

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS OVER THE FIFTY YEARS SINCE THE *JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION* BEGAN

The Context

From about 1900 until the 1960s almost all teachers of religion in Catholic schools in Australia were members of religious orders, mostly sisters and brothers with a small number of priests in a few schools conducted by orders such as the Marist Fathers, the Jesuits, and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.

Catholics in that period were obliged to send their children to Catholic schools under pain of excommunication, and the official rhetoric declared that there was a place in a Catholic school for every Catholic child. Religious education for Catholic children in state schools was not seen as a serious issue by most Catholics until much later.

The quality of general teacher education for the sisters and brothers in the Catholic schools over this time varied. Few teachers had more than one year's pre-service teacher training, and it was normally in primary teaching. At its best the teacher education for these Catholic religious was good but many sisters and brothers teaching in Catholic schools had no teacher education at all other than that attained 'on the job'. For example, as late as the 1960s some young Brigidine Sisters were going into secondary schools in New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland, with no teacher preparation other than novitiate training and their own experience of being secondary students two or three years before.

For those who were teacher trained the quality and length of teacher education varied from order to order and, from time to time within orders, depending on the priorities and competence of individual provincial or diocesan leaders, and of the people they chose to train their young teachers. In many schools where there were very large classes, few staff and no access to casual teachers, a local crisis often led to young sisters and brothers being called from their training and being sent into the schools with their teacher education incomplete.

In the 1950s very few sisters or brothers teaching in Catholic schools had completed a university degree as part of preservice. A number of teachers completed a degree part time while engaged in full time teaching. Many did not. One of the larger religious orders in Sydney sent only seven of its sisters to university between 1865 and 1962. Well

into the 1970s sisters and brothers were completing first degrees part time and attending summer and winter schools at the University of New England. In almost every case these teachers worked exceptionally long hours with large classes and fitted their own studies around their school and community obligations. Many teachers of religious education did no further teacher education after their one year preservice training.

A small number of sisters and brothers completed Masters degrees, occasionally in Rome or in other overseas institutions, though these graduates were usually then engaged in work in the training colleges and houses of formation for novices, or in leadership roles in their orders rather than teaching in schools.

Very few teachers in Catholic schools had university or the equivalent education in any aspect of religion. The professional development of teachers as *religious* educators in the 1950s consisted in most cases of the teachers' ordinary development as Catholics and their formation as members of religious orders. After coming from Catholic families and Catholic schools they had completed a novitiate of one or two years, they attended a religious retreat each year, and they took part in the life of their community. In some religious orders the members also completed internal study courses in aspects of religion in addition to some specifically religious education courses completed in their pre-service training. These courses were seldom of a tertiary standard.

John Henry Newman complained of the poor teaching and the third rate theology that trainee priests experienced in the Roman colleges of the nineteenth century. Chris Geraghty's account of the religion taught in one Australian seminary in the 1950s suggests Newman's observations had not been acted on here a century after he made them. Most teachers of religion in Catholic schools did not have even the standard of religious theory or critical training that the seminaries offered.

In 1952 and for the next ten years or so these Catholic school teachers were still living in what seemed an established and stable Catholic subculture buoyed up by the weekly church attendance of most Catholics, regular attendance at the sacrament of confession, the simple catechism,

and real or imagined anti-Catholicism of the establishment in Australia.

This culture was often a cover for poor religious education teaching. In the April 1955 number of *Our Apostolate* Brother Christian Moe described the use of the bible in schools, 'Bible History...has now been relegated to a very inferior position and is commonly treated by both pupils and teachers with something approaching good-natured contempt.' When religion has become ideological and therefore unquestioned it is a simple matter to get away with teaching it poorly. This situation of unquestioning obedience was not going to last much longer!

In the social structure of Catholic education of the time priests, usually with no educational training or experience of school teaching were normally the accepted experts in religious education. They were also the directors of Catholic Education and inspectors of schools though some religious orders, for example the Christian Brothers, would not allow diocesan officials to inspect anything in their schools other than religion. Orders that were not diocesan, especially Irish pontifical orders such as the Christian Brothers were jealous of their independence from the undue influence of local bishops.

