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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A TIME OF CRISIS: LETTING A FIELD OF PREVIOUSLY UNCONSIDERED POSSIBILITIES APPEAR TO US.

Abstract

One of the tasks of religious education in Catholic schools is to transmit the tradition with the presumption that tradition is not an object that is passed on but an ever-changing living subject. Not only does tradition change but humans change too. So objectives in religious education are at best tentative. Knowing the endpoint of any educational process is impossible. Education is a matter of creating the present while acknowledging that this means recreating the past. Anything that forecloses on the future, that has an absolutist set of objectives, cannot be educational because such objectives of their nature attempt to preclude change and preclude creation. Education cannot be anything else but oriented to change because it is first intergenerational and then communicative and it takes place in a world that is unfinished. As English theologian Nicholas Lash comments, "Its history still has some way to go."

This article enlarges on the paragraph above using the work of Hannah Arendt and Paul VI and others to argue that classroom religious knowledge can never be seen as a finished product to which students have to adapt. It presumes that students and teachers, individually and collectively make the knowledge of the future.

Introduction

I began my career in religious education teaching year three at St Anne's School Bondi Beach at the end of January 1964. At the time about 50% of Catholics went to Mass each Sunday, the seminaries and novitiates of Australia were overflowing and the Catholic church seemed to be going full steam ahead. On the fortieth anniversary of that auspicious day about 15% of Catholics will be at weekly Mass, the seminaries and novitiates will be all but empty, and the Catholic church in Australia will be, as it is now, in crisis. In my more gloomy moments I wonder if the state of the church and my teaching career are just a coincidence or an example of cause and effect. Whether my teaching had any causal effect in the crisis I am interested in the crisis in the church, particularly so in what I claim is a crisis in religious education.

In 1990 Robert Young claimed that there was a crisis in all of current education. He defined crisis in three ways. The first is the original Greek meaning that speaks of a moral dispute that has developed to the stage where it demands decisive resolution. I do not think we have that kind of crisis. Secondly there is the classical medical meaning of a stage in an illness where the fate of the patient hangs in the balance. Maybe we have that crisis but, not being apocalyptic by nature, I think we don't have that kind either. Lastly there is the more contemporary notion of a state of conflict and disturbance in some part of our normal functioning that is decisive for its continuity or change (Young, 1990). That is the kind of crisis I think we have in Catholic schools. It is a *crisis of meaning*. The question at the centre of the crisis is, – What is the meaning of religious education?

This question was easily answered when Catholic schools began in Australia and it still seemed easy to answer in 1964. Catholic schools were begun in Australia for all Catholic children because the church saw them as part of its mission (Fogarty, 1959). Religious education and Catholic identity were the basis of this mission.

For eighty years a Catholic school's success was judged in part by its ability to keep young Catholics affiliated with the church and also to provide full-time personnel for maintenance in the form of clergy and religious. Catholic schools were part of the social apparatus for transmitting and perpetuating a particular kind of Catholicism and for legitimating its symbolic universe (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 79).

But now while almost 20% of Australian Catholics are aged between twenty and twenty-nine only 7% of those attending church are in that age group. Catholic schools are not providing vocations to the clergy or religious life in significant numbers. The link between Catholic schooling and later affiliation with the church is not at all clear.

Now parents' reasons for choosing Catholic schools, while still including Catholic identity and commitment to the church, also include the needs of individual children, the financial capability of parents, the prospects offered to students for future employment, current fashions in education, and the success of advertising and promotion by rival schools and systems. The church's moral power to demand of parents that their children attend Catholic schools has evaporated, undermined in part by the church's own teaching in the documents of Vatican II, particularly the document on education, *Gravissimus Educationis*. One sign that Catholic education offices are aware of this is the significant part of their budget spent on promotion

and advertising of schools. Catholic education administrators now take market forces seriously.

