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The Education of Teachers for Catholic Schools

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Abstract

The much documented sociological and cultural developments which offered significant challenges to Catholic education in recent decades have played no small part in changing the composition of the Catholic teaching force. A weakening of religious practices and an increase in more personalized understandings of spirituality are now especially prominent in the younger generations of Catholics. As this is the pool from which Catholic teachers of the future will come, it is vital to look afresh at the way we offer support and faith formation. More formal Catholic teacher education processes have to address these challenges by making a commitment to thorough theological education in a range of institutions which are both academically rigorous and pastorally supportive.

Key Words

Teacher Education – Catholic Education – Catholic Cultures – Centres of Formation

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This paper will seek to engage two important strands of thought that inform the general discussion on the education of teachers in Catholic schools. Catholic schools and the teachers who work in them operate within a changing cultural context. Understanding this contemporary milieu is critical in any discussion of Catholic teacher education in light of seminal documents on the topic produced by official Church agencies. In the second part of this paper these documents will be discussed in light of the cultural contextualization provided.

Part One: Changed Cultural Contexts

Smith et al. (2014) refer to one of the clearest indicators of the changed cultural context in which Catholic schools operate as the loss of what they call “thickly” Catholic cultures.

‘The old system of Catholic faith transmission – which relied on concentrated Catholic residential neighborhoods, ethnic solidarity, strong Catholic schools, religious education classes designed to reinforce family and parish life and ‘thickly’ Catholic cultures, practices and rituals – had drastically eroded by the time this generation of parents came of age’ (Smith et al., 2014, 26).

Many parents and children today have not been involved in the sociological processes that build up communal solidarity, develop religious sensibility along with some type of cognitive map on which they could frame and interpret other experiences (Greeley, 2004). In this analysis, the loss of a wide and interconnected socialization network is not a recent phenomenon and has been a feature of Catholic life for at least two generations. This means that when we look for indicators of strong religious identification such as participation in the sacraments or a close alignment between personal beliefs and the teachings of the Church, students entering Catholic accredited teacher courses today are very likely to have similar beliefs and practices to their parents (D’Antonio et al., 2007). In order to see significant differences the comparison that needs to be made is between those who are approximately over the age of sixty and all those who are

younger than this. One powerful account of this bygone world is given by Moloney (1998, 168) when he writes:

‘I had been brought up a practising Catholic and the social and cultural setting of my life was steady as a rock. There was no need for the Bible, as I had the Pope, the Bishop, the Priest and weekly Mass. My belief system came from the family and a Catholic schooling, reinforced by the weekly sermon, the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, and various devotions.’

It is worth noting again that what is described above is a social fabric that is no longer intact.

Yet it still lingers in the consciousness of many as a type of template for how many Catholics are brought up (Rymarz, 2002). What needs to be brought to the forefront of the discussion of cultural context is that this pattern of socialization is no longer a factor in the lives of most Catholics.

Decline of the Cultural Religious Paradigm

Gill (2012) has described this change in socialization of younger generations as a manifestation of the decline of the cultural religious paradigm. Although generally applicable in many Western post-industrial countries it seems to have the greatest traction in those places where, in the relatively recent past, religion played had an important social function (Voas and Doebler, 2011). Amongst other things, it provided a way for many younger people to adopt an identity that bonded them with their co-religionists. Scotland is one example of how a strong and cohesive religious culture was able to provide Catholic youth with a sense of belonging to a wider religious community (Lynch, 1991). There was always a variety of levels at which individuals could define their commitment but underlying all of this was a sense of strong collective identity (Paterson, 2000).

