

# Catechesis and Catholic Religious Education: Distinct Nonetheless Complementary

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**Abstract:** Catechesis and religious education are two ways in which the ministry for the education for the faith is exercised, but within different physical contexts and with interlocutors coming from different backgrounds. Moreover, both catechesis and religious education share the same contents, which are passed on to the interlocutors. This paper seeks to shed some light on the relationship between catechesis and religious education, in terms of their being distinct but at the same time complementary to each other. In this pursuit, we put forward arguments from both directions, those in favour of considering Catholic Religious Education and catechesis as identical and those viewing the two as distinct. The aim is to highlight the specific mission and role of each in education for the faith of the contemporary human being.

**Keywords:** catechesis; catholic religious education, faith formation

The relationship between catechesis and Catholic Religious Education<sup>1</sup> (=CRE) has always been a point which has been debated and discussed in various fora, and with the attainment of different results coming from the different points of view adopted.<sup>2</sup> For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Religious Instruction in schools which is identical to CRE was taught with the explicit aim of educating for the faith of the interlocutor. Therefore, it has always been considered as identical to catechesis in terms of its aims and objectives.<sup>3</sup> It was only towards the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that there seemed to be a willingness to distinguish between catechesis and CRE. This is evident in several documents published by the Congregation for Catholic Education<sup>4</sup> and by the Congregation for the Clergy,<sup>5</sup> which were the two main Congregations which are responsible for Catholic Education, and for catechesis and CRE respective-

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<sup>1</sup> In the *General Directory for Catechesis* and other ecclesial documents, this is usually referred to as Religious Instruction.

<sup>2</sup> Rymarz, "Catechesis," 537.

<sup>3</sup> Franchi, "Catechesis," 467.

<sup>4</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*.

<sup>5</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*.

ly. John Paul II was the first Pope to speak about the relationship between CRE and catechesis as one of distinction and complementarity at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. An Unclear Relationship

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (=GDC) states that in the context of Catholic Schools, CRE may take the form of an extension of the Ministry of the Word as this is imparted in catechesis, homilies and liturgical celebrations, amongst others. In State schools which are a-confessional schools, where many different religions are taught, religious education has to adopt a more ecumenical character with a strong inter-religious component. In other circumstances, it may take a more comparative stance where religious education seeks to give a cultural knowledge of religions, including the Catholic religion.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the different types of students coming from different backgrounds in schools also calls for a differentiation in the way in which religious education is taught in schools. In any school, we can have:

- a. students who are believers and thus, religious education helps them to shed light on the great existential questions and to understand their culture better;
- b. students who are searching or are in doubt, with religious education seeking to shed some light on their questions and doubts;
- c. students who are non-believers, where religious education takes the form of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>8</sup>

Notwithstanding all these utterances by different Congregations on how Catholic Education in schools can be helped through CRE, an authoritative document which is promulgated with the specific aims, purposes, opportunities and challenges of CRE in schools is still lacking. This has contributed to a conceptual gap. In this respect there seems to be a void, which different nations, schools and Episcopal Conferences have sought to fill in and to bridge in different ways and to varying degrees in terms of the similarities and the complementarity which exist between CRE and catechesis.<sup>9</sup>

The GDC clearly demarcates that the relationship between CRE and catechesis should be “one of distinction and complementarity.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the GDC insists on the absolute necessity of distinguishing these two evangelisation ministries. This is a very interesting assertion since a study of what happened in the past in these two

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Discorso ai sacerdoti della Diocesi di Roma*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 34, 69; Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 75; Groome, “Catholic Religious Education,” 15.

<sup>9</sup> Franchi, “Catechesis,” 468.

<sup>10</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 73; Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 68.

areas and what is still happening demonstrates that the relationship suggested by the GDC has either been acceded to or simply ignored to various degrees. This is mainly due to the fact that CRE in schools and catechesis actually exist as forms of education for the faith in different contexts, each of which calls for a different form of co-existence and mutual dependence of these two areas of the Ministry of the Word.