Texts and Teachers

In 1924 *The Australasian Catholic Record* (ACR) had begun 'for priests and religious'. In the second issue that year Brother M. B. Hanrahan, a Christian Brother in charge of the teacher training of young brothers at Strathfield NSW began a series of short articles, *The Teaching of the Catechism*. Hanrahan was a fine teacher and an enthusiastic promoter of good teaching in all areas but especially in religion. In his articles in ACR he observed, 'it is therefore inexcusable if worn-out methods are still employed in Catholic schools for dealing with that which constitutes the very purpose of their existence' (i.e., 'the imparting of Christian knowledge').

As well as writing in the *Australasian Catholic Record* Hanrahan was associated with the Christian Brothers' in-house journal *Our Studies*. This journal, now *Catholic School Studies* and available to a wider readership, dealt with all manner of curriculum matters and discussion of strategies for the better running of Christian Brothers' schools in Australasia.

In that 1924 edition of ACR where Hanrahan's first of seven articles appears, there is a short piece on religious education in remote places by a Western Australian priest, John McMahon. Dr McMahon came to Perth from Ireland in 1921. A man of many talents and interests he set out to help the parents of

Catholic children in the West Australian wheat belt whose remoteness from Catholic schools meant that the parents themselves had to educate their children in the faith. Using summer schools, the local Catholic paper and texts he wrote himself McMahon, like Hanrahan, tried to wean teachers and parents off the rote learning and unthinking teaching that so easily fitted the style of the catechism.

McMahon's aim was to motivate children to love Catholicism. His method was to touch their imagination and he emphasised in his writing and teaching that teachers had to apply to religious education only sound educational theory and practice. He corresponded with and often visited religious education thinkers and practitioners such as Canon Drinkwater in Britain and the Benedictine priest, Virgil Michel at Collegeville in the United States. With Michel he developed the idea that children should be taught through the liturgy. McMahon's text *I Pray the Mass* was translated into several languages and used widely though even by the late 1950s neither his nor Hanrahan's efforts had been able to convince most teachers that the catechism was inappropriate for use in schools.

Other innovative individuals furthered their education in religious areas and used their experience in the classroom. The Dominican nuns sent two of their sisters, Dolores White and Anselm O'Brien to Sydney University in the 1920s to complete Bachelors and Masters studies in the Arts Faculty. Both of these women, the first women religious in Australia to complete post graduate university studies, were outstanding students and imposing teachers and after graduation were involved in the Catholic Education Association which conducted May Holiday conferences for Catholic teachers. These conferences which continued well into the 1960s included lectures on religious education from these women and from other educators like M. B. Hanrahan.

Dolores White corresponded with the Australian Frank Sheed, founder with his wife Maisie Ward in England of the religious publishing house Sheed and Ward. She discussed with him, and with O'Brien put into practice, the Catholic Truth Society methodology for teaching the girls at Dominican schools how to think about and pass on their Catholic faith. Her aim in teaching Catholic girls was 'to see that they have sufficient knowledge to make them confident in their apostolic efforts. They will then have no shrinking suspicion that to be Catholic is tenth-rate'.

In 1927 in a souvenir booklet marking sixty years of the Dominican nuns in Australia, Anselm O'Brien wrote a short article on how Catholic

teachers could bring a Catholic consciousness to their teaching of English literature. They could also show their students both what a Catholic approach would be and that there were views other than their own that they had to consider intelligently.

Dolores White in the same booklet declared, 'we (Dominicans) must train girls for their own generation; time, too, be it whispered, for the men to teach their boys that the new woman should be accepted without comment, and her economic liberty granted without grudge'. The consequent history of the Church in Australia suggests that not all the men were listening or that if they were they did not agree!

