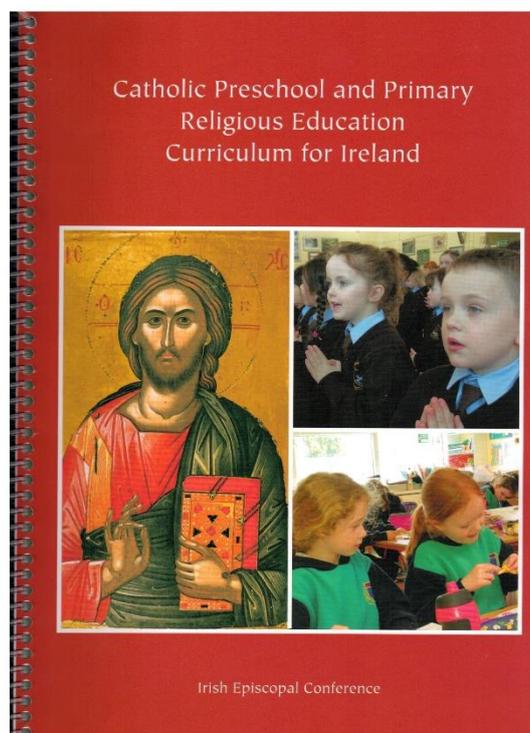


Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland, 2015.



Key Issues

Éanna Johnson PhD, 2017

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Key Issues

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Éanna Johnson PhD, 2017

INTRODUCTION

The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*¹ was commissioned by the Irish Episcopal Conference and published by Veritas Publications in 2015, after receiving the necessary approval of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation.² The principal author of the Curriculum was Dr Anne Hession. The Curriculum has been available to the writers of the new programme for Ireland's Catholic primary schools, *Grow in Love*³.

In 2002 Bishop Martin Drennan, Chairman of the Irish Episcopal Commission on Catechetics, announced preparation of a new Catholic primary school Religious Education Syllabus.⁴ 'It is timely to revisit and rewrite the original syllabus of the 1970s. When this new syllabus is written, it will be followed by another primary catechetical programme'.

In 2008 the draft of a new *Primary School Religious Education Syllabus for Ireland and Scotland* was prepared by the National Catechetics Office in Maynooth. Scotland was included because the *Alive-O Programme* was in use in Scotland's Catholic schools, but the Scottish Bishops phased out *Alive-O* and developed their own syllabus-cum-programme, '*This is Our Faith*', now used in their primary & secondary schools. The '*Catholic Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*' was subsequently prepared and issued in 2015.

The new Curriculum contains much good material, but also some key issues of concern on which Éanna Johnson PhD would like to offer comments:

There is an urgent need for Catechetical Reform and Renewal, because our young people are coming out of fourteen years of Catholic schooling as secularised as any in Europe, but the Curriculum's approach is inadequate, complacently assuming all is well.

It would be helpful to explicitly express and follow the Church's Criteria for Authentic Catholic Catechesis.

The Curriculum endorses a secularised type of "Religious Education" which is the enemy and destroyer of authentic Catholic Catechesis.

There is view that teaching Faith in School is distinct from Catechesis but is this really helpful in passing on the Faith to our young people in Ireland?

The Curriculum Structure partly follows the structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), which is good, but also departs significantly from the CCC structure in several ways, which is unhelpful.

The Pedagogical Aspects of the Curriculum rely too much on *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (SGN)⁵, which fails to adapt the *General Directory for Catechesis* to the Irish situation, but instead constitutes a blueprint to continue destroying the faith of the young people of Ireland. The Curriculum should set SGN aside and only follow the *General Directory for Catechesis* itself.

The Curriculum rightly stresses the importance of the Home, School, Parish Partnership, but fails to recognise the breakdown of this partnership since the mid-1970s, caused by the defective and deficient new religion programmes introduced into Catholic schools.

¹ Irish Episcopal Conference. *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2015.

² *Code of Canon Law 1983*. 775§2; *General Directory for Catechesis*. 285.

³ Irish Episcopal Conference. *Grow in Love*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2015, 2016.

⁴ Hermann Kelly, *Changes to RE on the way*, *The Irish Catholic*, Nov.28 2002, p.1.

⁵ Irish Episcopal Conference. *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2010.

KEY ISSUES

Need for Catechetical Reform & Renewal:

The Curriculum conveys an impression that all is well with Catholic Faith in Ireland, in particular in relation to the teaching of the Faith, of which 'we have evidence of many fine examples'. Nothing could be further from the truth. Teaching of the Faith in our Catholic schools used to be one of the great strengths of the Church in Ireland, a strength which Irish missionaries and emigrants brought with them all over the globe. Clearly that strength has now changed into a weakness, a liability instead of an asset – a tree is known by its fruit⁶. We are facing a crisis of Faith in Ireland and a failure in passing on the Faith to upcoming generations. Our churches typically show a preponderance of the older generation and scarcity of the two younger generations. First Communion is still celebrated with great enthusiasm, but most of the children don't show up again in the church until Confirmation, after which they reappear only for weddings and funerals. This is no time for the complacency evidenced in this Curriculum, it is a time for radical reform and renewal in teaching the Faith.

