

A close-up photograph of a stained glass window. The window features a central floral or starburst design with yellow, red, and blue glass panels. The design is framed by dark leaded glass lines. The background of the window is a light, textured glass. The overall image has a dark blue gradient overlay on the left side.

# Review of the Religious Education Curriculum

for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

As the Son was sent by the Father, so He too sent the Apostles, saying: 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' ... The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth.

– Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (1964) 17.

It is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristic and its 'structure' as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry. The Catholic school participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out.

– Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997) 11.

The idea of Catholic schooling for today and tomorrow requires more than finding ways of combining ideas around the words 'Catholic' and 'school'. We need to get used to thinking of a Catholic school as the compound noun it is meant to be. We need to think of how we can school people in a Catholic way; out of a Catholic perspective; from within a Catholic worldview. ... what we need is 'schooling Catholic' – a way of schooling infused with a Catholic vision and is imbued with all that our Catholic intellectual tradition offers.

– Archbishop Peter Comensoli, *Schooling Catholic* (Presentation to Leadership of Catholic Schools), 29 May 2019.

Our faith is a great grace that each of us must daily nurture and help others to nurture as well. In the light of faith, educators and students alike come to see each other as beloved children of the God who created us to be brothers and sisters in the one human family.

... At the same time, Catholic education is also evangelization: bearing witness to the joy of the Gospel and its power to renew our communities and provide hope and strength in facing wisely the challenges of the present time.

– Pope Francis, *Address to Members of the Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education Project*, the Vatican, 20 April 2022.



# Preface

The following report is substantial in several respects.

First, it runs to over 55,000 words.

Second, it includes social, intellectual, theological and textual reflection and analysis.

Third, it details and evaluates existing theory and practice within Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne and beyond.

Fourth, it surveys results from an online consultation with clergy, principals, religious education leaders and teachers, other teachers, parents, and MACS staff (see appendix 2).

Fifth, it recommends changes and innovations in ways of thinking about the content and delivery of religious education, and in the preparation of teachers.

In all of this, it has reviewed and drawn upon a wide range of sources: including scripture, Church declarations, statements, and other documents such as directories of education, material from MACS (and from its precursor, CEM), texts and curriculum materials, and responses to the consultation exercise. Evidently, for all its substantiality, there is more that could and should be thought and done, but we hope that this constitutes a solid basis for that further reflection and development.

We are grateful for assistance provided by staff of MACS, and of the Archdiocese of Melbourne; and by that provided by Byron Pirola especially for guidance and technical help in the preparation, distribution and collection of the RE Curriculum Survey, without which that important aspect would have been impossible.

The report is in two parts. Part One – ***Catholic Education and Its Challenges*** – sets out both the difficulties facing Catholic education today, and the resources Catholicism has available from its Divine foundation, and centuries of thought and practice, for addressing those challenges and contributing to the good of its members and of others. The difficulties Catholic education faces are of several kinds, and they are all substantial, but we believe they are not at all insurmountable. To address them, however, it is necessary first to be well-informed, second to be clear and rigorous in thought, and third to be honest and charitable. With study and grace all of this is possible.

Part Two of the report – ***Review of the Religious Education Curriculum*** – addresses the particularities of the remit set out in the terms of reference provided to us by Archbishop Comensoli (see appendix 1). It provides overviews from post-Vatican II church documents of the identity and mission of a Catholic School, and of the organisation of the curriculum. It gives a wide-ranging audit of curriculum content, and it addresses the needs of contemporary students. Beyond these elements it addresses the issues of formation of teaching personnel, and it offers guidance for RE curricula, distinguishing the needs of children at different stages of schooling. It also reports on the results of the consultation exercise.

We are aware of the responsibility assigned us in being commissioned to produce this report. We hope to have discharged it effectively, and that the report may be helpful in the cause of promoting the work of Catholic education within the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

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Part One:

## Catholic Education and Its Challenges

It is a familiar practice to begin a report with a section or chapter setting out the context in the which the matters to be discussed feature. This is especially important in the present case, since the situation with regard to Roman Catholic schooling, and within that of Religious Education, which is the focus of this review and report, is very challenging.

It is also rather complex, hence this ‘introduction’ is substantial in length and content, constituting Part One of the review. It addresses, among other matters, issues surrounding the existing RE curriculum such as the identity, mission and aims of Catholic schools, and the theoretical and methodological framework that has been used in specifying and assessing the character and aims of Catholic education in Melbourne, and more widely in Victoria, specifically the *Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (ECSIP or ‘Leuven Project’)*, and the use of the Post-Critical, Melbourne and Victoria Scales. There are, however, further surrounding issues that need to be addressed since they bear directly and indirectly on the work of MACS and on Catholic education in Melbourne more generally, as they, or analogous ones, do on Catholic education elsewhere.

### 1. Facing the Challenges

It is important not to eschew or minimise the challenges facing Catholic schools and religious education, and important also to try to offer a clear view of the range of external and internal factors that contribute to those challenges. Otherwise, they cannot be adequately evaluated and approached. More positively, an analysis also offers the possibility of charting a route through the difficulties towards a plan for meeting them.

The factors in question are of different sorts, and some have specific Melbournian, Victorian and more broadly Australian features, such as matters pertaining to the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, including its recommendations – for example, 16.6: ‘The bishop of each Catholic Church diocese in Australia should ensure that parish priests are not the employers of principals and teachers in Catholic schools’. The most far reaching and potent factors, however, are of kinds that obtain quite generally across the Anglosphere, within Western Europe and in parts of the world sharing in, or directly influenced by, these cultures.

Some are internal to the Church in its institutional aspects, specifically regarding papal encyclicals, apostolic letters, exhortations and addresses, Vatican declarations and pronouncements, statements of synods, episcopal conferences, individual bishops, and plenary councils and responses to these. Others relate to the

leadership of dioceses, to the situation of secular priests and members of religious orders and societies in respect of formation, membership, and conduct.

Some concern the formation, knowledge and attitudes of educational administrators, school managers, teachers and other staff. Others again pertain to the educational circumstances of households and communities to which students belong, while yet others relate to broader cultural, economic, societal and political environments.

Additionally, there is the effect of the press, broadcasting and internet media reporting, commenting on and seeking to influence these environments; and that of online groups and individuals on interactive blogs and chat sites, often contributing to a culture of specific accusation, complaint, denunciation and sanction. While the principal forces are secular, the growth of various kinds of Catholic electronic media and blogs has been significant but also increasingly preoccupied with sectional advocacy and criticism.

This is a substantial set of factors, and the situation is made more complex by the interplay between them, and by the rate and impact of social change. Viewing this large, complicated and dynamic state of affairs, it would be an illusion to think that one was doing so from a position removed from or even on the edge of it. Rather, we are all somewhere in its midst and continually subject to its changing pressures. Additionally, we are neither passive nor indifferent observers. Bishops, clergy, religious, academics, teachers, students, parents or others are individual and social agents whose thoughts and emotions are engaged by and with these situations, and their experiences and reflections shape their hopes, expectations and concerns.

## 2. Troubles Are Nothing New

Some are inclined to see in all of this a coherent shape or pattern, or a definite direction of development, viewing the interplay of factors as marking a significant moment or era in which things are tending towards some significantly better, or worse, situation. But these responses may simply be attempts to counter the feeling of oneself or of the environment as spinning out of control, or projections of specific hopes or fears. They may also involve the fallacy of *presentism*: the mistake of thinking that because contemporary circumstances are specially significant for *us*, they are therefore historically special *per se*. An alternative and more realistic response is to suppose that while these are indeed very testing times, others have occurred in the past and will occur in the future – such is the human condition, and such has been the experience of the Church.

The 20th century has been cited as the greatest in terms of enlightenment and progress, seeing the spread of democracy, liberty and social welfare. At various points, and from various sides throughout it, there have been triumphant proclamations of ‘historical destiny’, ‘historical inevitability’, and of ‘the end of history’. Yet it saw the rise and fall of totalitarian regimes of right and left that ranged from the Atlantic coast of Europe to the Bering and South China Seas, and were unparalleled in their scale, reach and brutality. While 35 million people were killed under the Nazi and other fascist regimes, a further 150 million people were killed under Communist governments. In the First World War 20 million were killed, and another 80 million in the Second. Religious freedom was restricted, and churches were closed in Spain



and Portugal, in Central and South America, and in Russia. Today the Churches are assailed by totalitarian regimes of right and left and by secular humanists; but ideological oppression, coercion and conflict are nothing new.

Besides suffering external attacks and persecution across the centuries, the Church itself has struggled with its own problems - often for extended periods. From the 4th to the 6th centuries it was riven with debates about whether the sinfulness of someone in holy orders invalidated the sacraments he administered. Prior to the creation of seminaries required by the 16th-century Council of Trent, the formation of priests could often be haphazard, and clerical appointment and advancement were often unconnected with virtue or merit, depending instead on favours, influence and control. Once created, seminaries themselves sometimes became centres of power-broking and impropriety. Theological disputes, clerical careerism, and violations of solemn promises and vows are nothing new.

There have long been various crises and scandals in dioceses and in religious societies. In 1646 the Piarists, the oldest religious order dedicated to teaching poor children and youths, were suppressed by Pope Innocent X, because of the sexual abuse of school children by the head of the order, and it was only restored a decade later. Religious communities were sometimes centres of dissent leading to heresy. The Jansenists of the 17th century grew and flourished at the Port Royal abbeys and schools in and around Paris. As the community came to be condemned, the pope ordered that their schools be shut, then refused permission to accept novices and finally the principal abbey was closed, the nuns were forcibly removed, and most of the buildings were destroyed. Clerical abuse and dissent are nothing new.

Later, in the 18th century, the second abbey came under attack from the French Revolutionaries pursuing the cause of reason against faith, state against Church, and atheism against Christianity. Under the title, 'The Cult of Reason', the 'Godless revolution' had its first feast day in 1793. During this 'Festival' Catholic churches across France were transformed into 'Temples of Reason', the high altar was replaced with an altar to Liberty, and in the sanctuary Festive girls surrounded the Goddess of Reason, who was installed on the Bishop's Chair. The following century, in the first year of his chancellorship, Otto von Bismark aligned himself with anti-Catholic liberals to launch a culture war (*kulturkampf*) against the Catholic Church in Germany. This involved legal penalties against German bishops and priests, and control over aspects of Catholic education. Anti-Catholic progressivism is nothing new.

### 3. Catholic Schooling

In the Christian perspective the world is under the governance of Providence, but it is not open to us to discern the ongoing course or stages of God's plan. What we can and ought to do is be clear about the authoritative scriptural and apostolic teachings and tradition of the Church, and about the commission to give witness to the Gospel, and to strive to be clear, straight and true channels of grace. While these points are perfectly general, they have particular relevance to Catholic education, and specifically to the identity and mission of Catholic schools and to the aims and content of religious education.

Among the principal and defining functions of Catholic schools is to help implement the responsibility of Catholic parents and guardians to raise their children in the faith as true Christians, enabling them to lead good and fulfilling lives that will bring them eventually to salvation. In keeping with English common law and other traditions, the Church regards the primary responsibility of education as lying with the parents (whether biological or adoptive). This responsibility undergirds the statement in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (article 26.3), that ‘Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children’.

Parents who have a primary and inalienable duty and right in regard to the education of their children, should enjoy the fullest liberty in their choice of school.

– Vatican Council II, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) 6.

In any considerable activity in which humans share a common interest, such as the education of the young, it makes sense to have a division of labour allowing various kinds of expertise to be deployed on behalf of the community. Schools exist for that purpose, serving *in loco parentis*. Hence, the educational function of Catholic schools derives from the primary responsibility attaching to parents to attend to the education of their children, and specifically in relation to religious responsibility, to raise them in the faith in order that they should come to know, to love and to serve God.

Of course, schools have multiple functions and many of these are common between Catholic, other religious, and non-religious schools. They have to equip children with a basic set of learning skills, developing their linguistic facility, literacy, numeracy, creativity, and so on. They also have to enable them to understand the society in which they live and to prepare for further higher study if they have the aptitude and interest for it. Returning to the question of faith, it is an essential and ineliminable role for Catholic schools to provide a foundation in religious knowledge and personal formation: not merely informing people *about* the content of religious ideas but actually forming them in the light of them.

#### 4. Lead, Kindly Light – Along the Narrow Rugged Path

John Henry Newman’s famous hymn ‘Lead, Kindly Light’ takes its title from the opening words of his poem, ‘The Pillar of Cloud’, which is a reference to the passage in *Exodus* 13:21 where God leads the Israelites through the desert:

By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

The first and most familiar stanza of the poem/hymn runs:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home – Lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene – one step enough for me.

The fourth and last verse of the hymn is, however, an addition by Edward Bickersteth, an Anglican priest and missionary who was himself a poet and later Bishop of Exeter. It begins:

Meantime, along the narrow rugged path, Thyself hast trod,  
Lead, Saviour, lead me home in childlike faith, home to my God.

The writer of *Exodus* refers to a time when the people of God, the Israelites, struggled as an exiled community and faced the dangers of the wilderness. Newman wrote his lines while becalmed in the Strait of Bonifacio, between the islands of Corsica and Sardinia, long known for the threats it poses to sailors. We may assume, therefore, that besides feeling a sense of powerlessness and uncertainty as to his life's journey, he also had immediate reason to fear being wrecked by weather, currents, sandbanks, and rocks. Similarly, Bickersteth had felt the contingencies and dangers of life when as a missionary he experienced two powerful earthquakes in Japan. The 'narrow rugged path' of which he wrote may be imagined as one across a mountain or along a cliff top – in either case an uncertain route; but it also echoes Christ's words 'narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it' (*Matthew 7:14*).

Poem and hymn are petitionary prayers asking for guidance through difficult places and times, but they are also expressions of Christian hope in God as one who will provide for the faithful, as he did for the people of Israel. The Light in the night, like the pillared cloud of the day, manifests or signifies the presence of God, and its movement offers a guide leading the traveller home. This provides a metaphor for the role of the Catholic school in contemporary society. In so far as it is a place of *schooling* it has familiar educational purposes, but in so far as it is *Catholic* it is part of the work of evangelisation and of the care of souls in order that they may, with God's grace, come to salvation.

Our faith is a great grace that each of us must daily nurture and help others to nurture as well. In the light of faith, educators and students alike come to see each other as beloved children of the God who created us to be brothers and sisters in the one human family.

... At the same time, Catholic education is also evangelization: bearing witness to the joy of the Gospel and its power to renew our communities and provide hope and strength in facing wisely the challenges of the present time.

– Pope Francis, *Address to Members of the Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education Project*, the Vatican, 20 April 2022.

Of course, increasingly many students and staff in Melbourne's Catholic schools (as elsewhere) are either nominal Catholics or non-Catholics, and this fact has to be accommodated, but not at the cost of compromising or marginalising religious purposes. Whatever else it may strive for and achieve, the Catholic school is justified as such only by its religious role, as a vessel of salvation, and it is in terms of this that it must be understood, structured, led and defended.



[T]he centrality of the human person as a creature that, in Christ, is the image and likeness of its Creator. This is the great truth entrusted to us, a truth that we must bear witness to and hand down, also in our educational institutions. 'We cannot fail to speak to young people about the truths that give meaning to life'. That is part of truth. Not to speak the truth about God out of respect for those who do not believe would be, in the field of education, like burning books out of respect for those who are not intellectuals, destroying works of art out of respect for those who do not see, or silencing music out of respect for those who do not hear.

– Pope Francis, *Address to International Conference: 'Lines of Development of the Global Compact on Education'*, 1 June 2022.

Defence implies attack or the threat of it by pressures liable to damage and perhaps even to destroy the Catholic school, rather as Newman feared the possible destruction of his small cargo boat. This is indeed the situation now in many places across the English-speaking world, including Australia. The cultural and political climates are unfavourable, the currents are strong and often treacherous, the waters are at points threateningly shallow yet elsewhere dangerously deep, and there are sandbanks and rocks a plenty.

## 5. The Aims of Education

True education aims to give people a formation which is directed towards their final end and the good of that society to which they belong and in which, as adults, they will have their share of duties to perform.

– Vatican Council II, *Gravissimum Educationis* 1.

While learning may come about in various ways, education is an intentional practice, and serious reflection on a practice must begin with attention to its proper ends, working back from these to appropriate and effective means of achieving them. Like other similarly broad areas of activity, education is related to the achievement of certain goods and there is often uncertainty, confusion and disagreement about what those goods are and what the proper order of priority is among them. Some think of them exclusively in terms of *external goods*. For example, it is common to hear of the economic and social benefits of education and of the need to shape curricula, syllabi and assessment so as to maximise these benefits.

But as well as external goods, and evaluatively prior to them, there are *internal* ones. Learning to read may equip one to check ingredient and instruction labels, but it also enables one to engage imaginatively with a text. Learning art, science, or sport may help develop marketable knowledge or skills, but each offers goods internal to the activities: imaginative seeing and making, understanding the nature of things, physical expression and performance, and so on. Any activity may have both internal and external goods, but the former are inherently prior as intrinsic to the nature of the practice.

Since education is inextricably linked to values, both in respect of its ends and of the means of pursuing them, and values are often contested, the aims and methods of education are themselves liable to be disputed. This is not to say, however, that one cannot be confident about them; but that confidence needs to be rooted in a broader understanding of human nature and human meaning such as Christianity and more specifically Roman Catholicism provides.

There are, however, several prevalent sources of challenge to efforts to specify and pursue in practice a set of aims of Catholic education schooling. The first of these is *relativism* – in the form of holding, often confusedly and inconsistently, that there is no objective right or wrong where questions of religious truth, or moral value and conduct are concerned. The confusions include uncertainty about, and oscillation between, measures of relativity: individual, cultural, historical and societal. The inconsistency shows itself in two ways. First, denying that there is any determinate and invariable truth about a matter while also proclaiming some view as unquestionable, and denouncing others as ignorant or malicious. Second, asserting that since values are relative, it is therefore wrong to impose or to inculcate some set of them – wrong according to what standard?

The evangelization of culture is all the more important in our times, when a ‘dictatorship of relativism’ threatens to obscure the unchanging truth about man’s nature, his destiny and his ultimate good. There are some who now seek to exclude religious belief from public discourse, to privatize it or even to paint it as a threat to equality and liberty. Yet religion is in fact a guarantee of authentic liberty and respect, leading us to look upon every person as a brother or sister.  
– Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, Glasgow, 16 September 2010.

The second issue is *diversity*, invocations of which commonly conflate empirical claims about ethnicity, culture, identity, and practice with the foregoing relativist notions, and (confusedly) with non-relativist values and commitments such as respect for difference, and appreciation and encouragement of pluralism. Mixed in with this are questions about the acceptability of directing children towards ways of thinking and behaving that are different from and perhaps in tension with their background. This connects with the further issue of *cultural conflict*, which may either involve opposition between the ideas and values of different *sections* of society, or arise as an internal matter between *factions* within a social or cultural group.

One example of the latter is the dispute among followers of Islam about what it means to be a Muslim, whether in relation to religious and moral teachings, traditions and sources of authority, or in relation to social values such as freedom and toleration. Another is the currently prominent and increasingly acrimonious dispute between feminists, LGB+ groups and trans activists about the nature of the standing of ‘trans women’.

Yet another challenge is posed by the various forms of an ideology of gender that ‘denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments

that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time'. It is a source of concern that some ideologies of this sort, which seek to respond to what are at times understandable aspirations, manage to assert themselves as absolute and unquestionable, even dictating how children should be raised.

– Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) 56.

These conflicts have divided what had hitherto been seen as homogenous groupings and obviously pose challenges for the treatment of religion and sexual identity in liberal secular schools, as well as in religious ones. They also provide interesting points of comparison with divisions among Roman Catholics about teachings on matters of faith, ethics and religious and moral practices, and about the nature of authority with regard to these.

## 6. A House Divided

The latter oppositions have become sharper and more public in the last two decades, in part because of people taking to media, and the ubiquity of the internet and social networks. But more substantially, because of a series of issues. Prominent among these are the scandals of sexual abuse by clergy, religious, and laity exploiting their power over minors, and the failures of their superiors to deal with these matters due to culpable ignorance, avoidance or concealment: in some cases fearing reputational damage to the Church and its institutions, in others through being personally compromised by their own actions. Additionally, there is the growing evidence of ongoing violation of solemn promises of celibacy by clergy and of vows of chastity by religious; and of decadence within some seminaries. Relatedly, there is the set of issues around sexuality and sexual activity more generally.

A further factor is the decline of vocations leading to demands for revision of the celibacy rule, and for more extensive liturgical and sacramental roles for laity. Again, in part because of theological arguments, but also because of the rise of equal-rights feminism, there are demands for, and opposition to, equal access for women to the diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy. There are also disputes about the authority of scripture and sacred tradition, about various doctrines and teachings, about what it means to be Roman Catholic, and about the status of other religions.

With respect to these various issues, and more generally, Catholics are increasingly divided along one or more of the following three axes: theology (*orthodoxy vs heterodoxy*), moral and political values (*conservatism vs liberalism*), and religious and more broadly cultural practice (*traditionalism vs progressivism*). These are distinct dimensions of alignment, and it is theoretically and practically possible to occupy any of the eight combinations. One may for example be orthodox with respect to credal matters, liberal in politics and liturgically traditional, or heterodox theologically, morally conservative and liturgically progressive. Nonetheless, there are reasons and causes that incline people to group their beliefs and attitudes in line with the first or second of each pair respectively. Thus, the familiar three-dimensional opposition among laity and clergy between orthodoxy, conservatism and traditionalism, and heterodoxy, liberalism and progressivism.



The highpoint of Catholicism in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, as measured in terms of church attendance, baptisms, marriages, vocations, church and school building, membership of societies, and pious practices, etc., was in the 1950s, when Catholic education tended to involve formal catechesis and pious practices in combination with a focus on Church-based community identity. Today, numbers in each category have declined at an accelerating rate, and within Catholic education there has been a trend to replace the idea and practice of instruction in articles of faith and morals with that of cultivating an 'ethos' and a shift in focus from Church to society.

'Conservatives' argue that this has amounted to a capitulation to secular values encouraged by faithless and worldly Catholics, while 'liberals' continue a critique of the previous condition as coercive, repressive clerical and infantilising. Both of these outlooks tend to rather restricted considerations of context and of the nature of Catholic tradition. 'Liberals' often confuse *authority* with *authoritarianism*, taking the negative character of the latter as a ground of criticism of the former; while 'Conservatives' often conflate *tradition* with *traditionalism*, assuming that the former entails the latter. Greater knowledge and rigour and clarity of thought would caution against such assumptions.

Had those responsible for Australian Catholic formation in the 1950s looked and thought harder about the state and direction of society more generally, then they might have developed a broader, more engaging, less defensive, and triumphalist approach to the wider world. Equally present-day liberal Catholics might be less inclined to go with the flow of progressive, empowering, diverse self-definition if they look at the way in which it tends to hedonism, narcissism, and the societal disassociation of 'identity' politics. As it is, two self-conscious responses to secular liberalism, adoption and reaction (in the forms of 'progressive liberal' and 'traditionalist conservative' Catholicism, respectively), have done nothing to counter lapsation, but only deepened divisions among those continuing to identify as Catholics and thereby threatened the collapse of the house they both claim to be saving.

## 7. Schools and Evangelisation

Against this broad and deep background, the questions of what should be the aims of Catholic education today, and how they should be pursued in the context of Catholic schooling, are urgent, but admit of no quick and simple answers. There are, however, significant resources to be drawn upon in the broad, deep, and rich tradition of Catholic thought and practice, but they need interpretation, development, and supplementation to meet present-day challenges. In very broad terms there are four elements to be developed.

*First*, Catholic anthropology: an understanding of human beings as created, sentient, rational and spiritual animals. *Second*, an account of the nature and dimensions of lived human experience, individual and social, and of its principal value components. *Third*, an explanation of the economy of salvation. This includes a diagnosis of human woundedness and of the role and means of grace in healing it so as to lead us to participation in the life of God. *Fourth*, an account of the principal aims of

Catholic education and of the forms, means and methods by which these may be pursued in light the preceding three elements.

To give one important and topically relevant example under the heading of anthropology, the Catholic understanding of marriage has at its heart the idea of mutual completion through exclusive sexual complementarity of male and female, open, where that is possible, to the creation and nurturing of others within the context of a family.

Secular culture, by contrast, has departed from the idea of exclusive, life-long, heterosexual familial union, substituting for its core the idea of publicly endorsed sexual partnership as a quasi-contract to be entered into and exited from at will, and specified without any reference to procreation and family life. But this is an individualist and reductionist view and the wider societal sexualisation of the personal detached from notions of complementarity, fidelity, and family life undermines the very possibility of enduring fulfilment.

Marriage is firstly an 'intimate partnership of life and love' which is a good for the spouses themselves, while sexuality is 'ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman'. It follows that 'spouses to whom God has not granted children can have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms'. Nonetheless, the conjugal union is ordered to procreation 'by its very nature'.

– Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) 80.

## 8. The Mission and Identity of Catholic Schools

It is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristic and its 'structure' as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry. The Catholic school participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out.

– Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997) 11.

Earlier it was noted that identifying and understanding the intended goals of a practice are necessary to understanding and evaluating the practice itself. Similarly, one cannot answer the question, 'What is a Catholic school?', other than in the trivial directory-listing sense, without understanding its purpose and identity. The issue is one of nature and not of names. Similarly, and for the same reason, one cannot begin to evaluate the adequacy of a school in respect of its Catholicity and mission without a clear and well-founded account of the nature of these.

The basic problem [of divergent interpretations of Catholic school identity] lies in the concrete application of the term 'Catholic', a complex word that is not easily expressed by means of exclusively legal, formal and doctrinal criteria. The causes of tensions are mainly the result on the one hand of a *reductive* or purely *formal* interpretation, and on the other of a *vague* or *narrow* understanding of Catholic identity. ...

The specific charism with which Catholic identity is lived out does not justify a *reductive interpretation* of catholicity that explicitly or de facto excludes essential principles, dimensions and requirements of the Catholic faith. ... Moreover, catholicity cannot be attributed only to certain spheres or to certain persons. ... This would contradict the responsibility of the school community as a whole and each of its members. ...

Another reason for conflicting interpretations is represented by the ‘narrow’ Catholic school model. In such schools there is no room for those who are not ‘totally Catholic’. This approach contradicts the vision of an ‘open’ Catholic school that intends to apply to the educational sphere the model of a Church which goes forth in dialogue with everyone.

– Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (2022) 68, 69, 72.

The self-avowed role of Melbourne Archdiocesan Catholic Schools (MACS) in ‘safeguarding and strengthening the Catholicity of its schools into the future’ is important and requires careful attention, knowledge and faithful commitment. Two questions are pertinent: first, what does it mean to speak of a school’s *identity*? And second, what does it mean to speak of *Catholic* identity?

## 9. Nature and Identity

In the case of human individuals, we can distinguish different levels of features: proceeding downwards and inwards from *manner*, to *temperament*, to *personality*, to *character*, and thereby to fundamental *nature*. Behaviour may reflect any of these, but authenticity relates to that which expresses the real and enduring *nature* of a thing. The same is true of human institutions, reflecting but also influencing the characteristics of the individuals that work within them. An individual or an institution can reform its manner more easily than it can change its personality; but character is close to the heart or nature of a thing, and the last cannot be changed while still remaining the same entity. The critical issue in considering identity, therefore, is that of *nature*; for what it is to be, and to continue as, one and the same person or institution is each case to have one and the same enduring fundamental nature.

In thinking about mission and general purpose, therefore, it is necessary first to get clear about what a Catholic school is, that is to say what is its identity-constituting nature. Evidently each school, like each individual human being, has distinguishing characteristics, but these belong to the levels of manner and personality. And just as we may ask what makes different individuals all *human beings*, so we can ask what makes different Catholic schools all *Catholic schools*. In other words, the deeper question is again that of a common intrinsic nature.

Since talk of ‘identity’ has become culturally ubiquitous and a matter of controversy and contest, it is now more than ever especially important to distinguish two ways of thinking about the matter: one *subjective*, the other *objective*. According to the first, *subjective* view, identity is self-determined and self-confirming. What that means is that someone or some institution is what it says it is, and its saying so is proof of the matter and not open to question. In this perspective one cannot be challenged or corrected about one’s self-proclaimed identity.

According to the second, *objective* view, by contrast, questions about identity can only be answered by investigating objective facts. 'Saying so doesn't make it so', and sincere claims to being this or that are not by themselves proofs of the matter. This view is universal in natural science and widespread in philosophy, history, anthropology and other traditional disciplines. It is also implicit and often explicit in Catholic theology. More broadly it is central to Catholicism's understanding of itself as being the institution created by Jesus Christ in gathering and commissioning the Apostles, and then in turn their chosen successors, to carry on his work of salvation.

Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.  
– *Matthew 28:18-20.*

## 10. Being Catholic

The question of the identity of the Catholic school presupposes an answer to the prior question of what it is to be *Catholic*. Drawing on the previous points, this is not an issue of manner, temperament, or personality, nor is it one of circumstantial characteristics, and nor is it self-determining or self-confirming. Catholicism has an *objective* nature comprising a synthesis of Hebrew and Christian scripture, apostolic tradition, conciliar and other authoritative teachings, and sacramental practices.

There are in addition, liturgical forms, institutional structures, pious devotions, cultural traditions and many other features that have developed out of this core nature, but which are not themselves strictly part of it. Here again the distinction between *tradition* and *traditionalism* is relevant. For it is important not to confuse, on the one hand, what has been handed on (*traditum*) as Christ's revelation to the Apostles confirmed to them by the Holy Spirit, which is the essence of the deposit of the faith, with, on the other hand, reverence for particular historical forms and customs (*accessiones*).

Tradition is not static: it is dynamic, aimed at moving forward. There was a French theologian from the fifth century, a monk, who wondered, talking about this, how dogma could progress without ruining the inspiration of one's own tradition, how it could grow without hiding from the past. And he said in Latin: '*Ut anni scilicet consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*': 'it progresses by being consolidated with the years, developing over time, sublimating with age'. This is tradition: we need to educate in tradition, but in order to grow.

– Pope Francis, *Address to Members of the Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education Project*, the Vatican, 20 April 2022.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The unnamed author to whom Pope Francis refers is St Vincent de Lérins. The quoted line continues '*incorruptum tamen illibatumque permaneat et universis partium suarum mensuris cunctisque quasi membris*': 'yet let it remain uncorrupted and unblemished complete and perfect in all the measurement of its parts.' *Commonitorium Primum*, c. 23, 56. 1.



How the core nature is realised and enacted may legitimately vary according to circumstances but there is also the possibility that a 'variation' (whether 'traditionalist' or 'progressive') may become – as the author whom Pope Francis quoted observed – an aberration and cease to be Catholic, though it might seek to operate under that name. How that distinction is to be drawn is by reference to scripture and sacred tradition as interpreted and proclaimed by the bishops in unity with the Bishop of Rome.

Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread and in prayers (Acts 2:42, Greek text) so that holding to, practicing and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort. But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.  
– Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (1965) 10.

Roman Catholicism is more (though not less) than an association of fellow believers or a church community. For, like the Eastern Greek Orthodox, and like the autonomous Oriental Catholic Churches (including the Coptic, Ethiopian, Maronite, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara ones, which have significant communities in Melbourne and elsewhere in Australia), it traces its origins to the apostolic foundations and holds to a core of authoritatively defined credal and conciliar teachings and sacramental practices.

Even where such Churches in these three groups (Roman, Greek and Oriental) disagree on some points they nevertheless recognise one another as authentic Apostolic Churches, acknowledging the validity of one another's priesthood and of one another's sacraments. 'Apostolic tradition' is not just a cultural or historical phenomenon but the necessary means for handing on and preserving the deposit of the faith given by Jesus to the Apostles for the sake of the salvation of humankind. The authority with which it does so is not that of human powers or roles but of God working in and through human agents.

This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.  
– Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (1965) 10.

It follows that Catholic identity is not a cultural, or psychological or sociological phenomenon, or something to be self-determined by the ideas and choices of individuals or groups, or negotiated in line with the attitudes and values of the prevailing secular culture. Instead, it is something whose identity derives from Christ's teaching and his commission to and empowerment of the first Apostles, and is expressed in the teachings, sacramental practice, and religious faith, hope and

charity of its members. Importantly, also, it is not sectarian, believing that it exists for the sake of its own members only, but is obliged to reach out and bring others into its communion by preaching the word of God, teaching the faith, and living it in practice so as to be, as was Israel, 'a light unto others'.

Through him [Christ Jesus], then, we both in the one Spirit have free access to the Father. So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow-citizens with the holy people of God and part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.  
– St Paul, *Letter to the Ephesians* 2:20.

As the Son was sent by the Father, so He too sent the Apostles, saying: 'Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' ... The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth.  
– Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (1964) 17.

## 11. Catholic School Identity

For some years, beginning with *Catholic Education Melbourne* and continuing with the establishment of MACS, questions of assessing and promoting the Catholic identity of Melbourne Archdiocesan schools have been addressed by reference to the *Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project* (ECSIP or the 'Leuven Project') and by the use of the *Post-Critical Belief Scale* (P-CBS), *Melbourne Scale* (MS) and *Victoria Scale* (VS). In light of the foregoing analyses of the notion of Catholic identity, and references to statements of Vatican II and other church documents (above and in Part Two), the methods and assumptions of ECSIP and of the scales, and the general appropriateness and efficacy of this approach, need to be addressed.

As well as advancing diagnostic criteria and methods, advocates of ECSIP propose a style of education or instruction, including the *Pedagogy of Encounter*, offering formation experiences' that themselves invite obvious questions as to what proper objectivity and engagement involve. There are frequent references to 'critical reflection and interpretation of beliefs' and criticism of 'literal versions of the faith', but there are significant issues as to the framing and application of these concepts. Here, therefore, it is relevant to explore the assumptions and background of the ECSIP approach first setting out its own framework and classifications.

The P-CBS uses a crossed-axes graph, the vertical ranging from the 'symbolic' to the 'literal', and the horizontal plotting degrees of 'inclusion' or 'exclusion' of the 'transcendental' (see figure 1). The MS uses a five-element typology of identity options: the 'confessional school', the 'Christian values school', the 'reconfessionalised school', the 'secularised school', and the 'recontextualising school'.

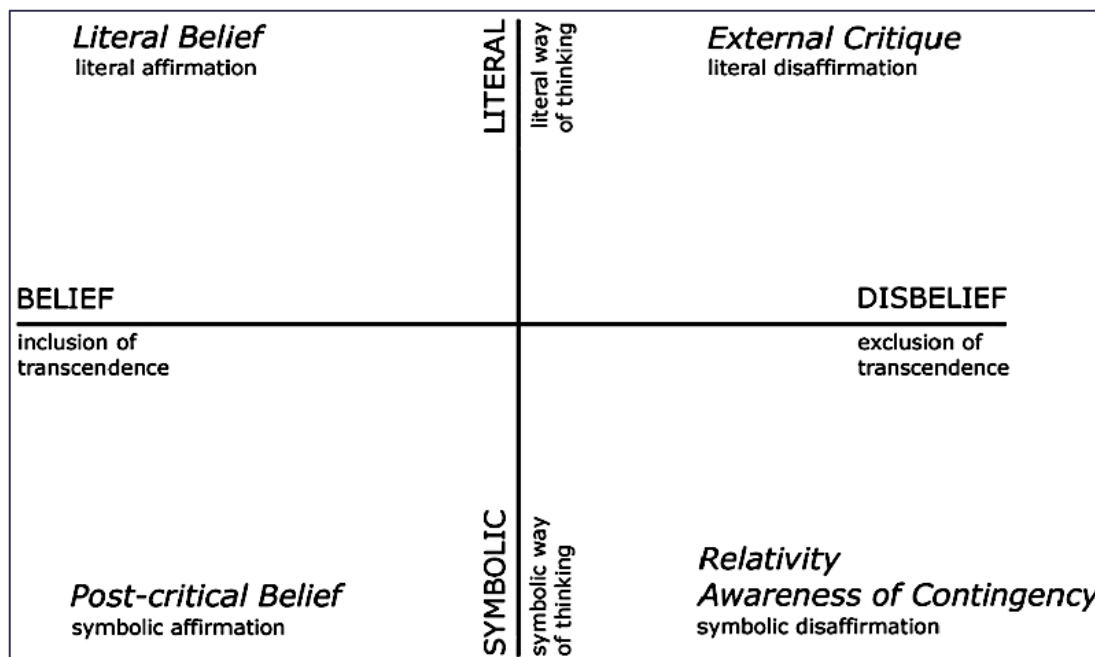


Figure 1. The Post-Critical Belief Scale. Credit: Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 'Framing the Identity', 2010.