Part of the crisis for Catholic education in Australia is that although the demand at present is for private rather than state education there is no necessary reason that this situation should prevail or that Catholic education should continue to flourish. Catholic secondary schools, like any schools, will flourish only if there is a creative and imaginative response to the present situation.

The limitations of an article of this length preclude a deeper explanation, to explain why I claim there is an epistemological crisis in the Australian Catholic church. We do not agree among ourselves what knowledge is, nor how it is gained or passed on. One of the responses to this crisis among religious educators for much of the last forty years has been that instead of looking seriously at the theories we have tried new methods. We are Australian Catholic teachers after all, practical people in a practical church.

In recent years this attitude has begun to change, though I contend that Catholic religious educators mostly took a long time to notice. The change towards theory was prompted by Thomas Groome (1980, pp. 139-151) who, as Louise Welbourne (1997, p. 1) points out, began to ask the right questions. He did not ask, – How can we better accomplish what we are doing? but – What are we doing? This led him to ask the epistemological questions, – How do we attain knowledge? How do we transmit it? Is knowledge an 'it' in the first place or is it a process or is it something else?

In Sydney the Parramatta diocese took Groome seriously though I believe that for a while they were still asking the wrong questions. The religious education curriculum, *Sharing Our Story* (1991) presented Groome's approach as a method and did not acknowledge adequately the philosophical principles that underpin it.

But Groome was taking up Alasdair MacIntyre's insight; that the only viable solution to an epistemological crisis is to discover new concepts and frame new types of theory (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 362). The burden of this article is to suggest some premises that could be the beginning of a suitable theory of education for a time of epistemological crisis and to introduce a hermeneutic approach to education that will provide the basis for religious education in an ever-unfinished church community.

Approaches to Education in a Time of Crisis

Communities have the desire and need to pass on their traditions (Dewey, 1916). At the same time they ought to acknowledge and honour the personal vocation of each member of the community.

To begin the task of framing new types of theory as part of the project of overcoming the epistemological crisis in religious education it is necessary to arrive at a suitable approach to education that holds in balance these two aspects of human endeavour, the community and the individual.

Honoring the perspective of the individual includes the right, the necessity for some, of rejecting or accepting only in a modified version, the tradition of the community. The reader or the hearer must have the right to say, "No!" Indeed, in so far as the problems that local people have are *local*, while the whole church community stories and beliefs are more general or shared, there is not only a right but a necessity sometimes for the local community to say "No!". Of course it is possible to say "No" unnecessarily.

Both the desire to transmit the tradition and the acknowledgement of individual choice take place with the presumption that tradition is not an object that is passed on but an ever-changing living subject, and that not only does tradition change but humans change too (Kelly, 1998).

These presumptions lead to the conclusion that objectives in education are at best tentative. Knowing the endpoint of the educational process is impossible. Education is a matter of creating the present while acknowledging that this means recreating the past. Anything that forecloses on the future, that has an absolutist set of objectives, cannot be educational because such objectives of their nature attempt to preclude change and preclude creation. Education, of its nature cannot be anything else but oriented to change because it is first intergenerational and then communicative and it takes place in a world that is unfinished. Reference was made earlier in this article to the comment of Nicholas Lash (1979, Introduction) – "Its history still has some way to go."

As well as being aware that students may validly or invalidly reject particular traditions in pursuit of their own vocations any approach to education that is to be useful to current educators in Australia needs to presume that education takes place in a plurality. If it ever did, education in Australia does not now take place in a monoculture where it is thought that *reality* is discovered without quotation marks. Pluralism acknowledges the social nature of all understanding and that all interpretation has many possibilities (Tracy, 1986).

