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SOMETHING IS NOT WORKING! REIMAGINING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN TODAY'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL: The All Black Culture, The Samaritan Woman at the Well, the ANZAC Mythology and the Crucial Importance of Formative Contexts

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Abstract: This article explores the pressing issue of the re-imagination of Religious Education in today's Catholic school. It does so within the context of the plenary re-imagination of the contemporary Catholic school itself, a work-in-progress to which it has both a complementary and a symbiotic relationship. In doing so, the author draws upon sources as diverse as the anthropological lessons at the heart of the powerful and inspiring All Blacks Rugby code, the ANZAC Tradition and the narrative of the surprisingly transformative encounter of the Samaritan woman with Jesus at Jacob's well in the Gospel of John (Jn 4:4–42). The Aparecida Document (2007) issued by the Episcopal Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) under the leadership of the then-Cardinal Bergoglio prior to his elevation to the Papacy and his adoption of the Pontifical name, 'Francis' (2013) provides a compass to find the way forward, not only for the Church itself but for Catholic Schools within its embrace. This article examines the potential power of the seminal integration of Religious Education within the plenary and daily narrative of the whole school, the liberating perspective gained through the re-defining and re-owning of it as 'the work of the whole educative village' and the acceptance of the responsibilities and challenges that this seismically challenging conceptual shift will necessarily bring.

Keywords: religious education; educational village; Aparecida; Catholic school today



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1. Firstly—Why Is There a Need to Reimagine Religious Education?

The short answer, examining the experiential evidence in Religious Education classrooms today, would be that 'Something Isn't Working'. The vast rupture that clearly exists in mandated Religious Education programs today between the classroom endeavours of even very well trained, enthusiastic and devoted teachers and the students before them is immense. The task of engaging today's students through the lenses of true but abstrusely expressed dogmas and doctrines is akin to trying to open their eyes to the wonders of the cosmos through the lens of Galileo Galilei's 1609 refracting telescope. There is a profoundly daunting chasm that separates the experiential, and therefore the 'real', world of the students as they perceive it and the pedagogical world in which the teacher finds herself or himself labouring.¹

Religious Education programs, like the Catholic schools in which they are grounded, are shaped and moulded by a range of contextual considerations. These determine their meaning, shape and purpose as well as the several challenges which both Catholic Schools and their constituent Religious Education programs confront. In a previous era in the Australasian socio-cultural narrative, the Christian religion held a place of importance and influence in the social, and even the national political, hierarchy. It was held in such importance that religious divisions and differences could be the cause of bitter sectarian rivalry, which was a part of a sometimes tragic, but very often sad, historical narrative.

Even the dominant, the ‘Invincible’ Australian Cricket team at its post-war zenith was, anecdotes would suggest, not immune.

In that internecine denominational context, meaning and purpose for Religious Education were found in defining and delineating the often finer points of sectarian doctrines. In fact, the underlying purpose of all dogma has always been to define, delineate and differentiate. Its purpose was to separate and to distinguish. Its eventual effect was to divide. Religious Education programs predicated upon that same dogmatic foundation were consequently themselves didactic, differentiating and catechismal.

Furthermore, the typical catechismal form of instruction (particularly in its common question-and-answer form) largely assumed existing affiliation and attachment to a tradition and, therefore, sought to strengthen, support and confirm a fiducial attachment that already existed. They were not evangelical. Identifying terms such as ‘The One True Church’, ironically the very antithesis of the literal meaning of ‘Catholic’, were both claimed and proclaimed by Mother Church. The vehemence of the struggle—still in the living memory of some—has now subsided in an external context of social indifference and an internal recognition of the need for a unifying graciousness and acceptance of difference.

Two factors warrant mentioning briefly here. Firstly, the underlying ecclesial anthropology, critical in understanding the historical assumptions surrounding the nature and purpose of Religious Education, was based on the belief that eternal salvation had been won for humanity by the salvific death of Christ upon the cross. This belief became foundational to Christianity. The soteriological algorithm was the core creedal understanding of Christianity—and Catholicism saw itself and the schools it sponsored as uniquely defined by it (Divini Illius Magistri, n. 26) (PIUS XI n.d.).

