The narrow understanding of the aim of religious education which confines it to that of nurturing faith is no longer viable. The exploration of the wider meaning of religious education can contribute to the establishment of right relations among people within nations and between the nations of the world themselves. There have been radical changes in the Irish cultural landscape over the last number of decades. The manner in which young people experience reality is culture bound and, therefore, it is critical to understand the culture of our time and place if we are to be effective religious educators.

This publication explores the meaning and identity of religious education within the cultural context of today. As a life-long process, religious education involves both the teaching of religion and the teaching of a religious way of life, thereby involving family, school and parish. An international perspective on some key issues currently confronting the teaching of religion in the classroom is also examined along with the future challenge for religious education of getting beyond (but not leaving behind) the schooling paradigm.

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Critical Issues in Religious Education
Edited by Oliver Brennan
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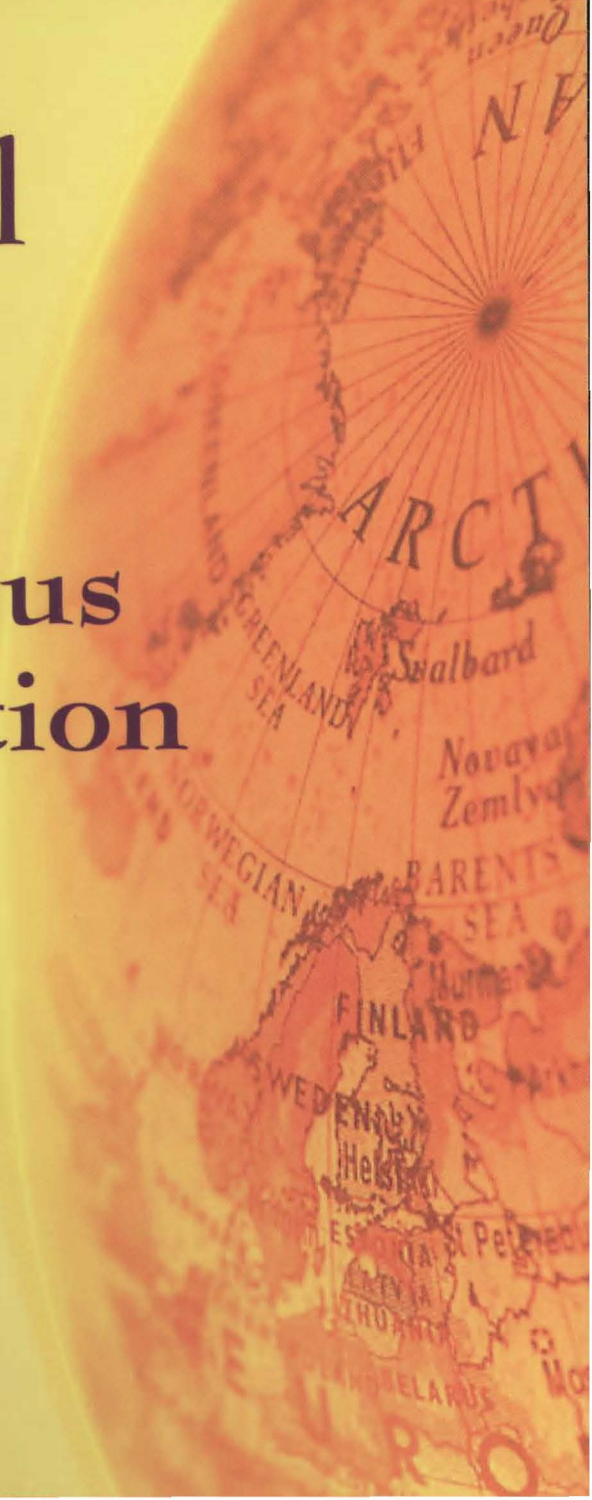

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schooling in religion can have a short-term effect upon students (in terms of understanding), any lasting effect is discernable only when this schooling is reinforced by family ties, prayer ties, social outreach ties; that is, other diverse and complementary forms of religiously educative activities.

