An Analysis of the

Draft Catholic Primary
Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland
2011

Éanna Johnson PhD
January 2013
CONTENTS OF ANALYSIS

Page

Introduction & Background 3
Overview of Draft Curriculum 3
Title and Table of Contents of Curriculum 4
Introductory Sections of Curriculum 6
The Curriculum’s Four Strands
   Christian Faith 20
   Scripture 25
   Ritual and Prayer 28
   Morality 36
Curriculum Appendices A, B & C 40
Curriculum Glossary 43
APPENDIX I: Press Releases after Bishops’ Meetings 50
APPENDIX II: Summary Comments on Draft Syllabus 2008 51

Note on author, Éanna Johnson, PhD(Theology).
Dr Johnson has broad experience in education: in teaching & research at second and third levels, and also while a management consultant in carrying out many significant assignments in the fields of education and training. He has given religious education for over thirty years to children, youth and adults. He was awarded a PhD in Theology by St Patrick’s College, Pontifical University, Maynooth; his research project was an in-depth theological and pedagogical analysis of the Alive-O religious education programme for Catholic primary schools (see http://eprints.nuim.ie/3076/). His analysis of the Alive-O programme was complemented by a nationwide Learning Assessment survey with pupils who had completed the Programme (see www.eannajohnson.org).
INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

This Analysis is of a Draft Curriculum for Religious Education in Ireland’s Catholic Primary Schools, which was written in 2011 by Anne Hession (lecturer at St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin) at the request of the Irish Episcopal Commission for Catechetics. The Draft Curriculum was sent to some people, undisclosed, for comment. This author learned of the Draft in Autumn 2011 and requested a copy from the National Catechetics Office in Maynooth; he was kindly sent a copy for comment, and having studied the Draft, submitted Comments to the Catechetics Office, all our Bishops, and the relevant office in Rome – the Congregation for the Clergy, (Responsibility for oversight of catechesis was transferred to the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation in January 2013). The Analysis was conducted with principal reference to the main sources recommended by the Church for Catholic catechesis: the Bible; the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) \(^1\); and the General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) \(^2\).

Work on preparation of the Curriculum is apparently continuing but no information on progress is being made available by the Episcopal Commission on Catechetics.

A syllabus or curriculum is generally understood as a concise statement of the main points or elements of a program. A syllabus or curriculum for catechesis (or RE) should address content and pedagogy in a clear and concise manner, to provide helpful guidance to writers of a programme, and to facilitate oversight of both Syllabus/Curriculum and Programme.

Background.

In 2002 Bishop Martin Drennan, Chairman of the Irish Episcopal Commission on Catechetics, announced the preparation of a new Syllabus for Religious Education for Catholic primary schools by a team of catechetical experts. \(^3\) This was confirmed by Bishop Drennan in 2003, writing in *Intercom*: ‘It is timely to re-visit and rewrite the original syllabus of the 1970s. When this new syllabus is written, it will be followed by another primary catechetical programme’. \(^4\)

Other sources also indicated that a Syllabus had been prepared in the 1970s for preparation of the first *Children of God series* for Catholic primary schools in Ireland. Anne Hession and Patricia Kieran state: ‘The syllabus for the *Children of God* series, while unpublished, has changed in the course of its second presentation and representation [the *Alive-O programme*] yet the general methodological approach, the anthropological-experiential approach which has guided the Irish National Catechetical Programme from 1973 to 2005 has remained the same’. \(^5\)

This author sought a copy of this original Syllabus from a number of sources, including from the Commission on Catechetics, the National Director for Catechetics and Veritas (publishers of the *Children of God* and *Alive-O series*), but was unable to obtain a copy or verify that such a Syllabus ever existed.

---


\(^3\) Hermann Kelly, *Changes to RE on the way*, The Irish Catholic, Nov.28 2002, p.1. No information was ever disclosed on the identity of the experts working on the preparation of the Syllabus.


In 2006 this author prepared an Outline Syllabus for Primary School RE, drawing on his own experience and researches, particularly on comparable syllabi from other countries, as a contribution to the process of syllabus development. This Outline Syllabus was sent to the Episcopal Commission for Catechetics, the National Catechetics Office and individual bishops.  

It has been the commendable practice for several years past to issue a Press Release after each of the quarterly general meetings of the Irish Episcopal Conference, covering key issues that have been considered at the meeting. The Press Release after Bishops’ Summer Meeting, 13 June 2007, included statement: ‘Work on the first draft of a new Religious Education Syllabus for use in the Catholic Primary schools of Ireland is at an advanced stage. This new syllabus will replace the previous one which was written thirty years ago at the beginning of the 1970’s. Drawing on the insights of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and written in the spirit of the General Directory for Catechesis this new syllabus will be an invaluable aid in furthering evangelisation, religious education and catechesis’.

While it is good to see a reference to the new Syllabus in an official Press Release, there are some worrying aspects. This is the only reference to date to a new Syllabus (or Curriculum) in the Press Releases following the Quarterly General Meetings of the Irish Episcopal Conference (see Appendix I). Might one conclude that this matter, which is so vital (given that teaching the Faith is every bishop’s first task), was considered by the Bishops Conference only once in the ten years since the project was initiated in 2002? Or might it indicate that the matter was discussed on other occasions but not considered important enough to report on? Or, more worrying still, might it indicate a decision to withhold information from the general body of the faithful (clergy, religious and laity) on the preparation process of the Syllabus / Curriculum?

One must also be concerned about the following part of the statement on the new Syllabus in the Press Release: “Drawing on the insights of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and written in the spirit of the General Directory for Catechesis”. This is very worrying, because it falls gravely short of the Church’s requirements, which are for ‘perfect harmony with the CCC’ and ‘due consideration for the norms and criteria in the GDC’, some of which are mandatory.

In November 2008 an incomplete first draft of Part 2 of a new Primary School Religious Education Syllabus for Ireland and Scotland was circulated by the National Catechetics Office in Maynooth to a number of people, Éanna Johnson included, inviting comments. I studied the draft and responded with comments to the National Catechetics Office, copied to the Irish and Scottish Bishops and to the relevant Vatican department, the Congregation for the Clergy. The draft Syllabus had some good features, but regrettfully fell short of satisfactory as the basis for an authentic Catholic catechetics programme.

The National Catechetics Office responded, acknowledging receipt of comments, and stating that a working group was being established to move the process forward. This author sought further information on the preparation process of the new Syllabus, but none was forthcoming, and it now appears that the Syllabus project was abandoned. This unsatisfactory lack of transparency has continued to date, notwithstanding a statement from the Irish Bishops’ Conference, 9.12.2009 that: ‘Charity, truthfulness, integrity and transparency must be the hallmark of all our communications'.

---

6 See www.eannajohnson.org  
7 Code of Canon Law 1983.  
8 General Directory for Catechesis. 10, 284.  
9 The inclusion of Scotland is presumably because the Alive-O Programme was in use in Scottish Catholic primary schools, not without controversy. One presumes the Scottish Bishops then opted out of the current Curriculum project.
Secrecy is unwise and unnecessary. It would have been easy and inexpensive to publicise the preparation of the Syllabus (and later the Curriculum), and make the draft available to all on a website, with invitation to read and submit comments. This approach was followed by Bishop Donal McKeown in preparation of a document on Youth Ministry. Many advantages would have flowed from an open and transparent approach. The final document would benefit from a wider consultation. The body of the faithful would be more involved and energised in the cause of catechesis. It would also involve people right across the Church in evangelisation, the primary mission of the Church, of which catechesis is an essential and integral component. Withholding information on this vital matter is also an injustice to the faithful in general and in particular to the children, parents and teachers most immediately involved in primary school education.

Draft Curriculum:
In October 2011, this author learned that a new Catholic Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland had been prepared for the Episcopal Commission on Catechetics by Anne Hession, lecturer in St Patrick’s, Drumcondra, and that the National Catechetics Office had sent the Curriculum for comment to some people. Seeking further information, the Irish Catholic Bishops’ website stated that: ‘At present the (Catechetics) Council is working on the new Curriculum for Primary Religious Education.’ No further information was given on the new Curriculum, and there was no indication as to what happened to the 2008 draft Syllabus, or why Scotland was no longer featuring in the project.

On contacting the National Catechetics Office this author was kindly sent a copy of the new Curriculum for comment, but no further information was forthcoming about the proposed new Curriculum. Having studied the draft, it was regretfully found unacceptable; comments were submitted to the National Catechetics Office in January 2012, copied to the Irish Bishops and the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome.

Since then no further information has been forthcoming concerning progress on the new Curriculum, though unofficial indications suggest that a new Draft has been prepared by Anne Hession, which has been sent to at least one person for comment. One can only deplore the continued lack of transparency and the exclusion of the general body of the faithful (clergy, religious, and laity, especially parents, teachers and others with a particular interest in catechesis and youth) from the process of information and consultation.

Note: In the Commentary sections following, the page numbers given are those of the Draft Curriculum, unless specifically stated as page numbers in this Analysis. It would have been helpful to include the Draft Curriculum as an Appendix to this Analysis, but that is not possible because the Draft Curriculum is the property of the Episcopal Council for Catechetics.

11 Several other people have informed me that their requests to the National Catechetical Office for copies of the draft Curriculum were refused, while information given on progress of the preparation of the new Curriculum was variable.
OVERVIEW OF DRAFT CURRICULUM

The draft Curriculum seems to be aiming to respond to the more pluralist situation that now exists in Ireland. However, in pursuing this aim, which is commendable in principle, the Curriculum falls into the trap of religious relativism, and is inadequate on Catholic teaching.

The title of this draft Curriculum refers to ‘religious education’, which can have many different understandings. The Curriculum’s definition of ‘religious education’ (Glossary, p.118) is relativist, giving equal value to all religions and non-religious options, and not containing anything Christian or Catholic. The Church does not recommend this type of ‘religious education’. This Curriculum’s foundation is therefore not Catholic or Christian, so the Curriculum as a whole could hardly be satisfactory. A relativist approach to ‘religious education’ would facilitate transfer of leadership from Church to State (as has already happened at secondary school level).

The Church requires for catechetical materials: ‘Perfect doctrinal fidelity, …. perfect harmony with the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) … and due consideration for the norms and criteria contained in the General Directory for Catechesis’ (GDC) 12. It is good that the Curriculum includes references from both CCC and GDC, but unfortunately no commitment is made to perfect harmony with the CCC nor to due consideration for the GDC; in practice, the Curriculum is found to diverge significantly from both CCC and GDC.

The GDC places catechesis at the heart of Church’s mission of evangelisation, and defines the foundational strategy of catechesis as ‘the pedagogy of God’ – transmission of the truths of the Faith received through Divine Revelation. The Curriculum diverges from these GDC requirements, not mentioning being part of evangelisation, not using the pedagogy of God as its basic strategy, and not acknowledging the truth of Christianity.

The fundamental structure set out by the GDC for education in Catholic Faith is the history of salvation, and its expression through the four-part structure (the four pillars) of the CCC: Profession of Faith; Liturgy & Sacraments; Life in Christ (Morality); Prayer (GDC16,108,115). It is good that salvation history is referred to in the Curriculum, but unsatisfactory that salvation history is not used as a basic structure, and not adequately presented.

The Curriculum has a four-part structure (Four Strands): Christian Faith; Scripture; Ritual & Prayer; Morality. This structure differs from the four pillars of the CCC, which is unhelpful. The Strands do contain some good material, but also significant deficiencies and omissions. Good material is undermined by defining it merely as ‘ideas and concepts’, not as truths.

The Strand, ‘Christian Faith’, has much good material, but falls short of fully satisfactory.

The Strand Unit, ‘Scripture’, diverges substantially from the Church. Sacred Tradition and Revelation are mis-defined and the Church’s Magisterium omitted. Indeed, the Curriculum does not recognise the Church’s teaching authority in any aspect of faith or morals.

It is unsatisfactory that the Curriculum substitutes the one Strand, ‘Ritual and Prayer’, in place of the CCC’s two Parts for ‘Liturgy & Sacraments’ and ‘Prayer’. Liturgy and Sacrament are thereby diminished by not according them a separate section and reducing them to mere ‘ritual’. There is good material in this Strand, but also omissions and deficiencies; the presentation of the Mass and Eucharist is particularly poor, which is very serious.

The Strand on ‘Morality’ appears syncretist, seeking to combine secular and Catholic approaches to morality, thereby failing to present authentic Catholic morality.

In general, the Curriculum does contain some good material, but regrettfully deficiencies, omissions, and a relativist approach render it unsatisfactory as a basis for education in Catholic Faith in Ireland’s primary schools. A complete re-write is needed, fully faithful to the clear, comprehensive and inspiring guidance of the Church’s Magisterium.

12 General Directory for Catechesis. 10, 120, 284-285.
A key word in the title is 'Religious Education'. There are many different understandings of this term, and so it is important to establish up-front what this Curriculum means by the term 'religious education'. This can be found in the Curriculum's Glossary of terms which includes Religious Education on page 118. The definition of Religious Education given in the Glossary is radically relativist in relation to religion, that is, between all religions without qualification (even though the multitude of religions in the world today range from the respected world religions to the extremely bizarre, e.g. the Church of Satan), and displays a benign attitude to all 'non-religious options' (which could range from principled agnosticism to aggressive atheism e.g. Marxism).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) of the Irish Government’s Department of Education and Science published syllabi for Religious Education as a public examination subject at Junior Certificate (2000) and Leaving Certificate (2003) levels. The Syllabi do not offer an exact definition of 'religious education', but the meaning can be inferred from the Aims and Rationale: ‘religious education exposes students to a broad range of religious traditions and the non-religious interpretation of life, exploring the human search for meaning, and how this search has found expression in religion, thereby contributing to the spiritual and moral development of students’. The Syllabi approach moral development separate from religious faith, exposing students to a variety of ethical codes and norms for behaviour, to help them develop for their own moral stance and decisions.

The NCCA Syllabi make particular reference to the Christian tradition, not to acknowledge Christianity as of any greater value than any other religion or non-religious view, but simply because of Christianity’s contribution to the culture of Irish life. Strangely, the Catholic Church (the religion of the great majority of the people of Ireland for 1500 years) is not mentioned anywhere in the Syllabi (not even in the Section – ‘Religion: the Irish experience’), which amounts to an unacceptable bias against Catholicism. The Syllabi could be considered to give a broad and religiously relativist understanding of 'religious education'.

The draft Curriculum’s understanding of ‘religious education’ harmonises with the view of the secular State Syllabi, as described above. However, this approach, which is religiously relativist, is contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church (further comment below, p.6-10, 45). This indicates that the Curriculum is built on an unsound foundation which is not authentically Catholic. One must also be concerned that this Curriculum will thereby facilitate the transfer of leadership in primary school religious education from the Church to the State (a disastrous course of action, which is nevertheless considered or advocated by some prominent Catholic religious educators), as has already happened at secondary school level. (see also p.18, 41 below of this Analysis).

14 Like building a house on sand, instead of on rock. Mt.7:24-27.
The Table of Contents shows that the core of the draft Curriculum is structured in four 'Strands', which are given as: Christian Faith, Scripture, Ritual & Prayer, Morality.

This basic structure departs from the structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), which has four ‘pillars’: Profession of Faith, Celebration of the Christian Mystery (which includes the liturgy and sacraments), Life in Christ (encompassing morality), Christian Prayer. These four pillars are also the basic structure in the Compendium of the CCC\(^\text{17}\), and the recently published Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church (*Youcat*)\(^\text{18}\). The Curriculum, therefore, is breaking with the Catholic approach to religious education in its basic structure.

The CCC places Revelation in the introductory section of the pillar ‘Profession of Faith’, indicating clearly that Christian Faith is founded on Revelation. This introductory section includes 'natural revelation' by which we can know of the existence of God by use of reason reflecting on creation and the human person, and also includes supernatural Revelation, comprising both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, which are committed to the teaching office of the Church (the Magisterium)\(^\text{19}\). The Curriculum breaks from this Catholic approach, by omitting Revelation in general, placing Scripture as a separate strand after Faith, while omitting Tradition and the Church’s Magisterium.\(^\text{20}\)

It is helpful to go again to the Glossary to clarify the Curriculum’s understanding in relation to Revelation, Tradition and Scripture. The Glossary does not have an entry for Scripture; the entries for Revelation and Tradition depart radically from the Catholic understandings (see further comment below, p.45, 46). As Revelation is the foundation for the Catholic approach (or ‘pedagogy') to religious education (GDC 36-59), the Curriculum can hardly claim to be authentically Catholic.

The draft Curriculum has a single Strand ‘Ritual and Prayer’, in contrast with two separate pillars in the CCC. The Curriculum is effectively downgrading the Catholic understanding of Liturgy and Sacrament, by equating them with 'ritual', and not giving them the importance of a separate Strand, but rather treating them as just an element of prayer. This is certainly not a Catholic approach.

In summary therefore, the selection of a structure for the Curriculum based on the four Strands noted above represents a significant departure from a Catholic approach to religious education, and is unsatisfactory for a Catholic curriculum.


