



Why is it time to stop referring to ‘Catholic Religious Education’?

Sean Whittle¹

Accepted: 4 September 2021 / Published online: 15 October 2021
© The Author(s) under exclusive licence to Australian Catholic University 2021

Abstract

It is still surprisingly common to hear advocates of Catholic education refer to ‘Catholic’ Religious Education. This article will identify the issues bound up with the concept of ‘Catholic Religious Education’. It will be argued that at the very least using this concept is akin to a category mistake, and at worst it skews our understanding of Religious Education in Catholic schools and as such inevitably triggers off some problematical debates. The nature and scope of Religious Education in Catholic schools is in many respects contested in relation to whether it is catechesis or Confessional education. Much of this is to do with the way in which it is framed or aligned with being ‘Catholic’. An important priority now is to stop referring to this part of the curriculum as *Catholic Religious Education*.

Keywords Religious Education in Catholic schools · *Catholic Religious Education* · Category mistake · Confessional education · Catholic curriculum · Catechesis

1 Introduction

On first impression there would appear to be a natural flow between the concepts of Catholic schools, Catholic education and the subject of the curriculum which is frequently referred to as *Catholic Religious Education*. It would appear to be an intuitive and uncontroversial step to regard the subject of Religious Education in Catholic schools as distinctively ‘Catholic’. Thus to frame the subject as *Catholic Religious Education* would appear to make sense. In recent years there has continued to be a number of publications which used this descriptor in their titles.¹ Presumably for publishers this is an effective marketing strategy, targeting those interested specifically in the Religious Education that happens in Catholic schools. However, repeated usage is not an effective way of overcoming a category mistake. Indeed when Ryle (1949) first launched his argument about the traditional ‘mind/body’ problem resting on a category mistake, he did so against the precedent

¹ See for example the double volume ‘*Global Perspectives on Catholic Religious Education in Schools*’ (Springer 2015 & 2019) edited by Buchanan and Gellel. This double volume brings together a staggering 77 chapters specifically under the banner of *Catholic Religious Education*.

✉ Sean Whittle
sean.whittle@stmarys.ac.uk

¹ St Mary’s University, London, UK

of common usage. His argument rests on the ways in which our repeated ordinary language use leads us to characterise the issues within the philosophical problem of mind along deeply dualist lines. The common usage had effectively masked the category mistake making it almost impossible to discern. Ryle's skill was in making the case for there being a category mistake at play. The opening part of this article seeks to make a similar manoeuvre over our common usage in relation to the concept of '*Catholic Religious Education*'. The common usage around this concept leads down problematic paths, largely because of an unacknowledged category mistake in relation to framing and aligning Religious Education in Catholic Schools as '*Catholic Religious Education*'.² Here it will be argued that there are educational and theological problems that stem from asserting that the subject is '*Catholic Religious Education*' and continuing to refer to it as such. The best way of resolving this difficulty is not just to acknowledge that there is a category mistake at play, but also to actively avoid the custom of depicting this part of the curriculum in these terms.

2 Where might the category mistake lie?

One way of recognising where the conceptual ambiguity lies is to consider what, in Wittgenstein's terms, would be described as the 'family resemblances' between the two statements:

- (1) Catholic Religious Education and
- (2) Religious Education in Catholic schools

There are overlapping meanings in that both (1) and (2) are referring to Religious Education (presumably both the formal classroom subject and in the broader sense) in relation to Catholic schooling and matters of education. The family resemblance is such that many would find it straight forward to conflate the two as broadly synonymous. However, to do so risks masking the differing sets of meaning at play and as a result ends up being unhelpfully ambiguous. With statement (1) the alignment of being 'Catholic' with Religious Education creates an emphasis on there being a distinctly Catholic version of this part of the curriculum. To push this further, (1) would appear to imply that there is something markedly different about *Catholic* Religious Education compared to the Religious Education that goes on in other types of schools. This might be in terms of both the content and pedagogy of Religious Education in Catholic schools. Presumably the same would be true for Religious Education in various other types of schools in the UK, from Jewish and Islamic schools to non-denominational schools. In contrast statement (2) aligns the school as a whole with being 'Catholic' rather than singling out one (possibly major) part of the curriculum and designating it as the '*Catholic*' component. Although statement (2) is not denying that Religious Education is distinct and an important part of the curriculum, it does allow for a more nuanced or flexible alignment between the Catholic nature of the entire school and the subject of Religious Education. This has a number of advantages in terms of the philosophy and theology of Catholic education. This is because there is an intuitively true sense in which 'religion' in terms of ethos, formal instruction and education