In this period too Bishop Michael Sheehan developed an approach to religious education based on his book *Apologetics and Christian Doctrine*. White, O'Brien, Sheehan and others were confident that Catholicism could bear an intellectual approach to its teachings. Not all teachers though had the confidence, the education or the time to follow these leaders.

Later, in March 1945 the Aquinas Academy began in Sydney. Here Marist priest Doctor Austin Woodbury taught neo-scholastic philosophy and theology and some of his students were sisters and brothers who were engaged in religious education in the schools. There is no doubt that Woodbury's work indirectly influenced the religion taught in local Catholic schools but its direct influence is yet to be investigated. Much later, after Woodbury had retired, the Aquinas Academy became one of the institutions that now run courses in religious education for teachers seeking accreditation to teach in Catholic schools.

A Time of Change

The Australian Catholic Church of the early 1950s was much as the church of the 1930s and 1940s had been. The 1915 *Syllabus of Religious Education* for the Archdiocese of Sydney had been replaced by updated versions but the content and the methodology of later versions were essentially the same. Classes were becoming larger and schools more strained as the population grew quickly and schools spread further into the suburbs and country towns. Religious orders and seminaries recruited larger numbers of young women and men. Ever larger novitiates were built. People were heard to describe inebriates, 'He's as full as a Catholic school'.

At the same time the first big wave of non-British migrants came to the country. Italian, Yugoslav, Dutch, German and other Catholics came with different experiences of church but they were expected to assimilate into the church as they found

it just as they were expected to be Australian in the way the old hands were. The Church was the Church was the Church.

In this context the De La Salle Brothers began *Our Apostolate* which became *Word In Life* which is now the *Journal of Religious Education*. The changes in name are a small map of the changes in emphasis in Catholic religious education over fifty years, from the frankly catechetical mode of 1952 to the broader position of 2002.

But the context was about to change. In a Europe just recovering from its second major war in thirty years Catholic theologians, liturgists and other thinkers were about to change the universal church such that it could never be the same again. Even before that theology and philosophy had not stayed still as they had in far off Australia. Most Australian Catholics, bishops and clergy as much as their flocks, were largely unaware of and unprepared for the changes.

The Split

The first major upheaval here was political. In 1955 the Irish influenced Catholic working-class church split over the meaning of Catholic Action. The 'Labor Party Split', the presenting problem for the split in the church, was over issues of ideology, and institutional and personal power. The Catholic church split ostensibly over a theological point but ideology and power were at the heart of it too. The two most powerful bishops in the country, Mannix and Gilroy were seen to be on opposite sides of both the theological and the political divide. Rome came down in Gilroy's favour but did not contain or quell the fight; there was too much at stake for those involved. Remnants of the fight persist today particularly in Victoria.

From 1955 families, religious orders, friendships and allegiances were divided. Catholics were being made ready for changes to come in church and society that most could not then imagine. Having had to take sides for or against deeply divided church leaders in the fifties Catholics could do it again later. Where individuals lined up on the political issues of 1955 was usually where they stayed when the changes took place in the church and religious education after the Vatican Council. The old Catholic unity was finished and the authority of the bishops was diluted.

The first major change in Catholic religious consciousness was the liturgical revival that took place in the late 1950s. There were the rediscovery of Gregorian chant, the renewed Easter liturgy, and the liturgical theory coming from Collegeville Minnesota and Europe, for example from Pius Parsch in *The Church's Year of Grace*. These and

English authors such as Clifford Howell in *The Work of Our Redemption* led to the hymns of James McAuley and Richard Connelly, the *Living Parish Hymn Book* in 1961 and a new vitality in the liturgy of the Mass. At this stage the changes were mostly joyous and the cause of little tension. Many Catholic teachers, old and young, were involved in liturgical innovation and recovery, and the discovery of the scriptures that accompanied it. They found it personally enriching and an influence on their teaching of religion.

Then in 1962 the second Vatican Council began in Rome.

