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REFLECTIONS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

The changes in the actual theory and practice of Religious Education are obvious. Educational theories more often seem to follow the transitions initiated in the classroom, than to anticipate further developments. A new understanding of the educational task becomes manifest in the development of curricula, in the concept of textbooks, in the variety of methods suggested, in the organization of sequences of the learning process, in the use of media or Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in the flexibility of grouping pupils, etc.

The author of this article intends to address some aspects of the present situation of Religious Education and Catechesis in England and Wales in Catholic Schools, with symptoms of a paradigm shift as regards the understanding of RE teaching and learning; taking into consideration especially the work of the National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education.

NATURE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS

In the last years a considerable literature has developed on the nature of Religious Education as a discipline at tertiary level and as a subject in Catholic

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[1] Cf. T.H. McLaughlin, J. O'Keefe, B. O'Keeffe, *Setting the Scene: Current Realities and Historical Perspectives*, in: *The Contemporary Catholic School. Context, Identity and Diversity*, ed. J. O'Keefe, B. O'Keeffe, London 1996, p. 2–7; B. O'Keeffe, *Faith, Culture and the Dual System:*

schools[1] and state schools. The most known English speaking Catholic theorists are: T. Groome (USA), K. Nichols (UK), G. Moran (USA), R. Rummery (Australia), G. Rossiter (Australia), M. Warren (USA), P. Purnell (UK). Many theorists argue that Religious Education, understood as a type of education, is distinguishable from more precisely religious efforts such as evangelisation and catechesis. Because evangelisation (promoting conversion) and catechesis (promoting maturity of faith among believers) are primarily religious in their motivation, they do not include a critical dimension[2].

The development of Religious Education as a subject has reached a point where such distinctions between evangelisation, catechesis and religious education are recognised in official Church documents on education. Thus *The Religious Dimension of Education in Catholic Schools* draws attention to:

> a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction, between religious instruction and catechesis, or the handing on of the Gospel message. The close connection makes it possible for a school to remain a school and still integrate culture with the message of Christianity. The distinction comes from the fact that, unlike religious instruction, catechesis presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school: a whole lifetime[3].

Next the

> Religious Education Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools' prepared by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales also makes such a distinction and says: „Religious Education in school leads children and young people into an exploration of the different aspects of religion and thoughtful reflection upon religious belief"[4].

But also stresses the complementary nature of evangelisation, catechesis and religious education.

The processes of teaching and learning that we have discussed so far are full of implications for the nature of the person, freedom, and time. Nevertheless, they

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a Comparative Study of Church and County Schools, London 1986; *From Ideal to Action: the inner nature of a Catholic school today*, ed. J. Feheney, Dublin 1998; *Commitment to Diversity. Catholic and Education in a Changing World*, ed. M. Eaton, J. Longmore, A. Naylor, C. Cassel, London–New York 2000; *Contemporary Catholic Schools*, ed. M. Hayes, L. Gearon, Leominster 2002.

[2] Cf. E. Osewska, *Edukacja religijna w szkole katolickiej w Anglii i Walii w świetle „Living and Sharing Our Faith. A National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education"*, Tarnów 2008, p. 197–288.

[3] Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic Schools*, London 1988, nr 68.

[4] Cf. Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Religious Education Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools*, Chelmsford 1996, p. 7.

are not specifically religious processes. As we come closer in our discussion to explicit theological motifs, it is appropriate for us to include some consideration of a number of explicitly religious teaching and learning processes. The distinction between „Christian education" and „education about Christianity" has been analysed in the light of a particular view of the outcomes of Christian education and the significance of the 'Christian affections', and the nature of empathetic understanding within phenomenological religious education. It is argued that the distinction, when understood in terms of learning outcomes, is best regarded as a difference of degree rather than of kind[5].

This is an effort to distinguish the concepts of catechesis and religious education, particularly as regards the possible contribution schools can make in this regard, which is still open for discussion. But the table presented below can help to situate the different comments or theories related to both linguistic expressions, or to disentangle the endless discussions and institutional conflicts. A „scientific" approach should provide a large enough range of distinctions in order to clearly identity each utterance about either catechesis or religious education, or the combinations of characteristics related to each of the forms of education into the religious world.

The difference is mainly related to the intention of the educational programme, the concrete organization, the tools used, and the institutional identity: faith education or providing information about religions. When someone is focussing upon the outcome or final result, the personal identity or attitude of the attendants is decisive, despite what is offered. The reality of plurality is a major component, which should be taken into consideration[6]:

- families can be divided as regards religious faith and religious practice, which affects the „reception" by the children of whatever religious life and faith education is provided;
- the parishioners represent a wide range of faith attitudes and relatedness with the institutional church; even if they „practice", religious diversity is a matter of fact (even church-goers can be a-religious…);
- the pupils in a Catholic school rarely represent a homogeneous audience; pupils filter the information or nurturing activities according to their personal religious or a-religious mindset and family background.

