



**ALIVE-O LEGACY**  
**Let the Children come to Me?**

*Éanna Johnson PhD*

2019

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## **Let the Children come to Me?**

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Éanna Johnson carried out in-depth research of the *Alive-O Programme*, for which he was awarded a PhD in Theology by the Pontifical University, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland. His thesis titled, 'A Theological and Pedagogical Analysis of the Catechetics Programme for Irish Catholic Primary Schools, 1996-2004' is available in the John Paul II Library in Maynooth, or online at <http://eprints.nuim.ie/3076/>

In parallel with his PhD research, Dr Johnson carried out a nationwide Learning Assessment Survey of religious knowledge of almost 900 pupils after they had completed the *Alive-O Programme*. The results of this Survey are included in this Review.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2015 Ireland approved same-sex 'marriage' in a Referendum by a 62% majority, with young people prominent in campaigning, voting and celebrating the result. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin wisely called for a "reality check" on how the Church gets across the message of Christ, considering most of the young people who voted YES were products of the Catholic school system for 14 years. Even greater heart-break was caused by the 2018 Referendum when 67% voted for Abortion, with the younger the age group the higher the YES vote, peaking at 88% for 18-24 year-olds.

This Review of *Alive-O's* legacy is part of that called-for "reality check" because the youngest age-groups voting in the 2015 and 2018 Referenda were pupils of the *Alive-O Programme* for 8 years in Catholic primary school. This Review tries to answer the question: if *Alive-O* had succeeded in its task of bringing children to Jesus (*Mk. 10:14*), how could these same children, when reaching 18-24 after a further 6 years of Catholic schooling, vote so enthusiastically for killing babies in the womb?

This Review delves into that big question by seeking answers to other questions: what is *Alive-O* and who were its pupils? where did *Alive-O* come from? did *Alive-O* teach true Catholic Faith? what did pupils learn from *Alive-O*? and what is *Alive-O's* ongoing Legacy?

This begs another question: what prompted Éanna Johnson to prepare this Review of *Alive-O* and its Legacy? the answer lies in the love that my wife and I have for our grandchildren.

Born in India of Irish parents, I attended a superb school run by Irish Presentation Sisters, getting a great start in a Montessori kindergarten set up by Maria Montessori herself who lived near us and the school at that time. Schooling continued with the Marist Brothers when we moved to Australia, and secondary schooling was completed with the Marist Fathers in Ireland. Education in Faith was seamless on all three continents, following the '*doctrinal/devotional*' model – thorough grounding in Catholic doctrine complemented by a rich devotional life. My Faith was further strengthened by two years volunteer service after university with the Catholic Mission in Nigeria, managing 'The Leader' weekly Catholic newspaper with nationwide circulation, and teaching in secondary school.

When our own children started primary school in the 1970s I remembered that the weakest part of my school education in Faith had been Scripture, and so I started a weekly Bible Study class for our own and the children of friends. It was serious Scripture study, but using creative and age-appropriate methods, with voluntary participation and parental support. I enjoyed teaching as much as the children enjoyed learning.

Over the years these classes have matured into a youth programme for 7-17 year-olds, with a weekly meeting focussing on the Word of God, with prayer, songs, games, and other enjoyable ways of learning, plus putting Christian love into practice, reinforced by an annual week's residential summer camp. The majority of young people who have come through this youth programme have continued strong in their Faith – today's leaders experienced the programme themselves.

When the new *Children of God series* was introduced to Ireland's Catholic primary schools in the 70s my wife and I assumed it was good because it was coming from the Church – our trust in our Bishops was total. I repent of my negligence in failing to check out the *Children of God* materials for myself, naively presuming that our own Bible Study programme was simply supplementing the children's school catechesis, whereas in fact, (thanks to the grace of God) our programme was compensating for the problems and deficiencies in *Children of God*.

Introduction of the *Alive-O Programme* in 1996 coincided with our grandchildren starting primary school, prompting me to research *Alive-O* in detail. I was profoundly shocked, stunned by what I found, I could not believe that this Programme, coming as it did from the Church, could be so bad. I am most grateful to St Patrick's College, Pontifical University, in Maynooth for accepting me to continue my research of the *Alive-O Programme* for a PhD in Theology. I greatly enjoyed the nature of this work – studying, analysing, identifying strengths and weaknesses, comparing with best standards and practice – which for me had been normal and essential for success achieved in my profession as a management consultant. However, I did not enjoy what I was finding – a programme deficient & defective in both theology and pedagogy (teaching approach & method), with capacity to confuse and damage the faith and morals of the Catholic children of Ireland, at the crucial stage of their lives when they are so open, receptive and impressionable.

## 1. ALIVE-O – PUPILS & PROGRAMME.

The *Alive-O Programme*<sup>1</sup> (*Beo go Deo* in Irish language edition) is a catechetical series for Catholic pupils in Catholic primary schools on the island of Ireland. The *Programme* has eight parts, one for each of the eight years of primary school: Junior and Senior Infants, and Classes 1 through 6. Pupils normally enter the *Programme* at age 4/5, and finish at age 12/13. The *Alive-O Programme* was introduced into Ireland's Catholic primary schools over the years 1996 to 2004. *Alive-O* replaced the *Children of God* series<sup>2</sup>, first introduced in 1976. *Alive-O* has now been phased out, with replacement by the new *Grow in Love* series being completed in September 2019.

Approximately 800,000 pupils<sup>3</sup> have completed the *Alive-O Programme*. These pupils would be largely dependent on *Alive-O* for their education in Catholic faith, because there is no Church-provided Catholic religion programme in Catholic secondary schools. The Church recommends<sup>4</sup> that Catholic secondary schools follow the Syllabi for State public examinations in a type of "*Religious Education*" which is agnostic (all religions and non-religious positions equally valid) and constructively anti-Catholic (because the Syllabi never mention nor even recognize the existence of the Catholic faith). The State examinations in "*Religious Education*" are taken by a minority of pupils – 43% at Junior Certificate level and 2% at Leaving Certificate. Information is not available on what kind of education in Catholic faith, if any, is received by the great majority of secondary school pupils who do not follow the State "*Religious Education*" programmes.

The *Alive-O Programme* is heavily 'branded' ALIVE-O, which is the chorus of the popular folk-song: 'Cockles and Mussels' (shellfish that were sold alive, therefore fresh, by Molly Malone on the streets of Dublin). *Alive-O* is published in English and in Irish, titled – *Beo go Deo (Alive Always)*.

The *Alive-O Programme's* published materials include: for each year a Pupil's Book, a Teacher's Book, a Resource Pack / Workbook with exercises and drawings to colour, audio-tape and CD of *Alive-O* songs, a Video for classroom use, and some posters. *The Alive-O Programme* makes use of a wide range of attractive teaching resources: 600 colour illustrations, 350 stories, 300 songs, 13 hours of video, poems, games, and activities. The Church has not stinted on making a substantial investment in the *Alive-O Programme*; a single set of materials for all 8 classes cost over €1,000.

While the *Alive-O Programme* appears attractive and impressive, thorough analysis reveals that it is very poor on authentic Catholic catechesis (see Section 3, p.15-26). It is hardly surprising therefore that *Alive-O's* 800,000 'graduates', now aged 13-28, rate so badly on knowledge and practice of their Catholic Faith (see Section 4, p.27-34, and Appendix B, p.38-45).

The attractively presented *Alive-O* Pupil's Books and Workbooks are very limited on content. The *Alive-O Programme* is essentially contained in the substantial Teacher's Books, with information for teachers only, along with detailed lesson material for use with pupils for each weekly lesson of the school year (252 lessons in total over eight years). The Teacher's Books are complex and massive, containing in total 3,200 pages of small print, with approximately 1.4 million words (over five times as much text as the comprehensive *Catechism of the Catholic Church*). The lesson material is multiples of what could be used in the class time available, so teachers must pick and choose elements to utilize with their pupils.

Parents, Bishops, priests, and other interested parties are unlikely to know what is contained in the *Alive-O Programme*, because they would not normally see Teacher's Books, or if they do see the Teacher's Books the daunting volume and complexity would make thorough evaluation a very difficult task, requiring many months, even years, of focused study. Primary teachers suffer from curriculum overload, and therefore lack the time to study Teachers' Books for classes other than the one they are teaching. All this means it is *Alive-O's* key designers / writers who really know and are controlling the complete process, with teachers as their instruments.

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<sup>1</sup> Irish Episcopal Commission on Catechetics. *Alive-O series*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1996-2004.

<sup>2</sup> Irish Episcopal Commission on Catechetics. *Children of God series*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1976-1987.

<sup>3</sup> *Irish Catholic Directories*, 2006-2017. Statistics.

<sup>4</sup> Irish Episcopal Conference. *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. 166.

Up to its replacement in 1976 by the *Children of God series* the catechism in use in Ireland's primary schools was the '*Penny Catechism*', ordered by the National Synod of Maynooth for General Use throughout the Irish Church. The *Penny Catechism* was a small book of 64 pages, 17,000 words, and some simple black&white illustrations. The one book contained the basics of Catholic doctrine, and served pupils, teachers, parents, clergy and others. The *Penny Catechism* was introduced at a time of poverty, so it had to be affordable to the poorest, and as few could go to secondary school, the catechism had to cover in primary school the basic teachings of Catholic faith as a foundation for the rest of their lives. For its time, the *Penny Catechism* was a work of genius.

The '*Penny Catechism*' and a single set of *Alive-O* materials can be seen in the photograph below:



'Penny Catechism'

Cost – €1-2 (estimate)

One set of *Alive-O* materials

Audio-tapes; Teacher's Books, video-tapes;  
Pupil's Books; Workbooks.  
Cost – c. €1,000.

Responsibility for catechesis in Catholic schools rests with Ireland's Bishops<sup>5</sup>, individually in each diocese and collectively in the Episcopal Conference. The *Children of God*, *Alive-O* and *Grow in Love series* are all produced by the Irish Episcopal Commission on Catechetics, and published by the Bishops' own publishing house, Veritas Publications. The Catholic Church requires that if an Episcopal Conference prepares a catechetical programme for its territory, it must obtain pre-publication approval from the Holy See<sup>6</sup>. *Alive-O* did not receive this approval.

<sup>5</sup> Pope St John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae - On Catechesis in Our Time*, 1979, 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Code of Canon Law 1983. 775§2. General Directory for Catechesis*, 284.

## 2. WHERE DID ALIVE-O COME FROM?

### TWO WAYS: THE CHURCH'S WAY vs THE ANTI-CHURCH WAY.

The *Alive-O Programme* is presented as Catholic catechesis, that is, teaching Catholic Faith, which is a vital part of the Church's mission. The Gospels show that Jesus devoted much of his public ministry to teaching, and his final command to his Apostles was to teach all he commanded them, the '*Great Commission*'.<sup>7</sup> The Acts of the Apostles and Epistles recount how the Apostles fulfilled this Great Commission, continued by the Church ever since. The Church assigns teaching the Faith as first of the three main tasks (teach, sanctify, govern) of each Bishop and his priests.<sup>8</sup> Parents have the primary right and duty to educate their children in true Catholic Faith.<sup>9</sup> The Christian faith is so beautiful, good and true that teaching authentic faith should, and can be, sheer joy.

The Church teaches that Catechesis is an integral element of Evangelisation<sup>10</sup>, which is the Church's primary vocation and mission, she exists in order to evangelise.<sup>11</sup> Catechesis seeks to transmit a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith, an education in both knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith, helping people to communion with Jesus Christ<sup>12</sup>.

In the era prior to the Second Vatican Council education in Faith in the Catholic Church had been strong on doctrine, with the model being the Catechism of the Council of Trent 1566, known as the *Roman Catechism*. Instruction in doctrine was complemented with a rich devotional life. While strong, this '*doctrinal-devotional*' model had limitations, and needed renewal.

The Second Vatican Council gave great impetus for renewal in all aspects of Church life, Catholic catechesis not excluded. There have been many positive catechetical developments, including several excellent documents from the Holy See, most notably the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>13</sup> The materials now available to prepare Catholic catechesis for all ages – children, adolescents, youth, adults – are probably the best ever in the history of the Church. This is the **CHURCH'S WAY** of fulfilling the commission given to her by Jesus to 'go teach all nations'.

Jesus commanded the Apostles to teach, but also warned against false teachers who would arise in the Church ('wolves in sheep's clothing'),<sup>14</sup> false prophets did emerge, driven by ignorance and arrogance<sup>15</sup> and sadly attracted many followers.<sup>16</sup> As the Holy Spirit was poured out in abundance at and after Vatican Council II, tragically that other spirit, Satan the Father of Lies and master con man, has also been very active seeking to lead astray the people of God. In 1972 Pope St Paul VI stated that the smoke of Satan had entered the Church, and shortly before his election in 1978 as Pope John Paul II, Archbishop Karol Wojtyla warned, 'We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has gone through. ... We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church & the anti-Church, of the Gospel versus the anti-Gospel'.

Catholic catechesis did not escape the effects of these serious problems in the Church. Much of what was presented after the Second Vatican Council as catechetical renewal (doubtless often sincerely thought to be so) was in fact seriously destructive of authentic Catholic faith – this has been the **ANTI-CHURCH WAY**, especially affecting the developed world, **Ireland** not excluded.

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<sup>7</sup> Mt.28:19-20; Mk.16:15

<sup>8</sup> *Code of Canon Law* 1983, 375, 519. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 888-892.

<sup>9</sup> *Canon Law*, 226§2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2221, 2226.

<sup>10</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 48, 63. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22, 24. John Paul II. *Catechesi Tradendae - On Catechesis in Our Time*. Apostolic Exhortation, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Pope St Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi - On Evangelisation in the Modern World*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975. *General Directory for Catechesis*. 46

<sup>12</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 39, 67, 116. Eph.1:17. *May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to a full knowledge of him.*

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Mt.7:15-20, 24:4,24; Mk.13:22;

<sup>15</sup> Acts20:29-30; 2Cor.11:3-4; Gal.1:7-9; Col.2:8; 2Thess.2:2; 1Tim.6:3-4; 2Peter2:1; 1Jn.2:18, 4:1-5; 2Jn.7-11; Jude4.

<sup>16</sup> 2Cor.11:4; Gal.1:6-9; 2Tim.4:3-4; 2Peter2:2.

## THE CHURCH'S WAY

### Catechesis and Evangelisation

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope St Paul VI defined Evangelization in terms of: proclaiming Christ to those who do not know Him, witness, preaching, catechesis, conferring Baptism and the other sacraments, entry into the community of the Church, and apostolic initiative – the person who has been evangelized is transformed and then goes on to evangelize others. Evangelisation aims at the renewal of humanity, beginning in this life but which is fulfilled in eternity in communion with God.

Witness of authentically Christian life is a key element in evangelization. 'Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.'<sup>17</sup> All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way all can be real evangelizers.

Nevertheless, even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. 'And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?... So faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.'<sup>18</sup> This could be expressed as the Faith being *both* 'caught' through witness, *and* 'taught'.

### Nature of Catechesis

The Church has always stressed the importance of catechesis, and continues to do so. Pope St John Paul II reminded Bishops: '*Let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care whatever in any way. ... You can be sure that if catechesis is done well in your Dioceses, everything else will be easier to do*'.<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul also said, '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.'<sup>20</sup>

Catechesis aims to mature initial faith by providing a systematic knowledge of the person and message of Jesus Christ. Catechesis can take various forms, including: 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 baptised but lack a proper Christian initiation.<sup>21</sup>

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 Community Life; and Missionary initiation.<sup>22</sup> The principal source for Catholic catechesis is Divine Revelation, as expressed in Scripture and Sacred Tradition, under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium.<sup>23</sup>

Catechesis of young people has a special importance because children are so open to learn, and respond so joyfully to the goodness, beauty and truth of the Faith, if presented in a good way. Young people's memories are so absorbent and enduring that the basic truths of Faith will stay with them for their lifetimes. Children's catechesis – education in Catholic faith – is a shared responsibility of their parents and the Church.<sup>24</sup> The principal means to help parents fulfil their role are schools, in which teaching the Catholic faith is under Church authority.<sup>25</sup> There should be a close and collaborative working relationship between home, school and parish.

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<sup>17</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 41.