The Second Vatican Council was a major event in the Catholic Church worldwide, including Ireland. After Vatican II Irish Catholicism was brimming with optimism and enthusiasm for change. (Irish society in general was eager for change at that time and we can see how that was played out in the massive progress in the economic sphere right into the 21st Century). There certainly was spiritual renewal in the universal Catholic Church, but also spiritual turmoil with major dissent (heresy) and secularised thinking within the Church, which particularly affected the economically developed countries. Pope Paul VI said 'the smoke of Satan had entered the Church'. (There is a saying: 'If Satan can't stop a parade he'll try to lead it' – sadly, only too true).

The post-Vatican II theological dissent also negatively impacted on Catholic catechesis, starting with the '*Dutch Catechism*' of 1966⁷ (see Appendix A: Common Problems to be Avoided). Subsequently new catechetical thinking was spread through an important series of International Study Weeks, which started well with emphasis on '*kerymatic catechesis*' giving greater focus to salvation history. Regrettably later Study Weeks lost their way with a secularised anthropological-experiential approach out of tune with authentic Catholic faith, and it was this latter approach that influenced the introduction of new catechetical programmes in Ireland from the mid-1970s onwards⁸.

At primary school level the basic text had been the '*Penny Catechism*', which was a comprehensive summary of Catholic faith appropriate to the age level, in a question and answer format. Similar catechisms were in use in other countries, e.g. the *Baltimore Catechism* in the USA. There was a need for catechetical renewal in harmony with the teachings of Vatican II, but it did not happen. The '*Penny Catechism*' was replaced with the *Children of God* series, which proved defective and deficient, to be followed in 1996 by the even less satisfactory *Alive-O Programme*, now being replaced by the *Grow in Love* series, still falling short of acceptable.

⁶ Matthew 12:33

⁷ Higher Catechetical Institute of Nijmegen. *A New Catechism – Catholic Faith for Adults*. London: Burns & Oates Limited, 1967.

⁸ Anne Hession & Patricia Kieran, *Children, Catholicism & Religious Education*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2005. Page 103. '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'.

At secondary level a good catechetical programme was simply dropped in the mid-1970s and not replaced. What followed was a free-for-all, with encouragement of unstructured classroom discussions of topics of the day, some schools / teachers chose text-books, others didn't. The 'solution' to this chaos was "*Religious Education*", handing over leadership in teaching of the Faith to the secular State (Republic of Ireland) for Religion as a public examination subject at Junior and Leaving Certificates. The Syllabi for these public exams represent a secular perspective in which all religions and non-religious options are equally valid or invalid. An unsatisfactory generic Christianity receives greatest attention, not because it is considered to be true or of any greater value than any other religion, but simply because of its greater influence in Irish society. Moreover, the Syllabi are *constructively anti-Catholic*, because the Catholic faith, which is now and has been for 1500 years the major faith of the people of Ireland, does not get a mention, not even in the Section – 'Religion, the Irish Experience'. Religion as an exam subject is not even successful in terms of uptake – less than half of pupils take Religion in the Junior Cert, which drops to only 2% in the Leaving Cert.

The Church encourages the preparation of National Catechetical Directories to adapt to the local situation the *General Directory for Catechesis*⁹, which is the standard of reference for catechetical pedagogy in the Universal Church. The preparation of such a National Directory for Ireland was a great opportunity for catechetical renewal, but the opportunity was not merely missed but *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, 2010* (SGN)¹⁰ has proved to be a further set-back for Catholic catechesis in Ireland. SGN supplants Catholic catechesis with a secularised type of "*Religious Education*". Evangelisation, the Church's principal mission of which catechesis is an integral element, is supplanted by 'Faith Development', a term which does not have any generally accepted meaning but which SGN expands to mean nearly all of Church life. In a brazen move SGN proposes an elite middle-management group, a National Faith Development Team, will coordinate Church life through new full-time 'Faith Development' staff in every parish and diocese, an effective take-over of control from the Bishops. Seven years into its planned ten-year programme SGN has achieved nothing of positive significance for Catholic catechesis in Ireland, while, thankfully, its plan for take-over of control from the Bishops is unimplementable because it is too ambitious and therefore unrealistically costly.

Young Irish people overwhelmingly supported same-sex 'marriage' in the 2015 Referendum, even coming home to vote in their thousands from all over the world. In a recent talk¹¹ Archbishop Diarmuid Martin noted that religious practice has dramatically decreased in Ireland, and that our young people are as secularised as those of any European nation, despite 12-14 years of Catholic schooling. True indeed, tragically. But what else could be expected after our young Irish Catholics have been given 14 years of heresy instead of authentic Catholic teaching – if you sow the wind you will reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). A new Curriculum should not approach its task with a 'business as usual' attitude, but rather do a 'reality-check' and be part of the desperately needed reform and renewal of Catholic catechesis in Ireland.