This is important for Catholic religious education because not only is there pluralism in the broader Australian society, there is also pluralism within Catholicism. Of course this pluralism in the church, as is the pluralism in Australian society, is a *bounded* pluralism. While every interpretation differs because of the local context, the prior and accompanying texts of the culture and the individual or community doing the interpreting, and other considerations, the dictionary or level one meanings of the words place limits on what can be interpreted from them. Defensible interpretations are limited to a group of 'family resemblances', otherwise people could never pragmatically coordinate cultures and form relatively peaceful human societies. While it may be at times a cliché, the response to some actions in the community that are condemned is simply to say, "That is not Australian". Just so, some actions and beliefs simply are not Catholic. Any kind of pluralism among adult Catholics is, though, not as critical to education as the gap there is between Catholic adults and the students in Catholic schools.

It is this gap in culture between the young and adults, this intergenerational and intercultural divide and the consequent differences in interpretation it engenders that are both the biggest challenge and the best chance of arriving at a new model for religious education because several theorists have addressed the differences between cultures in ways that will help us apply their insights to religious education.

One way of viewing what Christian religious educators do is to say that they have the task of interpreting or translating the event of Jesus Christ, and then the texts, symbols, rituals and the rest of the tradition to themselves and to those whom they are educating. When the members of the church do this they are obeying the injunction in Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore, make disciples of all nations." When teachers carry out this mission they have two problems: the pastoral or professional problem of *how*, and the problem of *what.* What is taught, the formulae of doctrine, the meaning of symbols, the texts that are canonical, the theological emphases, the laws, all these are the province of the teaching authority of the institution. So that family resemblances are maintained and so that the institution maintains its identity, some kind of credal formulae are necessary and some kind of teaching authority. That is the task of popes, councils, bishops' conferences, colleges of scholars, and other institutional arrangements. That there need be formulae is not in contention here. The hermeneutical approach to them is the issue.

Raymond Gaita (1991, p. 125), in another context, expresses the need for some form of scaffolding that maintains family resemblances. He is talking of the contrast between the particular and the universal:

> But we cannot explore this further unless we are part of a living culture in which we are able to learn our identity through a cultural conversation in which a grammar, or set of general terms, is available in which we can talk of our own identity as possibility.

Both Jurgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt (1958) offer ways to address pluralism and cultural difference.

The Human Condition

In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt analyses what it means to be human. For her, the human condition is one of plurality, symbolic relationships and renewal through the birth of new generations. We are plural because we are all the same but "in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."

This plurality is the basic condition of both communication and speech. If we were not equal we could not understand each other, hear those who came before, plan for the future, or educate our young. If we were not distinct we would not need speech, action or education (Arendt, 1958). One of the tasks of education, indeed living, is to connect the perspectives of social participants who inevitably view the world from different standpoints, that is, to form a relationship or an intersubjective ground between them.

This is the position taken by Paul VI that human progress is 'nothing other than the chronicle of the results obtained by dialogue with other people, with the environment, with the people who have come before us, and in a sense, with those who will come after us' (Hebblethwaite, 1984). Through the construction of this intersubjective ground we overcome the problems of plurality, without abolishing the reality of individual perspectives (Young, 1990). This is where revelation occurs. The revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others, neither for nor against, in sheer human togetherness. This is the process of humans revealing their unique personal identities and thus making their appearance in the human world (Arendt, 1958).

This can be done only when we acknowledge that the web of significant relationships, which gives our lives meaning is made up of essentially symbolic relationships, sustained through physical media (Arendt, 1958). They are not physical

relationships as such, and are not in any sense absolute. The web of significant relationships that constitutes a community, for example, exists only in its actualisation. Where the power that holds a community together is not actualised the community will collapse, as power cannot be stored for emergencies.