<sup>18</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21-22, 41-42; Romans 10:14, 17

<sup>19</sup> Pope St John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae - On Catechesis in Our Time*, 1979, 63.

<sup>20</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*. 19, 20.

<sup>22</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*. 85-87.

<sup>23</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 10; *General Directory for Catechesis*, 94-96.

<sup>24</sup> Pope St John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae - On Catechesis in Our Time*, 1979, 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Canon Law*, 796, 804. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2229.

## Vatican Council II & Catholic Catechesis

The Second Vatican Council of 1962-65 sought renewal of the Church and better presentation of the Faith to the world, which was received by most of the Church with great joy. Before the Second Vatican Council the Church's catechesis focused on teaching orthodox Catholic doctrine in a carefully structured manner – the standard doctrinal reference was the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*<sup>26</sup> (also known as the *Roman Catechism*) published in 1566. Linked with this strong catechesis was encouragement of a varied devotional life – Mass, the Sacraments, traditional prayers, missions, retreats, pilgrimages and other devotions. This 'catechetical-devotional' model was effective in handing on the Faith and forming Catholics in commitment to God and his Church, strong in faith and moral behaviour.<sup>27</sup>

There were movements for renewal of catechesis in the Universal Church before Vatican II. A greater emphasis on Scripture followed from the biblical movement in the Catholic Church – epitomised in the Encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XII<sup>28</sup>, culminating in the great Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*.<sup>29</sup> The 'kerygmatic movement' emphasised salvation history – the good news of our redemption in Christ.<sup>30</sup>

At the close of Vatican Council II in 1965 the scene was set for substantial and exciting developments in Catholic catechesis worldwide, building on the solid foundation of what had already been achieved. Many blessings followed, significant developments were achieved. The Church's Magisterium on catechesis took full account of the Second Vatican Council, and also incorporated the best of other relevant developments, such as the biblical and kerygmatic movements.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council provided rich resources for renewal and development of catechesis – Pope St Paul VI described the Council's documents as the great catechism of modern times. The great Creeds (especially the Creed of Nicaea and the Apostles' Creed) have been vital sources for catechesis from the earliest times of the Church. In response to doctrinal problems afflicting the Church following the Council Pope St Paul VI in 1968 issued his *Credo of the People of God*, which was a restatement and development of the Nicene Creed, highlighting those aspects of the Faith which were being denied, omitted or confused.<sup>31</sup>

At the Second Vatican Council some of the Bishops favoured composition of a new Catechism to succeed the *Roman Catechism*, but instead the Council prescribed that 'a directory be compiled for the catechetical instruction of the Christian people in which the fundamental principles of this instruction and its organization will be dealt with and the preparation of books relating to it'<sup>32</sup>. This instruction was brought to fruition in 1971 with publication of the *General Catechetical Directory*<sup>33</sup>, which provided excellent guidance in the conduct of Catholic catechesis, taking full account of the Second Vatican Council, in harmony with the wishes of the Council Fathers.

The decade of the '70s saw two more Magisterial documents that were vitally important for catechetical renewal. The 1974 Synod of Bishops considered the theme of Evangelisation, after which Pope St Paul VI issued the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi – On Evangelisation in the Modern World*, setting catechesis as an integral component of Evangelisation, the Church's primary mission.<sup>34</sup> Catechesis itself was the theme for the 1977 Synod of Bishops, after which Pope St John Paul II wrote *Catechesi Tradendae – On Catechesis in Our Time*, issued in 1979. A number of other excellent Magisterial documents, relevant and helpful to catechesis, were issued in the 1980s.

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<sup>26</sup> J Donovan DD (translator). *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. London: Baronius Press, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> George Weigel. *Evangelical Catholicism*. New York: Basic Books, 2013. 11-17.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*. 1893. Pope Pius XII. *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 1943.

<sup>29</sup> Second Vatican Council. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. *Dei Verbum*. 1965.

<sup>30</sup> Michael J Wrenn. *Catechisms and Controversies – Religious Education in the Postconciliar Years*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991. 89-91.

<sup>31</sup> Pope St Paul VI. *Solemni Hac Liturgia - Credo of the People of God*, 1968. 3, 4. Pope Paul affirmed the need for theological research, but warned that it should do no injury to the teachings of Christian doctrine.

<sup>32</sup> Second Vatican Council. Decree of the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, 1965. 44.

<sup>33</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory*, 1971.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi – On Evangelisation in the Modern World*, 1975.



The publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992 was arguably the greatest event for Catholic catechesis in over 400 years, ever since the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* of 1566. Though the Bishops at the Second Vatican Council had decided for a catechetical directory, rather than a new standard Catholic Catechism, by the 1980s things had changed. The 1985 Synod of Bishops proposed that the time was ripe for a new universal catechism, Pope St John Paul II took up the call and entrusted the task to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. The preparation was comprehensive and thorough, involving all the Bishops of the world, along with experts in relevant fields, and serves as a reference point for catechesis throughout the Church.

Publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, along with other documents and developments in Catholic catechesis since 1971, meant that revision of the *General Catechetical Directory* was needed. The *General Directory for Catechesis* 1997<sup>35</sup> comprehensively updates the 1971 Directory.

There are many excellent Magisterial documents that are helpful to Catholic catechesis, but Sacred Scripture, along with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *General Directory for Catechesis* of 1997, are the most important standards of reference today. For all Catholic catechisms the Church requires *perfect harmony* with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, meaning no deviations, incompleteness, confusions, errors, or extraneous additions. In relation to how catechesis should be carried out (pedagogy, methodology and organisation) the Church requires *due consideration for the norms and criteria* contained in the *General Directory for Catechesis* of 1997<sup>36</sup>, meaning that some of the 'norms and criteria' are mandatory and universally valid, while others are to be understood rather as good advice, indications or guidelines.

#### When Ireland used to follow the Church's Way.

Ireland's pre-Vatican II Catholic catechesis, similar to the rest of the Catholic world, was good but not without limitations and was in need of renewal, faithful to the Second Vatican Council. This 'catechetical-devotional' model<sup>37</sup>, with strong home, school and parish linkages, was followed in Ireland up to the mid-1970s.

The Irish Catholic Bishops '*Penny Catechism*' was the text for primary school catechesis – a concise and well-structured summary of the key truths of the Faith, with the *Roman Catechism* as the standard of reference.<sup>38</sup> In earlier times when there was great poverty in Ireland most children did not progress to secondary school, so the primary schools needed a minimum cost catechism to cover the basics of the Faith to provide as comprehensive a foundation as possible for their pupils' future lives.

Ireland's secondary schools had a programme with widely used common text books, building on the basics of the *Penny Catechism* and covering: doctrine, liturgy, apologetics, and Scripture. Dioceses had Inspectors who visited secondary schools to review progress, and conducted regular written examinations in religious knowledge.

There were many indications of the success of Ireland's education in Catholic Faith up to the 1970s.

Ireland's Catholic schools used to be an outstanding asset for the Faith. One of the many testimonies to this was the great many missionaries from Ireland who went all over the world to evangelise, to spread the Faith, and wherever they went the missionaries established schools as they had known at home. These Catholic schools served to spread the Faith and also set very high educational standards, highly respected and sought after by people of all faiths. A notable example was the mission led by Bishop Joseph Shanahan among the Igbo peoples of Nigeria, where the establishment of Catholic schools played a key role in a very fruitful missionary endeavor.

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<sup>35</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis* 1997, 10, 284.

<sup>37</sup> Such a model was also the experience of the young Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, growing up in Bavaria. See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. *Salt of the Earth – The Church at the End of the Millennium; An Interview with Peter Seewald*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997. 41-50. Dr Éanna Johnson had similar experience of education in Catholic faith during his school days in India, Australia and Ireland.

<sup>38</sup> Texts similar to the '*Penny Catechism*' were used in other countries, e.g. In USA the '*Baltimore Catechism*'.

Before Vatican II Ireland's six seminaries were full to overflowing, Maynooth alone had over six hundred seminarians right into the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> When Pope St John Paul II visited Ireland in 1979, huge crowds attended all the events; total attendance numbered about 80% of the Catholic population of Ireland. Particularly relevant to children's Faith education was the event especially for youth at Ballybrit Racecourse in Galway, where the Pope was visibly moved by the joy and enthusiasm of the young people in the 300,000 crowd.

After Vatican Council II Ireland was in a very strong position for renewal of Catholic catechesis – an extensive network of Catholic schools, dedicated teachers, supportive parents/grandparents and clergy, tried and proven catechetical programmes that only needed updating and renewal faithful to the Council. One would have expected Ireland to be a shining example of post-Vatican II Catholic catechetical *blessings*, especially as the Irish Church did not stint on pouring resources into religious education. One would have expected to see strengthened catechetical programmes, with better educated and trained teachers. One would have anticipated our churches overflowing with young people, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their faith, and eager to share the new things about faith they learned at school with their peers and parents/grandparents.<sup>40</sup>

### THE ANTI-CHURCH WAY

At the close of Vatican Council II in 1965 the scene was set for substantial and exciting developments in Catholic catechesis worldwide, building on the solid foundation of what had already been achieved. But while the graces and blessings of God were poured out in abundance at and after the Second Vatican Council, as might be expected, the Evil One – the Father of Lies and Spirit of Darkness – was also very active in opposition<sup>41</sup> to the work of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Truth and Light – leading Pope St Paul VI to state in 1972:<sup>42</sup>

'The smoke of Satan has entered the Church: it is doubt, uncertainty, questioning, dissatisfaction, confrontation. There is no confidence in the Church; instead people put their trust in the first secular prophet who comes along.<sup>43</sup> ..... Doubt has entered our consciences, and it entered through windows that should have been open to the light. .... The school becomes the gymnasium of confusion and sometimes of absurd contradictions. .... It was thought that after the Council a day of sunshine would dawn for the history of the Church. What dawned instead was a day of clouds and storms, of darkness, of searching and uncertainties... How could that have happened? ... It has been the action of Satan, to disturb & suffocate the fruits of the Council, and to prevent the Church from breaking into the hymn of joy at having renewed in fullness her awareness of herself'.

Catholic catechesis did not escape these doctrinal problems in the Church. Alongside excellent developments which have been noted above, there were also failures, some grave.

A series of six International Study Weeks were organised over the period 1959 to 1968 with venues in a number of different cities around the world, which were to prove highly influential in the direction taken by Catholic catechesis in the post-conciliar era. The earlier Study Weeks had a positive focus on incorporating into Catholic catechesis the growing biblical movement and kerygmatic movements, which would have made a very positive contribution to the Faith. Tragically, later Study Weeks shifted the focus from God to the world and its concerns, and promoted the '*anthropocentric*' (human-centred) or 'horizontal' approach, with disastrous results for Catholic catechesis.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Canon Patrick Marron. *Reflections of a Diamond Jubilarian*. Intercom, November 2018, p.21.

<sup>40</sup> Children from Catholic schools teaching parents may seem utopian, but it was the actual experience in Catholic mission schools, such as in Nigeria, where Catholic schools played a key role in Bishop Joseph Shanahan's evangelisation strategy. Children in mission schools often helped bring their parents to Faith.

<sup>41</sup> This recalls a wise saying: 'If Satan can't stop a parade he'll try to lead it'. Having failed to stop the 'parade' (Vatican Council II) Satan focused on leading the implementation astray.

<sup>42</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Homily given in St Peter's Basilica, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1972*. Quoted in Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing*, p.221-222. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> 1Tim.6:3-4; 2 Tim.4:3-4. St Paul warns Timothy against false prophets, driven by a combination of ignorance and arrogance, but nevertheless many people would have 'itching ears' for heretical teaching.

<sup>44</sup> Msgr Michael J Wrenn. *Catechisms & Controversies – Religious Education in the Postconciliar Years*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991. 92-99.

In 1966, without waiting for the Council's prescribed catechetical directory<sup>45</sup> (like a 'pre-emptive strike'), '*A New Catechism – Catholic Faith for Adults*', generally known as the '*Dutch Catechism*',<sup>46</sup> was published by the Netherlands' Bishops. Responding to complaints, most from laity, Pope Paul VI appointed a Commission of Cardinals to study the *Dutch Catechism*; the Commission praised the Catechism's good features, but also required correction of wide-ranging doctrinal errors and deficiencies. The text of the *Dutch Catechism* was never corrected, (though some editions included the Commission's corrections as an appendix), and it became a significant and enduring negative influence internationally, helped by official episcopal approvals in some countries<sup>47</sup>.

A number of Church documents drew attention to failures in Catholic catechesis. The *General Catechetical Directory 1971* warned of potential problems<sup>48</sup>. *Catechesi Tradendae 1979* deplored actual problems that were taking place.<sup>49</sup> Tragically, the problems continued, as evidenced by the need for the *General Directory for Catechesis* to draw attention to the same sort of significant problems in Catholic catechesis that were still occurring in 1997.<sup>50</sup>

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) set up a Committee to examine catechetical texts for conformance to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; the Committee reported in 1997 and 2003 on finding extensive and serious problems in school catechetical texts<sup>51</sup>, which largely repeated the problems found in the *Dutch Catechism* of 1966.

The Spanish Bishops carried out a major study in 2006 in association with the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and issued a report, '*Theology and Secularization in Spain, Forty Years after the end of Vatican Council II*'.<sup>52</sup> The study found that the Church in Spain was sick, and identified the sickness as secularisation within the Church, coming from a loss of faith and of knowledge of faith. Extensive doctrinal errors were found, particularly affecting preaching, catechesis and school instruction, summarized in four points of internal Church secularisation:

- a conception of faith and revelation as of human, not divine, origin;
- an understanding of Jesus and his mission in only human terms;
- a merely sociological interpretation of the Church;
- a secularized subjective version of Catholic morality.

A recurring feature of the negative trends in post-Vatican II Catholic catechesis has been that the problematic aspects were not singular or few, but right across the full spectrum of the Faith.<sup>53</sup> This all-embracing nature of false teachings with secular focus resembles the Modernist heresy, which Pope St Pius X defined as the synthesis of all previous heresies.<sup>54</sup>

This corruption of Catholic catechesis, affecting both faith and morals, caused heart-breaking distress among the faithful – clergy and laity alike; parents and grandparents especially have been bewildered and devastated by the lack of Faith of their children / grandchildren.

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<sup>45</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory*, 1971.

<sup>46</sup> Higher Catechetical Institute, Nijmegen. *A New Catechism - Catholic Faith for Adults*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1967. This edition received an *Imprimatur* from +Robert F Joyce, Bishop of Burlington, USA, 1967.

<sup>47</sup> *Catechisms and Controversies*. 140-148.

<sup>48</sup> *General Catechetical Directory 1971*. 5, 7-9, 36, 39, 69.

<sup>49</sup> *Catechesi Tradendae*. 17, 30, 49, 61. 'Limitations or even deficiencies have been recognised in what has been achieved to date.' 'Catechetical renewal .... 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'.

<sup>50</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis 1997*. 2, 9, 28, 30, 181/2

<sup>51</sup> *Reports of USCCB Standing Committee on Catechesis*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 1997, 2003.

<sup>52</sup> La Conferencia Episcopal Española. *Teología Secularización en España, a los Cuarenta Años de la Clausura del Concilio Vaticano II*. Madrid, 30 de marzo de 2006.

<sup>53</sup> *Catechisms & Controversies*, 140-147

<sup>54</sup> Pope St Pius X. *Pascendi Dominici Gregis – On the Doctrine of the Modernists*, 1907. 39.

### Ireland's U-turn to Follow the Anti-Church Way.

On the last day of his Irish visit in 1979, Pope St John Paul II gave a homily at Mass in Limerick<sup>55</sup>. The Pope said Ireland was at a point of decision in her history, and he called on Irish Catholics to choose Christ and his Church over the way of the world. We were like the Israelites arriving at Kadesh-Barnea after escape Egypt and being invited by God to enter the Promised Land, but they turned away to wander for 40 years in the desert<sup>56</sup>. Ireland was invited to enter a '*Promised Land*' of authentic post-Vatican II renewal of Catholic catechesis, but instead we turned the anti-Church way and 40 years later we are still wandering in a desert, a wasteland of catechetical confusion.