The second factor deserving mention was that these programs of religious instruction were able, however accurately or inaccurately, to assume familial religious affiliation. They took for granted, not without some justification, regular familial religious practice and the question-and-answer Catechism, known colloquially amongst Catholics as the ‘Sixpenny Catechism’ or the ‘Green Catechism’ in the 1950s, became symbolic of generational continuity of fidelity to the ‘Faith of our Fathers’ even in the face of death, which Faber’s (1849) anthemic hymn extolled. Reinforcing this sense of loyalty and unquestioned fidelity was seen as the Catholic school’s strong supporting role to the work of the family and parish.

However, for a complex of reasons which sociologists and historians struggle to explain (Marwick 1998), those seeming socio-religious certainties and the inherited presumptions they carried broke down. They were swept away in the years immediately following the Second World War and no shared socio-cultural meaning system arose to take their place (Wilkie-Jans 2019; Mackay 2020). Marwick’s ‘Long 60s’ took an irreversible toll.

Figure 1 below sets out the phenomenon of the rupture of religio-cultural contextual connections and the resultant loss of Catholic identity that ensued.

The goals of any program of Religious Education in the Catholic school today must be directed towards the healing of these key ruptures in contextual connection in young people and towards the restoration of the quintessential narrative of faith. It is about rekindling an attachment to—perhaps even a love for—the story.

Our story is not a narrative we relate. . . it is a reality we live.

The Author

Even a brief survey of the current context of Religious Education programs in Catholic schools reveals the extent of the resultant challenges to Religious Education today. Any of the multiple calibrations of shifting norms and patterns available, which it is not necessary to record comprehensively here, would demonstrate:

- the sharp statistical decrease of those nominating ‘Christian’ as their religion of affiliation in Australian Commonwealth census figures;
- the concomitant rise of those opting for ‘No Religion’ in census data;
- the positive increase in the cultural awareness of indigenous and other religions;
- the ascendancy of secularism and atheism in contemporary society;

- the decrease of the percentage of Catholic students in Catholic schools;
- the concomitant increase of enrolment of students of other religions or of 'no religion' in Catholic schools;
- the notable increase of Catholic students being enrolled in higher fee-paying non-Catholic independent schools;
- the changing profile of Catholic school staff with similar trends to those noted above amongst students;
- the accompanying decrease, or even disappearance of clergy and professed religious, both male and female engaged in Catholic education;
- the widely changing socio-cultural and religious demographic due, in part, to broad national and international patterns of migration.

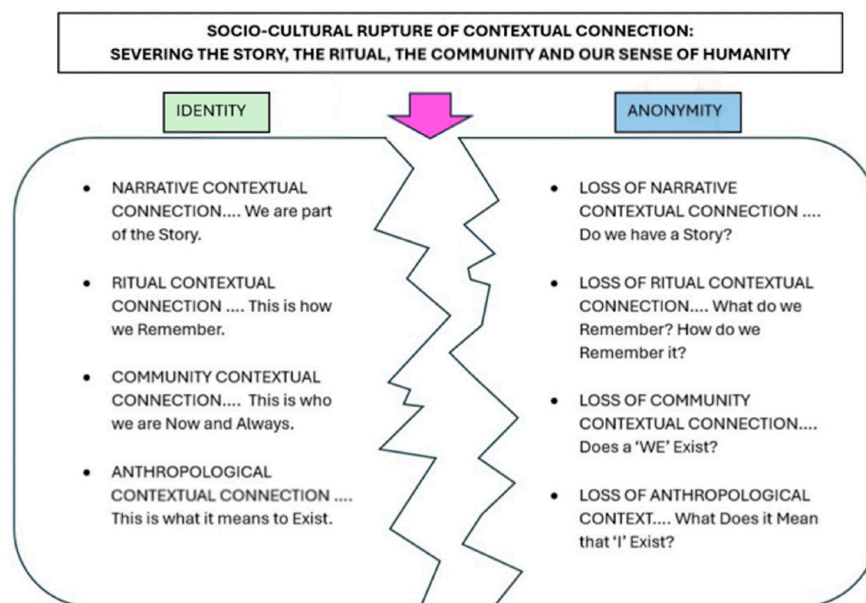


Figure 1. The Rupture of Religious Contextual Connections in Post-War Culture.