² Elsewhere I have drawn attention to issues at stake here—see Whittle (2021a) and (2021b).

is central to the project of Catholic education. Indeed the 1988 Vatican document on education³ is an extended description and discussion of the various ways in which 'religion' is a dimension of all genuine education. However, as I have explained elsewhere (see Whittle, 2021a, 2021b), pinning down how Religious Education and Catholic education, taken as a whole, are best aligned is difficult to achieve.

Ultimately the issue pivots on how central Religious Education is to the overall aims and goals of Catholic education and schooling. These issues quickly morph into the vexed debates within the philosophy of Catholic education, most notably around the idea of a Catholic curriculum. Against this context a key question becomes 'is the defining characteristic of the curriculum in a Catholic school the importance it attaches to Religious Education?' It can be argued that there is a widespread assumption that Religious Education is the essential or defining characteristic of Catholic education. In England and Wales, for example, documentation from the *Catholic Education Service* (which represent the collective interests of the bishops on matters relating to Catholic schools) asserts that Religious Education is the 'core of the core curriculum'.⁴ This metaphor underscores the importance of this subject to Catholic education, because it lies at the very heart of this vision of education. In contrast, some advocates of Catholic education (Sullivan, 1999) have argued in support of a broader way to frame the whole curriculum as being distinctively Catholic. In basic terms this is either to maintain that it is possible to frame every part of the curriculum in view of its relationship to the themes of Catholic theology, or to frame it in terms of the history of Catholic Christianity.

Moreover, it could be claimed that if God is taken as the first cause or creator of all things, there is a general theological underpinning to everything which could be learnt across the curriculum because it is part-and-parcel of the creation brought about by God. Thus whether it be English, art, mathematics or history, the subjects of the curriculum can collectively be characterised as Catholic. However, whichever sense of 'Catholic curriculum' is used, there are some significant epistemological reservations. Not least of these is the way in which the relationship between Catholic Christianity/theology and the subjects of the curriculum is, at best, tangential.⁵ This is because the purported links between the specific content of the curriculum and God being the creator of all things (visible and invisible) are far too tenuous and stretched to be genuinely meaningful. Rather than being a substantive epistemological claim about the divine origin of all things which are knowable, it is more apt to regard references to a Catholic curriculum as an expression of piety⁶ or theological conviction. In addition, if the existence of God is questionable, this undermines and seriously weakens the attempt to ground all knowledge or learning in a divine origin. Advocates of Catholic education are no doubt not inclined to question the existence of God and as a result there is a significant assumption at play. As a consequence the idea of a Catholic curriculum is an ideal that rests on this assumption.

³ This is *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*, the Congregation for Catholic Education at the Vatican.

⁴ See Catholic Education Service of England and Wales (2020). *Why is Religious Education in Catholic Schools important?* On-line CBCEW. I have presented a critical assessment around the CES's use of this metaphor in Whittle (2021a) pp. 8–9.

⁵ In fact a strong case can be made for there being at best only a precarious case for theology in Religious Education, see Whittle (2021c).

⁶ For a fuller discussion of how the use of piety and slogan has had a stifling effect on the development of the philosophy and theology of Catholic education see Whittle (2021a, pp. 5–15).