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[5] Cf. J. Astley, *The place of understanding in Christian education and in education about Christianity*, „British Journal of Religious Education" 16,2 (1994), p. 90–101.

[6] Cf. J. Arthur, S. Gaine, *„Catechesis" and „religious education" in Catholic theory and practice,* in: *Research in Religious Education*, ed. L.J. Francis, W.K. Kay, Leominster 1996, p. 335–337; G. Rossiter, *The need for a „creative divorce" between catechesis and religious education in Catholic schools*, „Religious Education" 77,1 (1982), p. 21–40; R. M. Rummery, *Catechesis and Religious Education in a Pluralist Society*, Huntington 1975; H. Lombaerts, D. Pollefeyt, *The Emergence of Hermeneutics in Religious Education Theories: An Overview*, in: *Hermeneutics and Religious Education*, ed. H. Lombaerts, D. Pollefeyt, Leuven 2004, p. 3–53.

When not distinguishing the institutional intention (and its legitimating) from the concrete personal attitudes of the attendants, a proper discourse becomes difficult. When not recognising the plurality of attitudes among the attendants, a clarification of what the educators actually are doing becomes impossible.

A definition of each of the terms has to integrate the intention, the institutional setting and its legitimating, and the personal position of the attendants. The distinction between catecheses and religious education should be approached in a systemic perspective. The interaction between institutional aspects with the people involved, and with the environmental reality (society, church, religion in general, other philosophies of life) will finally decide who is actually living a catechetical process, focussed upon a deeper and better informed personal involvement in faith, and who is involved in an objective, scientific study of religions, without the intention of starting a process of conversion.

As regards the clarification of catechesis, one should revisit the early Christian practice and understand better what was organised and why in those days, given the concrete context and the specific consciousness and concerns within the emerging Christian community itself. On the other hand, the confrontation between the Christian identity and church with contemporary society, culture and adulthood should help to clarify what faith education represents and where, with whom, and in what context it is happening[7]. The observation of the role catechesis had to take on throughout the different historical periods of Christianity offers an interesting documentation for noticing the change in meaning of the word. Catechesis had a different function in the overall pastoral policy and strategy of the Catholic Church in different parts of the world, according to the specific challenges.

As regards the clarification of religious education, the distance many believers take from the institutional Church and the outcome of their prolonged education induces a necessity to approach religions from a more scientific point of view: what are religions? What are they about? What is a „religious truth" about? A neutral institutional context is necessary for the attendants of religionclasses in schools, to better understand and appreciate the specific *raison d'être* of a particular religion. This „anthropology", historical inquiry, archaeological and exegetical information, the aesthetic and symbolically playful representation offer a possible background for making up someone's mind as regards a personal involvement. The mergence of „religious education" in the European context has a strong link with the disenchanting process of secularisation and emancipation of societies as a result of education into a hyper-modern society.

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[7] See *Source Book for Modern Catechetics*, ed. M. Warren, Winona 1993; *Source Book for Modern Catechetics*, vol. 2, ed. M. Warren, Winona 1997; A. Alberich, *Katecheza dzisiaj. Podręcznik katechetyki fundamentalnej*, Warszawa 2003.

	Family (with homogeneous or pluralist composition)	**Parish** (parishioners homogeneous or pluralist composition)	**School**		Neutral pluralist a-religious identity
			With religious identity		
			Homogeneous school population	Pluralist school population	
Catechesis catechists/ teachers represent the faith/Church community	Faith education Parents, grandparents living their faith	Faith education Catechists living their faith	Nurturing faith Teaching of religion Teachers witness faith commitment		
Religious education Teachers with Catholic Christian identity				Teaching of Catholic, Christian religion. Teachers witness faith commitment	
Religious education as teaching about religion Teachers with religious loyalty					Teaching about religion Teachers witness academic honesty as regards „religiousness"

Yet, the problem is sill present, when we take into consideration the nature, aims and situation of Religious Education in the Catholic schools. Let us take into consideration the situation in England and Wales. Published in 2000 by Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales *Religious Education in Catholic Schools* states:

In the life of faith of the Catholic school, religious education plays a central and vital part. At the heart of Catholic education lies the Christian vision of the human person. This vision is expressed and explored in religious education. Therefore, religious education is never simply one subject among many, but the foundation of the entire educational process. The beliefs and values studied in Catholic religious education inspire and draw together every aspect of the life of a Catholic school. We are committed to classroom RE, then, because all pupils have the right to re- ceive an overall education which will enable them, in the light of the faith of the

Church, to engage with the deepest questions of life and find reasons for the hope which is within them (cf. 1 P 3:15). Religious education is, then, the core subject in a Catholic school[8].

