

“CATECHESIS & RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A PLURALIST SOCIETY” REVISITED

By Dr Gerard Rummery fsc



This paper is the keynote address given at the Second National Symposium on Religious Education and Ministry, Sancta Sophia College, Sydney, Wednesday 18th April 2001

Introduction.

In speaking to the above topic doing I am re-visiting the book published in 1975 written out of my doctoral thesis presented to Lancaster University in October 1972. I believe that it may help to situate the original thesis somewhat better if I begin by stating just how I happened to concentrate on this particular topic.

In January 1969, after 14 years of teaching in a secondary school and another five years in the preparation of the young De La Salle Brothers of the Australian province as teachers, I had finished a M.Ed thesis at Sydney University as a preparation for doctoral studies. I arranged that following a session of personal renewal in 1969 at the International Centre of the De La Salle Brothers in Rome, I would begin doctoral studies in England on the topic *Some Philosophical Assumptions underlying the Training of Teachers*. In the course of my Rome experience, however, I had time to reflect on what had been an underlying concern of mine for some years: why had I been a successful teacher of Religion, English Literature and History to matriculation students in Melbourne but had never felt that I had achieved the same result with the same students in their continuing interest in and adherence to their Catholic faith.

Someone who helped me address this question was Brother Michel Sauvage, a recently deceased French Brother, whose 1962 doctoral thesis on *Catechesis and the Laity* remains the most complete historical and theological analysis of the vocation of the Teaching Brother. It was my reading of Sauvage's thesis in French which led me to a deeper understanding of catechesis and of the historical importance of the role of the Brother as catechist. This concern led me to begin my studies at the Institute of Education at London University with a MA thesis on *The Concept of Moral Education in Catechesis and the Concept of Moral Education in a Pluralist Society*. You will easily understand how my subsequent doctoral thesis on catechesis and religious education grew out of the many unanswered questions which I encountered in struggling with the MA thesis. This conviction was strengthened when, as a delegate to the important International Catechetical Congress held in Rome in 1971, I discovered that some US delegates to the congress seemed intent on translating the word *catechesis* in the newly published *General Catechetical Directory* as *religious education*.

REVISITING THE THESIS

In the Introduction to *Catechesis and Religious Education in a Pluralist Society* (Dwyer, E.J., 1975) I wrote:

“Anyone acquainted at first hand with the teaching of religion in schools today is aware of the controversy which has accompanied the introduction of new methods and new texts or the retention of the old... The argument of this book is that much of the confusion arises from a failure to appreciate the important distinctions which exist between the concept of catechesis as such and the concept of religious education as it is variously interpreted in the English-speaking world.”

The thesis of 1972 argued for a more carefully nuanced attention to significant changes in language which suggested that the traditional assumptions about the teaching of religion in the separate Catholic schools of a pluralist society needed to be looked at. All 19th century attempts at national systems of education in England, Ireland and Australia had foundered on the rock of the various understandings of what was meant by a ‘religious education’ until eventually the various Australian education acts of the 1870’s ended up being formulated as “free, compulsory and secular.” Now that schooling in western style societies up to a certain age is obligatory and in many countries fully or partly financed by the state, sociological studies show that parents who choose to send their children to Catholic schools do so for a wide variety of reasons, one of which (among others) is for them to receive instruction in the Catholic faith. But my experience and that of many secondary school teachers at the end of the 1960’s was that such religious instruction was usually seen by many students as “boring” and “irrelevant”. My attempt to express why this was so argued that increasingly, for a whole complex number of reasons, the secondary school classroom in a city school was no longer the extension of the parish primary school where one could simply assume that the teacher and the students were engaged in that “dialogue of believers” which was the traditional assumption underlying the renewed use of the term *catechesis*. On the other hand, from my M.Ed study in Sydney on the origin and content of the famous Joint Pastoral of 1979 issued by Archbishop Roger Bede Vaughan and his suffragan bishops against the proposed New South Wales Public Education Act, I had always retained the impression that one of the most important aspects of their insistence on no public education without religion was an argument for some form of religious education to be offered to **all** children

I wished therefore to draw attention to the educational value and richness of the broader term *religious education*, understood as education in that distinct form of thought and awareness which is religion. I acknowledge just how much my own thinking about religious education was influenced by study of the phenomenological approach to religion, pioneered in English by my supervisor, the recently deceased Ninian Smart. I believed then, and continue to believe, that the traditional Catholic arguments for religion as an essential part of education, which were advanced for separate Catholic schools in the late 19th century, needed to be looked at again in a much broader fashion. My feeling was that the important call for greater openness to the contemporary world commended by Pope Paul VI’s use of the word “dialogue” in his 1964 letter *Ecclesiam Suam* and strengthened by the second Council document on the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, was an invitation to Christian educators to look outwards beyond the limits of their own church so as to educate young people into a deeper understanding of the basic role of religion in human life. This was a call not only for a wider ecumenism but also in the long run for a deeper consideration of religions other than Catholic Christianity. I emphasised the important shift in meaning brought by the expression “education in (the) faith”, the hallmark of the post-war French catechetical movement. J.P. Liégé’s seminal article of 1964 *From catechism to catechesis* had summed up this important change of direction in which catechetical thinking and practice in France had already moved in the post-war years. In the light of the document *Dignitatis humanae* (ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM) from the Vatican Council with its emphasis that “the act of faith of its very nature is a free act”(No.10, Flannery ed. 1996), I argued that those responsible for the organisation and direction of Catholic schools needed to re-consider the role of compulsory attendance in activities and at ceremonies which supposed a shared faith in the participants.