⁹ Congregation for the Clergy. *General Directory for Catechesis*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1997. 282.

¹⁰ Irish Episcopal Conference. *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2010.

¹¹ Archbishop Diarmuid Martin. *The Challenge for the Church in the 21st Century*. St Killian's Lecture, Diocese of Wurzburg, Germany, 8th July 2017.

Criteria for Authentic Catholic Catechesis:

It would be helpful for a Curriculum to explicitly set out and follow Criteria for authentic Catholic catechesis. The *General Directory for Catechesis* states¹², 'In drawing up catechisms, the following two criteria must be carefully adhered to.

- a) perfect harmony with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 'a sure and authentic reference... particularly for preparing local catechisms';
- b) due consideration¹³ for the norms and criteria for the presentation of the Gospel message contained in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, which is also a 'standard of reference' for catechesis".

In relation to criterion a) above the Curriculum's Foreword (p.9) states that 'The curriculum has been written in conformance with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*', but the Curriculum itself (p.18) states only that it is 'based on the CCC' – this falls short of a commitment to 'perfect harmony'. In practice the Curriculum is not always in 'perfect harmony' with the CCC.

Two key principles to ensure that content is in perfect harmony with the CCC are:¹⁴

- ✓ Authenticity
- ✓ Completeness

Authenticity

"The person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive 'the word of faith' not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form, but whole and entire, in all its rigour and vigour. Unfaithfulness on some point to the integrity of the message means a dangerous weakening of catechesis and putting at risk results that Christ and the ecclesial community have a right to expect from it."¹⁵

Completeness

Saint John Paul II identified lack of completeness as a particular source of problems in Catholic catechesis in 1979, (still a problem in 1997 – GDC 30).

"This rich flowering (renewal of catechesis) has brought with it articles and publications that are ambiguous and harmful to young people and 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."¹⁶

In relation to criterion b) above, the Curriculum does have many references to the GDC, which is good. However, it is highly unacceptable that the Curriculum gives principal allegiance to the deeply-flawed *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (see above), rather than the GDC.

¹² *General Directory for Catechesis*, 284.

¹³ GDC 10 explains how all parts of the Directory do not have the same importance.

¹⁴ Office for the Catechism, *The Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, US Conference of Catholic Bishops

¹⁵ *Catechesi Tradendae – On Catechesis in our Time*, 30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 49

“Religious Education” vs Catholic Catechesis

A central issue in this Curriculum is the conflict between Religious Education, as expressed in the Curriculum (hereinafter distinguished as “*Religious Education*”), and Catechesis, as understood by the Catholic Church. “*Religious Education*” is neither Catholic nor Christian, but represents a secular perspective, putting all religions and non-religious options on a par. The Curriculum regularly refers to ‘Catholic “*Religious Education*”’, but this is a contradiction in terms, amounting to *syncretism* – an attempt to combine two incompatible concepts. This leads to confusion and misrepresentation, which has no place in a Catholic curriculum¹⁷.

‘*Catechesis*’ has been frequently referenced in many Church documents, so the Church has definite teaching and understanding of what she means by ‘Catechesis’. The *General Catechetical Directory 1971*¹⁸, *Evangelii Nuntiandi 1975*¹⁹, *Catechesi Tradendae 1979*²⁰, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994*²¹, and the *General Directory for Catechesis 1997*, give a comprehensive, thorough and clear presentation of the Catholic Church’s understanding of catechesis, as an integral element of evangelisation.

The term ‘*religious education*’ has been widely used in many contexts, but without any consistent or universally accepted meaning, which provides opportunities for confusion and misunderstanding. A number of terms, including ‘religious education’, have been used in Church documents in relation to teaching Catholic faith in schools (see Appendix B: Terminology in Church documents). However, the Church has never endorsed, and indeed explicitly rejects, the type of secularised relativist “*Religious Education*” embraced by *Share the Good News* and this Curriculum. “*Religious Education*” is the enemy, the destroyer of authentic Catholic catechesis.

The title of the Curriculum proclaims that it is “*Religious Education*”, not catechesis. The Curriculum offers a definition of ‘religious education’ in its Glossary p.190, which is that given in *Share the Good News* (SGN)²². This definition is generalised and religiously relativist, containing nothing Catholic or Christian; it is not even a genuine definition, but rather a wish-list of outcomes of “*Religious Education*”.²³

SGN gives unqualified approval for the type of ‘*Religious Education*’ in the State (Republic of Ireland) Syllabi for the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations²⁴. The Syllabi offer a secular and relativist perspective on religion, as outlined in their 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 disconnect morality from religious faith, encouraging an individualistic and subjective moral approach by exposing students to a variety of ethical codes and norms for behaviour, to help them develop for their own moral stance and decisions.

¹⁷ Like building a house on sand, instead of on rock. Mt.7:24-27.

¹⁸ Congregation for the Clergy. *General Catechetical Directory*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1971.

