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Journal article

The collective consciousness of an RE department during curriculum change: scripture, representation, science, fear and anger`

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Abstract

This article reports for the first time in full, a seed corn pilot study that presents a moment of the collective consciousness of an RE department in the midst of curriculum change. It records their concerns about the impact of increased content on depth in a new exam course, and the particular consequence this has for the kind of learning happening around texts. It reveals concerns about the representation of religion in the curriculum, the distance between that representation and teacher's perceptions of pupils' spiritual and religious lives. It also identifies teachers sense of fear and guilt about the challenge of fulfilling their duties to pupils, the secular authorities and the Catholic authorities, and reveals insights around the question of science of religion. In this single focus group, the collective consciousness of an RE department captures many key issues of significance in RE today.

Keywords

Teachers, Catholic, Religious Education, Sacred texts, curriculum change, examinations, representation,

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Authors' contributions

1. Introduction

This article presents findings of a seed corn project that preceded the *Texts and Teachers* project presented at the Association of University Lecturers in Religion and Education at Newman University, Birmingham, UK in 2019. The summary findings of the *Texts and Teachers* project are available online (Bowie, Clemmey and Panjwani 2020). This work is part of a longer area of interest in the teaching of sacred texts and hermeneutics in Religious Education (Aldridge 2018 and 2015). Previous work has highlighted enduring problems in sacred text practice reported over 20 years (Bowie 2018, 2016). The recent change to the national exam curriculum for 16-year olds was identified as a possible contributor to those problems (Bowie and Coles, 2018). This theme has been of substantive interest in other education jurisdictions (Carswell 2018a and 2018b).

The seed corn project findings have never been published in full and include data related to different areas. The study was a single focus group with six teachers from a large Catholic state funded girls' secondary school in the South of England talking about their experiences of teaching the first year of a new curriculum for exams sat at 16 years old. The project sought to establish whether the theoretical problems seen in the new exam curriculum (introduced from 2016-2018) had substance but the data reveals a broader range of issues.

A school with a high level of subject expertise was identified. This would mean the subject professionals are experts, with strong academic backgrounds, and a strong background of success in the subject. Before the focus group an initial exchange with the Head of Department, who participated in the focus group, who consulted with the departmental team and received permission from the Headteacher. The teachers in the department had things they wanted to say about the changes. They saw this as an opportunity to have their say on some changes they were unhappy with.

The author makes no claim about the representativity of the department in terms of RE teachers at large or RE teachers in Catholic schools and cautions against assumptions about the worldviews of the teachers themselves which the researcher concluded were diverse (including cultural and religiously traditional and liberal Catholic). The project used a focus group approach to try to capture the conversation the department was having about the changes so that the research would capture, at a micro level, the professional conversation to elicit understandings, opinions, views and how they are elaborated and negotiated in the Catholic school context and is particularly interested in how this talk acts as a window into underlying beliefs and opinions as well as a form of social action in its own right (see Wilkinson 1998, 187). It was intended that the focus groups be more collective conversations than group interviews (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2013). In the text below some sequences of interactions are reproduced along with indicators of agreement from other teachers when participant contributions are listed, as well as some longer sequences of exchange, to give the sense of the departments collective consciousness. Semi structured questions developed from themes from the previous literature studies were used. For this paper, the researcher returned to the original transcript and recording to draw as much as possible from the original responses.

The RE department that constituted the focus group was in a school with a strong track record of success in examinations. The project was cleared by ethics committee, assured anonymity and confidentiality for the contributors, conscious of any possible professional consequences. The participants were free to participate and free to withdraw their

contribution. The focus group was conducted with the agreement of the Headteacher who was not present. There were six religious education teachers in the Catholic secondary school, who were teaching a new English exam (GCSE) in Religious Studies with Catholic Christianity and Judaism as the religion options. New here means since the 2015 when the new framework for English exams were published by the UK Government (DfE 2015). This framework determined the content range and structure for Religious Studies and exam boards were then permitted to propose exams in subsequent years. A feature of the new exam was the study of two religions which had reduced content space for Christianity.