Tragically the Irish National Catechetical Programme had already from 1973 chosen to set aside the Church's way of catechesis<sup>57</sup>, and instead embraced the worldly *anthropological-experiential* (human experience) model<sup>58</sup> promoted at the final International Catechetical Study Week in 1968.

The English language edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published in 1994. For most Catholics in Ireland the *Catechism* was eagerly awaited and welcomed with open arms, but some of our theologians, with significant influence in catechetical circles, were among those who responded, not with approval, but with criticism of the *Catechism*<sup>59</sup>.

Catholic catechesis in Ireland from the mid-1970s onwards has reflected, not the Church's joyful and uplifting vision, but rather the widely occurring problems noted by Popes, Episcopal Conferences and in several Church documents (see p.10-11 above). Probably the most serious source of problems have been unsatisfactory religion programmes for Ireland's Catholic schools. A programme resembles the image of a ship's rudder in the Letter of St James<sup>60</sup> - a small rudder, controlled by a pilot, sets the direction of even the largest of ships. A programme, created by a handful of writers, sets the catechetical direction for thousands of teachers and hundreds of thousands of pupils for many years.

For Catholic *primary schools* the new *Children of God* series introduced in 1976 was much more attractive in appearance than the earlier *Penny Catechism*, which must have encouraged its acceptance by many. However, the *Children of God* followed the National Catechetical Programme's *anthropological-experiential* model, and therefore was deficient and defective, reflecting more the *Dutch Catechism* than authentic Catholic teaching. The problems of the *Children of God* series were identified in a detailed and comprehensive analysis carried out by a group of concerned laity and theologians, known as '*Pro-fide*' (For the Faith), but its well-presented Report was not accepted by Church catechetics leadership.

There used to be an effective partnership in Catholic catechesis between home, school and Church. The *Children of God*'s design and structure worked against involvement of parents, parish clergy and others, from participation in the religious education. This was confirmed by a 1999 study of the *Children of God*, which found such a profound disconnect between school, parents and parish clergy that the Report of the study was titled, '*Islands Apart*'.<sup>61</sup> The *Alive-O Programme* is also structured in a similar way, giving excess control to the school, while marginalising parents, parish clergy and others. For further analysis of the *Alive-O Programme* see Section 3, p.15-26.

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<sup>55</sup> *The Visit. John Paul II in Ireland – A Historical Record*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979. 83-88.

<sup>56</sup> Numbers 13, 14.

<sup>57</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 137-147.

<sup>58</sup> Patricia Kieran & Anne Hession. *Children, Catholicism & Religious Education*, Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2005. 103.

<sup>59</sup> Michael J Walsh, ed. *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1994. Most contributors criticised the *Catechism*, incl. Irish theologians, Rev Dermot A Lane (Mater Dei Institute), Rev Gabriel Daly OSA (Trinity College, Dublin), and Rev Gerald O'Hanlon SJ (Milltown Institute, Dublin). Quoted in, Michael J Wrenn & Kenneth D Whitehead. *Flawed Expectations – The Reception of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996. 211, 217, 219, 221-25, 231, 237-38.

<sup>60</sup> James 3:4.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Kennedy. *Islands Apart – Consultation Report regarding the 'Children of God' series for senior primary-school children involving parents, children, teachers and priests*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2000.

At secondary level the previous good religion programme, along with the system of inspection and examination, was simply abandoned, while classroom discussions among pupils on topics of the day were encouraged.<sup>62</sup> Some schools followed chosen texts, others did nothing. In 2000 the supposed 'solution' to the chaos that had been created was to adopt the State's (ROI) '*Religious Education*' for the Junior and Leaving Certificate public examinations.<sup>63</sup> These exam Syllabi are agnostic (all religions and non-religious options on a par), with an inadequate generic 'Christianity'. The Syllabi are also constructively anti-Catholic because the Catholic faith, Ireland's majority religion for the past 1,500 years, is omitted and never mentioned, not even in the Leaving Cert section: 'Religion – the Irish experience'. This anti-Catholic bias is made even more obvious by the State's provision of a separate Syllabus and examination on Jewish Studies.

Exam uptake is also a failure – less than half of pupils take '*Religious Education*' in the Junior Cert exam, and only 2% at the vital Leaving Certificate. The new Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification is even more agnostic, therefore even more likely to produce an agnostic mind-set, and less acceptable as a foundation for education in Catholic Faith.<sup>64</sup>

This means that **for over forty years the Irish Church has provided no Catholic religion programme for Catholic pupils in our Catholic secondary schools.** However, it is incomprehensible that the Church and her catechetical leadership continue to endorse this irrational failed strategy, with no plans to restore Catholic catechesis to Catholic secondary schools.<sup>65</sup>

Learning Assessment is recognized by education professionals as an essential component of all education projects. However, no learning assessment has been carried out by the Church's catechetical leadership for education in faith in Ireland's Catholic schools since introduction of new programmes in the mid-1970s. This is entirely unprofessional and unacceptable.

Tragically, since the introduction of new religion programmes in the 1970s, Ireland's Catholic schools are no longer a strength for the Faith, but have become an obstacle to passing on the Catholic Faith. The presence of many Nigerian priests in our parishes (and our Papal Nuncio Archbishop Okolo) are testimonies to the fruitfulness of the Catholic school system set up in Nigeria by Bishop Shanahan. The fact that these priests are needed in Ireland to fill gaps left by the grave shortage of young Irish priests is a testimony to the failure of our Catholic schools to teach the Faith over the past 40+ years. Of Ireland's six former overflowing seminaries five have closed, leaving only Maynooth, which had 600 seminarians and 67 ordinations in 1957, but now has only 66 seminarians in total.

From mid-1970s a generation and a half of pupils in Ireland (c. 2million), have experienced the problematic catechetical programmes in Catholic schools. Many pupils appear to have been so 'inoculated' with defective Catholic teaching that they are 'immune' to the real thing.

The situation in relation to teacher training is of serious concern, with Catholic colleges being handed over by the Church to secular control by incorporation into State universities.

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<sup>62</sup> Dermot A Lane, et al. *Dublin Diocesan Women's Forum Report – Nurturing the Faith of the Pilgrim People*. Submitted to Archbishop Desmond Connell, April 1998.

<sup>63</sup> National Council for Curriculum & Assessment (NCCA). *Religious Education Syllabus, Junior Certificate, 2000. Religious Education Syllabus, Leaving Certificate, 2003*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

<sup>64</sup> National Council for Curriculum & Assessment / Department of Education and Skills. *Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification*. To be introduced September 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Irish Episcopal Conference. *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2010. 107-111, 145-152, 166.

In 2015 Ireland voted in a Referendum to approve same-sex 'marriage' by a 62% majority. Young people were prominent in campaigning for a YES vote and were much to the fore in celebrating the result. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin stated that the Church needed a "reality check." He added, 'I ask myself, most of these young people who voted YES are products of our Catholic school system for 14 years. I'm saying there's a big challenge there to see how we get across the message of the Church'.

The 2018 Referendum on Abortion was even more heart-breaking, with removal of Constitutional protection from unborn children by a 67% majority – the younger the age group (the more recently they had completed 14 years of Catholic schooling) the higher was the vote for abortion. The 18-24 year age group, who all completed the *Alive-O Programme*, voted 88% in favour of abortion.

Statistics and common experience reveal a serious fall-off right across the nation in church attendance and practice, with congregations declining and ageing. The decline is particularly noticeable among young people. A widespread pattern is to see children participating joyfully in church at Baptisms, First Holy Communions, and Confirmations, but thereafter only re-appearing for special occasions like weddings and funerals – a childless church does not have a future.<sup>66</sup>

In relation to 'adult catechesis' there had been little described as such pre-Vatican II, but a considerable amount of adult catechesis actually took place in a variety of ways. The principal way was the Sunday sermon, with significant catechetical content. Retreats, missions and sodalities also had much catechesis. But from the 1970s most of this adult catechesis was lost. Sodalities virtually disappeared, missions became much less frequent, while retreats had less catechetical input with greater emphasis on reflection and meditation. After Vatican II the Sunday catechetical sermons became the homily breaking open the Word of God from the Scripture readings of the Mass, excellent in principle<sup>67</sup>, but in practice homilies have tended to lack real substance<sup>68</sup>. Priests lacked deep knowledge of Scripture, and were unaccustomed to that kind of preaching. Homilies should also be given at weekday Masses, but that practice is not common.

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<sup>66</sup> Fr Chris Hayden. *Editorial, Intercom*. November 2018.

<sup>67</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Homiletic Directory*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> J Anthony Gaughan. *At the Coalface – Recollections of a City and Country Priest*. Dublin: Columba Press, 2000. 183: Based on a lifetime of pastoral experience in Dublin Archdiocese, Fr Gaughan identified the factors mainly responsible for the decline in Faith: affluence, the influence of the media, and the unsatisfactory nature of catechetical programmes in the pulpit and in the school.

### 3. DID *ALIVE-O* TEACH AUTHENTIC CATHOLIC FAITH?

There are two main ways to find the answer to this vital question – did *Alive-O* teach authentic Catholic Faith to the approximately 800,000 Catholic children that experienced the *Programme* over the years 1996 to 2019?

The first way is to study how the *Programme* itself has been designed and written, to see if its Content and Pedagogy (teaching strategy and methods) are authentically Catholic and appropriate for this great task. This Section 3 focuses on this way to find the answer to the question.

The second main way to answer the question is to focus on the results, the outcomes – what have pupils actually learned and what actions follow on from this learning. Jesus said that we can know if a tree is good or bad by its fruits; a good tree will produce good fruits, a bad tree will produce bad fruits.<sup>69</sup> A well-known folk saying expresses the same idea this way – ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’. Section 4 and Appendix B address this way of answering the question.

*Alive-O* did not teach a clear and authentic account of Catholic Faith, at a level appropriate for pupils aged 4 to 12 years. *Alive-O* failed by repeating the errors that Pope John Paul II identified in 1979 as especially problematic for Catholic catechesis in the Universal Church after the Vatican Council – that is, an overall ‘horizontal’ or secularised version of Faith, expressed, not mainly through wrong statements, but rather through omissions and imbalances.<sup>70</sup> Theologically *Alive-O* ended up as a confusing mishmash of authentic, deficient, and defective elements, particularly tragic at primary school age when children are so open, receptive and impressionable.

Sometimes *Alive-O* presents a confusing picture of Church teaching, other times it is just different. *Alive-O* fails seriously through omission of important elements of Catholic faith. Omissions are by their nature very difficult to detect. This is particularly so with *Alive-O* because of the huge volume of material – 3,200 pages of small print in the Teachers’ Books with 1.4million words, over 600 illustrations, 300 songs, 350 stories, 13 hours of video. Songs, stories, illustrations and videos are particularly important because of their ability to touch the imagination and be remembered – there is a well-known saying that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Searching for something in *Alive-O*’s massive volume reminds one of the folk-saying about the difficulty of ‘finding a needle in a haystack’ – then how much more difficult it is to identify the ‘needle’ that should be in the ‘haystack’, but is not there! The legal system knows the damage that omissions can do to truth, and so requires witnesses in court to swear an oath, not merely to tell the truth, but also to tell the whole truth.

Omissions are particularly difficult to evaluate in a children’s catechetical programme, when some elements may be correctly omitted from early years and deferred for fuller development in later years. Nevertheless, there should be an appropriate degree of completeness at each stage to ensure integrity of the information being taught.

Imbalances can be even more difficult than omissions to detect and evaluate. If some truths of faith are given so little attention relative to others, this could convey a distorted and false picture of the Faith. Consider the difficulty in context of the proverbial ‘haystack’, in identifying that some ‘needles’ are getting too much attention, while other ‘needles’ are getting too little?

But the main problem in *Alive-O* is ‘horizontalism’ or secularisation (see *Catechesi Tradendae* 49), primary emphasis on the human and material to the neglect of the divine and spiritual.

The problems in *Alive-O* mentioned above can indeed be very difficult to identify. However, there are other problems in *Alive-O* that are glaringly obvious, though it can often be simple people and children that can see these problems.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Matthew* 7:17

<sup>70</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979. 49.

<sup>71</sup> *Matthew* 11:25. *I thank you Father for hiding these things from the learned and the clever, and revealing them to mere children.* Also reminiscent of the little boy in Hans Christian Andersen’s well-known story of ‘The King with no Clothes’.

There are 252 lessons in *Alive-O*, each lesson being a week's work. Analysis of the *Alive-O Programme* revealed that not even one single lesson was fully satisfactory. However, every lesson had some good material – on one hand this could be considered good news, but on the other hand it is bad news because it could encourage people to find acceptable what is not really so, due to defects and deficiencies in the lesson. There was only one lesson about which the analysis could find no good at all – the lesson on the Holy Spirit in Book 4 is not authentic Christianity, but rather reflects the 'New Age', a diverse phenomenon which combines secular thinking with various esoteric spiritualities, especially pantheism.<sup>72</sup>

The common understanding of the term 'heresy' is any teaching publicly proclaimed which is contrary to Church teaching<sup>73</sup>, and this is the meaning of 'heresy' that is used in this Review. Sadly, the Church has suffered from heresies from its earliest days. The 8<sup>th</sup> Century Church Father St John of Damascus listed 103 heresies that had afflicted the Church up to his time, and heresy has continued on right up to the present day.

The most recent great heresy, known as '*Modernism*', was strenuously opposed by Pope St Pius X, who defined Modernism as the synthesis of all heresies, aimed at the destruction of the Catholic faith. Pius X's 1907 encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, is a comprehensive explanation and condemnation of the Doctrine of the Modernists. The document, *Lamentabili Sane*, approved by Pius X, identifies 65 Errors of the Modernists.

Pius X's robust measures appeared to eliminate Modernism from the Church, but many people see a resurgence of Modernist ideas after the Second Vatican Council. Was *Alive-O* influenced by Modernism? A comparison of *Alive-O* with Modernist ideas reveals many parallels, examples below:

<u>Modernist ideas</u>	<u><i>Alive-O Programme</i></u>
Synthesis of all previous heresies <sup>74</sup>	Problems right across all aspects of Faith.
Based on human experience <sup>75</sup>	Based on ' <i>anthropological / experiential</i> ' model, not Jesus' way of teaching, required by Church.
Scripture only human, not divinely inspired <sup>76</sup>	Scripture treated like putty, changeable at will.
Jesus not divine, only human; no Trinity <sup>77</sup>	Jesus' divinity unclear, Trinity unclear.
Church of human origin, not established by Christ, everything can & should change. <sup>78</sup>	Poor presentation on Church; spiritual aspect weak while human dimension emphasised.
Church has no Magisterium, all teachings may and should change. <sup>79</sup>	Often not in perfect harmony with Church teachings; unclear on her Magisterium.
All sacraments of human origin, not established by Christ, no grace. <sup>80</sup>	Very poor presentation of sacraments, unbalanced emphasis on human aspects.

<sup>72</sup> Pontifical Councils for Culture and interreligious Dialogue. *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life – A Christian Reflection on the 'New Age'*. 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Richard M Hogan. *Dissent from the Creed – Heresies Past and Present*. Huntington IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2001. 26. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church 2089* focuses on the personal sin of heresy – the obstinate post-baptismal denial of a truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith.

<sup>74</sup> Pope St Pius X. *Pascendi Dominici Gregis – On the Doctrine of the Modernists*. 1907. 39.

<sup>75</sup> *Lamentabili Sane – Syllabus Condemning Errors of Modernists, 1907*. 20,22,40-41,53-54,58. *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, 6-13

<sup>76</sup> *Lamentabili Sane*. 1-4, 9-23.

<sup>77</sup> *Lamentabili Sane*. 27-38.

<sup>78</sup> *Lamentabili Sane*. 52-57.

<sup>79</sup> *Lamentabili Sane*. 5-8, 24-26, 58-65.

<sup>80</sup> *Lamentabili Sane*. 39-51.



## ANALYSIS OF ALIVE-O's CONTENT & PEDAGOGY

The Church attaches particular importance to catechisms in the context of her vision for catechesis, and summarises her requirements in relation to content and pedagogy (teaching approach and strategy) thus<sup>81</sup>:

'In drawing up catechisms, the following two criteria must be carefully adhered to:

- a) perfect harmony with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>82</sup>: a sure and authentic reference particularly for preparing local catechisms;
- b) due consideration for the norms and criteria for presenting the Gospel message contained in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, which is also a standard reference for catechesis'.