¹⁹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi – On Evangelisation in the Modern World*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae – On Catechesis in Our Time*. Apostolic Exhortation. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979.

²¹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, 1999.

²² Irish Episcopal Conference. *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2010. 38

²³ This embracing of secularised ‘religious education’ is also expressed by the lead author of SGN in, Gareth Byrne, *Religious Education Renewed*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2005, 5-7.

²⁴ National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, *Religious Education Syllabus for Junior Certificate & Leaving Certificate*. Dublin: The Stationery Office, 2000, 2003.

Is Teaching Faith in School distinct from Catechesis?

It has been noted above that many different terms have been used in Church documents to describe teaching of the Catholic Faith in schools, including 'religious instruction' and 'religious education'. For simplicity and to avoid possible misunderstanding, we will here refer to 'teaching Faith in school'.

The GDC makes a distinction between 'teaching Faith in school' and catechesis, on the basis that teaching Faith in school does not require the assent of faith²⁵. However, it may not always be relevant, or indeed helpful, to consider 'teaching Faith in school' as distinct from 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. Catholic schools were extensively and fruitfully established by Irish missionaries in the 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.²⁶

Leonardo Franchi, of the Department of Religious Education at the University of Glasgow, has done an in-depth study of the relationship between catechesis and teaching of Faith in school, finding that an excessive compartmentalisation between catechesis and teaching of Faith in school is less than helpful.²⁷

The Curriculum is somewhat ambivalent on this issue. It states that it addresses "*Religious Education*" as an academic discipline in Catholic schools (p.9), alongside parish-based and family catechesis, and includes a reference²⁸ to Church documents which note a distinction between teaching Faith in schools and catechesis (p.13/14). However, the Curriculum also says the school has a 'faith formation' dimension (p.13/14), and has a section devoted to 'Faith Formation Goals' (p.132-143).

The Faith Formation Goals that are expressed indicate a clear catechetical dimension, with an 'assent of faith' including putting that faith into practice. This is a good and commendable aspect of the Curriculum and the Goals are largely well expressed.

There are however some aspects that could have helpfully been included in the Faith Formation Goals. Evangelisation, the mission for which the Church exists²⁹, does not feature – no desire or attempt to share or defend the faith, to spread the Gospel. The Catholic Church does not feature – no goal for a strong, joy-filled and confident Catholic identity, no conviction of the Catholic Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, no embracing of the truth of Catholic Church's teachings, including her moral teachings. There is no eternal perspective, no desire for heaven or revulsion for hell.

²⁵ *General Directory for Catechesis*. 73-75.

²⁶ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School 41*, quoting 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 in 1962) 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 fruitful.

²⁷ Franchi, L. (2011). *Healing the Wounds: St Augustine, catechesis and religious education today*. Religious Education, 106(3). pp 299-311.

²⁸ Letter on Religious Education in schools from the Congregation for Catholic Education (2009) .

²⁹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

Curriculum Structure:

The structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), has four Parts: 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 of the *Catechism's* excellent summary, the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*³⁰, and the *Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church (Youcat)*³¹. The structure of the CCC also coincides with the four marks of the first Christian community that formed in Jerusalem after Pentecost: 'These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers' (Acts2:42).

The CCC's Part 1 on Profession of Faith is structured around the Apostles Creed, Part 2 on Celebration of the Christian Mystery is structured principally on the Sacraments, Part 3 on Life in Christ is structured principally on the Ten Commandments, while Part 4 on Prayer is structured on the Lord's Prayer (the Our Father).

It would have been wise for the Curriculum to follow the structure of the CCC, but it unhelpfully diverges in a number of ways.

The Curriculum chooses a different overall structure with four 'Strands': Christian Faith, the Word of God, Liturgy/Prayer, Christian Morality.

The CCC places Revelation in the introductory section of the pillar 'Profession of Faith', indicating clearly that Christian Faith is founded on Revelation, which includes 'natural revelation', Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture³². The Curriculum breaks from this Catholic approach, by omitting Revelation in general, while placing the 'Word of God' as a separate strand after 'Christian Faith'. The weakness in this approach is compounded by the fact that the great majority of the content of the 'Word of God' Strand is material that belongs under the Strand 'Christian Faith' – this invites confusion.

The Curriculum has a single Strand 'Liturgy/Prayer', conflating Parts 2 and 4 in the CCC. This is unhelpful and mitigates against giving a proper Catholic understanding of Liturgy and Sacrament.

The Curriculum's internal structuring of Strands departs more significantly from the Catholic approach. The internal structure of the CCC's Part 1 on 'Profession of Faith' is the Creed. This is appropriate because the Creeds have played a vital role since the early centuries of the Church in defining, expressing and transmitting Christian Faith. The Curriculum instead presents a diffuse structure, while relegating the Creed to a bare mention as one of many prayers, giving the Creed no special importance.

The internal structure of the CCC's Part 3 on 'Life in Christ' (Christian Morality) is the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue). The Curriculum's Strand 'Christian Morality' gives scant attention to the Ten Commandments and does not use them as the structure for the Strand.