One may simply and frankly ask whether CRE should have a place in schools and whether it should be considered as an academic discipline in line with all the other academic subjects. In response to such a query, especially if it is coming from within Christian or Catholic communities, we must first of all acknowledge that the school, especially Catholic Schools, are one of the vehicles through which contemporary evangelisation efforts can reach a multitude of students in a modern and adequate way. Schools provide possibilities for evangelisation which can rarely be found in other milieus.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Catholic Religious Education and Catechesis: A Distinction

We need to start seeking to distinguish between CRE and catechesis by acknowledging a statement of fact: many people today still use the terms *catechesis*, *catechetics* and *CRE* in a synonymous way without distinguishing between them. In reality, each of these terms refers to a specific area of study or to an action which is distinguished from the rest. Nonetheless, even though their content overlaps and is common, each of these spheres are not in conflict with each other, especially CRE and catechesis.<sup>12</sup>

The GDC outlines the aims of CRE in terms of its particular characteristics of entering into an interdisciplinary dialogue with other areas of knowledge and with specific reference to the area of culture. CRE specifically seeks to “make present the Gospel in a personal process of cultural, systematic and critical assessment”.<sup>13</sup> CRE helps students to get to know the Church and its teachings from the outside, following a layperson’s point of view.<sup>14</sup>

CRE in schools seeks to enlighten the seeds of the Good News of the Gospel in a harmonious way with other areas of knowledge which students will be studying in greater depth in other academic subjects. This will lead to a harmonization of the Good News with other areas which the students are seeking to know about in their scholastic itinerary. This helps the student’s faith to grow in line with and in the light of the logic of academic knowledge and education and in harmony with academic

<sup>11</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> Scott, “The Teacher of Religion,” 7, 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 73; Archdiocese of Malta – Secretariat for Catechesis, *Religious Education*, 30-32.

<sup>14</sup> Scott, “The Teacher of Religion,” 10.

progression.<sup>15</sup> By its very nature, CRE does not necessarily need the interlocutor to have faith, as catechesis strictly requires, but it may lead to adhering to the faith or to strengthening one's faith in a systematic manner.<sup>16</sup>

When CRE is considered an academic discipline in line with all the rest, it has to be treated as such with the same rigour and standard as all other academic subjects. This calls for CRE to be presented as a subject with the same academic objectivity as other subjects, and it should also be imparted to students in the same way in which knowledge is presented in other subjects. Thus, the school remains always a school but integrates CRE as a part of its educational culture.<sup>17</sup>

It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines. It must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge. It should not be an accessory alongside of these disciplines, but rather it should engage in a necessary inter-disciplinary dialogue. This dialogue should take place above all at that level at which every discipline forms the personality of students. In this way the presentation of the Christian message influences the way in which the origins of the world, the sense of history, the basis of ethical values, the function of religion in culture, the destiny of man and his relationship with nature, are understood. Through inter-disciplinary dialogue religious instruction in schools underpins, activates, develops and completes the educational activity of the school.<sup>18</sup>

For this to happen, CRE as an academic subject needs to have aims and objectives which are distinct from those for catechesis.

In this respect, the scope of CRE in schools can be defined as the search of the student in a bid to enlighten the spiritual and the religious dimensions of life and to encourage a healthy relationship between the interlocutor and him/herself, with God, with others and with nature. This can be achieved more specifically through an education which aims at:

- a) helping students to develop their own identity as citizens and eventually as believers as well;
- b) enlightening students on their moral and ethical responsibilities;

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<sup>15</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 73.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, "The Teacher of Religion," 11; Magro, "The Challenge of Integrating," 28.

<sup>17</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 73; Rymarz, "Catechesis," 538-539; Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter*, 19; Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 68-70; Scott, "The Teacher of Religion," 10-11; Magro, "The Challenge of Integrating," 28.

<sup>18</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 73.