The future challenge, then, entails getting beyond (but not leaving behind) the schooling paradigm. Or, better stated, the task is to place the schooling in religion in a larger context of complementary educational forms of life. Put simply, effective teaching of religion in schools is dependent on the cooperation of parish, home and school. Each must be recognised as playing a role in education towards a mature religious life. The role of each will be distinctive and unique. Each needs affirmative nature and linkage with the other. When this is recognised, they can balance and complement each other.

As noted in chapter three, Ireland is in a particularly good position to adopt the best elements within a comprehensive meaning of religious education. In Ireland especially, we can see the tension between a traditional nineteenth-century form of Church[2] and all the currents of a contemporary post-modern culture.[3] The rebellion of Ireland's young people today against this traditional Church form, (with its Tridentine strategy and emphasis on obedience to rules), calls for the opening up of new and flexible tracks to access their lives.[4] This crisis of access ('people without a system') may challenge the existing institution to reclaim some of the richer elements of its own Celtic spiritual past. It may also challenge schools, Churches and families to incorporate some of the British and American forms and practices of religious education.

In the short run, this may give rise to a 'Babel of languages' in religious education discussion. In the long run, however, it could be seen as a genuine attempt to honour the two arms of religious education: the academic and the pastoral, the study and practice, the understanding and formation in a religious

way. What is selectively adopted from these foreign sources could be combined with a distinctive Irish past and with present post-modern sensibilities. But the pivotal question is: How do we get there from here?

Building on the Past

If religious education is ever to flourish, its meaning cannot be separated from the past or from the existing work and loyalties of large numbers of people today.

Historically, religious education (if the term was used at all) was perceived as a way of inducting new members into the religious tradition of our ancestors. It was a way for the religious body to perpetuate itself. In modern times, many of these traditional processes and strategies have broken down. They have become dysfunctional.[5]

In response, religious communities (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish) have adopted some of the techniques and methods of modern education to help them achieve the same end, namely, formation of the neophyte in the tradition. Even though this move tended to protect the religious tradition from rational criticism, there was something valuable to retain here: attention to the concrete, particular and mysterious practices of a religious tradition. The wisdom lay in showing (teaching) people how to be religious in a Roman Catholic, Protestant or Jewish way.

On the other hand, the most lucid meaning of religious education in the world today is outside of church settings. It is in government schools in England and Wales. Here, as noted above, religious education is the well-defined work of the professional schoolteacher. It is the name of the classroom subject. It is the teaching of religion. Likewise, there is something valuable to retain here, namely, systematic reflection on the practice of our religious ways. The wisdom is in showing (teaching) people how to understand their own tradition in relation to a set of practices of the other.

Both wisdoms can be building blocks to a re-imagined future. The key to the future, however, lies in their integration. The question is: can we attend to the concrete, traditional practices of religion and, simultaneously, honour the modern study of religion? Or are these two sets of activities fundamentally conflictual and compartmentalised? To attempt an integration is like balancing hot and cold, yin and yang, husband and wife. But this is precisely the marriage needed at this time and in this place. I will deal with the need for integration in the latter part of this chapter.

First, however, let me take up the ancient form of religious education with its concern for initiation and formation in a religious heritage. In the United States, this is the direction religious education has taken in the latter half of the twentieth century. In contemporary Ireland, this form of religious education has run into serious trouble. Religion as a chain of memory has been broken in this generation.[6] No religious community, however, can long sustain its life without a built-in educational process. No religious tradition can survive without reconnecting the chain of memory.

Education has to do with the maintenance of community through the generations – its preservation and improvement. This maintenance or conservation must assure enough continuity of vision and values to sustain the self-identity of the community. Education here offers continuity.

At the same time, this work of maintenance must honour freedom and novelty, if it is to be adaptable to new circumstances. Education here offers change. This dynamic interplay between continuity and change enables a religious tradition to avoid, on the one hand, becoming a fossil or simply irrelevant, or, on the other hand, disappearing into relativism. Preservation and improvement, traditioning and transformation, then, are the dual purpose of education. It has to do with form, re-forming and re-patterning the life forms of a people. Religious education, at its best, is that

dynamic process operative in a religious body and its set of practices.