All of these factors add to the complex nature of an evolving society within which Catholic schools, and their undertaking of Religious Education, must function. It is clear that the contemporary context of Religious Education in today's Catholic school demands a fundamental process of **reimagining**. How the school conceives of that special educational project which has been an integral part of its life since its establishment calls for profound renewal. This, in turn, requires a concomitant reimagining of the very nature of the contemporary Catholic school itself (Mellor 2024, in publication) within which the Religious Education project resides. The crucial element of that reimagining is a renewed anthropology.

2. In the Light of Christian Humanism—The Anthropological Power of the ANZAC Mythology and the All Black Culture: Better Human Beings Make...

Anthropology is the key issue in the reimagining and the consequent reformation of the Catholic educational endeavour and, therefore, of Religious Education within it. In fact, anthropology is at the very heart—despite the sad fact that it usually remains unarticulated with any precision—of any collective social endeavour or movement, of political ideals, or, indeed, of anything that tends to have the capacity to define or motivate a society or a group within that society. The often underestimated power of anthropology rises to the fore.

For example, in 1915, as the early years of the 20th Century unfolded, in the dawn darkness of an April morning, on a rugged escarpment of the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey, the 600 m long beach now known as ANZAC Cove witnessed the blood-stained birth of what was to become a formative anthropological phenomenon in both Australia and

New Zealand. Out of abject defeat, death and the sheer pain-filled loss of thousands of young, vibrant lives, a formative anthropological mythology was conceived. It remains still, despite the nuanced tones in which it might be distilled in the two nations' mythology. Ideals of humanity that enshrined self-sacrifice, courageous compassion, resilience and care were born. The belief arose that this is what being a good and decent human being was all about. It enshrined the values of self-giving, loyalty, courage and care for others in the national soul. An anthropology was born. It is still called 'The ANZAC Spirit'.

On a different 'battlefield' in the latter decades of the 20th Century, seventy-two years later, when professionalism entered the sanctum of the theretofore strictly amateur game of Rugby Union and the World Cup was first played in 1987, the leadership of New Zealand's All Blacks examined critically and closely their way forward into the new age of the game. They chose to go to the very roots of the much-loved pursuit and articulated a lofty vision—the effectiveness of which cannot be gainsaid. The vision for the revered game was neither tactical nor structural but, more importantly and above all else, essentially human. The renewing vision enunciated that the key to the future sustenance and success of the code was essentially anthropological. It lay in the people who played it. Success would be founded upon an anthropological choice. It was tied, in the ideal, to issues of character and to issues of exacting personal and team standards. James Kerr explored this comprehensively in his book 'Legacy' (Kerr 2013). At the heart of this book, related to understanding the keys to success, is the powerful mantra that enshrines the belief that 'Better People Make Better All Blacks'. In other words, it is character that determines destiny. Character promotes commitment and resilience and elevates teamwork. It values service to the team's shared ideals. The wisdom of this conviction is beyond question. The continuing effectiveness of its implementation is beyond doubt.

To paraphrase, in pursuit of the present discussion of the work of Religious Education, at the very quintessence of Christianity lies the same incarnational anthropological conviction that '**Better Human Beings make... Better Human Beings**'. The core teaching of the Gospels is that a human life truly lived in goodness—lived in kindness, forgiveness, gentleness, courage, selflessness, compassion—is the indispensable pith of Christianity (cf. Gal 5:22). Striving to be a better human being is the core meaning of Christianity itself. It is the very meaning of the Incarnation. This is Christianity's essential dogma and the first one that should be taught with all of its implications for living. Ironically, it is an anthropological dogma that unifies rather than divides and differentiates.