Beginning in the nineteen sixties the cultural landscape changed in significant ways¹ (Brown, 2001). The general level of support for religion in the wider community declined sharply and unexpectedly. In addition, the capacity of religious communities to form and nurture younger members by internal mechanisms was also greatly weakened (Bruce and Glendinning, 2007; Singleton, 2014). There are a range of consequences of this changed cultural context for those working in the general area of formation of teachers to work in Catholic schools. The religious affiliation of many teachers will have much more in common with those of students than many people realize. This is because both groups have been subjected to the changed cultural forces mentioned earlier. One key aspect of this is that for many prospective teachers participation in sacraments will not be a key indicator of their Catholic identity. Figures for Mass attendance give a clear indication of this trend but an even stronger case could be made for participation rates in other sacraments such as reconciliation and even matrimony. To give one illustrative example of what is a well-established international trend, figures for Australian Catholics aged between 15-24 reveal that the national weekly Mass participation rate in 2011 was 6.9% (Dixon et al., 2013). On further analysis two other points can be raised here. In terms of the trend revealed this figure represents a decline of approximately 9% on the figure five years earlier. The 6.9% figure is an average which can mask significant regional variation. The Mass attendance figure is much lower for some dioceses, especially those outside the major cities which do not have significant numbers of migrants.

Participation in the sacraments by younger Catholics has been in decline for several decades and this has a number of implications for the preparation of teachers to work in Catholic schools. Two broad and related major trends can be identified here. Discussion of these does not discount

the existence of a smaller group of highly committed younger Catholics but recognizes that this group is not sizeable and may be suggestive of what has been called a polarization of religious affiliation (Bibby, 2012). The first major trend sees an increase in the number of younger people identifying as Catholics but doing so in a fashion that reflects their own interests and beliefs (Mason et al., 2007; D' Antonio et al., 2013). A defining characteristic of this trend is that connection with the religious community is not disavowed but it is not a strong or salient influence on personal beliefs and practices (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006). A good indication of this is seen when younger people are asked for what are the most decisive influences on their lives. When this is done, they tend to place religion as one of the lesser factors (Mason et al., 2007; Rymarz 2016a). Rymarz (2016b) has described many aspiring teachers in Catholic schools to be part of this demographic. While they are happy to work in Catholic schools and see themselves as supportive of their ethos, their own religious affiliation tends to be of the less committed variety.²

The second major trend sees decline in sacramental participation as a harbinger of a continuing and deepening disaffiliation with religious communities. The fastest growing religious demographic in many Western countries are those who identify as having no religion, the so-called 'nones'. The 2014 Pew study nominates 22.8% of the US population as declaring 'no religion'. This is a 7% increase on the number in the previous survey which was conducted in 2007. This trend to no affiliation is also very much evident in countries with historically lower levels of religious identification than the United States. Nations such as Canada and Scotland now have very large minorities who describe themselves as having no religion (Voas, 2006; Eagle, 2011). In New Zealand over 40% of the population are reported to identify as having no

religion (Smith, 2013). This trend seems to have consolidated over several decades. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2013), figures show that 22% of the population in 2011 census recorded no religion. The comparative figure in the 2001 census was 15%. Moreover the highest no religion response was amongst the youngest cohort, those aged between 15 and 34. For this group in 2011, 28% reported no religion in the census.

The trend to disaffiliation from religious communities seems to support the breakdown in the cultural paradigm of religion thesis. Bibby (2009) discusses this in generational terms. Whereas grandparents may have had a relatively close connection with a religious community, their own children do not have the same link but are still willing to identify with a religious tradition. The links, however, between the grandchildren and subsequent generations becomes much more tenuous. Over time religious belief and expression becomes commodified³ and is characterized as having low and diminishing intensity with little cultural relevance or sustainability (Turner, 2009; Niemela, 2015). In many Catholic schools the demographic of those who have no or little religious background will become an increasingly important one. This includes many teachers in Catholic schools who may themselves come from a family background with little or no religious sensibility. Although it cannot be explored in this paper in any detail it is important to note that having no religious affiliation is not to declare atheism or have no interest in religion but it does give a firm sense of the departure point of many teachers and students in Catholic schools today and into the future.

