themselves much of the material that they used in class. In this they used the internet heavily and it is worth noting that one of the key recommendations of the study was the need for teachers and students to develop more critical skills when using web based resources. These findings suggest that although textbooks are a valuable teaching aid they are of themselves inadequate and need to
be supplemented by other material. Alarmingly, the reviewers in strand one found that presentation of
religions is often compromised by inaccuracies and imbalance and well as a lack of depth – again this is a
reflection of the need to cover much ground in the religion study design. Following on from this finding a
key recommendation of the study was that teachers assess more strongly the accuracy of materials they
use as well as how well they convey both depth of understanding and the complexity and diversity within
religious traditions.

The study reported a number of interesting findings about the intent of classroom RE teachers. Teachers
overall valued the development of positive attitudes to religions as opposed to gaining knowledge about
religions, which suggests that in many schools religious education struggles to maintain an academic or
cognitive focus. The emphasis given in religious education is very dependent on the individual skills and
competencies of the teacher. An educational objective such as enhancing community cohesion, for
example, is not directly addressed in RE materials so how much of it is done in class depends much on the
interest and enthusiasm of individual teachers. This of itself is not a surprising finding but it does point to
the need for more oversight of the curriculum with a view to helping RE teachers develop course that are
both cogent and comprehensive.

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about the Impact of Religion on Life Orientation. Munster: Lit Verlag
ISBN 978 3 8258 1579 0, 264 pages

This book arises out of the strong European interest in practical theology. For many years there has been a
growing recognition that one of the key challenges facing the Churches is to bridge the gap between, for
lack of a better term, official theology and a theology that has more resonance with the lives of an
increasingly religiously detached population. This seems to be a special problem in countries which have a
long Christian tradition and with young people in these places. Practical theology sees itself as being
rooted in the actual life experience of contemporary men and women and as such places great value on
empirical studies which should reflect what is actually going on in the world as opposed to the somewhat
idealistic stance of official theology.

The thirteen chapters then of this volume arise out of this context. For religious educators, especially those
working in the context described above, this book has great relevance in both better understanding the
cultural context for religious education and also how better to tailor religious education to the needs and
interests of today. When you talk about Europe, however, you have already moved beyond the dictates of
a strictly empirical mindset, because Europe contains many different cultural contexts, that often make
generalizations difficult, a point made in several of the chapters. So a feature of this volume is a number of
chapters that address the issue of religious diversity within Europe. Tuin explores whether pupils in Europe
get the RE they want. He finds that the answer to this question very much depends on the local context.
Pupils in Poland, Israel and Croatia have different expectations than those in Sweden, Netherlands and
Germany. He tentatively concludes that his research suggests the need for more interreligious RE. I think
this chapter would have been strengthened if questions about the perceptions of the quality of RE were
included as these would have some bearing on what type of future RE is envisaged.

Kay provides a chapter of the religiosity of Christians, Jews and Muslims in Europe. He points out that while
Christians tend to be the most liberal on virtually all measures, he notes that the Christian sample in his
study contains a large number of self described nominal adherents. The chapter would be strengthened by
a sharper analysis of some of the data to identify national effects and also to differentiate between levels of
religious commitment. Kaye does acknowledge the large “tail” in the Christian sample but there would be
great interest in, say, comparing the responses of religiously committed Christians, Muslims and Jews to questions included in the survey such as those on inspiration of sacred text.

A concept that comes up in many of the chapters is the notion of authenticity. This is one of the seminal ideas in practical theology and although not easily defined usually refers to a decision to take on religious beliefs and practices from a personal position of conviction rather than as a passive acceptance of societal mores. In an increasingly secular Europe the strength of culturally acquired religious positions in ever weakening, so authentically religious persons are of some interest because they are taking a religious stance over and above what is conventional. Crpic and his colleagues explore the theme of religion and values and one of their conclusions is that for many young people in Europe today, authenticity is related to living within a universalistic ethic that is free from ideology. This conclusion is well supported in the wider, international literature as are the findings of other chapters. Lewis and his colleagues note, for example, the extraordinarily important influence parents have on religious socialization of children across Europe. And in a separate chapter, that is in need of a summative conclusion, they record well described differences in religiosity of European adolescent males and females.