In addition, when it comes to the central place of Religious Education, no supporting argument is offered to substantiate either the validity or coherence of the claim that it is the core of the core curriculum. It is important to appreciate that the concepts of 'core' and 'common' curriculum are difficult educational concepts to pin down and apply more generally to the curriculum. Indeed other than on grounds of economic expedience, the prioritising of English, mathematics and science as the Core Subjects (as is the case in the English National Curriculum) is very difficult to establish and defend. Justifying what is taken to be the 'core curriculum' is inevitably bound up with the particular educational aims and goals that are being advocated. For example, if the economic productivity of citizens is the key priority for education, having a school system which prioritises subjects related to literacy and numeracy makes sound economic sense. This is because it is likely to result in a more flexible workforce who can be more easily retrained and deployed to serve economic needs and market trends. However, across society as a whole there are a range of views on what the educational aims and goals of schooling are. The upshot is that there are a range of possible core subjects that could be identified for the curriculum. It is not enough to simply assert your preference (even if it is Religious Education) without offering detailed and sustained reasons in support of it.

When it comes to referring to statement (1), *Catholic Religious Education*, the difficulty is that our common usage dulls us into not noticing the ambiguity or unusual connotations involved. In large part this is because this statement is operating as if it were, to use Austin's linguistic analysis (1962), a speech-act, namely one that is using the concept of 'Catholic' as an identity marker. Just as we might denote a *Catholic* Bible or a *Catholic* church hall or even a *Catholic* child, the concept is being used to mark out the identity in a short-hand or colloquial and abbreviated way. Thus to refer to the hall owned or operated by a local church as a *Catholic* Hall is a quick or convenient way of marking out its identity and association with the Catholic community. It is, of course, not asserting anything about either the Catholicity of the hall nor even about the hall only being for the exclusive use of Catholics. The speech-act of framing the subject as Catholic Religious Education is emphasising that identity issues are at play (just as the formal act of naming an object or even a person is a declaration that marks out the identity).

There is a danger of being led into ambiguity and misunderstanding when statement (1) is not recognised as a speech-act which is seeking to assert something about the identity of this part of the curriculum. However, this speech-act is a problematic one. This is because referring to *Catholic Religious Education* is an anomaly compared to how the rest of the curriculum in Catholic schools is framed. It is helpful to recall that no other part of the curriculum in a Catholic school is routinely described as 'Catholic' in the way some refer to *Catholic Religious Education*. Thus we do not routinely refer to *Catholic* English, *Catholic* science, or *Catholic* mathematics lessons. There are of course aspects of subjects like science or art in which Catholic Christianity has played a pivotal role. For example, the history of science is peppered with Christian and deeply religious people being at the forefront of scientific development (Copernicus, Galileo, Lister, Newton, to name but a few). Similarly, Catholic Christianity has supported the Arts, and religious themes have been a fecund source of creativity in countless artist works. Even a cursory historical awareness would indicate that a Catholic worldview permeates many of the disciplines which underpin the entire curriculum. However, this is very different from recasting every subject as somehow distinctly *Catholic*.

Within the philosophy and theology of Catholic education, it is now customary to recognise that the curriculum as a whole is not well served by demarcating every subject as Catholic or not. Just as there is not a Catholic version of the entire curriculum, it ought to

strike us as something strange to designate one part of it as a *Catholic* version of a subject, even if it is Religious Education. It might well be that the emphasis on Catholic Religious Education is something of a compromise in that it puts a focus on where the 'Catholicity' is to be found in the curriculum. This compromise is needed because the actual practice of the Catholic curriculum is too challenging or just not possible. However, it is perhaps the repeated use of the phrase *Catholic Religious Education* that has blunted our ability to recognise and be wary about just what is going on in this way of framing the subject.

3 Is referring to *Catholic Religious Education* a serious issue?

It can be argued that referring to *Catholic Religious Education* is a short-hand but clumsy way of marking out the identity and context of the subject in Catholic schools. As such it has a degree of convenience or usefulness. Given this, it is tempting to dismiss the concerns over couching the subject as *Catholic Religious Education*. However, if statement (1) and (2) are not synonymous then this convenience might in fact be detrimental in a number of key respects. Here it will be argued that the issue at stake here is in fact more serious. A case can be made for there being two more substantive issues bubbling beneath the surface.