\(^{20}\) The vital importance of a correct understanding of Revelation was stressed recently by Pope Benedict XVI. ‘We are facing a profound crisis of faith, a loss of the religious sense, that constitutes the Church’s greatest challenge today. ….. The crucial problem is therefore the question of the structure of revelation – the relation between sacred Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and the office of the successors of the Apostles’. *Address to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*. Vatican City, Jan 30 2012, Zenit.org.
INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS OF CURRICULUM

Catholic Primary Religious Education in Ireland, page 7-8.

This section contains some helpful information on primary religious education in Ireland.

The final three paragraphs give much attention to the necessary respect for conscience, and the need for religious education to take account of varying religious situations of pupils and the many different levels of faith response. It is reasonable to include these aspects. However, it would have been more important to include the essential requirement that Catholic religious education should present the Faith in its fullness and integrity\(^{21}\), without confusions or omissions.\(^{22}\)

The second last paragraph refers to ‘the important distinction between religious education and catechesis’. This is a key issue, and worthy of further attention.

It has already been noted above that the Curriculum’s understanding of ‘religious education’ is religiously relativist. Church documents never give a religiously relativist meaning to the term ‘religious education’. However, there is potential for unclarity in what the Church does mean by ‘religious education’, because of variations in the use of the term ‘religious education’, and related terms, in Church documents.

**Nature of Catholic Catechesis.**

One might first consider the meaning of ‘catechesis’ in the Curriculum and in Church documents. The Curriculum has a definition of Catechesis in the Glossary (p.116), which is not unreasonable, but it is very brief and does not include a number of key elements in the Church’s understanding of catechesis. A curriculum for Catholic religious education could and should say much more about Catholic catechesis, which might include the following:

The *General Catechetical Directory 1971*\(^{23}\) presents catechesis as one of the forms of the ministry of the word. Under varied circumstances and needs, catechetical activity itself takes various forms, which include: religious instruction given to children and adolescents in or outside schools; catechetical programmes for adults; catechumenate programmes for those who are preparing themselves for the reception of baptism, or for those who have been

---

21 The importance of catechesis was emphasised by Pope Benedict XVI in his address to the Irish Bishops on the occasion of their 2006 *ad limina* visit: ‘Sound catechesis and careful “formation of the heart” are needed; …… Ensure that catechetical programmes are based on *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as well as the new *Compendium*. Superficial presentations of Catholic teaching must be avoided, because only the fullness of the faith can communicate the liberating power of the Gospel. By exercising vigilance over the quality of the syllabuses and the course-books used and by proclaiming the Church's doctrine in its entirety, you are carrying out your responsibility to “preach the word … in season and out of season … unfailing in patience and in teaching” (*2 Tim 4:2*). Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the Irish Bishops on their *Ad Limina* Visit, 28 October 2006. Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie).

22 In *Catechesi Tradendae – On Catechesis in Our Time*, 1979, 17,49, Pope John Paul II noted ‘not only an undeniable advance in the vitality of catechetical activity and promising initiatives, but also the limitations or even “deficiencies” in what has been achieved to date. These limitations are particularly serious when they endanger integrity of content’. ‘But it must be humbly recognised that this rich flowering has brought with it articles and publications which are ambiguous and harmful to young people and to the life of the Church. …… catechetical works which bewilder the young and even adults, either by deliberately or unconsciously omitting elements essential to the Church’s faith, or by attributing excessive importance to certain themes at the expense of others, or, chiefly, by a rather horizontalist overall view out of keeping with the teaching of the Church’s magisterium’.

baptised but lack a proper Christian initiation. Catechesis for adults must be considered the chief form of catechesis; all the other forms are in some way oriented to it.  

The General Catechetical Directory presents as functions of Catechesis: leading people to maturity of faith, through acquiring a more profound living knowledge of God and of his plan of salvation centred in Christ; opening people to the grace of conversion and renewal; helping them in performance of duties of faith; growth in knowledge of the faith; promoting the life of liturgical and private prayer; giving a Christian light on human existence; fostering the unity of Christians; helping to spread the Gospel in the world; preparing for eternal life in heaven, while also working for the improvement of human society.  

Evangelii Nuntiandi 1975, emphasised catechesis as an integral element of evangelisation. Systematic catechetical instruction is an important means of evangelization, helping people to learn truths of God, fixing in the memory, intelligence and heart the essential truths that must impregnate all of life.

Catechesi Tradendae 1979, reiterated that catechesis is a vital element in evangelisation. Within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, educating the disciple of Christ by means of an organic and systematic teaching of Christian doctrine, the knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, in catechetical practice, one finds that initial evangelization has often not taken place, at least not adequately, for children, pre-adolescents, adolescents or adults. This means that ‘catechesis’ must often be evangelistic, concerned not only with teaching the faith, but also with conversion to Jesus Christ of those who are still on the threshold of faith.

The General Directory for Catechesis 1997 further confirms the principle of catechesis as an essential and vital element in evangelization. The GDC distinguishes between initiatory catechesis and catechesis for ongoing formation in faith.

Initiatory catechesis matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him into the Christian community. However, in pastoral practice it is not always easy to define the boundaries of these activities, because many who present themselves for catechesis may still require genuine conversion. The first stage in the catechetical process may therefore be dedicated to ensuring conversion, sometimes called ‘kerygmatic catechesis’. Initiatory catechesis should be: a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith; education in both knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith, like an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life; and centred on the most fundamental and essential truths, laying the foundation for further growth in the faith and life of the Christian community.

Catechesis for ongoing formation deepens knowledge of the faith, and may include study of Sacred Scripture, the social teaching of the Church, liturgical catechesis, spiritual formation and theological instruction. An essential dimension is integration into the Christian community.

The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ, which is expressed in profession of faith in the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The fundamental tasks of catechesis are: Promoting knowledge of the faith; Liturgical education; Moral formation; Teaching to pray; Education for

---

24 General Catechetical Directory. 19, 20.
28 General Directory for Catechesis, 61-68.
29 Ibid. 69-72.
Community Life; and Missionary initiation. To fulfil its tasks, catechesis avails of two principal means: transmission of the Gospel message and experience of the Christian life.  

'Religious Education' and related terms in Church documents.

Over the period since the Second Vatican Council there has been some evolution in the use and meaning of 'religious education' and related terms in Magisterial documents, as set out below:

*Gravissimum Educationis* 1965 uses the terms ‘Christian education’ in a general sense, and ‘moral and religious education’ in relation to schools, in ways which are virtually synonymous with ‘catechesis’. Catholic teachers are to be trained in ‘religious knowledge’.  

*The General Catechetical Directory* 1971 uses the term ‘religious instruction’ for the form of catechesis given to children and adolescents in the school or outside it.

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975 uses the terms ‘catechetical instruction’ and ‘religious instruction’ in reference to catechesis for children and young people, whether given in church, school or home. ‘Catechetical instruction’ is also used in reference to catechesis in the form of the catechumenate for both young people and adults. The term ‘education in the faith’ is used as synonymous with ‘catechesis’.

*The Catholic School* 1977 uses the term ‘education in the faith’ as synonymous with ‘catechesis’. The term ‘Christian education’ refers to the total education given in a Catholic school, which includes the religious dimension, aiming to develop the complete Christian formation of pupils and their total commitment to Christ. The terms ‘catechetical instruction’ and ‘religious instruction’ refer specifically to the teaching of religion in the school, which is expected to supplement catechesis in home and church.

*Catechesi Tradendae* 1979 uses the terms ‘religious education’, ‘religious instruction’, ‘education in the faith’, and ‘Christian education’ as virtually synonymous with ‘catechesis’. In relation to ecumenical collaboration *Catechesi Tradendae* uses the term ‘common instruction in Christian religion’, which must be supplemented by full catechesis for Catholics. In relation to Catholic schools the terms ‘education in the faith’ and ‘religious education’ appear synonymous with full ‘catechesis’, while the terms ‘religious instruction’ and ‘religious training’ apply to the teaching of religion in the classroom, which may be differentiated in response to the needs of non-Catholic pupils in the school.

*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* 1982 uses the term ‘education in the faith’ as virtually synonymous with catechesis, to describe the religious vocation of the Catholic school. The terms ‘religious education’, ‘religious instruction’, and ‘teaching of the Catholic religion’ are applied to the religious teaching as part of the curriculum in the school, and are seen as distinct from and complementary to catechesis properly so-called. ‘Religious formation’ refers to the full preparation of Catholic teachers, including ‘religious knowledge’ with appropriate certification and religious pedagogy; this religious formation should be on a par with a teacher’s professional formation.

---

30 Ibid. 85-87.
33 Evangelii Nuntiandi, 47.
35 Catechesi Tradendae, 33, 38, 62, 65, 69, 70.
The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School 1988 uses the term ‘religious instruction’ to mean the classroom teaching on religion, which is presumed to be Catholic in a Catholic school. The terms ‘religious education’, ‘religious formation’ and ‘Christian formation’ imply the total education in faith given by the Catholic school (seen as a participation in evangelization), in which ‘religious instruction’ forms a part. ‘Religious instruction’ in the school is seen as distinct from but complementary to ‘catechesis’, whose natural location is in the Christian community – especially home and parish.37

The General Directory for Catechesis 1997 uses the term ‘religious instruction’ for the teaching of religion within the curriculum of a school, whether or not it is a Catholic school. The character of this ‘religious instruction’ will depend very much on the nature of the school. In a Catholic school the ‘religious instruction’ will be entirely from a Catholic perspective, but distinct from and complementary to other forms of the ministry of the word in the school (primary proclamation, catechesis, homilies, liturgical celebrations, etc.). In non-confessional or state schools the ‘religious instruction’ may include other religions, but it is presumed that the aspects dealing with the Catholic faith will be authentically Catholic.38

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium 1997 focuses on the terms ‘Christian formation’ and ‘Christian education’, meaning the complete education in the faith to be imparted to pupils by the Catholic school, participating in the Church’s essential mission of evangelization.39

Congregation for Catholic Education – Letter on Religious Education in Schools, 2009.40 This Letter uses the term ‘religious education’ to refer to the teaching of religion within the academic curriculum of the school, whether or not the school is a Catholic school. In any event, Catholic pupils should receive authentic Catholic ‘religious education’ in school. In this way, the Letter seems to have opted to use the term ‘religious education’ in place of the term ‘religious instruction’ in some earlier Magisterial documents. (The only time that the Letter uses the term ‘religious instruction’ is when quoting earlier documents 41.) The Letter says that ‘religious education’ in schools does not require the assent of faith, and is therefore different from, and complementary to, ‘catechesis’. ‘Religious education’ for Catholic pupils should be authentically Catholic whatever the school setting, while respecting the religious freedom of non-Catholic pupils. The Letter specifically rejects the kind of ‘religious education’ that teaches about the religious phenomenon in a multi-denominational sense, about religious ethics and culture, or is limited to a presentation of the different religions in a comparative and ‘neutral’ way, which would create confusion or generate religious relativism or indifferentism. The Letter also uses the terms ‘Catholic formation’, ‘Christian education’ and ‘Catholic education’ which appear to imply the total education of pupils in a Catholic perspective.

Religious Education and Catechesis.

It may not always be relevant, or indeed helpful, to consider ‘religious education’ in the school as distinct from catechesis, but rather as a particular form of catechesis. In the Irish tradition (at least up to the mid-1970s) school, home and parish were closely linked and the teaching of religion in the school was definitely catechesis in its fullest sense, participating in

38 General Directory for Catechesis, 73-76, 259-260.
41 Catechesi Tradendae 69; General Directory for Catechesis, 73; Code of Canon Law 1983, 804§1.
evangelisation. Catholic schools were extensively established by Irish missionaries in the fruitful service of catechesis and evangelization. In some mission territories evangelisation started (and continued) with Catholic schools, while only later was the Church able to construct churches and to establish a new Christian community; this is noted in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* 41, referring to an address given by Pope Paul VI in 1963.42

Leonard Franchi, of the Department of Religious Education at the University of Glasgow, has done an in-depth study of the relationship between catechesis and religious education. Franchi notes the tendency in educational circles over the past 30 years for religious education to be seen as a 'neutral' subject (study of religions in general), whereas he argues for a distinctly 'Catholic religious education'.43 Franchi also finds that an excessive compartmentalisation between catechesis and religious education is less than helpful.

**Defining Features of the Catholic Primary School Religious Education Curriculum, pages 8-12.**

This section presents 10 'perspectives' which have 'informed curriculum approaches to content, the development of skills and the appreciation of values'. All of the perspectives have some value, but some perspectives are vitally important, while others are quite minor, so it is not particularly helpful that they are all presented on a par. This tends to devalue the really important dimensions, and generally leads to a confused rather than a well structured presentation.

In particular, the first item 'Church Perspective' is the key; it is all about the Catholic faith, which should be presented as the centre, foundation, aim and objective of the whole Curriculum, and not just as one of ten 'perspectives' (some of minor importance), which effectively devalues the importance of the Faith.

**Church Perspective.** Various Church documents are listed as sources, which is helpful. There is reference to the complementary roles of the family, the parish and the school, which is excellent in principle, but there is no recognition that this partnership has seriously broken down since the mid-1970s when unsatisfactory religious education programs were introduced into the schools which were strange to both home and parish. These programmes have largely failed in handing on authentic Catholic faith to a generation and a half of pupils in Irish Catholic schools. Progressive development of school-based RE programmes over the past 35 years have ignored and marginalised both home and parish. If a new curriculum for Catholic primary school RE is going to be effective it will be essential to recognise that this breakdown has occurred and that any new programmes are truly faithful to the teaching of the Church, involve consultation with parents and clergy in the development of the programs, and are structured in such a way as to involve both home and parish in the religious education/catechesis of the pupils.

In general, this section on the Church perspective is weak and does not provide a good basis for the development of a satisfactory curriculum for Catholic religious education in the primary school. In particular, there should be a commitment that the Curriculum meets the

42 Address of Pope Paul VI to the National Congress of Diocesan Directors of the Teachers' Organizations of Catholic Action, *Insegnamenti*, I, 1963, p. 594. Paul VI may well have been influenced by a visit he made (as Cardinal Montini) the previous year to the area in south-east Nigeria which had been evangelized by Bishop Joseph Shanahan and the Irish Holy Ghost missionaries. The Catholic school played a key role in Bishop Shanahan's strategy of evangelization, which was outstandingly effective, as was witnessed by this author who was serving as a volunteer teacher there and met with Cardinal Montini during his visit.

Church’s requirements of perfect harmony with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and due consideration for the norms and criteria in the *General Directory for Catechesis*.

**Educational Perspective.** The Curriculum says that it is based on the principles underlying the ROI Primary School Curriculum as a whole. The dimension of religious education should stand on its own, and should not feel obliged to conform to the secular curriculum. It should only be in line with the secular curriculum to the extent that may prove helpful to Catholic religious education. The wording in this Curriculum suggests obligation to follow the secular curriculum, which would not be a good thing. (This author is not sufficiently familiar with the situation in Northern Ireland to comment on the situation relating to *The Northern Ireland Core Syllabus for Religious Education, 2007*).

**Early Childhood Perspective.** There is reference to secular educational guidelines for learning experiences of children in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. It would be reasonable for the Curriculum to be aware of these guidelines, and to draw upon them in an eclectic fashion, but not to feel obliged to follow them. Catholic religious education should not be constrained or obliged to follow any secular guidelines.

**Mission and Justice Perspective.** A mission and justice perspective should of course be integral to any Catholic religious education curriculum, and would result naturally from following the teaching of the Catholic Church. However, a problem is that 'mission' is only presented in human terms and a spiritual dimension is absent. Mission without a spiritual dimension amounts only to humanitarianism, not authentic Christian mission.

**Ecumenical and Multi-Faith Perspective.** There is reference to the concern of the Church for Christian unity and for the need for respect for those of non-Christian faiths; this is good. However, the Curriculum is gravely inadequate by omitting any reference to the fullness of truth to be found in the Catholic Church relative to other Christians, and to the unique truth of Christianity relative to other non-Christian religions. The Curriculum quotes from *Nostra Aetate* and the CCC, but only in a selective way, omitting quotes relating to the unique positions of the Catholic Church and of Christianity. In relation to non-Christian religions it would be very important to mention the special position of the Jewish people, but the Curriculum does not do so. The Curriculum has reference to 'the Christian missionary vocation' but gives the incorrect view that this amounts to no more than a positive relationship and respect for others of different religious traditions, and omits the mission of the church for evangelisation of all peoples; evangelisation is the primary mission of the Church, she exists in order to evangelise.

**Inter-Cultural Perspective.** There is reference to the Curriculum supporting Gospel values for good community relations, for respect, for understanding and for social justice. This is satisfactory. There is reference to providing positive images of race, ethnic group, gender and disability. This is also satisfactory, provided that ‘gender’ means male and female, and not, as proposed by some ideologies, a cultural construction involving a wide range of sexual preferences and options.

**Attitudes and Values Perspective.** ‘Christian values and attitudes derive from belief in God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ’; this is good.