Power is actualised only where word and deed have not parted company. That is, where words still disclose realities and deeds continue to establish relations and create new realities. Communities perish where words are used to veil intentions and deeds are used to violate and destroy. Power springs up between us only at the moment we act together, and it will dissipate the moment we disperse (Arendt, 1958, p 200). We construct relationships as symbolic participants with our own subjectivity, our own capacity to say yes or no. Berlin. (1980) *Personal impressions*. New York: Penguin Books. There is a good example of this 'construct(ing) relationships as symbolic participants with our own subjectivity, our own capacity to say yes or no,' in Isaiah Berlin's account of Albert Einstein's decision, on two separate occasions, to renounce his German passport. He first became Swiss and then American as he defined himself in contrast to the Germany of the nineteen thirties (Berlin, 1980, p. 151). The very basis of this capacity to speak and listen is an assumption of reciprocity, of equal subjectivity, which keeps alive, no matter what the circumstances, the radical possibility of equality between human beings.

It follows that we can never be content with the silence of others. We certainly cannot interpret it as agreement (Arendt, 1958). We need to know that they accept us; that they have heard. Among other things dialogue aims to reduce plurality by negotiating meaning. Much dialogue is about the alignment of meaning; it is reflective or formulating with regard to the meaning of the *rest* of the dialogue.

Having overcome the problems of plurality by establishing symbolic relationships through dialogue we find in the fact of each new generation of individuals the constant reminder that there is the possibility of new symbolic forms, of new and unanticipated ways of life (Arendt, 1958). Here we have set up an educational form of the hermeneutic circle. This is the miracle that saves the world, the fact of what Arendt calls 'natality', in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. Human affairs do not grind to a halt when we die and in the long run gain from the realisation that the enterprise does not finish with us (Arendt, 1958, 274). The significance of this for religious education is that we cannot know what new generations will create and so we cannot tell, except within certain limits, what the Catholicism of the future will be.

There are these limits of course, because we humans, aware of the danger of unchecked innovatory potential, have developed protective institutions like schools and churches and rules about interpretation to manage it. We need protection against fragmentation and degenerative change (Young, 1990). We need protection against ourselves so we set boundaries to change.

We believe in revelation. Here authority and fixed texts play a positive role as well. This is especially so in areas where purely human invention reaches its limit. For example, Arendt, distinguishes between the human condition and human nature. She takes Augustine's observation, "*Quaestio mihi factus sum*, I have become a question for myself." She points out that humans can answer the question, 'Who am I?' easily, by saying, 'I am a human, whatever that may be.' But the question, '*What* am I?' is outside our ken. Only the God who made us can answer that. That is the point of revelation (Arendt, 1958).

The limits are necessary even for those who do not believe in revelation, as David Tracy (1986) has pointed out. Interpreters, even in a time when interpretation itself is in crisis, have to keep returning to the classics. These are the traditions that are *there*; they have formed us. In this sense all humans are born with a long memory. The urgency is to find new ways of interpreting ourselves and our traditions, to be open to change (Tracy, 1986). For this we need imagination. Erin White points out that this is a critical concept for Paul Ricoeur for whom all biblical discourse, by implication all the classics of a culture, is addressed to the imagination where it invites the reader or hearer to consider new possibilities:

> It is in imagination that the new being is formed in me. Note that I said imagination and not will. This is because the power of letting oneself be grasped by new possibilities precedes the power of deciding and choosing. And he asks the rhetorical question: Do we not too often think that a decision is demanded of us when perhaps what is first required is to let a field of previously unconsidered possibilities appear to us? (White, 1986, p. 275)

This insight of Ricoeur's helps us see that the meaning-making that is religious education is an appeal to the imagination rather than a matter of doing as we are told. In Arendt's terms religious

education is an appeal to action not behavior, as has been said above. It is a matter of seeking human freedom to become who we are called to be and we can do this only by continually trying to understand better who we are called to be (Kelly, 1998).

Religious education as a quest for human freedom is a never-ending process but it is first a matter of being grasped by new possibilities. Linking this back to doing as we are told, human freedom is a matter of coming to know and do God's will but no existing human structure can be definitive in terms of the will of God. This is true of churches as of other cultural institutions. All humans can do is to continually work at constructing cultures that embody fully respect for all human persons and for the whole of creation. In this sense humans create God's will (Kelly, 1998).