The first of these is an educational problem. If Religious Education in Catholic schools is routinely referred to as *Catholic Religious Education*, it might well indicate that it is primarily a form of what the philosopher of education, Paul Hirst (1972), classifies as 'tribal education'. According to Hirst, a primitive approach to education is one that is focused on ensuring the survival and continuation of the tribe. The educational priority is to ensure all the roles and skills needed by the tribe are sustained as successive generations grow up. Given this, tribal education serves and reinforces tribal identity. Indeed the tribal identity is embodied in the educational process of being brought up, or schooled, in what it means to belong to the tribe. In contrast, the more developed or sophisticated form of education is not merely concerned with ensuring the continuation of the tribe. Here education is characterised as an intrinsic good in itself, and not something engaged with for extrinsic reason, such as tribal identity or continuity.

A key part of Hirst's analysis is that Christian education has all the hallmarks of being the primitive or tribal form of education. Thus through a Christian education children are nurtured into the beliefs and values of Christianity. There is a fundamental affinity between the primitive form of education and Christian education. Given the centrality of Religious Education in Christian education, it plays a key role in reinforcing the tribal identity. It follows, when couched in these terms, that referring to *Catholic Religious Education* is something negative. It makes Religious Education integrally bound up with reinforcing and handing on Catholic identity. More importantly, this way of depicting Religious Education has a close affinity with what is known as Confessional education. This is a theory of Religious Education which explicitly seeks to hand on specific religious beliefs to children through formal education. For at least the last four decades, the Confessional approach to Religious Education has been eschewed as a fundamentally inadequate way of framing the subject. In large part this is because there has been a widespread acceptance of Hirst's argument (1972) that Christian education is in effect a contradiction in terms. This argument maintains that to attempt to formally educate someone with the explicit goal or intention of them personally adopting religious beliefs, is actually a failure to properly educate someone. It is fundamentally catechesis or nurturing faith rather than a properly educational activity. A defining characteristic of genuine education is that it ought not to seek

to make children conform to certain prescribed belief, in particular religious ones. This means that referring to *Catholic Religious Education* could be viewed as a more troubling matter, because it could be too easily classified as a restatement of the primitive form of education which has (more worryingly) an affinity to the much maligned Confessional approach to Religious Education. It remains deeply difficult to actually justify this sort of Religious Education.⁷

4 Is it possible to overcome Hirst's concerns in relation to Catholic Education (and Religious Education)?

One way of responding to Hirst's analysis is to bring some of the specifics of historical reality into a sharper focus.⁸ Hirst is contrasting the negative aspects of the primitive form of education when compared with a contemporary liberal education, which is freely available to all children and young people. Against this context it is hard not to accept his analysis as deeply compelling. However, Catholic education in a country such as the UK has a long and complex development, with a rich and varied history. Thus it is important to pitch Hirst's analysis against the historical reality, rather than comparing it with the more favourable times of recent decades. Thus, in the wake of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century, the emergence of new 'reformed' denominations of Christians frequently resulted in outbreaks of anti-Catholic prejudice and discrimination in England (and throughout the British Isles). In England, Catholic Christians become a minority group, against whom there were laws (including the death penalty) to curb their religious freedoms. Against this context, advocates of Catholic education would, understandably, want to foster a deep Catholic identity amongst children and young people. In this sort of historical context, aspects of the primitive education would, almost inevitably, be part-and-parcel of a Catholic education. Moreover, in this sort of socio-political context it is hard not to be sympathetic to the goal of using education to form or reinforce a Catholic identity. As a minority group in England subject to prejudice and discrimination, the Catholic Christian community in the post-Reformation years would be very aware of the need to protect and ensure their survival. The primitive form of education would be an obvious and justifiable choice.