In harmony with the principles above, and in grateful appreciation of the comprehensive, *Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, prepared by the Office for the Catechism, US Conference of Catholic Bishops,<sup>83</sup>

in relation to Content of the Faith the key criteria are:

- ✓ Authenticity
- ✓ Completeness

and in relation to Pedagogical Aspects the key criteria are:

- ✓ Faithfulness to the Church's pedagogy
- ✓ Educational effectiveness

For criteria details, see Appendix A, p.36-37: Criteria for Authentic Catholic Catechisms.

## SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF ALIVE-O's CONTENT:

The principal standard of reference for Content of a catechetical programme, as recommended by the Church, is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The presentation of the analysis below follows the four-part structure of the *Catechism*:

1. The Profession of Faith (based on the Creeds / Divine Revelation)
2. The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Liturgy & Sacrament)
3. Life in Christ (Christian Morality)
4. Christian Prayer

### **1. Profession of Faith** (for correlation with Pupil Learning see Section 4, p.31-33)

Revelation: *Alive-O* contains much Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, teaching that the Bible is the Word of God, which is good in principle, but overall the treatment of Revelation is poor. It is unsatisfactory in relation to salvation history; Sacred Tradition; the role of the Church's Magisterium; the truth of Scripture; the unity of both Old and New Testaments in the context of salvation history; the difference between natural and supernatural revelation. Old Testament topics lack completeness, and are presented out of sequence with no sense of story. *Alive-O* acts with freedom to treat Scripture like plasticine or putty, which can be added to, taken from, or reshaped at will, often obscuring the Scripture original or presenting a different meaning, e.g. the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7) is presented 22 times but always given a meaning opposite to Scripture – the lost sheep is never likened to a repentant sinner, only physically lost, and far from repenting, the 'lost sheep' blames the 99 virtuous sheep for letting it get lost, whereupon the virtuous sheep repent of their 'sin'.

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<sup>81</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*. 284.

<sup>82</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999.

<sup>83</sup> 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, [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org). 8.2.2002.

The Trinity and God the Father: *Alive-O* stresses that God is good and loving and is creator of all things; aspects omitted are that there is only one God, and that God is transcendent, omnipotent and eternal. There is teaching that God is Father, but unclarity on the identity of God the Father, and confusion between God and God the Father. The Church teaches that the Trinity is the fundamental truth of Faith; in contrast *Alive-O*'s treatment of the Trinity is weak and comes only in Year 8, which could only give the impression that the Trinity is unimportant, maybe even irrelevant. In this *Alive-O* mirrors the approach of the '*Dutch Catechism*', in which the '*Trinity*' appears neither in Contents, sub-heading nor Index, and is only treated inadequately on page 499 of a 502 page book.

Jesus Christ: Jesus receives considerable attention, and most of the main events of his life are presented. Jesus is presented as healer, teacher, shepherd, and worker of miracles, who is sent by God. Jesus' mission is presented predominantly as to tell of God's love, and to teach by word and example how we should love God and others. *Alive-O* treatment is minimal on Jesus' identity as God the Son, Second Person of the Trinity, and his central role in salvation history as Messiah and Redeemer of the human race from sin through his death on the cross and his Second Coming as Judge at the end of time. Jesus comes across as a good human being, but not God.

Several of Jesus' teachings are included, some of which are well presented. Other teachings are poorly presented, with omissions, changes, and confusions, especially Jesus' parables.

The Holy Spirit: *Alive-O* includes many actions of the Holy Spirit: at Baptism and Confirmation; at Pentecost; and helping us to live like Jesus and be his witnesses in the world. The teaching is weak on the Holy Spirit as a distinct Divine Person, equal to the Father and Son. *Alive-O*'s presentations on the Holy Spirit tend to an understanding of the Spirit as a presence of God in material creation, not as a distinct divine Person. The lesson on the Holy Spirit himself is titled 'Earthed in the Spirit', focuses on the Spirit and human beings as connected to the earth, and is illustrated with a spider in her web with words parodying the Mass, essentially a New Age pantheist perspective<sup>84</sup>.

Creation: *Alive-O* teaches pupils that God is creator of human beings and the material world; human beings are created in the image of God. The wonder, beauty and diversity of God's visible creation are well expressed. Creation of angels and the human soul are omitted. Angels are mentioned but never explained, and the fall of the angels is omitted. Teaching on the Fall and original sin is weak, comes very late in the Programme, and is not connected with salvation history.

The Church: *Alive-O* brings out well the dimension of the Church as a unified body of people who love, support and care for each other, but the spiritual nature of the Church is weak. The image of the Church as the Body of Christ is presented, but Christ as Head of the Body is omitted.

Information on the Catholic Church is very limited. There is a simple presentation of the history of the Christianity through the ages, good in principle, but treatment of the Catholic Church is unduly restricted and negative. The coming of Christianity to Ireland through St Patrick is reasonably presented, including development of monasteries, but a serious omission is the extraordinary missionary activity of the monks in bringing the Christian faith back to Britain and Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire and invasions of pagan tribes.

Mary and the Saints: *Alive-O* covers the great events of the life of Mary, and teaches pupils to love her as a mother. *Alive-O* is weak on Mary's virginity; several illustrations invite an understanding that Mary was already pregnant at the time of the Annunciation, and had other children besides Jesus. The Hail Mary prayer is not explained nor linked to her key role in salvation history and significance of her 'yes'. There is no reference to approved apparitions of Mary and places of pilgrimage; no mention of Lourdes, Knock nor Fatima.

There are reasonable presentations on saints in general, on several individual Irish and other saints, but missionaries and martyrs are omitted. There is lack of distinction between the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls, which adds to the Programme's weak presentation on eschatology – the Last Things.

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<sup>84</sup> Could this be an unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit? Mt.12:31.

The Last Things (Eschatology): *Alive-O* covers purification in Purgatory after death, the joy of heaven, and that we can only cut ourselves off from heaven by rejecting God. The presentation is weak on the communion of saints and how our prayers, especially the sacrifice of the Mass, can lessen the suffering of souls undergoing purification in Purgatory. It is unsatisfactory that *Alive-O* omits that immediately after death the immortal soul will be judged by Christ, leading to heaven or hell, and that Jesus will come again at the end of time, his Second Coming, to judge the living and dead in a 'general judgement', when the bodies of the dead will rise and be reunited with their souls, and the material universe itself will be transformed. *Alive-O* could helpfully have included that Catholics celebrate funerals to pray for the person who has died, especially at the Eucharist when celebrated, and to comfort relatives and friends.

## **2. Celebration of the Christian Mystery** (correlation with Pupil Learning see Section 4, p.33-34)

Liturgy and Seasons of the Church: The Seasons of the Church Year are re-visited many times in *Alive-O*, going into greater depth and detail in parallel with the growing ability of the pupils to understand. *Alive-O* covers Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost, saying that the Church Year follows the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, which is good. However, it is not good that *Alive-O* omits to link the Liturgical Year with the full sweep of salvation history from Creation right through to the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of time. It is also unsatisfactory that minimal attention is given to Sunday, the Lord's Day, and its importance for the Church's liturgy.

Sacraments: It has been often said that primary school children in Ireland are over-sacramentalized, but under-evangelised. The truth is that the children are indeed under-evangelised, but they are also very poorly sacramentalized. *Alive-O* teaching on the Sacraments in general is very weak, depriving the Sacraments of meaning by omitting the Church's teaching on grace in general, and sacramental graces in particular. Further unsatisfactory omissions are: the essential nature of the sacraments; the seven sacraments were instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church to give grace, which is divine life won for us by the death and resurrection of Christ, and the sending of the Holy Spirit; each sacrament has a minister and an outward sign which signifies and makes efficaciously present, by the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, the grace proper to each sacrament; the ordained ministerial priesthood plays an important part in the sacraments.

Baptism: *Alive-O's* presentation of Baptism exemplifies the practice of omissions, imbalances and 'horizontalism' or unduly human-centred to the neglect of the spiritual. *Alive-O* emphasises Baptism as the ritual where the Christian community gathers to welcome a new member, but this is treated like the joining ritual of a human group. The spiritual effects of Baptism, which are the most important, are minimised or omitted altogether. Teaching on Baptism should be introduced earlier, during the years of preparation for First Penance and First Communion.

The rite of Baptism is presented to the pupils, but all parts of the rite are treated as of equal importance, which acts against understanding the true meaning of Baptism. Pupils should be, but are not, taught that the only essential part of the Baptism rite is immersing in water or pouring water on the person's head, while calling on God the Holy Trinity, saying 'I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'. The pupils should be taught that the other parts of the Rite of Baptism – oil of anointing, candle and white garment – add to the meaning and significance, but are not essential to the Sacrament.

It is very unsatisfactory that many important aspects of Baptism are not taught and properly explained, such as: Baptism confers graces, which come from the saving death of Christ on the cross, and it is by those graces that Baptism brings forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life as children of God the Father, and incorporation into the Church, the Body of Christ. Baptism also gives special graces of the Holy Spirit which empower the baptized to love and serve God, to grow in faith, hope and charity, and to live a good Christian life. Baptism places a spiritual mark or 'character' on the soul, which is why we can only be baptised once.

*Alive-O* should also teach, but doesn't, that at Baptism each person is given a Christian name, which is usually the name of a saint, who can be a model and example. *Alive-O* also omits that Baptism is usually given by the priest, but in emergency, any person can baptize.

Confirmation: *Alive-O* presents: the history of the Sacrament of Confirmation; renewal of Baptismal Promises; Confirmation names and sponsors; the rite of administration of the Sacrament by the Bishop, including the anointing with oil, laying on of hands, and the words spoken; gifts and fruit of the Spirit. The accompanying video has good presentations of the Blessing of the Oil of Chrism, and the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation itself.

However, it is unsatisfactory that there are significant omissions including the following: Confirmation completes the grace of Baptism. The Sacrament of Confirmation gives us graces of the Holy Spirit, which bind us with Christ and with the Church, and strengthen us to bear witness to Christ and to spread and defend the faith. Confirmation, like Baptism, puts a permanent spiritual mark on the soul, so that we can receive Confirmation only once. A candidate for Confirmation must have attained the age of reason, professed Christian faith, be in the state of grace, have the intention of receiving the sacrament, and be prepared to be a disciple and witness to Christ.

Eucharist and the Mass: *Alive-O* gives considerable attention to the Eucharist, which is good in principle, but *Alive-O's* teaching on the Eucharist is seriously unsatisfactory because there are significant omissions and confusions.

The Liturgy of the Mass is presented with a few different structures, which is confusing for pupils, and all of which vary from the structure presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pupils should be, but are not, taught the structure of the Mass in harmony with Church teaching, structured on the *Liturgy of the Word*, and the *Liturgy of the Eucharist*, with the key parts of each.

There is teaching on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, which is good, but unsatisfactory to omit the term 'transubstantiation' and its explanation, which best describes the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood, soul and divinity, of Christ.

*Alive-O's* emphasis is on the Mass as a shared meal, and on human attitudes and values. *Alive-O* also presents several para-liturgical Eucharist-like services in the classroom, in which pupils hold up their lunches with prayers similar to the Mass, and then eat their lunches – a kind of parody of the Eucharistic. *Alive-O* claims these para-liturgies will help pupils understand the Eucharist, but they are more likely to sow confusion and diminish the Eucharist.

It is utterly bizarre that *Alive-O* presents an illustrated story of a wicked witch and her magic bread-oven, which it claims will help the children to understand the meaning of the Eucharist.

*Alive-O* does not teach that the Mass is the sacrament of the sacrifice of the cross; that the same Jesus Christ, God the Son, who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the cross for our salvation is offered in an unbloody manner on the altar at Mass. This massive omission means that *Alive-O's* teaching on the Eucharist is not Catholic.

*Alive-O* does refer to priests presiding at Mass, but omits that it is only priests, who have validly received the Sacrament of Holy Orders, that can preside at the Eucharist and consecrate the bread and wine so that they become the Body and Blood of Christ.

Other important omissions from the Programme's teaching for pupils on the Eucharist are: 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. 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. The faithful are obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days. The Church encourages more frequent, even daily, attendance at Mass and reception of Holy Communion. The Church encourages visits to the Blessed Sacrament for prayer and adoration.

Penance: *Alive-O* presents the Rite of Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, focussing on Rite 2, with minimal attention to Rite 1. This is unsatisfactory because teaching should reflect the Church's preference, and give priority and comprehensive teaching on Rite 1.

*Alive-O* presents several non-sacramental 'Reconciliation Services' similar to Rite 2, inviting confusion and undermining the meaning of the Sacrament.

*Alive-O* teaches that the priest administers the Sacrament of Penance, but does not clarify that it is only an ordained priest through the grace he has received in the sacrament of Holy Orders who can forgive sins in the name of Christ. Also omitted is that the priest stands in the place of Christ, who is the one who grants forgiveness of sins through the merits of His sacrifice on the cross.

Other important omissions which render *Alive-O* teaching on Penance unacceptable are:

Before Penance we should examine our consciences to come to know our sins, reflecting on the Word of God, especially the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes.

In the Sacrament of Penance the main requirements of the penitent are,

- To have sincere repentance
- To confess sins to the priest
- To make reparation by carrying out the penance given by the priest, and making all reasonable efforts to repair any harm done to others by sins committed, e.g. return of stolen goods, restore reputation of someone slandered.

In Penance we are bound to confess all mortal sins that have not previously been confessed, which 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. In addition to forgiveness of sins, the graces of the Sacrament of Penance reconcile us with God and the Church, bring peace, give spiritual strength to live a good Christian life and to avoid sin.

The Church requires that we go to the sacrament of Penance at least once per year, but regular more frequent confession, even of venial sins only, is strongly recommended.

Anointing of the Sick: *Alive-O* describes the administration of the Sacrament, through which the Church expresses Jesus' care for those who are sick. While it is good to include participation of the community, it is not made clear that this participation, while desirable, is optional, and it is the priest (or bishop) who confers the Sacrament through the grace of Holy Orders, and not the Christian community as a whole.

Important omissions which render *Alive-O* teaching unsatisfactory are: the Sacrament has a special grace, which unites the sick person to the Passion of Christ, brings strength, peace, and courage to endure suffering in a Christian manner, brings forgiveness of sins if the person has been unable to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and may bring healing from the illness.

Marriage and Holy Orders are given special attention by the Church, calling them the '*Sacraments at the Service of Communion*', with a particular mission to serve and build up the People of God, but this is not reflected in *Alive-O*.

Holy Orders: *Alive-O* allots only one day in Year 8 to Holy Orders. One day out of *Alive-O Programme's* 1,260 days is seriously inadequate<sup>85</sup>, and it is also unacceptable that the teaching only comes in the last year of primary school. The Sacrament of Holy Orders should get significant attention and be introduced much earlier in the Programme when pupils are prepared for first reception of the Sacraments of Eucharist and Penance, because the Sacraments of Eucharist and Penance do not make sense in the absence of understanding of Holy Orders.

*Alive-O's* teaching on priests focuses on service, which is good as far as it goes, but the treatment is very much at a human level, and the spiritual meaning of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is seriously neglected. Therefore *Alive-O's* teaching is not authentically Catholic. In addition, *Alive-O's* treatment of priesthood throughout the *Programme* is inadequate, and diminishes the priest.

Important omissions from the *Alive-O's* teaching for pupils include the following:

The call to priesthood comes from God, and must be submitted to the judgement of the Church who will decide on suitability to be ordained. The Church is bound by the choice of Christ to ordain only men to the priesthood. The priest acts in the person of Christ our Saviour, the Head of the Church.

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<sup>85</sup> By way of comparison *Alive-O* has over 100 days (in 20 weeks of lessons), devoted entirely to the material world – water, food, the seasons.

Bishops and priests are normally not married, so they can give themselves entirely to God and the people they serve; celibacy is also an imitation of Christ, and of the Blessed Virgin.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders 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. 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 the Sacrament of Marriage. Ordination, like Baptism and Confirmation, can be received only once.