Implications for Catholic Education

The decline of a cultural religious paradigm, the growth of weak religious affiliation and the rise of those who profess no religion has clear implications for Catholic education. In terms of those

who work with prospective Catholic school teachers, careful consideration needs to be given to prior assumptions about these students. It is likely that many who enter teacher education programmes to work in Catholic schools may not have a strong cognitive grasp of Catholicism (Rymarz, 2012). One of the features of the new cultural conditions in which Catholic schools operate is that religious communities must take it upon themselves to provide a thorough and ongoing education for members of the faith community. One of the main reasons for this is that the wider culture can no longer be assumed to be supportive or even familiar with religious principles and ideals. In the absence of strong educative programmes, the beliefs of many, even those within religious communities, can default to the dominant position of the wider culture. There have been many attempts to delineate what this default worldview is. 'Worldview' is a term with a long history in philosophical and theological literature. It is now increasingly used in the social sciences to investigate the salient views and behaviours of individuals especially in cultures where conventional religious affiliation is weakening and religious descriptors are losing their capacity to accurately account for the beliefs and practise of young people (Droogers and van Harskamp, 2014). One of the strongest summations of the worldview of contemporary younger people is provided by Smith and Denton (2007). They describe the dominant worldview of most American teenagers as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). This worldview is adopted by large sections of the community and even those who espouse some type of religious allegiance. In this way we see a convergence at least in terms of worldview between those with no or little religious affiliation and those who identify, albeit weakly, with religious communities.

The main ambit of MTD is that moral concerns come to the forefront of self-identification. In this view religion is seen as a moral system at least insofar as it helps individuals integrate themselves into the wider community. One aspect of this worldview is that moral beliefs must have a therapeutic dimension. They must help the person live a life that they see as comfortable and avoiding excessive trials. The final aspect of MTD is that, in keeping with weak religious affiliation, belief in God is not rejected. Rather it is replaced with a view not in the personal God of Christianity but in something more in keeping with the eighteenth century Deistic philosophers' notion of the divine. This is a God who is in some sense present in the world but does not interact with creation. A benign force that requires little and certainly is not calling creation into relationship. Dean (2010) is critical of this disposition as she sees even the moral underpinnings of this dominant worldview not in terms of strong moral or ethical principles but rather an adherence to a superficial benevolence which she describes, caustically, as the cult of being nice.

There are other ways of describing the worldview of young adults which cannot be elaborated on here. The important point though for those engaged in the education of teachers for Catholic schools is that these worldviews may be very commonly held but they do not give people a firm grounding in Christian culture or beliefs. Many young people are not so much crafting a worldview of their own but acceding to the dominant cultural paradigm which is becoming increasingly detached from its Christian origins (Mason et al, 2007). These views are reinforced by family or origin and by social networks made up of other people who also share these ascendant positions. And these worldviews are quite stable in as much as many young people are not actively engaged in a search for alternate meaning (Rymarz, 2010). This does not mean

that they are closed to enquiry and questioning. If this does occur, however, it needs to be seen as taking place in a context where young people are not *tabula rasa* but do have pre-existing, stable positions that are supported by family and the wider culture. For those involved in the education of teachers what can be seen here is one of consequences of the collapse of the transmission of faith that Smith and his colleagues described earlier in this paper. This means that religious communities cannot assume that in the absence of strong religious formation young people have not adopted alternate positions. These may be derived from sources that do not have strong connections with the beliefs and practises of a religious community. For those who continue to identify as being part of the religious community this may be as part of a broader conception that sees religion as a part of personal identity but not an especially critical aspect. Some of the data discussed here suggests that this trend will continue into the future.