- c) helping students to be part of a community and to live community life as a source of strength while respecting diversity and the multi-cultural society in which they are called to live;
- d) seeking to empower them to give a positive contribution to contemporary society, in a bid to construct a more humane and respectful human culture;
- e) highlighting the contribution which religion has always given in building up and in sustaining western societies, particularly through politics, education, philosophy, the arts and the sciences;
- f) imparting to students a healthy knowledge of the Word of God by helping them get acquainted with both Sacred Scriptures and Tradition.<sup>19</sup>

It is when these aims are sought that CRE can be considered as a subject which engages in an interdisciplinary dialogue with other subjects. In this respect, CRE would help students to discuss the origins of the universe, to discuss the history of humanity and its finality, to engage in discussions on ethical issues, to embark on a dialogue between faith and culture, to discuss the ultimate aim of the human being and the relationship between the human being and nature in an intelligible and mature way.<sup>20</sup> This will ultimately benefit the student who will develop in a holistic way in all the six dimensions of the human being: physiological, cognitive, social, emotional, religious, and moral. Students have a right to develop in a holistic and integral way in their education and training towards maturity, including in the spiritual and the religious domain.<sup>21</sup> This right to the spiritual and religious formation is safeguarded on an international level in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>22</sup>, and on a national level in legislations pertaining to particular countries.<sup>23</sup>

The Religious Educator is a vital component in the effectiveness of CRE. The Religious Educator is indeed one of the key figures who are responsible for the education of the faith of children.<sup>24</sup> If the teacher is not a witness before being a teacher, CRE will remain a hypothetical subject which aims at what is seemingly impossible to reach.<sup>25</sup> A CRE teacher must be endowed with several gifts and abilities which are necessary to enter into dialogue with modern day interlocutors. Amongst these gifts and abilities, Timothy Arthur Lines presents the religious educator as a parent, a coach, a scientist, a critic, a storyteller, an artist, a visionary, a revolutionary, a ther-

<sup>19</sup> Archdiocese of Malta – Secretariat for Catechesis, *Religious Education*, 32-33.

<sup>20</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 73.

<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 69; Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 74; Archdiocese of Malta – Secretariat for Catechesis, *Religious Education*, 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 18.

<sup>23</sup> In the specific case of Malta, Ministry of Education and Employment, *A National Curriculum*, 17, 18, 32, 64-65.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, *Discorso ai sacerdoti della Diocesi di Roma*, 4; Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 96.

apist and a minister.<sup>26</sup> An unprepared or non-convinced teacher can inflict a lot of harm which can rarely and sparsely be repaired.<sup>27</sup>

The main aim of catechesis as set out in *Catechesi Tradendae* is to help interlocutors who are already believers not only to get to know more about Christ but to enter into a personal communication and communion with him.<sup>28</sup> This was later on repeated in the GDC which expounded on the way in which this had to be done: a three-tiered sequential itinerary commencing in the first proclamation, and then moving on to a systematic catechesis and finally moving on to an on-going catechesis. In this process, catechesis seeks to strengthen the initial act of belief in Christ by delving deep down into the Good News and eventually into the mystery of Christ and of the Kingdom of God. This is done without neglecting the commitment which is necessary for living a truly Christian life on a practical level.<sup>29</sup> Through the process of catechesis the interlocutors get an insider view of the Church, of its teaching and of the sacraments as aids to daily life.<sup>30</sup>

Catechesis as the etymology of the word denotes seeks to echo the Word of God in the daily endeavours of the interlocutor. This is done by seeking to read, understand and interpret all of one's life events in the light of the message of the Gospel.<sup>31</sup> This leads the person to seek to conform all one's words, actions and decisions to the Good News as this is presented in the Gospels. Catechesis seeks to realize its objective of helping the interlocutor to enter into a personal communion with Christ through six distinct but inter-related tasks. These tasks which include knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, learning to pray, education for community life, and missionary discipleship and service help the interlocutor to develop a faith which is "known, celebrated, lived and translated in prayer".<sup>32</sup>

Catechesis always presumes that the interlocutor is interested in awakening the initial conversion together with a willingness and orientation to develop a deeper understanding of the faith leading to taking particular actions in one's life. In other words, catechesis presumes that those who participate in the process of catechesis are already believers who wish to strengthen their faith and to participate more fully in the life of the Church through the liturgy and the Sacraments.<sup>33</sup> This is different

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<sup>26</sup> Lines, *Functional Models*, 53-498.

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, *Discorso ai sacerdoti della Diocesi di Roma*, 4; Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 97.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 5, 52.

<sup>29</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 80-82.

<sup>30</sup> Scott, "The Teacher of Religion," 10.

<sup>31</sup> Alberich, *La catechesi oggi*, 69-71, 107-118; Alberich – Vallabaraj, *Communicating a Faith*, 65-68, 103-114.