For much of the Western world, the loss of the potency and relevance of the soteriological algorithm, the conviction that the sacrificial death of Jesus upon the cross and its underlying anthropology of a fallen yet redeemed humanity, has left an anthropological void which has proven difficult to fill. Perhaps the scarifying experience of the lived reality of humankind's fallen state as well as its unprecedented capacity for its own immolation was too deeply and too painfully embedded in the human psyche in the first half of the 20th Century. Perhaps two irreparably destructive global conflicts and the accompanying exposure of the innate capacity of humanity for abject and unspeakable cruelty to other humans and of the burgeoning of an anthropological creed, evil both in its intent and practice, meant that redemption seemed beyond belief in the 20th Century's second five decades. Perhaps those iconic, fleeting, halcyon moments on Max Yasgur's farm at Woodstock, NY in August 1969 with their evanescent Edenic overtones were a 'cry from the human soul' for a redeeming return to 'The Garden'. However, for all that, perhaps a new understanding of human meaning and purpose can be found today in the papal teaching of a renewed and renewing vision of humanity based upon the rich and pregnant understanding of Christian humanism.

3. Christian Humanism: A New Context for the Catholic School and therefore, for Religious Education

In its simplest understanding, Christian humanism is a foundational understanding of human living that, sharing much with contemporary secular humanism itself, aspires to the

highest standards of a virtuous human life and includes the fostering of right relationships with other human beings, with our own deepest selves, with this Earth and with the Sacred Mystery. The core belief of Christian humanism is that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the complete model of a virtuous human life, being one ‘who has been tested as we are, yet without sin’ (Heb 4:15 NRSV). Christian humanism, as proclaimed by successive pontiffs, begins from the quintessential incarnational premise of Christianity and thus, holds all of human existence to be sacred. It cherishes the belief that every human being is graced with the presence of the Divine Mystery within. That is its profound and essential premise. No barriers of race, of creed, of gender, of belief can diminish or negate that premise. As St Paul liberatingly proclaims: ‘*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male and female for all of you are one in Christ Jesus*’ (Gal 3:28). The Spirit dwells within every human being. Religious Education begins...and in a sense, ends, with that belief (Rohr 2019). **This is the anthropological foundation of Christianity—that all people, all human beings are the dwelling place of the Sacred.**

It is this belief that defines today’s Catholic school. The ‘embrace’ of the Catholic school in the midst of plurality and diversity is exactly that—it is literally ‘catholic’—universal and holistic in the authentic sense of leading all its students, all its leaders and all its community towards that wholeness which is found in the realization of the completeness within in the sacred indwelling of the Divine (Mellor 2024, *in publication*). That is its challenge...and its privilege.

4. THE APARECIDA DOCUMENT: A New Context for Religious Education

A reimagining of today’s Catholic school, particularly in the light of a Christian humanist perspective, not only creates a new context for Religious Education but provides a renewed ground for reshaping and reconceiving it. The Aparecida Document (Concluding Document 2007) of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, to which the then-Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio had contributed prior to his election to the papacy in 2013, provides fertile ground for such a reconceiving. As Pope Francis, the former Archbishop Bergoglio found inspiration in the 2007 episcopal document which, in turn, later shaped the apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis 2014).

4.1. Addressing ‘Those Who No Longer Walk with Us’

The Aparecida Document, named after the Brazilian city in *Sao Paulo* from which it was issued, was specifically and poignantly addressed ‘to those who no longer walk with us’, an outgoing and reconciliatory focus which has come to mark Francis’ papacy. The document, issued during the pontificate of Francis’ predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, outlined four ecclesial ‘axes’ of renewal (n. 226). These essential points for renewal of the Church at large also consequentially outline the vision for the reimagining of the contemporary Catholic school within that renewing *Ecclesia*. In so doing, they announce the paradigm for the reshaping of Religious Education within those ‘Privileged Places’ which are today’s changing and evolving Catholic schools.

The four ‘axes’ of renewal point to a future Church, and therefore, to its future schools, as places where faith is first to be experienced before it is to be understood, to be felt before it is delineated and to be loved before it is defined. The bishops of the Caribbean and of Latin America, in setting the compass points by which the ‘Barque of Peter’ might navigate a new future in uncertain seas, offered the Church and its schools four cardinal points by which to navigate the future.

The future of Religious Education, which is indisputably a work of the total school community—or the privilege of the ‘whole village’ to cite the well-known axiom—is inextricably bound up primarily with the experience of being part of that community, part of a truly formative, and potentially transformative, ‘village’. Every single person plays a part. This truism is at the heart of the renewal of Religious Education today. It is quintessentially a question of experiencing, and of being invited into, faith. Crucially it is the story of formative experience. This is the core meaning of Figure 2.