‘The central teaching of Jesus is to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself’. This is not quite so. In saying this (Matthew 22:34-40) Jesus was giving the central teaching of the Old Testament Law (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). This was brought to fulfilment in the New Testament by teaching that we must accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour (John 3:16, 6:29, 8:24; 1John 3:23) and that we must love one another as Jesus loves us (John 13:34).

---

44 GDC 282-284  
46 CCC 767.  
47 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.
Second paragraph. 'Confidence in one's own religious identity'. This is entirely inadequate from a Christian and Catholic point of view. Catholic children should be brought to be confident that the Catholic Church is the one true Church of God, and teaches what is objectively true.

Special Educational Needs Perspective. The approach outlined here is inadequate because it treats children with special educational needs in a purely material and secular way, and omits the spiritual perspective. Children with special needs have souls that can be every bit as spiritually sensitive as children with normal mental and psychological capabilities; this spirituality should be fostered, recognised and appreciated in Catholic educational settings.

Ecological Perspective. There are many helpful aspects presented here in relation to ecology. Missing is the unique and special place of the human beings in the whole scheme of God's creation. It would be important to include this dimension because the children are likely to encounter the notion, which is popular in some ecological circles, that human beings are no more important than any other life form, and indeed human beings are often presented as the major problem in the ecology of the Earth.

**Principles about the Learner and Learning in Religious Education, page 13.**

The nine guiding principles set out here reflect a particular school of thought on religion, learning and children; the value to Catholic religious education is limited.

An important principle which is not addressed is the major change in children that occurs around the age of seven, an age is described as the age of discretion, or the attainment of the use of reason. The way that children learn and respond changes very significantly, and all educational programmes need to take account of this, not least religious education. It is significant that children are prepared to receive the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist at this age.

The age-group 8-12 years, which coincides with the second half of primary schooling, is also a critical period, sometimes referred to as pre-adolescence. The *General Directory for Catechesis* identifies pre-adolescence as critical for religious education (GDC 181), and any Catholic programme should take this into account.

Specific comments on the guiding principles are given below:

**Young children are naturally spiritual.** The perspective presented here is not Christian in relation to what constitutes 'spiritual'. The perspective is more theist, with an element of pantheism.

**Young children learn religious language, skills, beliefs, and values mainly through story and play.** This is contrary to good educational experience with children. Children are especially open and curious, with very retentive memories, and tend to accept readily what information is given to them. Story and play can form a helpful component of children's education, but the education would be very inadequate if it did not go beyond story and play. Stories from Scripture can indeed form an important part of religious education for children, and are to be greatly encouraged. An important principle which is not mentioned is that Scripture is the Great Story of Salvation, which should form the context and frame of reference in presenting Bible stories to the children.

**Young children learn through symbols and rituals.** There is truth in this, however, it has already been pointed out in relation to the Four Strands of the curriculum that it is not good to reduce the Church's liturgy and sacraments to 'ritual'.

**Young children learn through personal relationships.** Personal relationships, modelling and good example are certainly important in moral development. However, what is missing from these principles is that children learn through direct teaching of Christian faith and morals, of what is right and wrong.
Young children learn in kinaesthetic and visual ways, and Young children are active agents in their learning. These principles are indeed valid, it would also be helpful to stress that children have very keen and curious minds, and are avid for information directly.

Young children think religiously in ways that are appropriate to their needs. This principle suggests that religious educators should decide what they think children’s needs are, and then pick and choose from the Deposit of Faith and present to the children whatever they think might respond to the children's needs. This is potentially a dangerous principle. The Church teaches that the Deposit of Faith should be presented in catechesis in a comprehensive way, appropriate to the level of the person receiving the education. All of the Deposit of Faith meets the needs of the human person, and the task of the religious educator is to present that precious Deposit in all its fullness and integrity in a way appropriate to the age, stage and situation of the pupils.

Young children have concept development which may not be reflected in their language. The principle set out here is somewhat nebulous, and seems more a matter for the teacher, than something that could be structured into a curriculum.

Young children experience ‘multiple childhoods’. The meaning of ‘multiple childhoods’ is not clear. There is reference to the need to cater for the uniqueness of each child and for individual differences; this is hardly the task of the curriculum, but rather the task of the teacher.

‘The curriculum allows for socio-cultural differences and differences of lived spirituality, religious commitment and church affiliation’. It is not clear what this means. A Catholic religious education curriculum should provide for the fullness of Catholic faith. Naturally, not all will respond to this opportunity to embrace the Faith in its fullness to the same extent, because there is freedom of choice and the gratuitous gift of Faith from God. However, the curriculum should not be limited by this but should present the faith in all its integrity, purity and fullness appropriate to the age level of the pupils.


There are some good elements in these seventeen principles, and other elements which are unsatisfactory and/or inadequate, while key principles as set out in the GDC are absent: e.g. catechesis as an element integral to the Church’s mission of evangelisation, Revelation as fundamental to the Faith, the necessity to hand on the Deposit of Faith in all its fullness and integrity, the pedagogy of God which is the pedagogy of the Church.

Specific comments on the different principles are given below:

Religious education is an educational priority in Catholic schools. Stating this principle is good, but it is inadequate that the only support presented for this principle is that 2 1/2 hours per week are set aside for religious education.

Catholic primary religious education is theocentric. Jesus is ‘at the centre of all teaching for Christians’ (CT 1979). Christian teaching is at the core of Catholic religious education.

These three principles are satisfactory, but are given very little development. Reference to Scripture and Church Tradition is good, but the definition of ‘Tradition’ given in the Glossary (page 119) is very unsatisfactory and is not authentically Catholic.

Scripture is a primary source for Catholic religious education (GDC 94; CCC 132-3). The principle as stated is reasonable, but it falls short of the teaching of the Church, which emphasises the fullness of Divine Revelation contained in Scripture and Sacred Tradition. GDC 94 refers to the Word of God contained in both Tradition and Scripture. CCC 132-3 does refer to Scripture, but the CCC sets Scripture very much as a part of Divine Revelation (CCC 50-83). Absence of Divine Revelation from these principles is a serious omission.
It is good to refer to Bible stories for children; however, it would be very important to set individual stories in the context of the overall story of the Bible, which is the history of salvation. It is very unsatisfactory that these principles do not mention anything of the history of salvation, Jesus as divine Saviour, the Fall, and the life to come. Any programme which does not include these elements is not authentically Christian (GDC 16). Salvation history should be the overall structure and context of all Catholic RE (GDC 108, 115).

'Scriptures are introduced to children not as stories or texts with a didactic or moralising function but as God's Word'. This is a false dichotomy. All Scripture has a teaching function, and the moral sense is one of the three spiritual senses of all of Scripture (CCC 117).

'Differential emphasis of story segments is considered appropriate'. This is a dangerous principle because it can be used to justify personal preference in picking out certain parts of Scripture and ignoring others, instead of teaching the fullness of truth contained in each Scripture passage.

The Church's liturgy is an essential element of Catholic religious education. This principle as stated is very good; however, the very structure of this Curriculum militates against this principle, because instead of allocating a complete Strand to Liturgy and Sacrament in harmony with the four pillars of the CCC, there is one Strand which deals with Ritual and Prayer, thereby diminishing the importance of liturgy and sacrament by describing them as no more than 'ritual'.

Some good elements are presented, in particular the 'intimate relationship of the sacraments of baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist' and how 'each sacrament is presented as the action of Christ'. However, important elements are missing, e.g. the nature of liturgy and sacrament, Grace, the salvific merit of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the source of grace for all sacraments.

'Rituals provide excellent opportunities for ecological awareness and education'. This tends to give a meaning to 'rituals' which is secular and has nothing to do with Catholic sacraments and liturgy.

The experience of prayer is integral to Catholic religious education. This principle as stated is very good. There are a number of good elements, but also scope for including other elements which are vital to a Catholic understanding of prayer. These could include the Lord's Prayer as the model for all Christian prayer, the nature of prayer, different types of prayer (adoration, contrition, thanks, supplication, intercession).

Catholic religious education always emphasises moral education. This principle could be expressed more strongly, because the moral dimension 'life in Christ' is absolutely integral to Catholic religious education. There are some reasonable elements but omitted is the direct teaching of Christian morality to the children. This would include the nature of sin and virtue, the consequences of good and bad moral actions, the ways we can sin, the fall and original sin, temptation by Satan and the evil spirits, Grace, conscience, the Decalogue and the Beatitudes, the precepts of the Church, and the Sacrament of Confession, the eternal and eschatological dimension of the moral life.

'Story is the main medium of moral education for young children'. This principle is seriously inadequate. Children need to be taught clearly what is right and wrong, what pleases and displeases God, which they can pick up readily because their minds and memories are sharp, and even from a young age they have a real sense of justice, of right and wrong. Stories, especially the parables of Jesus, can help children to understand moral teaching they have received, but expecting young children to draw moral conclusions of their own from fictional stories is a very unsound method to teach them Christian morality.

Catholic religious education fosters children's spirituality. This principle as stated, in conjunction with the first line, 'children are invited into a relationship with Jesus Christ, thus developing a Christian spirituality', is very good.
However, everything that follows, in conjunction with the principle on spirituality on page 13 of the Curriculum, is not Christian, but rather could be better described as a variant of theism which each child is encouraged to develop for themselves, a kind of do-it-yourself religion. For example, 'children are enabled to reflect on key questions of meaning and truth, to develop their own ideas on spiritual matters'.

Again, the children are encouraged in their own self chosen concept of morality, not to follow a Christian concept of morality, as follows: 'children are invited to engage with the concept of fallibility, the fact that to be human is to continually fall short of our best visions of ourselves'. There is no mention that human fallibility has its roots in Original Sin, and is fundamentally an offence against God, a violation of the law of God.

Children's experience is an important part of Catholic religious education.

This principle is very reasonable, in harmony with the teaching of the Church. However, the two points following are problematic: 'Children explore the meaning of their experience, illumined by the light of the Gospel (CT 22; EN 29; GDC 116, 117, 152)'. 'An inductive method (going from children's lived experience to religious understanding) is most appropriate for young children (GDC 118)'.

The relevant quotations given above from Church documents all stress the importance of integration of the Gospel message with life; inductive and deductive methods are presented as complementary, but GDC 118 does not in fact recommend an inductive method for young children. The question of deductive and inductive approaches to learning was addressed in a very thorough and creative way by theologian / philosopher Bernard Lonergan, and he accords priority to the deductive. If priority is accorded to the deductive for people in general, then much more so is the case for children who have lively, active and receptive minds, but are lacking in life experience and reasoning power as the basis for an inductive synthesis.

Memorisation has a place in Catholic religious education (CCC 2688).

This principle is very good, and in harmony with the teaching of the Church.

With reference to memorisation of 'songs, hymns, poems', while it is true that these can be most easily memorised, great care must be taken that those chosen are in fact expressive of authentic Catholic faith. A particularly relevant reference for the topic of memorisation is CT 55.

The environment is important for Catholic religious education.

This principle is very good. However, it is unacceptable that nothing explicitly Catholic is mentioned for the environment. Catholic religious education needs to be supported by elements in the environment which are specifically Catholic.

Catholic religious education develops respect for other Christian traditions (GDC 197).

This principle is reasonable, but could be developed better. It gets only one brief point, in contrast with the next principle which gets extensive development of a half-page.


49 Catechesi Tradendae, 55. 'Catechesis has since the beginning known a long tradition of learning the principal truths by memorising. .... A certain memorisation of the words of Jesus, of important Bible passages, of the Ten Commandments, of the formulas of profession of the faith, of the liturgical texts, of the essential prayers, of key doctrinal ideas, etc. ....is a real need... The blossoms of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of memory-less catechesis. What is essential is that the texts that are memorised must at the same time be taken in and gradually understood in depth in order to become a source of Christian life on a personal level and the community level'.

18
Catholic religious education develops multi-faith awareness (GDC 200).

This is a reasonable principle, but gets disproportionate attention in relation to other more important principles.

The treatment of Judaism is not satisfactory. The Church lays considerable emphasis on the fact that special attention needs to be given in relation to the Jewish religion, because Christianity is the fulfilment of the call of God to the Chosen People of the Old Covenant; God is still waiting for the Jewish people to accept Jesus as their promised Messiah (GDC 199). The Curriculum’s, ‘while it is important to teach about Jesus’ Jewish background, this is taught separately from modern Judaism as a world faith’, is not supportive of the Church’s view.

While it is good to stress respect for the religious faith of others, what is missing is the unique truth of Christianity, and the necessity for a lively missionary sense among Christians in relation to other religions. (GDC 200).

Religious education includes appropriate processes for assessment and evaluation.

This is a very important principle, which has been sadly lacking from Catholic religious education for over 30 years. A weakness of the Curriculum here is the exclusion of parents (the children’s primary educators) from knowledge of or involvement in the assessment process. Another weakness is that assessment and evaluation are only discussed in general terms, and nothing specific is presented. There is a danger that in the absence of specific proposals, this principle will remain a pious aspiration and will not happen in practice. (The definition of Learning Assessment in the Glossary p.116 is not satisfactory – see further comment below, page 43).

Component Structure of the Primary RE Curriculum. Page 17.

The understanding of faith given falls short of a Catholic understanding of faith, as expressed in CCC 142-184.

‘Commitment to embodying Gospel values in the world is the mark of the educated Christian’. This falls far short of the Christian call to evangelise the world.50


‘The aim of this religious education curriculum is: to help children mature in relation to their spiritual, moral and religious lives, through their encounter with, exploration and celebration of the mystery of God and the Catholic faith’.

The above statement is not satisfactory from Catholic point of view, which is hardly surprising given that the reference for this statement is the State’s Primary School Curriculum, not any Catholic source. The aim as stated above does not include that the children should become believing or practising Catholics or Christians.

50 ‘Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise’. Evangelii Nuntiandi 14.
The above statement is seriously out of line with the aims that the Catholic Church set for religious education/catechesis, which are well expressed in GDC 78-83, including the following: 'The Church transmits the faith which she herself lives'. In transmitting faith and new life, the Church acts as a mother for mankind who begets children conceived by the power of the Spirit and born of God. ... She feeds her children with her own faith and incorporates them as members into the ecclesial family. 'The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ'. 'Communion with Jesus Christ, by its own dynamics, leads the disciple to unite himself with everything with which Jesus Christ himself was profoundly united; with God his Father, with the Holy Spirit, with the Church, his body, for which he gave himself up, with mankind and with his brothers whose lot he wished to share'. 'Catechesis has its origin in the confession of faith and leads to confession of Faith'.

Desired Outcomes.

Many of the points listed fall short of a desired Catholic outcome, including the following:

'Come to a knowledge of God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Spirit'. It would be better to state that the children should have a comprehensive knowledge of the Catholic Faith.

'Value self as loved and gifted by God'. Surely it would be more correct to state that children should value all people, not just themselves.

'Come to a knowledge and understanding of the response of Christian faith to the ultimate questions about human life, its origin and purpose'. Surely this should state: a knowledge of the truths about human life, its origin and purpose, as revealed by God and taught by the Church.

'Develop skills of religious literacy'. What does 'religious literacy' mean?

'Develop the ability to act in accordance with an informed conscience when making moral decisions as a child'. This is not unreasonable in itself, but what is missing is learning the moral teaching of the Church.


It has already been noted above that the structuring of the curriculum around four Strands is unhelpful from the point of view of Catholic RE because it departs from the structure of the four pillars of the CCC.

Christian Faith. This item is unsatisfactory from a Catholic point of view. Children 'engage with' the beliefs and doctrines of the Catholic Church, they become 'religiously literate', they 'respond to the revelation and presence of God in creation and in their own lives'. The Curriculum does not expect children to come to know the Catholic Faith, let alone make a commitment to it.

Scripture. This item is also unsatisfactory from a Catholic point of view. Catholic teaching emphasises that divine Revelation, which comprises Scripture and Tradition, is the foundation for religious education. This item does not mention Revelation, Tradition or the Church's Magisterium (DV 10), while the definitions given for Revelation and Tradition in the Glossary (pages 118, 119) are unsatisfactory from a Catholic point of view. Other key omissions are that Scripture is true, and tells the story of salvation.

'Children in Catholic primary schools need to develop the ability to authentically interpret the Scriptures'. This is unsatisfactory from a number of points of view; there is no mention that the Catholic Church is the ultimate authority for Catholics in the interpretation of Scripture, and in any case primary school children are too young to be expected to carry out scriptural exegesis.
Ritual/Prayer. This item is seriously inadequate in expressing the Catholic understanding of Liturgy and Sacraments. The importance of liturgy and sacraments is seriously diminished by classing them simply as ‘ritual’, and grouping them with Prayer, rather than giving them a separate section on their own in harmony with the great Catholic tradition, as evidenced in the CCC.

Morality. This section is inadequate from a Catholic point of view, principally because there is no requirement for the children to learn the moral teachings of the Catholic Church, or to follow them. The following Note states that very many key aspects of Christian morality are not dealt with in the Morality Strand, which focuses on ‘philosophical and educational bases’. This means that the Curriculum’s approach to morality is not authentically Catholic, but is more secular, reinforced by the ‘Note’ which says the Curriculum will complement the State’s secular RSE programme.