2. Sacred Texts in the Classroom “we live in a world where people pick and choose scripture to justify really good things but really awful things as well”

One of the consequences of the new curriculum was that the school chose to no longer study a Gospel paper. A previous common approach by English Catholic schools was to study one paper focussed on a Gospel (often Mark) and a second paper focused on another, broader aspect of Christian life and faith. Under the new curriculum proscribed by the Governments quality oversight body Ofqual, exams are required to teach two religions and exam boards them made offerings which have made following a Gospel paper unattractive to schools, such that now very few schools indeed follow a Gospel paper at this level. Religious plurality has *won out* over the study of sacred texts in a systematic way. Students would still encounter texts as quotes but no longer in the context of the sacred text study. This theme was foregrounded in preparation for the focus group. The participants were immediate alert to the consequence to the loss of sacred text study expressing both a loss of the familiar and the loved, and a concern about loss of depth, context and broader narrative:

I miss the Mark's Gospel but I miss what we did have which under the new course wouldn't have been there. So I miss that they are [not] doing some in depth biblical stuff as opposed to having, learning lots of biblical sources but not really having a huge amount of context for them, having the sources as opposed to knowing that there's a continuum, a story that's coming through. That's something I miss. [Participant 4]

This was linked to a concern that these losses would lead to substantive losses of learning with negative consequences about understanding possible contemporaneous meanings and losses about application of text to the present which would lead to an absolute loss.

They don't fully understand the text that we're using either because although we get them to understand why that text teaches that about that topic, all of those texts, the idea of lifting things out of their context in the world that they're in and you haven't got time to really go into details of exactly what was happening previously, what was happening afterwards, what was the political situation, when we're not doing Jesus and hermeneutics, so we can't do that. And I think they lose something from that particular quote that we're looking at. I don't think they'll ever really truly understand the quote because they only know that says that about that topic. [Participant 2]

This was seen in the context of broader concerns that the absence kind of skills that had been part of the teaching of the Gospel would be a significant loss to aspects of the applicability of the education received to aspects of life, civic, moral and spiritual.

And we live in a world where people pick and choose scripture to justify really good things but really awful things as well. [Participant 4, agreed with by Participant 2]

I think even if you look at the Conquistadors or you look at South Africa yes people use biblical texts. If you look at the Ku Klux Klan they use biblical texts. They use it completely out of context and we would understand it's out of context. I would prefer them to have a context rather than just you're going to need to use this quote to justify this. That's difficult. [Participant 4]

Here the implicit criticism is of an exam question structure (Bowie forthcoming, Bowie and Coles 2018) in which sacred text scholarship is replaced by quotes for exams answers. The oppositional / debating nature of the exam question style was seen to be imposing itself on the organisation of content. The erroneous use of sacred texts by extremist groups is identified as something built into the exam question design and the kinds of answers required. These questions require debates with sources to underpin arguments, with short quotes of sacred texts learnt as exemplar sources (Bowie forthcoming, Bowie and Coles 2018).

We're using the bible to justify Catholic beliefs rather than deriving Catholic beliefs from the bible.[Participant 2]

One teacher saw a loss that would reach to later adult life and the students ability to understand their own faith.

Yes and they'll answer their question and they'll get the marks for their question but then we aren't just getting them to pass an exam. Later on life they're at university and someone says so why are you a Catholic and they come out with this random quote that they've used and they've got marks for but actually isn't relating to their faith at all. [Participant 4, agreed with by Participant 3]

I think that they're losing stories about their faith and being in a Catholic school that was important to me. [Participant 4]

A particular example of this revealed a concern about the utilisation of sacred text for as a pretext for a debate topic, and a view that this particular use/interpretation was inappropriate.

I think it's the exam from Incarnation again, the use of Luke 1.44 for why we should be against abortion which is taken from Mary meeting Elizabeth, the Magnificat, that event is not about saying why we shouldn't abort babies really. I understand how we're using that quote in that way, but all we're doing with them is 'that's why we should do this' so they have no understanding of the Magnificat, of the significance of that, you don't get to talk about the fact that Luke gives to a woman this declaration of who Christ is, we're just going to say this tells us about why we should protect the unborn. [Participant 2]

At the same time there was a suggestion that an increase in content that had to be learnt would increase the standing of the subject.

But I must admit that's the one thing I do like about it, that it's making RE more rigorous. I am going to say that! It's making it more rigorous [yes] as a discipline. So it's not this Cinderella subject any more, you're going to take RS you're going to actually really have to think. [Participant 3, agreed with by Participant 2]

The impression these teachers shared are a consequence of the two religions approach combined with the long-standing type of question which is more argumentative. There are concerns about quantity of information over context and depth. As a consequent that worry about the learning that children won't get and do need.

3. That which is lost

One teacher saw this new *academic approach* as coming at the expense of personal development. The priority to content quantity over exploration and discussion was the concern here. This had adverse consequences for the experience in the classroom.