The exception to this gradual disengagement of young adults from the Church is the Catholic school. It is a paradox that in a culture of rising disaffiliation with religious communities denominational schools and especially Catholic schools remain popular.⁴ Despite the changes discussed here enrolment in Catholic schools in many places has remained very robust (Flynn and Mok, 2002; Buchanan and Rymarz, 2008; McKinney and Conroy, 2015). Figures from the National Catholic Education Commission of Australia provide one illustration of the popularity of Catholic schools. Comparing enrolments between 1985 and 2012 reveals an increase in that time of 21%. This trend seems to be escalating. Comparing enrolment figures for 2011 and 2012 shows an increase of 11,931 or 1.6% (NCEA, 2013). For many of those who seek to work in Catholic schools the substantial experience of being part of a religious community will be the time spent as students in Catholic schools. For most this experience has been a positive one

(Cook, 2000). It is an experience, however, that for many is not well integrated with either personal belief and practice and the praxis of the family of origin.

The cultural picture depicted above offers an interesting backdrop for internal Church discussion on how best to educate teachers for service in Catholic schools. In Part 2 there will be a study of how the Church's teaching authority has engaged with this important issue.

Part Two: The Expectations of the Church

In Part One we explored the significance of the weakening, if not the destruction, of the so-called 'thickly Catholic culture' in which Catholic schools were traditionally encased. We argued that a welter of sociological process had contributed to a gradual loss of the sense of community and belonging which both grew from and contributed to the popularity of Catholic schools. In Part Two we wish to identify the expectations of the Magisterium of the Church with regard to Catholic teacher education. Given the cultural realities described in Part One, our principal argument is that there is an urgent need for deep thinking about the formation processes for prospective Catholic teachers. Crucially, formation for prospective teachers cannot be separated from the ongoing formation of qualified teachers: both processes are interwoven. Only with such refreshed attitudes to Catholic teacher formation can the Catholic school reclaim its position at the heart of the Church's mission. Before mining the Church's established body of teaching on education for its insights on how this could be done, it is important to set out a few preliminary points.

In the first place, ‘Catholic teacher education’ refers to the field of study which allows students the opportunity to attain the academic qualifications required to teach in the Catholic primary and secondary school. It is a subset of ‘Catholic Higher Education’ which itself is a subset of the umbrella term ‘Catholic education’ (Pope John Paul II, 1990). Catholic teacher education, to be clear, is the union of two highly contested terms: Catholic education and teacher education. Each is host to a multitude of literature, ideas and policies on its ideal conceptual shape. It should come as no surprise to us that there is still much debate on what this should be.

Second, the Church’s body of teaching on education since the Second Vatican Council is balanced somewhat precariously on the shifting sociological and cultural sands which have softened the ‘rock’ on which authentic Catholic education depends (cf: Convery, Franchi & McCluskey, 2014; Engebretson, 2015)). Insights into Catholic teacher education are found in the wider educational teaching and lack, for now, a dedicated document. This in itself is not insignificant and is perhaps an indicator of the Church’s ‘failure’ to come to terms with the changing composition of the teaching force in Catholic schools worldwide. The ‘thickly Catholic culture’ alluded to above was held together by the robust presence of the Religious teaching orders / congregations (cf. O’Donoghue 2004; 2012). The decline of such institutions and the gradual increase in the numbers and influence of lay Catholic teachers was seen by the Church as an important moment of transition. The publication of *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982) was an attempt to deal with the personnel situation arising from the decline in the numbers entering Religious Orders and Teaching Congregations. The document, although well intentioned, tended to see the ‘lay teacher’ as somehow ‘filling the gap’ left by the departing religious orders. Such a view, however, did not

reflect the commitment to the lay apostolate as proposed in Vatican II's Decree on the Apostolate of the Christian Laity - *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (1965).

Finally, Catholic teacher education cannot ignore wider trends in education and in teacher education more generally. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is now a worthy field of study in its own right and boasts both of dedicated professional associations and established peer-reviewed journals housed in academic institutions worldwide. While wider ITE occupies a space between the twin pillars of academic study and professional qualifications, Catholic Teacher Education is, by extension, a three-way process with the added strand of 'religious commitment. It is hence, a field ripe for fruitful study.

All three issues serve as a thematic backdrop for a more forensic examination of the Church's stated teaching on how best to prepare teachers for service in Catholic schools.