<sup>32</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 84; Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 69. For more information about the six dimensions of catechesis and how these can be practically applied, see Sultana, "Catechesis," 23-44.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 23; Archdiocese of Malta – Secretariat for Catechesis, *Religious Education*, 20.

from the setting in which CRE is called to unfold, and where faith is not a necessary component. This implies that the optimal setting for catechesis is that of a community of believers, and not a scholastic or academic community.<sup>34</sup> Catechesis which seeks to strengthen and deepen the faith of the interlocutors finds its best milieu in the parishes and with the help of the family.<sup>35</sup>

The distinction comes from the fact that, unlike religious instruction, catechesis presupposes that the hearer is receiving the Christian message as a salvific reality. Moreover, catechesis takes place within a community living out its faith at a level of space and time not available to a school: a whole lifetime.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. The Relationship between Catholic Religious Education and Catechesis

The question of the relationship between catechesis and CRE in schools has long been a question of debate. The first substantial arguments were put forward as far back as the 1980's. In this debate, many different points of view have been posited in a spectrum of positions which range from that of a total separation between them to one in which catechesis and CRE are considered as identical. Moreover, different countries have adopted one of these varied positions in the relationship which they posit for catechesis and CRE.

Poland, and England and Wales respectively take a very different outlook on the relationship that there should be between CRE and catechesis. This is reflected in the way in which religious education is imparted in these countries respectively. In Poland, Religious Education and Catechesis are considered as completing each other. Nonetheless, the distinction between them is not as clear cut, and at times the relation between Religious Education and Catechesis runs counter to the distinction and complementarity that Church documents have lately postulated.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Religious Education imparted in schools is considered as a part of catechesis and it moves on the same frequency and wavelength: deepening and increasing the faith and introducing to the life of the sacraments. It is therefore objectively addressed to believers or to those who would like to adhere to the Catholic faith.<sup>38</sup> "Poland guarantees its citizens the possibility to attend catechesis classes at school. Despite the fact that

<sup>34</sup> Rossiter, "The Need for a 'Creative Divorce,'" 25-26; Rymarz, "Catechesis," 538.

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 67; Groome, "Religious Education," 587.

<sup>36</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> Mąkosa, "Confessional and Catechetical," 60; Zielińska – Zwierzdzyński, "Religious Education," 268-269.

<sup>38</sup> Kopiczko, "Religious Education," 304; Mąkosa, "Confessional and Catechetical," 61, 63; Zajac – Mąkosa, "Poland," 173, 179; Zielińska – Zwierzdzyński, "Religious Education," 268-269.

learning religion is of optional nature, it still holds a confessional character.”<sup>39</sup> Still, Religious Education in schools is treated as the other academic disciplines and it is subject to methodological updates as requested by the central educational regulatory authority.<sup>40</sup> In England and Wales, religious education is more in the form of religious studies aimed at teaching not only about Christianity but it is also aimed at helping student to get to know other religions as well.<sup>41</sup> While CRE in Poland takes a very confessional outlook, akin to catechesis in preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation,<sup>42</sup> in England and Wales religious education is based on the distinction and complementarity between catechesis and CRE:

The relationship between Religious Education and Catechesis is one of distinction and complementarity. What confers on Religious Education in schools its proper evangelizing character is the fact that it is called to penetrate a particular area of culture and to relate to other areas of knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

This section of the paper will put forward arguments which are in favour of both a separation between CRE and catechesis and in considering them as the same.

Several are those who disagree with the idea of having catechesis and CRE as separate entities, taught in different physical contexts and with different aims. Thomas Groome is one of the proponents of this position. He holds that catechesis and CRE should not be separated, but they are to be considered as different forms of educating for the faith on the same continuum.<sup>44</sup> Groome holds this position because he maintains that formation in the faith and critical reflection do not stand in opposition to each other but are interdependent. Groome is positively convinced that no subject taught in schools is neutral or does not shape the students’ identity and lives in some way or another. As a result, catechesis and CRE should be taught and held together as one subject in school.<sup>45</sup>

I’m convinced that it’s possible to teach any great religious tradition (a) with academic rigour and critical reflection, (b) without indoctrination or confessional bias, (c) and yet in ways that influence people’s identity in that they *learn from it* for their lives rather than merely *about it* for their heads.<sup>46</sup>

39 Kopiczko, “Religious Education,” 307; Zielińska – Zwierzdzyński, “Religious Education,” 265-267.

40 Mąkosa, “Confessional and Catechetical,” 62; Zając – Mąkosa, “Poland,” 171; 265, 267; Zielińska – Zwierzdzyński, “Religious Education,” 267.