The CCC's Part 4 on 'Christian Prayer' gives special attention to the Lord's Prayer (the Our Father) describing it as 'the fundamental Christian prayer' and 'the summary of the whole gospel'³³. In contrast the Curriculum gives the Lord's Prayer only a bare mention, minimal attention and does not use it as the structure and model for Christian prayer.

³⁰ *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. London: Catholic Truth Society, 2005.

³¹ *YOUCAT – Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Catholic Truth Society, 2011.

³² Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 1965. Flannery, Austin, Ed. *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975. 10; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 81, 85.

³³ CCC 2759, 2761.fr

Pedagogical Aspects of the Curriculum:

Pedagogical aspects deal with the 'how' of teaching, rather than the 'what', the content. The Church's principal document for the pedagogical aspects of teaching the Catholic faith is the *General Catechetical Directory (GDC)*³⁴. *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland (SGN)* is supposed to adapt the GDC to Irish conditions, but fails in this task and is a deeply flawed document. This Curriculum has many references to the GDC, which is good, but refers principally for pedagogical aspects to SGN, which is not good. SGN should be set aside, and the Curriculum should refer only to the GDC for pedagogical aspects.

Some pedagogical aspects are adequately addressed in this Curriculum: music and song (p.27); use of information technology (p.24). Some other aspects require further comment below.

Catholic Religious Education as a divine pedagogy. (Curriculum p.25). Various points listed under this heading are all good and relevant. However, it is unacceptable to omit reference to the 'Pedagogy of God', which is the fundamental pedagogy of the GDC. Indeed the entire GDC is oriented around the 'Pedagogy of God', so its omission from the Curriculum is unacceptable.

Evangelisation, Mission and Justice Perspective. (Curriculum p.20). It is good to include this aspect because a central principle of the Church, as emphasised in the GDC, is that catechesis is an integral element of evangelisation. However, the content under this heading gives scant attention to evangelisation and focuses on mission and justice from a secular humanitarian perspective, rather than a Christian perspective. The reference to Trocaire as model is unhelpful; Trocaire uses the network of Catholic parishes and schools to raise money, but in disbursing funds and doing development education in schools Trocaire's approach is like a secular humanitarian agency, not like a Christian agency e.g. Aid to the Church in Need – Catholic, and Tearfund – evangelical.

Memorisation and Learning Assessment. (Curriculum p.28, 29). It is good to include memorisation and learning assessment, because both are vitally important and have been so neglected for decades past. No learning assessment of religious knowledge has been carried out by our catechetical establishment in the past forty years. The Curriculum could helpfully have given greater attention and guidance to these aspects, in particular emphasising the truths of Catholic faith.

Home, school, parish partnership:

The Curriculum's Foreword (p.9) states that 'it has been devised on the basis of the partnership between home, school and parish'. This is not so, because the Curriculum was written by an elite group within the catechetical establishment, while parents and parish clergy in general were excluded from any involvement in the preparation process; they were neither consulted nor informed of progress. This follows the same non-transparent preparation process for other Irish catechetical documents, e.g. *Share the Good News*, *Alive-O Programme*, *Grow in Love*.

The Curriculum further refers to the importance of the home, school, parish partnership (p.13-14), which is satisfactory in principle and theory. The Church has a God-given role and responsibility to teach authentic Catholic faith to her members, and all people. Parents have a God-given role and responsibility to teach their own children. The Catholic school exists as a partnership between Church and parents, and should be a vital resource helping them to exercise their roles and fulfil their responsibilities.

³⁴ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1997.

The Curriculum's reference to the desirability of the home, school, parish partnership conveys an assumption that this is actually happening. Sadly, the reality for the past forty years in Ireland's Catholic catechesis has been the direct opposite.

There used to be a working partnership between home, school and parish, by no means perfect, but it was good and effective. The Catholic schools, both primary and secondary, gave authentic catechesis, teaching the Catholic faith. Homes focussed on living the Faith, ensuring family members attended Mass and sacraments, with personal and family prayer. The parish provided Mass and sacraments, and also other supports such as parish missions sodalities; Sunday sermons usually had a strong catechetical content, while Church authorities ensured that the Catholic school 'religious knowledge' programmes were authentic Catholic faith. Each of the three partners knew what the others were doing and were supportive. It is probable that parents were not adequately exercising their role as primary educators of their children, leaving too much of the actual teaching of the faith to the school, but this is understandable because parents were rightly confident that the schools were doing a good job in teaching authentic Catholic faith.

The Curriculum gives no recognition that the home-school-parish partnership has seriously broken down since the mid-1970s when deficient and defective religious education programmes were introduced into the schools, which have largely failed in handing on authentic Catholic faith to two generations of pupils in Irish Catholic schools.