Responding to Change

In the years after the Council there was much tension in the Australian church especially in religious education circles. One example was the unedifying fight about the *Come Alive* series, as much a struggle about power and a failure of authority in the local church as it was about theology and religious education. This saga is beginning to be chronicled in articles and general histories and needs several doctoral theses to explain its implications for religious education and the church in general.

As well as tension there were enthusiasm and diverse approaches to handling or responding to the new church. John XXIII had called on Catholics for an *Aggiornamento*, an opening of the windows of the church so that the Holy Spirit could fly in. One response was an attempt by some religious orders to find out from the sources in Europe and the USA what the church was doing and where the best leads were to be found in revitalising religious education and the church. For some it was combined with a hunch or a conviction that there were new directions that needed to be followed, for example the move into counselling and personal growth, or a rediscovery of the *charism* of the founders of the orders.

The Marist Brothers after their 1967 General Chapter in Rome set about with a will to take seriously the Vatican II declaration on education *Gravissimum Educationis* as a blueprint for their schools. They aimed to combine the insights of the Council with their own traditions and the thinking of the brothers throughout the world. University education became part of the preservice of their young men. Experienced brothers were encouraged to complete higher degrees.

Marcellin Flynn, Patrick Fahey, Kevin Treston, Kieran Geaney and others were sent to universities in the USA and Europe. When they returned to Australia they conducted a series of Catechetical Conferences in the summer holidays at St Joseph's

College, Hunters Hill. Flynn particularly began to research the effects of religious education in Catholic schools in Australia. As well religious education inservices were conducted for the teachers in Marist and other schools.

Ronald Perry, Ronald Fogarty and Brian Grey among others studied counselling and human growth programs. When Perry returned to Australia he became the founding director of The Institute of Counselling. This institute, established by the Archdiocese of Sydney following the leadership of Mary Lewis, began in 1970 and pioneered the link between the human behavioural sciences and Catholicism. Many of the participants in the Institute's courses have been and continue to be religious education teachers in Catholic schools as well as workers in other Catholic endeavours such as hospitals and welfare agencies. The effect of the Institute on religious education is yet to be researched but it is significant.

Early in the 1970s groups of sisters, brothers and priests came together in the major cities and developed what was innocently called 'the camp movement'. People involved in a revived Young Christian Students movement, members of religious orders experimenting with new ways of prayer and making retreats, people influenced by the human growth movement, others trying to work out different ways to encourage the young in the growth of spirituality came together and devised short residential experiences for teenagers.

Often it was the Presbyterians or Methodists and later the Uniting Church that owned the sites that were suitable for camps. Some of these camps were enormous like those conducted annually at the Hume Weir near Albury. In time religious orders bought sites or converted now empty novitiate buildings for these new camp style retreats. Though the aim of these religious camps was the formation of the students, the preparation and conducting of them also affected the formation of the teachers.

In the 1960s a catechetical institute, *Corpus Christi*, was begun in London. Like several other catechetical institutes it later closed down, a victim of the uncertainties and tensions that surrounded the post-Vatican II catechetical endeavour. In its early years however, several Australians were among its students. Other Australians attended the similar East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila.

By 1973 the Australian bishops had set up an equivalent organisation, The National Pastoral Institute (NPI), in Melbourne. The institute was led by Monsignor John F. Kelly. Kelly had written the new 1963 *Catholic Catechism* which, with its scriptural and liturgical emphasis had given

teachers a way of escaping the reproductive hermeneutic of the old catechism that had stymied Hanrahan, McMahon and other educators many years before. A founding staff member and later director, Sister of Mercy Rosemary Crumlin was a graduate of *Corpus Christi* in London.

The NPI as it was known eventually met the same fate as *Corpus Christi*. In the twenty or so years it existed however, religious educators, first religious and priests then mostly lay people from all over the country spent a year full time there and were initiated into the latest insights in the religious education world. In many cases they were also introduced to an adult approach to their own religion and spirituality, something not always encouraged or nurtured by their earlier religious training.