The VS again involves two axes, in this case measuring, on the horizontal, degrees to which 'diversity is embraced' by plotting 'the solidarity with people from sub-cultures other than the Catholic one: the measure of openness to a receptivity of other life visions and attitudes', and, on the vertical, the extent to which that community manifests 'a strong Catholic identity' (see figure 2). The assessment is conjoined to an aim: 'for a school to be strong both in its welcome and inclusion of each community member but also unambiguous in its Catholicity'. The conceptions of 'Catholicity' and of 'Catholic Identity' in use here also need to be examined.

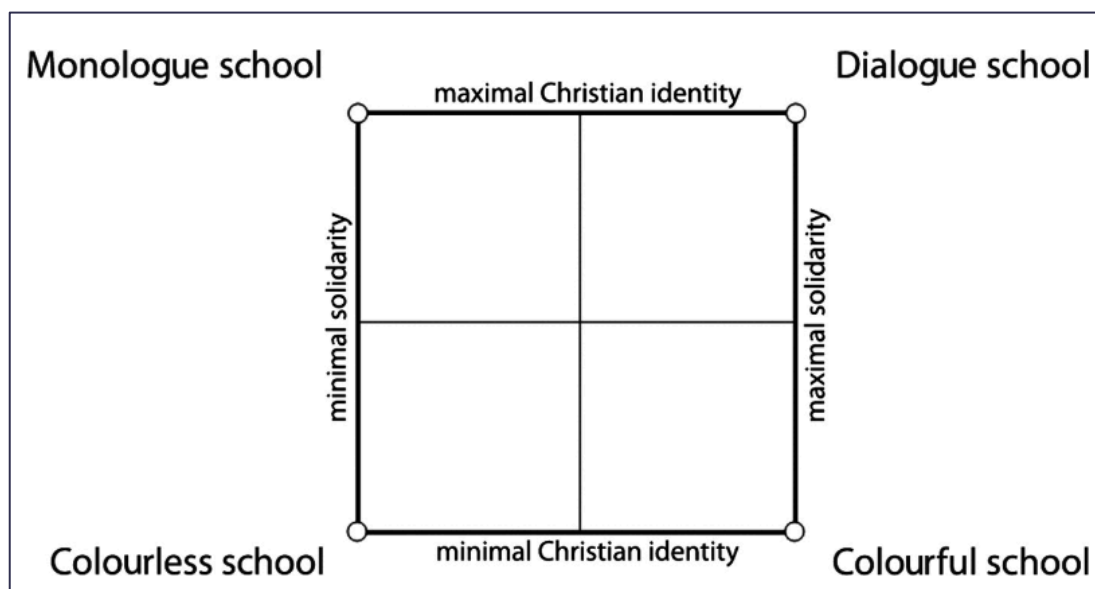


Figure 2. The Victoria Scale. Credit: Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 'Framing the Identity', 2010.

This combination (of diversity and identity) is acknowledged to face a number of challenges. For example, the 'risk of engagement and relevance' is taken to be that, in emphasising modes of these that reflect students' extracurricular experience, one

avoids religious language in general, and specific religious claims and values in particular, for fear that these may be alienating. In avoidance of this, ideas are then expressed in broadly secular ways that correspond to the modes and values of the surrounding non-religious culture, thereby threatening the aim of a school being ‘unambiguous in its Catholicity’.

Again, a method of identifying and responding to this risk is proposed that involves a typology and a measure of outlooks, this time applied using the ‘*Melbourne Scale*’. Another trio of possibilities is indicated: (1) reducing religious values to secular ones, (2) advancing religious faith despite the lived experience of students in a secularised world, and (3) translating Catholic concepts into terms that are intelligible but without evacuating them of their religious significance. Certainly, the risks identified are real, and acknowledgement of them and of the need to guard against and to counter them is creditable. But the salient issues here are the assumptions and ways of framing matters that lie in the background.

## 12. Framing Catholic School Identity

The main authors associated with the Leuven Model are Didier Pollefeyt, Jan Bouwens and Lieven Boeve.<sup>2</sup> In ‘Framing the Identity of Catholic Schools’ they introduce the *Post-Critical Belief Scale* as developed by Leuven psychologist of religion, Dirk Hutsebaut. It is important to appreciate, however, that just as the *Melbourne Scale* draws on Boeve’s recontextualising theology, the *P-CBS* draws directly on a psychological typology of religious attitudes and outlooks derived by Hutsebaut from that developed by David Wulff, formerly Professor of Psychology of Religion at Wheaton College in the United States of America.

Wulff, who has been a major figure in shaping the categories of recent psychology of religion, is the son of a Lutheran minister and was himself raised Lutheran. However, finding that he could not believe its teachings, he then explored Unitarianism and Quakerism before acknowledging to himself that he was in fact an atheist. In his subsequent work on the psychology of religion he sought to displace the Christian bias, more specifically seeking, by his own account, to counterbalance the Protestant-Christian disposition by introducing looser, less credal categories, such as that of the ‘spiritually attuned prototype’ oriented toward nature, the earth and paradox.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The most relevant publications in the present context are Didier Pollefeyt and Jan Bouwens, ‘Framing the Identity of Catholic Schools: Empirical Methodology for Quantitative Research on the Catholic Identity of an Education Institute’, *International Studies in Catholic Education* 2, no. 2 (2010), and Didier Pollefeyt and Michael Richards, ‘Catholic Dialogue Schools: Enhancing Catholic School Identity in Contemporary Contexts of Religious Pluralisation and Social and Individual Secularisation’, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 96, no. 1 (2020). See also Lieven Boeve, ‘The Identity of a Catholic University in Post-Christian European Societies’, *Louvain Studies* 32, nos. 3–4 (2006), and Dirk Hutsebaut, ‘Post-critical Belief: A New Approach to the Religious Attitude Problem’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 9, no. 2 (1996). Boeve is extensively cited by Pollefeyt on whose (Boeve’s) typology of identity options the *Melbourne Scale* draws. For critiques of *ECSIP* see Peter J. McGregor, ‘The Leuven Project: Enhancing Catholic School Identity?’, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2022), and Gerard O’Shea, ‘Vulgarised Rahnerianism and Post-critical Recontextualisation: Solvents of Catholic Identity in Contemporary Catechesis’, *Studia Elkie* 16, no. 3 (2016); and for an extensive critique of Boeve’s ideas, including that of ‘recontextualising’, which is critical to the *ECSIP* approach, see Conor Sweeney, *Sacramental Presence after Heidegger* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015) and, for a briefer critique, Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), chap. 4.

<sup>3</sup> David Wulff, ‘The Evolution of a Psychologist of Religion’, in *Psychology of Religion: Autobiographical Accounts*, ed. J. van Belzen (New York: Springer, 2012).



The relevance of this background to the issue of the Post-critical Belief Scale is that the typology devised by Wulff, abstracted by Hutesbaut, and adopted by Pollefeyt and Bouwens, has its origins in a non-theological perspective that sought to decentre the Protestant-Christian outlook but without taking any account of Roman Catholic theological understandings of Christian identity, as described above. Critically, however, Catholic understanding precisely rejects the notions of literalism and textual inerrancy, salvation by personal conversion, and other forms of fundamentalist uninterpreted and unmediated faith associated with Protestant Christianity. The uncritical adoption of the Hutesbaut, Wulf-inspired psychology of religion and the advocacy of 'recontextualising' theology is therefore problematic.

It might be that part of the explanation for the espousal and application of the 'literal belief' model is the hope that using it to characterise traditional Catholic faith and practice may help to explain the collapse of Catholicism in Flanders. But the advocacy of non-traditional, revisionist interpretations of Catholicism has been a feature of the Flemish Church for decades and has done nothing to halt its decline. Roman Catholicism was Belgium's and particularly Flanders's majority religion, but as of a decade ago church attendance in that region was at 5% and falling – now it is 2.5% across the country. Up to the late 1990s the Church published annual statistics for Mass attendance, baptisms, marriages, etc. It ceased to do so in 1998. Since then, the decline has become more precipitous, including requests for 'debaptism', that is, applications to be *removed* from baptismal registers (now numbering over 5000 requests a year), and ordinations reduced to 8 in 2021 (alongside 6 withdrawals from ministry).<sup>4</sup>

Given the domestic failure of Flemish efforts to enhance Catholic identity and commitment it is perhaps surprising that the Leuven approach should have been adopted in Victoria, and its theological and normative implications may not even have been appreciated by those who funded its adoption. Such is the speculation of one prominent Australian writer on the subject of religious education who himself favoured the ECSI Project:

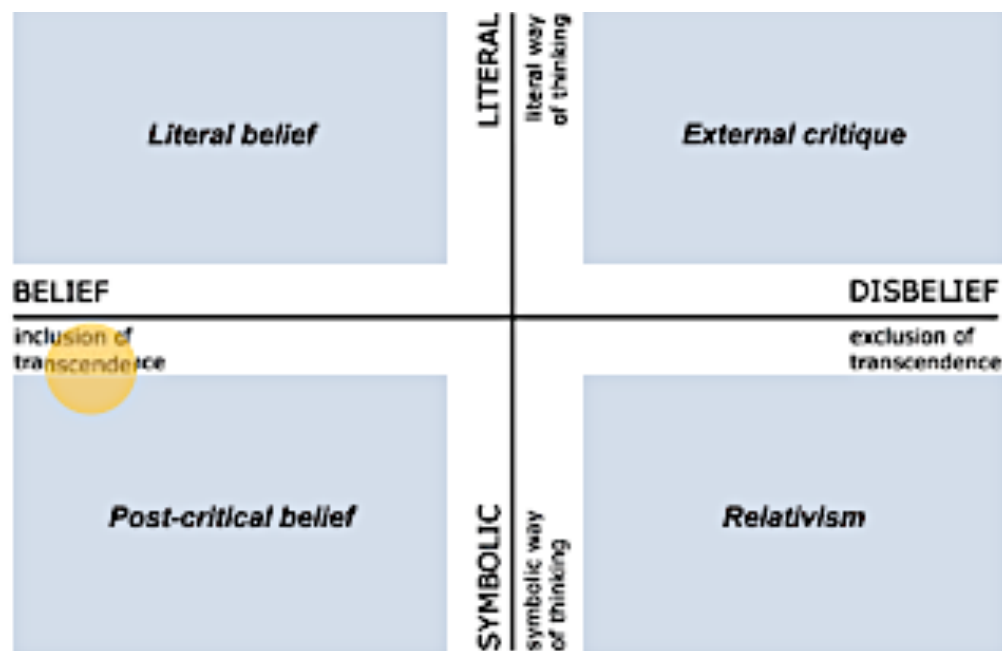
The researchers stated the preferred normative position as regards Catholic identity to be as follows: 'The normative framework of this research is the ideal of the re-contextualisation of Catholic identity, based on dialogue with plurality and a symbolic understanding of religion' (Pollefeyt & Bowens, 2020, p. 193). ... *Pollefeyt openly endorsed the Boeve theology underpinning the ECSIP. But one might wonder whether all of the Australian Catholic Church authorities who funded the project are fully aware of how radical the notion of re-contextualisation can be; perhaps some may really be in favour of re-confessionalisation, but felt that the ECSIP might bolster the Catholic identity of schools in opposition to the widespread erosion of parish engagement with the Catholic Church.*<sup>5</sup> (our emphasis)

<sup>4</sup> La conférence épiscopale des évêques de l'Église Catholique en Belgique, *Rapport Annuel: L'Église Catholique en Belgique* (Bruxelles: 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Graham Rossiter, 'Perspective on the Use of the Construct "Catholic Identity" for Australian Catholic Schooling: Areas in the Discourse in Need of More Emphasis and Further Attention – Part 2', *Journal of Religious Education* 61, no. 2 (2013): 25.

### 13. Interpretation, Mediation and Post-critical Belief

The terms and structure of the *P-CBS* and *Victoria Scale* as presented and recommended for ‘Enhancing Catholic School Identity in Contemporary Contexts’ are as follows:



**Figure 3.** The Post-Critical Belief Scale with the theologically optimal position (round marker).  
Credit: Pollefeyt and Richards, ‘Catholic Dialogue Schools’, 2020.

Pollefeyt and Richard then begin to characterise the positions (p. 79):

Starting in the upper left quadrant of the typology, ‘literal belief’ is the type shaped by a maximal affirmation of transcendence (belief in God) and a highly literal way of experiencing and thinking about the content of (one’s) faith and religious belief. Theologically speaking the literal belief type is marked by the conviction that experience of and communication with God is directly accessible and unmediated through elements of religion – for example, that God’s physical presence can be known imminently in sanctuary and sacrament, and sacred scripture literally communicates to us the words of God. When it comes to reading scripture, ‘literal belief’ pays minimal or no attention to ‘interpretation’ when one considers questions such as literary style, context of the author, context of the translator, the ‘lost-in-translation’ effects of moving between multiple languages, and so forth.

Then later (pp. 83–4):

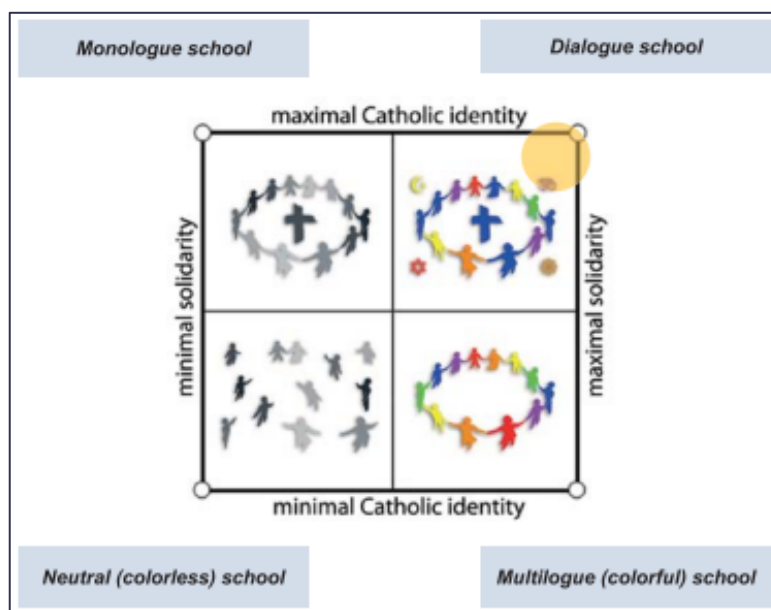
Fourth and finally in this typology, there is the ideal-type of ‘post-critical belief’ (PCB). Located in the lower left quadrant of the diagram, this type is the combined result of high affirmation of transcendence (belief in God) and a highly symbolic approach to experiencing and understanding the content of one’s religious belief ... In this way, one engages in a ‘continuous [search] for religious significance and

meaning without ever [arriving at] a final, absolute, established and certain answer' and is 'prepared for reinterpretation, [...] open to change, and [...] receptive to complex faith questions that feed the [perpetual] hermeneutical process'.

And (pp. 85–6):

This is a kind of faith-understanding that challenges the believer to move more deeply into the complexities of faith and belief in a context of vast religious and philosophical plurality and vast tensions between Christian traditions and the culture at large. Entering more deeply into 'post-critical belief' means leaving behind a (more literal) type of faith often characterised by security, limited contact with others, a certain distance from the culture, and perhaps at some level even fear of the unknown and the uncertain.

This leads to the typology and scaling of kinds of Catholic school with the preference for 'Post-critical Belief' now transposed and projected into a preference for the 'Dialogue School', in which 'Each person's identity takes shape in dialogue with others and with the Catholic tradition ... where a preference for the prominence and salience of Catholic identity meets a strong commitment to diversity and hospitality towards "others"' (p. 106).



**Figure 4:** The Victoria Scale with the theological optimal position (round marker).  
Credit: Pollefeyt and Richards, 'Catholic Dialogue Schools', 2020.

The alignment of the favoured identity for Catholic schools with that of the 'Dialogue School', where this is aligned in opposition to 'Literal Belief', rests on a faulty assumption involving a false characterisation of the nature of Catholicism, as expressed in its own self-understanding. Here it is telling, to compare and contrast the previously quoted remarks with the characterisation of Catholicism set out by one of the leading writers on the subject, and with a Vatican Commission: Again, Pollefeyt and Richards:

Theologically speaking the literal belief type is marked by the conviction that experience of and communication with God is *directly accessible and unmediated through elements of religion ... sacred scripture literally communicates to us the words of God. When it comes to reading scripture, 'literal belief' pays minimal or no attention to 'interpretation'*. (our emphasis)

Next, Richard McBrien editor of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* and of the two-volume work, *Catholicism*, himself in no way a 'Conservative' theologian, contrasts Catholic understandings with non-Catholic ones precisely in respect of the former's emphasis upon mediation:

Roman Catholicism is distinguished from other Christian traditions and churches in its understanding of, and commitment to, and exercise of, the principles of *sacramentality, mediation, and communion*. Differences between Catholic and non-Catholic (especially Protestant) approaches become clearer when measured according to these three principles.

... In its classical (Augustinian) meaning, a sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace. The late Pope Paul VI provided a more contemporary definition: 'a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.' A sacramental perspective is one that 'sees' the divine in the human, the infinite in the finite, the spiritual in the material, the transcendent in the immanent, the eternal in the historical. ...

... A kind of corollary of the principle of sacramentality is the principle of mediation. ... Encounter with God does not occur solely in the inwardness of conscience or in the inner recesses of consciousness. Catholicism holds, on the contrary, that the encounter with God is a mediated experience.<sup>6</sup>

Then the 1993 Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*:

The study of the Bible is, as it were, the soul of theology, as the Second Vatican Council says, borrowing a phrase from Pope Leo XIII (*Dei Verbum*, 24). This study is never finished; each age must in its own way newly seek to understand the sacred books. ... The Bible itself bears witness that its interpretation can be a difficult matter. ... The Second Letter of Peter insists that 'no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of private interpretation' (2 Pt. 1:20), and it also observes that the letters of the apostle Paul contain 'some difficult passages, the meaning of which the ignorant and untrained distort, as they do also in the case of the other Scriptures, to their own ruin' (2 Pt. 3:16).

No account of the mission and identity of Catholic schools can be adequate unless it is founded on a proper understanding of Catholic identity, in other than sociological or self-avowed psychological senses. Reliance on a treatment of this that rests on

<sup>6</sup> Richard McBrien, 'Roman Catholicism: *E Pluribus Unium*', *Daedalus* 111, no. 1 (1982): 76–7.



an inadequate typology and a flawed application of it to the case of Catholicism has practical implications most obviously in relation to religious education, both in respect of what is taught and how understood within the school.

One such, evidenced in some of the responses to the consultation conducted in the preparation of this report is the characterisation, citing the *Post-critical Belief Scale*, of orthodox Catholic belief as “conservative’, ‘literalist’ ‘rigid’ and ‘traditional’ and not appropriate to the ‘Dialogical School’ – the latter being understood to be the approved and recommended model. One irony in this is that the charge of ‘literalism’ was being applied to younger Catholic staff (and clergy) who in fact may well have a better understanding of Catholic identity in the religious sense than older teachers who grew up in a period of declining knowledge of and interest in Catholic beliefs and practice.

In summary, the conclusion of the analysis of the ECSIP approach is, first, that it is ill-suited to the purpose of understanding and promoting Catholic identity; second, that rather than assist in the task, it has hindered it; third, that it is an obstacle to the work of promoting the Catholicity of ‘Catholic’ schools and fourth, it is an impediment to the development of an effective form of religious education within them. Our recommendation is that it and the associated *Pedagogy of Encounter* should be abandoned and replaced as a matter of priority, and that steps be taken to explain to Principals, RELs, and other staff the reasons for this.

## 14. Identity and Mission

Taking account of the foregoing, and in anticipation of the analysis and critique of and recommendations concerning religious education presented in Part Two (below), the pressing question for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, and specifically for MACS, is: how should Catholic school identity and mission be understood and implemented? Both elements need to be specified in terms of, and by reference to, the Catholic Church’s understanding of itself and of its vocation. That means affirming its apostolic and evangelical purpose. The primary justification for Catholic schools is to serve the mission of the Church in its work of assisting in the salvation of souls by bringing the good news of Christ’s teachings and redemption.

The Catholic identity of schools justifies their inclusion in the life of the Church, even in their institutional specificity. And, all the more, the fact that Catholic schools are part of the *Church’s mission* ‘is a proper and specific attribute, a distinctive characteristic which penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity, a fundamental part of its very identity and the focus of its mission’. Consequently, the Catholic school ‘takes its stand within the organic pastoral work of the Christian Community’.

– Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (2022) 21; emphasis in original.

How an authentic understanding of Catholic identity and mission should inform the work of Catholic schools is a further and more detailed matter. It is already implied, however, that schools should be clear and explicit in stating their commitment to the evangelising mission of the Church. In light of this, the question arises of what

internal challenges they may face in embracing and practising an unambiguous, clear-sighted view of that identity and mission.

Among these internal issues are those concerning the formation, knowledge and attitudes of principals and other teaching staff. Not all staff of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese are Catholic. Not all who might be ‘formally’ Catholic, or self-identify as such, understand or accept the foundations and content of Catholic faith and practice as these are set out and reaffirmed in authoritative teachings. Not all who may be authentically Catholic in their personal lives may feel comfortable with the characterisation and adoption of the Catholic School mission in unambiguously apostolic and evangelical terms. This discomfort may be due to a variety of factors: lack of confidence; embarrassment about church failings, as discussed above; relations with non-Catholic or dissenting colleagues, friends and family; and/or fear of disapproval and criticism and censure within schools as well as from secular sources. Finally, not all who are authentically Catholic and are willing to express and give witness to their beliefs and practice are prudent in the manner of doing so, or recognise that Catholic identity and mission rooted in sacred tradition are not the same as nostalgic or reactionary traditionalism.

Catholicism is compatible with diverse cultural dispositions and sensibilities. Those who take a sociological or psychological approach tend to confuse these matters. What should be of concern to schools is that they be true to Catholic identity, holding fast to that which has been tested and found to be good and received and handed on as part of the deposit of faith (cf. *1 Thessalonians* 5:21). But that holding fast is not to be confused with clinging to a relic of an imagined past. Rather, it is a living, grace-infused faith that should encourage confidence in moving forward, and meeting the challenges of the present and of the future.

Because the tree, in order to grow, needs to have a tight relationship with the roots. Do not stay fixed at the roots, no, but in a relationship with the roots. There is a poet from my homeland who says something beautiful: ‘Everything the tree has produced comes from what it has underground’. Without roots, there is no moving forward. It is only through roots that we become people: not statues in a museum, like certain traditionalists, who are cold, stiff, rigid, who think that being prepared for life means living stuck to the roots. This relationship with one’s roots is necessary, but we also need to move forward. And this is the true tradition: taking from the past to move forward.

– Pope Francis, *Address to Members of the Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education Project*, the Vatican, 20 April 2022.

## 15. Teacher Formation

Taking account of the foregoing analysis, in consideration of responses to the consultation, and on the basis of first-hand experience and discussion, it is evident that there is acute need to attend to the education and ongoing formation of teachers at all levels. These matters are particularly important and pressing in relation to Principals and Religious Education Leaders, and attention needs to be given to programs of ongoing formation and assessment. If staff are to take on these critically important roles they should be trained, affirmed and rewarded for doing so. The

issues of initial teacher education, of accreditation to teach in a Catholic school, and of accreditation to teach religious education, or to lead in a Catholic school are addressed in Part Two. At this point, however, it is relevant to recommend adoption of a process of renewal involving clear explanation and direction. This could be done through group meetings by departments or across departments (preferably both) and it could take the form of short presentations by qualified and committed teachers or clergy. It is important, however, to avoid any implication that the matter of Catholic identity and mission in line with the Church's directions and guidance as set out in authoritative documents (including those quoted above) is unresolved or open for negotiation, or to be shrouded in ambiguity. Clarity and honesty are essential. Thereafter it is a matter of taking care to implement these in practice.

## 16. Mission, Purpose and Vision

Here it is relevant to set out the MACS *Statement of Mission*, together with the more recently produced *Statement of Purpose* and *Vision Statement* with the unfolding of these latter two.

### *MACS Statement of Mission*

*Catholic schooling seeks to provide the young with the best kind of education possible, one that fosters a formation of the whole person that is deeply and enduringly humanising.*

*Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth. This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterised by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord's disciples, the Church.*

(Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Catholic Educators, 2008)

With parents and parishes, Catholic schooling seeks to fulfil this mission by providing an environment in which students are enabled to:

- encounter God in Christ and deepen their relationship with him
- pursue wisdom and truth encouraged by a supportive academic culture
- grow in the practice of virtue, responsible freedom and serving the common good.

A Catholic school:

- is actively embedded in the life of the faith communities of the local Church, which in turn is tangibly manifest in the life of each school
- is an essential place for the evangelising of children and young people
- prioritises the forming of missionary disciples of Jesus

- exists to assist students and their families to integrate faith, reason, life and culture (Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 2019)
- is conspicuously Christian in outlook, explicitly Catholic in faith and practice, and intentionally missionary in orientation
- cultivates spiritual, social and emotional growth in a safe and protective environment
- provides a learning environment in which the whole educational community is formed to embrace life in all its fullness
- offers a human formation that has the intellectual, practical and moral excellence of learners at its heart
- forms consciences, fosters peace and develops respectful dialogue at the service of intellectual charity
- encourages the discovery of Catholic cultural heritage, especially in art, music, literature and architecture.

*Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture. (Pope Francis, Evangelium Gaudium, 2013).*

The good work of educating the young, undertaken in the light of the Gospel, is a co-responsible task led by every member of the Catholic school community. Modelled by parents, principals and teachers, in prayer and with wisdom, through witness and by example, Catholic schooling is at the service of the integral human formation of children and young people in Christ.

A Catholic school is eucharistic in character. The sacramental and prayer life of the local Church, especially in the gathering of God's People in Sunday Mass, is integral to the mission of a Catholic school and indispensable to its richness. A fruitful sign of the living witness of faith with parents and parishes is the participation of students and families in the life, mission and work of the local faith community, especially in the call to worship God and to serve the poor and marginalised (*Acts 2:42-47*).

By cultivating a maturing of faith and the intellectual life through the modelling of good relationships, Catholic school students are prepared for living fruitfully in the world.

### **MACS Statement of Purpose**

*Forming lives of faith, hope and love in the light of Jesus Christ*

The power of this statement lies in part in its clarity and simplicity, but the depth and richness of its meaning are only revealed by reflecting on what it summarises. That is best done by considering its words and phrases in turn.



1. **Forming lives** is giving them structure and shape. An architect forms the design of a house while the builder creates that structure. A composer forms a melody and a musician shapes sound to make that form audible. These are human artifacts but there is also forming *in* and *of* nature.

Every living thing has an inner principle of growth that determines the phases and forms of its development. When and how these emerge also depends on the environment. Human development is psychological and spiritual as well as physical, but we are dependent beings and our formative and ongoing growth is influenced by those around us, literally and in the form of wider social influences.

These facts make education possible and necessary. Left to its own devices a child will grow in size, but it will not grow into a knowledge of the English language or of mathematics, and nor will it grow into knowledge of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel. The most important aspects of human development depend on instruction and guidance. *Education is formation.*

2. **Forming lives of faith, hope and love** is quite different from that of teaching people to be confident, optimistic, affectionate, and generous. These last may be attractive and useful qualities, but they are not spiritual, let alone Christian ones. They can be understood and valued quite apart from and even in opposition to religious virtues. To appreciate the difference and why it matters we need to consider the human condition. There are two important aspects of this, the first unsettling, the second assuring.

We come into a world not of our own making, under conditions we did not choose, and live in circumstances over which we have little control. We are limited, vulnerable creatures inhabiting uncertain and often dangerous environments. We are prey to abuse, betrayal, conflict, disease and disaster. The affluent world seeks to insulate itself from this so as to deny it, and the interest in human enhancement expresses a desire to transcend it, but the simple and inescapable fact is that we cannot. Abortion on demand, casual sex, fault-free divorce, cheap alcohol, low-cost travel, investment portfolios, gym subscriptions, cosmetic dentistry and surgery, private medicine, private schooling, and assisted suicide at the point when things are going badly, are manifestations of a growing hedonism and narcissism. They are also proofs of the idea that we cannot bear much reality and prefer to fabricate illusions of control.

The assuring fact is that God knows our dependence and vulnerability, and our vain efforts to overcome these, and wants us to understand that we are better than we know. We are each an image of God and that means we are made to come into the company of God as loved ones. Ignorance and vanity put us in a bad place, but we are not

condemned to remain there. *Faith, hope and love* are the means of ascent, but only if they are not confused with worldly qualities.

**Faith** brings confidence only because it is belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. It is not faith in ourselves, or in others, or in nature, or in political or social movements, all of which are flawed and shaky foundations. It is belief and trust in God.

**Hope** is not optimism or a positive disposition, or a can-do outlook. It is an expectation founded in faith that God is in control, and that in God's good order and justice things are working to a good end. This does not mean that everything and everybody will be 'ok'. Jesus teaches that 'Small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads on to life, and few there are that find it!' (*Matthew 7:14*) and that 'Many are called but few are chosen' (*Matthew 22:14*). There is no easy or comfortable way of interpreting these passages. They state that those who receive the Gospel are challenged to live by it. Mercy is to be hoped for, having sincerely done one's best not by one's own estimate but by the standards given by Jesus.

**Love** (*caritas*) is neither generosity nor helping out. Christian love is primarily love of God and only derivatively love of self and of others for God's sake. This is far from secular understandings of charity, but it follows from the recognition that we are created by and continually wholly dependent on God. It is akin to the love of the child for the parent that has given it life and love. And since God has done that for us, we should care for ourselves and for others as a way of acknowledging and appreciating this shared gift.

3. Forming lives ***in the light of Jesus Christ*** has two aspects: a) the *source and substance* of the illumination and b) the means of its *transmission and reception*. Faith is often represented as a matter of inner feeling or conviction invested in things one finds personally compelling, perhaps a person, or a community, or a text, or ideas. That is not the Catholic view.

For Catholicism, God's revelation began with His covenant with Abraham which included a 'promise of blessing and redemption'. This is extended to all humanity through the new covenant established by Jesus Christ and fulfilled through the sacrifice of the Cross. Jesus's life, teaching, death and resurrection are the 'blessing and redemption' of all who receive and accept them. These are the source and substance of Catholic faith, which is primarily faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God and Messiah.

In order to make his redemptive work available to successive generations, along with channels of grace, Christ established an authoritative means of transmission and mediation. That is the Church itself, led by the successors of Peter and the other Apostles. Through it, the 'deposit of faith' is handed on, scripture is interpreted, God is

worshipped, the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders are administered, and morality is articulated and taught.

For Catholicism, *everything* is mediated. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are known not directly but through created things. Grace perfects nature; it does not supplant it. The Word of God is not the words on a page, but the meaning of scripture as taught by the Apostles and their successors. Recognising the necessity of mediation, the Church has always been interested in sacramental practice, pre-eminently the sacrifice of the Mass and Eucharist; in culture as a medium of inherited understanding; and in education as formation as well as instruction.

***Forming lives of faith, hope and love in the light of Jesus Christ*** is, therefore, part of the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church and has to be understood in terms of, and in line with that mission. Not all students in Catholic schools are Catholic: either real or notional; and Catholic schools have a broader mission, but that must be more and not less than is required by being authentically Catholic, which is to say faithful to Jesus Christ and his Church.

### ***MACS Vision Statement***

*Every student is inspired and enabled to flourish and enrich the world.*

As with the previous elaboration of the MACS Statement of Purpose, the unfolding of the *Vision Statement* is best done by reflecting in turn on its component parts.

***Every student***, Catholic or otherwise, shares in the dignity and intended destiny of human beings as images of God, created to know, love and serve Him, each in his or her own achievable way according to their particular abilities and condition.

Human dignity, like human personhood, is not a status or attainment that some possess and others lack, or that is had to a greater or lesser degree. Personhood and dignity belong to every human being as part of their nature and are the foundation and ever-present locus of each individual's equal moral standing.

The stock of human abilities is relatively stable, but their distribution varies considerably, as do their expression and development. For Catholic schools, every student deserves equal consideration because every student is equally considerable, not in respect of talents, contributions and attainments but on account of being a co-equal child of God. These are not mere pieties or politenesses, but the proper starting point for thinking about aims, objectives and policies of Catholic schooling.

**Being inspired**, in the context of Catholic education, has two meanings. First, receiving and growing in grace through the work of the Holy Spirit. Second, being enlivened in imagination, feeling, thought and action by the example, encouragement and guidance of others. The first is Divine work, the second human, but in the Catholic understanding these co-operate. Grace acts with and through human nature. Hence, parents, guardians, pastors and teachers co-operate with the Spirit in the sanctification of students.

Good teaching involves commitment, discernment, enthusiasm and expertise. Together these encourage love of learning and progress in academic, artistic and sporting activities. Catholic schools also emphasise the dimensions of spiritual formation and of community service within and beyond the school itself. Good teaching places these in relation to one another and emphasises their interconnectedness. Thereby students are inspired to work in ways that integrate their abilities and interests and have a care for the needs of others.

**Being enabled to flourish** means students having their powers of thought, feeling and choice brought into mutual connection and developed to act in the right way, at the right time prudently, courageously, temperately, and justly. Each living thing flourishes according to its nature, and this requires understanding of authentic human goods and of how to achieve them so as to grow and thrive personally and in relation to others.

Every student has the potential to **enrich the world** throughout their lives by using whatever gifts they have for knowledge, productive activity, friendship, love, and moral and spiritual sensitivity to do good things in good ways for themselves and others. Catholic schools educate, develop and guide students towards this end – inspiring and enabling them to live well.

Although these statements were produced in relation to MACS, they are relevant to the work of all Catholic schools in the Melbourne Archdiocese, recognising that individual schools may also have particular charisms of their own. They also set a context for considering the religious education curriculum, and, together with the foregoing analysis of the challenges facing Catholic education and the account of the role of the Catholic school in the work of the Church, they have important implications for the courses of study required for teacher formation, the requirements for accreditation, the duties of principals and religious education leaders, and for others in the school.

## 17. Spirituality

As traditional religious belief and practice declined in Western-style liberal societies, there arose the trend of saying such things as ‘I am not religious, but I believe in spirituality’ and ‘I am not a traditionally religious person, but I am a spiritual one’. This style of talk often went with agnosticism (and sometimes with soft atheism), but



it typically retained vestiges of, or adopted counterparts for, familiar religious notions. So, instead of speaking of 'reverence for God's Creation', one might talk of 'respect for all of nature', and in place of 'devotional prayer', propose 'personal reflection' or 'meditation'. Again, while departing from the idea of divine law and of the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity, it was common to talk of 'universal rights', and of personal 'open-mindedness', 'positivity' and 'respect'.

In saying these things, people seem to be clearer about what they are rejecting than about what they are affirming. In fact, it has generally been part of this trend away from substantial and determinate religious faith not just to give up traditional beliefs and practices but explicitly to criticise them, certainly as they are associated with Judaism and Christianity. Hence the latter, particularly in their traditional embodiments, were often said to be 'doctrinaire', 'dogmatic', 'exclusionary', 'guilt-inducing', 'moralising', 'narrow', and 'un(self-)critical'. However, whereas clear sense can be made of human rights and of respect for persons if they are rooted in the dignity of each as a unique, created *imago Dei* (image of God), it is not evident what, if anything, can ground natural rights or intrinsic human dignity on a non-religious basis.

Something similar to the 'spiritual, but not religious' trend began to emerge within Christian denominations with some saying that *their* 'religious' life was not a matter of adhering to traditional teachings about faith and morals, or traditional liturgies and rituals, but of having a 'spiritual' orientation.

This contrasting of the religious and the spiritual should be puzzling, since Christianity in general, and more specifically Catholicism (and Eastern Orthodoxy), have, since the early centuries, laid emphasis on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts and efficacy of grace, in nurturing personal spiritual development. Accordingly, they also developed traditions intended to further and promote it. Thus, they have *spiritual exercises* and *practices*, *spiritual direction* and forms of individual and communal *spiritual life*, and *spiritual writings*.

Catholicism has produced the greatest Christian classics of these sorts: Augustine's *Confessions*, Ugo Boscchi's *Little Flowers of St Francis*, Bonaventure's *Journey of the Mind to God*, Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*, Catherine of Siena's *The Dialogue*, Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, Ignatius of Loyola's *The Spiritual Exercises*, John of the Cross's *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, Frances de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Louis de Montfort's *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Jean Pierre de Caussade's *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, and Therese of Lisieux's *Story of a Soul* – with many lesser known works before, between and after these.

Since these writers were themselves generally members of religious orders and societies, were bound by solemn vows and subjected themselves to religious superiors, and were committed to Catholic doctrines and moral teachings, it should be clear that believing in and adhering to authoritative tradition and doctrine are not incompatible with having a spiritual life, and indeed with entering into the depths of spirituality and finding there treasures to be shared with others. Furthermore, in each of the cases mentioned, the spiritual insights and guidance draw directly from Catholic tradition.