Skills.
The Curriculum has a lot of material on ‘skills’ and ‘religious literacy’. These terms are not used in magisterial documents dealing with catechesis and education in the faith. The terms seem to be taken from the secular world, and the whole thrust of Pages 20 and 21 seems to be to conform religious education as closely as possible to the secular education that happens in primary school. This is made explicit by ‘emphasising the educational alignment between religious education and the other six areas of the NCCA Primary School Curriculum (1999)’. This is not at all satisfactory from the Catholic point of view, in which religious education should enlighten and permeate all secular subjects in a Catholic school, but not be limited by or conformed to the secular subjects.

This unsatisfactory situation is further emphasised by the following: ‘The concept of literacy applied to religious education prepares children for religious education as an academic subject in secondary school’. The current State Syllabi in secondary school for religious education are essential relativist (all religions and non-religious systems are treated as of equal value), so, if this Curriculum is designed to prepare for this unsatisfactory situation in the secondary schools, then it can hardly be a satisfactory Curriculum from a Catholic point of view. One must also be concerned that this Curriculum could prepare the ground for transfer of leadership in primary school religious education from the Church to the secular State, as considered or advocated by some prominent Catholic religious educators.51 (see also p.4, 41 of this Commentary), similar to how leadership has been transferred from Church to State at secondary school level.

Without going into details, the predominant language of these pages is religiously relativist, with a great deal of secular terminology, which is foreign to Catholic documents on catechesis and religious education, e.g. a ‘sacramental imagination’ is defined as ‘seeing God in all things’, which is contrary to a Catholic understanding of ‘Sacrament’, and ‘prophetic imagination’ is defined as seeing the need for change, whereas the Church understands prophecy as speaking God’s word. The aim seems to be that the children will be articulate about religion in a general way, with something of a Christian flavour, but will not really know or be committed to authentic Catholic faith.

Strand Units. Pages 21-22.
The strand units contain knowledge and concepts which contain the theological content prescribed by the Irish Episcopal Conference’. No reference is given for this statement, and

the author is unaware of any document or statement from the Irish Episcopal Conference setting out the required theological content in a primary school Catholic religious education programme. If such a document exists it should be referenced.

The reference here is to ‘knowledge and concepts’ in the strand units, and where the Strand Units are actually presented this is changed to ‘ideas and concepts’. It is unsatisfactory that there is no reference to ‘truths’, because knowledge, ideas and concepts are not necessarily true.

‘Can be adapted by teachers and programme writers’. It is unrealistic to expect teachers to work from a curriculum, either directly or adapted to their needs. Teachers have a considerable workload and need a good programme to help them in their challenging educational task. Programme writers need a good curriculum to guide them in their task, which is also very challenging.

**Planning and Implementation. Pages 22-23.**

The guidelines given for planning and implementation are vague and generalised, rather than, as required, specific and practical.

**Children of Other Christian Traditions & Other Religious Faiths in Catholic Primary School.**

The opening paragraph has some good information and general principles about how Catholic schools can cater for pupils of other Christian traditions and other faiths.

There is reference to ‘the distinctiveness of the Christian religious vision’, but this does not imply that Christianity embodies any unique truth, because there is also reference to the distinctiveness of other religions. The Curriculum should affirm the fullness of truth contained in the Catholic Church, and the respect that the Church has for the measure of truth and goodness found in other religions (NA 2).

While the situation of numbers of pupils of other Christian traditions and non-Christian faiths in Catholic schools is new to Ireland, this situation has existed in other countries for a very long time, and has been handled in creative ways with great success. There is much that we in Ireland could learn from the experience of Catholic schools in such countries.

The bullet points on page 23 are of concern, because they seem to imply that the religious education given in the school will be such that all pupils can participate in it, with only acts of worship being distinctively Catholic.

**STRANDS, pages 24-81.**

Each Strand is subdivided into five levels.

The first level is Preschool. This does not form part of a normal primary school, and the Church is generally not directly responsible for organisations or institutions providing preschool education. It would seem helpful to note that this difference exists, and therefore the curriculum material for preschool is advisory in nature, and not prescriptive in the sense that the education will be under direct management of the Church.

The next four levels each correspond to 2 years of primary school, which is satisfactory and should provide sufficient guidance to the writers of programmes for primary schools.

**Level 1.** This corresponds with Junior and Senior Infants, 4-6-year-olds.

**Level 2.** This corresponds with Classes 1 and 2, 6-8-year-olds. Children normally receive the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist in Second Class.

**Level 3.** This corresponds with Classes 3 and 4, 8-10-year-olds. Children are entering the crucial phase of pre-adolescence.

**Level 4.** This corresponds with Classes 5 and 6, 10-12-year-olds. Children normally receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in Sixth Class, when they are entering into adolescence.
The material in each Level is presented under three categories.

The first category is Aims. This is reasonable, because it is very relevant and helpful to first set out the aims or objectives that are to be achieved (GDC 80-83).

The second category is Skills. This does not correspond well with Catholic practice, because the GDC, CCC and other relevant magisterial documents do not talk about 'skills'. An approach based on skills is more in line with a secular approach in education, is therefore more difficult to relate to Catholic religious education, and may run the risk of forming a secular paradigm or mindset, rather than a Catholic one.

The third category is titled, Strand Units. This includes the content of material, subdivided under a number of subheadings. This is a reasonable way to present the material. It has already been noted above that classification of the material as mere 'ideas and concepts' is unsatisfactory.

**STRAND: CHRISTIAN FAITH, pages 24-40.**

**Aims.**

While the approach of first presenting Aims is a good one, as noted above, the actual material presented here across the 5 levels tends to be vague and incomplete from a Catholic point of view, and also appears to be heavily influenced by the religiously relativist definition of ‘religious education’ which has been adopted by this Curriculum.

The foundation set out at Preschool level is entirely relativist, using only secular sources as reference. The Preschool Aims are also far too complex for 3-4-year-olds.

There is some reasonable material about God, the Trinity, and Jesus Christ. However there is an absence of salvation history (creation and Fall, forgiveness of sins through Jesus' redemptive death on the cross, divine filiation and eternal life), and therefore a crucial lack in authentic Christianity (GDC 16). Also there is no reference to the Creed, which the Church sets out as the fundamental structure for teaching the Christian Faith in a comprehensive and orderly manner.

The Church is mentioned quite a lot, which is good in principle. However, the approach to the Church is quite inadequate. The Church is presented ‘as a community which continues the mission of Jesus’. What is omitted is that the Church was established by Jesus Christ, and that she is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The unique nature of the Catholic Church and her teaching authority are omitted.

There is reference to Christian ‘concepts’, ‘vision’ and ‘ideas’, but never reference to the ‘truths’ of the Faith. The Church teaches that religious education involves the transmission or handing on of the deposit of Faith, received through Revelation, and that what she teaches are indeed truths. Standard dictionary definitions of 'concept' include: a general notion, an abstract notion or idea, a thought, an opinion; this is a relativist approach to Christianity, not the understanding of the Catholic Church.

Critical dimensions omitted from the Aims in the Curriculum are the spiritual (including God’s invisible creation – angels, and the immortal soul), eternal and eschatological. This effectively presents Christianity as something to do with this world only, without an eternal dimension, and therefore is lacking an essential dimension of authentic Christianity.

The Aims give a great deal of attention to learning about other faiths and religions. It is reasonable to include something about learning about other faiths in the Aims, but there are...
a number of problem aspects to the Curriculum’s approach. Firstly, attention is given to learning about other faiths much too early; children need to know and be confident about being Catholics, before they are in a position to benefit from learning about other faiths. If they are introduced to other faiths too early it can only cause confusion and lead to religious relativism. The Aims state that children should start learning about other faiths in Preschool, that is, when they are only 3-4 years old; it must surely be obvious that this can only cause confusion in the children’s minds.

The heavy emphasis on learning about other religions continues right up through all the 5 levels. An appropriate level to introduce an understanding of other Christians and Judaism might be level 3. The appropriate level for learning about other religions, in particular Islam, would be level 4. In addition, the Aims lack the important distinctions that need to be made between the Orthodox Christian Churches, the Church of Ireland (Anglican), ecclesial communions resulting from the Reformation, Judaism, Islam (the third significant monotheistic Abrahamic religion), and other major world religions.

It would be helpful if the Aims included not just to come to the knowledge and understanding of God and Jesus Christ, but also to love God, to serve him, to defend and spread the Faith, to live in the Faith, and to be eternally happy with God in heaven.

**Skills.**

The skills are presented under the four subheadings below:

- **Understanding.** At Preschool and Level 1 there is a requirement for complex investigation and exploration, which is much too advanced for these age groups. (The skills in general at Preschool and Level 1 are vastly too complex for these age groups – many adults would have difficulty coping with them!).

  At Level 2 the requirement is very reasonable, to identify and explain, and apply Jesus’ teaching to their own lives. Levels 3 and 4 are not satisfactory because the emphasis is on investigate, imagine, evaluate, make decisions, analyse interactions and imagine connections, which are rather vague and suggest strongly that the children should make their own decisions about the Christian faith and how they think it might apply to their own lives, encouraging a kind of self-chosen religious position. ‘Truth’ is mentioned at Level 3, but only for children to evaluate and decide how the truth of religious statements might affect their lives; this hardly conveys that religious statements are objectively true.

- **Communicating.** Again at Preschool and Level 1 the requirement about discussion and expression of personal responses is far too complex for these young age-groups. At the other Levels there is an undue reliance on feelings, understandings, judgements and decisions about religious concepts and beliefs, rather than on being able to communicate the truths of the Faith, especially in relation to sharing and defending the truths of the Catholic Faith. There is reference to ‘religious truths’ at Level 3, but the context is for the children to evaluate and decide what applies to themselves; there is no acknowledgment of objective truths of Christianity or the Catholic Church, and our obligation to follow Church teaching.

- **Developing spiritual literacy.** It is not clear exactly what the term ‘spiritual literacy’ means. At Preschool and Levels 1 and 2 the emphasis is on discussion, exploration and description of feelings in a rather complex way, which seems far too advanced for these age groups. At Levels 3 and 4 there is an emphasis on investigation and exploration and evaluation of spiritual ideas and concepts, with an emphasis on the children coming to make decisions on their own spirituality, rather than growing in Christian spirituality.

- **Developing interreligious literacy.** This skill is proposed starting in Preschool. This is starting much too early, because children need to come to an understanding of their Catholic Faith before they can benefit from a knowledge of other religious traditions and faiths. There is also a major danger that they will end up in religious confusion if they are given all these
non-Catholic and non-Christian views too early. It is patently ridiculous to expect 3-4-year-olds to develop their own religious identity and learn about other faith communities in Preschool. (There is a disconnect between the introduction of the interreligious dimension in Aims & Skills from Preschool onwards, and the Strand Units which only introduce material on Other Faiths at Level 2. We would recommend deferring the interreligious dimension to Level 3 – see further comment below under Other Faiths in the ‘Strand Units’).

Also it is not at all acceptable from a Catholic point of view that the approach right through all Levels to interreligious literacy is entirely relativist, giving equal value to all religious positions; this could be a blueprint for fostering a relativist religious position in the children, leading to a lack of belief in the truths of the Catholic Faith, a vague theism, agnosticism or outright atheism.

Strand Units.

This subheading contains the content of the Curriculum at each of the five Levels. This approach is reasonable. However, it is not satisfactory that the content is described as 'ideas and concepts'; as has been noted above a 'concept' is a notion, thought or opinion, whereas the Church proposes that the content of religious education are truths of the Faith.

The Strand Units have the following subheadings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Levels:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mystery of God</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery of Jesus Christ</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery of Holy Spirit</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery of Trinity</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery of Church</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eternal Life</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Faiths</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall &amp; awaiting Saviour</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The material presented for each Strand Unit is progressively developed and expanded going from one level up to the next; this is satisfactory in principle.

Mystery of God. Mystery of the Trinity. It is not helpful that these two Strand Units are separated, because in the Christian understanding God is Trinity, and the Trinity is God. There is reasonable information given under these two Units on God and Trinity, but there is room for improvement. Key omissions are that there is only one true God, and that God is eternal - he always was, he is and he always will be.

Apart from the unhelpful separation of God and Trinity, the information on the Trinity could be presented earlier. It is unsatisfactory that there is nothing on the Trinity in Levels 2 and 3, and that significant information on the Trinity is postponed until the final Level 4. It is good to present information on the Christian faith in Levels 3 and 4. It is good to have a reference to revelation in level 4, but this could usefully be expanded and brought in much earlier in the Levels.

Mystery of Jesus Christ. The material here is generally comprehensive and well presented. In some cases, e.g. the salvation won for us by Jesus on the cross, the material could helpfully be much expanded and developed, in line with the teaching of the Church. The mystery of Christ is closely related to ‘The Fall and awaiting a Saviour’, so it is unhelpful that
this latter Unit only appears in Level 4, because one cannot really understand the meaning of the salvation won by Jesus on the cross unless one has a prior understanding of the Fall. The material on the Fall should be introduced in Level 2, because one cannot understand the Sacraments of Eucharist and Penance unless one understands the salvation won by Jesus. For comments on the Unit 'The Fall and awaiting a saviour' (see further p.24).

Creation. The material presented here across all Levels is good, with inclusion of God's invisible creation: Angels (Levels 1 and 3), and the human soul (Levels 2 and 4). It is good to include that human beings are created to know, love and serve God, and so come to heaven; however it would have been better to include this much earlier than Level 4. This is so important that it could have been helpfully introduced at Level 1 and repeated at each succeeding Level.

Mystery of the Holy Spirit. There is much good material presented here concerning the Holy Spirit. However, there are also some significant omissions, as follows:

The Holy Spirit gives grace (actual graces and sanctifying grace) to all God's people.

The Holy Spirit inspired divine Revelation, both Sacred Tradition and the Scriptures.

Christ gives the Holy Spirit through the Sacraments, especially in Baptism & Confirmation.

Mystery of the Church. There is much good and relevant material here under this Strand Unit. The second paragraph on page 39, dealing with other Christian Traditions, is under the subheading 'Mary', and should be moved to the subheading dealing with the Church. The titles of the Strand Unit for Levels 3 and 4 seem to imply that the Church and the Kingdom of God are the same thing; this is potentially confusing and should be corrected, because the Church and the Kingdom are related but are not identical. The Precepts of the Church (Level 4) would fit better under the Morality Strand.

There are some significant omissions, as follows:

The authority of the Catholic Church is omitted, most particularly, the authority of the Church to interpret Scripture and Tradition, to teach on faith and morals, and the obedience required by members of the Catholic Church to follow her teaching authority (magisterium). (CCC 100, 804, 889-892).

The marks of the Church, as given in the Creed, as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. (CCC811).

The unique position of the Catholic Church, in which we find the fullness of the one Church established by Jesus Christ. (CCC 870).

It would be good to spell out the three main tasks of Bishops (and of their priests as assistants) of teaching, guiding and sanctifying the Church in their dioceses. (CCC 938, 939).

It is good to refer to Bishops, priests, and religious, but it would also be important to include the Catholic laity. (CCC 941-942).

In referring to other Christians who are not Catholic (Levels 3 and 4) it would be important to note the important distinction between the different groupings of Christians: the Eastern Orthodox Churches which are in schism from the Catholic Church, but have valid sacraments and virtual identity of beliefs; the Anglican Communion; the ecclesial communions resulting from the Reformation. It would also be good to refer to the Eastern Rite Churches that are in full communion with the Catholic Church, which now have members in Ireland.

Mary. There is much good material in this Strand Unit about Mary, her person and her role in the Church. However, there are some other items that really should be there and are not, and also some other material which might be considered helpful if not absolutely essential.
The following are important omissions:

Joseph was Mary's husband, and foster-father of Jesus.

Mary was a virgin all her life, and had no other children besides Jesus.

The Church celebrates many feast days of Mary, especially the Annunciation, the Assumption, the birthday of Mary, the Immaculate Conception, and many others.

The Church encourages many great prayers of Mary: e.g. the Rosary, the Magnificat, the Memorare, the Hail Mary, the Angelus.

It would also be helpful to note that Mary was of the house of David, as was Joseph too, so that through them the prophecies were fulfilled that the Messiah would be descended from David. It would also be helpful to note the many apparitions of Mary, which are approved by the Church for our devotion but not required for belief, such as, Lourdes, Fatima, Knock, which are very much part of the experience of Irish Catholics.

Eternal Life. There is much good material here concerning eternal life which is relevant to primary school children. However, there is scope for improvement.

One hears much speculation about when the end of the world will come, so it would be good to include that only God knows the Last Day, when the material world as we know it will come to an end. (CCC 1040).

Too much of the material on the Last Things is left to Level 4; at Preschool, Levels 1,2&3 the children are only to be taught that everyone goes to heaven. Children at Level 2, who make the Sacrament of Penance, need to know the basics of the Last Things: heaven, hell and purgatory, and how they relate to the virtuous life and to sin, both mortal and venial.