Key points in the Church's Magisterial Teaching

The context for this study of the Church's thought on teacher education is set by *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Christian Education. This 'charter' for Catholic education, while heavily dependent on the Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* (Pope Pius XI, 1929), nonetheless attempts to locate Christian education within the context of the Council. Crucially, it places teachers at the heart of the educational mission:

‘But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programmes. 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’ (8).

This is a powerful commitment to the teacher’s central role in education. We note the importance afforded to preparation in all aspects of knowledge: it is not enough for teachers to have a good level of education; they must have a wide and ever-increasing commitment to excellence in all aspects of the art of teaching. We note also the encouragement to keep abreast with findings in the field of contemporary pedagogy: this recognition that the Church does not have all the answers to the ills affecting society is a significant marker of Vatican II’s commitment to dialogue with people who have other ways of understanding the world of ideas (Pope John XXIII, 1962). GE, however, did not claim to be anything more than a starting-document for a wider discussion on the Catholic view of education (see Preamble). The debate would move into a higher gear in the years following the Council.

The short extract from *Gravissimum Educationis* above provides the foundational principles for programmes of Catholic teacher education. It offers a precisely worded statement which brings together the importance of knowledge (religious and secular) and pedagogy. The subsequent interventions over the following five decades from the Congregation for Catholic Education sought to develop the broader educational principles adumbrated in GE but, interestingly, the field of teacher education did not receive anything more than a cursory treatment. This possibly

implies that the wider development of teachers in Catholic schools was deemed a matter best left in the hands of individual Bishops' Conferences and Religious teaching orders who had a more local knowledge of the educational realities.

Further thought was given to teacher education processes in two subsequent documents published by the Congregation for Catholic Education: *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982) and *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988). Other documents from the same source also mentioned the various ways in which the education of teachers could be supported, especially *The Catholic School* (1977) and *Educating Together in Catholic Schools* (2007). Along with *Gravissimum Educationis*, this set of five documents gives us sufficient primary material to make the claim that there are two key principles underpinning Catholic teacher education today: (1) Catholic teachers should be professionally competent with lifelong formation processes that recognize the centrality of 'the teacher' to the Catholic school and (2) centres of Catholic teacher education offer academic hubs linked to the wider Church.

1. Catholic teachers should be professionally competent with lifelong formation processes that recognize the centrality of 'the teacher' to the Catholic school.

Following the principles outlined in GE 8, we see that Catholic teachers are more than mere instructors or trainers. (Indeed this would be case for all teachers, not just those working in Catholic schools.) This position is not a denial of the value of dedicated training processes where and when appropriate in schools and other educational enterprises. Nonetheless, the Catholic teacher is called to pass on the Church's living body of traditions using the most educationally

appropriate methodology. The overarching ‘metaphor’ for this enterprise is ‘indispensable human formation’ and requires teachers to develop the wisdom, competence and expertise which are in line with this high demand (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, 16). To fail to measure up to these expectations is not just a failure in teaching expertise (woeful as this may be) but a failure to be the ‘cultural witness’ that the Catholic teacher is called to be (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007, 21).

In essence, all schools need prospective teachers who are knowledge-hungry and prepared to undertake ongoing study in order to give of their best to students in schools. Teacher education processes should thus recognize the centrality of ‘the teacher’ to the Catholic school who, like all teachers, is *in loco parentis* but also assumes professional responsibility for the religious education of the students. In some cases, Catholic teachers are required to act as principal catechist for the sacraments of Confession, Confirmation and First Communion. This important role requires suitably supportive and ongoing education processes for the teachers themselves, leading to what *Educating for Cultural Dialogue* calls ‘a formation of the heart’ (2013, 25). As the human heart needs exercise and care in order to function properly, Catholic teachers need pastoral and spiritual care in order to offer their own ‘heart’ to the school. In other words, the care of the religious mission of the Catholic school is part of their professional development and needs. If the Catholic teacher is to be truly ‘competent’, it is necessary to make a substantial investment in their theological education.⁵