This suggests that the combination of orthodox belief and practice, and of spiritual profundity, may be more than accidental. Perhaps it may even be that authentic Christian spirituality actually *depends* constitutively upon thinking, feeling and acting within the framework taught by Christ and the Apostles, and explored and unfolded within authoritative Christian tradition. Put another way, the very idea of spirituality as understood within Christianity, and more specifically within Roman Catholicism, presupposes Christian apostolic teaching.

Besides the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles the earliest Christian work, the *Didache* (*The Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*) establishes five elements and connections to be found in subsequent spiritual writings:

- First, it is *Christocentric*: Jesus is the model for the Christian and is present within the community of believers through Eucharist, prayer and scripture.
- Second, it is *eschatological*: directing believers to prepare for the life of the world to come.
- Third, it is *ascetical* in the sense of urging simplicity and the practice of virtue.
- Fourth, it is *liturgical*, stressing the importance of worship, with the principal focus being the Eucharist.
- Fifth, it is *social*, focusing on community, unity, and charity.

It is significant also that as eastern and western traditions of Christian spirituality developed, they converged on a three-stage structure of spiritual development involving *purgation*, *illumination*, and *perfection*. Sometimes, these are related to the sacraments of *baptism* (which washes away original sin), *Eucharist* (which illuminates mind and spirit through the presence of Christ), and *confirmation* (which seals and perfects the covenant created in baptism). At other times, they are related to aspects of Old and especially New Testament teachings about the routes to and from salvation, as in Paul's direction to the Galatians:

I tell you, be guided by the Spirit, and you will no longer yield to self-indulgence. The desires of self-indulgence are always in opposition to the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are in opposition to self-indulgence: ... When self-indulgence is at work the results are obvious: sexual vice, impurity, and sensuality, the worship of false gods and sorcery; antagonisms and rivalry, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions and malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things. And about these, I tell you now as I have told you in the past, that people who behave in these ways will not inherit the kingdom of God. On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control; ... Since we are living by the Spirit, let our behaviour be guided by the Spirit and let us not be conceited or provocative and envious of one another.

– St Paul, *Letter to the Galatians* 5:16-26.

## 18. The Spirit

In contrast to these clear and rigorous understandings which connect spirituality to the progression from sin, through grace to salvation, the post-Christian, or post-church use of the term 'spiritual' is generally vague and typically self-approving, associating itself with lack of rigidity, openness, and so on. The historical Christian source of the notion, however, has nothing to do with personal attitudes and sentiments, but refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the soul of the individual or of the community (and usually the former in consequence of the latter). Resultant from this indwelling, and manifesting it, are gifts for individuals' own sanctification, and for the help of others: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, courage, piety, and wonder and awe (*Isaiah* 11:2-3) and the fruits of the Spirit described by Paul: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control (again *Galatians* 5:22-23).

In this understanding, therefore, spirituality is connected to the Holy Trinity, and to the special relation between its Second and Third Persons: Jesus was *conceived* by the Holy Spirit, was *baptised* in the presence of, and *anointed* by, the Holy Spirit, was *filled* with the Holy Spirit, was *resurrected* through the Holy Spirit, and promised to *send* the Holy Spirit to animate and confirm the Apostles and their successors. Catholic spirituality is the practice of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the very opposite of self-oriented fulfilment.

With these points in mind, it is important to identify and diagnose two recent trends which at first sight may appear benign, but which can easily and quite quickly lead away from Catholic faith and practice.

The first is a shift from the teachings of Jesus Christ to 'Spirit-oriented thinking'. There are excellent reasons to reflect upon the nature and activity of the Holy Spirit and to pray to the Spirit, but the trend in question involves treating 'the Spirit' as if it were an alternative to God the Father and Christ the Son, a separately existing divinity, then choosing to 'listen to it' in order to escape some of the hard teachings of Jesus, thereby marginalising, ignoring or rejecting them. But this is in direct opposition to the teaching of Christ on the union of the Persons and the unity of their purpose:

Jesus said: 'I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him. ... I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate and counsellor [*Paráklētos*] to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth whom the world can never accept since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you'.

– *John* 14:6-7, 16-17.

The Gospels tell us that some of Jesus's teachings amazed and astonished hearers (*Mark* 1:22, 27), 'they could not bear to hear' (*John* 6:60), and from the time of hearing them many who had previously followed 'could walk no more with him' (*John* 6:66). Excluding duplications between Gospels, scripture gives us over 30,000 words of Jesus, and many of these are no less challenging today than they were to his immediate contemporaries:

In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ... For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person. As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me.

– *John 6:53-57.*

Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. For this reason, whatever you have said and done in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places be proclaimed from the housetops. To you my friends I say: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. I will tell you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, he is the one to fear.

– *Luke 12:2-5.*

You have heard how it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say this to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ... It has also been said, anyone who divorces his wife must give her a writ of dismissal. But I say this to you, everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of an illicit marriage, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

– *Matthew 5:27-32.*

Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it. ... It is not anyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. ... Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and his teaching made a deep impression on the people because he taught them with authority, unlike their own scribes.

– *Matthew 7:13-14, 21, 28-29.*

By contrast with Jesus's abundant and specific directions, no actual words are attributed to the Spirit. Instead, its activity is to be found in confirming the Apostles in their faith, empowering them in their works, and inspiring them and the Church in teaching and interpreting Christ's words.

The Holy Spirit, then, does not provide an alternative script but confirms that which has been produced and inspires the reading and interpretation of it by the Church. Turning to the Spirit, therefore, is not like seeking a second opinion in the hope that it might provide a more welcome and palatable message. When Jesus said 'The Father and I are One' (*John 10:30*) he was denounced and attacked; but just as Jesus and the Father are One, so are Jesus and the Spirit. And the warning against abusing the Spirit comes from Jesus himself:



Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather in with me throws away. And so I tell you, every human sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

– *Matthew 12:30-31.*

Through him, then, we both in the one Spirit have free access to the Father. So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow-citizens with the holy people of God and part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

– St Paul, *Letter to the Ephesians 2:20.*

## 19. Listening to the Spirit

The second increasing trend is to look not to scripture, nor to sacred tradition, nor to sacramental life to discern the Spirit, but to turn to 'the world' in expectation of hearing its voice. The pressing question, of course, is whether 'its voice' is that of the Spirit or that of the world. This trend is of a piece with the 'spiritual, but not church-bound' turn. Certainly, it is not for us to circumscribe where and when the Spirit is active, but there is evidently a pervasive confusion between the idea of hearing the Spirit *in* the present age and hearing the spirit *of* the present age.

The theme of the 2022 *Australian National Catholic Education Conference* held in Melbourne was '*The Future is listening*'. Someone might reasonably ask, 'Does this mean "The Future is *listening*", that is, as we proceed we need to listen more – more extensively, more attentively, more discerningly? Or does it mean "The *Future* is listening", that is, we are not speaking to or for ourselves only, for there are those who will in the future listen to what we are saying?' These interpretations could both be true, but there is a further clue, for the phrase '*The Future is listening*' recalls, and was intended partly to echo, the motto of the recent Plenary Council, whose goal was to renew the life and mission of the Church in Australia: '*Listen to what the Spirit is saying*'.

It is important to remember, therefore, that the latter is a quote from the *Apocalypse* – literally the 'Unveiling' or 'Revelation'. This was written before the end of the first century to the seven churches of Asia Minor by John of Ephesus. The full sentence is 'Let anyone who has an ear *listen to what the spirit is saying to the churches*'. The churches in question were those at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, all founded by the Apostle Paul, or perhaps in a couple of instances by one of his disciples. John evidently believes that the injunction to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches is of great importance since he goes on to repeat it six times in the course of two chapters.

The question of where, when, and how the Holy Spirit 'speaks' is a complex one. Also, it cannot be resolved without taking account of the fact that the source of Christian understanding of the Spirit and of its work originates in the apostolic period and relates to its threefold role in the lives of the Apostles: guaranteeing authentic revelation; bringing spiritual animation; and inspiring testimony on behalf of the Gospel.

One reason, however, why people think that if they listen they will hear new truths blowing in the wind is that they conflate two seemingly similar but in fact very different ideas. First, and again, that of the Spirit *in* the world (which is what is spoken of in scripture) and that of the spirit *of* the world as espoused by modern secular thinkers. The first, in the form with which Christians might properly be concerned appears in and is handed down from the apostolic age, as affirmed by Vatican II in *Dei Verbum* (the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation). The second is a notion developed by post-Christian thinkers in the 18th and early 19th centuries and associated with the idea of the *Geist der Zeiten*, or the more familiar *Zeitgeist* – literally the spirit of the time.

*Zeitgeist* talk has become commonplace in popular commentary as referring to current mores and cultural trends, but as a concept it lacks criteria by which to distinguish between the ephemeral and the enduring, and between the shallow and the deep. Thinking in terms of the Holy Spirit expressing itself is a more responsible and disciplined matter, for it requires an interpretative triangulation between scripture, authoritative church teaching, and lived experience. Moreover, such thinking has to reconcile whatever idea it inclines towards with conclusions arrived at in past centuries. Once again, the ideas of spirituality, the Spirit, and of listening to the Spirit all have their origins with Catholic tradition; and they work together in clarifying and developing the substance of that tradition. They cannot then be treated as an alternative to it.

Likewise, the development *of* doctrine, which John Henry Newman famously argued for, is to be distinguished from change *in* doctrine, which (following Vincent de Lérins) he terms ‘corruption’ in his oft-referred to, but seemingly little read, *Essay on the subject*. Newman titles chapter 5, ‘Genuine Developments Contrasted with Corruptions’, and writes:

It becomes necessary in consequence to assign certain characteristics of faithful developments, which none but faithful developments have, and the presence of which serves as a test to discriminate between them and corruptions. ... There is no corruption if it retains one and the same type, the same principles, the same organization; if its beginnings anticipate its subsequent phases, and its later phenomena protect and subserve its earlier; if it has a power of assimilation and revival, and a vigorous action from first to last.

Compare the following, from the Second Vatican Council, a little over a century later:

When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church, and thus, all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father. ...[D]iscernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly

to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.  
 – Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (1964) 4, 12.

## 20. The Sense of the Faith and the Sense of the Faithful

In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo* [in believing]. This means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God.  
 – Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) 119.

The relevance of the previous two sections to the issues of Catholic school identity, mission, and purpose, and of the RE curriculum, is that while it is obviously important in thinking about the content, form and aims of education to be aware of changes in the surrounding culture, and of what is being said and done in that culture, this is not the same as listening *out for*, let alone listening *to*, the Holy Spirit. The latter involves discernment informed by knowledge of and adherence to Catholic sacred tradition, and by the application of criteria such as those proposed by Newman.

In this connection it is important also for those involved in Catholic education, particularly senior staff, to be clear about the meaning and import of the idea of the sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*). These two expressions, particularly the first, began to be used more extensively following Vatican II, which, in its document, *Lumen Gentium*, used the former to introduce Catholic teaching on the concept of the sense of the faith, that is, the capacity to recognise and understand the truths of authentic revelation. If one reads *Lumen Gentium*, Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), and recent works such as *Sensus Fidei in the life of the Church* (2014) by the International Theological Commission, it quickly becomes clear that this idea is quite different and distinct from that of general opinion or sentiment.

Here the distinction is somewhat analogous to the difference between hearing the voice of the Spirit *in* the world and hearing the voice *of* the world. Vatican II emphasises *totality*, *grace-filled discernment*, the *Holy Spirit*, and *fidelity*:

The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name. The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One [the Spirit] cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters

of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.

– Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (1964) 12.

Similarly, in its sustained reflection on the subject, the International Theological Commission writes:

The *sensus fidei* is essential to the life of the Church, and it is necessary now to consider how to discern and identify authentic manifestations of the *sensus fidei*. Such a discernment is particularly required in situations of tension when the authentic *sensus fidei* needs to be distinguished from expressions simply of popular opinion, particular interests or the spirit of the age. ...

Dispositions needed for authentic participation in the *sensus fidei*:

- (a) Participation in the life of the Church
- (b) Listening to the word of God
- (c) Openness to reason
- (d) Adherence to the magisterium [the teaching authority of the Church]
- (e) Holiness – humility, freedom and joy.

– International Theological Commission, '*Sensus Fidei*' in the Life of the Church (2014) chapter 4: 'How to Discern Authentic Manifestations of the *Sensus Fidei*'.

From spirituality to the Holy Spirit, and from listening to the Spirit to having and manifesting the sense of the faith, the Catholic understanding is clear and distinct. The life that Christ offers and provides, and which the Spirit *confirms* and *sustains*, is the same as that given to the Apostles and handed on by them and their successors through the communities they founded. It is the same supernatural life of grace that the present-day Church exists to bring to and sustain in its members.

But the Church is not a sect seeking salvation only for its own. Jesus commissioned the Apostles to 'Go and make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time' (*Matthew* 28:19-20). Nor does the Church work only for those who share its faith. But just as the Israelites were told that they are to be a light unto the nations of the Gentiles (*Isaiah* 42:6), so the Catholic Church is to be a light to the world: 'You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house' (*Matthew* 5:14-15).



## 21. Conclusion

This report is prefaced with a series of quoted passages, including an extract from Archbishop Comensoli's presentation to the leadership of Catholic Schools (*Schooling Catholic*, 2019) and, in concluding this first part, it is apt to quote it again:

The idea of Catholic schooling for today and tomorrow requires more than finding ways of combining ideas around the words 'Catholic' and 'school'. We need to get used to thinking of a Catholic school as the compound noun it is meant to be. We need to think of how we can school people in a Catholic way; out of a Catholic perspective; from within a Catholic worldview.

So far as we are concerned with it here, Catholic religious education is located within the context of the Catholic school, hence the aptness of framing these reflections by repetition of this quoted passage. The idea of a 'compound noun' is well chosen to emphasise the unity of the conceptions of Catholic RE and of Catholic schooling. To most, the first will *seem* obvious as an idea, even if its character and content is hazy, but the second is likely to be less clear. This is due in part to inadequacies of education and formation.

The primary focus of concern is the schooling of students, but so far as that is *Catholic* schooling, and the RE *Catholic* religious education, our experience is that there is significant work to be done within MACS and the Archdiocese more generally with regard to the education of office staff and teachers about what 'Roman Catholic' means and implies. The serious mismatch between Catholic identity as represented in ECSI, and Catholic identity as understood by Roman Catholicism itself, means that as well as putting in place a more authentic conception within Catholic schools, it is necessary to consider requiring changes in some of the components and weightings within the existing programs of study available to intending and existing teachers. It is also apt to explore alternative programs, in addition to or in place of some of those currently recommended. Fortunately, as is indicated in the succeeding second part, there are a number of these, and indeed an increasing number as others elsewhere also address themselves to the pressing task of renewing authentic Catholic schooling. It would be appropriate, therefore, having considered what kinds of program would best suit the needs identified in this review, to initiate a process of tender through which existing and other potential providers could submit detailed schemes in line with the identified needs and priorities.

Fortunately, as is indicated in the succeeding, second part of this report, there are a number of these, and indeed an increasing number as others elsewhere also address themselves to the pressing task of renewing authentic Catholic schooling. It would be appropriate, therefore, having considered what kinds of program would best meet the needs identified in this report, to initiate a process of tender by existing and potential providers of initial, further, and ongoing education, training and formation.

Part Two:

## Review of the Religious Education Curriculum



### Chapter 1: The Identity and Mission of Catholic Schools: An Overview from Post–Vatican II Documents of the Church

1. The Nature and Goals of Catholic Schools
2. The Human Person and the Mediation of Culture
3. Evangelisation
4. The Community Dimension
5. Respect for Religious Freedom
6. The Primary Role of the Family
7. Social Engagement and a Culture of Dialogue
8. Reductive and Narrow Views of the Catholic School: Two Unhelpful Poles

#### **Recommendations:**

*The Identity and Mission of Catholic Schools: An Overview from Post–Vatican II Documents of the Church*

### Chapter 2: The Organisation of the Curriculum: An Overview from Post–Vatican II Documents of the Church

1. Key Understandings of Contemporary Catechesis: ‘Directory for Catechesis’ (2020)
2. Catechesis and Religious Education
3. Trinitarian Christocentricity
4. Sources of Catechesis and Religious Education
5. Tasks of Catechesis and Religious Education
6. Languages of Catechesis
7. Essential Content of Catechesis and the Primacy of the Kerygma
8. Mystagogy
9. Adaptations to Developmental and Pastoral Needs
10. Accompaniment

#### **Recommendations:**

*The Organisation of the Curriculum: An Overview from Post–Vatican II Documents of the Church*

## Chapter 3: Audit of Curriculum Content

### Part 1: Audit of Doctrinal Content: Elements Not Evident

1. Promoting Knowledge of the Faith
2. Liturgical and Sacramental Formation
3. Teaching to Pray
4. Moral Formation
5. Christian Community Life

### Part 2: The Bueclein Report: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Observations: Doctrinal Content of the Melbourne Religious Education Program

#### **Recommendations:**

*Audit of Curriculum Content*

## Chapter 4: The Needs of Contemporary Students

1. Student Contexts and Realities
2. [Aspects of Life] Valued by 15–19-Year-Olds
3. Early Years
4. Primary Years
5. Secondary Years
6. Australian Catholic Schools' Religious Affiliation
7. The Contexts and Realities of Student Faith Formation
8. Young People and Church
9. Education
10. Children, Young People, Spirituality and Faith
11. Students in Catholic schools

#### **Recommendations:**

*The Needs of Contemporary Students*

## Chapter 5: Survey Results

1. Sample Size
2. Wide Spread of Opinions
3. Methodology and Data Analysis in General
4. Results and Data Analysis: Primary Schools
5. Results and Data Analysis: Secondary Schools

#### **Recommendations:**

*Survey Results*

## Chapter 6: Programs of Religious Education Outside Melbourne

1. Sydney Catholic Schools
2. Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes (Primary School Only)
3. Diocese of Lismore
4. Archdiocese of Brisbane
5. Archdiocese of Chicago
6. Archdiocese of Denver
7. Archdiocese of Detroit

8. Archdiocese of Los Angeles
9. Archdiocese of New York
10. Archdiocese of Philadelphia
11. Archdiocese of San Francisco
12. Diocese of Pittsburgh
13. Diocese of Kansas City, Kansas
14. England and Wales RE Curriculum
15. Scotland RE Syllabus

### Chapter 7: Formation of Personnel

1. Essential Elements for Teachers as Missionary Disciples
2. Professional Attributes
3. Personal Attributes
4. Anthropological Vision
5. Key Principles of Faith Formation
6. The Renewed Ministry of Catechist

#### **Recommendations:**

*Formation of Personnel*

### Chapter 8: Guidance for a New Religious Education Curriculum

Insights from Contemporary Learning Theory

A Survey of Some Effective Contemporary Learning and Teaching Practices

1. Self-Reported Grades
2. Developmentally Appropriate Programs
3. Formative Evaluation
4. Microteaching
5. Reciprocal Teaching
6. Teacher-Student Relationships
7. Spaced Practice vs Massed Practice
8. The Impact of Movement on Learning and Cognition
9. Choice and Perceived Control
10. Inadequacy of Extrinsic Rewards and Motivation
11. Learning from Peers
12. Inquiry Learning and Direct Instruction

#### **Recommendations:**

*Guidance for a New Religious Education Curriculum*

### Chapter 9: Developmental Stages for Religious Education

1. *Overview of Developmental Stages*
2. *Characteristics of 3–6-Year-Old Children*
3. *Characteristics of 6–9-Year-Old Children*
4. *Characteristics of 9–12-Year-Old Children*
5. *Characteristics of Adolescent Students: Four Key Themes*

#### **Recommendations:**

*Developmental Stages for Religious Education*



# Chapter 1

## The Identity and Mission of Catholic Schools: An Overview from Post–Vatican II Documents of the Church

As was noted and stressed in Part One, the Catholic school passes on the faith not only by its Religious Education curriculum, but also by its very nature and identity. In the Catholic school, ‘logos’ can be seen as the intellectual, spiritual and doctrinal foundation and ‘ethos’ can be described as the embodiment of these ideas in institutional and social practices.<sup>7</sup> If the Catholic educational process is to succeed, its ‘logos’ and ‘ethos’ must be in harmony. For this reason, the following essential principles relating to the nature, identity and mission of the Catholic school are here further emphasised and elaborated.

### 1. The Nature and Goals of Catholic Schools

In relation to its schools, the Church has three primary responsibilities: proclaiming the word; celebrating the sacraments; and exercising the ministry of charity.<sup>8</sup> The mission of the Catholic school embraces all three of these dimensions and is described as being part of the evangelising mission of the Church, based on the Great Commission of Christ himself: ‘Go out to all the world and tell the Good News’.<sup>9</sup> In order to provide appropriate ecclesiastical guidance in this important mission, Catholic schools must be institutionally linked to the bishop of the diocese, who has the responsibility for their proper functioning.<sup>10</sup> At its core, the Catholic school is a place of integral education of the human person, and its particular project is directed at creating a synthesis between faith, culture and life; and it works towards the achievement of this task by promoting a Christian vision of reality.<sup>11</sup>

“A distinctive feature of its ecclesial nature is that it is a school for all, especially the weakest.”<sup>12</sup> Hence, a Catholic education promotes a wisdom-based society, which must go beyond mere knowledge and educate students to think, evaluating facts in the light of values.<sup>13</sup> This needs to be grounded in a particular religious climate which is expressed through the celebration of Christian values in word and sacrament.<sup>14</sup> The religious life of the school has various interrelated components: its Catholic identity, charism and culture, the sacramental and liturgical life, artwork, icons and symbols, engagement in social justice, classroom learning and the specific teaching

<sup>7</sup> See Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 34–5.

<sup>8</sup> See Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), 25. Henceforth DCE.

<sup>9</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 49, 72. Henceforth EN.

<sup>10</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops’ Conferences on Religious Education in Schools* (2009), 6–7. Henceforth RES.

<sup>11</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007), 12, 14. Henceforth ETCS. See also Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), 39. Henceforth CS.

<sup>12</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (2022), 22. Henceforth ICS.

<sup>13</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013), 66. Henceforth EIDC.

<sup>14</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988), 25. Henceforth RDE.

of religion.<sup>15</sup> The Catholic school is endowed with a specific identity, namely, 'its reference to a Christian concept of life *centred on Jesus Christ*'.<sup>16</sup>

The Catholic educational project seeks always to work in harmony with the nature of the human person as revealed in Christ.<sup>17</sup> It is through a personal relationship with Christ that a believer is enabled to look at the whole of reality in a radically new way, granting the Church an ever renewed identity, with a view to fostering in school communities adequate responses to the fundamental questions for every person.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, the Catholic school can never take a position of neutrality with regard to Christian values or what it means to be human.<sup>19</sup> To this end, there are four distinctive characteristics of a Catholic school. First, its distinctive educational climate. Second, its emphasis on the personal development of each student. Third, its emphasis on the relationship between the Gospel and the culture. Fourth, its illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Catholic education, by its nature, requires openness to other cultures, without the loss of one's own identity.<sup>21</sup> It must always be kept in mind, however, that the project of Catholic education is 'long-term' and so the value of Catholic schools cannot always be measured in terms of immediate efficiency.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. The Human Person and the Mediation of Culture

In the contemporary context, it is evident that Catholic education must embrace a new commitment to the individual seen as a 'person in communion' and a new sense of his or her belonging to society.<sup>23</sup> If it is to fulfil its mission, any sound Catholic educational philosophy must account for both the physical and spiritual powers of each individual human person, looking to Christ himself as the fullness of humanity.<sup>24</sup> Without hesitation, the Catholic Church insists that the religious dimension is in fact intrinsic to culture and contributes to the overall formation of the person. Only this 'makes it possible to transform knowledge into wisdom of life'.<sup>25</sup>

The Church's work of education 'aims not only to ensure the maturity proper to the human person, but above all to ensure that the baptised, gradually initiated into the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of faith'.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Christianity can be described as the religion of God with a human face. Moreover, reason is always in need of being purified by faith, and religion always needs to be purified by reason.<sup>27</sup> It is therefore necessary that the Catholic school

<sup>15</sup> National Catholic Education Commission, *A Framework for Student Faith Formation in Catholic Schools* (2022), 11. Henceforth SFF.

<sup>16</sup> ICS 20; emphasis in original.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania* (2001), 32. Henceforth EO.

<sup>18</sup> ICS 20.

<sup>19</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997), 10. Henceforth TTM.

<sup>20</sup> RDE 1.

<sup>21</sup> EIDC introduction.

<sup>22</sup> CS 84.

<sup>23</sup> EIDC 46.

<sup>24</sup> EO 32.

<sup>25</sup> Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (2020), 314. Henceforth DC.

<sup>26</sup> ICS 13.

<sup>27</sup> EIDC 11.

aim to bring faith, culture and life into harmony and to guide students through a critical and systematic assimilation of culture.<sup>28</sup>

As we confront the reality that many of our students have not had the experience of being catechised in practising Catholic families, we need to bear in mind that ‘God is at work in every human being who, through reason, has perceived the mystery of God and recognizes universal values’.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, ‘the generating nucleus of every authentic culture is constituted by its approach to the mystery of God’,<sup>30</sup> and in the various situations created by different cultures, the Christian presence must be shown and made visible, tangible and conscious.<sup>31</sup> From the earliest times in its history, Christianity has been aware of the reality conveyed in the Gospel of John: ‘Through him [Christ, the Word] all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him’.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the whole universe is underpinned by the ‘logic’ of God, and it is only through Christ that the world is made intelligible to us. If we fail to make this known to those we educate, we deprive them of the truth which will enable them to make sense of the world in which they live.

### 3. Evangelisation

In the words of St Paul VI, The Church exists to evangelise – to preach and teach and to be a channel of grace, reconciling sinners with God and perpetuating Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass.<sup>33</sup> Because Catholic schools are ecclesial entities, ‘they participate “in the evangelizing mission of the Church and [represent] the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out”’.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, ‘the education that the Church pursues is evangelisation and care for the growth of those who are already walking towards the fullness of Christ’s life’.<sup>35</sup>

The Church sees the purpose of its entire activity as an expression of the love that seeks the good of every human being, and this is brought about by means of evangelisation through word and sacrament.<sup>36</sup> Catholic school educators respond to a privileged sacred call to ignite a culture of learning in community where learners move towards their own human flourishing – a movement towards Christ.<sup>37</sup> Those involved in evangelisation do so primarily by means of their Christian witness. Their initial presence in charity, however, must eventually result in the explicit presentation of the Gospel message.<sup>38</sup>

Especially when dealing with those for whom the Christian message is unfamiliar, it must be born in mind that evangelisation, in the first place, is not the delivery of a doctrine but rather, making present and announcing Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup> More recent teaching of the Church identifies this as the *kerygma*. (More detail on this will be

<sup>28</sup> RDE 34.

<sup>29</sup> EIDC 13.

<sup>30</sup> EIDC 7.

<sup>31</sup> EIDC 57.

<sup>32</sup> *John* 1:3.

<sup>33</sup> EN 14.

<sup>34</sup> ICS 30.

<sup>35</sup> ICS 13.

<sup>36</sup> DCE 19.

<sup>37</sup> SFF 10.

<sup>38</sup> EN 21.

<sup>39</sup> DC 29.

expounded later in this report.) Even so, Catholic schools have an important role to play with those committed to their care and are reminded that catechetical instruction must not be neglected as a means of evangelisation.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. The Community Dimension

The characteristic element of the Catholic school, in addition to pursuing ‘cultural goals and the human formation of youth’, consists in creating ‘for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity’.<sup>41</sup> More recent documents of the Church highlight the fact that the Church encourages the project of fraternal humanism: ‘putting the person at the centre of education, in a framework of relationships that make up a living community, which is interdependent and bound to a common destiny’.<sup>42</sup> The Catholic school is well placed to provide a relational space where many forms of youth ministry, including that of the teacher, can take place. Youth ministry honours the student voice and offers unique witness to faith.<sup>43</sup>

The ‘community’ dimension has always played a very important role in the project of Catholic education. It must be stressed that this is not primarily a sociological concept, but an eternal mystery, revealed in Christ, of the communion of love that is the very life of God – the Holy Trinity.<sup>44</sup> The Church goes so far as to teach that a Catholic education can only be carried out authentically in a relational community context, because its purpose is to make human beings more human.<sup>45</sup> Isolation is one of the deepest possible forms of poverty and it springs from a sense of not being loved or being able to love.<sup>46</sup>

There are two dimensions to a genuine relational community – one with God and the other towards one another.<sup>47</sup> With this in mind, it is important to emphasise that one of the most important purposes of a Catholic school is that the students learn to overcome individualism by living in solidarity with Christ.<sup>48</sup> The Church identifies the project of ‘Globalising hope’, the absence of which is bound to produce conflict and generate suffering and misery.<sup>49</sup> By extension, the Catholic school has a role to play in promoting justice. This role must be placed in the overall context of its mission, which is multi-dimensional.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the curriculum must help the students reflect on the great problems of our time, including the difficult situation of a large part of humanity’s living conditions.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>40</sup> EN 42.

<sup>41</sup> ICS 16.

<sup>42</sup> See Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Fraternal Humanism* (2017), 8. Henceforth EFH.

<sup>43</sup> SFF 25.

<sup>44</sup> DCE 19.

<sup>45</sup> ETCS 12.

<sup>46</sup> EIDC 38.

<sup>47</sup> ETCS 12.

<sup>48</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), 50–3. Henceforth GDC.

<sup>49</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Fraternal Humanism* (2017), 19. Henceforth EFH.

<sup>50</sup> DCE 28.

<sup>51</sup> EIDC 66.



## 5. Respect for Religious Freedom

In Catholic schools, the religious freedom of non-Catholic pupils must be respected. The service offered to non-Catholics in Catholic schools is one of practical charity – freely given. It is not pursued for any other purpose. This does not mean, however, that Christ can be left aside, since often the deepest cause of suffering is the absence of God.<sup>52</sup> Invitational faith formation respects the dignity and human freedom of the child and young person. It always respects that faith is a free response to God’s invitation; it is proposed and not imposed.<sup>53</sup> For students who are non-believers, religious education assumes the character of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel and is ordered to a decision of faith.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel; to propose is not to impose.<sup>55</sup>

## 6. The Primary Role of the Family

The family is a divine institution that stands as the prototype of every social order.<sup>56</sup> In terms of its role within a Christian world view, ‘the family is a proclamation of faith in that it is the natural place in which faith can be lived in a simple and spontaneous manner’.<sup>57</sup> What the family offers is ‘a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured’.<sup>58</sup>

As was noted and emphasised in Part One, it is a long-established axiom that parents are the primary educators and, for this reason, the school is bound by the principle of subsidiarity in respect of the education of their own children.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, it is understood that educational and academic institutions placing ‘the person at the centre of their mission must respect the family as the first natural society, and to put themselves at its side, in line with a correct understanding of subsidiarity’.<sup>60</sup> It is impossible to promote the dignity of the person without showing concern for the family.<sup>61</sup> As a consequence of the important role played by families, schools need to provide concrete support to parents to enable them to fulfil this role – including meetings and programs to help equip them for the task.<sup>62</sup> Formation in faith is undertaken in partnership with parents and families.<sup>63</sup> Despite contemporary views to the contrary, the social teaching of the Church continues to hold that in the education of children, the role of the father and that of the mother are equally necessary.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> DCE 31.

<sup>53</sup> SFF 22.

<sup>54</sup> GDC 75.

<sup>55</sup> RDE 5.

<sup>56</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* (2004), 211. Henceforth CSD.

<sup>57</sup> DC 227.

<sup>58</sup> DC 228.

<sup>59</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), 3. Henceforth GE.

<sup>60</sup> EFH 9.

<sup>61</sup> See CSD 185.

<sup>62</sup> TTM 20. See also RDE 42–3.

<sup>63</sup> SFF 11.

<sup>64</sup> CSD 242.

## 7. Social Engagement and a Culture of Dialogue

Contemporary Catholic teaching offered by Pope Francis insists that the Christian vision of creation and of human activity offers ‘Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters’.<sup>65</sup> This implies a need to work with those who may not hold to the same world view but in some areas are seeking similar goals, and it is appropriate to open dialogue in these areas of common concern. A broad compact on education is needed, capable of imparting not only technical knowledge, but also and above all human and spiritual wisdom, “based on justice” and virtuous behaviour that can be put into practice.”<sup>66</sup>

The Church considers dialogue as a constitutive dimension and, because of its ecclesial nature, the Catholic school shares this element as constitutive of its identity. Nevertheless, as Pope Francis teaches, ‘We cannot create a culture of dialogue if we do not have identity’.<sup>67</sup> Pope Francis has provided three fundamental guidelines to help dialogue:

1. the duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others,
2. the courage to accept differences, and sincerity of intentions.
3. The duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others, because true dialogue cannot be built on ambiguity or a willingness to sacrifice some good for the sake of pleasing others.<sup>68</sup>

Today, due to the advanced process of secularisation examined in Part One, Catholic schools find themselves in a missionary situation. They are called upon to commit to bearing witness through an educational project clearly inspired by the Gospel.<sup>69</sup> In such circumstances, children and young people can be enlivened in faith by the witness of those around them to the person of Christ and the love of God. All members of the school community are called to this privileged presence in their everyday relationships.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the fact that not everyone will agree in all matters concerning Catholic teaching, everyone has the obligation to recognise, respect and bear witness to the Catholic identity of the school, officially set out in the educational project. This applies to the teaching staff, the non-teaching personnel and the pupils and their families.<sup>71</sup> At the time of enrolment, both the parents and the student must be made aware of the Catholic school’s educational project.<sup>72</sup> For the sake of clarity, Catholic schools must have either a mission statement or a code of conduct. These are instruments for institutional and professional quality assurance. They must therefore be legally reinforced by means of employment contracts or other contractual declarations by those involved having clear legal value.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Francis, *Laudate Si*’ (2015), 64. Henceforth LS.

<sup>66</sup> ICS 34.

<sup>67</sup> ICS 2.

<sup>68</sup> ICS 30.

<sup>69</sup> ICS 28.

<sup>70</sup> SFF 25.

<sup>71</sup> ICS 39.

<sup>72</sup> ICS 39.

<sup>73</sup> ICS 77.

## 8. Reductive and Narrow Views of the Catholic School: Two Unhelpful Poles

There are two unhelpful extremes that need to be avoided in the conduct of the Catholic school: a reductive view and a narrow view. In a reductive Catholic school model, the school does not live up to the specific charism with which Catholic identity is lived out. Such a model explicitly or de facto excludes essential principles, dimensions and requirements of the Catholic faith.<sup>74</sup> A narrow view, on the other hand, leaves no room for those who are not 'totally' Catholic. We must not lose our missionary impetus to confine ourselves on an island, and at the same time we need the courage to bear witness to a Catholic 'culture', that is, one that is universal, cultivating a healthy awareness of our own Christian identity.<sup>75</sup> To sum up, we might say: 'in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity'.<sup>76</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

*The Identity and Mission of Catholic Schools: An Overview from Post-Vatican II Documents of the Church*

1. Catholic Schools must work on behalf of the bishop to fulfil their three primary responsibilities: proclaiming the word; celebrating the sacraments; and exercising the ministry of charity.
2. Priests and MACS staff need to be given formation regarding their responsibilities with regard to the Religious Education program in the schools of the Archdiocese.
3. The Catholic school must attend carefully to the nature of the human person and the mediation of culture by means of a Christian vision of reality.
4. As ecclesial entities, Catholic schools are required to participate in the evangelising mission of the Church.
5. Catholic schools must attend to the 'community' dimension. This is a theological concept based on an eternal mystery, revealed in Christ, of the communion of love that is the very life of God – the Holy Trinity.
6. Catholic schools must be attentive to religious freedom as it is understood in the documents of the Church.
7. Catholic schools must acknowledge parents are the primary educators of their own children and, for this reason, the school is bound by the principle of subsidiarity.
8. Catholic schools need to be attentive to some of the elements of social engagement that are the proper concern of the lay faithful. Action in this area will become more significant when the students take on these responsibilities as adults.
9. Catholic schools must contribute to the building of a culture of dialogue according to the mind of the Church and in the context of their mission.

<sup>74</sup> ICS 69.

<sup>75</sup> ICS 72.

<sup>76</sup> ICS 85.