The final chapter is devoted to an analysis of worldviews of young people in Europe. Although striving for a more empirical basis practical theology, showing its European roots, still makes use of theoretical concepts such as worldview which has its origin in the writing of philosophers such as Hume. Ziebertz in this chapter argues that the worldview of many young Europeans is surprisingly religious but understood in a broad sense. His conclusion has great relevance for religious educators as he sees a need for them to assist young people to develop nascent worldviews into more sophisticated ones. He sees this development in terms of making worldviews more explicit and based on rational reflection, not claiming exclusive truth and being compatible with scientific knowledge. His bold, provocative conclusion both prescient and pregnant with meaning is worth quoting, “The religious heritage of Europe’s future will not represent a majority religion, but a set of concepts which imply richness of meaning which can support principled pragmatism in societal and cultural life.”

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SETTING THE STAGE TO TEACH CONTROVERSIAL MORAL TOPICS IN A DIVERSE CLASSROOM

Introduction

This article provides a brief overview of a teaching strategy to promote critical thinking, teamwork, intelligent reflection on and articulation of significant ethical issues, and civil discussion among class members, demonstrated by an in-class abortion debate.

Teaching Strategy: Three Components

To teach controversial moral topics in the classroom, three components serve to set the stage for effective discussion. The first two components pertain to classroom management and subject organization. The third and most compelling component pertains to dialogical structure. The first two components construct an overall foundation for fruitful discussion, while the third facilitates specific debate. I articulate each of these components below.

Addressing controversial moral issues in the classroom must proceed from clearly established expectations of the students. Thus, a first component of the promotion of fruitful dialogue is to set behavioural guidelines early in the classroom setting; the instructor establishes safe and trusted boundaries, and facilitates the process of dialogue. Some possible boundaries include the expectation that students will show respect for their classmates and their teacher, will refrain from personal attacks on one another, will engage the course materials thoughtfully, and will come to class prepared to discuss the topic at hand. From the start of the course, the instructor encourages students to become familiar with their peers using such practices as small-group discussions of reading materials and case studies. Reading materials might include an introduction to the Catholic moral tradition pertaining to health and healthcare (e.g., Catholic Health Association of Canada [CHAC], 2000), and discussions of the more specific ethical issues (e.g., Ashley & O’Rourke, 1989). Case studies can be drawn from numerous sources (e.g., Thomas & Waluchow, 1990), including contemporary examples played out in the public eye (e.g., the Terry Schiavo case in the United States regarding artificial nutrition and hydration for persons in a permanent vegetative state). Slowly immersing students in an environment of common expectations, with familiar peers, discussing controversial moral issues helps them to trust that their views will be respected, even in disagreement.

A second component that promotes fruitful discussion of controversial moral issues is the appropriate timing of topics, which contributes to the evolution of in-class dialogue and facilitates a progression towards more depth and skill regarding specific discussion. For instance, initial materials in a course on bioethical issues introduce Catholic moral thought, such as the values of the dignity of persons, interconnectedness of persons, and respect for human life as outlined in the Health Ethics Guide (CHAC, 2000); ethical theory, for example principle-based ethics rooted in autonomy, justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence (e.g., Callahan, 2000) and relational ethics accounting for the close interpersonal nature of moral decision-making (MacDonald, 2002); and the Canadian health care system based on the five principles of the Canada Health Act: comprehensiveness, portability, accessibility, universality, and public administration (Storch, 2005). With a common language and understanding from which to proceed,
students are invited to apply the foundational materials to specific issues pertaining to health care. This starting point serves to spur reflection on personal opinions, which leads the students to more substantial and nuanced articulations of their perspectives.

The topic of abortion is usually quite sensitive; therefore, it helps to introduce it well into the course, once students have comfortable familiarity with their classmates and an adequate grasp bioethical language. These factors facilitate respectful dialogue and thoughtfulness beyond individual perspectives on related issues. For the duration of the topic, we address required readings (Ashley & O'Rourke, 1989; CHAC, 2000; McCormick, 1981) as foundational texts for the coming debate. The Ashley and O'Rourke reading and the CHAC reading both provide the Catholic Church’s teaching on abortion. In particular, Ashley and O'Rourke clarify the categories of direct and indirect abortion and their corresponding moral status in the Church. Thus, prior to the debate, students have a sense of both the broader bioethical context and the narrower topic of abortion.