Where can we turn for assistance and guidance in incorporating these educational processes and strategies? Walter Brueggemann proposes that we may find clues for this type of education deeply rooted in our religious heritage. In his book, *The Creative Word*,[7] Brueggemann draws attention to the process and shape of the Old Testament biblical canon. How the biblical material reached its present form (canonical process) and the present form that it has reached (canonical shape) offers, he claims, insight into the community's self-understanding and its intent for the coming generations. His thesis is: this canonical process and construct models, both in terms of substance and as a process, educational ministry in our churches.

But what is the canonical process we discern? It is one of stability and flexibility, continuity and discontinuity, formation and re-formation, tradition and re-interpretation. And what is the canonical structure? The construct is the tripartite canon: law (Torah), Prophets, Writings.[8] In ancient Israel, it was this construct or shape that permitted and articulated the dynamic of continuity and change. The people of Israel valued all three parts of the canon. They held them in relational tension to each other. They were clear about the place and function of each, and never tried to make one substitute for another. Brueggemann directly implies that this threefold structure and principle of continuity and change tells us what to look for in parish religious education today.

I will turn now to these biblical texts and themes and view them through an educator's lens and interests. Each of the three parts of the canon has a different function. Each offers different forms of knowledge. Each has a different agent of instruction. And, each makes different claims to us. Conservatives, social critics and liberals may – by personal inclination and conviction – be drawn toward one part of the

canon or another to the relative neglect of the others: conservatives toward Torah, social critics toward the prophets: liberals toward 'the counsels of the wise' (Writings). However, a faithful community and integrated religious education must attend to all three. As Brueggemann remarks, 'Church education, both in its models and its substance, has gone awry precisely because of the failure to hold these three parts of the canon, these three normative modes of discourse, in balance and tension.'[9]

Critical of this endeavour will be the honouring of different teaching forms. The three (biblical) educational agents are the priest, the prophet and the sage. The three processes of education they unleash are: disclosure of what binds us as a people – the priestly task/role; disruption of the established order and critique of our wayward ways – the prophetic task/role; disruption of some fundamental order and meaning in our lives – the sage's task role.

Religious education in its fullness creates educational space for each pedagogical form. As I proceed, I will correlate the tripartite canonical structure and the three teaching roles with contemporary forms of religious education. I will turn now to take up in some detail each part of the canon and illustrate the type of education it embodies and evokes.

Torah Education

The first accent or form of biblical education is Torah focused. Torah education is a process of nurturing and leading the new generation into a view of reality held by our forefathers and foremothers in the faith. Torah is a statement of community ethos – its story and vision. It is a definitional statement of the character of the community. Communal identity is first established by stating its parameters and boundaries, and perceptual field in which the neophyte must live and grow. Torah seeks to form consensus on what claims of memories and stories link people. It wants to disclose what values and

visions bind a community in solidarity. This content and material is foundational for the educative forms to follow. It ushers the neophyte into a safe, secure life-world. In doing this, it saves the young from rootlessness, chaos, alienation and narcissistic subjectivity.

Torah education is education as nurture and formation. It deals with what is known, normative and given. It reports on that upon which there is consensus. It cultivates a centre for life, a core and chain of memory, an organising principle of life. One could say, it is the practice of the first naiveté (Ricoeur). It is essentially uncritical or precritical. It does not invite rational criticism. Rather its heremeneutic is one of retrieval and affection. With this focus, it provides the foundation for religious homecoming for children and adults. This form of religious education, then, is the formalised process of traditioning, the handing on of a way of life and its set of convictions to the next generation.

The primal mode of education, derived from Torah, is story. It is communal narration. The narrative offers a distinctive way of knowing. It is concrete, open-ended, experiential and the practice of imagination. As a retelling of Israel's public memory, it is subversive. It retrieves the 'dangerous memory' of a people, which, in turn, challenges an imperial consensus and offers a counter-cultural vision of reality. The story is to be told with charm, aesthetic sensitivity and partisan fidelity. This re-telling of a people's story keeps memories and hopes alive. It maintains religion as a chain of memory.

In contemporary Roman Catholicism, catechesis is the internal language for this form and process of educational ministry. Catechesis is the educational work of the Church, in the Church, and on behalf of the Church. It is unabashedly confessional. Its end in view is transmission of the heritage.

