

Part I

Theoretical Foundations

Just a little less than a third of the papers in this collection have been identified as being more theoretical in nature than the rest. Theory and practical implications are two sides of the same coin that should interact with each other. Thus while theoretical reflection should help us clarify our goals and actions, practice should move us to ponder on what we are doing in order to improve. It is only in this dialectic space that we can hope to progress in the discipline.

Unlike the second part of the edited collection, where the editors felt it necessary to include papers that represent all the major six geographical regions of the globe, the context of the contributors is not given priority in this section. However, in reading these papers, one should not be naïve and assume that the context does not influence the way that theory is shaped. It should be noted that the six authors hail from all the three geographical regions that are prevalently Western in outlook. Yet it is argued that the Catholic, universal, dimension of the theoretical insights are more evident.

The first four papers written by D'Souza, Gellel, Roebben and Kieran respectively deal with the nature and goals of Catholic Religious Education. It is striking the way how the four authors overlap in their reflections. The four authors concur on a number of subjects, especially on the importance of the concept of person for Catholic Religious Education, the advancement of the identity of discipline as well as the holistic understanding of knowledge.

The section is introduced by D'Souza who reflects on how the universal Church developed and clarified its understanding of Religious Education. D'Souza does this by focusing on how the themes of person, worldview, culture, justice and common good as well as the understanding of teachers and students found in education post Second Vatican council documents contributed to the construction of the Catholic meaning of Religious Education. This unusual approach allows the reader to reflect on how the slow and progressive unfolding of different themes contributed to the distinctive development of Catholic Religious Education. D'Souza firmly believes that in the context of cultural transformations, Catholic Religious Education must dialogue with other 'secular' disciplines in order to transform the world and equip

students with a strong conviction in the dignity of the human person so as to “bring about a synthesis between faith and culture and faith and life”.

Gellel continues to explore this need for dialogue with all branches of knowledge. He argues that an understanding of the identity and nature of the Catholic Religious Education is not only determined by the way the believing community defines the concept of human person but also by the way it understands and lives the way of being Church. The developments in public education, society at large as well as the shift of emphasis in ecclesial models have brought to the fore the need for dialogue. In his reflection, Gellel claims that dialogue is not only a need but that it is an intrinsic element of the identity of Catholic Religious Education in a post-Second Vatican Council period. He argues that this discipline should be tripartitely dialogical, namely with students, with the fragmented disciplines of knowledge and internally with its own pedagogical development.

Basing on the centrality of the dignity of the human person in Catholic tradition, Roebben requalifies the role of Religious Education in contributing to the integral growth of the human person in and through the project of the school. It is precisely because education needs to cater for the holistic development of the student that Religious Education is duty bound to put theology at its centre. If it fails to do so the student will be deprived from the possibility of finding “a safe space for understanding oneself as a vulnerable pilgrim in life”. He argues that children and young people are doing theology in their effort to understand their attachment to “ultimate concerns”. Religious Education should become a space where students find teachers who stand with them in their search for meaning. Thus, Roebben suggests that we should conduct theology with students in order to help them use the language of faith in order to have access to soulful experiences.

Scott takes a more direct approach in making evident the difficulties that underpin any common discourse or practice in the field of Catholic Religious education. He notes that little progress can be made in the discipline unless we seriously tackle the underlying language games. Different contexts both geographical terms and in spaces as well as educational or ecclesial environments weigh heavily on the development and practice of the discipline. Scott argues for the need of a common international integrated framework for Catholic Religious Education based on educational reasons.

The logic of the following two chapters by Altmeyer and Hackett respectively within this section may be understood as bridging between the purely theoretical and the practical issues that emerge from the context. Altmeyer’s contribution is both an investigation on the communicative language and processes of Religious Education as well as an interdisciplinary exercise. The implications of this study are far reaching for the methods and pedagogy adopted in Catholic Religious Education. Altmeyer argues that if we take the aesthetical dimension of Religious Education seriously we will be enabling students to search and find an adequate way of expressing their spiritual dimension and ultimate concerns. Aesthetic learning in Religious Education helps students decipher meaning and make sense of reality. Thus poetry, art, films and music are not ephemeral means but they become central to Religious Education process itself.

The last chapter in this section is more practical in its approach. Hackett embraces an interdisciplinary approach through a dialogue with Positive Youth Development (PYD). He notes that the theory behind this psychological model is in line with the Catholic understanding of the human person and of knowledge. He translates the theoretical frameworks of PYD into an acceptable language for Catholic Religious education. He convincingly posits that by adopting PYD in Catholic Religious Education we would be contributing to a more holistic approach to education and would enable students to better integrate their spiritual dimension with their everyday living.