However, socio-political contexts do not remain static and, as a result, the historical context shifted in the subsequent centuries after the Reformation. In Britain the Industrial Revolution and successive waves of immigration began to influence social attitudes. With the influx of Irish immigrants (in the wake of the potato famine and Irish land reforms) and others from other parts of Europe, there was a large increase in the size of the Catholic Christian community in England. At the same time the emergence of political liberalism had an impact on attitudes towards religious difference and the willingness to engage in religious tolerance. As a result the anti-Catholic legislation eventually changed (during

⁷ Carmody (2017) has argued in support of a Confessional account of Catholic education, arguing against the idea of non-Confessional Catholic education. He maintains that if the Catholic school is to be distinctive as the terms depicted by Church leaders in the various Education documents, it needs to be viewed as confessional. As such it has to respect the integrity of all its students and staff—Catholic and non-Catholic. Unfortunately Carmody's defence of Confessional Catholic education does not engage with the concerns Hirst raises about primitive forms of education.

⁸ Amongst the other ways of responding to Hirst's analysis is to challenge the coherence of the concept of 'tribal education'. For example, the concept of 'tribal education' has been subjected to some critique, for example Cooling (2010) and Hull (1976).

the Eighteenth Century) and this was coupled with the waning of more general prejudice across society. Throughout the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries this religious tolerance became normative. Many of the socio-political changes in relation to Catholics in England have been mapped by the sociologist Hornsby-Smith (1999). He has identified that throughout the entire twentieth century, an assimilation in attitudes and values between Catholics and the rest of society has taken place. Overt anti-Catholic prejudice and discrimination has become far less common. There was a shift in attitudes, with British Catholics no longer seeing themselves as a victimised minority within a prejudiced society. As a result, the contemporary Catholic community in England has less need to use formal education to reinforce their Catholic identity (as a response to anti-Catholic prejudice). The situation in England is more-or-less replicated in other countries, for example Scotland.⁹ The result of this shift in sociology-political context means that in the Twenty-First Century, the justification for the primitive or tribal form of Catholic education is no longer compelling. There is little real need to assert Catholic identity (even in Religious Education), because the historical reality has shifted so profoundly.¹⁰

In contrast to the Reformation period, the educational system which has become dominant in the UK is one that embodies the dominant values of secular liberal democracies.¹¹ As such the UK has adopted a more neutral (rather than hostile) approach to religions and religious involvement in schools and state provision of Catholic education. Against this contemporary context, the danger with asserting that the subject is *Catholic Religious Education* is that it reflects, at best, an anachronistic stance and at worst an unjustifiable tribal approach to education in Catholic schools. Of course socio-political contexts do change, and whilst it is unlikely, it is conceivable that there could be a return to prejudice and discrimination towards the Catholic community. If this became normative again, then the primitive or tribal approach with its ability to foster and nurture identity might once more become acceptable. The crucial point is that in our contemporary context, describing the subject as *Catholic Religious Education* raises an educational issue which ought to be addressed rather than dismissed as unimportant. The obvious way of avoiding this educational issue is to stop referring to the subject as *Catholic Religious Education*.

5 Theological concerns over the notion of *Catholic Religious Education*

The second substantive issue is a cluster of theological anxieties, which when viewed together make talk of Catholic Religious Education a matter for concern. The first anxiety is around the ecumenical inappropriateness of the notion of *Catholic Religious Education*. This means that emphasising the *Catholic* nature of Religious Education is, potentially, a way of perpetuating denominational differences within Christianity. The Reformation was

⁹ see McKinney and McClusky (2019) for a careful historical analysis of Scottish Catholics in relation to education.

¹⁰ In effect the use of *Catholic Religious Education* was used to serve as way of demarcating what was going on in Catholic schools from the alternative of what was perceived to be Protestant (Reformed) Religious Education. It might be possible to suggest that, in the current historical reality, the demarcation is between the sort of Religious Education that happens in Catholic schools as opposed to a secular approach to the subject in many schools. However, if this is more than just the amount of curriculum time and resources devoted to the subject in Catholic schools, far more research would be need to substantiate this claim.