Catechesis is vigilant about its own borders. Its gift is in honouring the past, affirming religious roots and sustaining a rich sacramental life. This is the work of catechist, parent

liturgist, and adult eductor.[10] It reminds one where one's home is and from what religious tribe one has sprung. This is its gift, but it is also its weakness. Its parochial language does not build bridges to other tribes – or other religious possibilities.

Catechesis, however, or Christian education as Protestants name it, is religious education in concrete expression. But how the elements of the tradition (teachings, rituals, practices) are approached will determine whether they are educational or not. Education is the re-shaping of religious traditions with end (purpose) and without end (closure).[11] Catechesis, as religious education, must fulfil both conditions. First, it must be education with an end in view (purpose). There is a way of life to be conveyed. There is a story to be told and made accessible. Second, *how* it is made accessible is key. The tracks must be laid down in such a way that the group recognises that there are truths beyond whatever has been formulated. If the catechist attempts to fix the mind on an established body of material that bears no further development, this would not qualify as education. It seems closer to socialisation or indoctrination. But, if, on the other hand, the catechist, in his or her every pronouncement, every ritual, every teaching, every belief and every gesture toward the other, acknowledges the community's incompleteness, this would qualify as education. In fact, it is among the most important priestly forms of religious education needed in the world today.

Prophetic Education

If we engage in Torah education (catechesis) we will do our people a great service. If a community, however, educates only in Torah, it may also do a disservice to its members. It may mature them to fixity, rigidity, to a sense that 'all questions are settled' and need only be recited (catechism style) over and over. This idealises the tradition, making it into an idol. Jaroslave Pelikan writes, 'Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And... it is

traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.'[12] Prophetic education is a call to resistance against traditionalism.

There are two moments in this prophetic process: criticising and energising.[13] It begins with the cultivation of suspicion and then moves toward the formation of an alternative imagination. In more technical terms, we would say: it commences with a hermeneutic of suspicion and proceeds to a hermeneutic of reconstruction. This prevents closure of judgement on the past and collapse of imagination in the future. These two movements or moments held in creative tension are the key to the vitality of prophetic education.

The first role of prophetic education is criticism. The task is to surface and foster critique that penetrates the numbness and staleness of the dominant culture or/and the religious tradition. Its work is to cut through, what Virginia Woolf called, 'the cotton wool of everyday life'. It does this by bringing a disruptive word to the established version of reality.

The function of the prophetic is to challenge the prevailing consensus, to practise criticism on that which until now has been beyond criticism. Prophecy is needed when we sense the old consensus is breaking down. It is urgent when the old truths have become inert, boring, weary, irrelevant, 'the dead faith of the living.' Prophetic education brings critique to the death-producing element of a people's story – its practices, doctrines, symbols and codes. The process is on developing the reflective consciousness of the total community with regard to the total community's life.

Education in the prophetic, then, means teaching people to take seriously, but not too seriously, official truth about fact, knowledge, power, interpretation. It is to be a catalyst for the surfacing of suspicion. This disruptive world is in the long and rich tradition of Jeremiah, Jesus, Martin Luther King and Paulo Freire. Paul Tillich, the great Protestant theologian, named this word and process 'the Protestant principle'. He described it as the need to question our

certainties in the very moment when they become absolutely certain. It is a word of resistance to the absolutist instinct. It is education as protest against closure on life's meaning. No thing is God: no viewpoint, no code, no rite and no policy. The educational task here is to prevent the creation of new idols.

The second role of a prophetic approach is in energising. The prophets protest what is. But the protest does not end in negativity. It is also protest for what is promised, namely, fresh forms of life. The education task here is to stimulate an alternative imagination and energise the emergence of a renewed story. This is the work of a hermeneutic of restoration, fertilised by the power of the creative imagination. This educational moment creates new openings and fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality. New 'moments of being' (Virginia Woolf) are ushered in and 'the living faith of the dead' (Pelikan) re-directs our lives.

This accent of prophetic education can lead to the revitalising of religious tradition and create life-giving forms of social grace in our world. Its power is in proposing an alternative imagination that redefines our situation. This is a movement beyond critique into the language of creativity and amazement. The restlessness with old truths is left behind and the recreation of new truths breaks upon us. Prophets are religious poets. They bring the passion of God to speech. They speak new forms of life into being.