41 Mąkosa, “The Communities,” 186.

42 Mąkosa, “The Communities,” 188; Zielińska – Zwierzdzyński, “Religious Education,” 268-269.

43 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales – Department of Catholic Education and Formation, *Religious Education*.

44 Groome, “Catholic Religious Education,” 16.

45 Groome, “Religious Education,” 588, 590.

46 Groome, “Religious Education,” 588.



Groome advocates for a CRE which while enabling a rigorous study of the faith, allows the students to be critical in such a way that their academic endeavours lead to form their identity as believers without the slightest trace of indoctrination.<sup>47</sup>

Considering catechesis and CRE in the classroom environment as one also has the advantage of giving firm believers a more thorough relationship with Jesus Christ by getting to know him even better. For the students who are not closely affiliated to the faith, this also acts as a catalyst which may kindle their interest in getting to know more about the Catholic faith and consequently to enquire more and get closer to Christ and to his teachings. This actually constitutes a locus where evangelization can take place.<sup>48</sup>

Graham Rossiter takes a totally different position. He advocates for a separation between CRE and catechesis. His position dates back to 1982 when he spoke of the need of a “creative divorce” between catechesis and CRE.<sup>49</sup> This separation is called for out of the very nature of catechesis which is necessarily linked to a community of faith and should be part of the evangelisation ministry within a believing community.<sup>50</sup> This means that catechesis requires the faith component as an integral part. This is something which is not necessary for CRE in schools, since the latter has a more cultural and academic dimension linked to it. Rossiter argues that the “creative divorce” is necessary if we are to free catechesis from the unnecessary burden and hindrance of being linked to an academic subject in schools.<sup>51</sup>

Graham Rossiter’s argument was taken up by *The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School*. This document was the first document by the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve of the clear distinction between CRE and catechesis.<sup>52</sup> This was re-iterated in 2009 in the *Circular Letter to Presidents of Bishops’ Conferences on Religious Education in Schools*:

Religious education in schools fits into the evangelising mission of the Church. It is different from, and complementary to, parish catechesis and other activities such as family Christian education or initiatives of ongoing formation of the faithful. Apart from the different settings in which these are imparted, the aims that they pursue are also different: catechesis aims at fostering personal adherence to Christ and the development of Christian life in its different aspects (cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* [DGC], 15 August 1997, nn. 80-87), whereas religious education in schools gives the pupils knowledge about Christianity’s identity and Christian life.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Groome, “Religious Education,” 595.

<sup>48</sup> Rymarz, “Catechesis,” 545-546.

<sup>49</sup> This term was introduced by Graham Rossiter in an article he wrote about this issue: Rossiter, “The Need for a ‘Creative Divorce’”

<sup>50</sup> Rossiter, “The Need for a ‘Creative Divorce,’” 21.

<sup>51</sup> Rossiter, “The Need for a ‘Creative Divorce,’” 21-22.

<sup>52</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 68-70, 98.

<sup>53</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter*, 17.

When catechesis and CRE are considered as identical or as having the same aims, something which as we have already seen is not so, the two areas end up with an identity confusion. This is because if both seek to have the same aims, in reality they actually cannot meet these common aims since both catechesis and CRE have different aims, even though the contents which are delivered through each of these forms of education for the faith are identical. Consequently, CRE in school needs to be re-thought in terms of the principles of instructional design, and not of catechetical exhortations.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, catechesis has always been linked to a community of faith where belief is practiced within the believing community. This is something which is not necessarily so in a school community, where students may be coming from diverse backgrounds, and at times, even from different faith traditions. The situation becomes even more complicated when the variable of the type of school (State/Public, Church or Independent) is considered.