# Chapter 2

## The Organisation of the Curriculum: An Overview from Post–Vatican II Documents of the Church

### 1. Key Understandings of Contemporary Catechesis: 'Directory for Catechesis' (2020)

The *Directory for Catechesis* was published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization in 2020. It brought together more recent teachings of episcopal synods and of Pope Francis in both religious education and catechesis. There are six key understandings that serve as the foundation for the contemporary task, as set out below:

1. The *Directory* reiterates the need for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, who is present in the Church, in the world and in the human heart.
2. It reminds us that the act of faith is born from the love that desires an ever-increasing knowledge of the Lord Jesus.
3. The role of the Christian community is reaffirmed as the natural setting for the generation and maturation of Christian life.
4. It is affirmed that the process of evangelisation and catechesis is above all a spiritual action.
5. We are called on to be active participants in the catechetical initiative (not passive consumers) and we are encouraged to become missionary disciples.
6. The proclamation of the Gospel requires the overcoming of any opposition between content and method, between faith and life.<sup>77</sup>

### 2. Catechesis and Religious Education

One of the difficulties that has been an ongoing challenge is the relationship between teaching the Catholic religion and catechesis. Some historical background may help to put this into its context for an Australian audience. In many European and Latin American countries, the passing on of the Catholic faith in earlier times was regarded as the responsibility of the Church and supported by the sovereign. With the demise of Catholic monarchies, the Church needed to come to an accommodation with secular states regarding this. It will not be helpful here to provide an outline of every country's unique circumstances, so one typical exemplar will suffice: the Italian context. By the Lateran Treaty of 1929, students in Italian state schools were sent to catechetical sessions provided in churches throughout the country – usually for two hours on Thursday afternoons. As time went on, Catholics began to agitate for the inclusion of some form of religious studies in schools, since Italian culture could not be properly understood without some input on the role of Christianity in its history. Hence, there came into being two kinds of religious education, one being catechesis, the other a kind of religious knowledge

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<sup>77</sup> DC 4.

suitable for a secular context. In parts of the world where there had never been a strong Christian presence in the culture (e.g., Thailand) the Church offered its educational expertise by opening schools as a service to communities. Hence, 'it is not possible to reduce to a single model the various forms of religious education in schools which have developed as a result of accords between individual states and Episcopal Conferences'.<sup>78</sup> For this reason, caution needs to be exercised in taking on a particular way of implementing religious education taken entirely from the experience of other countries.

The separation of catechesis from religious education has never been a legal imperative in Australia, since Catholic schools are not obliged to conform to a 'secular' curriculum when teaching the faith in their own schools. The only exception to this is at a higher level (years 11 and 12) where a form of Religious Studies accredited by state education authorities may be studied as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education or its equivalent in other states. In this country, we are free to follow the advice of the *Directory*, which describes the relationship of religious education and catechesis as 'one of distinction and complementarity. Where the distinction is not clear, there is the danger that both may lose their identity'.<sup>79</sup> What needs to be made clear in this matter is that a distinction is not a complete separation; *both* dimensions may be present in Catholic classrooms at the same time. The *Directory* goes on to make it clear that the religious education learning area complements faith formation and so provides opportunities for students to respond freely to the invitation to faith and prayer that they encounter through their learning.<sup>80</sup>

In terms of the cultural aspect, the *Directory* takes the stance that the religious dimension is in fact intrinsic to culture. "It contributes to the overall formation of the person and makes it possible to transform knowledge into wisdom of life."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, in the context of a school, religious education needs to be seen as a subject with the same systematic demands and rigour as other disciplines.<sup>82</sup> The definitive aim of catechesis, on the other hand, is intimacy with Christ and ongoing induction into the life of the Church.<sup>83</sup> In the Church's view, however, the distinction between religious education and catechesis does not change the fact that a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis.<sup>84</sup>

### 3. Trinitarian Christocentricity

The Trinity is the central mystery of the Catholic faith, and so it must find its place in the any sound program of religious education and catechesis. The starting point for it is Jesus Christ, who not only transmits the word of God: he is the Word of God. The project of educating in the Catholic faith is therefore completely tied to him.<sup>85</sup> Christ then leads us to the innermost mystery of God – the Holy Trinity, the central mystery of Christian faith and life.<sup>86</sup> Every authentic mode of presentation of the Christian

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<sup>78</sup> DC 316.

<sup>79</sup> DC 313.

<sup>80</sup> SFF 25.

<sup>81</sup> DC 314.

<sup>82</sup> RES 18.

<sup>83</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), 5. Henceforth CT.

<sup>84</sup> RDE 69.

<sup>85</sup> GDC 98.

<sup>86</sup> RES 99.



message must always be both Christocentric and Trinitarian: Through Christ to the Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit.<sup>87</sup> The ability of human beings to create culture derives from their being created in the image of God, a Trinity of Persons in communion.<sup>88</sup> Hence, made in the image of the Trinity, all human persons are relational by nature.<sup>89</sup>

#### 4. Sources of Catechesis and Religious Education

The *Directory* offers specific advice on the sources for catechesis and religious education. It begins with the way in which we encounter the Word of God in Jesus Christ. Sacred Scripture, which is inspired by God, reaches the depths of the human spirit better than any other word, but the revelation of the Word of God is not exhausted by Scripture: 'In the course of Tradition, the thought and writings of the Fathers have a significant role'.<sup>90</sup> Another significant source is the *magisterium*, or teaching office of the Church.

Christ has given the apostles the enduring mandate of proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth ... The roman pontiff and the bishops in communion with him are the custodians of the Magisterium of the Church.<sup>91</sup>

The *Directory* goes on to list the liturgy, the witness of the saints, theology, Christian culture and 'beauty' as valid sources of religious education and catechesis. The liturgy is one of the essential and indispensable sources of the Church's catechesis. The ancient principle, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, (the law or principle of worship is the law or principle of belief) recalls that the liturgy is an integral element of tradition. Moreover, the one who introduces another to the mysteries is first of all a witness. Hence, there is a need for a mystagogical journey which springs from the fundamental structure of Christian experience.<sup>92</sup> From the very first centuries, the example of the Virgin Mary and the lives of the saints and martyrs have been an integral and efficacious part of catechesis. 'The apparitions of the Virgin Mary recognised by the Church, the lives of the saints and martyrs of every culture and people are a true source of catechesis'.<sup>93</sup> 'The believers' seeking of an understanding of the faith – or theology – is an indispensable necessity for the Church ... Theological work in the Church is first of all at the service of the proclamation of the faith and of Catechesis.<sup>94</sup> Christian culture is born from the awareness of the centrality of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel, which transforms humanity. The heritage of great historical and artistic value is a resource that inspires and enhances catechesis in that it transmits the Christian vision of a world transformed with the creative power of beauty.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> GDC 100.

<sup>88</sup> EIDC 34.

<sup>89</sup> EIDC 34.

<sup>90</sup> DC 91–2.

<sup>91</sup> DC 93–4.

<sup>92</sup> DC 95–8.

<sup>93</sup> DC 99–100.

<sup>94</sup> DC 101.

<sup>95</sup> DC 102–5.

The *Directory* gives special attention to beauty, the *via pulchritudinis*, since, given the high value attached to the appreciation of art and nature, this seems to be uniquely capable of attracting the attention of contemporary people. 'In the New Testament, beauty is concentrated on the person of Jesus Christ, one who reveals the divine, who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature.'<sup>96</sup> The Church, therefore, bears in mind that 'in order to reach the human heart the proclamation of the Risen One must shine forth with goodness, truth and beauty. In this sense, it is necessary that every form of catechesis ... attend to the way of beauty (*via pulchritudinis*)'.<sup>97</sup> Beauty is always and inseparably 'steeped with goodness and truth. Therefore, contemplating beauty elicits within us sentiments of joy, pleasure, tenderness, fulness, meaning, thus opening us to the transcendent. The way of evangelisation is the *way of beauty* and therefore every form of beauty is a source of catechesis'.<sup>98</sup> The profound words of St Thomas Aquinas offer a philosophical foundation which can help us understand the role of beauty:

Beauty and goodness in a subject are identical fundamentally; for they are based on the same thing, namely, its form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ logically, for goodness properly relates to the appetite (goodness being what all things desire) and therefore it has the aspect of an end (the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing), On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned. As in what is after their own kind – because even sense is a sort of reason, just as is every cognitive faculty.<sup>99</sup>

## 5. Tasks of Catechesis and Religious Education

The *Directory* of 2020 compressed the more extensive description of the tasks of catechesis and religious education that was offered in the 1997 *General Directory*. These have been reduced to five, as set out below:

*Leading to knowledge of the Faith and the meaning of the Christian message.* In particular, it fosters a knowledge of the Creed that can be used as a reference for life. It is important not to underestimate the cognitive dimension of the faith.<sup>100</sup>

*Initiation into the celebration of the Mystery.* The sacraments, celebrated in the liturgy, are a special means that fully communicate him who is proclaimed by the Church. This requires attention to the liturgical year, the meaning of the signs and symbols, and an appreciation of the significance of Sunday for the Christian community.<sup>101</sup>

*Formation for life in Christ.* This task is intended to promote the life of Jesus in the dispositions described in the Beatitudes, which can be seen as the Christian's

<sup>96</sup> DC 107.

<sup>97</sup> DC 108.

<sup>98</sup> DC 109.

<sup>99</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 5, a. 4, reply to objection 1.

<sup>100</sup> DC 80.

<sup>101</sup> DC 81.

'identity card'.<sup>102</sup> It also includes a formation of the moral conscience and of the individual vocation of every Christian.<sup>103</sup>

*Teaching Prayer.* Catechesis has the task of educating for prayer by learning to pray 'like Jesus' and 'in Jesus'. The Our Father is the model for all Christian prayer. It incorporates blessing, adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise. This task requires training in both liturgical and personal prayer.<sup>104</sup> Making space for extended time for reflection enables and invites participants to listen deeply to the movement of the Spirit.<sup>105</sup>

*Introduction to community life.* The faith is professed, celebrated, expressed and lived, above all in community. By focusing on what is positive in others in order to cherish them as gifts of God helps us to reject selfishness and jealousy. The ultimate goal is to form missionary disciples for Christ.<sup>106</sup> In supporting students to respond to the gift of faith, the Catholic school is called to participate in the evangelising mission of the Church and support children and young people to grow in religious self-understanding, spirituality and participation in the community of faith.<sup>107</sup> Engagement in social justice provides one way for students to encounter the Gospel in action.<sup>108</sup>

## 6. Languages of Catechesis

The classic kerygmatic theologian, Johannes Hofinger, identified four main ways in which the Catholic faith needs to be communicated. These have been adopted by the *Directory* and proposed as 'languages' that need to be used in our own times. Every one of them is necessary. These languages are: Sacred Scripture (biblical language); liturgical symbols and ceremonies (symbolic-liturgical language); writings of the fathers, creeds, magisterium (doctrinal language); witness of the saints and martyrs (performative language).<sup>109</sup> In addition to these classic four, the *Directory* adds a further three: narrative language, art, music.

The *Directory* also gives a place to the now ubiquitous digital languages, arguing that 'the written word alone struggles to speak to the young, who are used to a language consisting of a combination of written word, sound and images ... It is necessary to learn effective approaches to communication and to guarantee a presence on the internet that bears witness to evangelical values'.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, the *Directory* issues notes of caution into the mix by pointing out that 'virtual reality cannot replace the spiritual, sacramental, and ecclesial reality experienced in direct encounter among persons'.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, 'we ourselves are means of communication and the real problem does not concern the acquisition of the latest technology ... what is needed in order to bear witness to the Gospel is an authentic form of communication that is the fruit of real interaction among persons'.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>102</sup> DC 83.

<sup>103</sup> DC 84–5.

<sup>104</sup> DC 86–7.

<sup>105</sup> SFF 25.

<sup>106</sup> DC 88–9.

<sup>107</sup> SFF 6.

<sup>108</sup> SFF 25.

<sup>109</sup> DC 205.

<sup>110</sup> DC 214.

<sup>111</sup> DC 217.

<sup>112</sup> DC 217.

## 7. Essential Content of Catechesis and the Primacy of the Kerygma

One of the key changes to the *Directory* concerns the primacy of the *kerygma* – the proclamation of the gospel. This will be no surprise to those who have followed the catechetical interventions of Pope Francis from his time as Archbishop of Buenos Aires and in the Episcopal Conference of Latin America. He has repeatedly stressed the *kerygma* throughout his ecclesiastical life. Pope Francis directly intervened in the preparation of the *Directory* to ensure that the kerygmatic dimension received what he considered to be its necessary emphasis. In his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, he had already made the point that ‘what the Church hands on is not solely a doctrinal content. There must be an encounter with the true God which touches the whole person’.<sup>113</sup> The essential content, the *kerygma*, is summarised thus: ‘Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you’.<sup>114</sup>

Other aspects of essential content are also specified in the *Directory*. To begin with, spirituality is about attending to the Mystery at the core of reality and how one lives one’s life. For Christians it involves contemplation on this human yearning for God who is revealed in Jesus and is a way of being in the world inspired by the Holy Spirit.<sup>115</sup> Even so, schools must promote two levels of learning – *cognitive* and *relational* – taking into account not only the content, but also attitudes and ways of respecting diversity.<sup>116</sup> There is a strong emphasis on faith formation, which can be the means to personal transformation, a call to missionary discipleship and a source of wisdom.<sup>117</sup> Hence, the curriculum of the Catholic school should not be fragmented; the religious dimension is not some kind of superstructure, it is integral to being human.<sup>118</sup>

In keeping with earlier advice the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is mandated as the standard reference for doctrinal presentations.<sup>119</sup>

## 8. Mystagogy

After the Synod on the Eucharist in 2007, the Church began to propose that *mystagogy* (initiation into the sacred mysteries of the Church) should reclaim its important place as a preferred method of pedagogy, particularly with regard to the Eucharist. Pope Francis reiterated this in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he drew attention to the slowness of implementation of this essential insight: ‘Many manuals and programmes have not yet taken sufficiently into account the need for a mystagogical renewal, one which would assume very different forms based on each educational community’s discernment’.<sup>120</sup> The Church’s great liturgical tradition teaches us that fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that one be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering one’s life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (2013), 40.

<sup>114</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 164. Henceforth EG.

<sup>115</sup> SFF 11.

<sup>116</sup> EIDC 69.

<sup>117</sup> SFF 6.

<sup>118</sup> RDE 55.

<sup>119</sup> *Apostolic Constitution, Fidei Depositum* (1993), 3.

<sup>120</sup> EG 166.

<sup>121</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007), 64. Henceforth SC.

The *Directory* takes up this theme of mystagogy and strongly emphasises it, insisting on the need to provide an education in eucharistic faith capable of enabling the faithful to live personally what they celebrate. Given the vital importance of this personal and conscious *participatio*, what methods of formation are needed? The Synod fathers unanimously indicated, in this regard, a mystagogical approach to catechesis, which would lead the faithful to understand more deeply the mysteries being celebrated.<sup>122</sup> Returning to the apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, we learn that the basic structure of the Christian experience calls for a process of mystagogy which should always respect three elements. First, it interprets the rites in the light of the events of our salvation, in accordance with the Church's living tradition. Second, a mystagogical catechesis must also be concerned with *presenting the meaning of the signs* contained in the rites. Finally, a mystagogical catechesis must be concerned with bringing out the *significance of the rites for the Christian life* in all its dimensions – work and responsibility, thoughts and emotions, activity and repose.<sup>123</sup>

## 9. Adaptations to Developmental and Pastoral Needs

It cannot be forgotten that every phase of life is exposed to specific challenges and must confront the ever-new dynamics of the Christian vocation.<sup>124</sup> It is therefore reasonable to offer pathways of catechesis that vary based on the participants' different needs, ages and stages of life.<sup>125</sup> There can be little doubt that it is indispensable to respect anthropological-developmental and theological-pastoral realities.<sup>126</sup> It is pedagogically important, in the process of catechesis, to attribute to each stage its own importance and specificity.<sup>127</sup> Guidance on some of the imperatives implied by this can be found later in this report.

## 10. Accompaniment

The idea of accompaniment has been another of the abiding contributions of Pope Francis and so the *Directory* takes this up directly and applies it to religious education and catechesis. To begin with, it draws attention to the fact that there are now widespread alternative relationships creating family situations which are complex and problematic for the Christian life. There is, however, a sort of nostalgia for the family, since there are so many who, intuiting its value, are still seeking it and want to build it.<sup>128</sup> The Church wants to accompany children marked by a wounded love, who find themselves in the most fragile condition, restoring their trust and hope.<sup>129</sup> Many children and teenagers are deeply affected by the fragility of their families, even though they are in situations of financial prosperity. These children, who for different reasons suffer from the lack of sure points of reference for life, often have less of a chance to know and love God as well.<sup>130</sup> Following the divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an

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<sup>122</sup> SC 64.

<sup>123</sup> SC 64.

<sup>124</sup> DC 224.

<sup>125</sup> DC 225.

<sup>126</sup> DC 225.

<sup>127</sup> DC 379.

<sup>128</sup> DC 233.

<sup>130</sup> DC 234.

<sup>130</sup> DC 238.



imperfect manner. She seeks the grace of conversion for them; she encourages them to do good; to take loving care of each other; to serve the community in which they live and work'.<sup>131</sup>

**Recommendations:**

*The Organisation of the Curriculum: An Overview from Post–Vatican II Documents of the Church*

1. The curriculum must incorporate the key understandings of contemporary catechesis as identified by the 'Directory for Catechesis' (2020).
2. The curriculum must acknowledge the relationship between catechesis and religious education as one of distinction and complementarity.
3. The curriculum must demonstrate an awareness that religious education must be Trinitarian and Christocentric.
4. The curriculum must incorporate all of the sources of Religious Education.
5. The curriculum must attend to all of the tasks of Religious Education.
6. While taking account of the developmental capacities of students, the curriculum must employ all of the languages used in religious education.
7. The curriculum must take account of the priority of the kerygma.
8. The curriculum must take account of the priority of the mystagogical aspects of religious education (particularly when presenting the Eucharist) as prescribed by 'Sacramentum Caritatis', 'Evangelii Gaudium' and the 'Directory for Catechesis'.
9. The curriculum must make provision for the judicious use of digital languages and tools. At the same time, care must be taken not to rely too heavily on technological tools.
10. The curriculum must pay careful attention to both the developmental and pastoral needs of students.
11. The curriculum must account for the current pastoral challenges to Christian family life.

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<sup>131</sup> DC 234.

# Chapter 3

## Audit of Curriculum Content

The content of the Melbourne Archdiocesan Religious Education Program was examined using the *Curriculum Framework*, the *Learning Progression Standards* and the *Scope and Sequence Charts, Foundation–Year 12*. An audit tool compiled from the relevant teaching documents of the Church was applied to these documents in order to determine its strengths and weaknesses in terms of content. The categories used come from the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020). The audit tool used for this purpose can be found at this link:

[https://1drv.ms/w/s!AkIqJv2E\\_jrlh8sXzN-FpFSccjWHLA?e=WsMXm3](https://1drv.ms/w/s!AkIqJv2E_jrlh8sXzN-FpFSccjWHLA?e=WsMXm3).

The results of the audit follow below.

### Part 1: Audit of Doctrinal Content: Elements Not Evident

The following elements *appear to be missing* from the Melbourne program. It is *not claimed* that these elements have not been covered in any of the Archdiocesan schools. Rather, there is no evidence that these items are *required* by the program.

#### 1. Promoting Knowledge of the Faith<sup>132</sup>

##### *Christology*

- The mystery of Christ's divinity.<sup>133</sup>
- The mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>134</sup>
- Christ as Saviour.<sup>135</sup>
- Christ as Priest.<sup>136</sup>
- Christ as Lord of the Universe.<sup>137</sup>

##### *The History of Salvation*<sup>138</sup>

- The Fall: origin of the mystery of lawlessness at work in our lives.<sup>139</sup>
- The Covenant with the ancient people of God.<sup>140</sup>
- The long period of waiting.<sup>141</sup>
- The incarnation of the Son of God; the coming of Jesus our Saviour.<sup>142</sup>
- We are now the new People of God.<sup>143</sup>
- We are pilgrims on Earth.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>132</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>133</sup> RDE 74.

<sup>134</sup> RDE 74.

<sup>135</sup> RDE 74.

<sup>136</sup> RDE 74.

<sup>137</sup> RDE 74.

<sup>138</sup> RDE 76.

<sup>139</sup> CT 30.

<sup>140</sup> CT 30. See also RDE 74.

<sup>141</sup> CT 30. See also RDE 74.

<sup>142</sup> RDE 74.

<sup>143</sup> RDE 76.

<sup>144</sup> RDE 76.

### *Mariology*

- Role of Mary in the mission of Christ.<sup>145</sup>
- Mary Immaculate.<sup>146</sup>
- Mary, Mother of God.<sup>147</sup>
- Mary, ever Virgin.<sup>148</sup>
- Mary assumed into heaven.<sup>149</sup>

### *Christian Anthropology*

- The human person is present in all the truths of faith.<sup>150</sup>
- The human person is a living creature having both a physical and a spiritual nature.<sup>151</sup>
- The redeemed human person is elevated by God to the dignity of a child of God.<sup>152</sup>
- The redeemed human person is a temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>153</sup>
- The obligation of human persons to love others.<sup>154</sup>
- Human persons should have a willingness to embrace life.<sup>155</sup>
- The human person is affected by original sin, but redeemed by Christ.<sup>156</sup>
- The human person as a being endowed with both rights and duties.<sup>157</sup>
- Human persons are capable of interpersonal relationships.<sup>158</sup>

### *Ecclesiology*

- The ideal of a universal human family is realised in the Church.<sup>159</sup>
- Students should have a knowledge of the Church they belong to, they will learn to love it with a filial affection.<sup>160</sup>
- Through the Spirit, we grow in the Church, offering us 'grace upon grace'; the only thing he asks is our cooperation.<sup>161</sup>

### *The Last Things*

- Reflection on the 'Last Things' using the story of Dives and Lazarus (*John 11:25-27*).<sup>162</sup>
- We are personally responsible in everything we do, because we must render an account to God.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> RDE 74. See also CT 30.

<sup>146</sup> CT 30.

<sup>147</sup> CT 30.

<sup>148</sup> CT 30.

<sup>149</sup> CT 30.

<sup>150</sup> RDE 84.

<sup>151</sup> RDE 55.

<sup>152</sup> RDE 84.

<sup>153</sup> RDE 84.

<sup>154</sup> RDE 76.

<sup>155</sup> RDE 76.

<sup>156</sup> RDE 84.

<sup>157</sup> RDE 55.

<sup>158</sup> RDE 55.

<sup>159</sup> RDE 76.

<sup>160</sup> RDE 76.

<sup>161</sup> RDE 79.

<sup>162</sup> RDE 80.

<sup>163</sup> RDE 81.

- In the last judgment the Lord points to an eternal destiny which each of us merits through our own works.<sup>164</sup>
- The good or evil done to each human being is as if done to Christ.<sup>165</sup>
- The Creed can be used as a pattern to help students to learn about the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>166</sup>
- Those who have believed in God and spent their lives in his service are called saints, even if not all are formally venerated under that title.<sup>167</sup>
- First among the saints is Mary, the mother of Jesus, living a glorified life at the side of her Son.<sup>168</sup>
- Those who have died are not separated from us. They, with us, form the one Church, the People of God, united in the ‘communion of saints’.<sup>169</sup>
- The truths drawn from a reflection on the ‘Last Things’ provide a sense of the dignity of the person, as destined to immortality.<sup>170</sup>
- Christian hope in our ultimate destiny offers comfort in life’s difficulties.<sup>171</sup>
- Participation in divine life here and hereafter.<sup>172</sup>
- We are journeying toward our eternal home.<sup>173</sup>
- All who die in God’s friendship, but are still imperfectly purified, are assured of their place in heaven, but after death, they must undergo purification to be ready for heaven.<sup>174</sup>

## 2. Liturgical and Sacramental Formation<sup>175</sup>

- *Christ is always present in his Church, especially in ‘liturgical celebrations’.*
- *Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of his salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist.*<sup>176</sup>
- *Understanding the sacramental journey has profound educational implications: something dynamic, responding to every person’s need to continue growing all through life.*<sup>177</sup>

### *Liturgy*

- Proper participation in the liturgy entails educating students for: praying with confidence, thanksgiving, repentance, community spirit, understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> RDE 80.

<sup>165</sup> RDE 80.

<sup>166</sup> RDE 81.

<sup>167</sup> RDE 81.

<sup>168</sup> RDE 81.

<sup>169</sup> RDE 81.

<sup>170</sup> RDE 81.

<sup>171</sup> RDE 81.

<sup>172</sup> CT 30.

<sup>173</sup> RDE 76.

<sup>174</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997), 1030. Henceforth CCC.

<sup>175</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>176</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>177</sup> RDE 78.

<sup>178</sup> GDC 85.

### Sacraments

- The essential point for students to understand is that Jesus Christ is always truly present in the sacraments.<sup>179</sup>
- Sacraments become comprehensible through understanding what it means to be a member of the Church.<sup>180</sup>
- Christ instituted the sacraments and his presence makes them efficacious means of grace.<sup>181</sup>
- *Sacrament of Marriage*: No evidence that this sacrament is referred to at *any* level.
- *Sacrament of Holy Orders*: No evidence that this sacrament is referred to at *any* level.

### *Sacrament of the Eucharist*:

- The moment of closest encounter with the Lord Jesus occurs in the Eucharist.<sup>182</sup>
- In the Eucharist, two supreme acts of love are united: our Lord renews his sacrifice of salvation for us, and he truly gives himself to us.<sup>183</sup>
- The Eucharist is both sacrifice and sacrament.<sup>184</sup>
- The reality of the Eucharistic Presence.<sup>185</sup>

### 3. Teaching to Pray<sup>186</sup>

- Communion with Jesus Christ leads the disciples to assume the attitude of prayer and contemplation which the Master himself had.<sup>187</sup>
- The climate of prayer is especially necessary when students are confronted with the more demanding aspects of the Gospel.<sup>188</sup>
- Students should be encouraged to open their hearts in confidence to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through personal and liturgical prayer.<sup>189</sup>
- The Our Father is the model of all Christian prayer. The handing on of the Our Father is a summary of the entire Gospel.<sup>190</sup>
- Students should learn to pray these different forms of prayer: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, filial confidence, supplication and awe for God's glory.<sup>191</sup>

### 4. Moral Formation<sup>192</sup>

- Each truth of faith has ethical implications, but a systematic presentation of Christian ethics is also required.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> RDE 78.

<sup>180</sup> RDE 78.

<sup>181</sup> RDE 78.

<sup>182</sup> RDE 78.

<sup>183</sup> RDE 78.

<sup>184</sup> RDE 78.

<sup>185</sup> CT 30.

<sup>186</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>187</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>188</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>189</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>190</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>191</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>192</sup> GDC 85.

<sup>193</sup> RDE 82.



### *First Christian Communities*

- Study of ethics can be introduced by looking at the first Christian communities.<sup>194</sup>
- In the first Christian communities, the gospel message was accompanied by prayer and the celebration of the sacraments.<sup>195</sup>

### *Christian Perfection*

- All are called to Christian perfection.<sup>196</sup>
- Christian perfection is a gift of Jesus through the mediation of the Spirit.<sup>197</sup>
- The gift of Christian perfection requires our cooperation.<sup>198</sup>
- God has the power to free us from the hold of sin.<sup>199</sup>
- There is a need for penance and asceticism.<sup>200</sup>
- Students need to be educated to understand the meaning of the virtue of faith.<sup>201</sup>
- Helped by grace, students are invited to give complete, free, personal and affective loyalty to the God who reveals himself through his Son.<sup>202</sup>
- Commitment to Christian living is not automatic; it is itself a gift of God.<sup>203</sup>
- The gift of Christian commitment must be asked for and waited for patiently.<sup>204</sup>
- People must be given time to grow and to mature.<sup>205</sup>
- Faith is thus based on knowing Jesus and following him.<sup>206</sup>
- The life of faith is expressed in acts of religion.<sup>207</sup>

### *Christian Social Ethics*

- Christian social ethics, founded on faith, sheds light on other disciplines such as law, economics and political science.<sup>208</sup>
- The human person is the central focus of the social order.<sup>209</sup>
- Justice is the recognition of the rights of each individual.<sup>210</sup>
- Honesty is the basic condition for all human relationships.<sup>211</sup>
- The realism of revelation, history and daily experience all require that we have a clear awareness of the evil that is at work in the world and in the human person.<sup>212</sup>
- When human beings wander far away from God, and the gospel message, they can poison the world with war, violence, injustice and crime.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>195</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>196</sup> RDE 95.

<sup>197</sup> RDE 95.

<sup>198</sup> RDE 95.

<sup>199</sup> CT 30.

<sup>200</sup> CT 30.

<sup>201</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>202</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>203</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>204</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>205</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>206</sup> RDE 74.

<sup>207</sup> RDE 82.

<sup>208</sup> RDE 89.

<sup>209</sup> RDE 89.

<sup>210</sup> RDE 89.

<sup>211</sup> RDE 89.

<sup>212</sup> RDE 91.

<sup>213</sup> RDE 91.

## 5. Christian Community Life<sup>214</sup>

- Christian community life is not realised spontaneously. It is necessary to educate it carefully.<sup>215</sup>
- Christian community life requires fraternal correction ('Go and tell him his fault ...' –*Matthew 18:15*).<sup>216</sup>
- Christian community life requires common prayer (*Matthew 18:19*).<sup>217</sup>
- Christian community life requires mutual forgiveness (*Matthew 18:22*).<sup>218</sup>
- In pursuing ecumenical objectives, the Church's doctrine must be expressed clearly.<sup>219</sup>
- Promoting missionary initiation (for lay people) founded in the sacraments and in the secular character of their vocation.<sup>220</sup>
- Encourage vocations to the priesthood and other forms of apostolic life.<sup>221</sup>

## Part 2: The Bueclein Report: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Another lens used to examine the contents of the Melbourne Archdiocesan Religious Education program comes from the protocols of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for examining the doctrinal content of religious education programs. In 1997, Archbishop Daniel Bueclein of Indianapolis published a report on behalf of an ad hoc committee set up by the USCCB. The committee, composed of bishops and lay experts, was charged with looking into the doctrinal content of religious education programs then being used in the United States. This lens continues to be applied to all religious education programs in the United States and accreditation is withheld from any published program that is found to be deficient in any of these areas. The report identified ten areas of doctrinal deficiencies which needed attention. These are set out as follows.

1. *There is insufficient attention to the Trinity and the Trinitarian structure of Catholic beliefs and teachings.*

Catechetical texts fail at times to present the Trinity as the central mystery of the Christian faith. The language used in referring to the Persons of the Trinity contributes at times to a lack of clarity. This is most evident in the reluctance to use 'Father' for the first person of the Trinity and, at times, to substitute 'Parent God' for God the Father. Particularly, the relationship between Jesus and the Father is often weak. There are times where the word 'God' is placed in a sentence where one would expect to find 'Father' or 'God the Father' since the reference is precisely to the relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity.

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<sup>214</sup> GDC 86.

<sup>215</sup> GDC 86.

<sup>216</sup> GDC 86.

<sup>217</sup> GDC 86.

<sup>218</sup> GDC 86.

<sup>219</sup> GDC 86.

<sup>220</sup> GDC 86.

<sup>221</sup> GDC 86.

2. *There is an obscured presentation of the centrality of Christ in salvation history and an insufficient emphasis on the divinity of Christ.*

Texts fall short, at times, in presenting Jesus as the culmination of the Old Testament and the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation. The indispensable place of the Incarnation in the plan of salvation is not always sufficiently presented. Jesus the Savior is often overshadowed by Jesus the teacher, model, friend and brother. It is a question of imbalance. Some texts do not present the mystery of the Incarnation in its fullness. Often there appears to be an imbalance in the instruction on the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. At times, we detect a negative undertone in speaking of the divine nature of Christ, as if divinity is equated with being 'distant and unreal'.

3. *Another trend is an indistinct treatment of the ecclesial context of Catholic beliefs and magisterial teachings.*

Catechetical materials do not always clearly present the Church as established by Christ to continue both his presence and his mission in the world. The teaching function of the Church and its apostolic nature, as well as the role of the hierarchy and the concept of the leadership of bishops and priests in teaching the Word of God are often under-treated. The mark of unity in the Church is at times eclipsed by an emphasis on the Church's catholicity and diversity.

4. *There is an inadequate sense of a distinctively Christian anthropology.*

By and large the catechetical texts do not seem to integrate the fundamental notions that human persons are by nature religious, that the desire for God is written in the human heart and that the human person is inherently spiritual and not reducible to the merely material. Neither are the texts generally clear that it is precisely in Christ that we have been created in the image and likeness of God. Nor do they emphasize that Christ has restored to us the divine image of God, an image disfigured by sin. Rather, too often the impression is left that the human person is the first principle and final end of his/her own existence.

5. *There is a trend that gives insufficient emphasis on God's initiative in the world with a corresponding overemphasis on human action.*

Texts do not adequately emphasize that human action is intended to follow upon God's action and initiative in the world. When the methodological starting point is predominately human experience, the texts leave the impression that our human initiative is the prerequisite for divine action. God's initiative at times appears subordinate to human experience and human action.

6. *We have detected an insufficient recognition of the transforming effects of grace.*

The catechetical texts tend to present an inadequate understanding of grace. Rather often it is described as God's love, then not much more is said about it. That the preparation of the human person for the reception of grace is already a work of grace is not clearly presented. Grace is not generally treated as God's initiative which introduces humanity into the intimacy of Trinitarian life and makes us his adopted children and participants in his life. The texts are generally weak in treating the particular efficacy of the grace proper to the respective sacraments.

7. *We have found a pattern of inadequate presentation of the sacraments.*

Catechetical texts often do not treat the sacraments within the Paschal Mystery, that is, the sacraments are not explicitly presented as the means by which we share in the new life of Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments are often presented as important events in human life of which God becomes a part, rather than as effective signs of divine life in which humans participate. Consequently, this leads to a deficient understanding of the divine action and the graced transformation that is at the heart of each of the sacraments. Particularly, the sacraments of the Eucharist and Holy Orders evidence deficiency because the texts usually do not present the character and role of the ordained minister in the life of the ecclesial community.

8. *We have seen a pattern of deficiency in the teaching on original sin and sin in general.*

In general, the texts do not clearly teach that original sin is the loss of original holiness and justice, transmitted by our first parents, and that it wounds human nature in all people. Too often the texts do not address how the doctrine of original sin informs other doctrines, for example, grace, baptism, sin, and redemption.

9. *We have found a meagre exposition of Christian moral life.*

At times an over-emphasis on personal identity and self-respect gives the impression that these are the primary 'sources' of morality. Too often the source of morality found in God's revealed law, as taught by the Church and grounded in natural law, are not adequately treated. Where texts could present the binding force of the Church's moral teaching in certain areas, often they do not. In addition, instruction on what is necessary for the formation of a correct conscience is either inadequately or even mistakenly presented.

10. *Finally, we have found an inadequate presentation of eschatology.*

The eschatological aspect of Catholic doctrine is often underemphasized. The transcendent, trans-temporal and trans-historical nature of the Kingdom is not always present. The general judgment, the concept of hell and the eschatological dimensions of the Beatitudes as well as the moral and sacramental orders are not always adequately taught.

The full report can be found on the website of the USCCB at this link:

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/archbishop-daniel-buechlein-report-june-1997>.

Subsequently, committees of bishops and lay experts were appointed to review textbooks or other religious education materials to assess whether they could be endorsed for use in dioceses. On average, it took 400 hours of work for a committee to review each series of religious education materials. In 2020, Archbishop Alfred Hughes of New Orleans recorded a presentation in which he restated the ten doctrinal deficiencies and pointed out that they continue to serve as an essential reference for the approval process. His presentation can be found at this link to the USCCB website:

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/presentation-10-doctrinal-deficiencies-archbishop-alfred-c-hughes>.

The list of currently approved series for use in US Catholic schools and parishes is regularly updated and posted on the USCCB website. Here is a link to the currently approved programs, updated as of 13 July 2023:

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/Current%20Conformity%20List.pdf>

### **Observations: Doctrinal Content of the Melbourne Religious Education Program**

The content of the Melbourne religious education program appears to be tailored almost entirely to support the preferred methodology of the Melbourne RE program, *A Pedagogy of Encounter*. As noted elsewhere, this pedagogy does not appear to be ‘fit for purpose’.

The *Pedagogy of Encounter* relies on a process of *dialogue* to establish and explore the truths of the Catholic faith at every level of the school. There can be no doubt that, at some point, dialogue must be introduced, since the Church teaches that it is a ‘constitutive dimension’ of the identity of the Catholic school. Nevertheless, as Pope Francis has observed, ‘We cannot create a culture of dialogue if we do not have identity’.<sup>222</sup> As noted above, Pope Francis has helpfully provided three essential principles for engaging in dialogue: ‘(1) the duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others; (2) the courage to accept differences, and sincerity of intentions; (3) the duty to respect one’s own identity and that of others, because true dialogue cannot be built on ambiguity or a willingness to sacrifice some good for the sake of pleasing others’. Every one of these principles necessarily implies a thorough grounding in one’s own identity first. Consequently, the *Pedagogy of Encounter* cannot begin to operate effectively until the students have received comprehensive, organic presentation of the truths of the Catholic faith. Hence, in this matter, the Melbourne RE program is deficient.