Prophetic education, then, honours deliberation and inquiry. It places priority on the critical and reconstructive rather than on proclamation and formation. It does more than simply tell. Its orientation is toward posing and opening up new perspectives. Torah offers safe limits. But the prophetic protest stretches and widens out our boundaries toward new realities.[14] In a word, prophetic education challenges every old truth for the sake of a new and richer truth which is breaking in upon us.

In contemporary Roman Catholic circles (and in liberal Protestant groups), the revisionist model of Christian religious education typifies this form of education. The work of Thomas Groome is a leading representative example of it.[15] Groome and his colleagues bring a critical hermeneutic to bear on the Christian tradition and correlate it with a critical decoding of contemporary human experience. This process is set to five educational movements by Groome and goes by the name of 'shared Christian praxis'.[16] It involves the application of modern critical reason to beliefs, symbols, values and lived-life of the Christian tradition. The process weds tradition and modernity, continuity and change. This enables the Christian tradition to become self-conscious – through the process of critical distancing. This form of education can save the tradition from dogmatism and traditionalism, and allow the creative re-appropriation of the heritage as a life-giving power. It can re-root us in the Christian tradition and allow us to live in creative tension with it.

This prophetic education belongs in the classrooms of our schools. The schoolteacher facilitates the re-interpretative task. This process also belongs at the centre of parish life. If the tradition is to come alive for people, all members need access to this educative form. It ought to be institutionalised into the structure of parish life and find multiple forums for expression. Something very fundamental is at stake here. Are we going to be conscious participants in the tradition or unconscious victims of it? The way we answer that question will tell us within a few generations whether we will have a tradition worth saving.

Wisdom Education

The third accent of religious education is neither disclosure (of the social glue that binds a people), nor disruption (of this cohesiveness), but rather discernment of our common human experience. Directing us in this discernment is the sage. The sage and the prophet do not start from the same premise, nor do they

move in the same direction. They do not deny the legitimacy of the other's focus. They are complementary, not contradictory; each has its distinctive motifs.

The distinctiveness of wisdom education is the cultivation of a different kind of knowing. The concern is not just for knowledge we can acquire, but knowledge we must wait and listen for in ordinary life. The posture needed is patience, a respect for not knowing what is yet to be discerned, an honouring of mystery.

The pedagogical task here is to show how to discern, how to attend to gifts given in experience, how to be receptive to the world around us, how to listen to the voice of Mystery (Word of God) in creation, in human and animal behaviour, in the lilies of the field. In a way, it is education toward knowing that what we see is not all there is. It is education for life – everyday life – and for unveiling the ultimate meaning undergirding it.

This kind of education exposes the rational limits of most modern education. Knowledge is not just rationally acquired, and the human person is not only the passive recipient of knowledge. Knowledge can be *discovered* and the human can be the generator of new knowledge not known before. However, the fundamental stance is close to a religious one, namely humility.

According to the sage, those who engage in their ordinary life, with their eyes and ears wide open, will see and hear intimations of more. Wisdom education cultivates and celebrates this human capacity for receptivity. The writings seek to discern order and meaning in the minutiae of mundane living. The sage's final word is not critique, but one of wonder, awe and amazement: doxology. This prayerful word is premised in the holy interconnectedness of all things. This is the central substance of the wisdom teachers. And the way to discover this web of holiness is by delving into the depth of life. Wisdom education is revelatory. The sage shows us how to pull back the veil covering the spiritual dimension.

Wisdom literature is a loose and miscellaneous collection of writings. They resist easy categorisation – lacking cohesive themes or authoritative rigour. There are two main hypotheses about wisdom. On the one hand, it is argued that there is *clan wisdom*. Here the sage teaches the young in the ways of the tribe by an informal process of socialisation. The other hypothesis sees wisdom as (formal) instruction in the *court school*. Both can be commended and both can serve our purpose here. And both can be related to the two dominant literary types in instruction. One, commonly called, 'instruction', is intentionally didactic. It takes the form of imperatives and prohibitions. While the other form, the sayings, emerge out of a tradition of experience. It takes the form of everyday folk-wisdom. As a body, the wisdom literature deals more explicitly and seriously with educational concerns than other writings. As noted, some of its educational focus is intentionally didactic. In other writings, it is indirect and evocative. On the basis of this delineation, I will sketch out six education concepts found in the wisdom traditions.