The new programmes effectively marginalised parents and parish, while empowering the school, actually empowering the elite in control of designing and writing the new programmes and providing teacher training. The new defective programmes were strange and difficult to understand, with most problems arising from omissions, which of their nature are difficult to spot and identify. In any case, few parents actually studied the new programmes, because most still trusted the Church to provide authentic Catholic teaching. The situation has got progressively worse. We now have a generation of parents who did not get real Catholic catechesis and so lack interest and ability to teach or support their children in the Faith. Vocations to the priesthood have collapsed and parish clergy do not have time to be involved in teaching Faith to children and youth.

The structure of the new primary school programmes are designed to exclude home and parish, with skimpy pupils' books with minimal content, which are all that parents and parish-clergy are likely to see. The programmes are essentially contained in the teachers' manuals, which parents and parish-clergy are unlikely to see, and even if they did make the effort to really understand the programmes they would find it a daunting task because the teachers' manuals are expensive, very large and complicated.

A study carried out on the *Children of God* primary school series in 1999 found home and parish so separated from the school that the Report was titled, '*Islands Apart*'³⁵. The situation did not improve when the *Children of God* series was succeeded by the *Alive-O Programme* with even skimpier pupils' books and larger teachers' manuals. The same unsatisfactory pattern is being followed with the current *Grow in Love* series.

A curriculum for Catholic primary school education in Faith should recognise the breakdown that has occurred in the home-school-parish partnership, and the causes of that breakdown. A curriculum should then include steps and guidance to restore that vital partnership. This Curriculum neither recognises the problem nor addresses the need for a remedy.

³⁵ Martin Kennedy. *Islands Apart – Consultation Report regarding the Children of God series*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2000.

APPENDIX A – Common Problems to be Avoided.

In the years since the Second Vatican Council the Church has provided many reference documents for Catholic catechesis and there are examples of excellent developments in Catholic catechesis in the Universal Church. However, there have also been serious problems and failures, to which attention has been drawn in documents coming from the Church's Magisterium and from some Episcopal Conferences. Ireland has not escaped the influence of these international problems in Catholic catechesis.

Some Catholic catechesis can contain much good material and appear at first sight to be faithful to Church teaching, but deeper analysis can reveal problems, which undermine and counteract the good material. Sometimes problems appear as incorrect statements, but most often the problems arise through omissions, imbalances, and inadequate or incomplete treatments, with undue emphasis on some aspects to the neglect of others; this results in confusion and obfuscation, rather than direct denial, of truths of the Faith. Omissions and imbalances are much more difficult to identify than incorrect statements.

In preparing a catechetical programme it should be helpful to be aware of common problematic positions -- *forewarned is forearmed* -- so that one can take especial care to avoid them, and, as opportunity affords, to counteract them. While the *General Directory for Catechesis, 64*, stresses the benefits to the Church of good initiatory catechesis (which is particularly relevant to primary school level), it also warns of the dangers that can be expected from the absence of such catechesis: "Without it (initiatory catechesis), missionary activity lacks continuity and is sterile, while pastoral activity lacks roots and becomes superficial and confused: any misfortune could cause the collapse of the entire building".

Listed below are important sources of information on common problematic positions, many of which have been repeated over the years in different publications.

A New Catechism; Catholic Faith for Adults (generally known as the 'Dutch Catechism'), was published in 1966, with approval of the Bishops of the Netherlands, and had a significant international influence on Catholic catechesis. In response to disquiet expressed by the faithful, Pope Paul VI set up a Commission of Cardinals to examine and report on the Dutch Catechism. The Commission's Report noted positive elements, but also called for correction of serious doctrinal deficiencies in these areas:

- ✓ God's creation of human soul, and angels.
- ✓ The Fall and Original Sin.
- ✓ Perpetual virginity of Mary, Mother of God.
- ✓ Redemption from sin through Christ's death.
- ✓ Mass as both sacrifice and banquet.
- ✓ Real Eucharistic Presence via transubstantiation.
- ✓ Truth of Church's teaching of doctrines of faith.
- ✓ Special character of the ministerial priesthood; authority of pope and bishops to teach and rule.
- ✓ Moral teachings of Church are binding on the faithful in all circumstances.
- ✓ Blessed Trinity; sacraments; souls in Purgatory, Second Coming & resurrection.

Pope Paul VI's *Credo of the People of God, 1968*, dealt indirectly with doctrinally problematic positions that had arisen in the Church. Paul VI expanded on the Nicene Creed to give clear guidance on those aspects of the faith which were being denied, omitted or obfuscated.

The General Catechetical Directory, 1971 (GCD), made some references to problems relevant to Catholic catechesis (GCD 7, 9, 36, 39, 69), including the following:

- ✓ Need for renewed catechesis to counteract religious syncretism.
- ✓ Reduction of Gospel message to temporal existence only.
- ✓ Truths of faith being sharply denied or neglected.
- ✓ Catechesis is useless if it neglects interrelation of God in his own mystery and in his saving intervention in history.
- ✓ Neglect of full catechesis on the Last Things.