In contrast, and by way of guidance for addressing the deficiencies, the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) specifies the criteria to be observed for the proclamation of the gospel message, namely: the Trinitarian and Christocentric criterion; the criterion of salvation history; the criterion of the primacy of grace and beauty; the criterion of ecclesiality; the criterion of the unity and integrity of the faith.<sup>223</sup> The *Directory* further identifies the languages that are used for conveying the faith of the Church: Sacred Scripture (biblical language); liturgical language; doctrinal language; performative language (witness of the saints and martyrs).<sup>224</sup> In addition to these perennial languages, the *Directory* exhorts that we incorporate others where appropriate: the languages of art and music; digital languages and tools. Finally, the *Directory* reminds us to make use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, whose content ‘is presented in such a way as to manifest the pedagogy of God’.<sup>225</sup>

The *Pedagogy of Encounter* does not provide teachers with sufficient guidance and detail about how to ground their students in a Catholic identity in a way that will allow

<sup>222</sup> ICS 2.

<sup>223</sup> See DC 168–78.

<sup>224</sup> See DC 205–17.

<sup>225</sup> DC 192.



them to participate in authentic dialogue at the appropriate moment in their education. What Catholic identity means is examined critically and substantially in Part One (above). The *Pedagogy of Encounter* is also developmentally inappropriate for most primary school students as well as a significant number (possibly a majority) of secondary school students. Finally, the *Pedagogy of Encounter* appears to rely too heavily on a single educational tool: discussion. A wider variety of learning methods is essential according to both traditional and contemporary research in this field.

The *Curriculum Framework* uses categories that are confusing and unable to express the fullness of the Catholic faith. There are obvious gaps in the structure. For example: Why is *God* placed in a different category from *Jesus*? Where does *eschatology* fit in? Where would one place a study of the Catholic understanding of anthropology? These are not insignificant questions. It therefore is recommended that, unless these categories are required for external examination at the level of years 11 and 12, the *Curriculum Framework* should use the categories employed by the *Catechism*: The Profession of Faith; The Celebration of the Christian Mystery; Life in Christ; Prayer.

In summary, the *Pedagogy of Encounter* appears to reverse the usual order, whereby a *logos* serves as the foundation for an *ethos*. In this case, it appears that the *ethos* (*Pedagogy of Encounter*) is attempting to create its own *logos*, determining what should be taught in order to fit into the pedagogy.

### **Melbourne Archdiocesan Program and the Ten Doctrinal Deficiencies Document**

The current Melbourne Archdiocesan religious education program (based on the *Learning Progression Standards* and the *Curriculum Framework*) appears to be inadequate in every one of these ten doctrinal deficiencies. This will be readily evident from the audit document below. This is in contrast with every US religious program that we have examined.

#### **Recommendations:**

##### *Audit of Curriculum Content*

1. In addition to being found 'not fit for purpose', the 'Pedagogy of Encounter' has become the de facto driver of content and needs to be abandoned and replaced by more suitable means. In its place, schools may consider using the existing 'To Know, Worship and Love' Archdiocesan Religious Education texts, or the Archdiocese of Sydney program, or any of the programs listed as approved by the USCCB accreditation process, see <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Current%20Conformity%20List.pdf>
2. Any new program of Religious Education needs to incorporate the following criteria and languages specified by the 'Directory for Catechesis':

Five Criteria for presenting the Gospel Message:

- a. The Trinitarian and Christocentric criterion
- b. The criterion of salvation history
- c. The criterion of the primacy of grace and beauty
- d. The criterion of ecclesiality
- e. The criterion of the unity and integrity of the faith.

Four languages that are used for conveying the faith of the Church:

- a. Sacred Scripture (biblical language)
  - b. Liturgical language
  - c. Doctrinal language
  - d. Performative language (witness of the saints and martyrs).
3. Any new program of Religious Education needs to demonstrate a comprehensive coverage of the teachings of the Catholic faith, spread across the thirteen years of schooling. These should be presented in accordance with their developmental suitability. Guidance can be found in the 'Audit of Content' document.
  4. Any new program of religious education needs to take into account the ten doctrinal deficiencies identified by the Bueclein Report.
  5. It is recommended that a pilot project be commissioned to create a new religious education program in accord with the recommendations of this report. It might involve twenty primary schools and ten secondary schools willing to volunteer for the project. Materials should be trialled as they come to hand.

# Chapter 4

## The Needs of Contemporary Students

A sound religious education program should attend to the needs of the students in the school. The following extract is taken from *A Framework for Student Faith Formation in Catholic Schools*, published by the National Catholic Education Commission (2022). Available at <https://ncec.catholic.edu.au/resource-centre/framework-for-student-faith-formation-in-catholic-schools/>. The data provided give a good snapshot of the contemporary sociological and religious background of Australian Catholic students.

### 1. Student Contexts and Realities

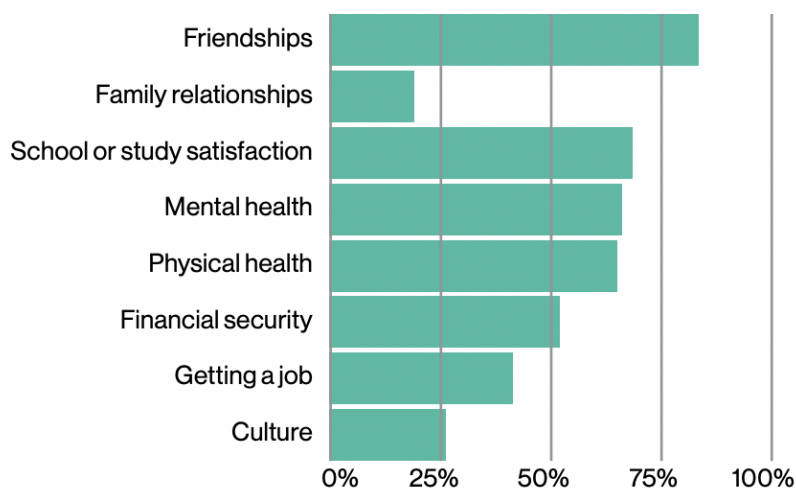
‘Every student is in some respect like all others, like some others and like no other.’ Students in Catholic schools are influenced by their families, cultures, peers, social and traditional media, the technological revolution and wider society including its consumer culture. They are as diverse as the influences that comprise our communities and come with a variety of life experiences, motivations, expectations and aspirations. Students live in a variety of ‘worlds’ which influence growth and provide context for interpreting life experiences, developing new concepts and shaping values and identity. The range of views students hear in these worlds and from their peers would often be at odds with what the school would be proposing to them. Furthermore, they come from families with a variety of religious backgrounds and experience; some families have strong spiritual roots and customs, and others have little or none.

These contexts are realities that cannot be ignored. They offer challenges and opportunities to Australian Catholic schools as they strive to provide rich faith formation that is responsive to the circumstances of the students and their families. In the words of Pope Francis: ‘Today’s vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness’. The following information presents some of the challenges that face children and young people.

- 4 in 5 children aged 0–2 were regularly read to or told stories by a parent. (2017)
- 3 out of 5 children spent time taking care of siblings at least once a week. (2020)
- Remote and very remote Indigenous families are most likely to be living in overcrowded housing. (2016)
- 2/3 of children aged 0–14 participate in organised physical activities outside school at least once per fortnight. (2018)
- The National attendance rate for year 5 was 93%. (2018)
- 75% of families became closer since COVID-19. 2020
- The average age for first time exposure to pornography was 12. (2018)
- 20.5% of Catholic primary school students received adjustments to participate in education because of disability. (2020)

- 11% of households with children were jobless families. (2019)
- Among children 5–14, asthma was the leading cause of disease burden followed by mental [ill] health. (2018)
- 44% of children between 0–2 had between 25–100 children’s books at home. (2017)
- 3.3% of Catholic school students identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- 1 in 7 children and adolescents aged 4–17 years experienced mental health issues in the 12 months prior to 2017.
- Almost 27.7% of Catholic school students live outside major metropolitan areas including majority indigenous schools, boarding schools and sole-provider schools.
- Females aged 15–19 were 7 times more likely than the average population to have been the victim of sexual assault.
- About 1 in 490 young people were in juvenile justice supervision on an average day in 2017–2018.
- School, study and work: - 97.3% intend to finish school, 64% plan to go to University, 30% to proceed to a job, 23% to take a gap year, 10% Technical and Further Education, and 10% Apprenticeships.
- In a survey of 2018 young people, 6% females and 4% of males identified as non-heterosexual.
- Suicide represented 31% of all deaths in young people aged 15–17 in 2020.
- 24% of homeless people were aged 12–24 in August 2016.

## 2. [Aspects of Life] Valued by 15–19-Year-Olds



## 3. Early Years

‘At this age it is a matter of first evangelisation and proclamation of the faith in an eminently educational form, attentive to developing a sense of trust, of gratuitousness, of self-giving, of invocation and participation, as a human condition onto which is grafted the salvific power of the faith’ (DfC [DC], 2020, n. 239). ‘The early years of life are a period of rapid growth and development as children form their language, social, emotional and physical skills, and undergo significant cognitive development. These years provide the foundation for learning throughout school and beyond. The key to children’s earliest learning and development is the

quality and depth of interaction they experience; between adult and child and between child and child.’ (*Mpwartne Declaration*, 2019, 7).<sup>226</sup>

#### 4. Primary Years

We adopt the perspective that educates [them] gradually, according to [their] capacities, to be active participants inside and outside the community (DfC [DC], n. 242). ‘Primary school is a key stage for children as they enhance their communication skills, establish and grow peer relationships, and have a growing understanding of their place in the world. This period of significant change and growth also sees children develop resilience and adaptability and strategies to manage themselves in different situations.’ (*Mpwartne Declaration*, 2019, 8).

#### 5. Secondary Years

‘In their journey of faith, adolescents need to have convinced and compelling witness by their side’ (DfC [DC], n. 248). Secondary school can be broken into two categories. Students in the middle years are finding ‘a sense of self and require investment in their emotional wellbeing and a voice in and influence over their learning. It is also a time when they are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning. Through directly addressing each student’s range of needs, schools must focus on enhancing motivation and engagement’ (*Mpwartne Declaration*, 2019, 8). ‘Senior years of schooling are a critical transition point for young people emotionally, socially and educationally. These years should provide all students with ... high quality advice, support and experiences to make informed choices about their future and smooth the initial transition to further education, training or meaningful employment’ (*Mpwartne Declaration*, 2019, 9).

(The text resumes on the next page.)

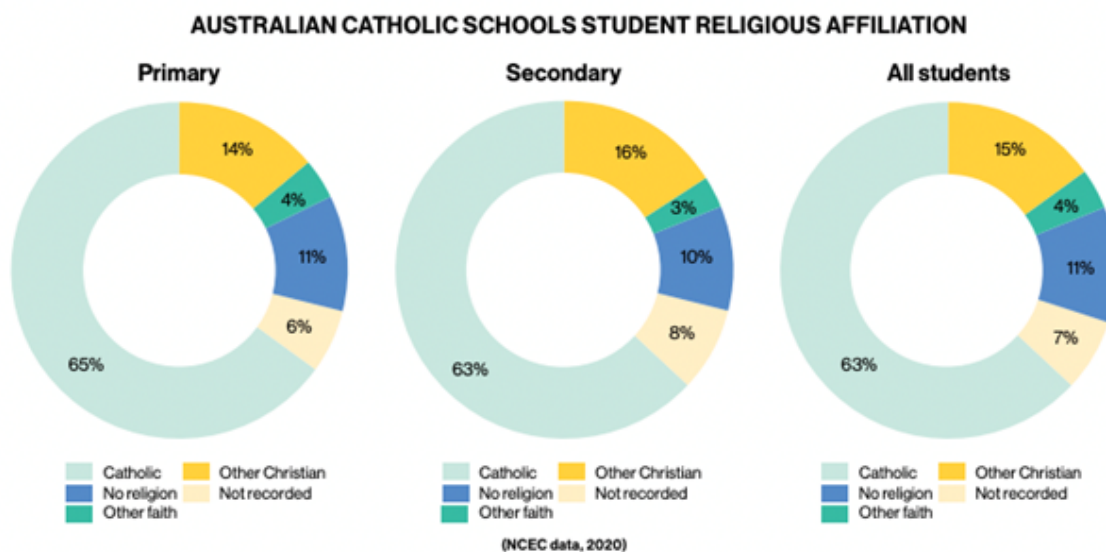
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<sup>226</sup> *The Alice Springs (Mpwartne) Education Declaration* (Education Council of Australia, 2019)



## 6. Australian Catholic Schools' Religious Affiliation

Some of the religious contexts in which teachers, children and young people encounter one another in Catholic schools are illustrated in the following data from the NCEC and from the *Putting Life Together*<sup>38</sup> surveys.



Secondary Students' Responses to 'Knowing Jesus helps make me a better person' and 'Religious faith helps shape how I live my life' (Table 1)

	Knowing Jesus helps make me a better person	Religious faith helps shape how I live my life
Definitely true	23%	15%
Probably true	20%	13%
Not sure, don't know	24%	21%
Probably not true	11%	18%
Definitely not true	22%	33%

Source: *Putting Life Together Surveys, 2011-2018.*

Mean Scores on a Scale of 1 to 10 of Students' Rating of Various Influences on their Thinking about Life, and Percentage Scoring the Influence Strongly (Table 2)

Influence	Mean Rating on a Scale 1 to 10	Percentage Indicating They are Strongly Influenced
Family	8.5	78%
Friends	8.3	76%
What is learnt at school	7.2	53%
Reading book	6.4	39%
School camps and retreats	5.9	33%
Teachers	5.8	28%
Leadership programs and opportunities	5.5	30%
Community and social justice programs	4.8	21%
Religious education	4.8	22%
Church	4.4	23%
School liturgies and services of worship	4.2	16%

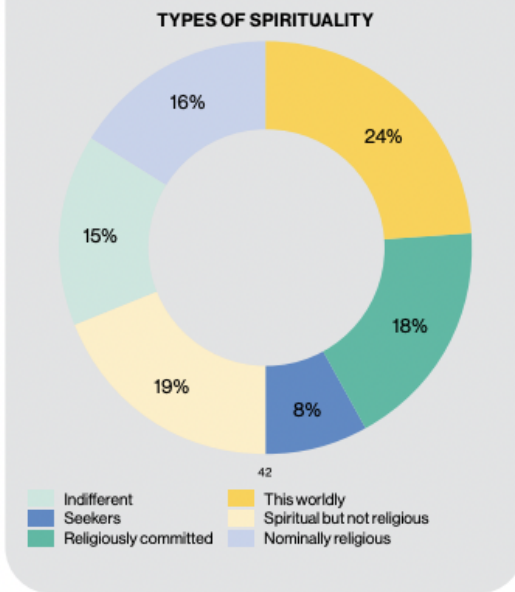
Source: *Putting Life Together Surveys, 2011-2018.*

## 7. The Contexts and Realities of Student Faith Formation

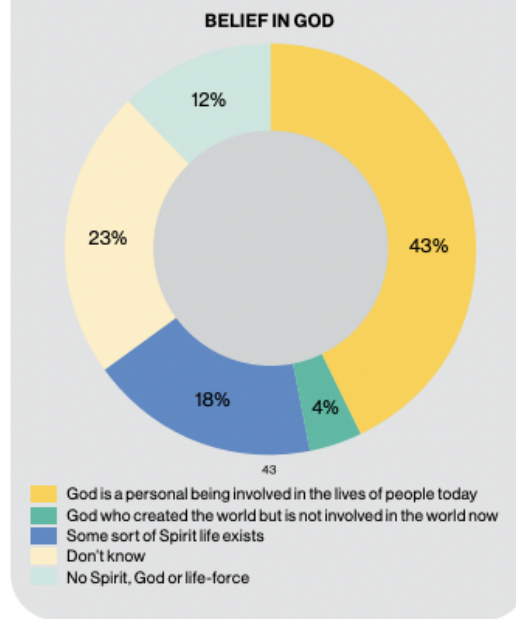
Significant research was completed in 2009 about the spiritual and faith stances of young Australians, showing 42% identified with a religious tradition, and 17% reported no relationship with God, while the remaining 41% retained a sense of spirituality.<sup>39</sup> This research is foundational to current understandings but raises the question - is this still the case?

More recent research shows that 34% of Gen Z (born between 1997-2012) believe in God with 46% identifying as Christian and a further 13% with spiritual beliefs, but no religious identification. The second highest proportion of those practicing their religion is also Gen Z.<sup>40</sup>

Other recent research identifies in Australian students various "spirituality 'types' which 'move beyond conventional understandings of religious or nonreligious identity'"<sup>41</sup> as illustrated in the following graph.



This research also indicates how these students responded to questions about their belief in God as illustrated in this graph.



### Staff reflection activity

Create a forum for a conversation about the culture and context in your school and community and look specifically at the exact data of your school in terms of religious and cultural backgrounds.

The following questions might help you break this open:

- What are the cultural backgrounds our students come from?
- What are the stories that our students bring with them?
- What socio-cultural events, stories and issues impact our students and the ways in which they learn and engage with the world?
- How do we make connections between our school story and the worlds of our students?
- What are some of the challenges and opportunities related to the spirituality and faith of students?

## 8. Young People and Church

For many young people the Church may be perceived as part of the Australian social landscape. However, many are not directly involved with Church life and find the Church does not influence their thinking about life and faith. In some communities, particularly those with recently arrived Australians, there are younger people who identify and connect strongly with the Church.

In order for the Church to engage with young people, it needs to meet them where they are at. As Pope Francis has noted, it is important to recognise that young people are the Church – they are not waiting to become the Church; therefore it is important that a listening posture is adopted towards young people. The Church community – inclusive of parishes, schools and families – is challenged to consider how it goes about this recognition and listening, that with the grace of God, it ‘seeks, encounters and welcomes [young] people in their concrete life situations’. ‘You are the ones who hold the future!’

## 9. Education

Like many aspects of society, education is experiencing significant change and schools are challenged to ‘prepare young people to thrive in a time of rapid social and technological change, and complex environmental, social and economic challenges’. In this context Catholic schools engage with families and students, in the spiritual development of children and young people within an holistic education that the *Mpwartne Declaration* seeks. ‘No less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth. But its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit.’

## 10. Children, Young People, Spirituality and Faith

Children are often seen as on their way to adulthood. The temptation is to see childhood as a phase to grow through and, when considered alongside spirituality, as an incomplete phase. In considering faith development, stages have been captured by many in different modes, none of which captures fully the openness of childhood and youth. Such frameworks can tend to present a constructivist approach to faith. Conceptions with such distinct separation of the two, when both are concerned with the interior and exterior, creates an unnecessary rupture between spirituality and religion. However, conceptual frameworks and development processes can help us to understand and acknowledge that the faith and spirituality of young people can be developed and are just as significant as those of adults, but these frameworks will always have limitations and inadequacies that do not acknowledge both individual experience and agency, as well as the movement of the Holy Spirit in each individual’s life. ‘Childhood itself has a direct relationship with God. It touches on the absolute divinity of God not only as maturity, adulthood and the later phases of life touch upon this, but rather in a special way of its own.’

## 11. Students in Catholic Schools

Students bring a diversity of religious backgrounds, experiences and understandings – a treasure which brings richness and challenges to school communities. Catholic schools welcome:

- those who are Catholic or other Christian learners for whom their faith formation is shared with their families and parishes
- those who are Catholic or from other Christian traditions for whom the Catholic school is their only regular connection with a Christian community. For these

- students, the Catholic school community may be a place of primary proclamation and for others, new evangelisation
- those from other religious traditions whereby the experience of a Catholic school community may deepen their own faith
  - those learners with no religious affiliation for whom the Catholic school community can be a place of first proclamation.

**Recommendations:**

*The Needs of Contemporary Students*

1. 'Every student is in some respect like all others, like some others and like no other.' As with all contemporary curriculum programs, the religious education program needs to be sufficiently flexible to deal with the variety students in classrooms.
2. The following advice from the 'Mpwartne Declaration' [MD] should be considered in the design of a sound religious education program:
  - a. 'It must be born in mind that the key to children's earliest learning and development is the quality and depth of interaction they experience; between adult and child and between child and child' (MD 7).
  - b. 'The primary school years are a time of significant change and growth which sees children develop resilience and adaptability and strategies to manage themselves in different situations.' (MD 8).
  - c. 'At the secondary school – middle level schools must directly address each student's range of needs, and must focus on enhancing motivation and engagement' (MD 8).
  - d. 'The senior years of schooling are a critical transition point for young people – emotionally, socially and educationally. These years should provide all students with ... high quality advice, support and experiences to make informed choices about their future and smooth the initial transition to further education, training or meaningful employment' (MD 9).
3. The data provided in 'A Framework for Student Faith Formation in Catholic Schools' published by the National Catholic Education Commission (2022) should be considered in the preparation of any sound religious education program that is prepared as a result of the recommendations in this report.



# Chapter 5

## Survey Results

A consultation survey conducted over a four-week period towards the end of 2022 for purposes of the review sought input from various categories of stakeholders on a variety of issues related to Catholic education in general and Religious Education in particular.

### 1. Sample Size

There are approximately 16,000 teaching and other staff who work in the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The responses were received from approximately 6.5%. Given that all were given the opportunity to respond, this represents a very small sample size and results must be viewed with caution.

### 2. Wide Spread of Opinions

Participants were left free to express their views without having them categorised beforehand. This has led to a wide spread of opinions, and these have been arranged according to common themes which emerged. Only those themes expressed by more than one respondent have been included in the following collated data and analysis.

### 3. Methodology and Data Analysis in General

Data were analysed according to two categories, Primary School and Secondary School.

Respondents were divided into seven cohorts as well as an overall category. The cohorts were: clergy, principals, Religious Education leaders, Religious Education teachers; other teachers; parents; and MACS office staff.

Due to the small numbers, the clergy and MACS staff cohorts who self-nominated as *primary school* have been combined with the *secondary school* numbers and analysed with the latter.

- Opinions which were expressed by only one respondent across all of the cohorts have not been included as the number of categories required would be unmanageable and would not add significantly to the usefulness of the data.
- The responses are compiled under four headings with relevant sub-themes as set out in the tables below.



### Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith

Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith

Lack of Catholic culture

Disconnect between parish and school

Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith

Non-practising or unsupportive teachers and parents

### Difficulties with curriculum

Inadequate teaching

Inadequate time to teach RE

Inadequate release time for RELs

Lack of clear direction in the inadequate curriculum

Difficulties with *Pedagogy of Encounter*

Inadequate resources

Issues with planning and assessment

Inquiry method unsuited to RE

RE is not a priority

Secularisation not being accounted for

### Current RE program does not meet students' needs

RE program is not meeting the needs of the students

### Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching

Church out of touch with contemporary needs

Rigid/traditionalist teachers

- The tables below identify the responses from each category in both numbers and percentages.
- After each table, there is a commentary on some of the salient features.

## 4. Results and Data Analysis: Primary Schools

## RESULTS OVERVIEW: PRIMARY

Respondents' Opinions	Clergy	Principals	RE Leaders	RE Teachers	Other Teachers	Parents	Office Staff	Total Respondents	% of Total
<b>(Number of Respondents:)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>432</b>	
Church out of touch with contemporary needs		14%			7%	5%		19	4%
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>		7%		2%	4%			11	3%
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith		11%	4%	6%	2%	23%		28	6%
Inadequate formation	30%	18%	32%	13%	7%			53	12%
Inadequate release time for RELs			3%		0.6%			3	0.60%
Inadequate resources				4%	2%			6	1%
Inadequate teaching						2%		1	0.02%
Inadequate time to teach RE		11%	4%	5%	5%			19	4%
Inquiry method unsuited to RE					4%			6	1%
Issues with planning and assessment	10%	3%	10%	10%	5%			34	8%
Lack of Catholic culture			3%	7%	7%			19	4%
Lack of clear direction in the curriculum		7%		33%	18%			67	16%
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers and students	50%	14%	7%	7%	5%	3%		30	7%
Other									
Parents are not practising or supportive		11%	7%	5%	4%			18	4%
Do not support the importance of RE in the school curriculum						21%		15	3%
<i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i> not being implemented			3%	2%				4	1%
RE is boring / does not relate to children's lives					8%	2%		14	3%
RE is not a priority			10%	7%	7%			24	6%
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	10%	18%	2%	1%	4%	6%		19	4%
Royal Commission issues			1%	0.5%				2	0.50%
Secularisation		3%						1	<0.01%

## ANALYSIS BY GROUP CATEGORY

### Clergy

Please note:

There were ten contributions from the clergy who self-identified in the primary school part of this survey. These have been combined with the twenty-one clergy participants who identified themselves as 'secondary or both primary and secondary'. For the clergy data, please refer to the secondary analysis below.

### Principals (Participants: 28)

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>54%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	3	11%	
Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith	5	18%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers and parents	7	25%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>31%</b>
Inadequate time to teach RE	3	11%	
Lack of clear direction in the curriculum	2	7%	
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>	2	7%	
Issues with planning and assessment	1	3%	
Secularisation not being taken into consideration	1	3%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>32%</b>
Church out of touch with contemporary needs	4	14%	
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	5	18%	

Primary school principals expressed their strongest concern as: inadequate formation of teachers and the presence of rigid, traditionalist teachers. A significant number were also attentive to a problem with inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith and the lack of support from parents.

**Religious Education Leaders (Participants: 68)**

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>53%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	3	4%	
Lack of Catholic culture	2	3%	
Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith	23	32%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers & parents	10	14%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>30%</b>
Inadequate time to teach RE	3	4%	
Inadequate release time for RELs	2	3%	
<i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i> not being implemented	2	3%	
Issues with planning and assessment	7	10%	
RE is not a priority	7	10%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>2%</b>
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	1	2%	

The most significant issue for RE leaders appears to be inadequate formation of teachers for the task of religious education. There is also some concern with curriculum issues of planning and assessment and a lack of priority given to religious education within schools.

**Religious Education Teachers (Participants: 86)**

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>38%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	5	6%	
Lack of Catholic culture	6	7%	
Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith	11	13%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers & parents	4	12%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>53%</b>
Inadequate time to teach RE	4	5%	
Lack of clear direction in the curriculum	28	33%	
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>	2	2%	
<i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i> not being implemented	2	2%	
Inadequate resources	3	4%	
Issues with planning and assessment	4	5%	
RE is not a priority	6	7%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>1%</b>
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	1	1%	

The largest proportion of any group in this review who focused on a single issue came from religious education teachers who identified a lack of clear direction in the curriculum. That fact that one third of teachers have identified this as their chief concern indicates a significant problem with this area. If combined with the issues of planning and assessment, close to half of religious education teachers are seeking clearer direction and improved planning procedures.

### Other Teachers (Participants: 169)

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>25%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	4	2%	
Lack of Catholic culture	12	7%	
Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith	12	7%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers and parents	15	9%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>49%</b>
Inadequate time to teach RE	8	5%	
Inadequate release time for RELs	1	0.6%	
Inquiry method unsuited to RE	7	4%	
Lack of clear direction in the curriculum	30	18%	
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>	7	4%	
Inadequate resources	3	2%	
Issues with planning and assessment	8	5%	
RE is not a priority	12	7%	
<b>Current RE program does not meet students' needs</b>			<b>8%</b>
RE program is not meeting the needs of the students	13	8%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>7%</b>
Church out of touch with contemporary needs	12	7%	

It is somewhat surprising that a cohort of teachers which does not directly engage with religious education should nominate a lack of direction in the curriculum as their most significant concern. Perhaps this reflects an awareness of the concerns of their colleagues.



**Parents (Participants: 62)**

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>26%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	14	23%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers & parents	2	3%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>23%</b>
Inadequate time to teach RE	1	2%	
Parents not supportive of RE in school curriculum	13	21%	
<b>Current RE program does not meet students' needs</b>			<b>2%</b>
RE program is not meeting the needs of the students	1	2%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>11%</b>
Church out of touch with contemporary needs	3	5%	
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	4	6%	

The most prominent concern in the primary school parent group is a perception that the presentation of the Catholic faith is not adequate. On the other hand, a small but significant percentage of parents do not appear to be supportive of the public teaching positions of the Catholic Church.

Many respondents in this group expressed individual opinions that were not shared by any other participants in the survey. To include them would have required another twenty-four categories. They have therefore been omitted.

## 5. Results and Data Analysis: Secondary Schools

***The data set out below are drawn from respondents who identified themselves as 'secondary' (350 participants) or 'both primary and secondary' (113 participants).***

- The responses were spread among seven cohorts: clergy (21), principals (9), RE leaders (50), RE teachers (135), other teachers (117), parents (126) and office staff (5).
- These responses were further classified into four major headings with constituent sub-themes arranged underneath them as set out in the tables below.

### Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith

Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith

Lack of Catholic culture

Disconnect between parish and school

Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith

Non-practising or unsupportive teachers and parents

### Difficulties with curriculum

Inadequate teaching

Inadequate time to teach RE

Lack of clear direction in the curriculum

Inadequate resources

Difficulties with *Pedagogy of Encounter*

*Pedagogy of Encounter* not being implemented

RE is not a priority

Secularisation needs to be accounted for

### Current RE program does not meet students' needs

RE program is not meeting the needs of the students

### Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching

Church out of touch with contemporary needs

Rigid/traditionalist teachers

- The tables below identify the responses from each category in both numbers and percentages.
- After each table, there is a commentary on some of the salient features.

## RESULTS OVERVIEW: SECONDARY

Respondents' Opinions	Clergy	Principals	RE Leaders	RE Teachers	Other Teachers	Parents	Office Staff	Total Respondents	% of Total
<b>(Number of Respondents:)</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>463</b>	
Church out of touch with contemporary needs				7	15	14		36	7.7%
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>	1	1		2	2			6	1.3%
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith			1	9	10	24		44	9.5%
Inadequate formation	6	4	8	11	4		2	35	7.6%
Inadequate release time for RELs									
Inadequate resources			1			1	1	3	0.65%
Inadequate teaching						1		1	0.22%
Inadequate time to teach RE			4	2				6	1.3%
Inquiry method unsuited to RE									
Issues with planning and assessment									
Lack of Catholic culture				1		1		2	0.4%
Lack of clear direction in the curriculum			2	4	2			8	1.7%
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers and students	10	3	6	15	15	7	1	57	12.3%
Other			2	5	23	18	1	49	5%
Parents are not practising or supportive	1	1		2	5	9		17	3.6%
Do not support the importance of RE in the school curriculum									
<i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i> not being implemented			4	6				10	2.2%
RE program is not meeting the needs of the students		1	4	36	26	22		89	19%
RE is not a priority			9	21	15	6		51	11%
Rigid/traditionalist teachers			1	5	15	12		33	7.2%
Royal Commission issues						1		1	0.22%
Secularisation			4		1			1	0.2%
Disconnect between parish & school					1	12		13	2.8%

**Overall Analysis (Secondary) (Participants: 463)****Major issues to be addressed**

1. Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith	31.7%
2. Difficulties with curriculum	19.7%
3. Current RE program does not meet students' needs	19.0%
4. Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching	14.9%
5. Miscellaneous 'other'	10.6%

1. The largest group of respondents (31.7%) believe that the most significant issue to be addressed is what they perceive as an inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith. The reasons given for this opinion vary and the category-by-category data for each group in the following tables will make this clearer.
2. A significant group of respondents (19.7%) identified problems with the current curriculum as a major area of concern.
3. Those who believed that the current curriculum does not meet the needs of the students constitutes the largest single category across the whole survey (19%). If specific concerns about the inadequacy of the current program were added to other curriculum concerns, the combined total would represent 38.9% of the total.
4. A small but significant percentage of respondents (14.9%) believe that the current programs and some teachers are too conservative in that they present the official Catholic teaching. Many of these respondents made it clear that they believe that the Catholic Church is 'out of touch' with contemporary society. Some respondents volunteered the information that they are no longer Catholic and had little respect for the Church and its teachings.
5. The responses that were classified as 'other' expressed opinions that covered a range of views, each view being put forward by only one respondent across all of the cohorts. These views together constituted 10.6% of the total (49 respondents). They were omitted because each view would have required a category of its own.

## ANALYSIS BY GROUP CATEGORY

### Clergy (Participants: 31)

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>94%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	5	16%	
Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith	9	29%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers and parents	15	49%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum:</b>			<b>6%</b>
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>	1	3%	
Issues with planning and assessment	1	3%	

By a large majority (94%), the clergy respondents identified the inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith as the most pressing issue needing attention. Within this overall category, the largest number of clergy (49%) pointed to the counter-witness of teachers and parents who do not practise the Catholic faith and thus provide a poor example to the students.

Another significant group of clergy (29%) believed that teachers are inadequately formed and are therefore not qualified to present the Catholic faith. Smaller numbers of clergy identified pedagogy and planning as issues of concern.

### Principals (Participants: 9)

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			
Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith	4	44.4%	<b>77.7%</b>
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers & parents	3	33.3%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum:</b>			<b>11.1%</b>
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>	1	11.1%	
<b>Current RE program does not meet needs of students</b>			<b>11.1%</b>
RE program is not meeting the needs of the students	1	11.1%	

The major concerns of secondary school principals seemed to mirror those of the clergy respondents, namely, the inadequate formation of teachers and the fact that many teachers and parents set a poor example by not practising the Catholic faith. Other principals referred to difficulties with the *Pedagogy of Encounter* and observed that the current program is not meeting the needs of the students.



**Religious Education Leaders (Participants: 50)**

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>30%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	1	2%	
Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith	8	16%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers & parents	6	12%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>46%</b>
Inadequate time to teach RE	4	8%	
Lack of clear direction in the curriculum	2	4%	
<i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i> not being implemented	4	8%	
RE is not a priority	9	18%	
Secularisation not being taken into consideration	4	8%	
<b>Current RE program does not meet students' needs</b>			<b>8%</b>
RE program is not meeting the needs of the students	4	8%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>2%</b>
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	1	2%	

The major overall issue for Religious Education leaders in the schools related to the area of curriculum. They focused in particular on the lack of priority given to the place of Religious Education (18%). Some of the other matters raised were:

- Timetabling – RE was not being given its fair share of 'prime teaching time'.
- Many teachers of RE were assigned the task contrary to their skills and wishes.
- Insufficient time was given to the teaching of RE and when other events were held during school time, it was RE that was most likely to lose its time allocation for the week.
- RELs were given insufficient time to do their work.

A significant number of RELs (16%) referred to the inadequate preparation and ongoing formation of teachers of RE. The example of teachers and parents not practising their faith was also a concern. In contrast with other groupings, only 2% of RELs identified an inadequate presentation of doctrine as an issue of concern.

Other issues of concern to the RELs were varied. Some believed that there was a lack of clear direction regarding the current curriculum. Others expressed the view that the *Pedagogy of Encounter* was not being properly implemented; that societal secularisation was not being taken sufficiently into account; and one REC complained of rigid, traditionalist teachers on the faculty. In contrast with other groups of respondents, only 8% of RELs explicitly expressed the view that the current program was not meeting the needs of the students.

## Religious Education Teachers (Participants: 135)

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>26.4%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	9	6.6%	
Lack of Catholic culture	1	0.7%	
Inadequate formation of teachers in the Catholic faith	11	8%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers & parents	15	11.1%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>25.9%</b>
Inadequate time to teach RE	2	1.5%	
Lack of clear direction in the curriculum	4	3%	
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>	2	1.5%	
<i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i> not being implemented	6	4.4%	
RE is not a priority	21	15.5%	
<b>Current RE program does not meet students' needs</b>			<b>26.6%</b>
RE program is not meeting the needs of the students	36	26.6%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>8.9%</b>
Church out of touch with contemporary needs	7	5.2%	
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	5	3.7%	

The most significant issue for teachers of RE (26.6%) was the view that the current curriculum is not meeting the needs of the students. A greater number of RE teachers than RE leaders (6.6% compared with 2%) were concerned that there was an inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith.

In a further comparison with RE leaders, only half the percentage of RE teachers (8%) pointed to inadequate formation of the teachers as an issue. Teachers and parents not practising their faith was a matter of concern for 11.1% of RE teachers.

While the RE teachers did not focus as strongly on the curriculum as RE leaders, there was one issue where there was a much closer alignment of views: that RE is not a priority in the school (15% of RE teachers expressed this view).

A belief that the Church is 'out of touch' was held by 5.2% of RE teachers, while a further 3.7% were critical of fellow teachers who were seen as rigid or traditionalist.