The first basic educational principle of wisdom is the insistence that we pay close attention to our daily-lived experience. Daily life must be respected and honoured, but also carefully discerned. This is the curricular content and the focus of the sage's teaching. The mundane events of life with their joys and sorrows, work and leisure, loves lost and gained, when reflected upon, can lead to discerning powerful and pervasive truths. The sage directs the learner to move in and through his or her own experience to make sense and meaning of it all.

The sage is linked to a tradition, a chain of memory. His or her pervasive concern is to connect the tradition to the learner's own experience. Both must be honoured. Both will change and grow as the community's understanding deepens. When a vital connection is made, tradition can make life work.

Traditions are embodied in texts. At times, texts seem to be substitutes for us for dealing with life. On the other hand, for the sage the study of text is a means to study life. The text mediates between a community of the past and a community of the present. It extends 'the franchise to our ancestors' (Chesterton). It can be a source of ancient wisdom and human possibility.

Wisdom teaches us that there is a proper time for everything. The sage is concerned with what is educationally suitable – saying and doing the right thing, in the right place, with the right people. In the current terminology, we could call the sages developmentalists. They had an acute sense of educational readiness. This requires a sense of judgement, which is intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and psychological all at once. The effective religious educator needs this proper sense of timing in every educative setting.

In the wisdom traditions, the pedagogical process is inherently dialogical. The conversation goes between the divine and human, tradition and experience, word and deed, texts and people, young and old. The Book of Job, for example, is a story of conversational engagement. Job's engagement with God is highly contentious, argumentative, and passionately dialectical. Job would have performed well as a schoolteacher of religion – a process that calls for dialectical discourse. He was a provocateur of the mind and a catalyst of cognitive dissonance. He lived the questions. Effective religious educators create this intellectual friction by moving back and forth between speaking and listening. Its gift is to enable students (and teachers) to think outside the box and acquire new understandings.[17]

The teaching methods of sages do not rely exclusively on memorisation. They proceed by encouraging participation in the creative process. Ready-made answers and universal truths are not supplied. Rather, the process and style is more indirect and evocative: playful, childlike, humorous,

paradoxical, a teasing into truth. Their tricks of the trade are puns, riddles, parables, stories, fables and imagery. This playing with knowledge helps to resist the lust for certainty and keeps open the hunger for wisdom. Consequently, the teaching of the sage, unlike priest and prophet, is just for today. It is partial and provisional. New future experience may enable us to make new judgements based on new data. Some will see, in the teaching of the sage, a post-modern strategy – an honouring of particularity, ambiguity and plurality. This premodern pedagogy may be timely for a post-modern education.

Finally, for the sage, education is not so much a process of dissemination of information or the mastery of knowledge, but the formation of character. Education is forming persons of integrity. Truth is not just thought, but action. The hypocrite is the fool. For the sage, a person is wise only when he walks wisely, only when he is a doer of the word. This congruence between word and deed is a life of integrity. It is also one of the ultimate purposes of religious education.

As it stands, on both Roman Catholic and Protestant sides, this form of religious education is comparatively undeveloped. Torah and prophetic educative forms hold centre stage. The recent writings of Charles Melchert have broken the mould on this genre and are a rich resource.[18] I would also interpret the later writings of Gabriel Moran within this kind of education.[19] Like a sage, for Moran, God is in the details of life. Revelation is a process of listening and seeing. Moran counsels: trust the authority of your experience, and gifts of reason, intuition and imagination. Don't wait around for officials to hand down the answers.

In Moran's project, religious education is directed to ordinary, everyday life. Its focus is the life of work, leisure, family and school. It seeks to bring us to a centre. This education begins with discerning life as good. It proceeds by evocatively calling us to re-shape it into a whole, namely, a life

of holiness. In the final analysis, this distinctive type of education is designed to raise up wise men and wise women in our midst. Its ultimate goal is a wise people standing, walking and resting in the presence of the Wise One.