So, in the words of this document the RE teaching in a Catholic school

will be enlightened by the faith of the school community and by the faith of the RE teacher. Its educational focus will be formed and enhanced by the vitality of faith. For some in the classroom, religious education may well be received as catechesis, deepening and enhancing their personal faith; for some it will be evangelisation, the first time they will have been presented, personally, with the truths of living faith. Nevertheless, its primary purpose is the step by step study of the mystery of Christ, the teaching of the Church and its application in daily life[9].

The authors refer precisely to awakening, nurturing and deepening the faith. Suggesting a kind not only of religious instruction, but the growth of faith. Whereas the intention of education is to develop the personhood of the pupil, the intention of catechesis is to deepen the personal faith of the pupil. There is a sense in which the Christian faith has as its ultimate intention the achievement of true humanity, and in that sense there may be little difference between Religious education and catechesis. However, in the reality of pluralistic modernity, where Christianity is conceived of as a religious belief system in distinction from other similar or perhaps dissimilar belief systems, a sharp distinction must be made between nurture of catechesis and Religious education, because even if the purpose of the catechesis is to humanise the pupil, the instruments of that humanisation will be very different.

A NATIONAL PROJECT OF CATECHESIS AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A very typical example of the ongoing process of searching for understanding of Religious Education in Catholic Schools in England and Wales is the „Living and Sharing our Faith. A National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education". Since its origin, this project is the most important pastoral project, which involved the Catholic community of England and Wales, and which coincided with the publication and the implementation of *Weaving the Web. A modular programme of Religious Education*. This document forms an integral part of this Project and represents the most controversial event in the history of Catholic religious education in England and Wales[10].

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[8] Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Religious Education in Catholic Schools*, London 2000, nr 4.

[9] Ivi, nr 8.

[10] Cf. *National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers*, *Induction Pack*, London 2003, p. 34; P. Purnell, *Our Faith Story*, London 1985; J. Gallagher, *Guidelines*, London 1986; P. Purnell, *Looking at the Future, Primary Religious Education in Home*, *School and Parish*, London 1982.

The Project was a response by the Catholic Church of England and Wales to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, and due to the establishment of the more recent catechetical document, the National Project in particular refers to *The General Catechetical Directory* and *Catechesi Tradendae*. The vision of the Project was to make significant developments in the theory and practice of catechesis and religious education. The emphasis has been put on education in faith as a life-long process with important specific foci for every stage. But rediscovery of adult catechesis made it possible to highlight the catechetical process which embraces several dimensions: belonging to a community, exploring and understanding the tradition, celebration and prayer, witness of life and service to the others, partnership and cooperation between home, parish, Catholic school, religious groups, and educational agencies. The distinction between evangelisation, catechesis and religious education underscores the special role Religious Education plays in Catholic schools. As a part of a review of the National Project, the Department of Education and Formation of the Bishops' Conference commissioned an evaluation of the Project, which has confirmed the importance of the work undertaken. Despite many critics, the immense work of the Project has been to supply the current needs of RE teachers, pupils of Catholic schools, parents, catechists and to prepare programmes, publications and directories[11].

According to the National Project, Religious Education in a Catholic School is based upon the presupposition that a Catholic school is a community of believers. Therefore, to teach the knowledge and to develop the skills for dealing intelligently with Christian doctrine and for helping youngsters to grow up, is as important as