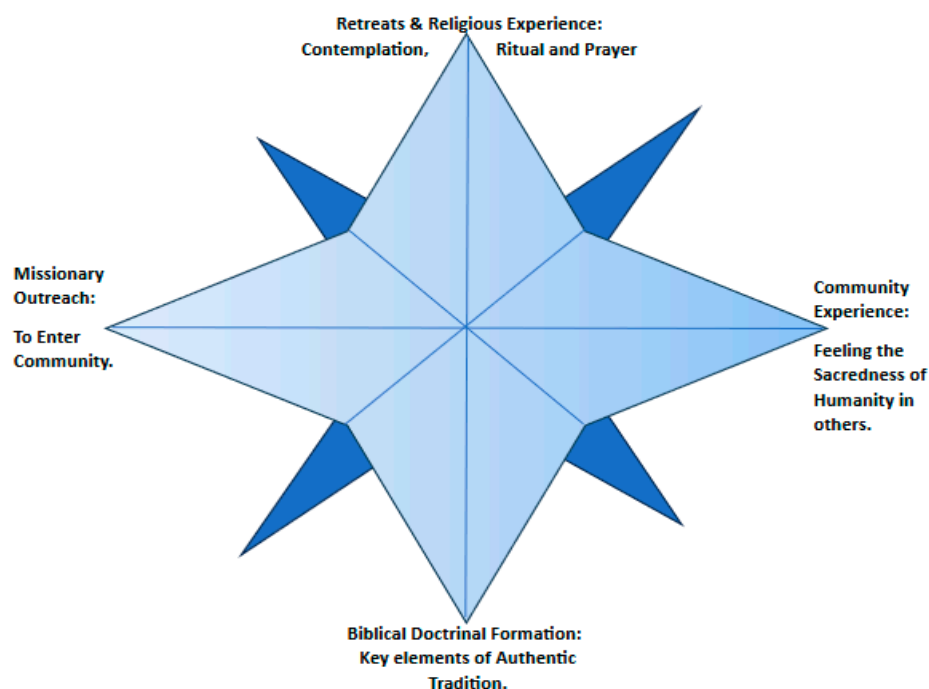


Figure 2. The Four Axes of Renewal.

The four salient points of renewal can be represented in Figure 2 below.

4.2. THE CONTEXT OF THE FOUR AXES OF RENEWAL: *Reimagining Religious Education as a Living Element Within a Formative Culture of Encounter*

The reimagining of Religious Education is a question of context much more than it is a matter of content. In fact, a didactic concern for content matters little if the environmental reality is not authentically lived and, therefore, encountered. A living environment of encounter has the potential to redress that ‘anonymity’, that separation from The Story (see Figure 1) and its accompanying nameless ‘atheism’ by default, by dislocation, by disaffection or by disillusionment. It is an ‘atheism’ that only living and authentic human encounter can redress.

The Aparecida Vision enunciates four salient, and essentially incarnational, premises:

- It speaks of **authentic religious experience** which is far from, and diametrically opposed to, superficial piety. It speaks of that touching of the human spirit at its deepest core wherein lives the ‘Ruah’, the Divine Breath, implanted within every human being. It speaks of encounter and it also implies the critical importance of ritual that is meaningful and which speaks firstly to the heart;
- It speaks of **Living Community**, with all its human frailty and brokenness, a community to which all are welcome;
- It speaks of **Doctrinal Formation**—of ‘telling the Christian Story’, which is part of the story of all humanity. Its core is credal—the concise expressions of belief, unadorned, pithy, and clear. They answer the question: ‘What is it Christians hold to be true?’ However, the content of any Religious Education curriculum matters little if it is not primarily a living reality in the core culture of the school;
- It speaks of **Missionary Outreach**, of living the Word in the World.

4.3. THE INVITATION TO ‘REJOIN THE STORY’

All four of these are, in essence, about the invitation to rejoin the Story from which we have become disconnected. It is essentially the ‘Story of what Human Life really means’ understood in terms of the Incarnational Presence of Jesus among us. The fourfold invitation to participate in that defining life Story will now be examined here.

5. RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: The First Core Element of Renewed Religious Education

This first focus of renewal and authenticity asks that the Catholic school, as an embodiment of the Catholic tradition, should offer the opportunity for a *'profound and intense religious experience. . .and (of) personal witness'* (Aparecida n. 226).

What Is 'Religious Experience'?

In 2015, Pope Francis expanded upon this theme in addressing the participants of the Fifth Congress of the Italian Church in Florence. He built upon the core concept of Christian Humanism and proposed a deeper and more practical understanding. He said:

"I do not want to outline here in the abstract a 'new humanism', a certain idea of the human being, but simply to present some characteristics of Christian humanism, which is that of the 'sentiments of Christ Jesus' (Phil 2: 5). These are not temporary abstract sensations of the soul, but the warm inner strength that makes us capable of living and making decisions. It presents the three characteristics of the new humanism: humility, selflessness and beatitude. These traits impede the obsession with power."

(Papa Francisco (2015) Encuentro con los participantes en el V congreso de la iglesia italiana)

The 'profound and intense religious experience' among the *desiderata* of an authentic Catholic school is, therefore, an intense human experience of humility, selflessness and beatitude. It would include the potency of ritual. What the community chooses to celebrate and how it ritualises those realities is a powerful gauge of what is important to it. It is a key means of reconnecting from 'Anonymity' to 'Identity'. Ritual essentially tells 'The Story' in a way that, sometimes even wordlessly, invites the community into transformative connection with that Story.

Ritual is the 'flesh' that completes the 'bones' of human religious experience. It is crucially and primarily about Identity. The capacity of Ritual to touch the human spirit is a force that can transform experience into deep and abiding spiritual memory.

Speaking about a Catholic education is equivalent to speaking about the human. . .about humanism.

(Pope Francis 2015)

6. COMMUNITY LIFE: The Second Core Element of Renewed Religious Education

Secondly, the Document speaks of the aspiration to form a welcoming community where (students and their families) 'are accepted fraternally and feel valued, visible, and included'.

Such communities are eloquent articulations of the 'Good News', the Kerygma, in which the Spirit of Christ finds a home. It is this communal experience which has the necessary power to heal the rupture of the Communal Contextual Connection referred to in Figure 1 above and to reverse the loss of identity that succumbs to anonymity.

The implications of this are that, in the complexities and pluralities of the life of the modern Catholic school community, there is no outer 'Court of the Gentiles'. All are one and whilst the Catholic tradition is steadfastly honoured and upheld, there is genuine acknowledgement of that truth which is found in every tradition that seeks that which is good. There is found, thus, in the Catholic tradition, a warm welcome not only to 'those who no longer walk with us' but also to those who have not yet found any path upon which to walk at all. Respect begets Respect and Identity begets Identity.

7. BIBLICAL AND DOCTRINAL FORMATION: The Third Core Element of Renewed Religious Education

Along with a strong religious experience and notable community life, students (and their families as far as possible) need to deepen knowledge of the Word of God and the

contents of the Faith. . .not as theoretical and cold knowledge but within the context of spiritual, personal and community growth (cf. Aparecida n. 226).

Fides Quaerens Intellectum?

St. Anselm of Canterbury's (1033–1109) dictum, used for the first time in his *Proslogion* (Discourse), describes theology as 'Faith seeking Understanding'. Critically, it begins with Faith. It assumes Faith. Doctrine or what might be described as 'distilled theological reflection' is the stuff of catechismal teaching. It assumes faith and it assumes something of religious affiliation as starting points.

Manifestly, the Catholic school of today cannot make these assumptions. This is yet another reason for the urgency of a plenary reimagining of Religious Education in the contemporary Catholic school.

The third axis of formative Religious Education involves exploration of the core elements of the Catholic tradition and its formative and essential relationship to human existence. Along with a strong communal spirit and the accessibility of truly religious experience, the exploration of those key truths and their revealed wisdom, which can be called authentically 'Catholic', form an integral part of the life of the contemporary Catholic school. The Creedal statements of the Church, the Apostles' Creed, and the Nicene Creed, among them, offer clear statements of the doctrinal heart of Christian Faith.