**Other Teachers (Participants: 117)**

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>22%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	10	8.5%	
Disconnect between parish and school	1	0.7%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers & parents	15	12.8%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>16.9%</b>
Lack of clear direction in the curriculum	2	1.7%	
Difficulties with <i>Pedagogy of Encounter</i>	2	1.7%	
RE is not a priority	15	12.8%	
Secularisation not being taken into consideration	1	0.7%	
<b>Current RE program does not meet students' needs</b>			<b>30.7%</b>
RE program is not meeting the needs of the students	36	30.7%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>25.6%</b>
Church out of touch with contemporary needs	15	12.8%	
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	15	12.8%	

Almost a third of non-RE Teachers in the schools believe that the current RE program does not meet the needs of students (30.7%). A further significant number (25.6%) believe that the Church is out of touch with contemporary needs or they criticise some of their colleagues as being rigid and traditionalist if they hold to the Church's doctrinal and moral teachings.

On the other hand, there are some who seem to line up on the other side of the question, with 8.5% of them claiming that there is an inadequate presentation of the doctrinal teaching of the Church and another 12.8% citing 'non-practising teachers or parents' as the main challenge facing Religious Education in their schools.

Perhaps, surprisingly, 12.8% of these teachers believed that RE is not a priority in their schools.

**Parents (Participants: 126)**

Items	Number	Item %	Category %
<b>Inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith</b>			<b>35.3%</b>
Inadequate doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith	24	19.5%	
Lack of Catholic culture	1	0.8%	
Disconnect between parish and school	12	9.5%	
Non-practising or unsupportive teachers & parents	7	5.5%	
<b>Difficulties with curriculum</b>			<b>6.4%</b>
Inadequate teaching	1	0.8%	
Inadequate resources	1	0.8%	
RE is not a priority	6	4.8%	
<b>Current RE program does not meet students' needs</b>			<b>17.5%</b>
RE program is not meeting the needs of the students	22	17.5%	
<b>Programs are too focused on official Catholic teaching</b>			<b>20.6%</b>
Church out of touch with contemporary needs	14	11.1%	
Rigid/traditionalist teachers	12	9.5%	

The major concern of parents appears to be that there is an inadequate presentation of the Catholic faith (19.5%). This is the only group where a significant number of respondents (9.5%) expressed concern about the disconnect between the parish and the school.

Parents did not express strong views on the specifics of the curriculum, with the only item referred to by more than one respondent as 'RE is not a priority in the school' (4.8%).

Like other cohorts, the parent group strongly expressed the view that the current RE program is not meeting the needs of the students (17.5%).

It must also be noted, however, that a significant percentage of parents (20.6%) has expressed dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church, with 11.1% believing that the Church is out of touch with contemporary needs. A further 9.5% of the cohort is critical of teachers who appear to hold too strongly to the Church's moral and doctrinal teachings and are seen as rigid and traditionalist.

**MACS Office Staff (Participants: 14)**

Some MACS office staff identified themselves as primary and others as secondary. As both cohorts were very small, they have been combined. Moreover, the concerns of both cohorts were in agreement regarding the main issues. It must be noted that the contributions from this group stood out for their coherence, relevance and insight. For this reason, we have not attempted to categorise them, but rather we have tried to provide a more complete summary, which is set out below.

- The introduction of a draft religious education curriculum did not do what was needed, according to at least some teachers of RE.
- Paucity of resources: the release of a new religious education curriculum, whether draft or approved, needs to be heavily resourced so that teachers of religious education have access to rich and relevant resources which will open up the particular inquiry being explored.
- Professional learning needs to be potent, offering every opportunity for teachers to join together in Communities of Practice that are well supported by highly-skilled learning consultants religious education.
- A weakness across the system and all learning areas is the lack of classroom coaching of teachers.
- There is a lack of support from leadership for time to plan with staff and for formation.
- Not having an approved curriculum for so long, and no hard roll-out of the curriculum yet knowing the previous KWL (*To Know, Worship and Love* Archdiocesan Religious Education) curriculum, does not speak to current best practice in education. Many schools are at different points in their journey. There is much confusion.
- Graduates having no accreditation.
- We say that a teacher of RE needs to be witness, specialist and moderator.
- Those who wish to be teachers of RE need direct access to formation opportunities that will further their commitment to the faith and deepen their understanding of it.
- Particularly in secondary colleges, too many teachers are given RE classes based around timetabling issues rather than according to ability and willingness to teach RE.
- The greatest weaknesses would be (1) many of the teachers do not practise the faith; (2) the lack of involvement of parents, most of whom also do not practise the faith. The school can only do so much in passing on the faith and can only be successful in as much as the families of the children promote the faith in their own lives. The saying that ‘the faith is caught, not taught’ stands true.

**Recommendations:**

*Survey Results*

1. There is a need for a properly resourced introduction of a new curriculum at all levels that provides:
  - a. professional development
  - b. teacher accreditation
  - c. learning and teaching resources
  - d. classroom coaching of teachers.
2. Support from school leadership is essential in order to:
  - a. provide teachers with adequate planning time
  - b. provide access to suitable formation opportunities
  - c. ensure that the teachers assigned to RE classes are the best available and not chosen solely based on ‘timetable issues’.



3. Employing authorities should, where possible, prioritise the recruitment of teachers who will take on a 'missional approach'.
4. According to survey respondents, significant attention needs to be paid to the following issues:
  - a. replacing the current curriculum, as it fails to meet the needs of students in terms of the development of their Catholic faith
  - b. ensuring that staff are properly formed in the Catholic faith
  - c. developing a strategy to account for non-practising or non-supportive teachers and parents.
5. According to survey respondents, significant attention needs to be paid to the following curriculum matters:
  - a. a lack of a clear direction within the curriculum
  - b. a need for better guidance in terms of planning and assessment.

# Chapter 6

## Programs of Religious Education Outside Melbourne

As part of the review, the Melbourne Religious Education Program was compared with other models in Australia and around the world. The following list is offered to provide context.

### 1. Sydney Catholic Schools

The RE Program of Sydney Catholic Schools provides access to the religious education curriculum through its RE online website. This offers teachers practical advice regarding content and resources. The general link is <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/>.

#### Primary School RE

The primary school curriculum documents are offered in the following categories: Core Documents: <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/>.

Kindergarten: <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/primary-religious-education/kindergarten-curriculum/>.

Year 1: <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/primary-religious-education/year-1-curriculum/>.

Year 2: <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/primary-religious-education/year-2-curriculum/>.

Year 3: <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/primary-religious-education/year-3-curriculum/>.

Year 4: <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/primary-religious-education/year-4-curriculum/>.

Year 5: <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/primary-religious-education/year-5-curriculum/>.

Year 6: <https://reonline.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au/primary-religious-education/year-6-curriculum/>.

#### Secondary School RE

The Years 7–10 curriculum online is set out in a single document:

<https://scsreonline.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/the-religious-education-curriculum-sydney-catholic-schools-v6.pdf>.

For Year 11 and Year 12 students there is a choice of RE programs.

The *Studies of Religion* course is an examinable HSC course and is supervised by the NSW Department of Education.

- The *Studies in Catholic Thought* course has been developed by the University of Notre Dame. It was accredited as a Board Endorsed Course Stage 6, with the first year of operation being 2022.
- The program also integrates with Youth Ministry and participation in World Youth Day.

## 2. Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes (Primary School Only)

The Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes program *Educating in Christ* is an adaptation of the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* for use in Catholic primary schools based on the book of the same name, published in 2018. The program has been operating for three years and has been introduced on a trial basis in the Dioceses of Broken Bay and of Wagga Wagga. For further information, see the following link to a series of articles in the *Sydney Catholic Weekly*, December 2020:  
[https://1drv.ms/b/s!AkIqJv2E\\_jrlh8sIGdoNOM9yYW3aRA?e=gRz7rU](https://1drv.ms/b/s!AkIqJv2E_jrlh8sIGdoNOM9yYW3aRA?e=gRz7rU).

The following table sets out the similarities and differences between *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* and *Educating in Christ*:

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to developmentally sensitive periods of the students</li> <li>• Follows liturgical cycle</li> <li>• Links made between scripture and liturgy</li> <li>• Montessori pedagogy</li> <li>• Use of concrete three-dimensional and two-dimensional materials</li> </ul>	<p><i>Educating in Christ</i> incorporates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctrinal statements as required by <i>Catechesi Tradendae</i></li> <li>• Formal assessment – achieved through a learning journal</li> <li>• Instruction booklets to support teachers who may be untrained in the method</li> <li>• Additional works to meet the requirements of church documents for a comprehensive and organic presentation of the faith</li> <li>• Strategies for creating an atrium environment in the classroom</li> <li>• Reduction in the size of materials for storage purposes</li> <li>• Structured sessions which can fit into a school timetable.</li> </ul>

## 3. Diocese of Lismore

The religious education curriculum for the Diocese of Lismore is essentially the same as that for the Archdiocese of Sydney, using the same structure and units.

- This appears to have allowed the diocese to focus on the aspect of youth ministry. These resources are of very high quality for this area and formed part of a project that ran from 2013 to 2020 called 'Proclaim Lismore'. The focus was on investigating youth ministry/evangelisation programs.
- *Proclaim Lismore: Strategic Intent for Catholic Culture Change*:  
[https://1drv.ms/b/s!AkIqJv2E\\_jrlh8srcx0vgFSxyut4IA?e=tCqef9](https://1drv.ms/b/s!AkIqJv2E_jrlh8srcx0vgFSxyut4IA?e=tCqef9).
- *Student Discipleship Survey Report*:  
[https://1drv.ms/b/s!AkIqJv2E\\_jrlh8stecmV7YWDPW15yQ?e=O8c6wH](https://1drv.ms/b/s!AkIqJv2E_jrlh8stecmV7YWDPW15yQ?e=O8c6wH).
- *Handbook for School Evangelisation*:  
[https://1drv.ms/b/s!AkIqJv2E\\_jrlh8ss7oGNOVoBOx3SxQ?e=LZrnWF](https://1drv.ms/b/s!AkIqJv2E_jrlh8ss7oGNOVoBOx3SxQ?e=LZrnWF).

## 4. Archdiocese of Brisbane

The religious education program of the Archdiocese of Brisbane is arranged in a curriculum framework of four categories: Sacred Texts, Beliefs, Church, and Christian Life. At each level, the learning program is viewed through two distinct lenses: skills, and religious knowledge and deep understanding. A detailed doctrinal overview is not available. The program outline can be viewed at this link: <https://curriculum.bne.catholic.edu.au/Curriculum/LearningArea?learningAreaName=Religious%20Education>.

## United States Programs

Programs of religious education in the Catholic schools of the United States tend to be highly prescriptive, relying heavily on textbooks. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has a committee which oversees the content of commercially available series that are in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Only these texts are approved for use in Catholic schools and parish programs throughout the United States.

The other characteristic of religious education in the United States is the explicit reliance on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as the standard for content. This is the case in every program we have examined. This is probably the most important lesson the Archdiocese of Melbourne can learn from the religious education programs used in the United States. Here is a link to the list of currently approved series, updated on 1 November, 2022: [https://1drv.ms/b/s!AklgJv2E\\_jrlh8suRIYkZ0Y0vOTyUg?e=jn7PrX](https://1drv.ms/b/s!AklgJv2E_jrlh8suRIYkZ0Y0vOTyUg?e=jn7PrX).

Individual dioceses run their own programs and many of these give specific details of the religious education curriculum. Some of those which provide comprehensive details of their programs can be found at the links below:

### 5. Archdiocese of Chicago

<https://pvm.archchicago.org/lifelong-formation/childrens-formation-religious-education/curriculum>.

### 6. Archdiocese of Denver

<https://archden.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AOD-Catechesis-and-Theology-Standards-2021-.pdf>.

### 7. Archdiocese of Detroit

<https://www.aod.org/teacher-resources>.

### 8. Archdiocese of Los Angeles

<https://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-4/section-4-3/topic-4-3-13>.

### 9. Archdiocese of New York

<https://catholicschoolsny.org/elementary/elementary-curriculum/religion/>.

## 10. Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Primary

<https://phillyocf.org/elementary-religious-education/>.

Secondary

<https://www.aopcatholicsschools.org/secondary/secondary-curriculum>.

## 11. Archdiocese of San Francisco

<https://sfarchdiocese.org/faith-formation-guidelines-and-policies/>.

## 12. Diocese of Pittsburgh

<https://diopitt.org/religious-education-curriculum>.

## 13. Diocese of Kansas City, Kansas

<https://archkck.org/catholicsschools/curriculum/religion/>.

## United Kingdom Programs

### 14. England and Wales RE Curriculum

A new Religious Education Directory for England and Wales was published in 2023 by the Catholic Education Service. Titled *To Know You More Clearly*, the directory covers Foundation Stage to Year 9, with a program of study and model curriculum replacing previous editions published in 1996 and 2012. It was drafted to reflect the 2022 instruction by the Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*.

Topics covered in *To Know You More Clearly* include the relationship between faith and science; the problem of evil; the nature of human freedom; the rights of the unborn; the plight of refugees and asylum seekers; and war and peace. There is also a focus on the beauty of Catholicism and its influence on culture through art, music, literature, science, and architecture, equipping young people to engage with the Church beyond intellectual remits, and to approach the transcendent. The directory can be downloaded from here:

<http://catholiceducation.org.uk/schools/religious-education/item/1000034-religious-education-curriculum-directory>.

### 15. Scotland RE Syllabus

The syllabus for Catholic religious education in Scotland, titled *This Is Our Faith*, governs the teaching of RE in Scotland's Catholic schools. It is designed to inform teachers' understanding of the nature of the Catholic school; the purpose of religious education; the role of the teacher; and the 'Strands of Faith', under which is organised the 'core learning' in faith which young people are expected to experience through their Broad General Education phase (P1 through to S3) and at the Senior Phase (S4 to S6).

*This Is Our Faith* is the first religious education syllabus to be originated wholly in Scotland and designed to meet the needs of young people in Scotland. It was published in 2011 by the Scottish Catholic Education Service on behalf of the



Catholic Bishops of Scotland. The Senior Phase version was published in October 2015. The syllabus can be accessed here: <https://sces.org.uk/this-is-our-faith/>.

### **16. Ireland Credible Catholic**

This is a Religious Education Programme for Senior Cycle non-exam RE provided by the Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference. It is designed for use in Catholic Voluntary Secondary schools in Ireland. An earlier version was written and produced by Fr Robert Spitzer SJ and the Magis Centre (California, USA) in 2018 and has been almost entirely re-developed for the Irish context, in line with feedback from RE teachers and theological advisors in Ireland.

Downloads and resource materials including 7 modules for teachers are available here <https://www.catholicschools.ie/crediblecatholic/>.

# Chapter 7

## Formation of Personnel

### 1. Essential Elements for Teachers as Missionary Disciples

The National Catholic Education Commission document *Formation for Mission* focuses on forming collaborators for missionary discipleship, and challenges schools and parishes to begin moving in this direction. This missionary discipleship incorporates five dimensions: *Koinonia* (living a spirituality of communion), *Kerygma* (preaching Christ), *Leiturgia* (engaging in worship), *Martyria* (witnessing to Christ), and *Diaconia* (serving Christ).<sup>227</sup>

### 2. Professional Attributes

Significant attention has been paid to the professional attributes of teachers working in a Catholic context and this is reflected in a variety of documents. It is made clear that teachers must have a solid professional formation. Inadequacy in this area undermines the success of their work with students and their ability to witness to their faith.<sup>228</sup> More than professional competence is needed, however, since in order for the teaching of the Catholic religion to be fruitful, “it is fundamental that teachers be capable of presenting the relationship between faith and culture, human and religious components, science and religion’.<sup>229</sup> As in other subject areas, religious education teachers must be continually updating their professional qualifications.<sup>230</sup> Those responsible for hiring teachers and administrators in Catholic schools are advised to take account of the faith life of those they are hiring.<sup>231</sup> All teachers in a Catholic school should be ‘sensitive to finding opportunities for allowing students to see beyond the limited horizon of human reality’.<sup>232</sup> Teachers and leaders need to know confidently where the Church comes from and where Catholicism stands as a faith tradition, and their place within it.<sup>233</sup>

Those working in the issue of *the environment* need to take care to proclaim the truths of the faith underlying the subject of environmentalism: ‘God the Father as almighty creator; the mystery of creation as a gift that precedes the human being who is the pinnacle and guardian, the correlation and harmony of all created realities, the redemption worked by Christ, the first born of the new creation’.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>227</sup> National Catholic Education Commission, *Formation for Mission* (2017), 17. Henceforth FM.

<sup>228</sup> ETCS 21–2. See also GE 8, RDE 42–3.

<sup>229</sup> DC 318.

<sup>230</sup> ETCS 20.

<sup>231</sup> EO 33.

<sup>232</sup> RDE 51.

<sup>233</sup> FM 11.

<sup>234</sup> DC chapter 2. See also CCC 279–384.

### 3. Personal Attributes

Religious Education teachers need ongoing formation in personal attributes as well. The *Directory for Catechesis* is unequivocal in insisting that ‘teachers should be believers committed to personal growth in the faith, incorporated into a Christian community desirous of giving the reason for their faith through professional expertise as well’.<sup>235</sup> A successful Catholic school needs its teachers not only to know how to teach or direct an organisation; they also must bear authentic witness to the school’s values.<sup>236</sup>

The effectiveness of the religious education program is closely tied to the personal witness given by teachers.<sup>237</sup> Religious education teachers should have a personal commitment to the role, enabling them to carry it out ‘in communion with Christ’.<sup>238</sup>

Catholic educators need a formation of the heart as well as of the mind if they are to contribute effectively to the project of religious education.<sup>239</sup>

### 4. Anthropological Vision<sup>240</sup>

Religious Education teachers should be formed in an authentic vision of Christian anthropology. The NCEC document *Formation for Mission* specifies the need for an authentic anthropological vision. Such a vision has certain essential characteristics. It must acknowledge that the desire for God is written in the human heart, because the human person is created by God and for God. The starting point for a Catholic understanding is that every human being is a person made in the image and likeness of God; hence human nature is essentially good.

The mystery of the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ serves as an essential foundation for an understanding of who we are in the plan of God. Through the mystery of the Word made flesh, the true meaning of the human person becomes clear. The divine became human so that the human could become divine. The divine image is never lost, even by sin and the misuse of human freedom. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, humanity is restored, and the grace of salvation is offered to all men and women. As a result, a Catholic anthropology is shaped by hope in the mercy of God. No human person is ever self-sufficient, but, above all, in relation to God, we are always in need of God’s grace. In the Catholic understanding, the human person is a moral agent, an acting subject initiating and responsible for one’s own actions and capable of repentance for sin and ongoing conversion in response to God’s mercy.

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<sup>235</sup> DC 318.

<sup>236</sup> EIDC 80.

<sup>237</sup> RDE 96.

<sup>238</sup> CT 9.

<sup>239</sup> ETCS 20.

<sup>240</sup> FM 7.

## 5. Key Principles of Faith Formation<sup>241</sup>

The key principles for the formation of religious education teachers in a Catholic school are summarised in this way by *Formation for Mission*: such teachers require a formation of the heart that is characterised by prayerfulness and reflection. This formation must be respectful, experiential and relevant, building on participants' personal story and everyday reality. It should be explicitly Christological, scripturally rich and ecclesially grounded. The formation should have an affective focus on a person's faith journey and discipleship. Even though it is essentially a formation of the heart, it must also have a substantive theological content and must set out to build communal Catholic religious identity and culture. It is differentiated according to individual and community needs and promotes personal vocation, connection with the Catholic tradition and responsiveness to mission. Ultimately, it must aim at developing the willingness, confidence and capacities of participants in their roles to serve the evangelising mission of Catholic school education.

## 6. The Renewed Ministry of Catechist

In his apostolic letter, *Antiquum Ministerium*, issued in 2021, Pope Francis called for recognition of the ministry of catechist.<sup>242</sup> This document drew attention to the challenges of globalisation in the contemporary world and identified specific requirements for those engaged in this ministry. It calls for genuine interaction with young people, and for creative methodologies and resources capable of proclaiming the Gospel and putting into practice the missionary transformation that the Church has undertaken. It emphasises fidelity to the past and responsibility for the present.<sup>243</sup>

Whereas catechists, as we have for many decades hitherto understood them, have tended to be drawn from retired women and men who have volunteered their services for taking religious education classes in state schools for half an hour each week, this is not what is envisaged here. Catechists are now called to be experts in the pastoral service of 'transmitting the faith as it develops through the different stages from the initial proclamation of the *kerygma* to the instruction that presents our new life in Christ and prepares for the sacraments of Christian initiation and then to ongoing formation'.<sup>244</sup> A catechist now needs to be seen as a 'witness to the faith, a teacher and mystagogue, a companion and a pedagogue, who teaches for the Church. Only through prayer, study and direct participation in the life of the community can they grow in this identity and the integrity and responsibility that it entails'.<sup>245</sup>

This formation cannot be seen as solely academic, but more properly as catechetical. It needs to incorporate 'suitable biblical, theological and pedagogical formation to be competent communicators of the truth of the faith'.<sup>246</sup> Professional competence in catechesis of this kind should be available to school communities as well. Given the importance of this newly instituted though ancient ministry, schools may find it helpful to move towards having at least one instituted catechist

<sup>241</sup> FM 14.

<sup>242</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (2021), 5. Henceforth AM.

<sup>243</sup> See AM 5.

<sup>244</sup> AM 6.

<sup>245</sup> AM 6.

<sup>246</sup> AM 8.

on the staff (and more if circumstances require it), whose mission would involve the formation of Catholic students. A designated training institution may need to be set up for this purpose. This is envisaged in *Antiquum Ministerium*, which invites episcopal conferences to ‘render effective the ministry of Catechist, determining the necessary process of formation and the normative criteria for admission to this ministry and devising the most appropriate forms for the service which these men and women will be called to exercise in conformity with the content of this Apostolic Letter’.<sup>247</sup>

### **Recommendations:**

#### *Formation of Personnel*

1. In their formation of personnel, Catholic schools should aim at forming missionary disciples through koinonia, kerygma, leiturgia, martyria and diaconia.
2. The formation of religious education teachers in Catholic schools should incorporate professional training for the role.
3. The formation of religious education teachers should promote ongoing personal growth in faith.
4. Religious education teachers should be formed in an authentic vision of Catholic anthropology based on acknowledging that:
  - a. The starting point for a Catholic understanding is that every human being is a person made in the image and likeness of God; hence human nature is essentially good.
  - b. ‘The divine became human so that the human could become divine.’
  - c. The divine image is never lost, even by sin and the misuse of human freedom. Through Christ, humanity is restored and the grace of salvation is offered to all men and women.
  - d. In the Catholic understanding, the human person is a moral agent, an ‘acting subject’.
5. The key principles from the National Catholic Education Commission document ‘Formation for Mission’ should be seen as fundamental guidelines for Catholic schools.
6. The Archdiocese may wish to consider the setting up of a Catechetical Institute for the training of suitable teachers for the ministry of catechist.
7. Schools should move towards the employment of those holding accreditation for the ministry of catechist to work in schools. This does not imply a separation of the catechetical and religious education in curriculum or personnel, but it does acknowledge a distinction between the two.

<sup>247</sup> AM 9.



# Chapter 8

## Guidance for a New Religious Education Curriculum

### *Insights from Contemporary Learning Theory*

In terms of a philosophy of religious education, contemporary learning theory has much to offer by way of professional insights into the skill of teaching. Indeed, educational professionals are encouraged to take this line by the *General Directory of Catechesis*:

The Church ‘assumes those methods not contrary to the Gospel and places them at its service ... Catechetical methodology has the simple objective of education in the faith. It avails of the pedagogical sciences and of communication, as applied to catechesis.’<sup>248</sup>

It seems that the best of modern contemporary learning theory is substantially compatible with the educational vision of the Church. There is an enormous variety of educational writing that could be cited, but this chapter will confine itself to some of the best practices currently used in the field. It will be useful at this point to identify some key, research-based teaching practices that would be helpful to incorporate into a religious education program. The list cannot be exhaustive; there will be other effective approaches that could also be used, and the ‘landscape’ of learning theory is every expanding: new and effective teaching and learning practices are always coming to light.

### *A Survey of Some Effective Contemporary Learning and Teaching Practices*

#### 1. Self-Reported Grades

This practice consists of asking the student’s advice about the current state of their own learning. Research indicates that students are quite good at indicating what they know and don’t know. A meta-analysis by Kuncel, Crede and Thomas (2005) of 209 studies indicates that students had a very accurate understanding of their achievements levels – what they did and did not know – across a wide range of subjects.<sup>249</sup> In his exposition of this phenomenon in his master classes, John Hattie explains further that, when students present accurate information of this kind to the teacher, and the teacher then responds by providing incrementally appropriate learning materials which can be accessed independently by the student, highly effective learning takes place. The student is given the freedom to spend exactly the amount of time needed on each material to gain mastery, and then move on. The effect size, which is 3.6 times the expected average, is likely to be achieved, because of this precise focus on the exact need of the individual.<sup>250</sup> (An effect size is the measure used by Professor John Hattie to measure the effectiveness of an

<sup>248</sup> GDC 148.

<sup>249</sup> N.R. Kuncel, M. Crede and L.L. Thomas, ‘The Validity of Self-Reported Grade-Point Averages, Class Ranks, and Test Scores: A Meta-analysis and Review of the Literature’, *Review of Educational Research* 75, no. 1 (2005): 63–82.

<sup>250</sup> See John Hattie, *Visible Learning* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 43–4.

education practice. I measures the observable change across ten months based on a student's performance on comparable norm referenced tests.)

## 2. Developmentally Appropriate Programs

From studies conducted by Naglieri and Das (1997)<sup>251</sup> and Sweller (2008),<sup>252</sup> together with many studies that have preceded these, it is clear that teachers' knowledge of the typical way in which students think at their particular developmental stage is likely to be the most important factor determining their choice of material for students. In other words, teaching/learning experiences will be far more effective if they are designed to meet the stage of development of the learner and focus on their necessary developmental tasks. This will naturally capture their interest and attend to the pre-existing 'hard-wiring' of the student. The *Early Years Report*<sup>253</sup> of the Canadian province of Ontario has made a good start in bringing together the research in relation to all of the major developmental needs of children up to the age of seven. There is also longstanding support for this practice in the educational method of Maria Montessori, whose work in this field began in 1907, and has continued to be developed through action research by the world-wide Montessori education community up to the present. Hattie claims that the effect size of this practice is 1.2 – three times the expected average.<sup>254</sup>

## 3. Formative Evaluation

Teachers have a significant impact in the teaching/learning program, and so it is essential that they be open to improving the program through appropriate evaluation. One highly effective way of improving any system is through formative evaluation. Fuchs and Fuchs (1986)<sup>255</sup> demonstrated the effectiveness of using an evidence-based model of systematic formative data in place of simple 'teacher judgement'. Hattie has cited a further thirty studies to corroborate this effect, yielding an effect size of 0.9.<sup>256</sup>

## 4. Microteaching

Microteaching usually refers to the process whereby teachers deliver lessons to small groups of students, thus making them better able to gauge the responses of students to what they are offering. Hattie has identified over four hundred studies demonstrating the effectiveness of this teaching practice, and has identified its effect size as 0.88.<sup>257</sup> It also has an impact on the future practice of teachers in training. Metcalf (1995)<sup>258</sup> has argued that when teachers engage in this kind of teaching, it has a significant impact on the effectiveness of their teaching, and this does not diminish over time.

<sup>251</sup> J.A. Naglieri and J.P. Das, 'Intelligence Revised: The Planning, Attention, Simultaneous, Successive (PASS) Cognitive Processing Theory', in *Handbook on Testing*, ed. R.F. Dillon (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), 36–163.

<sup>252</sup> J. Sweller, 'Cognitive Load Theory and the Use of Educational Technology', *Educational Technology* 48, no. 1 (2008): 32–4.

<sup>253</sup> See [www.children.gov.on.ca/.../earlychildhood/early\\_years\\_study-1999.doc](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/.../earlychildhood/early_years_study-1999.doc), accessed 4 November 2013.

<sup>254</sup> See Hattie, *Visible Learning*, 297.

<sup>255</sup> L.S. Fuchs and D. Fuchs, 'Effects of Systematic Formative Evaluation: A Meta-analysis', *Exceptional Children* 53, no. 3 (1986): 199–208.

<sup>256</sup> See Hattie, *Visible Learning*, 181.

<sup>257</sup> See Hattie, 112–13.

<sup>258</sup> K.K. Metcalf, 'Laboratory Experiences in Teacher Education: A Meta-analytical Review of Research' (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, 1995).

## 5. Reciprocal Teaching

One of the most effective ways to learn something is to have to teach it to someone else. The research of Rosenshine and Meister (1994)<sup>259</sup> has demonstrated this, and there are a further thirty-eight studies quoted in Hattie's meta-analysis that lend further weight to the practice, giving it an effect size of 0.74.<sup>260</sup> The need to teach something will often provide a motivation to succeed at a particular task that would otherwise be lacking. The learning program will be significantly enhanced if the students are challenged to take responsibility for teaching something to someone else.

A note of caution needs to be sounded here. Those who benefit most from this strategy are usually not those who are already highly competent; rather, it is those who have not yet struggled through to a fully developed understanding who will be helped by this process. On another level, it is often the case that highly competent students do not succeed in teaching their peers. There are a number of reasons for this. The competent student may not see the difficulties that others can experience and move too quickly through the task; alternatively, competent students can have their own agenda – to demonstrate how clever they are by 'putting down' those they are teaching.

## 6. Teacher-Student Relationships

A very large corpus of educational research has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of building good student-teacher relationships, described in the literature as the 'person-centred teacher'. Cornelius-White (2007) has identified 119 studies incorporating 2439 schools, 14,851 teachers and 355,325 students in which they found 1450 positive effects based on this characteristic.<sup>261</sup> Hattie cites the aspects of 'agency, efficacy, respect by the teacher for what the student brings to the class ... and allowing the experiences of the child to be recognized in the classroom',<sup>262</sup> and claims that these 'person-centred variables' result in classrooms where there is more engagement, minimal resistant behaviours and respect for self and others, with an effect size of 0.72.<sup>263</sup>

## 7. Spaced Practice vs Massed Practice

Much of current educational practice is based on what might be called the 'unit model', in which a large amount of time is devoted to mastering a particular set of skills and knowledge. Once this is finished, however, the field is rarely, if ever, covered again. This approach is referred to as 'massed practice'. Research findings have consistently called this practice into question, demonstrating that there is a better way of organising a program, known as 'spaced practice'. As the words imply, this requires the spreading out of the tasks over time. This does not mean simple repetitive 'drill and practice', which can simply be monotonous and largely

<sup>259</sup> B. Rosenshine and C. Meister, 'Reciprocal Teaching: A Review of the Research', *Review of Educational Research* 64, no. 4 (1994): 479–530.

<sup>260</sup> See Hattie, *Visible Learning*, 203–4.

<sup>261</sup> J. Cornelius-White, J. 'Learner-Centred Teacher-Student Relationships Are Effective: A Meta-analysis', *Review of Educational Research* 77, no. 1 (2007): 113–43.

<sup>262</sup> Hattie, *Visible Learning*, 118.

<sup>263</sup> See Hattie, 118–19.

meaningless. It is about 'deliberative practice', which provides for students to enhance their understanding by returning to the same material in different and interesting ways – possibly even adapted to their own advancing age and growing confidence. (The model of the regular cycle of the liturgical year, when used properly, would be an example of an effective use of 'spaced practice'.) In Hattie's words, 'it is the frequency of different opportunities rather than spending more time on a task that makes the difference to learning'.<sup>264</sup> He suggests that the proper use of spaced practice will yield an effect size of 0.71.<sup>265</sup>

## 8. The Impact of Movement on Learning and Cognition

In the early 1960s, Held and Hein published their classic research on the impact of movement on learning.<sup>266</sup> Two kittens, one designated the leader and the other the follower, were permitted out of a dark room for only three hours a day. During this time, the leader kitten was fitted with a harness, and needed to drag around a cart carrying the follower kitten. After three months, both kittens were tested. The leader kitten had developed normal vision, the follower, despite being exposed to exactly the same visual stimuli, had serious vision problems. This work began a great deal of research into the impact of movement on learning. There is now a large body of research that indicates the importance of fine motor, tactile activity. In the area of judgement, for example, Glenberg and Kaschak (2002),<sup>267</sup> Ochs, Gonzales and Jacoby (1996),<sup>268</sup> McNeill (1992),<sup>269</sup> and Kraus and Hadar (1999),<sup>270</sup> have demonstrated in a variety of ways that movement and cognition are closely aligned. Memory also, it seems, is significantly improved when connected with fine motor movement, as demonstrated in the research of Cohen (1989),<sup>271</sup> Engelkamp, Zimmer, Mohr and Sellen (1994),<sup>272</sup> Noice, Noice and Kennedy (2000),<sup>273</sup> and Laird, Wagener, Halal and Szegda (1982).<sup>274</sup> In summing up, Lillard writes: 'there is abundant research showing that movement and cognition are closely intertwined. People represent spaces and objects more accurately, make judgements faster and more accurately, remember information better and show superior social cognition when their movements are aligned with what they are thinking about or learning'.<sup>275</sup> It seems, then, that a program that restricts movement too narrowly or does not permit tactile engagement with 'real' objects also restricts learning in significant ways.

<sup>264</sup> Hattie, 185.

<sup>265</sup> See Hattie, 185–6.

<sup>266</sup> R. Held and A. Hein, 'Movement Produced Stimulation in the Development of Visually Guided Behaviour', *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology* 56, no. 5 (1963): 872–6.

<sup>267</sup> A.M. Glenberg and M.P. Kaschak, 'Grounding Language in Action', *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 9, no. 3 (2002): 36–41.

<sup>268</sup> E. Ochs, P. Gonzales and S. Jacoby, 'Collaborative Discovery in a Scientific Domain', *Cognitive Science* 21 no. 2 (1996): 109–46.

<sup>269</sup> See D. McNeill, *Hand and Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>270</sup> R.M. Kraus and U. Hadar, 'The Role of Speech Related Arm/Hand Gestures in Word Retrieval', in *Gesture, Speech and Sign*, ed. L.S. Messing and R. Campbell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 93–116.

<sup>271</sup> R.L. Cohen, 'Memory for Action Events: The Power of Enactment', *Educational Psychology Review* 1, no. 1 (1989): 57–80.

<sup>272</sup> J. Engelkamp, H.D. Zimmer, G. Mohr and O. Sellen, 'Memory of Self-Performed Tasks: Self-Performing during Recognition', *Memory and Cognition* 22, no. 1 (1994): 34–9.

<sup>273</sup> H. Noice, T. Noice and C. Kennedy, 'Effects of Enactment by Professional Actors at Encoding and Retrieval', *Memory* 8, no. 6 (2000): 353–63.

<sup>274</sup> J.D. Laird, J.J. Wagener, M. Halal and M. Szegda, 'Remembering What You Feel: Effects of Emotion on Memory', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 42, no. 4 (1982): 646–57.

<sup>275</sup> Angeline Stoll Lillard, *Montessori: The Science behind the Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.



## 9. Choice and Perceived Control

Nowhere is it disputed that freedom is a foundational, constitutive element of authentic human life and development. Even as children, human beings function best if they are given a degree of choice in order to manage their own circumstances. The capacity to use this freedom develops over time, and with very young children, choices must necessarily be limited. If the capacity to make simple choices is entirely absent, however, the learning process is significantly diminished. Recent research has affirmed the value of making limited choices available to students. Some examples include the studies of Ryan and Deci (2000),<sup>276</sup> Iyengar and Lepper (1999),<sup>277</sup> and Markus and Kitayama (1991).<sup>278</sup> While agreeing with this as a general principle, other research indicates that unlimited free choice will actually have a negative effect on learning, as in the studies of Iyengar and Lepper (2000)<sup>279</sup> and Schwartz (2004).<sup>280</sup> Another benefit of some degree of choice can be found in the increase in students' capacity to concentrate deeply and for long periods of time, as supported by the research of Ruff and Rothbart (1996),<sup>281</sup> Cumberland-Li, Eisenberg and Reiser (2004),<sup>282</sup> and Carlson, Moses and Hicks (1998).<sup>283</sup> It appears that some degree of limited choice will dramatically enhance the learning outcomes of students at every level, and this will have its application in a religious education classroom, as it will in any other human learning activity.

## 10. Inadequacy of Extrinsic Rewards and Motivation

During the early 1970s, educational psychology began to turn away from what had, up to that time, been a prevailing focus on behaviourism – the notion that human beings are shaped primarily through reward and punishment. This idea was challenged by studies such as the one conducted by Lepper, Greene and Nisbett (1973),<sup>284</sup> which began to indicate that this emphasis could actually result in less 'motivation' among students. A large meta-study by Deci, Koestner and Ryan (1999)<sup>285</sup> provided clear evidence of the ultimately negative impact of a 'reward and punishment'–based system in sustaining motivation to learn. At the same time, there are studies that demonstrate that some rewards can be helpful – for example, as

<sup>276</sup> R.M. Ryan and D.L. Deci, 'Self-determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Self-Development, and Well-being', *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 68–78.