Over-managing creative potential, the opposite of letting unconsidered possibilities appear to us, is as threatening to our welfare as the risk of letting it run unchecked, as Hegel (in Young, 1990, p. 27) has pointed out. We are potentially a self-forming species. But instead of recognising and vitalising our capacity to be the authors of our own history, we are prone to objectify our own creations and to regard them as natural and unchangeable aspects of the human condition, in short we absolutise them (Young, 1990, p. 27).

That is one of the mistakes of conservative hermeneutics, in fact of conservatives generally (Kelly, 1990, 36-38). Arendt (1958) calls it erecting a 'man-made world only after destroying part of God-created nature'. It is what leads some educators to objectify learning in such a way as to cut off creativity altogether and is the basis of a traditional education such as occurs in its latest incarnation, education by objectives.

In most approaches to religious education the tendency to objectify our own creations has extra force as these human creations are claimed to be creations of God, thus they are sacrosanct and untouchable. Such an objectification results from a positivist approach to the text whether it is the Scriptures or Tradition. Educators need to heed the warning of Arendt (1958) who reminds us that all events told by the actors themselves even when entirely trustworthy become mere source material for the historian. The significance and truthfulness of what we do needs a later mind to interpret it.

The second insight of Arendt that I want to note is her revisiting of the Aristotelian distinction between *poesis* and *praxis*. *Poesis* is making, and involves technique and craftsmanship. *Praxis* is acting or doing and includes political and ethical actions based on prudent judgements. Habermas (1980) points out that Arendt wished to resist the temptation to reduce the political action of citizens to just another kind of instrumental or strategic interaction oriented to finding the most efficient means to a predetermined goal.

Arendt understands practice as that which "articulates the historical experiences and the normative perspectives of what we call today participatory democracy" (Young, 1990, p. 26). That is, the goal of political action is not predetermined. This is equally true for all education, including religious education. In a community that acknowledges its plurality and therefore its ambiguity education cannot have predetermined goals, because predetermination of its nature denies the possibility of taking seriously the insights and aspirations of all the individuals, or all the separate groups that constitute the pluralism. It denies some interpretations and puts some genuinely educational learning experiences off limits.

That Groome, and after him the Diocese of Parramatta, also opted for *praxis* in this Aristotelean sense is good education. If we succeed at *praxis* we are never sure where we will end up! If we succeed at praxis we are introducing Catholics into participative democracy.

The Catholic Condition

Schools and churches exist, among other things, to order and contain human innovative capacities. Institutions like the Catholic church and Catholic schools cannot allow relativism to exist in them otherwise the beliefs that they espouse lose their significance. But not to fear! As Habermas claims we humans can coordinate our creative actions:

> Only on the condition that [we] reach a common definition of the situation with which [we] have to cope, [we] offer different interpretations and try to come to an agreement. In these interpretative achievements each actor draws from a common stock of knowledge which is provided by a cultural tradition shared with others. It is this background knowledge which represents the context of the life-world, and in which any communicative action is imbedded ... to those who act in concert the life-world is present as a background in the model of implicit self-evidence. This certainty is in striking contrast to that of any piece of knowledge which is explicitly expressed in utterance. Any such expression can be rejected ... background assumptions and practices which are always taken for granted do not have this basic property of

> knowledge (Habermas, 1980 in Young 1990, p. 28).

Young (1990, p. 28) points out that background-knowledge cannot normally be questioned, it can only normally break down. So if we are to become aware of our imprisonment in existing states of affairs we must make at least some of this background knowledge explicit and so subject to the possibility of critique.