Re-visiting this thesis, therefore, leads me to note some of the principal developments of the catechetical movement since 1972. The topic is vast. Not everything that has happened in these 29 years can be treated so I have chosen first to mention briefly what I consider some ten events and documents which are the necessary reference points on the catechetical landscape of what has become an even more pluralist society and world than it was at the time of writing.

- i. the Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelisation in the Modern World” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*) of Pope Paul VI in 1975, in my view, the most important Church document since the Council ;
- ii. the document of Jacques Audinet, *Catéchèse: Action d’Eglise et Culture*, presented to the Assembly of French Bishops at Lourdes in 1975, translated into English and published in “Our Apostolate” in August 1976 under the title *Catechesis: the Church building the Church in a particular culture*;
- iii. the 1977 Roman Synod entitled *Catechetics in Our Time*, the Message from the Synod and the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* of 1979;
- iv. the emergence of “Liberation theology” in Latin America in the light of the Medellin and Puebla conferences and some of the resulting implications for catechesis ;
- v. some personal reflections on the publication of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992;
- vi. the *General Catechetical Directory of 1971*, the encouragement of local catechetical directories and the revised *General Catechetical Directory* of 1998;
- vii. the significance of the three situations for mission characterised by Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* (THE MISSION OF THE REDEEMER) in 1990 as first, the mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term, second, the mission in solidly established practising communities, and third, the intermediate situation of those traditionally Christian groups who now “live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel”: it was to this third group that the Pope addressed the idea of a “new evangelisation”;
- viii. the shifts in emphasis which saw the Vatican’s *Secretariat for Non-Christians* transformed into the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* and the symbolic importance of the meeting of the present Pope to pray for peace with ten other religious leaders at Assisi on 27th October 1986;
- ix. the continuing saga whereby since 1955, either through the intervention of Vatican or local authorities, almost every national or international catechetical centre in the English-speaking world has at some time or another, been shut down or had some of its teachers banned;
- x. the continuing efforts of conservative groups in the Church to oppose new texts of which they do not approve even when these new texts are expressly written out of the Vatican Council’s own documents as the Church attempts to renew itself in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

Against this rich background of events and documents in a pluralist world I wish to reflect on the following six topics:

1. the importance of noting significant changes in language as new ways of seeing reality;
2. the movement from the certainties of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to the present Pope’s frequent use of the expression the ‘Aeropagus of the Modern Age’;
3. the importance of the Catholic School as ‘Church’;
4. ecumenical and interreligious dialogue;
5. liberation theology and the continuing conflict over catechetical centres and materials;
6. the *General Catechetical Directory* of 1998.

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTINUING SHIFTS IN LANGUAGE

I believe that we can trace the main lines of the catechetical movement in Catholic schools in the English-speaking world by paying attention to some of the changes in terminology which have been adopted over the past 50 years. Here is the beginning of my litany, broadly chronological from my childhood through my years as a teacher. You may wish to enlarge the list from your own experience:

- Christian Doctrine or Religious Knowledge
- Catechism and Bible History;

- Religious Instruction or simply RI;
- *Catechism Workbooks* for Years 4-9 1954 - 1970;
- Freaan’s *Commentary on the Catechism*;
- Sheahan’s *Apologetics* ;
- Maher’s *Catholic Social Principles*;
- Young Christian Students groups based on Cardyn’s methodology of “See, Judge and Act!”
- *My Way to God* (John F. Kelly’s Australian Catechism), especially the Teachers’ books;
- *Living with Christ* (from St Mary’s Press, USA), a 4 year secondary school course for years 9-12 introduced into some Australian secondary schools in the 1960’s;
- Christian Living Camps as developed in Australia in the 1960’s;
- *Come Alive* (1968);
- Religious Education;
- Divinity and Theology (in England);
- World Religions;
- *Making Moral Decisions*;
- the Moral Education movement in U.K., Canada and U.S.A;
- Biblical Studies;
- Campus Ministry

Two remarks are in order. The first is the clear shift from a mainly doctrinal content orientation by means of an instructional model, based almost exclusively on the catechism, to a greater use of the Bible and a much greater emphasis on how Catholic faith is to be lived. The second remark is the growing distance between the original instructional model and a more broadly based educational approach which is less prescriptive, more aware of different personal and/or family options with regard to the way the Catholic faith is being lived, more of an invitation to personal commitment through a variety of practices and activities. Perhaps this ‘distancing’ is seen most clearly today in a general reluctance about being too dogmatic about anything. It may account as well for the popularity of ‘New Age’ texts and the self-selection approach to certain aspects of Eastern religions, especially Buddhism.