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[11] See J. Russi, *Just Seniors. Teacher's Book*, London 1990; J. Russi, *Just Seniors* 1, London 1990; J. Russi, *Just Seniors* 2, London 1990; D. Magee, *Walking the Road. Reflecting on the Gospel Story*, London 1990; J. O'Shea, V. Cosstick, D. Lundy, *Parish Project. A Resource Book for Parishes to Review their Mission*, London 1992; *Rejoice One*, ed. A. Withe, A. Byrne, Ch. Malone, London 1993; *Rejoice Two*, ed. A. Withe, A. Byrne, Ch. Malone, London 1993; *Rejoice CD*, ed. A. Withe, A. Byrne, Ch. Malone, London 1993; D. Lundy, P. Cope, M. McKeone, *Where 2 or 3 are gathered. A reflection programme for young people 14–16*, London 1994; *The Pastoral Formation Team, Moments that Matters. Staring School*, Chelmsford 1995; *The Pastoral Formation Team, Moments that Matters. Preparing for the Sacrament of Eucharist*, Chelmsford 1995; *The Pastoral Formation Team, Moments that Matters. Preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation*, Chelmsford 1995; *The Pastoral Formation Team, Moments that Matters. Moving on*, Chelmsford 1995; *Walk with me. Catechist's Guide, Introduction*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1996; *Walk with me. Catechist's Guide, Year 1*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1996; *Walk with me. Catechist's Guide, Year 2*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1997; *Walk with me. Catechist's Guide, Year 3*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1997; *Walk with me. Catechist's Guide, Year 4*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1997; *On We Go – Children's Worksheets. Year 1*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1996; *On We Go – Children's Worksheets. Year 2*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1996; *On We Go – Children's Worksheets. Year 3*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1996; *On We Go – Children's Worksheets. Year 4*, ed. A. White, Great Wakering 1996; A. Byrne, Ch. Malone, C. Darby, A. White, *My Eucharist Journey*, London 1997; A. Byrne, Ch. Malone, C. Darby, A. White, *My Reconciliation Journey*, London 1997.

helping them to be mature members of Catholic Church[12]. Yet the Coordinators of the National Project realise that not the school, but the parish is a better place for initiation into the Christian faith[13]. Religious education has been presented as complementary to catechesis, so in the case of many pupils it will deepen and enrich their understanding and help them to live their faith. Therefore the aims presented in the RE programmes and textbooks are in the range of knowledge, forming attitudes and providing opportunities of prayer, celebration, and worship. The stress is put on the specific settings of RE and catechesis, and the need for a close cooperation between the different environments of faith education. The starting point and the full implementation of effective catechisation, and faith education should be family catechesis, which should take place in the special atmosphere of a community of people, who are a selfless gift to each other[14]. But catechesis in the parish is the foundation for the preparation and the celebration of Penance, first Holy Communion and Confirmation. The parish should also undertake more regular catechetical work with adults. All these settings are part of the global educational process leading to a more thoughtful faith[15].

PRESENT SITUATION

N. Pyke in T*he Tablet* points out:

The success of Catholic schools seems to present a contradiction: at a time when classrooms have never been so full, the churches they serve have never been so empty. For all their popularity with parents, and for all their much-praised success in generating communities of love and trust, often in defiance of the fragmented conditions immediately outside the school gate, Catholic schools have had no

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[12] Cf. G. Grace, *Catholic Schools. Mission, Market and Morality*, London 2003, p. 99–107; H. Johnson, *Using the Catholic Model: the consequences of the changing purpose of Anglican faith schools and the contrasting interpretations within liberalism*, „School Leadership and Management" 23,4 (2003), p. 471–473; *Catholic Education Service, Principles, Practices and Concern*, London 1996, p. 3; *Catholic Education Service, Evaluating the Distinctive Nature of Catholic School*, London 1999, p. 7, 8.

[13] Cf. J. O'Shea, V. Cosstick, D. Lundy, *Parish Project*, London 1992, p. 2–5; P. Rylands, *Sharing the Gift. Preparing to celebrate sacraments with families in the parish*, London 1989; A. Byrne, Ch. Malone, C. Darby, A. White, *My Eucharist Journey My Reconciliation Journey*, London 1997.

[14] See A. Bulen, *Parents, Chlidren and God*, Glasgow 1972; A. Bullen, *Happy Families*, Glasgow 1980; T. Castle, *Let's Celebrate*, London 1984; *The Pastoral Formation Team, Moments that Matters. Staring School*, Chelmsford 1995; *The Pastoral Formation Team, Moments that Matters. Preparing for the Sacrament of Eucharist*, Chelmsford 1995; *The Pastoral Formation Team, Moments that Matters. Preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation*, Chelmsford 1995; *The Pastoral Formation Team, Moments that Matters. Moving on*, Chelmsford 1995.

[15] Cf. E. Osewska, *Edukacja religijna w szkole katolickiej w Anglii i Walii w świetle* „Living and Sharing Our Faith. A National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education", Tarnów 2008, p. 240–288.

success at all in halting the precipitous downward slide in church attendance. Are they struggling, along with parishes and parents, to counter the advancing forces of secularism? Has a more liberal Church lost the confidence and authority required to transmit a sense of belonging? Is the decline in attendance to do with a perceived weakness in Catholicism's message, or a perceived attractiveness in the distractions and alternatives?[16].