Yet, whilst 'religious knowledge' and its associated understandings have historically been foregrounded as the core of Religious Education, the contemporary Catholic school understands that knowledge of a religious tradition finds its full value today when it is joined to that broad river of 'Lived Truth' which flows towards the embrace of the Universal Sacred Mystery, a part of a transformational communal searching for 'The Good and The True'.

8. MISSIONARY COMMITMENT OF THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY: The Fourth Core Element of Renewed Religious Education

The fourth axis of reimagining of Religious Education today is:

the shared missionary commitment to those beyond the community, to those who are afar (a commitment which is) concerned about their situation.

(cf. Aparecida n. 226)

This commitment to the wellbeing of others, including those beyond the community and beyond identity, is at the core of the Gospels. Compassion, like the quality of Shakespeare's 'Mercy', brings blessings to all. It blesses both the heart that shows compassion as well as the one to whom compassion is shown (cf. *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 4. Sc 1) (Shakespeare 2003).

A comprehensive experience of Religious Education in the contemporary Catholic school will include exposure to, and participation in, undertakings which reach out to those in real need of the experience of kindness and practical generosity. Such experiences form the human spirit in what is the heart of Christian Humanism. They have the power to be transformative. A brief exploration of the dialogic essence of Transformative Experience may assist this discussion.

8.1. THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL: A REIMAGINING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TODAY AS PART OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER WITHIN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

John's account of the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well near Sychar (Jn 4:4–42) is a definitive example of the power of formative experience. The dialogue between Jesus and the woman—another key perspective for the life of the Catholic school today—allows for formation through experience and encounter.

This formative experience can then blossom into a transformative one. It is the experience of encounter and dialogue, more than instruction, which nurtures the environment for transformation at Jacob's Well in Samaria on that hot noon day, for the possibility of what

James Fowler, almost two millennia later, would call his sixth and highest stage of Faith Development—‘Universalising Faith’:

“Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. . . God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

(Jn 4:4–42 passim. NRSVCE)

Faith, universal, encompassing and truly human, is about Spirit and Truth. That which embraces Spirit and that which teaches Truth is the heart of authentic Religious Education, wherever and whenever it is found.

(The Author)

The above reflections point to a way forward for the reimagining and the concomitant renewal of Religious Education in the contemporary reimagined Catholic School.

8.2. SUMMARY: The Reimagined Catholic School of Today

❖ **Firstly**, the work of Religious Formation, of which the didactic exercise of Religious Education forms only a part, is the endeavour of the *whole school*.

Every staff member, every leader, has a role to play. It is an integral part of the work of the totality of the Catholic school.

Figure 3 below illustrates the various elements which comprise the religiously formative nature of the Catholic school. The variegated reality is reflective of the fact that there are many parts to the human process of formation and education. In the religious life of the Catholic school—and a feature which is its quintessentially defining element—every community member has a role to play. Education is the work of the ‘whole village’.

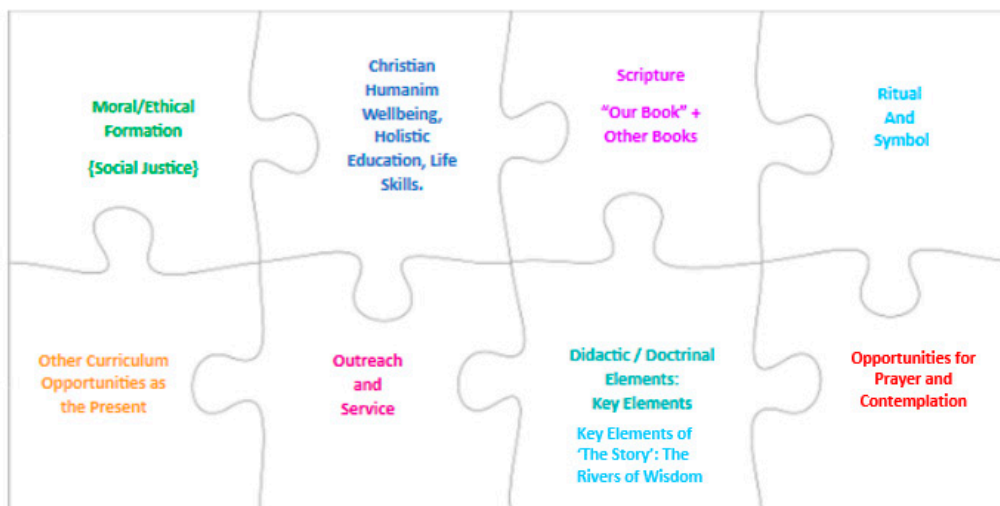


Figure 3. Some of the Pieces that Make Up Religious Education.