What I have called ‘distancing’ is not peculiar to religious education but can be seen as related to the general ‘retreat’ of religion from its previous position in public life. In a somewhat ironical review of a recent book called *Un piccolo ecclesiale illustrato* [AN ILLUSTRATED BOOKLET ON THE CHURCH] by Roberto Beretta, the influential Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera* of August 18th 2000 noted the following changes with regard to some changes in Church terminology in Italy:

PREACHING OR SERMON	HOMILY
PREACHER	HOMILIST
BAPTISM	BAPTISMAL OPTION
MASS	LITURGICAL CELEBRATION THE LORD’S SUPPER THE BREAKING OF BREAD CELEBRATORY ACTIVITY
CONVERSION	METANOIA
ATHEIST	NON BELIEVER
SERVICE	DIAKONIA
FIRST COMMUNION CONFIRMATION	SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION
PARADISE	FULLNESS OF LIFE [PLEROMA]
CHARITY	TREATING THE OTHER IN THE SAME WAY AS ONESELF
CATECHISM	CATECHESIS
GIFT	OBLATIONARY PERSPECTIVE

We could note that at one level the change in terms can indicate important changes in theological or pastoral perspectives indicating a genuine effort to renew the importance of the actions they describe. To the newspaper’s reviewer, however, they suggested rather a ‘weakening’ or even a ‘euphemistic’ way of attempting to soften the way in which prescriptive things were formerly known. What is striking about the right-hand terms is the greater respect for personal freedom: faith is seen for the gift it is and “the act of faith is seen of its very nature to be free’, as the Council document *Dignitatis humanae* (ON HUMAN DIGNITY) expresses it. Another way of describing these changes in vocabulary is to see them as indicating that rupture between faith and its traditional forms of expression through religious practices and modern day culture. No.20 of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EVANGELISATION IN THE MODERN WORLD) states baldly that “the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times.” Rather than a ‘retreat’ I think that these shifts in language could be read also as a sign of vitality in a search for a better contemporary expression of matters of great significance.

2. FROM THE CERTAINTY OF THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO THE “AEROPAGUS OF THE MODERN AGE”

Under this title, I have chosen to indicate how the desire expressed in the 1977 Synod “Catechetics in Our Time” to have formulated and published a new catechism for the universal church eventually found its fulfilment through a resolution of the extraordinary Synod of 1985, called to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council.

“Very many have expressed the desire that a catechism or compendium of all catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals be composed, that it might be, as it were, a point of reference for the catechisms or compendiums that are prepared in various regions. The presentation of doctrine must be biblical and liturgical. It must be sound doctrine suited to the present life of Christians.” (Final Report of the Extraordinary Synod, 7th December, 1985)

As far back as the Roman Catechetical Congress of 1950, there had been voices calling for a new catechism. The first important national initiative immediately after the Vatican Council was the *Dutch Catechism*, the text of which, like that of the original Catechism of the Council of Trent, was in continuous prose, not in question and answer form. Translations were quickly made into other European languages. The gentle dialogical approach of the Preface, redolent of the Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, (JOY AND HOPE) was addressed equally to committed believers as to fellow pilgrims seeking the meaning of life. It was significant that the authors set out in their Preface “to throw light on present-day questions by means of the gospel.”

The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has received its share both of applause and of criticism. Some commentators have wondered why an instrument which originated with Gutenberg and the printing press and the thrust of the Counter-Reformation should be given such a high priority as an important pastoral tool in the post-modernist era where other forms of communication have become so much more important. Certainly, it is difficult to read the literature following its publication without feeling that it is impossible for one book to satisfy so many diverse expectations. Perhaps the most important conclusion which can be drawn is that any one document which attempts to provide answers to such a wide range of matters concerning human beings and their relationship to God can have coherence only so long as it remains within the isolation of theology as a perfect complete system apart from the insights of other disciplines, especially the human sciences of psychology and sociology. The Catechism has been singled out by exegetes for its tendency to adopt a functional approach to Scripture, by dogmatic theologians for its confusion of Christologies and by moral theologians for its failure to note “the three major shifts from law to responsibility, from the particular moral act to the agent, and from the pursuit of an individualistic ‘perfection’ to loving service of the neighbour” (Spohn, W, S.J., *The Moral Vision of the Catechism*, p.138 in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, Harper San Francisco,

1990). Secondary school teachers working with senior students who are following the extraordinary advances in cosmology via the internet find the Catechism’s approach both inadequate and unnecessarily limiting. Teachers and catechists who meet young people coming from very diverse situations as regards the marital situations of their parents frequently experience just how forbidding and peremptory the official catechism answers can appear to be.

My concern is that where the Catechism is given an exaggerated importance it too easily draws catechetical programmes and pastoral programmes back to a post-Reformation mentality quite out of step with the more recent emphases of Church documents and papal pronouncements. Controlling or attempting to control what is seen as *orthodoxy* can easily override an equally important *orthopraxis*. This is exactly what the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* warned us against:

“It is useless to play off orthopraxis against orthodoxy. Christianity is inseparably both.” (op.cit. No.20)

Yet my personal experience of recent years with catechetical materials produced by printing firms sponsored by my own congregation in Spain and in the United States has been that there are self-appointed vigilante groups who attend book-launchings to insist on judging material mainly by the number of explicit references to the Catechism. Such literal fidelity to texts can be seen too often as self-satisfying or even arrogant, especially where the footnotes can sometimes give the impression that the Church had anticipated all today’s questions long ago.