It is insufficient at Level 4 to give the only reason why people might go to hell is that they fail to care for the poor and the little ones who are brothers and sisters of Jesus (related to the parable in Matthew 25:31-46). It should be included that people can only go to hell who deliberately choose to be separated from God through any unrepented mortal sin (CCC 1037). It should also be noted that hell is a place of terrible unhappiness, and that no one should wish to go there.

The fall and awaiting a Saviour. It is good to include this material, but it is too late to leave it only until Level 4; it needs to be introduced at Level 2 for children who are preparing for the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist.

There are also several key omissions from what the children should learn about the Fall and awaiting a Saviour, as follows:

It is good to mention that our first parents were tempted by Satan, but the children should also be taught who Satan and the Devils are. Some of the angels rebelled against God, and were driven out of heaven into hell; this is called the Fall of the angels. The fallen angels are called devils; their leader is Satan. They tempt human beings to reject God and to sin, but their power is limited. (CCC 391-395, 414).

It is good to mention ‘original sin’, but it should also be made clear that the first sin of Adam and Eve was ‘original sin’, which was an act of disobedience of God, and is called the Fall of man. Original Sin is transmitted from Adam and Eve to every human being. (CCC 396-399, 415-419).

It is good to mention that original sin gives a selfish attraction to sin; it should also be included that human nature is weakened, and we suffer pain and ignorance and will one day die. (CCC 405-409, 418, 1714).

It is good to mention God’s promise of salvation. It should also be mentioned that the Saviour who God sent is his Only Son, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who was the only who could redeem the human race from sin through his sacrifice on the cross, fulfilling the justice and mercy of God. Also included should be that Baptism erases original sin
through the power of Christ's saving death; Baptism turns us back to God but we are still inclined to sin and need the help of God's grace. (CCC 405, 410, 601, 607, 619-620).

Other Faiths. The Aims and Skills indicate that material on Other Faiths should be introduced at Preschool and Level 1, whereas the Strand Units indicate that the material should only be introduced from Level 2 onwards. We would agree with this deferment, and go further and recommend that the material on Judaism should be introduced at Level 3 and other faiths at Level 4.

There is reasonable material on respect for people of other faiths and how Christians should treat them and relate to them.

There is some reasonable information on Judaism, but also a serious omission. Judaism is treated as very much a separate religion from Christianity, and the vital dimension of Christianity as the fulfilment of Judaism is missing.

The amount of attention given to Islam seems disproportionately high relative to other non-Christian faiths. There is also the statement that Muslims worship the same God as Christians, but this is hardly so, even though Islam is a monotheistic religion. A very significant dimension is omitted, which is that Islam is an Abrahamic religion and that Muslims consider themselves to be the true descendants of Abraham.

STRAND: SCRIPTURE, pages 41-53.

It would be better if this Strand dealt with Divine Revelation, rather than with Scripture alone. The Church teaches that religious education and catechesis is founded on Revelation, and that Revelation is comprised of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

The situation is further disimproved by the unsatisfactory un-Catholic definitions in the Glossary for Biblical Literacy (p.116), Revelation (p.118), and Tradition (p.119). See below p.44, 45, 46 for further comment.

The Bible is the story of salvation, but salvation history is not adequately dealt with, being only introduced in the Strand Unit in Level 4, too little too late. A serious problem is the absence of any statement that Scripture is true; the only reference to truth is for the children to question the truth of Scripture (skills, Level 2).

Aims.

There is some good material here in the Aims, but also scope for improvement.

The Aims at Preschool and Level 1 are rather too complex and pretentious for these age groups.

There are also a number of key omissions:

There is no reference to Divine Revelation or Sacred Tradition. There is no reference to the Catholic Church, and in particular the authority of the Church for the authentic interpretation of Scripture (DV 10). In contrast, there is emphasis on personal interpretation of Scripture and application of Scripture to one's own life. Therefore, the Aims reflect more a Protestant view of Scripture, rather than a Catholic one.

It is good to refer to the inspiration of Scripture, but the truth of Scripture is omitted.

It is good to refer to the Old Testament and New Testament, but what is omitted is the unity of the two Testaments, and their essential relationship, i.e. that the New Testament is buried in the Old, and the Old Testament is fully revealed in the New (St Augustine).
It would be good to include in the Aims a basic understanding of the different types of literature in the Bible: history, poetry, prophecy, prayer, teaching, wise sayings, etc.

It is good to include a reference to salvation history in Level 4, but this is too little too late. Salvation history is so integral to the Bible (and to Christianity), it would be important to introduce the perspective of salvation history much earlier, at least in Level 2.

It would be important to include in the Aims to connect Scripture and Revelation with the other aspects of Catholic religious education and catechesis, that is, Creed, Sacraments and Liturgy, Morality/Life in Christ, and Prayer.

**Skills.**

The Skills given for Preschool and Level 1 are far too complex and pretentious for these age groups; many adults would be unable to cope with these skills.

The skills outlined for Level 2 are more reasonable. However, it is unacceptable to include the skill to ‘evaluate the truth/rightness of characters' words/actions in Scripture stories’. The desired skill should be that children learn the truth and goodness contained in Scripture, rather than setting themselves up as the discerners and judges of what is true or false, right and wrong in Scripture.

The skills for Level 3 are good, except that it is the rather pretentious and potentially dangerous to expect the children to ‘interpret Scripture texts’. It would be good that they should understand Scripture texts, but 'interpretation' is the more serious business of Scripture exegetes, with the Church having the final say.

One would have a similar concern about skills given for Levels 4. There is an emphasis on the children learning skills of interpretation and construction of personal meaning, thereby encouraging a personal self-chosen type of religion, rather than understanding of in the great tradition of the Catholic Church.

**Strand Units.**

All the Strand Units are expressed in terms of ‘ideas and concepts’; this is unsatisfactory. Religious education should be concerned to bring the children to a knowledge and understanding of truths and facts about Scripture (and all of Divine Revelation), not merely ‘ideas and concepts’.

**Bible:** The material for Preschool and Level 1 is reasonable and appropriate.

The material for Level 2 could helpfully be developed further to include several items which appear later at Level 3.

The material for Level 3 is an improvement, but could be further improved by incorporating much of the material that is left to Level 4, e.g. the Bible is essentially the story of salvation inspired by the Holy Spirit, rather than simply 'the story of God's love told by the people of God'.

The Curriculum uses the term 'Hebrew Scriptures' in preference to ‘Old Testament’. It would be better to follow the Church in favouring the term ‘Old Testament’; the term 'Hebrew Scriptures' might be misunderstood as excluding the Deutero-Canonical Books (which Protestants exclude as 'Apocrypha').

There is good material featured in Level 4 in relation to the Bible. However, there are also omissions:

The material omits that Scripture is part of Revelation, the other part being Sacred Tradition, and the key role of the Church's Magisterium. Tradition, Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are inextricably connected, and one cannot stand without the others. (DV 10).
The truth of Scripture is omitted, which is gravely unacceptable.
The material is also weak on salvation history, which is only introduced at Level 4. The Bible is the story of salvation. Salvation history gives structure and context to Scripture study, and makes the Bible more meaningful to the children.

**Texts and References:**
The Scripture Texts and References listed are reasonable and relevant. It is not clear why some are classified as 'Texts', while others are classified as 'References'.

However, it is not very helpful to simply give lists of Scripture quotations, unconnected with the various parts of the Curriculum to which they relate.

**Images of God.**
There are Scripture references given under this theme at all five Levels. No explanation is given as to why this particular theme was singled out for special treatment; there are a wide range of other themes that might have been chosen, many of which are as important or more important, e.g. salvation history.

For Christians the image of God as Trinity is especially vital. Images of God in the Old Testament sometimes showed signs of the Trinity, especially the image of God as Father, but the fullness of God as Trinity is only revealed in the New Testament. In considering Scriptural images of God it would be helpful to separate the two Testaments, showing first the images of God in the Old, which are fulfilled by Trinitarian images of God in the New.

There are references from both Old and New Testaments, but they are not separated. The great majority (about three-quarters) of references are from the Old Testament. The Trinitarian image of God is not brought out – there is only one New Testament reference to God as father (Lk.11:2), and none to the Holy Spirit. So this is not a satisfactory presentation of images of God from a Christian point of view.

Another unsatisfactory aspect is the substantial imbalance in images of God as mother relative to God as father. As God is neither male nor female, it is perfectly reasonable to note Scriptural images of God as mother, which emphasise God's immanence (CCC 239). However, the balance in Scripture should be respected, not misrepresented. The Curriculum presents more than twice as many references to mother images of God as father images, which must convey the impression that Scripture favours mother images – an entirely erroneous impression, because in fact father images overwhelmingly predominate in Scripture, especially in the New Testament.

God is explicitly addressed as Father more than 250 times in the New Testament (only one of which is noted in the Curriculum, Lk.11:2), but never as mother. Jesus repeatedly referred to his Father in heaven, never to his mother. Jesus revealed that God is Father in a new way, vital to an understanding of Christianity (CCC 240-242); an imbalanced emphasis on maternal images of God risks undermining a true Christian Trinitarian understanding of God.

While Scripture has many explicit and strong images of God as Father, the Scriptural references quoted for mother images of God tend to be oblique (Ps.131:2; Is.49:15), or tenuous (Ho.13:8; Is.42:14; Is.46:3-4; Is.49:5; Pr.9:1-5). Two references are of special interest (Is.66:13; Mt.23:37), because the images involve both Jerusalem and God; in Scripture Jerusalem / Zion frequently personifies the Chosen People, with whom God is present in a special personal way, an expression of his immanence. 'Jerusalem' prefigures the Church, and both are frequently personified with feminine images in Scripture (mother, wife, virgin, bride, daughter). The Catholic Church is often personified as Mother (e.g. Pope John XXIII’s Encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* – Mother and [female] Teacher). This Curriculum does not apply the Scriptural feminine images to the Church, in particular the image of Mother.
As has been noted above, the selection of this particular Strand is not in harmony with the practice of the Catholic Church, and is not satisfactory in a Curriculum which is proposed as Catholic. It is unsatisfactory from two points of view. The Church treats Prayer separate from Liturgy and Sacraments, as set out in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and which is also Scriptural, Acts 2:42. Secondly, the replacement of the terms 'Liturgy and Sacraments' by 'Ritual' greatly diminishes the significance, meaning and importance of the Church's Liturgy and Sacraments.

The Curriculum does not reflect the Church's call to teach Liturgy, Sacraments and Prayer in the context of the history of salvation (GDC 108, 115). The Curriculum sees the Liturgical Year as presenting the life of Christ, which is good, but it should go further to see the Year presenting the fullness of salvation history, from creation to eschatology. The Curriculum does not connect Sacraments (especially the Eucharist) or Prayer with salvation history.

**Aims.**

The unsatisfactory combination of two Pillars of the CCC into one Strand, as noted above, is reflected and expressed in the Aims. The aims suffer from a combination of prayer, liturgy and Sacrament, along with many other elements. The Aims also suffer from a tendency to emphasise the connections with human life, and to omit grace, which tends to secularise the sacraments and liturgy.

**Preschool.** The Aims given here are far too advanced for this age group. It would be sufficient to focus on simple Christian prayers, including prayers in song and actions.

**Level 1.** The Aims given here are also too advanced for this age group. It would be better to focus on continuing to learn and use simple Christian prayers, both formal and informal. In relation to liturgy the aim should be to help the children understand the Mass, which they will be attending with their parents, ideally.

In relation to Sacraments it would be good to introduce the children to Baptism, so that they can begin to understand the one Sacrament that they have already received. The Aims emphasise understanding of sacraments through exploring secular celebrations, attitudes, human values and life concepts, which is not helpful because sacraments are primarily spiritual; the supporting reference to GCD 25 is not actually supportive, because it is only speaks of the spiritual meaning of sacraments.

**Level 2.** It is good to introduce at this level the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, the Liturgical Year and the Bible as a source of prayer.

**Level 3.** It is good to refer to the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Marriage and Holy Orders, but the aim should be much more than to 'explore'. The aim should be to learn and understand what a Sacrament is, the outward sign and inward grace, minister and requirements for participation of each of the sacraments. This would include teaching the meaning of grace, sanctifying grace, actual grace and sacramental graces.

In relation to Liturgy the aims are poor, with an emphasis on special events and places, and how to create prayers and rituals for a variety of purposes. This reduces the liturgy to something that we can create for ourselves in response to certain situations and events. In contrast, the Church treats the Liturgy as a gift that is received from the Lord to be celebrated, not something that we can manufacture or change at will.

**Level 4.** There are some reasonable ideas here in the Aims, but they suffer from ranging across prayer, sacraments, liturgy and 'ritual'. The lack of distinctive focus on Liturgy, Sacraments and Prayer diminishes and confuses the understanding of all three.

It is good to include a study of the Lord's Prayer, but it is most unsatisfactory that this is left to year 8 and in the Republic of Ireland only. The Church teaches that the Lord's Prayer, the
Our Father, is the fundamental Christian prayer and the model for all Christian prayer. Therefore, the study of the Lord's Prayer should commence in Level 2, if not Level 1, and be progressively developed and deepened right through to Year 8.

General. It has been noted above that this Strand suffers from attempting to combine two of the Pillars of the Church's tradition of catechesis, that is Liturgy/Sacraments and Prayer, which results in a diminution of understanding of all.

In relation to Liturgy it would be good if the Aims focused on learning about the Church's liturgy, especially the Mass on Sunday, and how to participate in a prayerful, joyful manner in order to grow closer to Jesus. It relation to the Liturgical Year the aim should be to show how it is an expression of salvation history. There should also be explicit reference to Sacramentals, and how they are part of the liturgy, but different from the seven Sacraments.

In relation to Sacraments the aims should include knowing what a Sacrament is, appreciating the significance and meaning of each Sacrament, the outward sign and special internal grace of the Sacrament, the minister, requirements, and benefits of each Sacrament. The aim should also be to understand the Church's teaching on the meaning of grace (sanctifying, actual, and sacramental).

In relation to Prayer the aims should include teaching the children how to pray, the meaning of prayer, especially the great prayers of the Church, which should be memorised; teaching the children how to pray the great prayers of the Mass and sacraments; knowing the principal forms of Christian prayer; encouragement to family prayer, and for the children to pray at home privately, even in the absence of family prayer.

Skills.
The prominence of a category termed 'skills' tends to conform religious education to a secular mould. The Church's documents on catechesis do not feature the development of 'skills'.

Preschool. Praying simple prayers with music and actions is good. To 'explore symbols, words, gestures and actions in prayer, ritual and sacraments' is too advanced for this age group.

Level 1. To explore symbols, feelings, words, gestures, of prayer, ritual and sacraments is too advanced for this age group, and also puts the emphasis on the human and secular, rather than where it belongs on the spiritual. Engaging in guided meditations is too advanced for this age group, and potentially harmful.

Level 2. Sequencing actions and activities, and focusing on understandings, questions and feelings puts the emphasis on the secular and human, rather than where it should be most importantly placed that is on the spiritual. 'Participation in preparation for sacraments' could more positively be expressed as 'prepare for the sacraments'.

Level 3. 'Explore' and 'investigate' are insufficient; children should learn and come to know. It is not satisfactory that the Church's liturgy is replaced by the terms 'customs and rituals'. The skills to design classroom rituals and to create objects, symbols and spaces by the children themselves will lead to a kind of self-made liturgy and sacraments, and undermine the true meaning of the Church's liturgy and sacraments, which are a gift to be received, cherished and celebrated, rather than something we can manufacture for ourselves.

Level 4. Connecting Scripture, art, poetry and music with liturgy and prayer is good.

General. Significant omissions are the skills of being actually able to pray (apart from simple prayers at Preschool and Levels 1), participate in celebration of the Church's Liturgy, and receiving the sacraments.
**Strand Units.**

A significant problem here, as in all the Strands, is that there is only mention of 'ideas and concepts', but no mention of truths.

God invites us into a loving relationship. It would be simpler and more readily understandable to title this sub-heading 'Prayer'.

There is much good and relevant material here in relation to prayer, and it is generally reasonably structured by Level. There are however some important omissions:

The church is rightly mentioned as a place of prayer, but there is no mention of the church as the place for celebration of Mass, and the place of the Real Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle, which children can visit and pray.

Great Prayers of the Church are mentioned (Sign of Cross, Our Father, Creeds, Hail Mary, Glory Be, Angel Guardian, Act of Contrition, Angelus, Hail Holy Queen), which is good. However, there is no mention that the meaning of these prayers should be explained, or that they should be memorised (nor indeed that any prayers should be memorised).

The Lord’s Prayer, the Our Father, receives attention at Level 4, but this is too little and too late. The CCC gives major prominence to the Lord’s Prayer, which should receive commensurate attention in this Curriculum.

The Trinity receives inadequate attention; the Church teaches that Christian prayer is primarily Trinitarian, directed to the Father, through Christ, in the power of the Spirit.

A very serious omission is the family and its role in children’s prayer, which is never mentioned.