¹¹ This is broadly equivalent to what philosophers of Education, such as R.S.Peters advocated for in terms of 'education for its own sake'.

a deeply painful time and resulted in the further splintering of Christians (in the West) into rival and competing denominations. The unity that Jesus insisted upon between his disciples and followers (see John 17:20–21) was shattered by the Reformation. It took several centuries, marked by religious discord and intolerance, to give way to a desire for unity and the healing of denominational hurt and rivalry. Initially among Reformed Christians there was a move towards ecumenism. The modern Magisterium, as embodied in the documents and proceedings of the Second Vatican Council, can be regarded as the moment when Catholic Christianity embraced a distinctively ecumenical turn. The priority in ecumenism is to emphasise, wherever possible, unity and collaboration between different denominations of Christians. The Council embraced the idea of Catholics identifying primarily as Christians. Being Christian, rather than a denominational identity is what really matters. Since the days of Paul VI (who became Pope during Vatican II,) the symbolic gesture of the Bishop of Rome praying with the leaders of other Christian Churches has become a routine event. It has served as a powerful (and ongoing) expression of ecumenism now being normative. Those who are not Catholic Christians belong to ‘sister Churches’ and the rigidity of ‘no salvation outside the Church’ is gently softened in *Lumen Gentium* (1965) (see the commentary on par. 14). Given that the modern Magisterium overtly embraces the ecumenical turn, there is something discordant about the notion of asserting Catholic (as in denominational) Religious Education.

A related theological anxiety stems from the various education documents promulgated under the auspices of Vatican II. These explicitly put the focus on Christian education rather than on Catholic education. Thus Vatican II’s declaration on education, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), describes the extreme importance of Christian education. Although it is a firm restatement of the rights of the Church to be involved in offering state education, it deliberately uses the language of a Christian education rather than a Catholic one. As such it shares the concerns raised by the only Papal Encyclical on Catholic education, Pius XI’s *Divini Illius Magistri*, (1929). It is interesting to note that the typical translation for this encyclical is ‘On the Christian Education of the Youth’. What is being emphasised is a Christian education rather than an overtly Catholic one. To emphasise *Catholic Religious Education* is out-of-step with this broader way of grasping Catholic education (and the place of Religious Education within it).

A possible third theological anxiety, or perhaps caveat, surrounds the educational relevance of Vatican II’s *Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965). This key conciliar document has a deeply inspiring opening statement, about how the hopes and fears of all people are shared by all members of the Church. Solidarity, collaboration and co-operation with all people of good will is to be a hallmark of the Church in the modern world. The implication is that the Church is to serve the needs of humanity (particularly the poor), and thus its involvement in education ought to be fundamentally understood as an expression of this. The whole curriculum, which includes Religious Education, has a role to play in bringing this about. Rather than prioritising Catholic identity, Religious Education is part-and-parcel of a curriculum which has the goal of serving the needs of humanity. Thus it would not appear as theologically apt to describe this as *Catholic Religious Education*. It is rather the sort of Religious Education that should take place in a Catholic school which strives to serve all people of good faith, in particular the poor. However, it does need to be recognised that the inclusive vision advocated by *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) is still very much in the process of being fully received.

When these theological anxieties are viewed in relation to the substantive concerns over Confessional education, a more general theological discomfort over the very notion of *Catholic Religious Education* comes into sharper focus. The wider educational concerns