There are three degrees of the ordained ministry: bishop, priest and deacon. 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 the fullness of priestly ordination, including the sacramental power to ordain priests, deacons and other bishops, and to administer Confirmation. Deacons are ordained for tasks of service; permanent deacons are men who may be married.

Marriage: *Alive-O* gives one day to Marriage in Year 8, in the same week as the teaching on Holy Orders. This is scandalously inadequate.

Marriage is so important always, but especially in our time when marriage and family are under severe attack. *Alive-O's* short teaching on Marriage is not unreasonable, as far as it goes, but Marriage should receive much greater attention. In addition, teaching on marriage should be introduced earlier than the final year of primary school.

Significant omissions from *Alive-O* teaching on Marriage include the following:

Good illustrations of a wedding and of a family, which would make the lesson, and Marriage, more interesting and attractive. By performing his first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus gave a sign confirming Marriage as a Sacrament of the Church. *Alive-O* mentions 'special help' of the Sacrament – this should be made explicit as the graces particular to the Sacrament that help husband and wife to love and care for each other, and to bring each other closer to God on the way to eternal life. *Alive-O* does mention that the couple pass on the gift of life to their children, but more needs to be taught – that the couple must be open to life, and must love and educate their children in the Catholic Faith. Jesus' love for his Church is a model of love for all married couples. Catholic weddings are normally celebrated during a Nuptial Mass. The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Nazareth is a model for the Christian family home, which is rightly called "the domestic church." *Alive-O* teaches that a couple should love each other before having a baby, but does not teach that they should be married.

### **3. Life in Christ / Morality** (for correlation with Pupil Learning see Section 4, p.34)

In relation to morality in general, the Programme emphasises as foundation the natural goodness of children and development of human maturity. While accepting the innate goodness of human beings as created by God, it is essential to include the aspect of original sin. The focus should be on God and his goodness as the source and measure of morality. It is seriously unacceptable that *Alive-O* omits Original sin and its effects, which introduce an inclination to evil in everyone, including children, and we need the grace and mercy of God, which was won for us by the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

*Alive-O's* 'Act of Sorrow' has good elements but also deficiencies, and should be replaced by an 'Act of Contrition' in harmony with the tradition of the Church, e.g. from the Maynooth Catechism: 'O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest my sins above every other evil, because they displease Thee, my God, who for thy infinite goodness art so deserving of all my love; and I firmly resolve, by Thy holy grace, never more to offend Thee and to amend my life. Amen'. A similar excellent 'Act of Contrition' is in the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Ten Commandments / Moral Laws: *Alive-O* presents in a number of different versions of the Ten Commandments, giving principal attention to its own deficient version, which is bound to cause confusion in the minds of the pupils. Pupils should be taught to focus on and memorise the Church's standard version, as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is unsatisfactory that *Alive-O* gives only limited teaching on some of the Commandments. Simple teaching should be given, explaining the meaning of each and all of the Ten Commandments, in harmony with the approach adopted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

In relation to other moral laws, *Alive-O* helpfully presents the Beatitudes (Mt.5:1-12), but it is unacceptable that greater attention is given to *Alive-O*'s own alternative and inferior beatitudes-like list, '*Be Blessed*'. The focus should be on the Gospel version of the Beatitudes.

*Alive-O* presents a number of other guidelines and codes of behaviour, including pupils' own 'classroom codes'. It is unsatisfactory that *Alive-O* gives as much credibility to these other codes as to the law of God, not saying that God's law is superior to all human codes of morality.

Other Aspects: *Alive-O*'s use of 'little Beings' (these 'New Age' type objects are further commented on below under 'Pedagogical Aspects') in morality and prayer is confusing and potentially spiritually dangerous. In the current state of society it would be especially important to give good, sensitive and age-appropriate teaching on sexuality, in partnership with parents.<sup>86</sup> However, *Alive-O* teaches very little of the Church's vision on sexuality, but (in Teacher's Book only, unseen by parents), provides for detailed physical sex education, with colour posters of male and female reproductive organs, and boys and girls with their private parts exposed. This is highly unsatisfactory.

It is entirely unacceptable that *Alive-O* omits other very important elements in relation to morality that should be taught to primary school children. Significant omissions on morality include: Temptation, free will, the Christian understanding on feelings and emotions, conscience, virtue, what is sin (including mortal and venial sin), grace including sanctifying and actual graces, the authority of the Church's moral teaching.

#### **4. Christian Prayer** (for correlation with Pupil Learning see Section 4, p.34)

*Alive-O* generally provides for prayer in the lessons, including several great prayers of the Church (especially the Sign of the Cross, Glory Be to the Father, Our Father, Hail Mary), which is good in principle. However, it is unsatisfactory that *Alive-O* does not teach the meaning of these great prayers, nor is there emphasis on pupils memorising the prayers. This applies especially to the Our Father, which in contrast is given great prominence in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

*Alive-O* provides for symbols to be displayed during the prayer-times, which is reasonable in principle. However, it is unsatisfactory that in the great majority of prayer-times the candle is the only symbol used, and no explicitly Christian symbol is used, in particular no cross or crucifix, which should always be present. *Alive-O* does add other symbols for special occasions, but it is unsatisfactory that the great majority are secular in nature, not Christian.

*Alive-O*'s prayer times include many prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession, which is reasonable, but unsatisfactory that these prayers tend to be preponderantly 'horizontal'; the balance should be changed to focus more on spiritual matters. Pupils should also be taught about God's response to prayers of petition and intercession, explaining that God always hears our prayers and responds in the way he knows is best for us, which might not always be the way we would like.

*Alive-O*'s prayer times are predominantly *Alive-O*-written prayers, often lengthy, to be read out by the teacher with pupil responses, which vary from day to day. This is impractical because the prayers are only in the Teacher's Book, so pupils will not be able to make the responses. Also, this approach will not form the pupils in habits of regular prayer, which they could continue on their own.

*Alive-O* seeks to introduce pupils to meditation, which is reasonable in principle. However, it is very unsatisfactory to focus on a secular type of meditation, with techniques for achieving mental detachment with focus on self and material things. Little attention is given to meditative and contemplative prayer as taught by the Church, focusing on Christian matters so that one might

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<sup>86</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family. *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*. Oxford: Family Publications, 1996. 64,68,78,83,122,124-125.

conform one's life better to the way of the Lord, and experience silent communication with God. It is unsatisfactory in the extreme that some of the meditations focus on the children's secret Little Beings, which are New Age in nature, and potentially very dangerous.

*Alive-O's* prayer-times include more than a hundred classroom para-liturgical rituals, about half of which could be considered 'para-sacramental'. *Alive-O's* para-liturgies are unacceptable, more likely to confuse rather than educate pupils, because the Programme does not present any essential difference between these para-liturgies and the sacraments and liturgy of the Church.

It is also unacceptable that *Alive-O* omits other key elements on prayer, which should be taught to primary school Catholic pupils, including the following: Christian prayer is primarily Trinitarian; we normally pray in the Holy Spirit through Christ to the Father. We may also pray directly to the Father, Jesus or the Holy Spirit. The Christian family – the “domestic church” – is the first place for learning to pray, especially at family prayer times and going to the church as a family. We can overcome distractions in prayer by giving our hearts fully to God and persevering in prayer.

### IS ALIVE-O'S PEDAGOGY EFFECTIVE AND CATHOLIC?

The criteria are: Faithfulness to the Church's Pedagogy and Educational Effectiveness.

#### ***Alive-O* Pedagogy vs the Church's Pedagogy**

In Church documents the term 'pedagogy' means the overall teaching approach or strategy. The *General Directory for Catechesis* is the Catholic Church's principal guidance document on pedagogy, on how education in the Faith should be carried out.

The Church does not have a particular method for catechesis, but rather encourages a diversity of methods and methodologies. However, the *General Directory for Catechesis* does specify one particular pedagogy, the 'Pedagogy of God' as the source and model of the pedagogy of the faith<sup>87</sup>. The 'Pedagogy of God', based on transmission of Divine Revelation<sup>88</sup>, is Jesus' way of teaching, which was followed by the Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and continued to this day by the Church, the 'pedagogy of the Church'. The Pedagogy of God requires that salvation history is the overall structure for all Catholic Catechesis<sup>89</sup>.

*Alive-O* does not recognise the existence of the 'Pedagogy of God', and does not use salvation history as a structure for its teachings. Instead *Alive-O* presents a 'Process' with three steps:

1. *Focus* on particular experiences which are part of the pupils' lives;
2. *Explore/Reflect* on the experience and feelings, including the “Christian story” as it sheds light on their experience;
3. *Response* to the pupils' own lives and actions. This is an *anthropological-experiential* approach giving priority to human experience. It also reflects Thomas Groome's *Shared Christian Praxis*, which is based on Brazilian Marxist Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, through which Freire aimed to encourage communist revolution.<sup>90</sup> Building a Catholic catechism on the 'Pedagogy of God' is like building on a firm foundation of rock, but *Alive-O's* pedagogy is more like building on shifting sands, as in Jesus' parable of the house built on rock which withstood the storm, while the house built on sand collapsed. (Mt.7:24-27)

*Alive-O's* later Books do give greater attention to Scripture and divine Revelation, but the overall pedagogy remains focussed mainly on human experience. This is unacceptable for a Catholic programme. The *General Directory for Catechesis* has wise guidance on many aspects of methodology, including the role of human experience<sup>91</sup>. The *General Directory for Catechesis* affirms the importance of relating the truths of Faith to life, but does not make human experience the starting point and base for a pedagogy for Catholic catechesis<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis* 137-147

<sup>88</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 50.

<sup>89</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis* 108, 115.

<sup>90</sup> Maria O'Rourke, Head of Catechetics, Veritas Publications. *Getting the Most from Grow in Love*. Intercom, November 2018. 22.

<sup>91</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis* 148-162.

<sup>92</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 152-153.



## Learning Assessment

Learning Assessment is an essential component of any educational activity and has many benefits, including: motivation for memorisation; feedback to teachers and others on the effectiveness of the educational programme; input for future planning.<sup>93</sup> There is no provision in *Alive-O* for teachers to carry out learning assessment. Neither is there provision or encouragement for parish clergy and Diocesan Advisers to carry out learning assessment with pupils.

The Church strongly recommends memorization with understanding of key elements of Faith, as Pope St John Paul II wrote: '*The blossoms of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memoryless catechesis*'.<sup>94</sup> Learning Assessment can help verify that the necessary memorization and understanding are taking place.

Radical changes were made in the catechetical programmes in Ireland's Catholic primary and secondary schools, around the mid-1970s. The Church used to assess learning through Diocesan Inspectors and formal examinations, but this admirable practice was dropped after introduction of the new programmes; was this lack of professional competence, or deliberate concealing of the poor results of the new programmes? (For further information on Learning Assessment, see Section 4: *Alive-O's* Fruit – Knowledge & Action?).

## Education Resources:

*Alive-O* employs a comprehensive range of education resources. The principal materials employed are: for each Year there is a Pupil's Book, a Teacher's Book, a pupil's Workbook, a video, and an audiotape or CD with songs. Contained within these materials are: teachings, songs, hymns, stories, poems, illustrations, liturgies and para-liturgies, prayers, games, activities, discussions and drama. The role of the teacher is of course vital, but it is also true that good resources can be very helpful to the teacher, while poor resources can be a major hindrance.

A good Pupil's Book is a vital resource. It is educational best practice for the Pupil's Books to contain what the Pupils are to be taught, in a creative and learning-friendly manner. The Pupil's Book is enduring; a good Pupil's Book can be an invaluable reference, not just in its current year, but in future years. A good Pupil's Book also protects pupils from limitations in teacher competence. *Alive-O* Pupil's Books are very low on content, so pupils do not have a comprehensive and enduring reference to what they should be learning. It is also unsatisfactory for teachers, unduly increasing their responsibility and workload.

A good Pupil's Book could contribute significantly to a positive home-school-parish partnership. It could offer a fruitful shared experience for parents and children to learn together. This would be particularly important for today's generation of primary school parents, who were victims of the deficient and defective '*Religious Education*' programmes introduced to Ireland's Catholic schools from the mid-1970s. A good Pupil's Book could help parish clergy to contribute to the children's education in faith, which is the first of their three main tasks – teach, sanctify, govern.<sup>95</sup> However, *Alive-O's* content-starved Pupil's Books mean that parents and parish clergy will know little of what the children are being taught, working against a fruitful home-school-parish partnership.

A good Teacher's Book could be extremely helpful to the teacher and should focus on how the teaching is to be done, and typically would include: aims, programme structure, additional background reading and other resources for the teachers, learning activities, Learning Assessment instruments, advice on presentation, glossary and index, etc.

*Alive-O* Teacher's Books are complex, voluminous (3,200 pages in total), poorly structured, and contain multiples more material than teachers could use. At the same time, the Teacher's Books omit potentially helpful aspects, e.g. Learning Assessment instruments, glossary, index.

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<sup>93</sup> Éanna Johnson. *Learning Assessment in Catechesis*. Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference, Veritas Publications: Intercom, March 2019, p.28.

<sup>94</sup> Pope St John Paul II. *Catechesi Tradendae* 1979. 55; *General Directory for Catechesis*, 154.

<sup>95</sup> Code of Canon Law, 519, 528.

The great majority of the songs, hymns, stories, poems, illustrations, liturgies, prayers, games, activities, and lesson materials are specially written for and unique to *Alive-O*, and are likely to be unfamiliar to parents/grandparents/guardians and to parish clergy. *Alive-O* is essentially contained in the extensive Teacher's Books, which will rarely if ever be available to parents and priests, with little information in the Pupil's Books and Workbooks. Pupils are immersed in a unique *Alive-O* environment, which is foreign to home and parish. *Alive-O*'s structure gives control to the Programme's designers/writers, with teachers as their instruments, while marginalizing parents, parish clergy and others.

**'Little Beings':** A particularly disturbing resource in *Alive-O* is the use of 'little Beings', which are plasticene models which each child is required to make. The 'little Being' can be anything the child imagines, with a personality and name which is not to be disclosed to anyone, not even their parents nor teacher. Parents will not even be aware of the existence of 'little Beings', because they are kept in school and are not mentioned in the Pupil's Book. A 'little Being' could be harmless or malign, giving a dangerous opening for the sinister or even occult. Children are invited to place their 'little Beings' on their desks, pray in the presence of their 'little Beings', even hold the Being in their hands while going into deep meditation with altered mental consciousness when they are invited to talk to their 'little Being' and listen to what the 'little Being' is saying to them – spiritually dangerous.

### **Home, School and Parish Partnership:**

Parents have primary responsibility from God for education of their own children in Catholic faith<sup>96</sup>. The Church's bishops, assisted by their priests, have a divine mission and duty for educating in the Catholic faith, firstly in each Bishop's own Diocese, and collectively for the wider Church<sup>97</sup>.

Among the ways of advancing education, Catholic schools are the principal means of helping parents and the Church to fulfil their divinely appointed roles of educating the upcoming generation of Catholics in the Faith. The formation and education in the Catholic religion in any school is under the authority of the Church, to be supervised by the diocesan Bishop<sup>98</sup>. Catholic schools, therefore, derive their mission from the divinely appointed missions of parents and Church. The schools are to serve parents and Church, in a collaborative partnership between home, school and parish.

A consultation survey on the *Children of God series*, was carried out by Martin Kennedy in 1999, and the Report was published by Veritas under the title '*Islands Apart*'.<sup>99</sup> Martin Kennedy's Survey focused on the views of teachers, and to a lesser extent the views of parents, priests and pupils. The principal finding of the Survey was the huge disconnect between home, school and parish, which was expressed in the title: '*Islands Apart*'. As noted above, the *Alive-O Programme's* structure makes the Programme's designers/writers the masters through the schools, further disconnecting home, school and parish.