The empirical work of John Hattie (online) has shown that among the many variables affecting pupil attainment, teacher expertise is crucial. Following on from this, Catholic schools need, of course, to strive for excellence in all aspects of their community life, not just in the explicitly

religious aspects. Nonetheless, how teacher expertise in ‘religious knowledge’ is formed and developed is a question which cannot be put to one side: it should be a central evaluative mechanism for the Catholic school. In *Educating Together in Catholic Schools* (2007), the Congregation reiterated the key issues for teachers in Catholic schools which had been outlined by *Gravissimum Educationis* in 1965 (see above) re quality and formation:

‘One of the fundamental requirements for an educator in a Catholic school is his or her possession of a solid professional formation. Poor quality teaching, due to insufficient professional preparation or inadequate pedagogical methods, unavoidably undermines the effectiveness of the overall formation of the student and of the cultural witness that the educator must offer’ (2007, 21).

Again we note the emphasis on adequate professional and cultural formation as essential features of the witness to which the Catholic teacher is called. Prospective Catholic teachers, for their part, need introducing to the wide and deep vision of humanity which underpins the vision of Catholic education. As part of this educational experience, they will perceive that the art of teaching goes far beyond facilitation and mentoring but is rooted in witness to ‘good living’ underpinned by a firm religious commitment (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 78). Educators are called to be open to insights from history and see themselves as part of a living chain of witness to the value of education for human flourishing. This moves ‘teacher expertise’ beyond a mere didactic transmission of knowledge to embrace a wider variety of methods while bearing in mind that the chosen ‘method’ is not an end in itself but acts as the handmaid of the core knowledge.

The much-desired Catholic culture can only grow when watered by the systematic study of doctrine. This offers the theological ‘raw material’ for creative engagement with other ways of thinking as well as providing the core knowledge necessary for the teaching of Religious Education. This applies *a fortiori* to those who aim to specialise in the teaching of Religious Education and the documents recommend that those in this position need to obtain properly accredited academic qualifications (see below). This is a necessary reminder that the teaching of Religious Education in the Catholic school, while often dependent on the willing co-operation of teachers with no formal academic qualifications in a relevant discipline at tertiary level, remains a scholarly discipline and should be recognized as such by schools and Bishops’ Conferences. This leads to the perennial question of how we ensure access to high quality theological education for prospective Catholic teachers.

2. Centres of Teacher Formation Offer Academic Hubs linked to the Wider Church

The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the 2015 World Congress on Education, *Educating for Today and Tomorrow* (2014), has two important sections headed respectively ‘The Challenge of Teachers’ Lifelong Training’ and Places and Resources for Teacher Training. The genre of an *Instrumentum Laboris* does not allow for a detailed treatment of any one issue as it is primarily an opportunity to highlight key questions and facilitate discussion across the universal Church. The list presented here is expansive and merits quoting in full as it explores the issue of where the ‘training’⁶ (sic) should take place:

‘Diocesan structures: vicars or diocesan directors of teaching activities, in synergy or

partnership with training institutions. We should really think about the opportunity to centralize the training of lay people with ecclesial responsibilities and religion teachers in one single diocesan facility. On the one hand, this choice would lead to a stronger identity, but it would not provide the answer to a difficult question: how can this kind of training be adapted to needs that are typical of learning contexts? We should not forget that teachers have specific professional identities, with their peculiar features, that should be taken into account during training.’

This is a serious set of proposals and requires careful analysis. The issue of centralization alone is worthy of another article. In general, there are obvious benefits to aligning teacher education processes to the wider theological energy of the Church: a sense of faith community, an awareness of the common theological themes which underpin different lay missions and an openness to insights from other aspects of the life of the Church. The reverse side of this, as recognized by the proposal, is the challenge presented by the need to address the ‘specific professional identities’ of teacher education. In other words, what are the component parts of the Catholic teacher’s mission which require dedicated treatment? Furthermore, it is necessary to address the academic framework underpinning qualifications: are diocesan or national agencies in a position to offer a framework for sufficiently rigorous—and academically validated—qualifications? The matter is less complicated, perhaps, for those countries with Catholic universities but does offer significant challenges for areas where such institutions do not currently exist.