with Confessional education share a close affinity with worries amongst Catholic Christians about the relationship between catechesis and the Religious Education which takes place in schools. There is an obvious desire for a complementary and reciprocal relationship between the Religious Education that takes place in school and the catechesis that happens in the home and the parish. However, beyond this, catechesis seeks to foster, nurture and deepen a living faith relationship. In contrast to the educator working in the context of the Catholic school, an explicit goal for the catechist is faith development. However, it is important not to exaggerate the differences too much. Neither the catechist nor the Religious Education teacher in a Catholic school would want to compel or force the child to be a person of faith. Both would want to take a firm stance against indoctrination. The very concept of faith involves personal assent, which is made without pressure or compulsion. Indeed one of the roles of a catechist is to check the person being catechised is making the next stage in their faith journey for the right sorts of reasons. For example, a catechist working with young people for sacramental preparation (for first Holy Communion or Confirmation) will often need to challenge them not to receive the sacrament for merely extrinsic reasons (such as gifts or rewards). The traditional concept which deals with this aspect of catechesis is known as discernment. The process of discernment might involve scrutiny of motives and intentions, and thus could be a deeply challenging process. This is far removed from the idea of the catechist handing on doctrines and apologetic discourses to a passive receptor—a child or young person who soaks up all this information in a non-critical way. However, the catechesis in the parish or home is, of course, a deeply Confessional activity because the explicit intention is to hand on a living faith. Indeed the discernment is a process of scrutiny that seeks to check that an authentic faith is handed on. In contrast the formal intentions of Religious Education in a Catholic school are not bound up in the Confessional activity of handing on a living Catholic faith (nor a solid Catholic identity). Given the differing sets of intentions at play it becomes important to find an appropriate and effective way to designate and differentiate catechesis from the Religious Education that takes place in Catholic schools. It is in this regard that the phrase *Catholic Religious Education* proves to be theologically unhelpful. Marking out Religious Education as being *Catholic* has the potential to unhelpfully blur the relationship with catechesis, implicitly suggesting a catechetical aspect to it.¹²

6 Conclusion: now is the time to stop referring to *Catholic Religious Education*

It has been argued that in the tendency to conflate *Catholic Religious Education* with Religious Education in Catholic schools a category mistake is in operation. It is tempting to dismiss the issues here, in favour of the convenience or usefulness of staking out the distinctiveness of Religious Education in Catholic schools. However, there are some substantive issues that trigger concerns. Although on a first glance the educational issue appears more serious, the cluster of theological anxieties indicate that there is, in our post-Vatican II context, a genuine theological discomfort surrounding the ongoing use of the phrase Catholic Religious Education. An obvious way of avoiding this is to stick with statement

¹² I have critiqued the attempt to bring Religious Education and Catechesis into the sort of strong alignment proposed by the guidance document *The Religious Dimension of Education* (1988). See Whittle (2021b) for a fuller discussion.

(2), namely to describe the subject as Religious Education in Catholic schools, and to positively eschew the use of *Catholic Religious Education*.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge (Mass.).
- Carmody, B. S. J. (2017). The Catholic school: Non-confessional? *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 9(2), 162–175.
- Catholic education Service of England and Wales. (2020). Why is Religious Education in Catholic Schools important. On-line CBCEW.
- Cooling, T. (2010). Doing God in Education. Theos. Retrieved from <https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/education/our-work/research-enterprise/national-institute-christian-education-research/docs/doing-god-in-education.pdf>
- Gaudium et Spes*. (1965). In: Abbott, W. (Ed) (1966). *The Documents of Vatican II*. Herder and Herder.
- Gravissimum Educationis*. (1965). In Abbott, W. (Ed) (1966). *The Documents of Vatican II*. Herder and Herder.
- Hirst, P. H. (1972). Christian education: A contradiction in terms? *Learning for Living*, 11(4), 6–11.
- Hornsby-Smith, M. (1999). *Catholics in England: 1950–2000 historical and sociological perspectives*. Cassell.
- Hull, J. (1976). Christian theology and educational theory: Can there be connections? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 24(2), 127.
- Lumen Gentium*. (1965). In: Abbott W. (Ed) (1966). *The Documents of Vatican II*. Herder and Herder.
- McKinney, S., & McClusky, R. (2019). *A history of Catholic education and schooling in Scotland: New perspectives*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ryle, G. (1949). *The philosophy of mind*. Oxford University Press.
- Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. (1988). *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*. Catholic Truth Society.
- Sullivan, J. (1999). Catholic Education: distinctive and inclusive.
- Whittle, S. (2021a). *Irish and British perspectives on Catholic education*. Springer.
- Whittle, S. (2021b). Religious Education in English Catholic Schools: Reflections on formal and informal Catholic Education. In G. Byrne & S. Whittle (Eds.), *Catholic Education: A life long journey*. Veritas.
- Whittle, S. (2021c). The precarious role of theology in religious education. In G. Beista & M. Hannam (Eds.), *Religion and education: The forgotten dimension of religious education*. Brill.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.