A proposal has been floated that sacramental preparation should be taken out of Catholic primary schools, and undertaken by parents and parish. This proposal misses the point, because the problem lies in the bad religion programmes in our Catholic schools for the past forty years, not where the programmes are taught. There is a crying need for high-quality authentic Catholic religion programmes to serve home, school and parish but the proposal unwisely contradicts the ideal of full home-school-parish collaboration. In practical terms the proposal would be disastrous – today's parents are victims of 40 years of bad religion programmes in Catholic schools, most therefore lack the capability to catechise their children, while parish clergy are ageing, reduced in numbers and over-worked, in no condition to take on the added considerable catechetical task. Finally, taking sacramental preparation out of the Catholic schools could be a first step in the *Share the Good News'* irrational plan to remove all Catholic catechesis from Catholic primary schools leaving only agnostic "*Religious Education*", under effective control of the secular State.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Code of Canon Law*. London: Collins Liturgical Publications 1983, 226, 793.

<sup>97</sup> *Code of Canon Law*: 773-777, 794.

<sup>98</sup> *Code of Canon Law*: 796, 804-806.

<sup>99</sup> Martin Kennedy. *Islands Apart – Report on the 'Children of God'*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2000.

<sup>100</sup> *Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. 145-152, 164.

#### 4. ALIVE-O's FRUIT – KNOWLEDGE & ACTION?

Section 3 above focussed on an in-depth study of the *Alive-O Programme* itself to see if its Content and Pedagogy (teaching strategy and methods) are authentically Catholic and appropriate for this great task of handing on the Faith to the 800,000 pupils that experienced *Alive-O*.

This Section 4 focuses on the other main way to assess *Alive-O*, which is to focus on the results, the outcomes – what have pupils actually learned and what actions follow on from this learning. Jesus said that we can know if a tree is good or bad by its fruits; a good tree will produce good fruits, a bad tree will produce bad fruits.<sup>101</sup> A well-known folk saying expresses the same idea this way – ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’.

To find out what pupils had learned of the Catholic Faith after completing the eight years of the *Alive-O Programme* Dr Johnson carried out an extensive Learning Assessment Survey of pupil knowledge, the results of which are linked to the assessment of *Alive-O* itself presented in Section 3 above. Details of the Learning Assessment Survey are given on p.29-34, & Appendix B,p.38-45. .

#### HOW HAVE PUPILS PUT INTO ACTION WHAT THEY LEARNED FROM ALIVE-O?

Knowledge and action are intimately linked, but it is more difficult to assess the actions than assessing the knowledge outcome through a Learning Assessment Survey. Other factors come into play, most especially the other catechetical programmes in Ireland's Catholic schools, primary and secondary, over the past forty years, where we have seen a succession of unsatisfactory programmes in our primary schools, and no Church-provided Catholic programme in our secondary schools. Nevertheless, connections can be made between *Alive-O* and various outcomes.

The eight years of Irish primary schooling at one time provided the foundation for life-long participation in the Church for most Catholics in Ireland. However, in recent decades, it is common to see babies brought to the church for Baptism, they appear again for First Holy Communion and Confirmation, after which they only return for special occasions, like weddings and funerals. Sunday Mass attendances are reduced and ageing, with virtual absence of young people – a childless congregation is a dying congregation and a childless church does not have a future.<sup>102</sup>

In 2015 the Republic of Ireland voted in a Referendum to approve same-sex ‘marriage’ by a 62% majority – ‘graduates’ of the *Alive-O Programme* fitted into the 18-24 age-group voting in that Referendum. Young people were prominent in campaigning for a YES vote and were much to the fore in celebrating the result. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin stated that the Church needed a "reality check", adding, ‘I ask myself, most of these young people who voted YES are products of our Catholic school system for 14 years. I'm saying there's a big challenge there to see how we get across the message of the Church’.

The Barna Research Group Report, *Finding Faith in Ireland*,<sup>103</sup> was based on a study carried out in the Republic of Ireland in 2017 into the faith and practice of young people 14-25 years old. Barna's selected age-group would have included *Alive-O* ‘graduates’, who were 13-26 years old in 2017. Barna found Irish youth to be lost and curious, with a muddled understanding of core Christian teachings, struggling to anchor their sense of morality at all, let alone to God or Church teachings. Barna found high levels of ‘nominal’ Christianity and low Church attendance, with Catholics faring worse than other Christians. Young Irish people's views on Jesus differed little from those in nearby countries. The great majority of young people included in Barna's research were Catholics who had all come through the *Alive-O Programme*, and then gone on to 6 years in Catholic secondary schools where there was no Catholic religion programme.

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<sup>101</sup> *Matthew 7:17*

<sup>102</sup> Fr Chris Hayden. *Editorial, Intercom*. November 2018.

<sup>103</sup> *Finding Faith in Ireland – the Shifting Spiritual Landscape of Teens & Young Adults in the Republic of Ireland*. Barna Research Group, in partnership with Christ in Youth. 2017. See [www.barna.com:dom@alphaireland.org](http://www.barna.com:dom@alphaireland.org)

Further evidence of the poor state of Faith of Ireland’s young Catholics was provided in the 2018 Referendum on abortion, in which young people voted overwhelmingly YES to remove protection for the unborn from Ireland’s Constitution. The younger the age cohort (i.e. the more recent the experience of 14 years of Catholic schooling) the higher was the YES vote.<sup>104</sup> The 18-24 year-olds, the first group to experience the full *Alive-O Programme*, voted 88% YES to abortion, which is a further indication of bad fruit coming from *Alive-O*.

It is disturbing that after the Referendum an influential member of the *Alive-O* leadership team commented on the responsibility of all Catholics to respect the Referendum result and to implement the ensuing abortion legislation, while the opinions of those who voted for and against abortion are equally acceptable and like the differences existing between the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity.<sup>105</sup>

It is accepted that school catechesis is by no means the only factor influencing voting behaviour on the issue of abortion. Nevertheless, the quality of the catechesis received over 14 years of Catholic schooling must surely influence one’s sense of right and wrong, and therefore be significant when voting on a moral issue like abortion. The tables below correlate voting behaviour by age-group in the Abortion Referendum with school catechesis received.

### Catechesis Programmes in Irish Catholic schools vs. Vote in Abortion Referendum,

Voting record taken from the RTE / Behaviour & Attitudes Exit Poll. 36<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

Age group	Voted YES to abortion, 2018	Primary school catechesis received	Secondary school catechesis received	Catechesis evaluation
18-24	88%	<i>Alive-O Programme</i>	State agnostic “ <i>Religious Education</i> ” 22%, no programme 78%	Poorest.
25-34	85%	Most <i>Children of God</i> / some <i>Alive-O</i>	State agnostic “ <i>Religious Education</i> ” programme / No Programme	Poorer
35-49	73%	<i>Children of God</i>	No Programme	Poor
50-64	64%	‘ <i>Penny Catechism</i> ’ / <i>Children of God</i>	Catholic programme / No Programme.	Teaching Faith ‘going off rails’.
65 & over	41%	Pre-Vatican II programme, based on ‘ <i>Maynooth Catechism</i> ’ (‘ <i>Penny Catechism</i> ’).	Good Catholic pre-Vatican II programme	Good catechesis, (needing renewal).

<sup>104</sup>RTE / Behaviour & Attitudes Exit Poll, 36<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

<sup>105</sup> *Mgr Dermot A Lane*. Homily at 11.30am Mass, Trinity Sunday, 27 May 2018, Balally Parish, Dublin Archdiocese. Source: Balally Parish website.

## Catholic School Religion Programmes in Ireland

<i>Primary school programmes</i>	<i>Secondary school programmes</i>
<u>1996-to date:</u> <i>Alive-O Programme</i> , which intensifies human-centred <i>anthropological-experiential</i> approach. Very poor. (Phased out, replacement completed by new <i>Grow in Love series</i> , Sept. 2019).	<u>2000 to date:</u> Adoption of State (ROI) agnostic “Religious Education” programmes: Junior Certificate 2000. Leaving Cert 2003. Syllabi agnostic (all religions and non-religious options of equal value), constructively anti-Catholic, because nothing Catholic, existence of Catholic Church not even recognised. Uptake failure: 43% of pupils take “Religious Education” in Junior Cert, only 2% in Leaving Certificate.
<u>1976-1996:</u> <i>Children of God</i> series. Based on human-centred <i>anthropological-experiential</i> approach. Falls short of authentic Catholic teaching, poor.	<u>1975-2000:</u> No catechesis programme provided by the Church. Emphasis on un-structured classroom discussions. Schools/teachers do whatever they choose. No exams. Very poor.
<u>Up to 1976:</u> <i>doctrinal/devotional</i> model. Content based on the Catechism of the Council of Trent, 1566. Text the Maynooth Catechism (the “ <i>Penny Catechism</i> ”).	<u>Up to 1975ish:</u> Good programme with doctrine, apologetics, liturgy/sacrament, and Scripture. Diocesan Inspectors and written exams.

### PUPIL KNOWLEDGE OF CATHOLIC FAITH AFTER ALIVE-O?

#### **Learning Assessment Survey of Faith Knowledge after *Alive-O***

The process of evaluating the outcomes of an educational endeavor is known as ‘Learning Assessment’, which is accepted by educationalists as an essential component. A cyclical process of teaching, learning, assessment, and planning future actions is essential to ensure quality in all spheres of education.

The Irish Government Department of Education and Skills attaches great importance to Learning Assessment in Primary Schools.<sup>106</sup> Two complementary approaches are proposed: *Assessment **for** Learning*, which happens between teacher and pupil in the classroom, and *Assessment **of** Learning*, using more formal approaches, including tests and exercises, giving feedback to teachers, school management, parents, and other relevant parties. (The *Catholic Primary RE Curriculum*<sup>107</sup> recognizes only ‘*Assessment **for** Learning*’, that is, learning assessment between teacher and pupils, but not *Assessment **of** Learning*, which gives feedback to other parties).

The Church strongly recommends memorization and understanding of key elements of Faith, as Pope St John Paul II wrote: ‘*The blossoms of faith and piety do not grow in the desert places of a memoryless catechesis*’.<sup>108</sup> Particular attention should be paid to the principal formulae of faith (e.g. *Creed, Ten Commandments, Our Father*), which should also be explained, taken in and gradually understood. Learning Assessment can help verify that the necessary memorization and understanding are taking place.

<sup>106</sup> *Primary School Curriculum - Introduction*. 1999. *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum – Guidelines for Schools*, NCCA, 2007.

<sup>107</sup> Irish Episcopal Conference. *Catholic Preschool & Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*, 188.

<sup>108</sup> Pope St John Paul II. *Catechesi Tradendae – On Catechesis in Our Time*, 1979. 55; *General Directory for Catechesis*, 154.

No provision for learning assessment was built into the *Alive-O Programme*. Considering the vital importance of Learning Assessment to the integrity of his research, Dr Johnson, as a parallel initiative carried out, in 2007 and 2018, a nationwide Survey of the Religious Knowledge of pupils after they had completed the *Alive-O Programme*. This was the first and only learning assessment survey of its kind since the introduction of new primary school programmes (*Children of God series* and the *Alive-O Programme*) in the mid-1970s.

All pupils in the Survey were in the First Year class in secondary school, where their religious knowledge would have derived from their eight years in primary school with the *Alive-O Programme*. The 15 participating secondary schools were of various types, large and small, in both urban and provincial areas, situated in all four Ecclesiastical Provinces – Armagh, Dublin, Cashel and Tuam – drawing pupils from approximately 70 primary schools.<sup>109</sup> Almost 900 pupils participated in the Survey, reasonably balanced between girls and boys.

A Questionnaire was prepared as the survey instrument. The question types were multiple-choice, complete the blanks, and questions requiring short definite answers. These question types were chosen as the most satisfactory way of assessing pupils' religious knowledge and understanding, while maintaining interest to encourage pupils to apply themselves to the questionnaire. The questions covered a broad range of aspects of faith, at a basic level appropriate for the pupils at their age and stage of education, for completion within a normal class period. The Survey questions were substantially the same in both 2007 and 2018, with just a few amendments. There was an overall dis-improvement of about ten percent in 2018, but the pattern of responses was essentially the same. The surveys were administered by the school's own staff, usually the religion teacher.

Strict confidentiality was maintained, essential for Surveys of this nature. All questionnaires were anonymous. The identities of participating schools are also confidential. The results of each school are returned to the school to help RE teachers in their work, and kept confidential to that school alone. The overall results of the Survey have been made public, to provide feedback to the Church and all those interested in Catholic catechesis of our young people.

Sincere thanks to are due all who participated or helped in the Learning Assessment Surveys of Pupil Religious Knowledge: pupils, teachers, chaplains, school management, diocesan advisory personnel and those who assisted in marking of the survey questionnaires.

## **Overall Conclusions of Religious Knowledge Survey**

The Learning Assessment Survey revealed alarming defects and deficiencies in Catholic Religious Knowledge of pupils who had completed the *Alive-O Programme* across the full spectrum of Catholic Faith – Scripture, doctrine, sacraments, morality, and prayer. The questions all concern basics of Catholic Faith, at a level appropriate for pupils going into secondary school at age 12/13 years old. An acceptable level of correct responses should be 80%, or over <sup>110</sup>. The actual average level of correct responses is only 34%, dropping closer to 20% for a set of twenty questions most fundamental to Catholic Faith.

Serious ignorance of the basics of the Faith means that the great majority of pupils could only be nominally Christian, at best, because they just don't know the real Jesus Christ. Could one reasonably expect pupils to love, believe and stay with a Faith and Church about which they have only a confused and impoverished knowledge? Withholding the fullness of the truth, goodness and beauty of the Faith is spiritual abuse of Catholic children, and a betrayal of their parents' trust.

A key issue is the degree to which pupil learning is influenced by the *Alive-O Religion Programme* itself, in comparison with the influence of other factors.

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<sup>109</sup> *Irish Catholic Directories 2007 & 2017*. Statistics.

<sup>110</sup> Reasonable expectation of a correct level of responses of 80% or higher is confirmed by the achievement of this figure in several areas where teaching in the *Alive-O Programme* is good, i.e. Q.3-2 Bethlehem, Q.3-4 Apostles, Q.4-5 St Brigid, Q.5-1 Advent. A similar level of correct response is also achieved in naming the Pope, presumably mentioned in class and seen in the news.

Teachers are a very important factor for any subject in the primary school curriculum. However, teachers suffer from 'curriculum-overload', and are under significant pressure to cover all subjects in the primary curriculum, and are therefore likely to rely on the programmes provided for each subject, including religion.

Parents can be another significant factor, but most parents of today's pupils did not have good Catholic catechetical programmes in primary and secondary school, and so will probably be lacking in knowledge of the faith. Also, Irish parents have traditionally placed unquestioning trust in Catholic schools to teach authentic Catholic faith to their children – parents are generally unaware that this once-justified trust has not been so for over forty years. Visits of parish clergy are another factor to be considered. However, clergy shortages cause considerable time pressures, curtailing classroom visits. Lack of knowledge of what is in the *Alive-O programme* will limit the influence of parents and clergy.

The wider society and culture can also be an influence. Indications are that Irish society has become more secularised in the past forty years; the collapse of Catholic school education in Faith must have contributed substantially to the growing secularisation of society in general.

The Religious Knowledge of pupils, strengths and weaknesses, correlate significantly with the *Alive-O Programme* itself, which was found in Dr Johnson's PhD research to be seriously defective and deficient in theological content, while its pedagogy (teaching strategy and methodology) departs from good educational practice and the Church's pedagogical norms, most particularly, *Alive-O* embraces an *anthropological-experiential* approach instead of the 'pedagogy of God' (Jesus' way of teaching). This points to the *Alive-O Programme* itself as the major influence on pupil learning.

*We have sown the wind, now we reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7).*

## Findings of Religious Knowledge Survey

(The detailed Responses to the Survey Questionnaires are given in Appendix B, pages 38-45).

The Findings are grouped under four headings, in line with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>111</sup>, and correlate with the Analysis of the Content of the *Alive-O Programme* given in Section 3, pages 17-24 above.

1. The Profession of Faith (based on the Creeds / Divine Revelation)
2. The Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Liturgy & Sacrament)
3. Life in Christ (Christian Morality)
4. Christian Prayer

Relevant Survey Question numbers are given in brackets, e.g. (Q.2-5).

### 1. Profession of Faith (for correlation with Analysis of *Alive-O* Content, see Sect.3 p.17-19)

Divine Revelation: Scripture and Tradition comprise Divine Revelation, which is the principal source for Catholic catechesis. It is good in principle that *Alive-O* includes much Scripture, but the treatment of Scripture is particularly poor

It is unsatisfactory that less than half of pupils believe that the whole Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is therefore the word of God (Q.1-4). It is also unsatisfactory that only 41% of pupils correctly identified Joseph (son of Jacob), whose fascinating story is one of the best known and loved in the Old Testament (Q.1-1).