Catechesi Tradendae, On Catechesis in Our Time, Pope John Paul II, 1979 (CT), was more explicit than the GCD on the nature of problems which by then had appeared in Catholic catechesis (CT 17, 30, 49, 61):

- ✓ Deficiencies in renewal of catechesis, which can endanger integrity of content. Two tendencies are equally dangerous for catechesis. (i) 'Routine' which refuses change and leads to stagnation, lethargy and eventual paralysis; (ii) 'Improvisation' which begets confusion, deviations, fracturing and eventual destruction of unity.
- ✓ Integrity of content is vital for catechesis. The person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive "the word of faith" not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigour. Unfaithfulness on some point to the integrity of the message means a dangerous weakening of catechesis and putting at risk the results that Christ and the ecclesial community have a right to expect from it. No true catechist can lawfully, on his own initiative, make a selection of what he considers important in the deposit of faith as opposed to what he considers unimportant, so as to teach the one and reject the other.
- ✓ Along with a rich flowering of genuine renewal of catechesis, there have been 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.
- ✓ The danger of an "unstable balance" passing to catechesis. Theologians and exegetes must take great care that people do not take for a certainty what on the contrary belongs to the area of questions of opinion or of discussion among experts. Catechists must refuse to trouble the minds of the children and young people, at this stage of their catechesis, with outlandish theories, useless questions and unproductive discussions.

In spite of these magisterial warnings, problems still persisted, so that the General Directory for Catechesis, issued by the Congregation for the Clergy in 1997, while acknowledging much good progress in Catholic catechesis, also found it necessary to draw attention to many defects and deficiencies (GDC 2, 9, 28, 30, 64, 113, 202, 205, 113), including:

- ✓ doctrinal inadequacies, defects & errors;
- ✓ unbalanced treatment of revelation with insufficient attention to Sacred Tradition and the Church's Magisterium;
- ✓ excess emphasis on Jesus' humanity at the expense of his divinity;
- ✓ doctrinal lacunae (about God & man, sin & grace, eschatology – the Last Things, morality, Church history & social teaching);

- ✓ weak links with liturgy;
- ✓ departure from the pedagogy that is proper to the Faith;
- ✓ marginal attention to the missions;
- ✓ Church deprived of her mystery;
- ✓ incorrect inculturation resulting in syncretism which enfeebles the Gospel and secularises the Church, leaving her open to collapse.

In 1995 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops set up a special Committee to examine catechetical texts to assess their conformance with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In its 1997 Progress Report the Committee identified ten *doctrinal deficiencies* common to many of the catechisms studied (mostly primary school), in following areas:

- ✓ Insufficient attention to the Trinity and the Trinitarian structure of Catholic beliefs and teachings.
- ✓ Obscured presentation of the centrality of Christ in salvation history and insufficient emphasis on the divinity of Christ.
- ✓ Indistinct treatment of the ecclesial context of Catholic beliefs and magisterial teachings.
- ✓ Inadequate sense of a distinctively Christian anthropology.
- ✓ Insufficient emphasis on God's initiative in the world with a corresponding overemphasis on human action.
- ✓ Insufficient recognition of the transforming effects of grace.
- ✓ Inadequate presentation of the sacraments.
- ✓ Deficient teaching on original sin and sin in general.
- ✓ Meagre exposition of Christian moral life.
- ✓ Inadequate presentation of eschatology (the Last Things).

In its 2003 Progress report the US Bishops' Committee noted that in relation to High (Secondary) School catechisms,

- It had been unable to grant a declaration of conformity to the CCC to any one complete catechetical series which were in most frequent use in US high schools,
- Two-thirds of reviews judged the materials not only inadequate for conformity, but also could not be amended and therefore needed to be rewritten.
- The Committee expressed grave concerns about doctrinally deficient texts being widely used supposedly to educate and form young people in the faith.

The 2003 Report gave examples of deficiencies commonly found in high school RE texts, which included the following:

- ✓ Relativistic re Church and faith - one religion or church as good as another.
- ✓ Truths of Faith not based on objective truth revealed by God.
- ✓ Sacramental theology seriously flawed – priesthood, Eucharist, Confession, Marriage, Last Rites.
- ✓ Distinctive role of priest sidelined or ignored, with absence of clear teaching on priest's sacramental power in Eucharist, Confession and Anointing of the Sick.
- ✓ Morality is a matter of opinion and personal choice.

- ✓ Relationship between moral life and life to come not often treated.
- ✓ Inaccurate understanding of divine nature of the Persons of the Trinity, treating the Father only as God, with implication that Jesus is different from or less than God.
- ✓ Overemphasis on humanity of Jesus at expense of His divinity.
- ✓ Treatment of Holy Spirit either missing or flawed, describing the Holy Spirit only as 'Spirit of God' or 'God's Spirit', suggesting that the Holy Spirit is somehow less than God.
- ✓ Implication that Scriptures are to large degree merely human texts.
- ✓ Approach to Church overemphasizes role of the community.
- ✓ Social teaching not grounded in divine initiative of Holy Spirit, or related to personal moral teaching or to eschatological realities.

