

Part II

Issues Emerging from the Context

Introduction

Part II explores issues pertaining to Catholic religious education which arise from the context in which the topics under consideration are situated. The impact of government regulation in some geographical locations impacts upon the direction and shape of Catholic religious education in schools. In other contexts, the interplay between secularism, culture and religious perspectives influences the development of Catholic religious education curriculum in schools. Teaching and leadership development in religious education have emerged as issues impacting upon the quality and delivery of Catholic religious education in some schools.

Australasia

Australia is made up of a diverse population, and this is reflected in contemporary classrooms and early childhood settings in Catholic institutions and schools. With regard to curriculum design, Catholic religious educators face the additional challenge of respecting the religious diversity of early-year students and also at the same time respecting and remaining true to the religious integrity and identity of the institution. In the light of this, Jan Grajczonek explores the tensions and their implications, associated with Australian early childhood religious education. She suggested that the nature and purpose of religious education in early childhood be informed and shaped by contemporary early childhood education theory. This in turn contributes to the development of religious education programmes that are both true to the nature and purpose of religious education and supportive of the rich diversity of students in Australia. In the following chapter, Shane Lavery investigates how to be true to the message while at the same time responding to the concrete interests and needs of young people and society in general. Aware of the urgency of the issue of sustainability, the extent to which it is close at heart to young

Australians, Lavery investigates papal social teachings on sustainable development and explores the practices of Catholic religious education teachers.

Issues and tensions of another kind impact upon religious education curriculum reform initiatives in China. Francis Chan explores Catholic religious education in Hong Kong and considers the tensions that arise in the development of Catholic religious education due to its accountability to the sovereign power of Beijing which he suggests is not always amicable with the Vatican. The tensions have the potential to compromise the development of religious and moral education, as well as the professional growth and development of teachers of this discipline. Rito Baring explores the tensions and challenges underpinning the implementation of Catholic religious education in schools in South East Asia. He identified the challenges in terms of diversity, national policies, faith-based instruction, new media technologies, justice and peace and contemporary articulations of youth attitudes. In considering these diverse challenges, Rito Baring argues that Catholic education needs to see new threads that confront religious instruction and Christian formation in the region.

Europe

Regarding the interreligious education context emerging in schools in Belgium, Annemie Dillon considers whether students need to be initiated into one religion before learning about others. She claims that in the Belgian context, children come into contact with religious and philosophical diversity from an early age. Therefore, it is important to search for methods that stimulate children in critical, hermeneutical thinking and communication about religion in dialogue. To do this, she suggests that children from diverse backgrounds need to be able to communicate with each other and with materials from other religions and world views. However, at the same time, Dillon emphasises that a profound introduction in the Catholic religion is necessary in order to stimulate a communicative attitude. Theo Van der Zee considers the growing trends towards diversity and individualism in the Netherlands and the tensions associated with making Catholic religious education relevant in Catholic schools. He found that one of the problems pertaining to the lack of relevance is that teachers and other staff appear rarely to link the contribution of Catholic religious education explicitly with the Catholic tradition in which the school is situated. He compares two schools and discusses the findings in light of Catholic schools being able to respond to the challenges posed by today's world, particularly those of diversity and individualism. Roisin Coll explores the implications of the major curriculum change in Catholic religious education in Catholic schools within the Scottish education system. While the new curriculum is perceived in a favourable light in terms of its content focus and theological accuracy, it has resulted in some significant challenges for teachers of religious education. Roisin Coll argues that in

order to bridge the gap between teacher education and curriculum delivery, a strategic plan for teacher development in religious education is required in order to meet the increased expectations of the Catholic Church in Scotland. Many of these expectations are placed on Catholic religious education teachers in the Scottish education system.