Usually we are forced to do this only when we are under the pressure of a crisis in which background-knowledge breaks down. Crises are fertile gardens for critique to grow. Of course churches are not always quick to admit crises especially to outsiders. Even in the midst of profound crisis there are always some authorities or other adherents who deny that anything is changing at all and who try to explain dysfunctions in the system in terms of, for example, the lack of generosity among the current young people, or the untoward influence of the media. Some, though, do become aware of the background-knowledge. In 1953 Teilhard de Chardin wrote in a short article, *The God of Evolution*:

> Not only among the Gentiles or the rank and file of the faithful, but even in the religious orders themselves, Christianity still to some degree provides a shelter for the 'modern soul', but it no longer clothes it, nor satisfies it, nor leads it. Something has gone wrong – and so something, in the area of faith and religion, must be supplied without delay on this planet. The question is, what is it that we are looking for?

Teilhard de Chardin, nearly ten years before the Second Vatican Council, was questioning the background knowledge of Catholicism before, as the result of the Council and of rapid social changes in most western countries, it broke down.

Background knowledge is taken-for-granted knowledge. It is ideology; not only is it natural, it is unquestioned and even unarticulated (Young, 1990, p. 28). Religious education in Catholic education systems and in the schools in Australia had a taken-for-granted knowledge like this from the 1880s until the 1970s. Arguments about whether the Fleury catechism or the Boston catechism were the best models for the Australian Church for example, about the new syllabus in Sydney in 1915, and new approaches to religious education such as the Kerygmatic approach of the early 1960s, did not question the prevailing Catholic ideology. They sought more effective ways of reproducing it. Even when the new *Australian Catholic Catechism* was published in 1963 it was a change of teaching method with a new emphasis on Scripture, but the background knowledge was not questioned in the way de Chardin was doing ten years before. With hindsight it is clear that the 1963 catechisms were part of the process of making explicit the old background knowledge of Australian Catholicism and thus exposing it to critique.

Since then the background knowledge has broken down. That is the crisis in religious education. In response there have been religious education guidelines and other curriculum documents, new syllabuses, documents from Rome, both papal and from the curial agencies, and much theorising, all attempts to defend the life-world of Catholicism and to pass on effectively the traditions to new generations. Some have been little more than a lament for things passing but others offer a better basis for the fruitful continuance of a Catholic life-world.

Defending the Catholic Condition

The attempts to defend the life-world of Catholicism that offer the best basis are the ones that ask epistemological questions, that is those that ask what religious education means, and that address the hermeneutical questions, that is, they face the problem of interpretation. It is only through facing the problems of meaning and interpretation that any theory of religious education can hope to defend a Catholic life-world. Habermas offers a way into a theory of interpretation that addresses the incompleteness of knowledge. To build a position on which a life-world might be defended in a pluralist society Habermas wagers on Arendt's analysis of Kant's conception of *Urteilskraft*, practical judgement (Young, 1990, p. 29). Kant argues that any position from which a life-world is to be defended must be one that comes from an 'enlargement of mind', a universalisation of perspective. Habermas quoting Arendt describes it as:

> Comparing our judgement with the possible rather than the actual judgements of others, and in putting ourselves in the place of any other man [*sic*] ... Critical thinking makes others present and thus moves potentially in a space which is public, open to all sides (in Young, 1990, p. 30).

But it is only when we create a public realm of discourse open to all, based on the dignity of all human beings, in a situation where all citizens can come to grips with the issues created by the destruction of meaning, that the reconstructed life-world can be studied and critically evaluated in a way that frees citizens from its reifying power

(Young, 1990). This is a prerequisite for inculturation. This is also part of the move from organisation back to institution, from presuming that the authorities are the church to recognising that they are merely part of the People of God like everyone else. This is the start of a moderate critical hermeneutic that can overcome the epistemological crisis.