It seems that the Church is still asking the same sort of questions identified in the 1980s when the Magisterial focus was principally on the perceived theological deficit arising from the gradual replacement of teachers from religious orders/congregations with increasing numbers of lay teachers. The principles explained in that era remain valid today with recognition of the importance, indeed, necessity, of appropriate theological education for teachers:

‘It is highly recommended, therefore, that all Catholics who work in schools, and most especially those who are educators, obtain the necessary qualifications by pursuing programmes of religious formation in Ecclesiastical Faculties or in Institutes of Religious Science that are suitable for this purpose, wherever this is possible (Congregation for Catholic Education’ 1982, 65).

The issue was again highlighted in another document published by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1988, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*. This important document admitted that the diminishing number of priests and religious employed in schools had a negative affect on the theological capital of the Catholic school. To address this lacuna, it was recommended that lay teachers should receive a theological education equivalent to that provided in seminaries and houses of formation. This might come over as a forlorn hope given the many demands placed on such programmes by other subject areas yet it was a timely reminder of the depth of the vocation to teach in a Catholic school:

‘We need to look to the future and promote the establishment of formation centres for these teachers; ecclesiastical universities and faculties should do what they can to develop

appropriate programmes so that the teachers of tomorrow will be able to carry out their task with the competence and efficacy that is expected of them' (1988, 97).

A crucial issue here is the nature of the institution offering the Catholic teaching qualification. This is not the place to assess the merits of undergraduate v post-graduate routes into teaching nor to evaluate the role of the university in teacher education. Nonetheless we have to assess the implications of the stated aspiration to have 'formation centres' linked to the wider Church when not all countries have established Catholic higher education networks. Clearly, the moves internationally to embed teacher education in the university must influence the formation processes for Catholic teachers (Cf. Donaldson, 2011; *Aspiring to Excellence*, 2014). Where Catholic higher educational institutions exist these must serve as the hub of Catholic education and make a contribution, to a greater or lesser extent, on the formation of prospective Catholic teachers.

'It may be worth noting that centres of teacher formation will differ in their ability to provide the kind of professional training that will best help Catholic educators to fulfill their educational mission...If we take all of this into account, it follows that it would be better to attend a centre for teacher formation under the direction of the Church where one exists, and to create such centres, if possible, where they do not yet exist'
(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, 64).

The process of constructing new institutions for the formation of Catholic teachers is no easy task given the many challenges arising from suitably qualified personnel and lack of finance. It

might be a more viable option, at least in the short term, to explore avenues of dialogue with established universities which, with due consideration of the need to have qualifications which are academically rigorous, doctrinally sound and pastorally sensitive, will lead to enhanced modes of co-operation and dialogue between the Church's educational agencies and the wider secular agenda.⁷ In following this line, we might be preparing a new channel in which there will be genuine fruitful dialogue between Catholic thinking on education and secular thought. In the UK, for example, the moves in the 1990s to integrate teacher-training colleges with universities offered potential identity crises for established Catholic institutions (Conroy and McCreath, 1999). The inevitable question of how to maintain a Catholic identity within the secular atmosphere of the contemporary university brought forth, in time, a range of partnership models. *Aspiring to Excellence* (2014) a review of teacher education in Northern Ireland, looked *inter alia* at the ways in which a Catholic identity could be maintained in such settings and offered some examples of how this had been put into practice (2014, Annex IV). Only time—and further research—will tell if this marriage between religious and secular institutions has had a positive impact on Catholic teacher education.