The first event for the new NPI was the 1973 Eucharistic Congress Catechetical Conference at Melbourne University. Alfonso Nebreda, the director of the EAPI in Manila was a keynote speaker as was the Indian catechist Father Amalopavodas. The 1970s and 1980s was a period in which many visiting educationists were invited to Australia by religious orders, by the religious publishers Dove Communications, by other organisations interested in religious education, and by Catholic Education Offices in different dioceses. Jungmann had been here in the 1950s to teach the *kerygmatic* approach. Bruce Vawter came in the 1960s as Australian Catholics were discovering the bible. From 1970 on Gabriel Moran, Catherine O'Sullivan, Joe Wise, Ronald Goldman, Kevin Nichols, Maria De La Cruz, David Konstant, Michael Warren, Maria Harris, Thomas Groome, Mary Boys and many others came and contributed to the religious education melting pot.

In 1974 Ninian Smart came. Smart was the founding Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster in England. There he and a large talented staff had developed an approach to religious education that was in Smart's term 'non-confessional'. This meant that religions were to be studied on their own terms and for their own sake by school students. The aim was not to convert or to encourage practice but to have students understand and empathise with religions. In fact not all of the staff at Lancaster taught his way. It was possible for a Catholic to do a Master of Arts in Religious Studies at Lancaster and study Synoptic Gospels, the Theology of Vatican II and the History of Christianity, for example, without looking at another religion at all. But their thrust was Religious Studies.

A number of Australian religious educators studied at Lancaster. Gerard Rummery among others was

influential in Catholic religious education on his return to Australia. So were those who set up schools of Religious Studies at the Universities of Queensland, Sydney and South Australia. The Studies of Religion courses in the Higher School Certificate and equivalent courses in several Australian states grew out of the Lancaster and other British experiments. As most of the students sitting these final year subjects are from Catholic schools Smart's influence on the formation of religious educators and students in Australian Catholic schools must be considerable.

Gerard Rummery, a De La Salle brother influenced the move to religious studies via his 1975 book, *Catechesis and Religious Education in a Pluralist Society*, a version of his Lancaster doctoral thesis. Before that he introduced seminal articles on religious education from France in the pages of *Our Apostolate*, the progenitor of this journal. Rummery translated Jacques Audinet, Pierre Babin and others in the early 1970s. These articles were important then for linking Australian educators with European thought and are worth revisiting now when later research puts a new perspective on them.

Another influential theorist has been Thomas Groome from Boston College. Groome is important in the formation of religious educators in this country for several reasons. First, there have been so many Australian Catholics who have studied at Boston College with Groome, Mary Boys and others. A number of these have since written curriculum material, school texts and religious education theory or have administered religious education departments in Catholic Education offices. Secondly Groome's shared Christian praxis approach to religious education has been used as the theory base and methodology for several diocesan guidelines or syllabus documents. The dioceses of Parramatta and Canberra-Goulburn are two examples.

There are critics of Groome; Helen Raduntz and Maurice Ryan are two. There are also supporters; Michael Bezzina, Louise Welbourne and Terry Lovat are some. One source of the criticism is that Groome has not always been addressed in his own terms. For example the first version of the Parramatta curriculum document *Sharing Our Story* published in 1991 uses Groome's method without clearly being aware of his epistemological questions.

Possibly Groome's main contribution has been that he asks, and answers for himself theoretical questions of religious education. He asks what *knowing* is, what does it mean to know in religion? The first Parramatta attempt to use Groome stopped

at his method and was in danger of becoming the very thing Groome set out to replace, 'just another religious education bandwagon'.

The 1999 version of Parramatta's *Sharing Our Story* has addressed the theory questions and has become the benchmark for several other diocesan curriculum documents in NSW. This is partly the result of the critique that religious education scholars in the universities, especially Australian Catholic University and the Universities of Newcastle and South Australia have brought to bear on Groome and on the uses of his work. The Catholic Education Office encouraged and participated in the dialogue. The development of other curriculum documents in between the two versions of *Sharing Our Story*, particularly *Celebrating Our Journey* and the 1996 version of *Faithful To God: Faithful To People* from the Sydney Catholic Education Office has influenced the later Parramatta work. The dialogue and research in religious education in Australia have reached a level not previously experienced here. The enthusiasm and enterprise of religious leaders after the Second Vatican Council have born fruit.