The need for a public realm of discourse open to all is just as necessary for a church that is re-constructing its life-world as it is in any other community. If the church does not embrace an enlargement of mind in the Kantian sense it becomes ideological in the narrow and harmful sense, that is it has knowledge and practices which serve the interests of some groups or sections of the church but not the interests of all. When the interests of only some groups or sections of the church are served, or when this is perceived to be the case, one section of the church is colonising other sections. Even when the teaching authorities are exercising a legitimate teaching role and not being ideological in the negative sense a lack of public discourse can lead to the perception of colonisation and presumed sectional interest. For example, the papal decree in 1996 that the ordination of women is a topic not to be discussed in the Catholic church is seen by some Catholics of good faith as a case of a one-sided interest disguised as being in the interests of all. In this case it was declared by the Vatican as a matter outside the realm of human control altogether, being a command of God and so part of the natural order of things.

In a letter to *The Tablet* 15th August 1998 Professor Michael Dummett comments on the apostolic letter *Ad Tuendam Fidem, For the Defence of the Faith.* Dummett remarks, "It appears to me that there cannot be a religious duty to believe anything which cannot be *known* to be true." He defines something that is *known* to be true as, something of which "it can be ruled out that the Church should ever reverse its teaching concerning that proposition; and it surely cannot be the duty of a Catholic, as a Catholic, to believe that proposition unless he can know that that it can be ruled out that the Church should ever reverse its teaching concerning it." He then expresses his conviction that the church cannot reverse its teaching on whether women can be priests but he adds, "But it is only my *opinion* that it can be ruled out that the church should ever reverse its teaching on the matter." He later states that Catholics who disagree with him do not have the *duty* to agree with his opinion. He uses the teaching on contraception as another example. Dummett agrees with the present teaching of the pope on each matter but he concludes, "I cannot see that someone who in good conscience believes that the Church both could and ought to modify that teaching in whole or part can be judged to have departed from the Catholic faith: it cannot be *known* that such a view is wrong." (See Kelly, 1998, pp. 9-10.) Such an approach has the effect that de Chardin was describing in 1953; it neither satisfies, clothes nor leads the modern mind, or the modern heart (See Klemm, 1986, pp. 5-24.) It is what Habermas (1980, in Young, 1990, p. 30) identifies as the extension of instrumental forms of reason and is one of the key ideological supports for the expansion of the interests of power that is colonisation, rather than the making present of others that would leave the reconstruction of a Catholic life-world open to *all* Catholics (Young, 1990). To be open to all Catholics is to be open to a wide constituency of people of the past, present and future in every culture, especially to those alive now, from the very old to the very young.

In the Catholic church persons are considered full members of the church when they have been baptised, confirmed and received first Eucharist. Baptism is normally conferred in infancy. It is becoming the norm in the Australian church that confirmation and first Eucharist take place about the age of eight. From this age on Catholics are not only receivers of the church's worldview, they are full members of the institution and, if we accept a critical view of knowledge, they are technically fully involved in the recreation of its life-world. Otherwise it is envisaged that they are to spend their lives more fully adapting to a finished product at the command of the organisation. Where classroom knowledge, in this case religious knowledge, is seen as a finished product rather than a communicative culture it can be seen as something to which students have to adapt. This positivist approach which underlies traditional education was the normal way of teaching religious education in Catholic schools in Australia for more than a hundred years. In it neither teacher nor student is accepted as being a true member of the institution involved in the creation of the Catholic life-world.

The Catholic life world *is*. But, in a moderate-critical approach to education, where the historically created character of knowledge is taken for granted, the fact that students will individually and collectively *make* the knowledge of the future places a great emphasis on their freedom to form their own views. This is not to argue for relativism. It is simply to argue for translation, for inculturation. Acknowledging the historically created character of knowledge is in accord with a Christian theology of creation that accepts the whole of reality, ourselves included, as gift. The task of human freedom, as Kevin Kelly (1998, p. 28) says, is to become who we are but we can do

this only by trying to understand better who we are in a never-ending process. There still must be in all Catholic school religious education a stubbornly Christ-informed core but, as Gerard Manly Hopkins has it in the poem *Inversnaid*, "Christ plays in ten thousand places."

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