Church documents written and promulgated to help in the organisation and the strengthening of catechesis on a communitarian and parochial level can sparsely help in the teaching of CRE in schools because these were written from the particular perspective of the believing community and considering that the point of departure is such a faith community. The catechetical aims and ideas of such documents cannot be simply applied to a school setting, where the faith dimension of the believing community is usually completely lacking.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the school setting leaves much to be desired in seeking to accommodate the requisites of a believing community. This is more so due to the fact that the relations in a school community are not based on and centred around a faith tradition, but around a working community which has specific educational goals. CRE does not seek the specific maturation of the faith of the interlocutor as a definitive goal, but it does focus on knowledge of the faith.

Considering catechesis and CRE as identical is detrimental to both areas, since in our day and age, people tend to seek ways of being efficient in what they do in order to economise on time. In this light, when one seeks to identify catechesis with CRE, one is actually contributing to the annihilation one of these areas, since people start to consider them as identical, and so choose between catechesis and CRE in an 'either...or' way. On the other hand, "a clearer differentiation between religious education and catechesis...could foster more authentic and creative development of both aspects".<sup>56</sup>

When CRE is considered as a separate academic subject in itself, it is treated as such by other teachers as well. This is because the emphasis now shifts from the faith/community dimension to the academic dimension where CRE is studied using modern didactic techniques, where learning objectives which are age-appropriate using

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<sup>54</sup> Rossiter, "The Need for a 'Creative Divorce,'" 22.

<sup>55</sup> Rossiter, "The Need for a 'Creative Divorce,'" 25, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Rossiter, "The Need for a 'Creative Divorce,'" 22, 27-28.

taxonomies addressing a range of cognitive skills and competencies, and assessments and assignments indicate a particular pedagogical approach.<sup>57</sup> This demonstrates that the CRE curriculum is concentrating more on educating the students, rather than just giving them information. In this way, CRE as a subject gains its professional status as an academic subject in schools which is studied with the same rigour and scientific approach as all other subjects. This is in effect the role of CRE in the entire process of evangelisation: an academic subject which is taught using academically valid pedagogies while teaching the Catholic faith in an orthodox way at the same time.<sup>58</sup> Teaching CRE as an academic subject in itself without mixing it with catechesis makes students think critically about what they believe.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, had CRE and catechesis to be considered as identical, and presented as CRE in schools, then both spheres would lose since CRE loses its scientific approach which is typical of an academic subject.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, considering catechesis and CRE as identical would divest catechesis of its six tasks by focussing only on one of them – knowledge of the faith – at the expense of a more balanced catechesis and formation for the faith.<sup>61</sup>

CRE has often been accused of teaching students through a process of indoctrination. To this accusation, the immediate response should be that faith is never a matter of imposition, but it should always be proposed to the interlocutors who freely accept it or otherwise.<sup>62</sup> When CRE and catechesis are considered as the same thing, there is a great risk of falling into this error of indoctrination, because the school classroom becomes a physical space where moral pressure may be applied on students to comply with the different aspects of the faith. This is certainly a harmful and even violent form of education, where students are not respected for their intellectual abilities to reason things out and to choose for themselves, but they are simply spoon fed into a confessional faith in an unfair and undesired way. On the other hand, CRE as a subject which is different from catechesis opens the way to a more critical form of teaching religion in schools. In this way, CRE becomes a way of helping students to discern different proposals of the faith and to seek to deepen their knowledge and understanding of religious phenomena through higher order cognitive skills brought about by being critically minded.<sup>63</sup>

A very plausible reason for which catechesis and CRE should be separated is the fact that many baptized individuals have different levels of affiliation with the Catholic faith. Some may be very close, others may be on the periphery while others may

<sup>57</sup> Scott, "The Teacher of Religion," 11; Magro, "The Challenge of Integrating," 28.

<sup>58</sup> Franchi, "Catechesis," 470; Rymarz, "Catechesis," 545.

<sup>59</sup> Groome, "Religious Education," 587.

<sup>60</sup> Rossiter, "The Need for a 'Creative Divorce,'" 30-31; Rymarz, "Catechesis," 544.

<sup>61</sup> Magro, "The Challenge of Integrating," 28.

<sup>62</sup> Rossiter, "The Need for a 'Creative Divorce,'" 34.