<sup>277</sup> S.S. Iyengar and M.R. Lepper, 'Rethinking the Value of Choice: A Perspective on Intrinsic Motivation', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76 (1999): 349–66.

<sup>278</sup> H.R. Markus and S. Kitayama, 'Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion and Motivation', *Psychological Review* 98 (1991): 224–53.

<sup>279</sup> S.S. Iyengar and M.R. Lepper, 'When Choice Is De-motivating: Can One Desire Too Much of a Good Thing?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, no. 6 (2000): 995–1006.

<sup>280</sup> See B. Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

<sup>281</sup> See H.A. Ruff and M.K. Rothbart, *Attention in Early Development: Themes and Variations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>282</sup> A. Cumberland-Li, N. Eisenberg and M. Reiser, 'Relations of Young Children's Agreeableness and Resiliency to Effortful Control and Impulsivity', *Social Development* 13, no. 2 (2004): 193–212.

<sup>283</sup> S.M. Carlson, L.J. Moses and H.R. Hicks, 'The Role of Inhibitory Processes in Young Children's Difficulties with Deception and False Belief', *Child Development* 69 (1998): 672–91.

<sup>284</sup> M.R. Lepper, D. Greene and R.E. Nisbett, 'Undermining Children's Intrinsic Interest with Extrinsic Reward: A Test of the "Overjustification" Hypothesis', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 28, no. 1 (1973): 129–37.

<sup>285</sup> E.L. Deci, R. Koestner and R.M. Ryan, 'A Meta-analytical Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation', *Psychological Bulletin* 125 (1999): 627–68.



described by Cameron, Banko and Pierce (2001)<sup>286</sup> in cases where it is necessary to motivate students to complete very 'low interest' tasks. Nevertheless, it does seem that the use of extrinsic rewards undermines the most potent student motivator: 'success'. Those who work only for reward will need to be offered ever greater rewards. Those who are encouraged by their own success are more likely to persist in the face of difficulties.

In terms of religious education, the application is clear: if the task is essentially 'intimacy with Christ', then this should be seen as a free relationship aiming at mutual love. The idea that students should participate in this relationship to receive extrinsic rewards will actually undermine the notion of genuine love. Even in human relationships, the friend who uses another to gain reward is not regarded as a true friend at all. While there is always a place for spontaneous gift-giving, this should never be presented in terms of reward and punishment.

## 11. Learning from Peers

Educational research identifies three different aspects of successful peer learning: *imitative learning*, *peer tutoring* and *collaborative learning*. Each one of these has a valuable contribution to make to learning. It seems that different developmental ages favour different peer learning models – or combinations of these models. In the early 1960s, Bandura, Ross and Ross (1963)<sup>287</sup> offered what has become the classic research demonstrating the value of learning through observation and imitation of peers: simply watching the way others do things. Subsequent studies have consistently confirmed the value of this approach. These include those of Carpenter, Akhtar and Tomasello (1998),<sup>288</sup> Chartrand and Bargh (1999),<sup>289</sup> and Gergely, Bekkering and Kiraly (2002).<sup>290</sup>

Results from peer tutoring programs indicate a high level of effectiveness. Such programs not only benefit those receiving assistance, but also the tutors themselves. Studies demonstrating this include those of Gauvain and Rogoff (1989),<sup>291</sup> Greenwood, Terrey, Utley, Montagna and Walker (1993),<sup>292</sup> Fantuzzo and Ginsburg-Block (1998)<sup>293</sup> and Gauvain (2001).<sup>294</sup>

<sup>286</sup> J. Cameron, K.M. Banko and W.D. Pierce, 'Pervasive Negative Effects of Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation: The Myth Continues', *Behaviour Analyst* 24, no. 1 (2001): 1–44.

<sup>287</sup> A. Bandura, D. Ross and S.A. Ross, 'Imitation of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66, no. 1 (1963): 3–11.

<sup>288</sup> M. Carpenter, N. Akhtar and M. Tomasello, 'Fourteen through 18-Month Old Infants Differentially Imitate Intentional and Accidental Actions', *Infant Behaviour and Development* 21 (1998): 315–30.

<sup>289</sup> T.L. Chartrand and J.A. Bargh, 'The Chameleon Effect: The Perception-Behaviour Link and Social Interaction', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76 (1999): 893–910.

<sup>290</sup> G. Gergely, H. Bekkering and I. Kiraly, 'Rational Imitation in Pre-verbal Infants', *Nature* 415, issue 6873 (2002): 755.

<sup>291</sup> M. Gauvain and B. Rogoff, 'Collaborative Problem Solving and Children's Planning Skills', *Developmental Psychology* 25, no. 1 (1989): 139–51.

<sup>292</sup> C.R. Greenwood, B. Terrey, C.A. Utley, D. Montagna and D. Walker, 'Achievement, Placement and Services: Middle School Benefits of Classwide Peer Tutoring Used at the Elementary School', *School Psychology Review* 22, no. 3 (1993): 497–516.

<sup>293</sup> J. Fantuzzo and M. Ginsburg-Block, 'Reciprocal Peer Tutoring: Developing and Testing Effective Peer Collaborations for Elementary School Students', in *Peer-Assisted Learning*, ed. K. Topping and S. Ehly (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998), 121–44.

<sup>294</sup> M. Gauvain, *The Social Context of Cognitive Development* (London: Guilford, 2001).

While peer tutoring implies a one-to-one relationship, collaborative learning is about a group of students working together. There are a number of studies which demonstrate that collaborative approaches can help people to learn better in certain circumstances. These approaches can go beyond academic achievement to include social development as well. Not all studies show this improvement, and there seem to be some limiting factors. For example, very young children do not seem to benefit from collaboration of this kind. Another limit seems to apply if the material to be studied is especially unfamiliar, in which case students benefit more from observation and imitation before moving on to a collaborative approach. It also seems that the success of collaborative learning can be considerably greater if students are allowed to work with friends. Among the many studies demonstrating the effectiveness of the various aspects of collaborative learning include Flavell (1999),<sup>295</sup> Azmitia and Crowley (2001),<sup>296</sup> Rogoff, Bartlett and Turkanis (2001)<sup>297</sup> and Aronson (2002).<sup>298</sup>

## 12. Inquiry Learning and Direct Instruction

Inquiry-based learning has become very prominent in recent years. It attempts to harness the interest of the students and gives them the freedom to discover ever greater dimensions of knowledge. This approach has much to recommend it, especially its capacity to encourage independence in learning. Clearly, it brings together many of the effective teaching practices described above and would serve as a very useful and productive tool in an overall teaching and learning strategy.

There is, however, a significant caveat that must be addressed – especially in terms of religious education. Some of the more radical exponents of *inquiry learning* can take a dismissive view regarding essential content – this is determined by the interests of the students.<sup>299</sup> For religious education, content is not an irrelevant consideration. On the contrary, using educationally appropriate means, it is important to present at least a basic summary of the deposit of faith (*depositum fidei*). This content must also be remembered by the students.<sup>300</sup> It is not just in the field of religious education where such concerns have been expressed. Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006) demonstrated the ineffectiveness of inquiry- or problem-based learning strategies when used for students working with new or complex material.<sup>301</sup> Clark (1989) noted that even when students express a preference for this approach, they do not learn as effectively as they would from direct

<sup>295</sup> J.H. Flavell, 'Cognitive Development: Children's Knowledge about the Mind', *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (1999): 21-45.

<sup>296</sup> M. Azmitia and K. Crowley, 'The Rhythms of Thinking: The Study of Collaboration in an Earthquake Microworld', in *Designing for Science: Implications for Everyday, Classroom, and Professional Settings*, ed. K. Crowley, C.D. Schunn and T. Okada (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001), 51–81.

<sup>297</sup> B. Rogoff, L. Bartlett and C.G. Turkanis, 'Lessons about Learning as Community', in *Learning Together: Children and Adults in a School Community*, ed. B. Rogoff, C.G. Turkanis and L. Bartlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–17.

<sup>298</sup> E. Aronson, 'Building Empathy, Compassion, and Achievement in the Jigsaw Classroom', in *Improving Academic Achievement: Impact of Psychological Factors in Education*, ed. J. Aronson (San Diego: Academic, 2002), 209–25.

<sup>299</sup> Reggio Emilia is an example of an educational approach that takes this view of content.

<sup>300</sup> CT 56.

<sup>301</sup> See P.A. Kirschner, J. Sweller and R.E. Clark, 'Why Minimal Guidance during Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential and Inquiry-Based Teaching', *Educational Psychologist* 41, no. 2 (2006): 75–86.

instruction.<sup>302</sup> Lundeberg (1987) and Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) indicated that mastery of a variety of learning strategies – not just inquiry-based ones – was necessary for developing expertise across different domains.<sup>303</sup> Samuelstuen and Braten (2007) confirmed that students benefit more from using a variety of learning approaches.<sup>304</sup> Small (2003) identified the fallacy of radical constructivism’s epistemology and pointed to the unhelpful confusion between the legitimate and well-established *learning* process (by which human beings *construct* knowledge by relating component parts) and the *teaching* strategy involved in problem-based learning.<sup>305</sup> Phillips (1995) concluded that the issue should be considered from the learner’s perspective. The *construction* of knowledge by an individual benefits more from direct instruction and does not need inquiry methods to achieve the best result.<sup>306</sup> John Hattie, the world’s most cited educational researcher, expresses the frustration of those who have pointed out the shortcomings of radical constructivism and the over-dependence on inquiry learning.

Every year I present lectures to teacher education students and find that they are already indoctrinated with the mantra ‘constructivism good, direct instruction bad’. When I show them the results of these meta-analyses, they are stunned, and they often become angry at having been given an agreed set of truths and commandments against direct instruction.<sup>307</sup>

Hattie believes that direct instruction involves seven major steps, from which I will quote in detail:<sup>308</sup>

1. Before the lesson is prepared, the teacher should have a clear idea what the learning intentions are ...
2. The teacher needs to know what success criteria of performance are to be expected and when and what students will be held accountable for from the lessons/activity. The students need to be informed about the standards of performance.
3. There is a need to build commitment and engagement in the learning task ... a ‘hook’ to grab the students’ attention ...
4. There are guides to how the teacher should present the lesson – including notions such as input, modelling, and checking understanding ...
5. There is the notion of guided practice. This involves an opportunity for each student to demonstrate his or her grasp of new learning by working through an activity ... under the teacher’s direct supervision.

<sup>302</sup> See R.E. Clark, ‘When Teaching Kills Learning: Research on Mathematics’, in *Learning and Instruction: European Research in an International Context*, vol. 2, ed. H.M. Mandl, N. Bennett, E. de Corte and H.F. Friedrich (London: Pergamon, 1989), 1–22.

<sup>303</sup> See M.A. Lundeberg, ‘Metacognitive Aspects of Reading Comprehension: Studying Understanding in Legal Case Analysis’, *Reading Research Quarterly* 61, no. 1: 94–106.

<sup>304</sup> See M.S. Samuelstuen and I. Braten, ‘Examining the Validity of Self-Reports on Scales Measuring Students’ Strategic Processing’, *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 77, no. 2 (2007): 351–78.

<sup>305</sup> See R. Small, ‘A Fallacy in Constructivist Epistemology’, *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37, no. 3 (2003): 483–502.

<sup>306</sup> N.B. Phillips, C.L. Hamlett, L.S. Fuchs and D. Fuchs, ‘Combining Classwide Curriculum-Based Measurement and Peer Tutoring to Help General Educators Provide Adaptive Education’, *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice* 8, no. 3 (1995): 148–56.

<sup>307</sup> Hattie, *Visible Learning*, 204.

<sup>308</sup> Hattie, 204–5.

- The teacher moves around the room to determine the level of mastery and to provide feedback and individual remediation as needed.
6. There is the closure part of the lesson. Closure involves those actions or statements by a teacher that are designed to bring a lesson presentation to an appropriate conclusion ...
  7. There is independent practice. Once students have mastered the content or skill, it is time to provide for reinforcement practice. It is provided on a repeating schedule so that the learning is not forgotten.

In other words, while *inquiry learning* is an excellent tool for *building on an existing framework of knowledge*; there would be significant problems if it were to be employed as the means of establishing that basic framework. The cognitive load (the number and complexity of intellectual demands on the learner) in establishing the data to be used is beyond the capacities of inexperienced learners if they are left to establish this simply using their own inquiries. In terms of religious education, this means that students need to be comfortable and proficient with the basic content of their faith before they should be asked to undertake further inquiry. Inquiry learning has much to offer, but it cannot carry the whole load of teaching the essential content of the Catholic faith.

### **Recommendations:**

#### *Guidance for a New Religious Education Curriculum*

In terms of pedagogy, it is recommended that the following practices be used where possible:

1. **Self-Reported Grades:** Students need to be given the freedom to select from a range of activities, and, within this framework, to work on the aspects of their learning that most meet their needs.
2. **Developmentally Appropriate Programs:** Students need to be given learning material at a developmentally appropriate level.
3. **Formative Evaluation:** Teachers need to gather data from their students which inform the impact of the learning program and adjust it accordingly.
4. **Microteaching:** Where possible, microteaching strategies should be employed so that individual needs can be determined by the teacher, who can adjust the learning program accordingly.
5. **Reciprocal Teaching:** Students should be given the opportunity of teaching what they know to somebody else.
6. **Teacher-Student Relationships:** A focus on person-centred variables – whereby agency, mutual respect among students and teachers, efficacy, and recognition of the students' achievements are observed – will result in more engagement and minimal resistant behaviours.
7. **Spaced Practice vs Massed Practice:** An atomised curriculum organisation in which specific units cover a topic is referred to as 'massed practice'. Where possible, this should be avoided in favour of 'spaced practice', where students return to the same topics on a regular basis.

8. Encouraging movement as an aid to learning and cognition: Where possible, a range of fine-motor movements should be incorporated into the program.
9. Choice and Perceived Control: Efforts should be made to incorporate a choice of activities into the program.
10. Inadequacy of Extrinsic Rewards and Motivation: The goal of religious education and catechesis is essentially 'intimacy with Christ'. An emphasis on extrinsic rewards would undermine the notion of such genuine love.
11. Learning from Peers: Three different aspects of successful peer learning are: imitative learning, peer tutoring and collaborative learning. Each one of these has a valuable contribution to make to religious education.
12. Inquiry Learning and Directed Teaching in Religious Education: Both direct instruction and inquiry learning can be used in religious education. Direct instruction is valuable for establishing basic content. Inquiry learning is valuable for further investigation.



# Chapter 9

## Developmental Stages for Religious Education

### 1. Overview of Developmental Stages

The *Directory for Catechesis* makes it clear that the developmental stages of the child and adolescent have distinct needs which must be heeded in the design and formation of a religious education program. The *Directory* refers to the insight of St Augustine that students in the early and middle stages of childhood are capable of a simple dialogue with God and they must be helped to perceive and to develop a sense of God.<sup>309</sup> Children of this age, the *Directory* informs us, have a capacity to 'pose meaningful questions relative to creation, to God's identity, to the reason for good and evil, and are capable of rejoicing before the mystery of life and love'.<sup>310</sup>

Early childhood is a time when religious education focuses on input from parents and from the environment in which children live. Basic prayers and the celebration of major feasts, such as Christmas and Easter, and other key moments in the life of Jesus and Mary, have a profound effect on these children.<sup>311</sup> Middle childhood is the time to emphasise the main events of salvation history and the first proclamation (*kerygma*), together with an understanding of the role of sacraments and participation in the liturgy. It is also the moment when the child should begin to encounter the word of God in Sacred Scripture.<sup>312</sup> Religious education for teenagers and young people undergoes a shift towards a more active participation. According to the *Directory*, it is 'entirely appropriate' to configure the program according to the formative model of the catechumenate.<sup>313</sup>

While these insights from the *Directory for Catechesis* provide some degree of guidance, we also have available to us significant academic literature that provides very specific detail about the stages of development and the kind of religious experiences that will most support the typical needs of students at different ages. Of course, these insights can never be imposed rigidly; each human person is unique and individual. It is likely that the most effective explanation of these stages has been provided by Maria Montessori and modified by those generations of people who, for over a hundred years, have used her methods with children. A brief outline of the principal characteristics of these stages as they relate to school-aged students is set out below.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> DC 236.

<sup>310</sup> DC 236.

<sup>311</sup> DC 239.

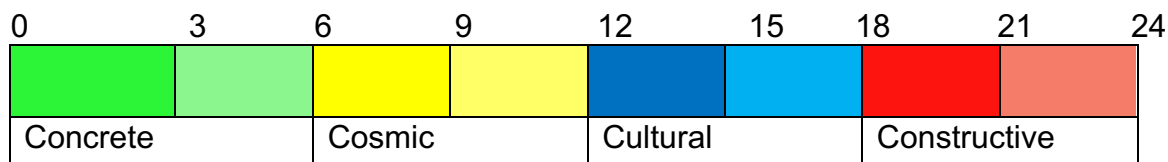
<sup>312</sup> DC 240.

<sup>313</sup> See DC 242.

<sup>314</sup> More comprehensive details can be found in chapters 2–6 of *Educating in Christ*, by Gerard O'Shea (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico, 2018).

## Developmental Stages: Sensitive Periods

There is an enduring piece of research in the field of education which is generally referred to as ‘Developmental Stage Theory’. Essentially, it is claimed that there are particular moments in which some developmental tasks can be undertaken with minimal effort and connect with an underlying drive in the child. Maria Montessori was among the first to articulate this – she referred to the stages as the ‘sensitive periods’. Montessori and others since her time have continued to refine their observations of what is the most appropriate kind of learning for each sensitive period. It appears that, once the sensitive period has passed, human beings can still learn, but it is no longer easy; a good deal of effort must be put into the task. These educational theories have now been largely vindicated by contemporary rigorous medical observations. The stages outlined here bring together a variety of research pieces, but are principally based on those described by Montessori. She identified four principal planes of development, covering approximately six years each, with each plane of development divided into two sets of three years, each with its own set of distinctive characteristics. These stages are summarised below up to the age of 24 years.



## 2. Characteristics of 3–6-Year-Old Children

### Characteristic 1: Exploring the Environment through the Senses and Naming/Labelling Real Objects

Montessori used the term *absorbent mind* to describe the first plane of development, from birth to six years of age. Children working on this plane go through two sub-planes. The first one, ending at about the age of three years, is simply based on experiencing physical reality and classifying these experiences with basic labels. Very young children are most interested in exploring their immediate environment using all of their senses – but particularly touch. Objects which can be held are of particular interest to the youngest children. In this very early stage, the human brain seems to be ‘hard-wired’ to gather a great deal of information without wasting time looking for links and complex meanings. It can best be described as a *data gathering* stage. The richer these experiences are at this point, the more data will be available for making ‘big-picture’ links later on. The grosser manifestations of this process are usually over by the age of three years.

#### *Refining the Data-Gathering Skills*

At this point, children are still in a stage where the absorbent mind is operating, but they have passed on to a more refined capacity for complex labelling of objects and experience. Some elements of the next plane also become evident. Children of this age still tend to learn best by encountering specific objects which allow them to be absorbed in what is real. This goes hand in hand with another characteristic of this age: a sense of wonder. Cavalletti noted that wonder is actually brought about by ‘an

attentive gaze at reality'. Even at this age, children remain fascinated with every new reality they encounter and are drawn into it. This is a profoundly human quality; even adults never really lose this capacity to be 'awed' in the presence of beauty of any kind and drawn into a transcendent reality.

For human beings of any age, the careful contemplation of concrete objects appears to direct us to a spiritual reality beyond ourselves. This characteristic points us to the genuinely human starting point of religious education: attending to the needs of the body through the senses. If we circumvent this step, we are simply not attending to human nature as it is constituted. There is a well-known axiom of good teaching practice expressed simply as 'concrete to abstract'. The child's focus is on 'what' something is called. Children at this level are not yet interested in 'why' things are the way they are, although some more advanced children show signs of this interest later in the sub-plane. Children will be captivated with simple but real things, especially in the natural world. They will stop and stare for a long time at a spider spinning its web, a snail leaving a trail on a path or a bird feeding its young in the nest.

### *Implications for Religious Education*

The fascination with what is real is entirely in keeping with the Church's understanding of human nature: we are composite beings with integrated bodily and spiritual abilities. This integration of the concrete and the spiritual is the basis of the sacramental system: through what we can see, hear, touch, smell, taste, we are drawn into a spiritual reality beyond ourselves. If religious education is to be successful at any level, but particularly in the ages of three to six years, it cannot neglect or omit this essential concrete starting point. The bodily senses have a crucial role to play. The focus needs to be on what is real and tactile. We must allow children to experience things without trying to explain how they fit into an overall picture just yet; that will come a little later. Children of this age have an enormous capacity to assign and remember names and brief stories. Hence we need to give them names and images of important religious realities, particularly the key stories from the New Testament and the names of liturgical furniture, vessels and vestments. In particular, it has been found in Montessori-style learning environments that young children are drawn to key aspects of the two great mysteries of the Christian Faith: the incarnation and the paschal mystery.

With regard to the incarnation, four aspects seem to be of special interest to most children of this stage: the Annunciation; the Visitation; the Birth of Jesus; and the Presentation in the Temple. (The correlation with the joyful mysteries of the rosary has been of enduring interest!) In turning to the paschal mystery, it is the Last Supper, followed by a very brief and (not very graphic) mention of the death of Christ, and then the resurrection. These are presented in two ways simultaneously: a limited but accurate reading from the actual words of the Bible takes place while the scene is presented through three-dimensional materials on a small diorama. Immediately after the presentation the children have open-ended questions posed to them, beginning with the words, 'I wonder ...'; for example, 'I wonder why God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus?' Children are then given time to work with the materials, or to create an artistic representation of what they have heard – through, for example, painting or drawing or other artistic media.

## **Characteristic 2: The Need for Love, Care and Protection**

Maria Montessori asserted that a young child's need for love, care and protection is absolutely crucial and no religious education can be successful unless it builds on this foundation. The need for this love does not abate even in adulthood; human beings cannot become properly human unless there is someone to love them.

Typically, this need is met, in the first instance, by the child's parents, and so it is very important that all those involved with the child's welfare should encourage parents to be affectionately involved with their children. This will have more effect on the relationship than anything else. It is possible to support this deep need for love, care and affection through the parable of the Good Shepherd, which contains all the elements that the children are seeking. He knows his sheep by name, loves them, cares for them, feeds them and refreshes them beside still waters and cooling streams. Small wooden models of a shepherd and some sheep will allow children to spend time looking, touching and reflecting – the typical way in which an absorbent mind is nourished.

## **Characteristic 3: The Need for Movement and Touch**

Children of this age have a drive towards what is concrete and sensorial. For the youngest of children, there are no exceptions; they cannot learn unless they engage with concrete objects. Gross motor and, more particularly, fine, motor movements appear to be indispensable in the formation of a healthy human personality. For this reason, it is helpful to provide these children with concrete materials: models and dioramas for scriptural stories; miniature models of the liturgical furniture, vessels and vestments. Visits to the church can be useful, but children should not be handling the actual vessels used at Mass; small models are more effective. Engagement with concrete materials at this stage lays the foundation for understanding the purpose of sacraments in their lives. Ultimately, the goal of the senses is Christ himself – God made visible in concrete form.

Closely associated with this need for touch and movement are activities which Montessori described as 'practical life exercises'. These activities include simple chores such as dusting, sweeping, flower arranging, tidying, pouring, and even leaf washing. This encourages children to look closely at real things. Young children are captivated by slow and deliberate movement. Go slowly and encourage the children to do the same. Places like classrooms can be made 'special and important' by acts of routine care. These activities establish a capacity to appreciate what is sacred and spiritual – realities beyond themselves.

## **Characteristic 4: The Need for Order, Routine and Repetition**

The youngest children have a need for order, routine and repetition. They require an externally provided order in their physical world to feel safe and secure. Too many changes and novelties are unsettling for children of this age. A disordered classroom – one in which 'the rules' are not followed – will cause stress in children in this stage of development. Their behaviour will reflect the nature of the classroom, be it ordered or chaotic. Wise teachers will spend their first week with the children running

through (in careful detail) all of the necessary rules of grace and courtesy, the procedures and routines to be followed for the year.

### *Incorporating Order, Routine and Repetition into the Religious Education Program*

To incorporate this dimension into the religious education program, every new idea is to be associated with a concrete material and delivered in a carefully prepared presentation. This requires the teacher to follow a predictable format by explicitly modelling it the way in which the materials are to be used. If these presentations are done well in the first instance, a great deal of time will be saved. The teacher's job at this age is *not* to explain everything. Knowing the procedure for using materials will enable children to absorb the meaning through repeated use. In organising a session, a small amount of time is expended in preparing or presenting new material. The majority of time is spent allowing the children to work with their materials that have already been presented in the ways that they have been shown. Allowing the students some structured choices will help gain their cooperation and encourage 'on-task' behaviour.

## 3. Characteristics of 6–9-Year-Old Children

### Characteristic 1: Exploring the Environment through the Senses and Naming/Labelling Real Objects

There is a dramatic contrast between the typical child of five years and one who is seven years of age. The *absorbent* mind fades and gives way to a *reasoning* mind. They will continue to encounter new things and learn their names, but their real interest is in the explanations: why are things the way they are? and where do they come from? If the earlier stage has been rich and varied, children will be equipped with a huge store of data. These pieces of information are what they now work with and link together. Six-to-nine-year-old children now need more than models of people and places, stories from the Bible, and objects from the liturgy and sacraments. They need to 'synthesise' – to put things together in such a way that they can begin to see the relationships between them. It is a mistake to 'tell them the answers' to their questions unless they cannot work them out for themselves.

### Characteristic 2: The Role of Imagination and Creativity

A child prior to the age of six is focused on what is real; two-year-old children who are told about Santa Clause will invest this character with a 'real' existence; that is all they know. At around six years of age, however, children cease to invest fictional characters with a real existence, and, at this point, they become genuinely capable of imaginative activity. This is a *sensitive period* for imagination, and this faculty is indispensable for the development of a reasoning mind. *Imagination* is what they use to begin making links that give coherence to the real things they know – filling in the gaps with imaginative speculations. At first, these speculations can be wildly imaginative and have little connection with reality – they might suggest that the 'blue fairy' arranged items in this way for their entertainment! If children are allowed to be creative in their use of imagination at this stage, it will serve them well in their future development. They will develop their potential for innovation in the future. As they become more competent, they will be less satisfied with 'wild imaginings' and will begin to move towards more realistic explanations. Imagination allows children to



look beyond what is available immediately to their senses and nourishes their interest in the total universe, putting the pieces together in their own way.

### *The Role of Imagination and Creativity*

In 1940, the insightful French theologian, Henri de Lubac (who was later created a cardinal), drew attention to what he perceived to be a loss of the sense of the sacred in religious education. He claimed that the reliance on a program that heavily emphasised catechism pre-digested questions and answers had the potential to undermine the *mystery* that is God. He did not doubt that these propositions had their place for clarifying matters and ensuring that the picture we have of God did not fly off into mere wild imaginings. Yet if they are not used in conjunction with other activities, they had a tendency to narrow the vision of the infinite God into manageable, predictable and 'safe' categories.

### *Scientific and Poetic Expressions of the Truth*

For human beings, there have always been two principal ways of presenting the truth: scientifically and poetically. For example, if we are describing a cold morning, we might say that it was zero degrees. This is accurate and leaves nothing more to be said. If we were presenting it poetically, however, we might use this image from John Keats:

St Agnes' Eve – Ah, bitter chill it was!  
The owl, for all his feathers was a-cold;  
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass  
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:  
Numb were the beadsman's fingers while he told  
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,  
Like pious incense from a censer old,  
Seemed taking flight from heaven, without a death.

Here, a series of concrete images invites us to enter personally into the picture and to keep reflecting on the meaning. Each time we return to these images and stories, they are likely to evoke different insights and emotions within us. In this way, children can be invited to enter personally into the mystery. In this the faculty of imagination is indispensable.

### *Limitations of Scientific Explanations and the Value of Religious Imagination*

Scientific explanations of the world always suffer from the same limitations: they are 'time-bound', yet our human understanding of scientific realities is always expanding. The images and words used to express the current understanding in one generation will come across as limited and even primitive to subsequent generations. For example, the Ptolemaic explanation of the Earth as the centre of the universe was 'cutting-edge science' in its time, but is looked on as quaint and amusing today. Science does not have a good record of providing timeless understandings of reality, because it is inflexible in its expression: everything must be couched in precise and limited language.

### *Evocative Biblical Language*

The Bible uses evocative, poetic language and stories of God's dealing with people in order to convey the truth, not scientific language. This approach releases us from the 'doubtful certainty of scientific facts' and encourages us to seek the timeless mysteries without ever believing that we know all there is to know about an infinite God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has put this beautifully in its entry on the account of the fall of Adam and Eve:

The account of the fall in *Genesis* 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents.

– *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 390.

We know that we are not being given exact details; only that something of great significance is conveyed in a story we are meant to reflect on imaginatively and continually. This is the essential task of religious education: to encounter the mystery of God. Without some kind of imagination, this is impossible.

### *Incorporating Imagination and Creativity into Religious Education Activities*

Music, art and literature can be very useful in stimulating the imagination, and children are usually interested in making their own contributions to at least one of these fields. High-quality religious art can play a very important role in helping them to do this. Most aspects of the Catholic faith that have been represented artistically through twenty centuries of reflection are now easily available through internet searches. By offering children an artistic representation, we can be confident that a number of essential elements will be present, but they will not impose themselves all at once on the mind's eye. The meaning will unfold gradually and even when the child has seen all that there is to be seen, another artwork can be provided to open the same question from a different perspective.

### *Role of Summary Propositions*

Within this context, summary propositions should still be learned by heart. Even the great gift of a creative imagination needs to be fitted into an overall picture. Of particular value are the following: the words of Scripture; the Creeds; parts of the Mass; the words from some of the sacramental rites; traditional prayers. These come at the end, not at the beginning of the process. There is much more to know and love about God than what can be compressed into a few pertinent phrases.

## **Characteristic 3: Focus on the Big Picture**

Children of this age begin looking for an overarching structure to make things fit into their developing view of the world. This need was so evident to Montessori that she developed a series of five lessons that would offer children of this age a suitable framework to facilitate their development: the 'Great Lessons'. Maria Montessori understood, along with Thomas Aquinas and the whole Catholic tradition, the interconnections between all of creation. Every part of it bears the mark of its Creator: the transcendental properties of truth, beauty and goodness. These lessons have proved to be an enduring indication of the five key areas in which children have

a need for making sense of the world. They are readily available online. Each one of the 'Great Lessons' makes use of the child's developing interest in *time*. Prior to this age, they are confined to measuring time very basically – 'how many sleeps until my birthday?'

#### **Characteristic 4: Mental Order Replaces Physical Order**

There is a very clear – often very unwelcome – indication that a child has moved into this plane of development. They can become quite messy. In the previous stage, 'order' in the physical environment was necessary for them to feel safe and comfortable. Normal development in 6–9-year-old children will see them reach a point where they are capable of mentally organising their world. This will usually see them moving beyond their reliance on the merely physical. Tidiness will no longer be crucial to their sense of security.

##### *Dealing with Untidiness*

This can be a difficult moment in the 6–9-year-old child's development if they are not treated sympathetically. Some parents and teachers may not recognise what is happening and insist on exactly the same standards of neatness that was the hallmark of the younger child. This is likely to have long-term consequences: either the child will become chronically messy, often for a lifetime, in reaction to this attempt to interfere in natural development; or they might remain in a state where they may become compulsive 'neat freaks' more or less permanently.

#### **Characteristic 5: The Dawn of Moral Agency**

One of the most significant features of the 6–9-year-old age group is the dawn of moral agency. There can be no fixed rule about when children become aware of the moral principles which should undergird their actions. Even from the age of two years, there can be glimpses of the child's growing capacity not just to distinguish right from wrong, but to understand something of why each is so. This development in the moral sphere parallels the change from *what* to *why* typical of this stage. Some particularly advanced children seem to reach it as early as four or five years of age. Children of this age can begin to discern the presence of rules and regulations governing their lives and the whole universe – this is what the 6–9-year-old sensitive period prepares them to do.

##### *Physical Order Is Replaced by Mental Order*

At this age, there is a change from *physical* to *mental* order. This consists of a series of very clear rules which these children want applied rigidly. Whereas, in the previous stage children craved predictable physical order so they could feel safe, at this age they want a series of very clear rules – applied rigidly. Often these rules will be self-imposed. Parents of children at this age will also be familiar with their elaborate rules of what is 'not fair'. The rigidity can be disconcerting for parents and teachers alike, but it allows children to set up the moral framework that forms the basis of their understanding of justice.

### *Accounting for the Dawn of Moral Agency*

Here a note of caution is warranted. Children of this age crave moral guidance, and this must be offered with delicacy. If they are given a very lengthy set of rules which they must adhere to, there will be a risk of making them stressed and needlessly anxious and guilty. There is no need for this; they will make up enough rules of their own without having the burden added to.

For Christianity, morality is more than a set of rules; it is a relationship of love which leads to action: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (*John 14:15*). Only deep and genuine love is capable of bringing out the best in human beings; we are capable of making great sacrifices for someone we love, and these must be given freely. If the same sacrifices are demanded or exacted, the motive is inadequate and it will be almost impossible to fulfil these requirements.

### *Maxims of Jesus*

There are two very effective ways of bringing out both dimensions: the motive of love, and the wise rules that will make us happy. Both require a connection with the life of Christ. The first strategy is to introduce children to the moral maxims of Jesus. It is recommended that these be pasted, carved or written onto little wooden boards so that the children can hold them and reflect on them. They can be kept in a suitable box near the prayer table, and the children can take up any one of these at a time they choose. The maxims are best introduced briefly and simply as part of a morning prayer session, and then placed in the container to be used later. These twelve are recommended by Cavalletti:

1. 'Love your enemies.' (*Matthew 5:44*)
2. 'I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.' (*John 13:34*)
3. 'Do good to those who hate you.' (*Luke 6:27*)
4. 'When you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door and pray to your Father in private.' (*Matthew 6:6*)
5. 'Ask and you will receive. Speak and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened.' (*Matthew 7:7*)
6. 'Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.' (*1 Corinthians 6:19*)
7. 'You must be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.' (*Matthew 5:48*)
8. 'Say yes when you mean yes and no when you mean no.' (*Matthew 5:37*)
9. 'I do not say forgive seven times, but seventy times seven.' (*Matthew 7:22*)
10. 'Always treat others the way you would have them treat you.' (*Matthew 7:12*)
11. 'Give when you are asked to give and do not turn your back on someone who wants to borrow.' (*Matthew 5:42*)
12. 'Pray for those who persecute you.' (*Matthew 5:44*)

### *Parables of Mercy and Moral Parables*

The second strategy for encouraging children to engage in moral reflection is the use of the parables – stories Jesus told which should guide the way we act and treat others. These are likewise best introduced at a morning prayer session. It is useful to have them written out on little cards so that these too can be left in a container near the prayer table for repeated use. There are two categories of parables that have been found useful: parables of mercy and moral parables.

#### *Parables of Mercy*

The Centurion's Servant	( <i>Matthew</i> 8:5-10, 13)
The Forgiving Father	( <i>Matthew</i> 15:11-24)
The Lost Coin	( <i>Luke</i> 15:8-9)

#### *Moral Parables*

The Good Samaritan	( <i>Luke</i> 10:30-37)
The Pharisee and the Tax Collector	( <i>Luke</i> 18:9-14)
The Insistent Friend	( <i>Luke</i> 11:5-8)
The Debtors	( <i>Matthew</i> 18:23-34)
The Sower	( <i>Matthew</i> 13:3-8)

This 6–9-year-old sensitive period is the ideal moment for introducing children to the sacrament of reconciliation.

### **Characteristic 6: A Need for Repetition / A Dislike of Repetition**

While a 3–6-year-old child loves the feeling of competence that comes from repeating the same task competently, the 6–9-year-old dislikes repetition. Even so, like human beings of any age, repetition is necessary if they are to learn; this is required if the formation of neural pathways in the human brain is to be successful. There are two elements to consider. The first consists of offering a variety of activities based on the same essential need. This can be achieved by providing different materials, or by giving children a variety of different ways of using the same materials – identified by different task cards of varying complexity.

The second approach for building in repetition goes by the name of 'spiral curriculum': returning to the same content at deeper and deeper levels at spaced intervals. Children may encounter the same basic ideas at every level of their stages of development, but there will be different aspects of the same content covered according to the needs of the sensitive period.