Within the German context, the influences of secularism and diversity have influenced a shift away from institutional religious perspectives and world views towards individualisation and de-traditionalisation perspectives. Reinhold Boschki argues that Catholic religious education in schools should aim to help students get rooted in the Catholic tradition. This is vital if students are to be able to competently dialogue with and about other denominations and religions. He concludes by stating that Catholic religious education has a twofold responsibility: preserving the tradition of the Church on the one hand and on the other being open for dialogue and encounter with others. Thus, RE can help maintain Catholic principles, Catholic identity and Catholic values in the context of a pluralistic world. Elzbieta Osewska also explores the tensions arising from the influences of secularism and diversity in Polish society which has contributed to a shift away from catechetical approaches to Catholic religious education. As a consequence, a multidimensional approach to religious education has gained momentum, and she suggests that the way forward must involve an attitude of dialogue, learning for life, personal and religious development of pupils, the dignity of the human person, identity formation, critical thinking skills, moral formation, new models of collaboration with the family, methodology and communication. Elzbieta Osewska concludes that Poland needs to evaluate the emerging trends in the light of the Gospel and find creative responses appropriate to present and future context.

Africa

Mary-Chizurum Ugbor notes the tension between state-based educational policies in Nigeria and the teaching of Catholic religious education. While Catholic religious education in Nigeria is Christocentric, Ugbor indicates that state policy dictates that religious education must be sensitive to cultural, racial and religious plurality and must involve all sectors of the school community. She suggests that the way forward is to be sensitive to policy requirements. Paul Faller considers the revival and survival of religious education in schools in South Africa. He considers the tensions and challenges associated particularly with relation to Catholic religious education. He notes that the resource base for the subject is thin both with respect to personnel and materials and that Catholic religious education is not adequately supported by the education departments in South Africa. Paul Faller explores some possibilities for the survival and advancement of Catholic religious education in geographical context that barely supports its contribution to South African society.

North America

Ron Nuzzi draws attention to the steady decline in enrolment in Catholic schools in the United States and suggests that it has provided the impetus for sustaining and strengthening the identity of the Catholic school. He indicated that it is central to this teaching of Catholic religious education and the professional development and spiritual formation of the teachers of religious education. He concluded indicating that the teaching of religion in Catholic schools in the United States plays a vital role in the evangelising mission of the Church. Richard Rymarz indicated that cultural and social circumstances offer a series of challenges. In the light of this, he explores that official Canadian Church educational documents reflect an understanding that closely associated catechesis with religious education. Furthermore, he claims that in the absence of strong, ongoing bureaucratic support, religious education can often lack a strategic sense that monitors current practice and also plans for the future. He concludes by stating that to have a better prospect of engaging students today, religious education, as a discipline, in Canadian Catholic schools needs to become more prominent in all aspects of educational planning. Only then will it have a chance to develop a well-grounded contemporary approach to religious education. Margaret Myrtle Power examines Catholic religious education in Primary and Junior Catholic Schools in Canada from the perspective of the development of curriculum structures and methodology in teaching. She investigates the relational power and transformative contribution of narrative hermeneutics with an emphasis on the aesthetic dimensions of teaching and the imagination as an invaluable ingredient in religious education. She concludes that the significant contribution of a practical hermeneutical method that shapes the catechetical process inspires the creation of new applications, new designs, new openings and new inclusivity.

South America

Sergio Junqueira explores Catholic religious education in Brazil in the light of the law reforms enacted in 1996. The growing religious plurality of Brazilian society had provided the impetus for a major rethink of religious education in the public and private educational sectors. Junqueira draws attention to the tensions and challenges this has on religious education in Brazil which must cater for two schooling systems. Junqueira concludes by arguing that Catholic schools, like other schools, should have the opportunity to choose their methodology for religious education provided that the pedagogical project is approved by teachers, representatives of the students, families and relevant stakeholders in the community. Jara Fuentealba and Dagach Imbarack critically examine the professional and social expectations of religious education teachers in Chile whose society is underpinned by a secular character. Certain tensions and challenges designed to configure a sense of purpose of

regarding the religion classes in Chile are analysed in light of initial training, curriculum development and teacher practice within school institutions.

Conclusion

Catholic religious education in schools around the globe encounters many tensions and faces several challenges which originate from a number of contexts including government policies and legislation, cultural and social differences, secularism and individualism and diverse national populations. These contexts impact upon decisions pertaining to the nature and purpose of Catholic religious education in schools throughout the world. Issues to do with curriculum design and development and the professional development of religious education teachers and religious education leaders are explored in section two of this edited collection.