<sup>63</sup> Scott, "The Teacher of Religion," 10; Magro, "The Challenge of Integrating," 28.

profess to be Catholic just because they are baptised. In schools, we can have all these three different levels of affiliation within the same class at the same time. Giving such a variety of interlocutors the same treatment as if they were all affiliated to the highest degree would actually amount to giving them what many of them would not be asking for, and what they do not actually seek or desire.<sup>64</sup>

The teacher is always a fundamental element in helping students to either love a subject or to dislike it. This also stands for CRE teachers. Had we to equate CRE to catechesis, and with the possibility of having teachers who may not be convinced of what they are teaching, then the expected result is that we will have students who are sceptic of their faith. Such teachers actually do more damage and harm than leave a positive impact. This means that with our heterogeneous society, the school classroom environment, where the teacher plays a primary role together with the students, is no longer the ideal setting for catechesis. In this regard, a separation of catechesis from CRE is beneficial to both areas.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4. A Way Forward

The differences between catechesis and CRE should not only be reflected in the physical settings in which each of these areas is conducted, namely in parishes and in schools respectively, but also in the aims which each one of these different areas seeks to reach. Catechesis decisively aims at helping the interlocutor to enter into a personal communion with Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup> In this respect, faith is a necessary component both before the process begins and more importantly, after catechesis. In this respect, the parish community plays a leading role. When we consider adult catechesis which is the prototype of catechesis with different categories of people, we see that this requires a community of faith as a *sine qua non* condition.<sup>67</sup> It is the community of faith which triggers the interlocutor to embark on the process of catechesis to be initiated in the faith; it is the community of faith which sustains catechumens in their itinerary of formation; it is the community of faith which spurs those who are already members of the community to seek to enlighten their lives through on-going catechesis. This shows that catechesis is tightly linked to the community and calls for a parochial faith community since catechesis is a ministry in which the believing community has a primary and undeniable role: “The Christian community is the focus *par excellence* for nurturing and maturing the faith in all its aspects.”<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Rymarz, “Catechesis,” 542.

<sup>65</sup> Rossiter, “The Need for a ‘Creative Divorce,’” 26.

<sup>66</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory*, 80-87.

<sup>67</sup> Magro, “The Challenge of Integrating,” 31.

<sup>68</sup> Magro, “The Challenge of Integrating,” 32.

On the other hand, CRE in schools takes a more cultural route seeking to impart knowledge about Christian life and the Christian identity as a way of life. In this respect, CRE may lead to adhering to the Christian life in a more authentic and knowledgeable way.<sup>69</sup> “It contributes to the overall formation of the person and makes it possible to transform knowledge into wisdom of life.”<sup>70</sup>

Although in our contemporary and multicultural world we cannot have strait jackets and one-size-fits-all solutions, we can still indicate a way forward which is beneficial for both CRE and catechesis. It seems that the best way forward today is that catechesis and CRE are considered as, and actually remain distinct subject matters which are complementary to each other. Although distinct as fields of study, they also mutually complement and help each other.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, considering catechesis and CRE as distinct does not mean that they are considered as opposed to each other or at loggerheads.<sup>72</sup> We must constantly keep in mind that the fact that CRE and catechesis are distinct but complementary demonstrates that they are not mutually exclusive, and that both of them are necessary for a balanced presentation of the Catholic faith and identity.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

The pedagogical relationship between catechesis and CRE remains a wide-open debate where many different points of view can be emphasised in many different approaches in various settings. This has always been the approach after several decades of discussions and ecclesial utterances. It is not easy to clearly find plausible reasons which could eventually find one position which would be exclusive of all others. Notwithstanding this, a position where CRE and catechesis are distinct but at the same time complementary to each other seems to be the best way of envisioning the relationship between CRE and catechesis in their respective responsibility and duty of educating for the faith.

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<sup>69</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter*, 17; Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 69.

<sup>70</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to Teachers*.

<sup>71</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Circular Letter*, 17; Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension*, 70; Franchi, “Catechesis,” 469, 474; Rymarz, “Catechesis,” 544.

<sup>72</sup> Rymarz, “Catechesis,” 545.

<sup>73</sup> Magro, “The Challenge of Integrating,” 28-29.

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