Twenty years after the first publication[17] of the *National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education* presenting the Catholic Church's vision for Religious Education, catechesis, adult faith formation; the Catholic Education Service published *On The Way to Life*[18]*, which is an* investigation of how the Church can respond to the many challenges of modernity and post-modernity. Drawing attention to the „crisis of transmission" in the Catholic faith and pointing to the combined inability of home, parish and school to secure the sort of commitment to the Church from younger generations seen in the past. It argues for an open debate about what, for many, remains an extremely sensitive area. But it also insists that a positive outcome is entirely possible. Accepting the reality of modern life, it concludes, does not mean striking damaging compromises, let alone rolling over completely. Instead, the authors place their hope in the vision of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the promise of a distinctively „Catholic modernity"[19].

In one sense schools appear to be the main targets for the study. Schools and parishes are to be issued with explanatory materials. Yet schools barely make an appearance in the study – and this is not because their role in the crisis of transmission or the attempt to overcome it is taken as read. Far from it. Large secondary schools, after all, face great difficulty when it comes to the explicitly Catholic side of their mission. The most basic concepts – authority, the possibility of shared values, the possibility of community, or even the possibility of meaning itself – are often doubted. Catholic schools do valuable Catholic work, but the message tends to be implicit, demonstrated through the shared life of a school community rather than spelled out in the catechetical language of previous eras[20].

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[16] Cf. N. Pyke, *Catholicism for the Next Generation*, „The Tablet" 1 October 2005.

[17] Cf. P. Purnell, *Our Faith Story*, London 1985.

[18] Cf. Catholic Education Service, *On the Way to Life*, London 2005.

[19] Ivi.

[20] Cf. N. Pyke, *Catholicism for the Next Generation,* „The Tablet" 1 October 2005; *National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers, Broad Areas of Attainment in Religious Education*, London 1994; *National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers, Broad Areas of Attainment in Religious Education 16–19 years*, London 1996; *National Board of Religious Inspectors and Advisers, Guidelines for the Assessment, Recording and Reporting of Religious Education*, London 1998.

CONCLUSION

The responsibilities for Religious Education in Catholic schools are described in many educational and Church documents. However, within the new context it is now more crucial than ever that Religious Education and Worship are seen as an integral part of the whole school curriculum. It is not Religious Education or Worship which gives the Catholic school its distinctive nature, but the underlying faith and values which permeate the whole curriculum and find expression there, as well as in the context of RE and the celebration of Worship. The whole Catholic school curriculum and environment must encourage teachers and pupils to respond to Jesus Christ' challenge.

A short presentation of religious education and catechesis in England and Wales illustrates the importance of a searching for an interpretation of the emerging authentic forms of Christian faith. Each event is a challenge for exploring God's presence at the core of present social, cultural and religious evolution. The Catholic Church engagement with contemporary society and culture is not optional. Entering into dialogue with all those who search for meaning and work at the interpretation of religious traditions may be crucial for the future of religious education in Catholic schools in England and Wales. The positive solution requires an ecclesial community which is ready to take the risk of „translating", „interpreting", and „creating the living language" as a task of the religious education process.

REFLECTIONS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND
Summary

The distinctions between catechesis and religious education are recognised in the official Church documents on education, but still are causing problems in Catholic education theory and practice. The author of this article offers some reflections on the research into how far the distinction between catechesis and religious education is has been recognised by the Catholic education theorists with particular reference to *The National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education*. The immense work of the Project has been to supply current needs of RE teachers, pupils of Catholic schools, parents, catechists. Yet, the present situation requires an ecclesial community which is ready to take the risk of „creating the living language" as a task of the religious education process.

REFLEKSJE DOTYCZĄCE EDUKACJI RELIGIJNEJ I KATECHEZY W SZKOŁACH KATOLICKICH W ANGLII
Streszczenie

Różnice pomiędzy katechezą i edukacją religijną są zdefiniowane w oficjalnych dokumentach Kościoła katolickiego dotyczących edukacji i wychowania, ale wciąż rodzą problemy w teorii i praktyce edukacji katolickiej. Autorka niniejszego artykułu przedsta-

wia refleksje na temat postrzegania różnic pomiędzy katechezą i edukacją religijną przez teoretyków edukacji katolickiej ze szczególnym odniesieniem do *The National Project of Catechesis and Religious Education*. Ogromna praca związana z projektem jest odpowiedzią na potrzeby nauczycieli religii, uczniów szkół katolickich, rodziców i katechetów. Jednak obecna sytuacja wymaga, aby wspólnota eklezjalna była gotowa w procesie edukacji religijnej podjąć ryzyko stworzenia języka adekwatnego do opisu zachodzących procesów.

Keywords: Catholic school, catechesis, England, religious education
Słowa kluczowe: Anglia, edukacja religijna, katecheza, szkoła katolicka