In seeing the Religious Education lesson for what it really is—simply the didactic piece of an encompassing and multifarious endeavor—the reimagined Catholic school finds ways to become what its modern socio-cultural context both calls it to be and allows the freedom for it to become. It is a place which, above all, creates, in the midst of its human, fragile, failed yet sometimes joyous struggles, a place where the Sacred Mystery made manifest in Jesus the Nazarene would feel welcome and would recognize as ‘home’.

The Catholic school’s formative mission is at the heart of every subject, of every element of the school’s daily routine, and it is a quintessential part of every encounter between mentor and student. In fact, it is the interpersonal encounter, however incidental

it may seem, within which the sacramentality of the Catholic school exists (Mellor 2024, *in publication*).

Moreover, the teaching of every element of the curriculum by every teacher in every lesson, from the Christian Humanist perspective, has a much broader formative effect. The positivity and respectfulness of relationships and the unrelenting setting of standards for teacher and student alike are religiously educative:

“...proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.”

(2Tim 4:2)

This formative responsibility is something from which no teacher, in any capacity within the school, can resile:

Christian Humanists believe one can combine Christian faith and an authentic relationship with God, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, secular knowledge. Human talents, intellect, and creativity are viewed as God-given and to be developed to their fullest.

(Sullivan 2013, p. 1)

- ❖ **Secondly**, the ‘profound and intense religious experience’ which is an axis of the development of the Catholic school is bound up with the understanding that the Sacred can be revealed everywhere and at all times in all things, as taught by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556).

8.3. Finding God in All Things

The ritualising of life experience in ways rich in meaning can be a vital part in assisting students to be open to the intensity of religious experience and to the meeting with the Sacred within that experience. Finding time and contemplative space for ritual and preparing it well is a priority in the life of the authentic Catholic school. Recalibrating the time set aside in the school calendar for developing contemplative experience in comparison to the exercise of didactic praxis may prove helpful. It may take time, but it can flourish!

The practice of Ritual at specific times and in specific places assists the human spirit to grow to that openness and sensitivity to the Sacred Presence in all things that surround and pervade human life everywhere and in everything.

- ❖ **Thirdly**, the building of an authentic, warm, and welcoming community is both an obligation and a privilege for the whole school.

8.4. Better Human Beings Make. . . Better Human Beings

This is something which can happen both informally as well as in structured ways. Importantly, being open at every level to the nurturing of the three hallmarks of Christian Humanism—humility, selflessness, and beatitude—allows for their growth. It is these three characteristics which support an atmosphere of welcome and inclusion, so vital to the truly Catholic school.

- ❖ **Fourthly**, there exists an evident and powerful need for staff formation if the contemporary Catholic school is to survive. All staff, all leaders, all aspiring leaders, at both pre-service and in-service levels, need to have a clear understanding of both today’s challenges and today’s compass points for future growth. A sound and resilient understanding of the shared and inescapable responsibility of every teacher and every leader to be part of the transformative future is a universal need.

9. Conclusions

It cannot be gainsaid that the changing contexts of the Catholic school have both wrought challenges and have brought change to the school’s threshold and have raised essential questions about purpose and meaning into the future. Those same contexts

have brought similar and consequential challenges and questions to the undertaking of Religious Education.

The foundational anthropological and theological premises which shaped and directed it have altered irreversibly. What is of critical importance is that all Catholic school staff, including all their leaders, seek and are assisted to find clarity of direction in their challenging and evolving task. Perhaps the foregoing has assisted in some small way.

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Note

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE). 1989. National Council of the Churches of Christ.

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