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Religious Education

Religious education is an educational approach to the religious life of children, adolescents and adults. In the English-speaking world, as I noted above, religious education has taken two major directions: immersion in a religious tradition and stepping back to study it. Currently, these two directions tend to locate people in separate compartments or parallel tracks. At their best, however, these two processes can be profoundly complementary and integrative. For a rich and intelligent religious life, people need access to each kind at some time in their lives. Both kinds can operate simultaneously in a person's life, although at different periods one is likely to predominate.

In the early years, teaching people to be religious, with the goal of formation into the religious group, will take precedence. In late adolescence and early adulthood, this formation process is often challenged. Teaching religion, with the purpose of understanding, needs to commence at this stage. The older adult is in the best position to maintain a fruitful tension between the two kinds of religious education.

Not every religious educator has to do both kinds of education. Some may wear both hats at different times in different settings. Some may concentrate on only one kind. While focusing on this one kind, however, the educator needs to be aware of the other complementary aspects of the work. The overall educational strategy and intention is to facilitate easy passage from one side to the other.

In brief summary form, I will identify three habits with each approach, and a seventh to tie them together.

Religious Education as Formation in the Practices of a Religious Community

The first habit of the religious educator is to show people how to root themselves in a religious heritage. Young and old need a place to stand, a religious home, and an underlying structure of meaning to support their lives. They need incorporation into tradition. Tradition is a set of enduring practices – attitudes, rituals, beliefs, disciplines and style of action. These practices need to be put on like one's clothing. They will be modelled foremost by parents. Tradition is also comparable to a living language. It has its grammar and rules. The initial task of the religious educator is to show the neophyte how to speak the language, in other words, how to embody the practices. This is religious education as catechesis.

Religious traditions, however, can become dead and deadening. They can become stale, rote and meaningless, and little more than a tourist curiosity. We have a choice – we can be conscious participants in the practices or unconscious victims of them. The choice is between (creative) recovery and (numbing) rejection.

The effective religious educator enables young and old to re-root themselves in their religious tradition by a process of critical appropriation. Interpretative skills are needed to do this: skills of critical reflection, critical remembering and creative reconstruction. These skills will enable the religious educator to show people how to revitalise a dormant religious heritage.

Religious education in Church and family ought to be an education by practice, that is, the practice of a vibrant religious life. The life of a parish and the practice of family living ought to show by its rituals, its modelling of virtue, its sense of sacramentality, its spirituality, its polity and its social outreach, a path of knowledge. They ought to educate by doing – showing a human way of living, dying and going

beyond dying. The educator here is the whole communal life of parish and family. The parent, the priest, the catechist, the chaplain, the social activist, each with his or her own distinctive skills and in collaboration with each other, show the community how to walk the way.

This will require a re-shaping of Church – its communal life, its life of worship and its political structures so as to make possible a powerful Christian witness. A similar re-shaping of the family is needed for it to become a more effective educative form.

Religious Education as Teaching to Understand Religion

The effective religious educator directs students toward intellectual understanding. This should be done with fairness and integrity. The schoolteacher makes accessible a rich and deep knowledge of the tradition. He or she shows forth the tradition in a luminous manner. The style of showing, however, needs to be dialogical. The tradition has to be open to questioning. It is not an idol. It is good, but not God.

This teaching and study of religion must be inter-religious. Religious identity is powerful. It can bind, seal and close people off in a collective 'sameness'. This is sectarianism. A healthy and mature identity, however, springs from acquiring a sense of who I am in relation to who I am not. The other elicits my identity. The face of the other evokes my response and enriches my self-understanding. The effective teacher of religion enables students in classrooms to cross over into the (inner) world of the other and to return to their own religious world transformed. In this way, they can discover the deeper roots of their own heritage.

Schooling in religion is not just for school children. There is a critical need to involve adults in an educationally effective way. Before September 11, George W. Bush thought the Taliban was a contemporary rock group. A fundamentalist Muslim assumes and asserts it is the only authentic version of Islam. Similar claims are made by fundamentalist Christians, Jews, Hindus, in fact, almost all world religions. We see throughout the world today

that ignorance can be deadly and destructive. Adult religious literacy is indispensable in our pluralistic religious world. It needs to be at the centre of the curriculum of parish religious education.