This remark about placing too much emphasis on the Catechism is not simply a theoretical concern. Some weeks ago I was present at Sunday Mass in a country diocese and heard read the bishop’s letter in which he announces a two-year programme of 14 instructions at Sunday Masses from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I am not contesting the bishop’s right as first teacher of the faith in his diocese but I am sorry that he did not benefit from hearing some spontaneous reactions from some members of his congregation outside the cathedral. I am even more concerned with the imbalance which this suggests with regard to the overall pastoral plan of the diocese. The Council document on Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) stressed the importance of the homily based on the word of God heard in the believing assembly. In his most recent Apostolic Letter *At the Beginning of the New Millennium* (NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE, 6th January 2000) Pope John Paul has a paragraph entitled *Listening to the Word*:

“There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed *listening to the word of God*. Ever since the Second Vatican Council underlined the pre-eminent role of the word of God in the life of the Church, great progress has certainly been made in devout listening to Sacred Scripture and attentive study of it... But it is above all the work of evangelisation and catechesis which is drawing new life from attentiveness to the word of God.” (No.39)

Returning to sermons on doctrinal matters is returning to the strategy of the Council of Trent and depriving the faithful of the nourishment of reflection on the word of God. From the viewpoint of the history of catechesis since 1936 it is as though the emphasis of Jungmann, Colomb, Hofinger and Nebreda and so many others on a return to the gospel itself as the basis for effective catechesis, on the need to discover the person of Jesus himself first of all and not some condensed theological formula, has been bypassed!

If those who advocated the Catechism of the Catholic Church were looking for greater certainty their expectations must have been somewhat overshadowed by the wider acceptance and use of expressions like “de-christianisation” or “secularism” to indicate the reality of what had been traditionally Christian societies. This perception had already led Pope John Paul in 1990 to set out the three distinct pastoral situations of No.33 of *Redemptoris missio* (THE MISSION OF THE REDEEMER) and his sustained use in a number of documents through the 1990’s of the term *Areopagus* to indicate what he saw as the complex situation in which many people live today. The *Areopagus* incident described in *Acts of the Apostles* 17: 16-34 seems to me especially significant because, although Paul adjusts his proclamation of Jesus

Christ to the audience of Epicureans and Stoics, he receives nothing more than mockery from some and polite interest from others. In *The Mission of the Redeemer* No.37c, the Pope takes the *Areopagus* “as the symbol of the new sectors in which the Gospel must be proclaimed.” He goes on to specify first “the world of communications” but then speaks of many other forms by giving as examples, “commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples, the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities, the advancement of women and children, safeguarding the created world.”

The Pope, along with many other commentators, seems to be aiming to counter not so much any marked antagonism towards the Church as such but rather a general agnosticism or apathy towards organised religion in any shape or form. It is easy to forget this. As an example I recall that last year a French colleague of mine teaching in a Catholic school told me of a teenager who showed great interest in reading the Gospel of Matthew for the first time, asked many questions and was most enthusiastic about the Sermon on the Mount and the basis of the Last Judgement but who simply laughed when he came to the Resurrection narrative and was assured that Christians really believed that Jesus rose from the dead! I suggest that this young man needs something more than a watertight catechism definition!

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL AS ‘CHURCH.’

It seems to be a common enough experience of a growing number of school teachers in Catholic schools today that the Catholic school itself is the only regular experience of ‘church’ for many young people. This is so, I believe, because the wide variety of activities achieved through campus ministers, religious education staffs and the overall organisation of the school can offer various kinds of religious experiences which the limitations of time, space and qualified personnel make extremely difficult in many parishes. The contrast between some parish churches and the Christian activities carried out in the school is often quite startling. In the school, young people are often closely involved in many activities which invite them to express their faith. One of the most common would be the invitation to prepare a class or school Mass by studying the scriptural texts, preparing appropriate hymns, formulating the Prayer of the Faithful, organising the presentation at the Offertory and so on. All of this is in stark contrast with what many of them seem to experience in some parish settings on a Sunday where they often feel themselves passive spectators imprisoned in benches. How can the Catholic school and the parish be more complementary?

This limitation to the “free and active participation” to which all are invited by the Vatican Council document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is particularly so with regard to the nourishment which the same document expects from the reading and understanding of the word of God read in the vernacular and addressed through the homily, not the sermon. All who have lived with radio and television for most of their lives are easily critical of the way they are sometimes addressed in church. This is especially true when there is very little attention given to ensuring that the word of God is presented to us in a way that has contemporary relevance and meaning. Let me give you an example from a few months back. The reading was from the Book of Daniel and the responsorial psalm was the psalm beginning “By the waters of Babylon there we sat and wept.” In a morning congregation of some 20-30 persons, it would have been so much more relevant if the reader had not been restricted to saying simply, “A reading from the Book of Daniel.” At a time when our media was telling us daily of the plight of some 100,000 persons living in a forced exile in West Timor, how much more relevant and full of meaning it might have been if the reader or celebrant had said. *I wonder what it’s like for the 100,000 people living in exile in West Timor today? How do they feel when they think about the separated members of their families? How do they feel when they are taunted by those who guard them in the refugee camps? Today’s first reading and the psalm response to the reading are about something similar which happened to the Jewish people taken into exile in Babylon for 70 years.* Yet this is exactly what I experienced as an introduction the very same day when I attended a class Mass which an experienced RE teacher had prepared with a group of Year 9 boys. The celebrant and the boys exchanged ideas for about 10 minutes on these same readings which now had a present tense and a relevance. The word of