### **Characteristic 7: The Development of Social Relationships**

The 6–9-year-old child needs to begin exploring social relationships, and this expresses itself in their desire to be in groups and work together. When left to themselves, children of this age group in a school playground will rarely be found alone. They will often form clubs and societies with elaborate rules – they will even make up their own language and passwords to identify themselves as members of a group. In the classroom, this desire to be in regular communication continues. Children of this age tend to prefer to work together most of the time. The teacher's response must begin with acknowledging that these children need to talk and to



work together. These things need to be managed, not denied. It is entirely possible to give the children strategies for meeting these needs, and even of harnessing them to assist in the whole learning process.

One strategy is to have a 'supply centre' where children need to come in order to get the things that they need to do their work. It serves the same basic need as the water cooler in an office. Part of its function is to allow for the short break and quick exchange of news and pleasantries that break up the day and provide the mental and emotional refreshment to continue working. Children of this age should be discouraged from having too much of their own equipment; it can serve as a 'currency' to bribe other children: 'you can use my sparkle highlighters if you ...'. The supply centre teaches many other lessons too. It teaches children to wait courteously for others; it points out that resources are not inexhaustible. It is an opportunity to work with others to keep shared resources in good order.

Children need to be trained to work with one another in a way that does not create loud distracting noise. A low working 'buzz' takes time to create, and a great deal of effort to maintain. Children need to be trained to speak in quiet voices, and the teacher needs to model this. It takes about six to ten weeks of repeated insistence (pleasantly and calmly!) before it becomes a habit.

### **Characteristic 8: The Goal of Independence**

The 6–9-year-old child's expressed need for independence is more in keeping with a reasoning mind: 'help me to think for myself'. This manifests itself in a variety of ways. Six-to-nine-year-olds come into a new need for mental rather than physical independence; they want to be in charge of themselves, and may be stubborn, refusing to do things. By the same token, they become more mentally tough, and can handle just criticism: if they are told that they have fallen short of expectations, they know that this is true. No longer is it sufficient to tell children that you want them to do something: they want to know the reason behind it; they want to know why.

Montessori also described this as the 'age of rudeness', in which children seem to lose their good manners. If they have developed normally, 6–9-year-olds no longer desperately seek to please the adults in their lives; they are already confident of being loved and start to take more emotional risks. Since they have now grown in competence, 6–9-year-olds should be capable of finding their own answers.

An appropriate response to most of their questions might be something like: 'I'm not sure; what do you think?' This shifts responsibility for their learning back on to themselves. Children of this age do not like hearing this from adults; they prefer learning to be easy, but this is not helpful to them. When they do find answers for themselves, their confidence grows and they begin to understand why you might be acting in this way. The adult should not at first take away all support from the developing child. It is useful to give them sufficient background so that they can find their own way to satisfactory answers. It is also useful to ask a series of questions which allow them to find the answer for themselves.

Religious education materials that are presented to this age group should leave space for children to work some things out for themselves. It is often sufficient to

group the components into related categories, and then have the children put these together in the proper sequence for themselves. All of the necessary elements will be present, but the links between them will be something that the 6–9-year-old must work out. Eventually, it may be possible to simply present the learning materials, and tell the children to see what they can make of them for themselves. Once they have mastered the basics, they may wish to propose further projects for investigation.

#### 4. Characteristics of 9–12-Year-Old Children

##### Characteristic 1: Refinement of the Imagination

The 9–12-year-old student tends to build on existing capacities and refine them. The most obvious of these refinements can be found in the tempering of the imagination. This still remains present, but it is less extravagant in its application. The links that the student makes among existing items of data become more and more constrained by the child's actual experience of reality, and this begins to take on its adult form. The 9–12-year-old is far less likely to seek solutions in 'magical' possibilities and begins to distinguish more clearly between facts and fantasy. While they continue to enjoy creative and fanciful possibilities, they are more likely to seek 'scientific' explanations that explain their actual experiences. Nine-to twelve-year-old children remain capable of looking 'outside the square' in their search for solutions, and can readily imagine things that have not been set before them, but this capacity is waning. If their imaginative and artistic endeavours have not been encouraged in the earlier period, it will be fading quickly during this stage.

##### Characteristic 2: Refinement of the Concept of Time, and Interest in History

One of the significant developments of the 6–9-year-old stage was a basic orientation to time as a way of providing a 'big-picture' framework for their thoughts. By way of contrast, in the 9–12-year-old child, with the fading of the imaginative sense, the capacity for understanding the abstract notion of time strengthens considerably. They tend to develop a great interest in and ability to explore time – especially history as basic chronology of events. They will enjoy focusing on particular aspects, events or historical figures within these events and will continue to investigate them until they are satisfied. Church history and the lives of the saints are particularly suitable at this point in the child's development.

##### Characteristic 3: Refinement of the Need for Repetition

As with 6–9-year-old children, the 9–12-year-old age group continues to need repetition, but they are even less content about repeating things in the same way. They need more than just different approaches; they need to understand why they are being asked to look at the same content again, and it needs to have greater challenges associated with it. This can be achieved partly by offering greater responsibility for the organisation of their time and the sequencing of their activities.

### Characteristic 4: Refinement of the Social Dimension

The 9–12-year-old continues the focus on the social dimension of relationships, but this narrows down to a smaller number of close friends rather than a large ‘herd like’ structure. This allows them to focus even more deeply on the lessons that must be learned about social relationships, and it carries with it the attendant difficulties that must be faced. There is a growing self-consciousness and a concern about what their peers think of them. They do not normally want to stand out from the crowd. This characteristic is beginning to anticipate the primary focus of their next level of development (adolescence), when the peer group becomes central to their thinking.

### Characteristic 5: A Focus on the Mystery of Life and Death

Cavalletti and her collaborators believed, after long observation, that there were three mysteries that pre-occupy the 9–12-year-old child: *life and death*; *relationships*; and *time*. The mystery of life and death is one that every human being must come to grips with, but children of this age become capable of grasping its full impact and understanding its place. A Christian understanding of this mystery is capable of giving hope and purpose to their whole lives; it should not be passed over or ignored. If it becomes particularly personal through the death of someone who has been close to them, this should be dealt with quite specifically.

There are now many excellent materials for dealing with the stages of grief, and children should have their grief acknowledged in healthy ways such as those discussed in these materials. They should also be encouraged to pray for the repose of the souls of those who have died. Some understanding of the theology of the Last Things and of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is appropriate.

### Characteristic 6: Relationships and Subsidiarity

Relationships are of critical concern to children of this age group, and this will intensify as the child approaches the stage of adolescence, where it will become the primary focus. More and more, these children will need to be with their peers to continue to discover who they are. They will need increasing levels of independence which should reflect the Church’s key principle of social teaching: subsidiarity ... Don’t do things for them if they can do it for themselves. From this point, difficult though it may be, parents and teachers need to begin actively promoting independence.

In a nutshell, the principle of subsidiarity in relation to these children means that adults should not do things for them that they should be capable of doing for themselves. Children should be allowed to make their own decisions on simple matters where they no longer need direct adult guidance. Unless this begins as a slow process at this time, adult carers (parents and teachers) are likely to miss the natural window of development. If this is not achieved, the children will ultimately need to insist on their legitimate freedom during a needlessly turbulent and angry adolescence. Teachers must learn to stand back even more and make sure that the children are not given quick answers, but must work towards finding these for themselves.

Another vital aspect of relationships at this time is concerned with sexuality education. There can be no doubt that the child's parents are best placed to take on this responsibility. One of the most effective ways of meeting the child's needs at this age is for parents to make a regular time – as little as half an hour a week – with each child individually. If the child can rely on their parent's undivided attention, they will be able to learn many of the necessary relationship skills which will fit them for adulthood. The Church's document, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, advises that, usually, the father is best equipped to build this relationship with boys, and the mother with girls.

### Characteristic 7: A Focus on Time and Eternity

The mystery of time is the 9–12-year-old student's window on eternity. Their simple sequencing of concrete objects and their attempts to link these things together have already been part of their development and this has prepared them for the notion of mystery. They will normally have a willingness to accept that there are sometimes aspects of reality beyond their present grasp. They will realise that what they already have is real, but there will always be more truth, more beauty and more goodness to ponder in the infinite riches of the Trinity. Most students of this age will be ready to discover that the God who called them into life is also the God of history, who has what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls 'a plan of loving goodness'.

Cavalletti describes two ways in which this developing capacity of the 9–12-year-old can be developed. The first is a study of the plan of God, both as a big picture and in detail. They are meant to discover the cosmic unity that is found not just in the present, but that goes back to the beginning of time and leads to the Parousia: the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. The Montessori *Great Lessons* (readily available online) may be useful in conveying this idea.

Biblical history reveals three key moments in time:

*Creation*: the marker for the beginning of history;

*Redemption*: the saving death and resurrection of Christ, indicating the centre point of history;

*Parousia*: which points to the fulfilment of history.

This framework allows the students to structure their thoughts and sequence the events and personalities involved in the history of salvation. It provides a 'big picture' which allows a proper sequencing of events before, during and after each one of these. As the students become more competent, more markers will be able to appear on the timeline, each of them standing in relation to all of the others. There is also a role for the student. Cavalletti refers to it as 'the blank page', the history that has not yet been written. It helps them to realise that they too have a role in history; they must contribute to God's ongoing 'plan of loving goodness'.

## Characteristic 8: The Five Key Typologies

Typology continues to be the most foundational Catholic way of reading the Bible. This finds its most obvious expression in the arrangement of biblical readings in the Sacred Liturgy, where the Old Testament reading usually foreshadows what is presented in the New Testament readings. The word *typology* comes from the Greek word, *typos*: the hollowed out imprint of a mould. When applied to the Bible, we begin from a belief that God already knows the whole of history from beginning to end. Consequently, when the events of the Old Testament are taking place, God already knows their significance, and places into the Bible some events that give a faint indication of what is to come. Earlier events, institutions and persons indicate things that are yet to come. Those people living at an earlier time would not be able to recognise what the events and signs were pointing to in the future; they could only be read once the fulfilment had taken place.

St Ambrose described this very well by saying that God's revelation of his plan takes place in three stages:

First, the *shadow* in the Old Testament;  
Then the *image* in the New Testament;  
Finally, the *reality* to be revealed at the Parousia.

Cavalletti identified five key typologies which need to be examined in detail at this age:

1. The typology of Creation
2. The typology of Sin and the Fall
3. The typology of Noah and the Flood
4. The typology of Abraham and the Covenant
5. The typology of Moses and the Exodus.

These studies of typology also serve as a stimulus for the children to begin reading the Bible for themselves. Experience has demonstrated again and again that this kind of activity nourishes their relationship with Christ on the level of the heart. It allows them to get to know their God better, and piques their curiosity to undertake more serious study about what they discover. To use the words of St Jerome: 'ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ'. Many teachers have reported that when students of this age are offered the opportunity of reading the Bible for themselves, it frequently becomes the activity they enjoy the most.

## 5. Characteristics of Adolescent Students: Four Key Themes

There are four key themes running through adolescence and although it may be necessary to consider them separately, they cannot ever be compartmentalised. These themes are:

1. The need for social relationships within a peer group;
2. The drive towards critical thinking;
3. The need to confront the dilemmas of life rather than be protected from them;
4. The capacity for boundless energy in pursuit of self-chosen goals.



Each of these is linked, sometimes in unexpected ways. The mixture is never tidy or predictable and is always unique to the individual. There is no substitute for actually getting to know an individual in a direct, one-to-one relationship.

## Adolescence Is a Social Age

The need for social relationships with peers begins to be noticeable at around the age of six, but in the adolescent it is the primary focus, the lens through which almost everything else is filtered. Adolescents are overwhelmingly influenced by what their peers say and think. To discover who they are themselves, they need friends so that they can discern similarities and differences in their developing personalities. This is a time when friendship is often at its most intense, and it is to their friends that adolescents turn to share their secrets, their problems and their aspirations for the future. To be without a friend is extremely damaging; the adolescent 'loner' is something that should sound warning bells to those who look after their needs. It is at this time of their lives that healthy human development causes adolescents to begin looking beyond their own families and to build their own sense of community. This is an essential task of this age – to learn how to live and work with others, those they like and those they dislike. They also need to begin relating to adults.

### *Strategies for Meeting the Need*

Given the need to see themselves in relation to others, it is helpful to have adolescents engage in shared projects in which contrasting skills are necessary and everyone in the group is able to contribute in a constructive way. It will be particularly helpful if such projects are directed at producing something tangible or doing a recognisable service for others. It is more useful if these activities or products can be valued for what they are and not 'assessed' competitively for credit. If such a focus on assessment is absolutely necessary, care should be taken to ensure that each student's individual contribution can be credited separately. Otherwise, those who are more competent will feel pressured to 'carry the load'. This has the potential for causing resentment and can undermine the sense of community that is the goal.

### *Explaining Levels of Friendship*

If the focus is on social relationships, there will be a need for some basic input on the different levels of friendship that can be met in normal human relationships. At least three levels need to be made familiar to them so that they can discern what is happening in their groups. The Aristotelian divisions into utility friendship, pleasure friendship and virtue friendship can serve as an illustration of the basic outline that needs to be covered.

A *utility friendship* may involve two or more people, but the focus is self-directed. One person wants something from the other, and if this is not forthcoming, the friendship will end. It takes many forms, depending on what the initiator wants ... most business promotions are based on this kind of perceived friendship: 'True Bargain Industries' wants you to have this special gift of a carry bag, because we care about our customers! It can also be quite manipulative and difficult for adolescents to deal with as in this scenario: 'If you really loved me, you would sleep with me'.

In a *pleasure friendship*, another level is reached. Whereas in utility friendships there is a focus on the initiator getting what they want, in this case there is mutual benefit to being friends. Both enjoy the same thing – the football, music, ballet or something else. Even though the benefits are mutual, the pleasure friendship, however, is still essentially selfish. If the mutual enjoyment of something passes, then the friendship ends. It was never about the other person; it was only about an individual's own enjoyment.

The *virtue friend* is the one whose purpose is to do good things for the other person, irrespective of whether there is a return. The hallmark of virtue friendship is that the other person in the relationship can be 'annoying' and yet the friendship remains. A virtue friendship will stand the test of time because it is no longer selfish, and it is only this kind of friendship that can serve as the basis of a happy, sacramental marriage.

Adolescents need to perceive their friendships for what they are, or they will find themselves deeply disappointed and even depressed if they fail to 'read' what is happening to them. The model of the true friend is Christ himself: the one who calls out the best in us, forgives us and is always there for us. This model of relationship is the essence of Catholic Christianity and one in which adolescents can comfortably work. It is possible to proceed from sound, loving relationships to the next level of idealistic giving of the self to worthy causes and high principles that have always been characteristic of this age group. It has little chance of success, however, if the demands are made without presenting them as the expression of a deeply felt loving relationship with God.

### *The Adolescent Need for Community*

In supporting adolescents in their search for genuine community, teachers and parents need to be careful that they are not seen to be imposing their own detailed agenda. Adolescents need to be given serious input about matters that concern them, and they need to find their own friends. Schools have become quite good at making it possible for students to do this. A wide variety of activities – chess clubs, drama societies, sporting teams and the like – have become a normal part of school experience. These serve the purpose of allowing the adolescent to mix in circles that have broadly the same interests and thereby find potential friends. It also allows them to work together on projects in which they are likely to share the same interests. It may seem to some adults that this approach shifts the focus away from serious study, but it must be remembered that an unhappy student is unlikely to do well at school. Adolescents need to find their own identity, and they will tend to react against anything that is imposed on them. They are human, and one of the most fundamental characteristics of the human person is the desire for freedom to make decisions of their own.

### **The Adolescent Drive towards Critical Thinking**

Almost every Christian Faith Community affirms a key human characteristic: freedom of the will. Ultimately, we are rational creatures who are meant to think our own thoughts and make our own decisions. Young children need a long apprenticeship before they become capable of exercising this freedom in appropriate ways; they need the opportunity to integrate the necessary elements. They must be shown, for example, how to eat and drink in a healthy way, to respect the rights of others, to give due consideration to the spiritual and human values which make them happy.

### Subsidiarity

Parents and others who care for the needs of children need to understand that this guidance must be progressively wound back as the child matures. During adolescence, this 'stepping back' gathers pace until, at the age of eighteen, parental legal authority ceases altogether, and the influence takes the form of advice and persuasion. This is a difficult time for those who have exercised a caring role. Force of habit makes it hard to allow children to begin making some of their own decisions. At all times during their development, children need to be prepared for the time when they are completely independent. In this regard, the principle of subsidiarity has already been referred to as foundational and indispensable.

### Forming Their Own Conclusions

The main focus of adolescents is on *who they are* and their place in the world rather than the world itself. For this reason, the adolescent must come to their own conclusions about the world. For this purpose, their imaginative faculty diminishes – they are no longer so concerned with creating mental constructs for explaining the world to themselves, and they turn this on its head. They have a need to investigate for themselves the reasons for what they believe and critically review the explanations they have received. This is one of the defining characteristics of adolescence. They must critique the world in general, each other, and adults. Mostly, they are critical of themselves, although this tends to be disguised by the appearance of self-confidence. They can appear quite negative and are inclined to take a contrary position when those who have hitherto guided them – parents or teachers – make any kind of assertion. This must be handled sensitively, and not treated as if it is a personal attack. It is normal; it is to be expected from this age group, and it serves a vital function in their development.

If parents or teachers attempt to 'impose' their world view, even if it is superior and full of well-grounded arguments, it is still entirely possible that it will be rejected. It is also helpful to keep in mind that this criticism is frequently associated with emotions – how they are feeling today. It can be quite unpredictable and inconsistent. Perhaps the best advice for adults is to 'fall back' into a respectful silence and to acknowledge that the adolescent is making interesting points that should be considered. Whatever conclusions adolescents eventually come to, they must come to them by themselves. Any insistence that they must adopt a particular conclusion may result in stubborn, irrational refusal. We must accept that God has created *free agents* who must choose *the good* for themselves.

### Critiquing World Views

This is the time for adolescents to object, to analyse and to argue; they see the persuasiveness of opposing reasons and want the opportunity to weigh them for themselves. It does not mean that they are ultimately going to turn against all that they have learned; they just want to make sure that things have been subjected to proper scrutiny. Adolescents engaging in this kind of critical thinking are actually subjecting themselves to challenges. They are 'pushing themselves' in order to find their own authentic personal limits. In this process, they will learn more about themselves. Critical thinking is their way of posing intellectual challenges to themselves and others.

**Recommendations:**

*Developmental Stages for Religious Education*

It is recommended that attention be paid to the religious developmental needs of students as set out in the above section.

1. Characteristics of 3–6-Year-Old Children:
  - a. Absorbent mind
  - b. Sense of wonder
  - c. Focus on the real world
  - d. Need for order, routine, repetition
  - e. More spontaneous than systematic
  - f. Imitation leading to independence.
  
2. Characteristics of 6–9-Year-Old Children:
  - a. Reasoning mind
  - b. Need for a 'big picture'
  - c. Importance of imagination and creativity
  - d. Need for mental order replaces need for physical order
  - e. Need for repetition / dislike of repetition
  - f. The dawn of moral agency
  - g. The 'age of rudeness' and the need for objective rules
  - h. Desire to belong to a large peer group
  - i. Seeking independence.
  
3. Additional Characteristics of 9–12-Year-Old Children:
  - a. Desire to make their own discoveries
  - b. Focus on three mysteries: time, relationships, death
  - c. Value of salvation history
  - d. Work on the levels of friendship
  - e. Avoid excessive technology or too many predigested work sheets.
  
4. Characteristics of Adolescent Students: Four Key Themes:
  - a. The need for social relationships within a peer group
  - b. The drive towards critical thinking
  - c. The need to confront the dilemmas of life rather than be protected from them
  - d. The capacity for boundless energy in pursuit of self-chosen goals.

# Appendix 1

## Review of the RE Curriculum for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

### Terms of Reference

#### Introduction

**Pursuant to Canons §804.1, §804.2 and §806.1**, the local Ordinary carries responsibility for the teaching of Religious Education (RE) in all Catholic schools located within his Diocese. He is to be attentive to the needs of students such that they receive formation and education in their Catholic faith, and that RE teachers are afforded every opportunity to be outstanding in their faithful witness as teachers.

The current RE Curriculum in use within the Archdiocese of Melbourne was approved in 2008. Coupled with changes in the governance and structure of Catholic schooling in parts of Melbourne in recent years, it is timely that a review of the RE Curriculum is now undertaken. The Archbishop of Melbourne is therefore commissioning a review of the RE Curriculum at this time.

#### Governance and support

The 2022 RE Curriculum Review is authorised by the Archbishop of Melbourne for purposes of renewing the Curriculum and refreshing the approach and purpose of RE teaching in Catholic schools within the Archdiocese. The Archbishop will appoint a review panel, comprising Miss Natina Giacco, Professor John Haldane, and Professor Gerard O'Shea. The Archbishop of Melbourne will determine with them the manner and processes by which the review will be conducted, and it will report on its work to the Archbishop.

#### The reviewers will:

- Enjoy secretariat and project planning support from MACS.
- Conduct a wide review of the RE Curriculum in light of relevant ecclesiastical documents.
- Identify the needs of contemporary primary and secondary Catholic school students in the current learning and cultural environments of RE.
- Identify the needs and opportunities to provide appropriate support for RE teachers, to assist in their mission of Catholic education and the spiritual and academic flourishing of their students.
- Conduct a survey of a representative sample of RE teachers in Melbourne and consider that data in light of the professional hopes and aspirations of those teachers in their classroom context.
- Draw from the experience, advice and wisdom of relevant parties.



- Identify good models outside of Melbourne from which to learn and with which to engage.
- Identify what content and structure would be required for an effective missional approach.
- Produce guidance for a new RE Curriculum grounded in:
  - > a Catholic Anthropology
  - > a sound, contemporary and developmentally appropriate pedagogy
  - > a clear understanding of the needs of students
- Prioritise RE with a view to both faith formation and academic excellence where this is achievable.
- Recommend implementation steps in which changes can be made to build up a culture of RE excellence.
- Develop recommendations regarding the alignment of RE with the MACS statements of Mission, Purpose and Vision, and other strategic documents.
- Engage with RI and MPJP schools to ensure RE approaches are directed towards excellence in our shared faith tradition.

# Appendix 2

## Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Religious Education Curriculum Review – Survey

*Note. The survey elicited about 900 responses to the 12 substantial questions (8–19 below). Of these responses, about 70% came from teachers (principals, RE leaders, RE teachers and others) in primary or secondary schools. The following is the text of the survey questionnaire.*

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This survey seeks broad input into the Religious Education Curriculum Review Panel. It includes open-ended questions and allows free form written response. Respondents may provide as little or as much input as they feel appropriate to each or any question. It is recognised respondents may not be able to answer every question, so any question may be left unanswered.

The survey is anonymous; however, we are seeking some general non-identifying information about respondents to contextualise the input being provided.

### About you:

#### 1. Religion

Catholic  
Non-Catholic Christian  
Other Non-Christian  
No religion

#### 2. Gender

Male  
Female

#### 3. Age

25–35  
35–45  
45–55  
55–65  
>65

### About your role:

#### 4. Primary School:

Not Applicable  
Principal  
Religious Education Leader  
Teacher (Religious Education)  
Teacher (other subjects)

Parent  
Clergy (includes Parish Priests and Administrators,  
Permanent Deacons, retired clergy)  
MACS office staff  
RI/MPJP Governors  
Other

**5. Secondary School:**

Not Applicable  
Principal  
Religious Education Leader  
Teacher (Religious Education)  
Teacher (other subjects)  
Parent  
Clergy (includes: Parish Priests and Administrators,  
Permanent Deacons, retired clergy)  
MACS office staff  
RI/MPJP Governors  
Other

**6. Type of School you are associated with:**

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) school  
RI/MPJP school  
Both

**7. Teaching Experience:**

Not Applicable  
<5 years  
5–10 years  
>10 years

**Survey questions:**

**8. What do you believe is the purpose of a Catholic school?**

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**9. What do you think makes a school Catholic?**

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**10. What do you see as the strengths of Religious Education in your school?**

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**11. What do you see as the weaknesses of Religious Education in your school?**

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**12. How is the content of the Religious Education Curriculum decided in your school?**

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**13. Do you feel you could explain adequately the Catholic faith to someone who was interested to know about it?**

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With regard to the following call from the Second Vatican Council:

*'... let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world.'*

(Pope St Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis* #8)

**14. How well prepared do you feel our Catholic community has prepared our teachers for this role?**

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**15. If you are a teacher, are you supported in this by your ongoing professional development, and what further support would you like?**

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**16. Do you feel you know and understand as much as you need to, of the Catholic tradition and culture? Please explain your answer.**

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With regard to the following words from the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC):

*'... Teachers and leaders need to know confidently where the Church comes from and where Catholicism stands as a faith tradition, and their place within it.'*

(NCEC, *A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education*)

**17. Can you identify any actions we can take to build the confidence of our teachers and leaders?**

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**18. What are your experiences and views of the Religious Education Curriculum as an expression of our faith tradition?**

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**19. Do you believe that the resources provided for Religious Education are adequate for understanding where the Church comes from and what we stand for as a faith community? Elaborate as needed.**

# Appendix 3

## Compilation of All Recommendations

### 1. The Identity and Mission of Catholic Schools: An Overview from Post-Vatican II Documents of the Church (from chapter 1)

1. Catholic Schools must work on behalf of the bishop to fulfil their three primary responsibilities: proclaiming the word; celebrating the sacraments; and exercising the ministry of charity.
2. Priests and MACS staff need to be given formation regarding their responsibilities with regard to the Religious Education program in the schools of the Archdiocese.
3. The Catholic school must attend carefully to the nature of the human person and the mediation of culture by means of a Christian vision of reality.
4. As ecclesial entities, Catholic schools are required to participate in the evangelising mission of the Church.
5. Catholic schools must attend to the 'community' dimension. This is a theological concept based on an eternal mystery, revealed in Christ, of the communion of love that is the very life of God – the Holy Trinity.
6. Catholic schools must be attentive to religious freedom as it is understood in the documents of the Church.
7. Catholic schools must acknowledge parents are the primary educators of their own children and, for this reason, the school is bound by the principle of subsidiarity.
8. Catholic schools need to be attentive to some of the elements of social engagement that are the proper concern of the lay faithful. Action in this area will become more significant when the students take on these responsibilities as adults.
9. Catholic schools must contribute to the building of a culture of dialogue according to the mind of the Church and in the context of their mission.

### 2. The Organisation of the Curriculum: An Overview from Post-Vatican II Documents of the Church (from chapter 2)

1. The curriculum must incorporate the key understandings of contemporary catechesis as identified by the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020).
2. The curriculum must acknowledge the relationship between catechesis and religious education as one of distinction and complementarity.
3. The curriculum must demonstrate an awareness that religious education must be Trinitarian and Christocentric.
4. The curriculum must incorporate all of the sources of Religious Education.
5. The curriculum must attend to all of the tasks of Religious Education.



6. While taking account of the developmental capacities of students, the curriculum must employ all of the languages used in religious education.
7. The curriculum must take account of the priority of the *kerygma*.
8. The curriculum must take account of the priority of the mystagogical aspects of religious education (particularly when presenting the Eucharist) as prescribed by *Sacramentum Caritatis*, *Evangelii Gaudium* and the *Directory for Catechesis*.
9. The curriculum must make provision for the judicious use of digital languages and tools. At the same time, care must be taken not to rely too heavily on technological tools.
10. The curriculum must pay careful attention to both the developmental and pastoral needs of students.
11. The curriculum must account for the current pastoral challenges to Christian family life.

### 3. Audit of Curriculum Content (from chapter 3)

1. In addition to being found 'not fit for purpose', the *Pedagogy of Encounter* has become the de facto driver of content and needs to be abandoned and replaced by more suitable means. In its place, schools may consider using the existing *To Know, Worship and Love* Archdiocesan Religious Education texts, the Archdiocese of Sydney program, or any of the programs approved by the USCCB accreditation process, available at [https://1drv.ms/b/s!AklqJv2E\\_jrlh8suRIYkZ0Y0vOTyUg?e=jn7PrX](https://1drv.ms/b/s!AklqJv2E_jrlh8suRIYkZ0Y0vOTyUg?e=jn7PrX).

2. Any new program of Religious Education needs to incorporate the following criteria and languages specified by the *Directory for Catechesis*:

Five Criteria for presenting the Gospel Message:

- a. The Trinitarian and Christocentric criterion
- b. The criterion of salvation history
- c. The criterion of the primacy of grace and beauty
- d. The criterion of ecclesiality
- e. The criterion of the unity and integrity of the faith.

Four languages that are used for conveying the faith of the Church:

- a. Sacred Scripture (biblical language)
- b. Liturgical language
- c. Doctrinal language
- d. Performative language (witness of the saints and martyrs).

3. Any new program of Religious Education needs to demonstrate a comprehensive coverage of the teachings of the Catholic faith, spread across the thirteen years of schooling. These should be presented in accordance with their developmental suitability. Guidance can be found in the 'Audit of Content' document.

4. Any new program of religious education needs to take into account the ten doctrinal deficiencies identified by the Bueclein Report.
5. It is recommended that a pilot project be commissioned to create a new religious education program in accord with the recommendations of this report. It might involve twenty primary schools and ten secondary schools willing to volunteer for the project. Materials should be trialled as they come to hand.

#### 4. The Needs of Contemporary Students (from chapter 4)

1. 'Every student is in some respect like all others, like some others and like no other.' As with all contemporary curriculum programs, the religious education program needs to be sufficiently flexible to deal with the variety students in classrooms.
2. The following advice from the *Mpwartne Declaration* [MD] should be considered in the design of a sound religious education program:
  - a. 'It must be born in mind that the key to children's earliest learning and development is the quality and depth of interaction they experience; between adult and child and between child and child' (MD 7).
  - b. 'The primary school years are a time of significant change and growth which sees children develop resilience and adaptability and strategies to manage themselves in different situations' (MD 8).
  - c. 'At the secondary school – middle level, schools must directly address each student's range of needs, and must focus on enhancing motivation and engagement' (MD 8).
  - d. 'The senior years of schooling are a critical transition point for young people – emotionally, socially and educationally. These years should provide all students with ... high quality advice, support and experiences to make informed choices about their future and smooth the initial transition to further education, training or meaningful employment' (MD 9).
3. The data provided in *A Framework for Student Faith Formation in Catholic Schools* published by the National Catholic Education Commission (2022) should be considered in the preparation of any sound religious education program that is prepared as a result of the recommendations in this report.

## 5. Survey Results (from chapter 5)

1. There is a need for a properly resourced introduction of any new curriculum at all levels that provides:
  - a. professional development
  - b. teacher accreditation
  - c. learning and teaching resources
  - d. classroom coaching of teachers.
2. Support from school leadership is essential in order to:
  - a. provide teachers with adequate planning time
  - b. provide access to suitable formation opportunities
  - c. ensure that the teachers assigned to RE classes are the best available and not chosen solely based on 'timetable issues'.
3. Employing authorities should, where possible, prioritise the recruitment of teachers who will take on a 'missional approach'.
4. According to survey respondents, significant attention needs to be paid to the following issues:
  - a. replacing the current curriculum, as it fails to meet the needs of students in terms of the development of their Catholic faith
  - b. ensuring that staff are properly formed in the Catholic faith
  - c. developing a strategy to deal with the challenge of non-practising or non-supportive teachers and parents.
5. According to survey respondents, significant attention needs to be paid to the following curriculum matters:
  - a. a lack of a clear direction within the curriculum
  - b. a need for better guidance in terms of planning and assessment.

## 6. Formation of Personnel (from chapter 7)

1. In their formation of personnel, Catholic schools should aim at forming missionary disciples through *koinonia*, *kerygma*, *leiturgia*, *martyria* and *diaconia*.
2. The formation of religious education teachers in Catholic schools should incorporate professional training for the role.
3. The formation of religious education teachers should promote ongoing personal growth in faith.
4. Religious education teachers should be formed in an authentic vision of Catholic anthropology based on acknowledging that:
  - a. The starting point for a Catholic understanding is that every human being is a person made in the image and likeness of God; hence human nature is essentially good.
  - b. 'The divine became human so that the human could become divine.'

- c. The divine image is never lost, even by sin and the misuse of human freedom. Through Christ, humanity is restored and the grace of salvation is offered to all men and women.
  - d. In the Catholic understanding, the human person is a moral agent, an 'acting subject'.
  - e. Human beings are created as male or female in their nature, with every cell of their bodies exhibiting the corresponding characteristics.
5. The key principles from the National Catholic Education Commission document *Formation for Mission* should be seen as fundamental guidelines for Catholic schools.
  6. The Archdiocese may wish to consider the setting up of a Catechetical Institute for the training of suitable teachers for the ministry of catechist.
  7. Schools should move towards the employment of those holding accreditation for the ministry of catechist to work in schools. This does not imply a separation of the catechetical and religious education in curriculum or personnel, but it does acknowledge a distinction between the two.

## 7. Guidance for a New Religious Education Curriculum (from chapter 8)

In terms of pedagogy, it is recommended that the following practices be used where possible:

1. *Self-Reported Grades*: Students need to be given the freedom to select from a range of activities, and, within this framework, to work on the aspects of their learning that most meet their needs.
2. *Developmentally Appropriate Programs*: Students need to be given learning material at a developmentally appropriate level.
3. *Formative Evaluation*: Teachers need to gather data from their students which inform the impact of the learning program and adjust it accordingly.
4. *Microteaching*: Where possible, microteaching strategies should be employed so that individual needs can be determined by the teacher, who can adjust the learning program accordingly.
5. *Reciprocal Teaching*: Students should be given the opportunity of teaching what they know to somebody else.
6. *Teacher-Student Relationships*: A focus on person-centred variables – whereby agency, mutual respect among students and teachers, efficacy, and recognition of the students' achievements are observed – will result in more engagement and minimal resistant behaviours.
7. *Spaced Practice vs Massed Practice*: An atomised curriculum organisation in which specific units cover a topic is referred to as 'massed practice'. Where possible, this should be avoided in favour of 'spaced practice', where students return to the same topics on a regular basis.
8. *Encouraging Movement* as an aid to learning and cognition: Where possible, a range of fine-motor movements should be incorporated into the program.

9. *Choice and Perceived Control*: Efforts should be made to incorporate a choice of activities into the program.
10. *Inadequacy of Extrinsic Rewards and Motivation*: The goal of religious education and catechesis is essentially 'intimacy with Christ'. An emphasis on extrinsic rewards would undermine the notion of such genuine love.
11. *Learning from Peers*: Three different aspects of successful peer learning are: imitative learning, peer tutoring and collaborative learning. Each one of these has a valuable contribution to make to religious education.
12. *Inquiry Learning and Directed Teaching in Religious Education*: Both direct instruction and inquiry learning can be used in religious education. Direct instruction is a valuable for establishing basic content. Inquiry learning is valuable for further investigation.

## 8. Developmental Stages for Religious Education (from chapter 9)

It is recommended that attention be paid to the religious developmental needs of students as set out in, *Developmental Stages for Religious Education*.

1. *Characteristics of 3–6-Year-Old Children*:
  - a. Absorbent mind
  - b. Sense of wonder
  - c. Focus on the real world
  - d. Need for order, routine, repetition
  - e. More spontaneous than systematic
  - f. Imitation leading to independence.
2. *Characteristics of 6–9-Year-Old Children*:
  - a. Reasoning mind
  - b. Need for a 'big picture'
  - c. Importance of imagination and creativity
  - d. Need for mental order replaces need for physical order
  - e. Need for repetition / dislike of repetition
  - f. The dawn of moral agency
  - g. The 'age of rudeness' and the need for objective rules
  - h. Desire to belong to large peer group
  - i. Seeking independence.
3. *Additional Characteristics of 9–12-Year-Old Children*:
  - a. Desire to make their own discoveries
  - b. Focus on three mysteries: time, relationships, death
  - c. Value of salvation history
  - d. Work on the levels of friendship
  - e. Avoid excessive technology or too many predigested work sheets.
4. *Characteristics of Adolescent Students: Four Key Themes*:
  - a. The need for social relationships within a peer group
  - b. The drive towards critical thinking
  - c. The need to confront the dilemmas of life rather than be protected from them
  - d. The capacity for boundless energy in pursuit of self-chosen goals.



# Appendix 4

## Key to Abbreviations

- AM Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* (2021).
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997).
- CS Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977).
- CSD Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* (2004).
- CT John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979).
- DC Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (2020).
- DCE Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005).
- EFH Congregation for Catholic Education. *Educating to Fraternal Humanism* (2017).
- EG Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013).
- EIDC Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013).
- EN Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975).
- EO John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania* (2001).
- ETCS Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007).
- FM National Catholic Education Commission, *Formation for Mission* (2017).
- GDC Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997).
- GE Vatican Council II, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965).
- ICS Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (2022).
- LS Francis, *Laudate Si'* (2015).
- RDE Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988).
- RES Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences on Religious Education in Schools* (2009).
- SC Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007).
- SFF National Catholic Education Commission, *A Framework for Student Faith Formation in Catholic Schools* (2022).
- TTM Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997).