Partners in Interplay

The final habit for the effective religious educator is to place these two sides, the practice and study, in interaction with each other. This may be the most valuable habit and skill of all. Religious educators need to attend to this continuous engagement. Practice without study can become blind, narrow and meaningless. Whereas understanding without practice flies into abstraction, detachment and lack of appreciation. The religious educator brings them together as a couple in creative tension. In enabling this marriage, he or she points the way toward a mature religious way of being in the world. And this, I would claim, is the ultimate purpose of religious education... a religious education that honours continuity and change, that builds on the past and re-imagines the future.

Notes

1. See G. Moran, 'Religious Education after Vatican II' in D. Efroymson and J. Raines (eds.), *Open Catholicism: The Tradition at its Best* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), p.151-166.
2. See M. Drumm, 'A People formed by Ritual', in E.G. Cassidy (ed.) *Faith and Culture in Irish Context* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1996).
3. See O. V. Brennan, *Cultures Apart? The Catholic Church and Contemporary Irish Youth* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2001) on how this tension is being played out in the lives of contemporary Irish youth.
4. M. Kennedy, 'Tracks into a New Civilisation: A View of the Irish Roman Catholic Church' in Michael Warren (ed.), *Changing Churches: The Local Church and the Structure of Change* (Portland: Pastoral Press, 2000): 90-108.
5. Ibid; Brennan, op. cit. and M. P. Gallagher, 'Atheism Irish Style' *The Furrow*, April 1984.

6. See D. Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000)
7. W. Brueggemann, *The Creative Word* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1982).
8. The Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, is called the Pentateuch. This literature embraces Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The prophetic writings group together Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings – termed the 'former prophets' – and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel – and the twelve (minor prophets) – termed the 'latter prophets'. The Wisdom literature, also named the Writings, is a miscellaneous collection of counsels. Of these various books, the most important are the Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastics and the Wisdom of Solomon.
9. Brueggemann, op. Cite, p.11.
10. K. Scott, 'Three Traditions of Religious Education', *Religious Education* 77, 6, 1982: pp.615-627.
11. G. Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language* (Birmingham, Al: Religious Education Press, 1989), p.49.
12. J. Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), p.65
13. W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978), Ch. 3 & 4.
14. See R. J. Starratt, 'The Prophetic Education Leader', *Religion and Education*, 24, 1, 1997, pp.40-45.
15. See K. Scott, op.cit.
16. T. Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (New Year: Harper and Row, 1980) and Sharing Faith (New York, Harper and Row, 1991).
17. See N. C. Burbules and S. Rice, 'Dialogue across Differences: Continuing a Conversation', *Harvard Educational Review*, 61, 4, 1991, pp.393-416.
18. See C. Melchert, *Wise Teaching: Biblical Wisdom and Educational Ministry*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998) and 'Pluralistic Religious Education in a Postmodern World', *Religion Education* 90 pp.3,4, 1995: 346-359; *'Wisdom is Vindicated by Her Deeds'*, *Religious Education* 87, 1, 1992, pp.127-151.
19. See G. Moran, *Interplay: A Theory of Religion and Education* (Winona: St Mary's Press, 1981): *Religious Education Development: Images for the Future* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1983); *Religious Education as a Second Language*, op.cit. and M. Harris and G. Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

Chapter 5

Practising the Trinity in the Local Church: The Symbol as Icon and Lure

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This chapter explores the task of teaching people to be religious through a post-modern reinterpretation of the classic doctrine of the Trinity. For the Christian, to know God is to live trinitarian. Living in a trinitarian way, however, can be understood in two senses: as *orthodoxy*, as correct believing, as the right perception of God as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, and, as *orthopraxis*, as right practice, as living out this perception in right acts. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is orthodoxy (right perception), and it calls for orthopraxis (right response). In both of these meanings, the doctrine is eminently practical. It emerges as the theological criterion to measure the faithfulness of the practices of the local church – its ethics, spirituality and worship. It can have far-reaching consequences for Christian living. This is the thesis I wish to pursue in this chapter.

On first impressions, the thesis may seem overextended or exaggerated. In Christian communities, most consent to the doctrine in theory but have little need for it in their religious practice. The doctrine has the reputation of being an arcane and abstract theory that has no relevance to Christian practice. It has been relegated to the margins of the tradition, vexed theologians, puzzled preachers on Trinity Sunday, and frustrated parish religious educators. In fact, the late Karl