God really did resonate in this believing community because an active participation by those present was encouraged and made possible. I had no doubt that this class Mass was an experience of faith at many levels for all those who participated. Perhaps you are already wondering with me whether the Eucharist celebrated in this way in school is really any preparation for wanting to be a part of a traditional parish liturgy. Certainly, the efforts currently being made in many countries to limit sacramental programmes to what can be done through the parish, seems to be based on a policy of trying to ensure greater parental involvement and thereby strengthening parish life for the future. I wonder, however, whether too great an emphasis on the parish may not be sometimes short-sighted and sociologically flawed. The school is not the parish but it can be an important ally. It has been, and can continue to be, one of the strongest pastoral arms of the Church in educating the young. In my experience prior to 1989 of working in the former Eastern-bloc countries with members of my own congregation who had been imprisoned in Slovakia, Czech, Hungary and Romania and seen their schools closed for over 40 years, I was struck by the Communists’ conviction that Catholic schools as such were a threat to their ideology and therefore all such schools were banned. Members of religious teaching congregations were dispersed after their release from imprisonment and forbidden to set up their communities again. Churches could remain open but not Catholic schools! The Brothers of my congregation in Vietnam, Myanmar and Cuba today may live in community but may not reopen their schools.

A greater emphasis in catholic schools on faith being expressed in action

If the modern catechetical movement has stressed the importance of **proposing** rather than **imposing** activities which assume faith in the participants, it has done so because of the essential relationship between the act of faith and personal freedom as expressed in the following citation from the Council document *Of Human Dignity*:

“One of the key truths in catholic teaching... is that human beings should respond to the word of God freely, and that therefore nobody is to be forced to embrace the faith against their will. The act of faith of its very nature is a free act... It is therefore fully in accord with the nature of faith that in religious matters every form of human coercion should be excluded.” (Flannery ed., 1998, No.10).

Was Kierkegaard musing on the nature of faith when he wrote,

“Just as important as the truth, and even more important, is the way in which truth is received. It would not be much of an achievement to lead millions of people to the truth if by the very way in which they were led, they effectively found themselves outside of it.”(cited by Jean Le Du in *Cette impossible Pédagogie*, Fayard-Mame 1971, p.132)

Since Jungmann’s seminal thesis of 1936, the modern catechetical movement has been concerned to see God’s great saving plan of salvation and to move away from an historical emphasis which had been too easily reduced to the learning of catechetical formulae. The important *Message* from the 1977 Synod on Catechesis summarised the specific nature of the pedagogy of faith in the following paragraph:

“In all catechesis one must always unite indissolubly and in an integrated manner: knowledge of the Word of God; celebration of faith in the sacraments; the proclamation of faith in daily life.”

I believe that one of the present strengths of much catechetical activity is the way in which the baptismal faith of our young people is being invited to grow through putting their Christian beliefs into action. Quantitatively and qualitatively many Catholic schools have developed what are called service or outreach activities in a way which is much stronger than what was being done a generation ago. The most striking aspect of this which I have been privileged to see in many parts of Europe and North America in recent years is the challenge to faith development which underlies the actions taken. While

there is a very conscious effort to offer young people ‘exposure’ to social problems and to encourage their participation in helping others in such activities as soup kitchens, the plight of refugees, meals on wheels etc. the best programmes are those which encourage deep reflection through an ‘unpacking’ of the experience. Research in the United States has shown conclusively that failure to ‘unpack’ such experiences with the young can simply reinforce negative stereotypes based on ethnic and linguistic differences. What does ‘unpacking the experience’ mean in practice and how can it be said to aid the deepening of faith? Allow me to use a particular example to make my point.

In February of 1999 I was visiting a school of my congregation and attending the first class of the day. On the previous evening, a group of 15 years olds with their teacher had had their first experience of serving in a soup kitchen in the inner city of San Francisco. They had helped with the preparation, served at table and helped with the washing-up. But there had been an unexpected hiccup. When the last two boys entrusted with the serving had finished their work and went to eat their own meal the only place to sit down was at the end of a long table where there were already six of the men whom they had served. When they did eventually sit down there, the men already at the table simply got up and left them by themselves. This was the burning question which dominated the class meeting on the following morning: Why had the men walked away and left them there? “We felt rejected” said one of the students, “after all we had done for them.” “I wonder why the men walked away?” asked the teacher. There was a long silence until one of the students said, “I guess they felt that we in our designer jeans, loafers and clean clothes were too different from them.” A very lively discussion ensued with the teacher asking as the period bell sounded “Well, what about next week? Should we go back?” The class, almost with one voice affirmed, “Yes, we’ve got to go back!” This is what I mean by ‘unpacking’. In a later discussion in the same class on chapter 25 of Matthew’s account of the Last Judgement, one of the class ventured to say, “It says here that what you do for someone else will be remembered when you come to be judged but it doesn’t say anything about being thanked at the time you do it!” I think that this is a down to earth example of how a good RE teacher can help to develop the faith of young people where faith is seen as a ‘doing’ word which tests beliefs through action. I recall a Religious Education coordinator who told me late last year of two Year 12 students who, having opted not to go on the class retreat, agreed to spend a few days working in the local Saint Vincent de Paul Centre instead and came back fired up for their religion more obviously than those who went on the retreat. Faith must not simply be reduced to learning formulae: faith is also a doing word!