In relation to the listing under the subheading ‘Formal Prayer’, there are many good prayers included. However, what is less than helpful is the random mixing up of various types of prayer – the Great Prayers of the Church, other well-known prayers (e.g. Memorare, Prayer to the Holy Spirit, Acts of Faith, Hope & Charity), Scripture, prayers from the Mass, devotions like the Stations of the Cross and the Rosary, and lastly a large number of unknown prayers. It would be more helpful if the known prayers were grouped according to type, and the unknown prayers excluded. A helpful addition to the known prayers would be the Prayer to St Michael the Archangel. (There is a sub-heading ‘Prayers at Mass’ at some Levels, containing some Mass responses, but other Mass prayers appear in the general listings of ‘Formal Prayer’).

**Liturgical Year.**

There should be a section on ‘Liturgy’. The ‘Liturgical Year’ is good, but it is only one aspect of the Church’s liturgy, and as a result there are significant omissions in relation to the Church’s liturgy, viz.

The liturgy is the public prayer of the Church, in which she celebrates above all the death and resurrection of Christ which accomplished our salvation. The members of the Church come together, usually in the church building, and all participate. The Holy Spirit helps us to pray with Jesus to God the Father, uniting us to God and to one another. Liturgical celebration can include sign & symbol, words & actions, song & music, and sacred art. (CCC1067, 1071-1073)

The liturgy is led primarily by Jesus Christ, our redeemer. Bishops, priests and deacons take the place of Christ in leading the prayer and worship. (CCC 1142, 1188).

It is good to note that the Liturgical Year celebrates the life of Jesus through to the hope of his second coming. A significant omission is that the Liturgical Year celebrates the entire sweep of salvation history, from creation through to the end of time and the Second Coming of Jesus at the Last Judgement.
The Seasons of Advent and Lent are well covered. Some aspects of Holy Week and Easter are well covered, but overall the coverage is seriously inadequate because there is minimal attention given to the central reality of Easter, which is the salvation of the human race from the sin of Adam and all consequent sin through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross, and his subsequent Resurrection. It is also very unsatisfactory that the vital connections between the Last Supper, Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross, and the Mass are not brought out.

The treatment of the Feast of Pentecost is light, and could be strengthened. Feast Days are well covered, in particular Feasts of Mary, and the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls. It would be helpful to note that feast days of saints are normally celebrated on the dates of their deaths, which are the anniversaries of their entry into heaven.

Sacraments and Sacramentality.
The subheading here should simply be ‘Sacraments’. Adding the term ‘sacramentality’ is unhelpful, at best, and potentially damaging. The meaning of ‘sacramentality’ is not found in Church documents, standard dictionaries or this Curriculum’s Glossary. It might be connected with terms which are in the Glossary – ‘Sacramental Principle’ and ‘Sacramental Imagination’ – which give a meaning to sacrament which is radically different to the Church’s understanding of Sacrament.

General: Sacraments in general are addressed at Levels 3 and 4; this should be brought forward. Children need to learn the basic meaning of Sacraments at Level 2, when they are prepared for the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist.

There is much good material on Sacraments, but also scope for strengthening, as follows: It would be helpful to clarify that the source of the grace of all the sacraments is Christ’s redemptive death on the cross (CCC 1128). Sanctifying grace is the stable gift of the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it, while actual graces refer to God’s interventions, among which are sacramental graces, gifts proper to the different sacraments. (CCC 1999-2000, 2003). Each sacrament has its own special outward signs (words and actions) and minister, which are an essential part of giving the sacrament and cannot be changed. Each sacrament has its own particular grace and the outward visible sign helps us understand this grace. (CCC 1129, 1131, 1189).

The Curriculum says, ‘The sacraments do not work automatically; they require an active faith on our part’ (page 68). This is not quite so. The Church teaches that the sacraments act ex opere operato (by the very fact of being performed), but that the fruits also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them (CCC 1128).

A significant omission is any reference to the Church’s sacramentals (CCC 1667-1678).

Baptism.
There is much good material on Baptism in Levels 1 through 4, which is appropriate. However, many key elements from Levels 3 and 4 should be brought forward to Level 2, because children preparing for the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist need an adequate basic understanding of Baptism.

A significant omission is that the grace of Baptism comes from the redemptive death of Jesus on the cross, signified by the principal meaning of the symbol of the baptismal water, which is that we are immersed in Christ’s death and come out a new creature, freed from sin and reborn as sons of God. (CCC 1213-1214).

It would be helpful to clarify that pouring or immersing in water while saying the Baptismal words are the essential signs of the Sacrament; the other signs (oil of chrism, candle, white
garment) are not essential, but help us understand the meaning and graces of Baptism. (CCC 1234-1243).

It would also be helpful to teach the children the significance of the Christian name given in Baptism. (CCC 2156, 2158).

**Penance or Reconciliation.**

There is much good material here on the Sacrament, at Levels 2, 3 and 4. However, more of the key truths about the Sacrament should be brought forward to Level 2 so that the children preparing for the Sacrament of Penance can have an adequate understanding to receive the Sacrament fruitfully.

There are also some important omissions and scope for strengthening, viz.

It should not be omitted that the grace of forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament comes from the merits of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice on the cross.

It is good to note that the Sacrament may be celebrated individually or communally (p.64), but it should be added that individual celebration is the norm (CCC 1484).

It is good to note that through absolution God’s forgiveness is received from the priest; it would be good to add that this spiritual power to forgive sins is given to bishops and priests through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

For true contrition, wanting to sin no more (p.64) is insufficient; there must be a decision, a firm resolution, not to sin again.

It is good to refer to the need for examination of conscience (p.70); it would be helpful to add the Church’s recommendation to use the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes as guides (CCC 1454).

It is good to include the recommendation for regular confession of sins (p.70); it would be helpful to add the requirement (second Precept of the Church) for confession of sins at least once per year (CCC 2042).

While one must accept that misuse of God’s creation can be sinful, some of the language used seems inappropriate, i.e. ‘breaking friendship with creation’ (p.64) and ‘mutual respect that binds us to the earth’ (p.69). This could lead one to think of the earth as a person, which would be pantheist, not Christian.

A grave omission is any reference to mortal and venial sin, which are vitally important in the Church’s teaching on sin, and especially so in relation to the Sacrament of Penance. In the Sacrament we are bound to confess all mortal sins that have not previously been confessed; this remains the only ordinary means of reconciliation with God and the Church. The confession of venial sins, without being necessary in itself, is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church (CCC 1493, 1497).

**The Mass.**

The section on the Mass is poor; it is disjointed, imbalanced, and with serious omissions. It is unsatisfactory that any part of the Curriculum should be so poor, but it is particularly serious in relation to the Eucharist, because the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church’s life (CCC 1324). This failing in relation to the Eucharist must have a negative effect on the entire Curriculum.

The material is presented under five points. Eucharistic Presence. Memorial Sacrifice. Thanksgiving and Praise. Communion. Structure of the Mass. This structure is disjointed and confusing. To use the structure of the Mass itself for the whole presentation would be
reasonable, but to use the 'Structure of the Mass' as just one of five points inhibits coherence and clarity.

Eucharistic Presence. The presentation here is quite inadequate. At Level 2 the material is very inadequate for children who are being prepared for First Holy Communion. The description of the Eucharistic presence is consubstantiation, which is not a Catholic understanding, rather than transubstantiation which is Catholic teaching. Significant omissions are of transubstantiation, and that Jesus is present soul and divinity.

Memorial Sacrifice. The presentation here is seriously inadequate. At Level 2 there is only mention of a meal. At Level 3 there is mention that Jesus died and rose to save the world, but the full nature of his redemptive sacrifice is not explained or described. At Level 4 the impression is given that Jesus gave up his life in the way that millions of other people have given their lives for others, and that this is an example that we should follow. The true nature of the unique redemptive sacrifice of Jesus is omitted – Jesus' redemptive passion, that freed mankind from the slavery of sin and reconciled us to God, was the very reason for his Incarnation (CCC 601, 607, 619-620).

Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving. The emphasis here is principally on giving thanks, which is good in itself, but falls short of the true and unique nature of the thanks that is due to God in Jesus for our salvation from sin. There is reference to 'thanks for the world, for one another and for Jesus', and in that order, which could imply that the least important thing to give thanks for is Jesus. Level 4 refers to ‘thanks to the Father for all that he gave us in Christ’ but there is no explanation or development of the unique gift of salvation given to us by Jesus on the cross and in the Mass.

Communion. There is reference to Jesus giving us his body and blood in the Bread of Life, which helps us to grow in friendship with God and others, and to love and serve like Jesus. This is good. However, the presence of Jesus in his soul and divinity is again omitted; also omitted is the grace given by receiving the Eucharist, the forgiveness of venial sins, and the help to preserve us from mortal sin. (CCC 1416).

Structure of the Mass. There are good elements in this section, but also limitations and omissions. Description of the structure at the critical Level 2 is very limited. The description at Level 3 is much improved, but this improved presentation is needed at Level 2 when the children are being prepared for First Holy Communion. The two-part structure of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (CCC 1346), is mentioned at Level 3, but should be emphasised at all Levels. At Level 4 it is good to note that in the Creeds we profess the central truths of Christian faith, but it is not helpful to present the origins of the Eucharist as firstly in Jesus’ practice of table fellowship, which tends to limit the understanding of the Eucharist as a shared meal, which is not a satisfactory Catholic understanding. It is unsatisfactory that the Consecration is not identified and emphasised as the very heart of the Eucharist / Mass (CCC 1352).

Overall, there are significant omissions in relation to the Eucharist and the Mass, as follows:

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church’s life, because it contains Jesus, God the Son, himself. (CCC 1322, 1324).

The Eucharist re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, which accomplished our salvation. The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Mass are one single sacrifice. (CCC 1359, 1366-1367).

It is Christ himself, acting through the ministry of the priest, who offers the Eucharistic sacrifice, to which the whole Church (communion of saints) is united. Only ordained priests have the power, through the Holy Spirit, to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. (CCC 1368-1372, 1410-1411)
When the priest says the words of consecration spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper: “This is my body which will be given up for you. . . . This is the cup of my blood. . . .”, the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Christ himself becomes present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his body and his blood, his soul and his divinity; this change is called ‘transubstantiation’. Christ is present whole and entire in both the bread and the wine, and their parts, i.e. breaking the bread does not divide Christ. (CCC 1377, 1412, 1413)

Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of Penance. (CCC 1415).

Receiving the Eucharist gives grace which increases our union with Jesus, forgives our venial sins, preserves us from grave sins, and strengthens the unity and love of the members of the Church. (CCC 1416)

The faithful are obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, and prepared by the Sacrament of Penance, to receive the Eucharist at least once per year, if possible during the Easter season. The Church encourages more frequent, even daily, attendance at Mass and reception of Holy Communion. (CCC 1389)

The Church encourages the greatest respect to be shown to the Eucharist, including genuflecting and visits to the Blessed Sacrament for prayer and adoration. (CCC 1378-1381, 1418).

**Holy Orders.**

The material on Holy Orders is allocated to Level 3; it would be very important to introduce the basic understanding of the priesthood at Level 2, because otherwise the children could not adequately understand the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, for which they are being prepared.

There is good material given here in relation to Holy Orders, but also need for a clarification and a number of significant omissions.

Holy Orders is defined as a ‘Sacrament of Commitment’. While it is true that commitment is involved, it would be better to follow the Church, which describes Holy Orders as one of two Sacraments in the Service of Communion. (CCC 1113).

The Curriculum states that ‘priests are consecrated to preach the Gospel, to preside at the liturgy and to engage in pastoral governance and care (CCC 1592)’. ‘Preaching the Gospel’ may be misunderstood as no more than reading the Gospel and giving the homily at Mass; the Church calls priests to teach the fullness of the Faith, to catechesis (CIC528). Priests are called to more than ‘preside’; the Sacrament of Holy Orders spiritually empowers them to conduct and perform liturgy and sacraments. The principal duty and grace for governance of the Church is given to bishops, in which priests participate as co-workers under the bishop (CIC 375, 519).

Significant omissions include the following:

Holy Orders ordains a man a bishop, priest or deacon, giving grace to serve the Church, in the name and place of Christ, our Saviour, the Head of the Church. The sacrament was instituted by Christ at the Last Supper, when he established the Twelve Apostles as the bishops to lead and take care of the Church. (CCC 1536, 1548)

The bishop is a successor of the apostles and head of his diocese. He also shares in responsibility for the whole Church, under the authority and in union with the Pope, the successor of St Peter. The bishop has fullness of priestly ordination, including the sacramental power to ordain priests, deacons and other bishops, and to administer Confirmation. (CCC 1576, 1594, 1600)
Priests receive responsibility from the bishop to look after a parish or some other special work. Priests receive through ordination the gift of a ‘sacred power’ to celebrate mass, proclaim the Gospel and consecrate the Eucharist, to forgive sins in Confession, and to administer the Sacrament of the Sick. Priests normally administer Baptism, and officiate at Marriage. (CCC 1551, 1562-1567, 1595)

Deacons are ordained for tasks of service, assisting the bishop and priests. (CCC 1596)

The Church ordains only baptized men, who have sensed God’s call to the priesthood and have been judged suitable by the Church. (CCC 1578, 1598)

Bishops and priests (in the Latin Church) are normally not married, so they can give themselves entirely to God and the people they serve, and in imitation of Christ. (CCC 1551, 1579-1580, 1599, 1618)

Marriage.

Marriage is also described by the Curriculum as a ‘Sacrament of Commitment’. While commitment is indeed essential to marriage, it would be better to follow the Church, which classes Marriage as a Sacrament in the Service of Communion (like Holy Orders).

The material provided is reasonable, but could be strengthened by including the following:

By performing his first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus gave a sign confirming Marriage as a Sacrament of the Church. (CCC 1613).

The Sacrament of Marriage gives special graces to husband and wife to love and care for each other, to bring each other closer to God on the way to eternal life, and to love and educate their children in the Catholic Faith. Jesus’ love for his people, the Church, is the model of love for all married couples. (CCC 1660, 1661)

Our family and home are precious to God, just like the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. The Christian family home is rightly called “the domestic church.” (CCC 1666)

At a Catholic wedding husband and wife freely give themselves to each other in love for life before a priest, who blesses them and acts as a witness for the Church. The couple are the ministers of the sacrament for each other. It is normal to celebrate the wedding during a Nuptial Mass, in the presence of family and friends. (CCC 1662-1663)

Marriage is between one man and one woman, and is open to having children (CCC 1664).

Anointing of the Sick.

There is reasonable material on this Sacrament at Level 4. It could be strengthened by the following additions:

The Anointing of the Sick was instituted by Christ as a sacrament; it is intended for those in old age, as well as those suffering serious illness. (CCC 1509, 1511, 1527)

Each time a person falls seriously ill they may receive the Anointing of the Sick, and also again if the illness worsens. (CCC 1529).

There is reference to the ‘celebrant’ of the Sacrament. It should be made clear that only priests (and bishops) can give the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, using oil blessed by the bishop. (CCC 1530)

The Sacrament may bring healing from the illness, but if not, it helps prepare the person for passing over to eternal life. (CCC 1532)
Signs and Symbol.
There are several signs and symbols listed, which is not unreasonable in itself, because liturgical celebration can include sign & symbol, as well as words & actions, song & music, and sacred art. (CCC 1145,1153,1156,1159). However, the value of listing signs and symbols on their own, unconnected with particular Sacraments or liturgies, and without explanation, must be doubtful. The only explanation offered (for the crucifix at Level 4 – p.71) is inadequate.

STRAND: MORALITY, pages 72-81.
For a Catholic curriculum it would be more appropriate to term this Strand, ‘Life in Christ’, in harmony with the CCC. The term ‘Morality’ might harmonise better with a secular curriculum. In fact, the content of this Strand is syncretist, containing both secular/humanist and Catholic elements. This does not lead to a satisfactory Catholic curriculum.

Aims & Skills.
Preschool.
The aims and skills given are far too complex and advanced for this age-group, and generally syncretist, as noted above.
There is a predominance of secular/humanist moral values, with secular references. There is reference to ‘rules’ and to ‘right and wrong behaviour’, but the children are expected to develop the skill of making their own rules and moral decisions (at age 3-4 years!). There is a reference to Christian moral values, but the children are expected to identify these by listening to stories, a difficult task for any children, especially for 3-4 year-olds. There is no requirement that the children should be taught Christian moral values, or taught what is right and wrong from a Christian perspective.
There is reference to ‘God’s unconditional love’. It is probably better not to describe God’s love as ‘unconditional’, because it could lead to misunderstanding of God’s love. Neither Scripture nor the Catechism of the Catholic Church describe God’s love as ‘unconditional’. It is true that God loves each of us with an infinite love no matter what our condition, circumstances or sinfulness. However, there are conditions on our part if we are to receive God’s love, so in that sense God’s love is not unconditional. For example, the extraordinary expression of God’s love in forgiveness of sin is freely offered to all through Christ’s redemptive sacrifice on the cross, but our reception of that love is conditional on our forgiveness of others – ‘forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us’ (Mt.6:12).