Pupils show a less than satisfactory knowledge of the Gospels with only a little over half able to name all four Gospels and one-third unable to name any Gospel at all (Q.1-6). Some familiarity with the Gospels is indicated by correct recognition of Apostles by 50-80% of pupils (Q3-4).

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<sup>111</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, 1999.

Awareness of the rest of the New Testament is poor, with only 10% able to name two other books of the New Testament (Q.1.6). Neither is knowledge of the Acts of the Apostles satisfactory; only a third know what is in Acts (Q.1-3), only 21% could correctly identify St Paul (Q.1-2), and just half could identify St Stephen, the first martyr (Q.4.4). On the other hand, pupils displayed a reasonable understanding of Sacred Tradition with 60% choosing the correct option (Q.1-5).

Overall, the responses indicate an unsatisfactory knowledge of Scripture, which correlates with *Alive-O's* poor treatment of Scripture.

The Apostles' Creed: This Creed is so called because it is a faithful summary of the apostles' faith. Primary school pupils should be taught to memorise the Creed, and know the basic meaning of each of the Creed's statements. The Survey revealed (Q.2-7) a seriously unsatisfactory knowledge of the basic truths of Christian faith, with an average completion rate of only 26% of the statements of the Creed, while less than 10% of pupils were able to complete all statements and nearly 30% were unable to complete any statements at all. This correlates with the *Alive-O Programme*, which gives little attention to knowing and understanding the basic truths of faith as expressed in the Apostles' Creed.

The Blessed Trinity: The Survey reveals serious deficits and confusion in pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Trinity. Only 27% are able to even name the Trinity (Q.2-6). Less than half of pupils choose a correct description of the Trinity (Q.2-1), while as many pupils opt for clearly heretical understandings of the Trinity. The majority of pupils opt for descriptions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit as not divine (Q.3-3 & Q.2-4).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 234 tells us that the Blessed Trinity is the most important truth of Christian faith, the foundation on which all other truths of the Faith are built in the '*hierarchy of truths*'. If the foundation is unsound, then the whole building will be in danger of collapse, and instead of a '*hierarchy of truths*' we can expect a '*hierarchy of errors*'. The Survey results indicate that the great majority of pupils have confused and heretical notions of the Blessed Trinity, correlating with *Alive-O's* poor treatment of the Trinity.

Jesus Christ: The Survey indicates pupils' familiarity with Jesus Christ's existence, with 85% knowing that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Q.3-2), 90% knowing that Advent is the time of preparation for Jesus' birth at Christmas (Q.5-1), and 76% being able to name at least one of Jesus' miracles (Q.3-5). It is good that over half write of something important that Jesus did for us, but serious that only 10% mention Jesus' death to redeem us from sin (Q.3-6) – *Alive-O* is by no means clear on the sacrificial and salvific nature of Jesus' death on the cross. Only a minority of one third opt for Jesus as divine (Q.3-3), while two-thirds opt for Jesus as no more than a great human being.

The Survey answers indicate that most pupils are familiar with Jesus and know many good things about him. However, the answers also indicate that the great majority of pupils lack the essential Christian understanding of Jesus as both human and divine, our God and Saviour, a person who is more than an exceptionally good human being. This correlates with deficiencies in *Alive-O's* presentation of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit: Only 20% opt for a correct description of the Holy Spirit as a divine person of the Trinity (Q.2-4), while 80% opt for the Holy Spirit as no more than a loving or godly presence. Less than half knew that Pentecost celebrates the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Q.2-5).

Creation: The Survey indicates poor pupil knowledge of God's spiritual invisible creation, with only a quarter of pupils choosing the correct option on the nature of angels (Q.2-3). The great majority of pupils, 67%, choose the option that angels are people who have died that come back to earth – probably influenced by popular TV programmes and movies. One third of pupils choose the correct option of Satan as a fallen angel (Q.3-1), but most pupils, 59%, choose the incorrect, though popular, concept of the devil as only a symbol of evil, not a real personal spiritual being.

This correlates with the *Alive-O programme*, in which angels are included, but there is no teaching on what angels actually are, nor illustrations of angels (even though children love drawing angels). *Alive-O* does not teach pupils about the Devil, Satan.



The Church: The Survey responses reveal pupil ambivalence in relation to the Catholic Church.

It is somewhat encouraging that two-thirds of pupils opt for Church teaching as the best way to understand the truth about God, but still unsatisfactory that one-third opt to rely on other religions and their own experience (Q2-2). It is of serious concern that these preferences are reversed when it comes to morality – only one-third opt to be guided by the Church, while almost half opt to depend on other views and on themselves (Q.6-1). The situation is even more problematic in relation to sexuality, with just 11% agreeing that Church teaching is completely true, while 70% find Church teachings mostly, partly or not at all true (Q.6-2).

It is reasonably encouraging that in relation to the principal mission of the Church over half choose the correct option of evangelisation, to spread the Gospel so people will become Christian. There is also some encouragement in 40% opting for caring for the poor and teaching people to love one another, because these are part of the Church's mission, but there is the danger that over-emphasis on humanitarian work could detract from the primary nature of the Church as the Body of Christ.

The high level of correct responses on the identity of the Pope, 80% or more, are very encouraging (Q.4-2). That only about one-third of pupils know what Diocese they are in and who is their Bishop indicates scope for greater Episcopal involvement and/or communication (Q.4.8).

Mary and the Saints: It is disappointing that only 23% could identify the *Annunciation* as the event when Mary consented to be the mother of Jesus (Q.4.3). The 80% correct response to the question on St Brigid is most encouraging (Q.4.5).

The Last Things (eschatology): Q.4-7 on what happens to people after they die indicates poor pupil understanding of the Last Things, with only one-third opting for the Church's belief in judgment, heaven and hell, while another third choose the comfortable, but erroneous, idea that everyone achieves happiness with God after death, no matter what. It seems extraordinary that 21% opt for reincarnation! The near total ignorance of the Communion of Saints is gravely disturbing (Q.4-9).

The responses to these two questions point to inadequate pupil understanding of the Catholic vision on the Last Things (eternal life, death, judgment, heaven, purgatory, hell), which correlates with *Alive-O's* very poor treatment of the Last Things.

## **2. Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Liturgy & Sacrament).**

(for correlation with Analysis of *Alive-O* Content, see Sect.3 p.19-22)

Liturgy and Seasons of the Church: It is most encouraging that 90% identified Advent as the time of preparation for Jesus' birth at Christmas (Q.5-1). However, it is unsatisfactory that a minority of 43% knew that Pentecost celebrates the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Q.2-5), and a smaller minority of 23% correctly understood the meaning of the Annunciation (Q.4-3).

Sacraments: It has been stated that pupils in Ireland's Catholic primary schools are '*over-sacramentalised*', but this is not so. The *Alive-O Programme* does give significant time and attention to preparation for the Sacraments, but careful analysis shows that the treatment of the Sacraments is both deficient and defective. As a result Catholic primary school pupils are gravely '*under-sacramentalised*', which is reflected in this Survey.

Only 2% of pupils can give a satisfactory answer as to what is a Sacrament; only a quarter of pupils can name all seven Sacraments, while almost 60% are unable to name any Sacrament (Q.5-5).

Eucharist and the Mass: On the Sacrament of the Eucharist, half of pupils correctly opt for Jesus' real body and blood under appearance of bread and wine, while a quarter incorrectly choose the 'spirit of Jesus in the blessed bread' (Q.5-3).

In relation to a Catholic understanding of the Mass, a significant 42% know the Mass to be an occasion and place for prayer, but it is very problematic that well under 10% know the essentials – Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, hearing the Word of God in Scripture and receiving Jesus in the Eucharist – while almost half have no answer at all (Q.5-6). It is nevertheless encouraging that two-thirds opt for the correct obligation of Catholics to attend Mass (Q.5-2).

Penance: On the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance/Confession, it is highly unsatisfactory that only a quarter of pupils can name Reconciliation as one of the Sacraments (Q.5-5), and less than 10% of pupils can make a reasonable attempt at the main things to do in order to make the Sacrament properly (Q.6-5).

Holy Orders: In relation to the Sacrament of Holy Orders much less than 10% of pupils can give a reasonable answer to the question on the spiritual powers given to priests by the Sacrament, while three-quarters of pupils cannot give any answer at all (Q.5.8). On the question of ordination of women to the priesthood, only a quarter of pupils opt for the Church’s position that she has no power from God to ordain women (Q.5-4). *Alive-O* is very poor on teaching about Catholic priesthood, with only one day in whole eight years of the *Programme* given to the Sacrament of Holy Orders, in which the priest is presented only as a dedicated serving Christian, with no special spiritual powers from the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

### **3. Life in Christ (Christian Morality)** (for correlation with *Alive-O* Content, see Sect.3 p.22-23)

The Ten Commandments (Decalogue): The Survey addresses pupils’ knowledge of the Ten Commandments, asking them to complete each of the Commandments. The responses indicate very poor knowledge of the Commandments, with an average completion of only 24%, while almost half of pupils could make no response at all (Q.6-3). Only 29% of pupils showed awareness of the Commandment – ‘You shall not kill’. Could this have contributed to the 2018 Referendum vote of 88% for abortion by 18-24 year olds, the first *Alive-O* ‘graduate’ group?

*Alive-O* does include the Church’s standard formulation of the Ten Commandments, but then confuses matters by giving greater prominence to two inferior *Alive-O*-written versions of the Ten Commandments. To add to the confusion, *Alive-O* leads pupils to write their own version of the Ten Commandments, with no suggestion that God’s version might be better than their own. *Alive-O* does not follow the Church’s way of developing and explaining the meaning of each Commandment.

Other Aspects: It is of serious concern that only one-third opt to be guided by the Church on morality, while almost half opt to depend on other views and on themselves (Q.6-1). The situation is even more problematic in relation to sexuality, with just 11% agreeing that Church teaching is completely true, while 70% find Church teachings mostly, partly or not at all true (Q.6-2).

Only 12% of pupils indicate a correct understanding of conscience, with another 8% partly correct, while 80% have a wrong idea or do not answer (Q.6.4).

### **4. Christian Prayer** (for correlation with Analysis of *Alive-O* Content, see Sect.3 p.23-24)

The Lord’s Prayer / Our Father: The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives great prominence to the Lord’s Prayer, describing it as the fundamental Christian prayer and a summary of the whole Gospel, and developing the meaning of each of its seven petitions. Question 5-7 of the Survey asks pupils to write the Our Father. Given the great importance the Church places on the Our Father and the simplicity of the prayer, one should expect correct responses close to 100%. It is therefore disappointing that completion of the parts of the Lord’s Prayer is just 63%, with 20% not responding at all – this does indicate that the majority of pupils have some familiarity with the Lord’s Prayer, but falling short of the thorough knowledge to be expected in the Church’s catechesis on prayer.

## 5. ALIVE-O's ENDURING LEGACY

The *Alive-O Programme*, first introduced in 1996, has been fully phased out in 2019. However, the Legacy of *Alive-O* lives on in its 800,000 'graduates' or 'survivors', who are now 13 to 28 years old.

Section 3 of this Review has shown that *Alive-O* was an unacceptable programme, failing seriously in teaching Catholic Faith. *Alive-O* was a confusing mishmash of authentic, deficient and defective elements, and departed significantly from the Church's pedagogy (teaching strategy and methods). In particular, *Alive-O's* sacramental preparation was extremely poor.

Section 4 of this Review showed that the great majority of *Alive-O's* graduates / survivors finished after eight years with a confused, deficient and defective knowledge of Catholic Faith, and most do not return to church after receiving the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Confirmation.

Most *Alive-O* graduates / survivors go on to Catholic secondary schools, where the Church has provided no Catholic catechetical programme, only an irrational recommendation to follow the secular State examinations in an agnostic type of "*Religious Education*". Only a minority of pupils take the State "*Religious Education*" exams; information is lacking on what Catholic Faith education, if any, is received by other pupils.

Indications are that the deficiencies in *Alive-O* are not made good in Catholic secondary schools. The Barna Research Report found in 2017 that 14-25 year-olds in the Republic of Ireland (*Alive-O* graduates / survivors were then aged 13-26) were lost and curious, with a muddled understanding of core Christian teachings, shaky sense of morality, and high levels of 'nominal' Christianity.

This problematic state of Faith of the 800,000 graduates / survivors, currently aged 13-28, is *Alive-O's* Legacy for the rest of their lives, well into this 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ripples of *Alive-O's* Legacy will go much further, affecting others whose lives are touched by the graduates / survivors, especially families and children, even into the 22<sup>nd</sup> century.

What can be done? Superb resources for Catholic catechesis are available – primarily the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the *General Directory for Catechesis*.

Adult catechesis is obviously a way of seeking to make good the deficiencies in Faith left by *Alive-O*. However, this is very challenging. The 'inoculation effect' can kick in – when people are 'inoculated' with a defective view of Catholic faith, it can make them immune to the real thing. Preaching from the pulpit needs revitalisation – the Vatican's *Homiletic Directory* is good and should be helpful. The movements and Catholic associations are planting many green shoots of spiritual renewal.

Reform and renewal of Faith education in Catholic schools is a priority. Secondary schools should discontinue following the State's agnostic, constructively anti-Catholic, programme, to be replaced by a genuine Catholic programme, if necessary sourced from another country. It is good that the new *Grow in Love* series in Catholic primary schools is an improvement over *Alive-O*. It is also good that *Grow in Love* is catechesis, going against the unacceptable recommendation of *Share the Good News* (SGN 145-152,164,166) that there should be no catechesis in Catholic schools, primary or secondary, but only agnostic "*Religious Education*". However, a preliminary review reveals limitations in *Grow in Love*, rendering it short of satisfactory. Individual Bishops are personally responsible to God and their people, so they should not feel constrained by collective positions, but free to introduce religion programmes they discern as right for their own Dioceses.

Catholic parents/grandparents and laity in general need to take more initiative and responsibility for educating themselves in Faith and passing the Faith on to others. The Church's vision is for a dynamic collaboration between home, school and parish. Few parents can handle the onerous task of complete home-schooling, but they should see themselves as home-schoolers in the Faith, in collaboration with school and parish. However, parents have primary responsibility for their own children, so parents must be prepared to go it alone if school and parish are falling short.

Absolutely essential is Prayer. We can do nothing in our own human strength, we must rely on the grace and guidance of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Vision of Knock could serve as an inspirational Icon – centred on Jesus, saving Lamb in the Eucharist, the protecting hosts of angels, the Family of Mary and Joseph, in union with the Church in the person of John as Bishop.

## APPENDIX A: Criteria for Authentic Catholic Catechisms.

Grateful appreciation is due to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for their excellent and comprehensive, *Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, prepared by the Office for the Catechism, USCCB.<sup>112</sup> The Protocol has been particularly helpful in drawing up the following criteria, which have been used in assessing the *Alive-O Programme's* authenticity as a Catholic catechism.

In relation to Content of the Faith the key criteria are:

- ✓ Authenticity
- ✓ Completeness

### Authenticity

The following specific elements are relevant to *authenticity*:

- The content should be in perfect harmony with the CCC, and there should be nothing contradictory to Church teaching as expressed in the CCC.
- The presentation should be clear and straightforward, avoiding ambiguity, confusion, evasion, and obfuscation.
- While using language that is understandable by the pupils at the different age-levels, priority should be given as far as possible to expression of a common language of faith within the Church, in preference to using 'language' (to include songs, images, prayers, devotional practices) that is alien to the wider Church, especially the pupils' parents, grandparents and parish clergy.
- Sometimes it is appropriate to re-word Scripture and Church teaching in order to make it more readily understandable to young pupils. However, great care must be taken that any re-wording does not change, distort or confuse key truths of faith, or compromise the integrity of Scripture.
- Promotion of a healthy and vital Catholic identity in such a way that pupils are encouraged to hear the message clearly, live it with conviction and share it courageously with others.
- The structure of the Programme should reflect salvation history, and the 'four pillars' of the CCC – creed, liturgy/sacrament, life in Christ/morality, and prayer.<sup>113</sup>
- A Trinitarian and Christological framework should permeate the entire programme, expressing the creative and saving initiative of God the Father, the salvific mission of God the Son and the sanctifying role of God the Holy Spirit.
- The Programme should present the Christian mystery in an organic way, respecting the *hierarchy of truths of the faith*.<sup>114</sup>
- Manifestly rooted in Sacred Scripture, because 'ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'<sup>115</sup>.
- May include teaching on other Christian churches / ecclesial communions, and other religions, but always preceded by an appropriate grounding in Catholic faith, age-sensitive and presented from a Catholic perspective.