There is a further comment on service activities which is worth making. For many years in the United States, such activities were obligatory in many Catholic schools, a requirement for being eligible for the High School diploma. In a number of schools this requirement has now been dropped. The reason for the change is usually a feeling that there should be more emphasis on invitation and on proposal, because of the faith-sharing activities – prayer beforehand, scriptural reflection as part of the de-briefing afterwards – which are felt to be an essential part of service.

Relevant to this same topic is the importance of so many volunteer programmes organised by secondary schools and universities in which young people give of their time and expertise to work with less fortunate people. This is one of the most important movements of our time. While many such groups have no apparent religious motivation as such, it is important for Catholic schools and institutions to offer the challenges of such service as part of faith development for the senior and after-school years.

Religious education courses for years 11 and 12

I venture into this controversial area simply from a theoretical viewpoint in pursuing the implications today of my revisiting the words ‘religious education’ and ‘pluralist society’ against the background of the already cited assertion from *Dignitatis humanae* that “in religious matters every form of human coercion should be excluded.” Catholic schools in the various Australian states now have the option of taking some very good courses of religious education at Years 11 and 12. A real difficulty appears to arise where the more gifted students take academic courses usually well taught by specialist teachers

but where the less gifted students are required to follow a less academic course prescribed by Church authorities. It seems that many students resent this imposition for a wide variety of reasons. Students feel that this compulsory subject narrows their choice of subjects. Certainly, many non-specialist teachers who have to take charge of these courses seem to encounter difficulties similar to those experienced by their students and regret that their last contact with students in matters religious should be the source of so much friction. Among other reasons given is the practical one that it appears to some students to be difficult to score a high mark in this subject. Certainly this attitude is easy enough to understand in this age of growing competitive ‘league tables’ based on examination results. My concern would be that it is important that young people have the opportunity to be confronted with some of the profound religious questions which confront all human beings but I’m sure that experienced teachers learned a long time ago that force-feeding has never worked.

4. ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

In 1964 when the Second Vatican Council was still in session and somewhat uncertain of how to proceed, the newly-elected Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, the major part of which pointed the way forward for the Council by the introduction of the word **dialogue**. The practical implications of this approach can be seen in the second document on the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, and in the decision to continue the collegial movement of the second Vatican Council by regular Synods of Bishops every three years.

It is this approach through dialogue which has given such impetus to the ecumenical movement. Progress has been made at a number of levels, particularly by face to face meetings between the last two Popes and the leaders of other Christian churches. The present Pope has made this inter-church dialogue one of the priorities of his pontificate as shown in his encyclical letter *That they may all be one* (Ut Unum Sint) and in his more recent letter welcoming the new millennium. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in its *Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* has some very original and challenging paragraphs for Catholic Universities and Schools which show just what has been achieved since the Vatican Council.

My concern in this paper, however, is to emphasise especially the importance of the growing importance of Interreligious Dialogue. In a first step, Pope Paul VI in 1964 set up what was then called the *Secretariat for Non-Christians* as something quite distinct from the *Council for Ecumenism*. Pope John Paul II transformed the *Secretariat for Non-Christians* into its present title of the *Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*. In 1984, this Secretariat for Non-Christians published a remarkable document entitled *The Attitude of the Catholic Church to the Believers of Other Religions*, generally referred to in English as *Dialogue and Mission*. The ideal of dialogue is expressed in these words:

“Dialogue refers not only to speaking but also to all aspects of interreligious relationships with persons and communities of various beliefs so as to come to learn more about one another and to profit by mutual enrichment.”

The document breaks new grounds in its indication of the four places where dialogue is to be pursued:

- the dialogue of life through presence to one another;
- the dialogue of shared works;
- the dialogue of specialists;
- the dialogue of religious experience, especially the sharing of prayer.

In its discussion of Mission, the document emphasises the traditional missionary call for conversion with respect for what it calls “the supreme law of conscience,” respect for the Spirit who inspires conversion, emphasises the mutuality essential to such dialogue and affirms the importance of active collaboration in building a real peace. In 1992, the Secretariat published its much more ground-breaking

document *Dialogue and Proclamation* which argued that these expressions were complementary: one was not more important than the other, but both were to be pursued as essential to the Church’s mission.

In 1995, Pope John Paul II speaks in the same vein in No. 28 of *Ut Unum Sint* (THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE) where he characterised dialogue as follows:

“Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts’.... There is a closer relationship between prayer and dialogue. Deeper and more conscious prayer makes dialogue more fruitful. If on the one hand, dialogue depends on prayer, prayer also becomes the ever more mature fruit of dialogue.”