In March 2006 the Spanish Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a document which was prepared in collaboration with the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, entitled *Theology and secularisation in Spain: Forty years after the end of Vatican Council II.* This document identified the main problem of the Catholic Church in Spain as being internal secularisation due to the widespread promotion of errors in theology and interpretation of Scripture. The faith convictions of parents, educators, and catechists have been shaken by misleading, ambiguous and harmful theological propositions that have weakened faith and undermined the joyful transmission of the Gospel through catechesis in homes and schools.

Problematic positions identified by the Spanish Bishops (paras 5, 9, 10, 13, 17, 19, 25, 27, 28, 31, 34, 35, 41, 42, 44, 47, 53, 59, 68) included:

- ✓ Denial of certain aspects of faith or placing the authority of certain writers before that of the Church's magisterium, which leads on to compromising the entire Christian life and total loss of faith.
- ✓ Excessive reliance on historical-critical methods of biblical exegesis, which leads to excluding the possibility of revelation, miracles, and the intervention of God.
- ✓ Considering Revelation as a subjective perception by which one becomes aware of the God that dwells within us and tries to manifest himself to us.
- ✓ Treating the New Testament as primarily a testimony of faith in Jesus, but which says very little about Jesus himself; a rupture between the "historical Jesus" and the "Jesus of faith".
- ✓ Seeing the mission of Christ as a merely human event, and his passion and death as a failure, rather than a voluntary redemptive sacrifice for mankind. Jesus is primarily an ethical leader and teacher who champions the oppressed and marginalized.
- ✓ Obscuring key elements of the mystery of Christ, including: his pre-existence, his divine filiation, his knowledge of his identity, of his death, redemptive mission, resurrection, ascension, and glorification.
- ✓ Jesus Christ is not the fullness of the revelation of God, which places him on a similar level as other great religious leaders, and leaves other world religions as pathways to salvation complementary to Christianity.
- ✓ Doubts and errors concerning the 'last things': the coming of the Lord in glory at the end of time (the parousia); the resurrection of the body; the particular and final judgments; purgatory; the real possibility of eternal damnation (hell) or eternal beatitude (paradise).

- ✓ Proposing that it was not the intention of Jesus to found a Church, thereby breaking the bond between the will of Christ and the Church, which leaves the hierarchal constitution of the Church and the ordained ministry as the human fruit of historical forces.
- ✓ Denial of the distinction between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood.
- ✓ Attitudes of dissent from and antagonism to the Church passed off as “prophetic denunciations”.
- ✓ Promotion of moral relativism, according to which any opinion on moral issues is seen as equally valid.
- ✓ Church’s teaching on original sin presented in ambiguous way and gravity of sin passed over or denied.

APPENDIX B: Terminology in Church Documents

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’.³⁶

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.³⁷

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. The term ‘education in the faith’ is used as synonymous with ‘catechesis’.³⁸

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, while ‘catechetical instruction’ and ‘religious instruction’ refer specifically to the teaching of religion in the school.³⁹

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.⁴⁰

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

³⁶ Declaration on Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965. Flannery, Austin. Ed. *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975. 7-8.

³⁷ *General Catechetical Directory 1971*, 19.

³⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 47.

³⁹ Congregation for Catholic Education. *The Catholic School*. Document, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1977. 19, 51, 73, 84.

⁴⁰ *Catechesi Tradendae*, 33, 38, 62, 65, 69, 70.

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.⁴¹

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.⁴²

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. In non-confessional or state schools the 'religious instruction' may include other religions, but the aspects dealing with the Catholic faith will be authentically Catholic.⁴³

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.⁴⁴

*Congregation for Catholic Education – Letter on Religious Education in Schools, 2009.*⁴⁵ When The Letter uses the term 'religious education' it means 'confessional religious education', which is the teaching of religion in accordance with the wishes of parents, whatever the nature of the school (State-run or non-State-run, Catholic or non-Catholic). 'Religious education' for Catholic pupils means 'teaching the Catholic religion'. 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'.

*Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools, Living in Harmony for a Civilisation of Love.*2013⁴⁶ This document strongly encourages intercultural dialogue, with clear guidance on why and how this should be carried out, and cautions against relativism and syncretism. The document eschews the term 'religious education' and avoids confusion by referring only to 'teaching the Catholic religion'.

⁴¹ Congregation for Catholic Education. *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*. Document, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982. 38, 43, 56-58, 60-66.

⁴² Congregation for Catholic Education. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School - Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal*. Vatican City : Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988. 19, 44, 66-70, 73, 98-99, 107.

⁴³ *General Directory for Catechesis*, 73-76, 259-260.

⁴⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education. *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*. Document, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. 11, 12, 21.

⁴⁵ Congregation for Catholic Education. *Letter to the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences on Religious Education in Schools*. 2009. 0, 4-7, 11-14, 19.

⁴⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education. *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools, Living in Harmony for a Civilisation of Love*. Vatican City, 2013. 1-12, 15, 70-75.