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<sup>112</sup> 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, [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org). 8.2.2002. This excellent document has been helpful in drawing up these criteria.

<sup>113</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*. 16, 108, 115.

<sup>114</sup> Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Vatican Council II, 1964. 'In Catholic doctrine there exists an order or "hierarchy" of truth, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith'.

<sup>115</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 25; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 133.

## Completeness

The following specific elements are relevant to the criterion of *completeness*:

- The doctrines of the Church should be presented as an integrated whole, with intrinsic cohesiveness to presentation of the faith, no omissions and imbalances.
- All four pillars of the CCC – articles of the Creed, sacraments, Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, should be embraced and presented clearly.
- The history of salvation should be presented without omission of key elements, unfolding in depth as the programme progresses through its eight years, showing how truths of the faith fit into the history of salvation in a coherent manner.
- The criterion of *completeness* must be related to the age of the pupils and stage of the programme. The truths of the Faith are to be unfolded progressively in an age-appropriate manner, each year building on and reinforcing what went before. Certain aspects may be legitimately deferred from earlier to later years. Nevertheless, there must be an inherent completeness and coherence in whatever is presented to a particular age-group.
- The criterion of *completeness* is closely related to sacramental preparation. During primary School the pupils are prepared for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. The programme must present sufficient material for the pupils to understand the basics of these three sacraments, as well as teaching on all seven sacraments in general, and in particular the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Orders.

In relation to Pedagogical Aspects the key criteria are:

- ✓ Faithfulness to the Church's pedagogy
- ✓ Educational effectiveness

The following elements are relevant to these criteria:

- Due consideration for the norms and criteria for presenting the Gospel message as given in the *General Directory for Catechesis, 1997*.
- Draw on the insights, wisdom and practical guidance in other relevant Magisterial documents; especially *Evangelii Nuntiandi 1975, Catechesi Tradendae, 1979*.
- Reflect the context of evangelisation, the Church's primary mission, seeking to evangelise pupils while catechising them, bringing them into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a committed Christian faith, which will empower and motivate them to evangelise others.
- The *General Directory for Catechesis* encourages a diversity of educational methodologies and techniques, but mandates one, and only one, 'pedagogy' or overall teaching strategy. This pedagogy is the 'pedagogy of God', which is Jesus' way of teaching, which is also the Church's way; the transmission of the deposit of Faith, of the Gospel.
- Make appropriate use of available educational methodologies and techniques, drawing on the vast catechetical experience of the Universal Church, using the best of modern technology and also, with due prudence and discretion, learning from educational advances in the secular world. Methodologies and techniques should be age-appropriate, and should be attractive, engage attention and interest, while transmitting the essential deposit of Faith.
- The appropriate use of human experience forms an essential methodology in Catholic catechesis (as developed in the *General Directory for Catechesis*). However, human experience (the *anthropological-experiential approach*) should not be the foundation, source or chief focus of catechesis, becoming the 'pedagogy', instead of the 'pedagogy of God'.
- Presentation of the Faith should be age-appropriate across the range 4-12 years covered in the eight years of primary school. Particular attention should be paid to the change that occurs at about age 7/8 – the age of discretion – coinciding with reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. Attention should also be paid to the subsequent four years, termed as the phase of pre-adolescence, which the GDC identifies as of crucial importance in catechesis of young people and formation of their faith. <sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 181.

## APPENDIX B: Pupils' Knowledge of Catholic Faith after *Alive-O*

Findings from the Learning Assessment Survey of Pupils' Knowledge of Catholic Faith after completion of *Alive-O* have been reviewed and discussed in Section 4 above.

The detailed Responses to the Questionnaire are presented below, combining the results of the Surveys of 2007 and 2018:

The figure on the right of each row below is the percentage of responses to that option or item for 892 First Year pupils in 15 participating secondary schools, coming from about 70 primary schools. Correct answers are highlighted in bold. Where relevant, model answers are given.

### **SECTION ONE**

1-1. He was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt:

	<b>% of pupils</b>
a. Joshua	11
b. Judah	19
<b>c. Joseph</b>	<b>41</b>
d. Jeremiah	26
No Answer	3

1-2. Knocked to the ground on road to Damascus, he converted to be a Christian and preached to the Gentiles' (the non-Jewish people):

<b>a. Paul</b>	<b>21</b>
b. Peter	23
c. Luke	28
d. Matthew	20
No Answer	8

1-3. Which best describes what is in the Acts of the Apostles:

a. The life of Jesus	56
b. The teachings of St Paul	7
<b>c. The spread of the early Church</b>	<b>32</b>
No Answer	5

1-4. Which parts of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit and are truly the word of God:

<b>a. The entire Bible</b>	<b>48</b>
b. Some parts of the Bible	39
c. None of it	9
No Answer	4

1-5. Sacred Tradition is:

a. The traditions the Church developed through the ages	22
b. Writings of great saints of the Church	12
<b>c. What Jesus taught the apostles, which has been handed on by the Church</b>	<b>59</b>
No Answer	7

1-6. Name the four Gospels,.....

	% of pupils
1 right	1
2 right	6
3 right	8
4 right	53
None right / no answer	32

.....and two other books of the New Testament:

1 right	10
2 right	10
None right / no answer	80

## **SECTION TWO**

2-1. The mystery of the Blessed Trinity is:

a. Three Gods acting together as one	18
<b>b. Three divine persons in one God</b>	<b>48</b>
c. Three different ways in which God acts	29
No Answer	5

2-2. We can best understand the truth about God:

<b>a. From the teaching of the Church</b>	<b>64</b>
b. Comparing what different religions believe about God	10
c. What's true for me is my own experience of God	23
No Answer	3

2-3. Angels are:

<b>a. Intelligent spiritual creatures without bodies</b>	<b>25</b>
b. Great stories for children, which we don't have to believe when we grow up.	5
c. People who have died that God sends back to earth to help us	67
No Answer	3

2-4. The best description of the Holy Spirit is:

a. A spirit of love and peace	33
b. A sense that God is with us	45
<b>c. A divine person of the Blessed Trinity</b>	<b>19</b>
No Answer	3

2-5. The Church celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit on:

<b>a. Pentecost Sunday</b>	<b>43</b>
b. Trinity Sunday	14
c. Corpus Christi	5
d. Easter	34
No Answer	4

2-6. Name the Blessed Trinity: *Best answer: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.*

*Acceptable: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Not acceptable: God, Jesus, Holy Spirit).*

*For a Right Answer, all three must be named.*

	% of pupils
<b>Right</b>	<b>27</b>
Wrong	12
No Answer	61

2-7. Complete the sentences below from the Apostles' Creed:

*The blanks that were to be filled in are highlighted in italics below.*

I believe in God the Father Almighty, <b>creator of heaven and earth.</b>	47
I believe in Jesus Christ, <b>his only Son, our Lord .</b>	39
He was conceived <b>by the Holy Spirit</b>	16
and born <b>of the Virgin Mary.</b>	21
He under suffered Pontius Pilate, <b>was crucified, died, and buried.</b>	26
He descended into hell; on the third day he <b>rose again from the dead</b>	57
He ascended into heaven and <b>is seated at the right hand of the God the Father Almighty;</b>	35
From there he will come to <b>judge the living and the dead.</b>	27
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the <b>holy catholic Church,</b>	9
the communion of saints, the <b>forgiveness of sins,</b>	8
the resurrection <b>of the body,</b>	12
and <b>life everlasting.</b> Amen	14
AVERAGE OF ANSWERS	26%
No Answer	29

### SECTION THREE

3-1. The Devil (Satan) is:

<b>a. a fallen angel</b>	<b>34</b>
b. a symbol for evil	59
c. a story to frighten people to be good	5
No Answer	2

3-2. Jesus was born in the town of:

a.Nazareth	8
b.Jerusalem	5
<b>c.Bethlehem</b>	<b>85</b>
No Answer.	2

3-3. Which of these best describes Jesus Christ:

a. a great son of God	30
b. a great teacher & leader	33
<b>c. true God &amp; true man</b>	<b>33</b>
No Answer.	4



3-4. Circle the names of those who were apostles chosen by Jesus:

	<b>% of pupils</b>
<b>a. Peter</b>	<b>81</b>
b. Zacheus	15
<b>c. Judas</b>	<b>54</b>
d. Mark	68
<b>e. John</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>f. Andrew</b>	<b>48</b>
No Answer	4

3-5. Name three miracles performed by Jesus:

**Miracles of Jesus** e.g. *Marriage Feast at Cana; Draught of Fishes (x2); Widow's Son Raised to Life; Feeding of 5,000 & of 4,000; Jairus Daughter Raised to Life; Raising of Lazarus from Death; Jesus Walks on Sea; Tempest Stilled; Change bread & wine into his body & blood. (Jesus' own resurrection and major healings performed also acceptable)*

One miracle	20
Two miracles	25
Three miracles	31
No miracles	6
No Answer	18

3-6. What do you think were the two most important things that Jesus did for us:

<b>Died to redeem us</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Other important things</b>	<b>44</b>
Not important things	11
No Answer	35

## SECTION FOUR

4-1. The principal mission of the Church is to:

<b>a. spread the Gospel so people will become Christians</b>	<b>56</b>
b. care for the poor	8
c. teach people to love each other	32
No Answer	4

4.2. The name of the present Pope is:

<b>2007 – Benedict XVI</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>2018 – Francis</b>	<b>79</b>
No Answer	6

4-3. Mary consented to be the mother of Jesus. The Church celebrates this event as:

	% of pupils
a. The Assumption	18
b. The Immaculate Conception	50
<b>c. The Annunciation</b>	<b>23</b>
No Answer	9

4-4. He was stoned to death:

a. St Thomas More	10
<b>b. St Stephen</b>	<b>50</b>
c. St Augustine	31
No Answer	9

4-5. She founded a convent in Kildare and was famed for her charity:

a. St Ita	5
<b>b. St Brigid</b>	<b>80</b>
c. St Clare	10
No Answer	5

4-6. St Joseph was Jesus':

a. real father	27
b. uncle	9
<b>c. foster-father</b>	<b>59</b>
No Answer	5

4-7. What happens to people after they die?

a. Everyone finds peace with God in heaven	36
<b>b. People will be judged by God, &amp; will live forever in heaven or hell</b>	<b>35</b>
c. A person's soul could get re-born in a different body	21
No Answer	8

4-8. What diocese is your school in, and which Archbishop / Bishop leads the diocese?

*Close-neighbouring diocese, or Auxiliary Bishop, if relevant, accepted as right answer.*

<b>Bishop right</b>	<b>30</b>
Bishop wrong / no answer	70
<b>Diocese right</b>	<b>34</b>
Diocese wrong / no answer	66

4-9. What is the Communion of Saints?

*The members of the Church on earth, the souls in Purgatory, & the saints in heaven. (CCC 962)*

<b>Right</b>	<b>1</b>
Partly right	4
Wrong	18
No Answer	77

## SECTION FIVE

5-1. A time of preparation for Christmas:

	% of pupils
a. Lent	3
<b>b. Advent</b>	<b>89</b>
c. Holy Week	6
No Answer	2

5-2. The Church says that Catholics have an obligation to attend Mass on:

a. All Sundays	18
<b>b. Sundays &amp; Holy Days</b>	<b>63</b>
c. Christmas & Easter	6
d. Most Sundays	7
No Answer	6

5-3. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is:

<b>a. Jesus' real body &amp; blood under appearance of bread &amp; wine</b>	<b>49</b>
b. A celebration meal which helps us remember Jesus' Last Supper	18
c. The spirit of Jesus in the blessed bread	24
No Answer	9

5-4. The Catholic Church and ordination of women to the priesthood:

a. The Church could ordain women, but will never do it.	20
<b>b. The Church has no power from God to ordain women priests</b>	<b>27</b>
c. The Church will eventually ordain women at some time in the future.	37
No Answer	16

5-5. What is a sacrament? *The sacraments are given to the Church by Christ to give us grace. Each sacrament has an outward visible sign and an inner unseen grace. (CCC 1131).*

<b>Right</b>	<b>2</b>
Partly right	9
Wrong answer	10
No Answer	79

Name the seven sacraments:

Baptism	36
Confirmation	35
Eucharist / Communion	38
Penance/Reconciliation/Confession	27
Anointing of Sick	24
Holy Orders	23
Marriage	33
AVERAGE OF ANSWERS	31%
No Answer	58

5-6. What do you understand the Mass to be?

*The Mass is a thanksgiving celebration of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our salvation, a banquet where we are nourished by the Word of God in Scripture and by receiving Jesus Christ truly present in the Eucharist. (CCC 1407, 1408)*

	% of pupils
<b>Mass as sacrifice of cross</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Hear Word of God in Scripture</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Receive Jesus in the Eucharist</b>	<b>4</b>
Other relevant answer	42
No Answer	46

5-7. Write the Our Father:

Our Father who art in heaven,	77
Hallowed be thy name.	75
Thy kingdom come.	72
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.	70
Give us this day our daily bread,	63
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,	54
And lead us not into temptation,	46
But deliver us from evil. Amen.	45
AVERAGE OF ANSWERS	63%
No Answer	20

5-8. What are the principal spiritual powers the priest receives through the Sacrament of Holy Orders?

*To preside at Mass / Eucharist and change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ through the words of consecration. (CCC 1566).*

*To forgive sins in the Sacrament of Penance / Reconciliation / Confession. (CCC 1461).*

*To anoint the sick in the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick (CCC 1516)*

*To act as preacher/teacher and leader in the Church (CCC 1592).*

<b>Eucharistic consecration</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Forgive sins</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Anoint Sick</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Preach/teach &amp; lead</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Other reasonable answer</b>	<b>6</b>
Wrong answer	7
No Answer	73

## SECTION SIX

6-1. In matters of morality (what is right & wrong) Catholics should:

	% of pupils
<b>a. be guided by the Church</b>	<b>35</b>
b. consider all views before making a decision	24
c. simply trust their own sense of right & wrong	24
No Answer	17

6-2. The Church's teachings on sexuality are:

<b>a. completely true</b>	<b>11</b>
b. mostly true	22
c. somewhat true	25
d. not at all true	23
No Answer	19

6-3. Complete the sentences below of the Ten Commandments:

*The blanks that were to be filled in are highlighted in italics below; correct numbering not essential.*

1. I am the Lord your God, <b><i>you shall not have strange gods before me.</i></b>	22
2. You shall not take <b><i>the name of the Lord your God in vain.</i></b>	24
3. Remember to keep <b><i>holy the Lord's Day.</i></b>	20
4. Honour <b><i>your father and your mother.</i></b>	35
5. You shall not <b><i>kill.</i></b>	29
6. You shall not <b><i>commit adultery.</i></b>	19
7. You shall not <b><i>steal.</i></b>	38
8. You shall not <b><i>bear false witness against your neighbour.</i></b>	10
9. You shall not covet <b><i>your neighbour's wife.</i></b>	22
10. You shall not covet <b><i>your neighbour's goods.</i></b>	20
AVERAGE OF ANSWERS	24%
No Answer	48

6-4. What is conscience?

*Conscience is the judgment of our minds which tells us that our acts are good or bad, right or wrong. (CCC 1778)*

<b>Right</b>	<b>12</b>
Partly right	8
Wrong	9
No Answer	71

6-5. What are the main things you must do in order to make the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance, Confession) properly? (CCC 1491)

<b>Have sorrow (repentance, contrition) for your sins</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Confess sins to the priest</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Carry out the penance that the priest gives, and repair wrong done</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Other reasonable answer</b>	<b>7</b>
Wrong answer	11
No Answer	68