The Catholic Education offices in the various dioceses have influenced the formation of religious educators too. In 1979-80 Kerry Doyle from the Catholic Education Office Sydney, at a time when the Sydney Archdiocese extended over the whole of the Sydney metropolitan area conducted a survey of religion teachers in the archdiocese. Nearly fourteen hundred primary teachers and two hundred and eighty secondary teachers responded. Of these respondents: 26.2% of primary teachers and 22.6% of secondary teachers of religion had no training at all in religious education, or formation in a religious order, or any other post school training in religion.

Under the leadership of Father Barry Collins the office set out to have a system of accreditation for all religious education teachers. The dioceses of NSW came together and designed a certificate course to provide a basic religious education for teachers who had no post school religion training. In 1982 a *Directory of Religious Studies Opportunities* was published to encourage all religious education teachers to further their education. Dioceses paid or reimbursed teachers who completed courses. This was combined with inservice for teachers and by policy changes that made religious education coordinators part of school executives and religious education training a prerequisite for many other executive positions in Catholic schools.

The Catholic teachers colleges which eventually became the Australian Catholic University: Christ

College, Mercy College, Aquinas, Signadou, McAuley, Glebe, Strathfield, Castle Hill, Mount Street and Dundas all began as religious order teachers' colleges. From shortly after the council the religious education and theology staffs were mostly sisters, brothers or priests. Those who had post graduate degrees mostly had them from European, British and American universities. Almost no teachers in schools had post graduate qualifications in religion.

In 2001 two hundred and forty one students were enrolled in the Master of Religious Education over the five campuses of Australian Catholic University as well as the same number in the Graduate Diploma of Religious Education. There were twenty-six enrolled in PhD and EdD programs in religious education. There are also religious education teachers enrolled in graduate programs at Notre Dame, Western Australia, and at other universities and at colleges of divinity in each of the states.

Conclusion

In 1952 when this journal was begun by the De La Salle brothers a visiting lecturer could stand in front of a hall full of Catholic school teachers and know that all but one or two had done a strict novitiate, had been to mass that morning, were celibate and obedient and were part of a strong and united Catholic sub-culture that was essentially Anglo-Celtic in origin. The same speaker, had she thought about it would also have known that many had not attended university, almost none had post graduate studies in anything, few were trained to be critical thinkers and that most knew little of marriage or the ordinary day to day life of their lay sisters and brothers in the church.

A lecturer in front of such a crowd of Catholic school teachers today can presume very little of the audience except that they all have three, four or more years of tertiary education and that, if religion teachers they usually have some form of accreditation to teach religion.

Between 1952 and now there has been the confusion that followed the ideological changes in Catholicism following the Second Vatican Council. The teaching staffs of Catholic schools, education offices and the Catholic University are almost all lay-people. There has been a decline in priestly and religious vocations and of overt religious practice in Australia. There has been also the feminisation of many female teachers and of some of the males. There have been changes in education generally. The past is indeed a different country.

This article is Sydney centred reflecting the writer's experience and the restrictions of one article. It

raises more questions than it answers because of these limits, because the writer does not know many of the answers, and because this is an enormous topic. The history of the professional development of religious educators in Australia deserves many volumes. Someone looking for a doctoral topic could find one here.

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ECHO AND SILENCE

Contemporary Issues for Australian Religious Education

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This book brings together a number of leading Australian religious educators to present their research and reflections on the present state of religious education in Australia. The book provides scholars and practitioners in schools, parishes, diocesan offices and universities with a rich selection of material with which to further their work. A broad range of interests has been surveyed in this collection. A number of contributors reflect on issues of schooling and classroom curriculum authors.

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