Level 1.
Aims and skills are largely too advanced for this age-group (Junior & Senior Infants, 4-6 year-olds), e.g. ‘identify, debate, resolve and evaluate moral dilemmas,’ and ‘engage in moral discussion and debate using arguments’.
The approach is again syncretist, with the secular/humanist understanding of morality predominating. There is reference to ‘rules and right and wrong behaviour’, but not of their source. There is reference to ‘identifying Christian moral values and teachings’, but no indication as to how this might happen.
Level 2.
This is the age-group at which the children are prepared for First Penance / Reconciliation, and is therefore crucial in relation to Life in Christ / Morality. It is a serious omission that the aims and skills contain no reference to First Penance.

The syncretist approach is continued. The first three of eight Aims are specifically Christian, but are still inadequate in relation to preparing children for the Sacrament of Penance. The remaining five Aims and all the Skills are secular.

Level 3.
The first three of eight Aims are specifically Christian, and it is good that there is reference to Jesus’ way of love, loyalty to the Father, the two-fold commandment of love and the Ten Commandments. However, these Aims are quite limited for Catholic children at the crucial phase of pre-adolescence. The Ten Commandments should certainly have been introduced at Level 2 in preparation for the Sacrament of Penance.

The remaining five Aims and the Skills reflect predominantly a secular approach to morality.

Level 4.
The Aims are much improved, and are predominantly Christian and relevant for this age-group. However, a desirable aim that the children actually live Christian moral lives is only weakly expressed as ‘begin to incorporate moral ideals of conduct into their identity’.

It is most unsatisfactory that human sexuality is to be addressed in the context of the RSE programme. The State’s RSE programme is secular, and while some of its content does not conflict with Catholic morality, other aspects do. Catholic sexual morality should be taught independent of, and superior to, any RSE programme. A good Catholic religious education programme would eliminate the need for a RSE programme.

The Skills express a secular approach to morality, which is not satisfactory in a Catholic curriculum.

Strand Units:
A serious problem here is that the material is not presented as truths, nothing real or factual, merely ‘ideas and concepts’. Catholic religious education is founded on presenting the truths of the Faith, so to reduce this to mere ‘ideas and concepts’ is entirely unacceptable for an authentic Catholic curriculum.

Preschool, Level 1, Level 2.
These three levels are analysed here together, because there is much in common in content and approach, and because they lead up to a key stage in relation to morality, which is preparation to receive the Sacrament of Penance.

There is much good material presented here, including: the love of God for each person, the need to show love to others and to God, respect for one’s body and the environment, respect for parents, the importance of love in the family, the need to forgive, and God’s law of love – love one another as Jesus has loved us.

There are also however, significant weaknesses. All human beings are limited and fallen, and for this reason God in his great love for us provided teaching on what is right and wrong, initially in the Old Testament (typified most clearly in the Ten Commandments) and then again in the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament Epistles. The Church has always followed this divine example and has sought to teach clearly on what is right and wrong. The material in these Strand Units relies solely on presenting good behaviour, but fails in teaching what is wrong and why it is wrong.
There is no mention of sin, let alone an explanation of what sin is, why it should be avoided and consequences of sin. There is no explanation of mortal and venial sin. Also omitted is any mention of Original Sin and its effects. There is no mention of salvation from sin. There is no mention of grace, neither the grace of salvation, sanctifying grace nor the actual graces we need to counteract temptation and avoid sin. There is no mention of temptation by Satan and his demons. There is no mention of the moral authority of the Church, and our obligation to follow the Church’s moral teachings.

There is a reliance on the children being able to work out for themselves what is wrong and evil by listening to stories. This is not God’s way, the way of Jesus, the way of the Church. If children are simply presented with stories they could draw many different moral conclusions; probably no two children will draw the same conclusions, which may or may not accord with Christian moral teaching. Many of Jesus’ parables had a moral message, but it was presupposed the hearers knew the moral teachings of the Law, and the parables sought to emphasise, illustrate, draw out certain moral teachings. Stories of Saints may indeed help illustrate moral principles, but the children need a foundation of teaching on what is right and wrong.

There is reference to ‘RSE in a Christian context’. This is unsatisfactory. RSE is a secular State programme with a secular approach to morality; some RSE aspects are compatible with Christianity, others are not. A Catholic curriculum should be independent of, and superior to, any secular RSE programme. Indeed, it would be hard to see the need for a RSE programme if there was a good Catholic religious education programme in place.

There is reference to the second, third and fourth commandments, but only very brief references which are not developed in a way which would be helpful. In preparation for the Sacrament of Penance the children should be given a basic understanding of the entire Decalogue.

The omission of the First Commandment is of the utmost gravity; the First Commandment is foundational for the Second and Third Commandments, for the complete Decalogue, and indeed for the entirety of Christianity.

There is reference to ‘Christian moral values such as sharing, caring, love, forgiveness, friendship, welcoming the stranger, importance of family, care of the earth, peacemaking, social justice, interdependence, and care for the sick’. While these values are all admirable, they could equally express the values of good humanism. In a Catholic religious education curriculum one would expect to also see moral values which are specifically Christian, and indeed a focus on virtue, which is conspicuous by its absence from the Curriculum.

The perspective is not authentically Christian because it is entirely concerned with our material this-worldly existence; there is no eternal perspective, no connection of our eternal destiny with how we live our lives on earth, no mention of the spiritual immortal soul. No connection is made between the morality of our lives and the Last Things – heaven, hell, purgatory. This entirely this-world perspective is more in tune with a secular view of morality.

Level 3 & Level 4.
These two Levels are analysed here together, because the material in both is similar, and these Levels cover the remaining period of primary schooling, culminating in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation.

The earlier Levels (Preschool, Levels 1 & 2) suffered from omission or inadequate treatment of key elements of the Catholic understanding of morality; this trend is continued in Levels 3 & 4.

There is still a lack of clear teaching on what is right and wrong. There is still no mention of sin, no explanation of what sin is, why it should be avoided and consequences of sin. There
is no mention or explanation of mortal sin or venial sin, especially the deadly consequences of mortal sin and the necessity to seek forgiveness for mortal sin in the Sacrament of Penance. There is reference to ‘a struggle within ourselves between good and evil’, but this is quite inadequate, because there is no mention of Original Sin and its effects, nor of temptation to sin by Satan and his demons. There is no mention of salvation from sin. There is no mention of vices (habits of sin), nor of the seven deadly sins. Excessive emphasis on sin is out of place in a Catholic curriculum, but to leave children in such ignorance about sin is gravely irresponsible.

The earlier Levels presented solely good behaviour, omitting teaching on what is wrong; this is not God’s way, the way of Jesus and of the Church. The same approach is continued in Levels 3&4, with just minimal reference to some wrong behaviours: discrimination, hurting the poor, anger, hatred and injustice.

There is reference to the Ten Commandments in total, which is good as far as it goes. However, it is unsatisfactory that the Curriculum does not develop teaching of each and every Commandment in a systematic way. There is a reference to the fifth Commandment fostering respect for human life and the sacredness of human life, which is good. However, very much more needs to be said to give the children an adequate understanding of the fifth Commandment.

There is reference to the teaching of the sixth and ninth commandments, but it is unsatisfactory that this is presented in the context of the State’s secular RSE programme. Many of the positive values of these two commandments are well presented, but there is a complete omission of anything that is forbidden by these commandments, which is irresponsible, especially in our current secular culture which departs so radically from Christianity in relation to sexual morality.

There is mention of grace, which is good: grace of the sacraments, and God’s help to answer his call and use our freedom responsibly. However, the presentation on grace is still inadequate, with no mention or explanation of the grace of salvation, sanctifying grace or actual graces. Also it is not made clear that grace is not merely helpful but necessary to avoid sin; non-recognition of the necessity of grace is the error of Pelagianism.

There is still no mention of the moral authority of the Church, and our obligation to follow the Church’s moral teachings. The Precepts of the Church have been addressed under the Strand – Christian Faith. The Precepts would fit better here in the Morality Strand, or should at least be repeated here.

The perspective still focuses on our material this-worldly existence, omitting the eternal perspective and the connection between the morality of our lives and the Last Things – heaven, hell, purgatory. The perspective on morality is therefore not authentically Christian. There is a reference to the Last Judgment, but only to say we ‘hope it will show the true value of all just and unjust actions in the world’ so that ‘this hope will commit us to work now for justice’; this is an inadequate explanation of the meaning of the Last Judgment.

It is good to include reference to organisations that are working for good, like the St Vincent de Paul Society. However, inclusion of Amnesty International is wrong. Amnesty has done much good in the past, was founded by a Catholic, but has betrayed its best traditions by deciding to support abortion, and therefore no longer merits approval by people of good will, especially by Catholics.

It is good to refer to the covenants with Noah and Abraham (page 77), but the covenant with David is also vitally important, and should not have been omitted. It is good to include a reference to emotions (page 79), but the relationship between the emotions and morality should be better developed, because there is so much confusion about this issue in modern secular society (cf. CCC1767-1768, 1773).
‘The entire Law of the gospel is contained in the New Commandment of Jesus, to love one another as he has loved us’ (page 79). This is not quite so. Jesus said that to love God and to love neighbour as oneself summed up the entire Law and Prophets of the Old Testament (Matthew 22:34-40; Dt.6:5; Lv.19:18). The command to love one another as Jesus loved us (John 13:34) is the Gospel fulfilment of the command to love neighbour as oneself. However, the Old Testament command to love God also has its Gospel fulfilment in the command to believe in Jesus Christ as the only Son of God, our Saviour (1 John 3:23; John 3:16, 6:29, 8:24).

Other significant omissions are teaching on conscience and the virtues.

The ‘virtue of chastity’ is mentioned (page 80), which is good. However, it is unsatisfactory that this is the only reference to virtue. The virtues are extremely important in a Christian understanding of the moral life (cf. CCC 1833-1844), especially the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, and the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

SPECIAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM GUIDELINES, pages 82-91

It is reasonable to present guidelines for special education. However, these guidelines would require to be rewritten in line with the necessary re-write of the Curriculum itself.

APPENDIX A: SKILLS IN THE SPIRAL CURRICULUM – SOME EXAMPLES, p.92-95

The concept of a Spiral Curriculum is excellent, with themes returned to at higher levels with progression in complexity and richness.

The focus on ‘Skills’ is less satisfactory. The Church’s documents on religious education do not refer to ‘skills’, unlike the secular curricula, which do feature ‘skills’. By majoring on Skills, this Curriculum is therefore aligning itself with a secular model, rather than with the pedagogy of the Church, which is unhelpful and could further facilitate the option of handing over control of religious education in Catholic primary schools to the secular State.

Various sample skills are presented from the Strand: ‘Christian Faith’.

The first skill is to ‘investigate Christian beliefs’. There is some reasonable material here, but also significant omissions. Various means of investigation are given, but no reference to studying, learning, listening or reading. There is no reference to truths of Faith, or the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The second skill is to ‘express responses to the revelation and activity of God in their lives and in creation’. The material here is unsatisfactory. The understanding of ‘revelation’ is the un-Catholic definition of ‘Revelation’ given in the Glossary, p.118. The skills listed do not contain anything Christian, and are more representative of a theist understanding of God.

The third skill, ‘identify and explain Christian beliefs’, is an improvement. However, there are limitations; there is still no reference to ‘Christian truths’, only ‘beliefs and concepts’, which does not necessarily imply that Christianity is true. To acquire the skill to ‘explain’ is good, but it would be better to go further and have the skill to defend the Faith. In modern society it is especially important to be able to defend the Faith, which is the art of Apologetics, about which one hears little these days.

The fourth skill is to ‘respect and learn about and from people of other cultures and religious faiths’. It would be better to separate culture and religion, because the issues involved are fundamentally different. It would also be vital to include the skill of witness to the unique
truths of Catholic Christianity; a false irenicism \(^{52}\) serves nobody, neither Catholics, other Christians, nor people of other faiths or none.

Another sample skill is given from the Strand: ‘Scripture’.

The skill is to ‘represent ideas, feelings and questions about Scripture’. This is less than satisfactory because there is no reference to understanding and incorporating the truths of Scripture into their lives. It would also be helpful for the children to relate Scripture to a full Catholic understanding of Revelation (Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium), and to the other dimensions of Catholic religious education – Profession of Faith (Creed), Liturgy & Sacraments, Life in Christ (Morality), and Prayer.

APPENDIX B: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM, p.96-114

This Appendix addresses the integration of religious education with secular subjects in the primary school.

The three general aims in the State’s Primary School Curriculum (PSC)\(^{53}\) are set out, followed by details on how this Religious Education Curriculum contributes to those aims. This is not satisfactory because the contributions of this RE Curriculum are expressed in theist terms containing nothing Catholic or Christian. In fact, one key contribution is not even theist but is entirely relativist in relation to all religions and none, as follows: ‘allows for the development of an inclusive curriculum which is accessible to all students’. Another contribution is favourable to religious relativism – ‘aims to facilitate the transition from primary to post-primary religious education’ – because the post-primary Syllabi for Junior and Leaving Certificates are fundamentally relativist, since the Church has ceded leadership of religious education in Catholic secondary schools to the secular State. This (and the issue of ‘integration’ below) raises the question as to whether this Curriculum will facilitate a similar handover of leadership of religious education at primary level to the State, as has been considered or advocated by some prominent Catholic religious educators.(see also p.4, 18 above).

INTEGRATION:

The Primary School Curriculum encourages integration, making connections between learning in different subjects (PSC 16). This is good educational practice. However, for a Catholic school the position of religious education goes beyond being just one subject among many to be integrated with other subjects. The Church expects Catholic religious education in a Catholic school to permeate all subjects and the entire school environment with the Gospel \(^{54}\). In this Appendix the Curriculum tends to follow the PSC perspective of integration of religious education as one subject among many, rather than the Church’s perspective that Catholic religious education should permeate and give meaning to all other subjects.

The secular / relativist approach is to separate religion from morality; religion is seen as something private and personal, morality is treated as public, inter-personal and independent of various private religious beliefs. Christianity does not separate religious faith and morality, as exemplified in the CCC title for Part 3 on morality, ‘Life in Christ’. This Appendix has


several elements which tend to favour the secular approach to morality. The Appendix differentiates between ‘spiritual, moral and religious education’ (p.97,99). The Appendix gives priority to the secular RSE Programme in relation to sexual morality (p. 102, 104, 105, 112, 113, 114). The Appendix favours children debating and making their own moral decisions, but not being guided by and following God’s morality, as taught by the Church (p.98, 99, 100, 109, 110, 113, 114).

Another deficiency in this Appendix is that there is only minimal reference to the Catholic Church; quite unsatisfactory in a Curriculum for Catholic religious education.

1. Language & Literacy, p.97-100.

The perspective here is how religious education can serve to develop secular language and literacy skills, which is not unreasonable. However, what is missing is how religious education can permeate language and literacy in the Catholic school with the Gospel.


This is principally how mathematics can serve in religious education, which is reasonable.


The opening summary of contributions by Religious Education are all secular, not Catholic or even religious.

The history curriculum is not unreasonable, though quite inadequate on the Catholic Church.

The geography curriculum is not unreasonable.

The Science curriculum is inadequate. The emphasis on the secular RSE programme is unwise. There is lack of appreciation of how Christianity in general, and the Catholic Church in particular, has contributed hugely to the development of science.


The opening summary of contributions by Religious Education are predominantly secular / relativist, not Catholic, which is not satisfactory.

The visual arts curriculum is reasonable, in that it identifies many good ways in which the visual arts can serve in religious education. There is reference to learning from Christian art, but only briefly, which hardly does justice to our Catholic heritage, the great treasury of visual arts – paintings, mosaics, icons, sculpture – through 2000 years of our history.

The music curriculum is reasonable, insofar as it identifies ways in which music can contribute to religious education, but it is quite limited, and hardly does justice to the immense and rich Christian musical heritage, contemporary, traditional and ancient.

The drama curriculum is reasonable insofar as it identifies that drama can contribute to religious education, which is good. However, it massively over stretches the contribution that drama can make. It also gets into issues that have nothing to do with drama, especially promoting self-chosen religion and morality, e.g. identifying, debating and resolving moral dilemmas; creating your own ten commandments; devising a new model of Church; developing a code of conduct for a religion; creating your own moral maxims; creating a new creation myth. This is most unsatisfactory.

5. Physical Education, p.111.

The contributions proposed for religious education are limited.


The opening summary of contributions made by religious education are largely good humanism, theist at most, with nothing specifically Catholic or Christian. This is not satisfactory in a Catholic RE Curriculum.
Detailed contributions to the SPHE curriculum are similar. They are largely good humanism, with some theist elements and a minimal Christian reference. As in the Drama Curriculum above there is an absence of Catholic morality but rather a favouring of self-chosen morality, e.g. critically evaluating moral choices; developing an ethic; values and ideals that are important to the students.

APPENDIX C: CURRICULUM STRANDS, p.115

This Appendix attempts to summarise the material in the Curriculum’s four Strand’s at each of the five Levels. It is hard to see it being of practical value, because it is so brief and repetitive. It also exposes the deficiencies of the main Curriculum.

GLOSSARY, pages 116-119.