Concluding Remarks: Educational Documents are not Enough

In this article we have shown how Catholic teacher education has not been immune to the challenges posed by secularisation and a weakening of established modes of Catholic culture. The enthusiasm for reform which swept the Catholic world post Vatican II did not always pay sufficient heed to maintaining the Church's doctrinal and cultural legacy. While the Church's educational documents in this period did encourage a positive atmosphere in the Catholic school vis-à-vis cultural change, little was said about how teachers should be formed to address this

commitment. The time for institutional innovations is now. The desire to locate teacher education in universities⁸ is a call to the Church to give serious thought as to how it can offer robust formation processes to prospective Catholic teachers who have grown up in a Church challenged on many fronts by those who seek to lessen the importance of religion in society and in schools.

Notes

¹ For an excellent synopsis of some of the causative factors behind these changes see the first chapter of Smith, C. Longest, K., Hill, J. and Christoffersen, K. (2014). *Young Catholic America: Emerging adults in, out of, and gone from the Church*. New York: Oxford University Press.

² For a further discussion of the issue see Widdowson, D. A., Dixon, R. S., Peterson, E.R., Rubie-Davies, C. M., Irving, S.E. (2014). Why go to school? Student, parent and teacher beliefs about the purposes of schooling. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 27, 131-152.

³ The recent strong growth of nones – those with no affirmed religious affiliation is partly explained by methodological issues. In many countries the no religion (or something similar) category is only a relatively recent addition. In Australia, for example, it was only included in national census forms after 1971. It is also important to emphasise again that professing no religion is not synonymous with atheist or hostility to religion.

⁴ There are a range of possible, not mutually exclusive, explanations for this paradox. In many places Catholic schools offer perhaps the only viable alternative to government schools as other private schools are prohibitively expensive. Catholic schools may also provide a very tangible way for weakly affiliated Catholic parents to maintain some advantageous connection with the Church. Finally, Catholic schools, relatively speaking, generally provide a quality education at least in the eyes of many parents.

⁵ It is hard to ascertain the picture globally. Certainly excellence in Catholic education requires a substantial involvement in theological education (Weeks and Grace 2007). Recent moves in the British Isles to update syllabi in RE are marked by a clear move towards enhancing theological literacy (Cf. Scottish Catholic Education Service 2011. SCES 2015; Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2012; Irish Episcopal Conference 2015). The specialised knowledge at the heart of these syllabi requires ongoing support for Catholic teachers. This is an urgent task for agencies charged with directing Catholic education.

⁶ The use of ‘training’ in the *Instrumentum Laboris* is inadequate. The discourse in Catholic education is about the ongoing formation of teachers. This is an issue of translation as the Italian text uses ‘formazione’ (formation)—a much more suitable term. Nonetheless, ‘training’ is still part of the lexicon in England and Wales. The challenge to how we address teachers’ formation needs is therefore limited in the English translation.

⁷ In Australia, the establishment of the La Salle Academy at the Australian Catholic University in 2014 offered new impetus to the theological formation of teachers, albeit within the structure of a renowned Catholic institution. An example of fruitful co-operation between a Catholic institution and a secular university is the merger between St Andrew’s College and the University of Glasgow in 1999. This union created a Faculty of Education with a mission to serve the needs of Catholic schools. The subsequent establishment of the St Andrew’s Foundation for Catholic Teacher Education in 2013 consolidated and strengthened the University’s commitment to Catholic education. An overview of this process of engagement is offered as Case Study 5 in Annex IV of *Aspiring to Excellence*, a review of teacher education provision in Northern Ireland, published in 2014). For other perspectives on the merger, see Conroy and McCreath (1999) and Coll (2015).

⁸ The move towards locating teacher education in universities is contested. The situation in England is a case in point: the direction of travel is towards more school-based provision with a diminishing importance placed on the universities. This seems to be a reaction against overly simplistic perceptions that university based teacher education was too far removed from the life of the classroom. Nonetheless school-based teacher education is now part of the mainstream and raised issues for universities, schools and teachers (White, Dickerson and Weston, 2015).

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