The third and most compelling component in facilitating discussion and debate of a controversial moral topic requires the creation of a scenario that can diffuse over-passionate engagement. Requiring students to consider the controversial issue from a perspective other than their own does just that. The point of debate is to encourage intelligent consideration of the moral issue based upon previous learning (e.g., the value of respect for human life, the principle of autonomous decision-making in healthcare ethics, and the relational context bearing upon the decision). When students are emotionally, religiously, and intellectually invested in one position or another, they tend to fall back on entrenched beliefs and tired slogans. This exercise provides them with a safe environment in which to explore the merits of opposing positions while not necessarily relinquishing their own beliefs.

Regarding abortion, a good example of this exercise is a debate based upon a case study of disagreement between spouses about an unplanned pregnancy and ensuing abortion (Thomas & Waluchow, 1990). Linda and Bob are happily married, with two children aged seven and five. Currently, Bob is the sole income earner and shares parenting equitably with Linda (i.e., relational context). Although using contraception (an IUD) since the birth of their last child, Linda unexpectedly finds herself four months pregnant. Bob is overjoyed at the prospect of another child in the family and tells their two children. Linda is unhappy about the pregnancy, not wanting to delay her career any longer. She sees the decision about the pregnancy as hers alone (i.e., autonomy) and is outraged when Bob informs the children. Understanding the fetus to have no right to life at only four months, Linda proceeds with an abortion. Bob disagrees about their potential child’s right to life and considers it an innocent and defenseless human being (i.e., value and status of nascent human life). He believes this is a family decision (i.e., autonomy as relational).

Following presentation of the foundational materials on abortion, students are each asked to identify their support for either Bob or Linda. The class is divided into two groups, one each for self-identified Bob and Linda supporters. If the debate were to proceed from this point, it is quite possible that, despite McCormick’s Rules for Abortion Debate (1981), the discussion would devolve into iterations of entrenched perspectives with little development of personal insight or critical reflection on the complexity of abortion. Therefore, at this point the teacher informs them that each group will be debating on behalf of the position opposite to their own. That is, those who self-selected as Linda supporters will be debating on behalf of Bob, and vice versa.

In their groups, the students are instructed to construct an argument for their assigned perspective by applying Catholic values and teachings (e.g., respect for human life from the moment of conception, creation and stewardship), bioethical principles (e.g., autonomy, justice), relational ethical considerations (e.g., the relational development of autonomy), and contextual analysis (i.e., the details specific to the situation). They are also instructed to choose from amongst themselves one person who will provide an introductory, two-minute statement of their ethical position. Following the introductory statements, anyone from either group is welcome to participate in the debate, which the instructor moderates. The groups are each given some time in class to prepare their discussions.
The objective in applying this strategy when engaging in abortion debate is not for students necessarily to change their positions drastically, although that sometimes happens. Rather, the objective is for students to think critically about an issue from perspectives that are not their own, to integrate and apply bioethical thought to a concrete situation, to engage in teamwork and dialogue with their peers, and to expand their understanding of a complex moral issue. For students to consider an issue about which perspectives are often strongly held and perhaps uncritical requires that they recognize their own biases and open themselves to the possibility of broadening their horizons.

In my experience, students generally respond very positively to this exercise. While they very rarely do an “about-face” in their perspectives on abortion, they consistently report a more informed understanding of the complexity of abortion in concrete cases. They are often surprised by their own passion while debating a position with which they disagree. With deeper understanding, they also report a more compassionate response to persons contemplating the position opposite to their own, and movement beyond ideological stance to personal reality. On a wider scale, they note the importance of engaging perspectives beyond their own to achieve a balanced understanding of all controversial moral issues.

**Implications for Teaching**

When teaching in a diverse classroom, engaging controversial moral issues can be a challenge. The strategy outlined above could be useful in numerous settings (e.g., junior and senior high schools, undergraduate settings), with any issue about which participants tend to be predisposed to one position or another (e.g., abortion, euthanasia). The objective of the exercise is to challenge students to think critically about controversial moral issues, apply concepts and theories in concrete situations, and reflect meaningfully beyond their own positions. In so doing, they acquire the skills to move social and professional dialogue forward on controversial moral issues, while considering multiple diverse realities. In a classroom setting in which an instructor cannot expect to find univocal agreement on moral questions, it is helpful to diffuse debate with intelligent discussion of perspectives not previously considered. The process of creating a safe and familiar environment, providing a common language and starting point for discussion, and switching ideological positions is one strategy for meeting that objective.

**References**


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