It is very good in principle to have a Glossary of key terms, which can help in understanding the meaning of what is in the Curriculum.

Some of the definitions given are satisfactory, viz.: Denominational schools; Ethos; Exigencies; Existential issues; Holistic; Humanism; Interreligious dialogue; Method of Mystagogy; Relativism; Secularism.

Other definitions are reasonably satisfactory, but still merit a comment as given below.

Still other definitions are unsatisfactory from a Catholic point of view, which is very serious, particularly as many unacceptable definitions relate to dimensions which are vital for the Faith, as noted in the comments below.

The lack of references to source documents, especially magisterial documents, is also unsatisfactory. There are just two source references given in the Glossary, only one of which is to a Church document.

Assessment is for learning. This offers the view that learning assessment is to help learning by providing feedback to teachers and their pupils, but not for other purposes, such as accountability, ranking, or of certifying competence. This view is unhelpful. Good learning assessment is multi-purpose, which should certainly help learning by feedback to teachers and pupils, but should also provide the vital feedback to other partners in the religious education process, in particular: parents, clergy, school and Church authorities, especially Bishops. The Primary School Curriculum sees Assessment as wider than teachers and pupils, in particular to include parents, all in the social context of the learning community – family, school, teacher, principal, board of management, and the local community.

The definitions in this Glossary are mostly taken from the Glossary p.370-386 in Children, Catholicism, & Religious Education (CCRE), authors Anne Hession & Patricia Kieran. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2005. Some of the CCRE definitions are modified, but thereby disimproved. A number of relevant (but not all satisfactory) CCRE definitions are excluded, e.g. Apostolic, Catholicism, Ecclesiology, Evangelisation, Evangelism, Faith Education, Ideology, Incarnation, Magisterium, Pedagogy, Pre-evangelisation, Religious Instruction, Religious Knowledge, Trinity, Virtue.

NCCA, Primary School Curriculum 1999, 17, 18.
Biblical literacy. The definition here is unsatisfactory from a Catholic point of view, because it treats the Bible as interesting literature, but not as the divinely inspired Word of God.

Catechesis. The definition given here is reasonable, and is the only definition in the Glossary which quotes a magisterial document as a source reference.

Conversion. The definition given is not unreasonable, but it would be helpful to bring out the close connection the Church sees between conversion, contrition and repentance. It would also be helpful to note that conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God, and involves taking up one's cross each day in following Jesus. It would further be helpful to give the appropriate reference: CCC 1427-1439. The final sentence in the definition is somewhat confusing.

Curriculum. The definition is not unreasonable, except that the content is referred to as 'concepts and skills', which is not satisfactory for Catholic religious education, which is primarily concerned with developing knowledge, understanding, virtue, belief in God and communion with Jesus Christ.

Doctrine. The definition is not unreasonable, but could bring out better that the Church's doctrine expresses the fullness of divine Revelation.

Ecumenism. The definition falls short by referring only to dialogue between Christians. Ecumenism is much wider than dialogue, which is just one aspect, though certainly an important one. The fundamental objective of ecumenism is Christian unity, in harmony with the title of Pope John Paul II great encyclical Ut Unum Sint – that they may be one (John17:21-23).

Grace. The definition sees grace as God's loving favour which is present always and everywhere; this falls radically short of an authentic Catholic understanding of grace (cf. CCC 1715, 1972, 1999-2004, 2017, 2020-2024). As grace is so important in Catholic doctrine and religious education, this is an extremely serious failure of the Curriculum.

Inculturation. The first part of this definition is not unreasonable, but could better express the Church's understanding of inculturation, as presented in GDC 109-110, 203-207. The second part of the definition does not express Church teaching, and is unsatisfactory. The second part proposes that the way children respond to their own secular culture should be used by teachers as a model for how the children incorporate the Gospel; this proposed model is inadequate, because the Gospel contains the unchanging ultimate truths of human existence, which transcend each culture and all cultures.

Interreligious education. It is insufficient to speak of 'growing in appreciation of one's own religious faith' while learning about and from other faiths. A sound knowledge of and commitment to the Catholic Faith is a precondition and foundation for learning about other faiths, otherwise interreligious education is likely to lead to loss of one's Catholic Faith, embracing some other faith or descending into religious confusion and relativism.

Kingdom of God / Reign of God: The Greek word in the New Testament, basileia, can be translated 'kingdom' or 'reign' (CCC2816). Major bible translations and the CCC normally use 'kingdom'. This definition gives preference to 'reign'; it would seem better to use 'kingdom', because it reminds us that it is Jesus who is our King.

The definition is unsatisfactory in that it is vague, omits key elements, and is open to many interpretations. Most particularly, the definition omits that Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection accomplished the coming of the Kingdom, that the Church is the beginning and seed of the Kingdom on earth, and the ultimate fulfilment of the Kingdom is in Jesus' Second Coming at the end of time (CCC 541-556, 567, 2816-2820).
**Original Sin.** This definition is unsatisfactory in that it is limited and vague, and does not do justice to the teaching of the Church on Original Sin, which is clear, comprehensive and specific. 57

**Pluralism.** The definition of the ‘pluralist proposal’ is hard to understand. The definition of the ‘pluralist society’ is reasonable.

**Redemption. Salvation.**

These two terms are analysed here together, because of the similarities between them. Though there is some good material, the definitions are not satisfactory because of omission of elements essential to a Catholic understanding.

The definitions do not connect the need for redemption / salvation with the Fall, and do not mention God’s promise of salvation immediately after the Fall (CCC 55). The definitions propose that salvation / redemption was brought about in some unspecified way by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but do not mention the sacrifice of the cross or that God’s saving plan was accomplished by the redemptive death of Jesus Christ, which is the centre of the Good News (CCC 571). The definitions speak of a healing from oppression in this world only, there is no eternal perspective, no spiritual dimension, whereas the Church teaches that the ultimate fruit of salvation is eternal life (CCC 658). The definitions omit that believing in Jesus is necessary to obtain salvation, and that the Resurrection is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ (CCC 161, 638). Also omitted is that through the liturgy Christ continues the work of our redemption, in, with and through his Church, especially at Easter time (CCC 1069, 1095).

**Religious Education.** This definition proposes that ‘religious education’ is essentially radically relativist. (This is not the only definition of ‘religious education’ in current use in education circles). If this Curriculum understands ‘religious education’ as essentially relativist, then the title ‘Catholic Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland’ is a contradiction in terms, a kind of oxymoron. An authentically Catholic curriculum cannot be religiously relativist, and a ‘religious education’ (by the above definition) curriculum cannot be authentically Catholic.

**Revelation.** This definition departs radically from an authentic Catholic understanding of divine Revelation (cf. DV 1-20; CCC 50-141). This is extremely serious because Catholic religious education is founded on Divine Revelation. If the Curriculum is so un-Catholic in its understanding of Revelation, then the Curriculum cannot claim to be authentically Catholic.

**Sacramental Initiation.** This definition correctly identifies the Sacraments of Initiation as Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. However, the emphasis is on entry to Church membership. In contrast, the Church herself focuses primarily on entry into the Christian life, Church membership follows as a consequence. (CCC 1212).

---

57 A summary of the Church’s teaching on Original Sin might include the following: ‘Some of the angels rebelled against God, and were driven out of heaven into hell. The fallen angels are called devils; their leader is Satan. They tempt man to reject God and sin, but their power is limited. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created good and without sin. But tempted by Satan or ‘the devil’, they disobeyed God and lost their original holiness. This event is called ‘The Fall’ and the first sin is called ‘Original Sin’. Original Sin is transmitted from Adam and Eve to every human being. As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened, with a selfish attraction to sin; we suffer pain and ignorance and will one day die. After the Fall God did not abandon the human race, but promised to send a Saviour, who is Jesus Christ. Baptism erases original sin through the power of Christ’s saving death. Baptism turns us back to God but we are still inclined to sin and need the help of God’s grace’. (CCC 391-399, 405-410, 414-419, 1707, 1714)
Sacramental Principle. Sacramental Imagination. These definitions depart radically from a Catholic understanding of sacraments. The CCC emphasises the essential role of divine grace in the Sacraments, institution by Christ, and the seven Sacraments given by Christ to the Church. (CCC 1210-1666). These Curriculum definitions do not recognise divine grace as something spiritual and independent of the material, while any material thing or event that reminds one of God’s presence in creation is defined as a sacrament, to be perceived through a ‘sacramental imagination’.

Spirituality. There are probably many different understandings of ‘spirituality’. This definition is vague and broad – ‘the overall meaning and direction of a human life’. It is hard to see how this is helpful to a Catholic curriculum.

Theology. This is one particular and rather narrow definition of theology – ‘study of the experience of God from within a community of faith’. The definition might also suggest that God can only be known through human experience, which would not be satisfactory from a Catholic point of view. Other definitions tend to be broader (e.g. Oxford Dictionary – study of or system of religion; rational analysis of a religious faith). One simple and popular definition is ‘faith seeking understanding’.

Tradition. This definition departs radically from the Catholic understanding of Tradition (DV 7-10; CCC 75-85). As Tradition is an integral component of Divine Revelation, the foundation for Catholic religious education, it follows that this Curriculum cannot claim to be authentically Catholic.
**APPENDIX I:**

**Press Releases after Quarterly Meetings of the Irish Episcopal Conference**

References to the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, and to the new Syllabus or Curriculum for Primary School RE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 December 2012</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 September 2012</td>
<td>SGN to be key resource in Year of Faith</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 May 2012</td>
<td>Progress reported on implementation of Directory</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 March 2012</td>
<td>Directory praised; will be framework for response to Year of Faith</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Dec. 2011</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June 2011</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Dec. 2010</td>
<td>Publication announced, with great praise.</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Oct. 2010</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June 2010</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March 2010</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Jan. 2010</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Dec. 2009: Statement of commitment to 'charity, truthfulness, integrity &amp; transparency in all communications'</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Oct. 2009</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 June 2009 (Catholic schools)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 March 2009</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Nov. 2008</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Sept. 2008 (Youth Ministry doc. approved, but not mentioned in Press Release)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 June 2008 ('Vision '08' ref.)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March 2008</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Dec. 2007</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Oct. 2007</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 March 2007</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Dec. 2006</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Oct. '06 (ref to Education – but catechesis not mentioned)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 June 2006</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 March 2006</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Dec.'05 (Council for Pastoral Renewal &amp; Adult Faith Development launched, School catechesis endorsed)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Sept. 2005</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June 2005</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Media publicity given to launch of preparation of National Directory, May '05, but no ref. in press release)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 March 2005</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Dec. 2004</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Oct. 2004</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June 2004</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fidelity to the Catholic Church

The most important references for Catholic catechesis today are the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), and the *General Directory for Catechesis 1997* (GDC). A prerequisite for any Catholic RE syllabus is fidelity to the Church’s teaching, succinctly given in GDC 284 as: (a) ‘perfect conformance with the CCC’ and (b) ‘due consideration for the norms and criteria … contained in the GDC’ (emphasis added); GDC 10 explains that some of its provisions are mandatory, others are indications or guidelines.

The Draft Syllabus commendably contains references to both CCC and GDC, but does not contain any clear statement of faithfulness to Church teaching. The covering letter simply states that the Draft Syllabus ‘models the four parts of the CCC’ and ‘takes into account the insights of the GDC’, which falls short of a full commitment of fidelity in accordance with GDC284. It would be good to see the Syllabus start with, and follow through on, a clear statement of faithfulness to the Church. The Syllabus is actually found to follow Church teaching in many respects, but there are also unclarities, deviations and omissions.

Episcopal Oversight

A primary RE syllabus should state, clearly and concisely, the items to be covered in each of the eight years of the programme, with appropriate references for each item, most especially to the CCC and GDC, which are *standards of reference*. This kind of presentation would help our bishops exercise their essential oversight over the Syllabus and subsequent programme.

The Syllabus is voluminous (this Sect.2 probably c.115 pages when fully written – Section 1 yet to come) and could helpfully be made more concise (an excellent comparable syllabus has just 21 pages). It would be helpful to make the Syllabus structure more simple, logical and in harmony with the CCC (see details below), thereby eliminating much complexity, confusion and repetition. The general references to Church teaching for each ‘Strand Unit’ have merit, but references specific and directly relevant to each item would be more helpful.

Overall Structure of the Syllabus

It is good that the Syllabus’ four ‘Strands’ model the four-part structure of the CCC, but there are also deviations. The CCC’s four Parts are expressed in terms of Christianity; the Syllabus’ four Strands are titled as ‘Catholic’, which could imply something less than ‘Christian’. It is reasonable to have a sub-structure of ‘Strand Units’ within each Strand, but the Syllabus’ strand-units diverge unhelpfully from the equivalent sub-structure of the CCC.

The Syllabus has nine sub-headings under each Strand Unit, which adds unnecessary complexity and repetition. Some of the sub-headings also facilitate the Syllabus’ pedagogy of human experience and religious relativism (see further below). It would be more helpful to simply set out the items to be covered in the RE programme under each Strand Unit.

Syllabus Strand 1: What Catholics Believe

This Strand correlates with Part One of the CCC: *Profession of Christian Faith*, where the sub-structure focuses on Revelation and the Apostles’ Creed. This Strand unhelpfully departs radically from the CCC’s logical sub-structure. There is good material in this Strand, but much room for improvement. Treatment of Revelation is weak. Creation is material only, omitting God’s invisible spiritual creation – the immortal soul, angels, heaven. The Fall (angelic and human) and original sin are omitted, thereby undermining the mystery of Christ (CCC389). Commendable attention is given to the Trinity, but the Syllabus is unclear on the full divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Attention given to Jesus is also good, but Jesus’ mission is treated mainly as giving a good example, neglecting his mission as divine Saviour from sin. The Apostles’ Creed and salvation history are neglected.
Syllabus Strand 2: What Catholics Celebrate

This Strand correlates with Part Two of the CCC: *Celebration of the Christian Mystery*, and the sub-structure harmonises well with the CCC, except that the Church is unhelpfully re-located here from where it belongs as part of the Creed, the Profession of Faith. In other respects the Syllabus gives reasonable coverage of the Church, except that the ecumenical approach is more relativist than Catholic. There is much good coverage of the Sacraments, but also weaknesses, most notably on: the nature of sacrament, the graces particular to each sacrament & how they flow from the salvific grace of Jesus’ sacrifice, and Holy Orders. There is also much good material on the Liturgical Year, but the meaning needs to be fully drawn out in the context of salvation history.

Syllabus Strand 3: What Catholics Live

This Strand correlates with Part Three of the CCC: *Life in Christ*, but its sub-structure and content diverge from the CCC. The Syllabus focuses on ‘Love God and Others’, which is good in itself, but the approach concentrates on human nature as the foundation of the moral life. The Syllabus neglects much relevant Church teaching: the spiritual dimension, grace and justification, virtue and conscience, original sin and its effects, demons / temptation / spiritual battle, nature of sin, moral authority of the Church, the Decalogue.

Syllabus Strand 4: How Catholics Pray

This Strand correlates with Part Four of the CCC: *Christian Prayer*. The Syllabus’ sub-structure is unhelpfully complex, unlike the CCC. Nevertheless, the Syllabus contains much good material on Prayer in harmony with the CCC, but with some omissions. There is an excellent list of the formal prayers of the Church, but nothing on teaching pupils the meaning of these great prayers. The essential Trinitarian dimension of Christian prayer is neglected. The Syllabus mentions the Lord’s Prayer, but gives it no special attention, in marked contrast to the major focus of the CCC on the Lord’s Prayer, the model for all Christian prayer.

The Pedagogy of God

The GDC mandates the 'pedagogy of God' based on Divine Revelation as the fundamental teaching strategy for Catholic religious education. The draft Syllabus in contrast focuses throughout on human experience and the natural world as its principal foundations. Human experience has an important part in Catholic catechesis (see GDC), but not as principal RE source. The Syllabus needs to be comprehensively re-oriented to the pedagogy of God.

The Issue of Pluralism

It is appropriate for the Syllabus to address the issue of fellow Christians who are not Catholic, the Jewish people, those of other religions or none. However, the perspective should be authentically Catholic, avoiding relativism and syncretism, and only after pupils have received a thorough grounding in Catholic Faith. The draft Syllabus however, starting with 4/5-year-olds in Junior Infants, presents a confusing relativist perspective, implying equal validity of all religions and belief systems. Particularly worrying is the presence in every Stand Unit of the category 'Other Belief Systems', which is potentially a veritable Pandora's Box. The Syllabus needs revision to give an authentic Catholic perspective.

The Way Ahead

There is much good material in this Draft Syllabus, but significant further revision is needed to harmonise with the Church. Writing of Section 1 of the Syllabus should be completed as soon as possible. Religious Education in our Catholic primary schools is vitally important for all members of the Church, so the preparation process for the complete Syllabus (Sections 1 & 2) should be transparent and inclusive, informing & consulting as widely as possible among clergy, religious, parents, teachers and all the lay faithful, clearly under the responsibility and oversight of the Bishops. The precedent of making the Draft Youth Ministry document available to all on a website could well be followed.