Earlier, on 27th October 1986, in what some commentators have seen as one of the most important symbolic religious events of the last century, Pope John Paul II, allegedly against the advice of some curial officials, had stood at Assisi as one with ten other religious leaders and prayed for world peace. On the following day he spoke as follows to the assembled Cardinals:

“In every authentic religious experience, the most characteristic expression is prayer. Because of the human spirit’s constitutive openness to God’s action urging it to self-transcendence, we can hold that every authentic prayer is called forth by the holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person.” (*L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition No.37-16, 7th September 1998.)

In the same edition of *L’Osservatore Romano* which summarises his teaching on the relationship between Christianity and other religions, Pope John Paul II observes:

“Normally, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their own conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their Saviour.” (ibid)

I think that this development of both ecumenical and interreligious dialogue has very important implications for both catechesis and religious education in Catholic schools in this country. There is a long tradition of Christians other than Catholic preferring to send their children to Catholic schools. As we and our young people become much more aware in our one world of the bases of various religious conflicts in the Balkans, Indonesia and the Philippines I am sure we deplore the tendency of our syndicated media to portray Islam, for example, mainly in fundamentalist terms. All Australians in our growing relationships at all levels with Asia need to be better informed and educated with regard to the great religions which have their spiritual home there. Some experienced theologians see greater attention to interreligious dialogue as the necessary agenda for the Church in this new millennium.

5. LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND THE CONTINUING CONFLICT OVER CATECHETICAL CENTRES AND MATERIALS

The fifth of the important international catechetical congresses between 1960 and 1971 was held in Latin America in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968 just as the term *liberation theology* was coming to be used, especially through the seminal work of Gustavo Gutierrez. It was the period of the generals and the *juntas* throughout much of Latin America, a period in which many people were to know oppression, injustices and right-wing death squads. In some countries catechists and those who worked in the ‘basic groups’ of the time were targeted as ‘communist.’ Many were to know imprisonment and torture and some countries in their zeal to control and censor texts found it necessary to suppress Mary’s *Magnificat* since it spoke about ‘putting down the proud and raising up the humble.’ Liberation theology has had a lasting impact on the catechetical movement. A Latin American catechist,

participant in the Medellin Congress, saw Medellin “as a prophetic cry that brought joy and enthusiasm to many: it was also a prophetic cry that frightened many, inside and outside of the Church.” (Genaro Saenz de Ugarte, *From Medellin to Puebla in Word in Life*, February 1982, page 4). The ensuing controversy over the accusation that any form of social analysis used in liberation theology was necessarily Marxist led to continuing tensions, violence, fear and mistrust, some of it still unresolved. But it put squarely on the catechetical agenda the importance of the Church standing solidly for the rights of the poor.

The controversy over Liberation theology was another incident in a much longer conflict. It is significant that since the 1955 suspension from his teaching position in Paris of the great French catechetical pioneer, Joseph Colomb, the efforts of other catechetical innovators and of catechetical centres in different parts of the Catholic world have been viewed with suspicion and even downright condemnation by local or Vatican authorities. Apart from some Australian examples known to you all, suffice it to mention from an international perspective the closure in 1973 of the *Corpus Christi Catechetical Centre* in London, the wholesale resignation of the staff of the *Lumen Vitae* Centre in Brussels in 1975 over the Vatican insistence on the dismissal of the Salesian Girardi who was teaching Liberation Theology (thereby prompting also the resignation of the founder Georges Delcuve SJ), the unwillingness of some 16 Irish bishops to employ in their dioceses any graduates of the *Mount Oliver Pastoral Centre* at Dundalk, the objections from Vatican authorities on material produced under the authority of the French hierarchy in their *Pierres vivantes* (Living Stones) material, and the sustained attack on the authors of the catechetical materials coming from the *National Project* (“Weaving the Web”) in England today.

I believe that Jacques Audinet’s article of 1975 already referred to gives the clearest explanation as to why this **was**, and I believe **is**, inevitable when he says:

“... catechesis is always localised and particularised. It is, at a given point in time, in a given society, the act by which the Church community attempts to give the message she bears, with the help of the very means which the culture of that society offers. The work of catechesis, then, seems like the work of the Church community here and now attempting to articulate the language, symbols, values, customs of a period or a group by means of the Word which she bears. Our contention is that it is this *articulation* which is today in question. The manner in which it has been carried out in recent centuries and in which we have inherited it, is challenged by the changes which have occurred during the present time.”

Part of this tension then, according to Audinet, comes from the perceived success over a long period of time of the traditional catechetical method based on the catechism which sometimes tended to limit its achievement to word perfect knowledge of catechism answers, a smattering of Bible History and a strong sense of morality as based on obligation to obey the Ten Commandments. All of this took place in Australia in what was often a self-isolated separate community which had learned through experience the importance of a Catholic solidarity. It is not surprising, then, that the extraordinary progress made in Biblical studies, the change in perspective from the Church “without spot or wrinkle” to the Church “always in need of renewal”, the paradigm shift in the study and teaching of morality led by Bernard Haring and the rapid transition to a vernacular liturgy have all combined to shake that very point of articulation as Audinet calls it, between the faith as learned and faith as life.

There have been and continue to be important programmes of adult education which have tried to help adult Catholics to understand what their children are now learning in Catholic schools. It is probably significant that there has been continuing controversy over the way to teach the Infancy narratives in Luke’s Gospel or over the attempt in *Pierres vivantes* to begin study of the Bible with Abraham rather than with the opening of the Book of Genesis. How much of modern day Biblical scholarship should be included in specifically catechetical programmes with children? Just as it was the vernacular translations of the Bible and their diffusion “without note or comment” in the first century of printing

which led to the challenges of the Reformation and incidentally brought the catechism into being, so too today our greater knowledge of the various literary forms of the Bible presents its own challenge to the way in which, in a functional way, Biblical citation was, and often still is, being used wrongly as a buttress to doctrine. Scripture quotations badly used are a path to fundamentalism.

6. THE GENERAL CATECHETICAL DIRECTORY OF 1997

The original *General Catechetical Directory* of 1971 was strongly contested at the time of its publication at the International Catechetical Congress in Rome. Many delegates felt that it was premature because there had been insufficient consultation of the wider Church. This was particularly so with regard to the insistence that initiation to the reception of first sacraments should begin with the sacrament of Penance despite the practice of beginning with Eucharist as had been approved for some dioceses of the world. Many delegates at the Rome Congress felt that it was only after the production of national directories that any one general directory could, or should, be produced. Not that this experience of national directories was necessarily good. Certainly, the experience of the French church was that some texts produced in their national *Pierres Vivantes* programme along the lines of their own national directory had ultimately to be withdrawn because of intervention from Vatican authorities.

The revised Directory of 1997 is a much more comprehensive document, somewhat less ‘dogmatic’ in its approach and language. While situating the preaching of the Gospel in the contemporary world through the Parable of the Sower and by stressing what it is to look at the contemporary world from a perspective of faith, it is much more successful than many other Church documents in avoiding a difficulty with those Church texts which appear to address the contemporary world from some perfect society outside of it. However satisfactory this essentialist approach may be to trained theologians it is completely foreign to the education and experience of many educated parents, teachers and even senior students.

It concerns me, however, that the Directory still seems to have little understanding of the significant nuances in English which distinguish between *religious instruction* and *religious education*. Anything which happens in school is reduced to the word *instruction*. Sections 74 and 75 especially, which deal with *The school context and those to whom religious instruction is directed* seem to be unaware of what many educators in English speaking countries would describe as *religious education* as the following citation shows:

“in other circumstances *religious instruction* (sic) will have an extensively cultural character and teach a knowledge of religions including the Catholic religion.”

My point is that this failure to distinguish the expressly confessional from the broadly educational will continue to promote misunderstanding and confusion, at least in English-speaking countries. More importantly, however, the confusion is not simply one of language but one of incomprehension of the reality of many English-speaking countries where Catholics set up separate Catholic schools as an important way of preserving their cultural and Catholic identity but where, today, Catholics no less than many of their fellow citizens, are concerned that there be at least an acknowledgement of the religious component in the cultural history of their countries.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Each section of my very broad survey has its own practical implications as regards the distinct yet often complementary meanings of *catechesis* and *religious education* in the pluralist society in which we live today. My purpose has been to insist that I see both concepts as still relevant and necessary in curriculum construction. What has changed for the better, in my view, is that since the Australian Catholic University has come into being, there is now the possibility of a whole range of scriptural,

theological and educational studies being made accessible to all those who wish to avail themselves of such riches. I believe that many more teachers now have the possibility of deepening their own background, thereby contributing to better quality programmes and teaching at all levels. Even surveying the list of workshops that are being offered throughout this symposium makes me aware of the distance we have travelled in the past 30 years. I only wish I could follow each one of the workshops! It in this spirit that I offer you the questions which I have appended to the text now being distributed.

SOME QUESTIONS WHICH HAVE TAXED ME IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS PAPER

1. "The split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times." *Evangelisation in the Modern World* (No.20)
Given the importance of significant cultural differences between different societies in today's world, what are some of the interdisciplinary ways in which religious educators can help to educate Australians into more broadly based perspectives on the relationship between **faith** and **life**?
2. "If, " as the 1977 Synod on Catechesis insisted, "the catechesis of adults is normative" what might be done by the agency you represent so that this orientation towards the continuing catechesis of adults might become a practical pastoral priority for the Church in this country?
3. The most significant changes in the Church's liturgy – Mass in the vernacular facing the people and the attention given to the proclamation of the word of God – came from the renewed attention to Scripture following the greater freedom accorded by the document *Divino Afflante Spirito* of 1943. What more can be done to ensure that the fruits of important Scripture scholarship be more widely diffused and made more readily accessible to the People of God?
4. The public reaction of many Catholics to the *Statement of Conclusions* which some Australian bishops were asked to sign in Rome following the Oceania Synod indicated a widely held resentment about what was seen as an inaccurate assessment of the vitality of the Australian Catholic Church. Cardinal Clancy has recently indicated that he doubts whether Australian 'egalitarianism' is easily understood by some Vatican authorities. How do you see this impinging on the role to be played by the Australian Catholic University in relation to the document *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*?

Gerard Rummery

18th April 2001

P.O. Box 77 (160 Bignell Road)

East Bentleigh 3165

Telephone: (03) 9570 8866

Fax: (03) 9570 8008

E-mail: grummery@mlpanet.com.au