But I still didn't feel that it was hitting them, it was just their... they liked studying it from an academic point of view, that was how it was coming across to me. But I really didn't feel, or I don't feel when they're in front of me that really they're engaging personally with it." [Participant 3, sup agreed with ported by Participant 1]

So if I use words like character, spiritual, moral, whole development, that's the big that you're sort of...? [Interviewer]

And that's the bit that I think is most important." [Participant 4]

A binary between academic and personal formational learning was evident in these responses. Recent scholarship has sought to make the case for the place of student individual reflection within the academic frame (Cooling 2020 and Larkin, Freathy, Doney and Freathy 2019). These writers have sought to locate an aspect of personal learning within an academic frame rather than in opposition to it. They see this in terms of the researcher's ability to understand their own motivations and positionality as they undertake a study, and also in terms of their ability to be involved themselves in conversations around religion, belief and worldviews themselves.

One issue a teacher identified was the emphasis of propositional knowledge over disciplinary knowledge in the curriculum. The expansion of content is seen in contrast to skills development for critical analysis. Here it is not personal learning that is lost but another kind of academic knowledge. The emphasis on propositional knowledge acquisition squeezes out disciplinary or procedural knowledge.

Because I think one of the things that we've got with A level [country exam for 18 year olds] is we're encouraging through GCSE to enjoy critical thinking and analysis, and I feel that in the GCSE [country exam for 16 year olds] course there is so much content and I'm spending a lot of time delivering content and getting them to understand it, I'm spending a lot of time teaching them exam technique in terms of skills, but actually how much time I've really got for real critical analysis of what we're doing and thinking through things and how that might impact them, I feel that's so squished now. [Participant 2, agreed with by Participants 1 and 3]

And we haven't got the time to unpack all of that, and that's the important issue I think for the students. [participant 2]

It is here where discursive space is felt to have been lost which is a particular in complex and controversial topics.

And there isn't that space to really discuss things, like in the second unit in Incarnation you get to where we discuss what it says in terms of protection of the unborn so we can discuss abortion. And actually, I had to do that in one lesson because if I took any longer over it we'd run out of time. So this really important being able to think about all these different things that we've looked at, the impact that would have on your understanding of this key issue that is relevant in contemporary society, we had hardly any time on it because I've got to get on with the next unit, because there's more content to deliver. [Participant 2, Participants 1 and 3 agreed]

The lack of depth is seen as likely to reduce student enjoyment.

Normally that would have been about 3 or 4 lessons definitely to look at issues to do with abortion, which they enjoy and engage with. Life and death issues, really getting them to think, and I did it in a lesson. (Participant 1)

The lack of unpacking time was thought to be likely to produce mechanistic responses in students answers especially in terms of the longer evaluation questions.

I think we're going to get a mechanical response, I think that's what it's going to be. Mechanical responses. It's going to be 'this is how you do it, this is how you structure it' but it's going to be very few that actually give insightful responses where they engage personally with the text or the issue. I think it's very much a kind of robotic approach. (Participant 3)

I think for a lot of our students when we're looking at evaluation answers it would be a focus on arguments for that statement and arguments against that statement, so that they've got ideas in their heads, they can do two points of view and come to a conclusion to ensure their marks. (Participant 2, agreed with by Participant 3)

This was seen as important particularly in terms of how the department manages situations where students disagree with formal Church teachings, and the desire of teachers to give time for an open and careful discussion about the issues protecting personal responses from students that may differ and may reflect conscientious disagreement among Catholic students.

No and in terms of how we do it lower down the school it's very much so this is what the church teaches, this is what other people teach, off you go kids. It's not... So we've certainly set up as a department that the students have to be given the space to discuss and disagree and on a lot of those issues the vast majority of our students... [Participant 2]

It also led to comments being made about a fear of simply not being able to get through the content in time, but also that the compression of the curriculum might undermine recruitment into A level and onto university. Recent advocates of a knowledge rich approach to curriculum in RE (eg. Kueh 2020) have emphasised the need to ensure that includes disciplinary knowledge. In the selected quotes above the concern is that the exam has over emphasised the propositional knowledge (sometimes called substantive knowledge). This is a

direct result of the focus in the Government's approach to setting the content boundaries of exams (DfE 2015) and an exam driven approach to education where, in the case of Religious Studies, the tools needed to deal with the exams are not closely related to a particular discipline related to the substantive content (Bowie forthcoming).

4. Teaching a 'very Catholic' curriculum and engaging all students

Religious education scholarship has frequently focussed on the question of representation and misrepresentation of religion drawn to influential prominence in the work of Jackson and Nesbitt (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993 and Jackson 1997) and the landmark work on the study of an ethnographic and interpretative approaches in RE. In the findings of this present case, this issue is clearly evident in the kind of Catholic Christianity being represented which the teachers saw as antithetical to pupils and their own personal understand of Catholic faith. This was reflected in multiple responses. First in the sense that argumentation encouraged an apologetics approach to the subject, rather than a scholarly one, and the view that a particular traditional or conservative account of Catholicism was underscored in the associated textbook, that there was a given normative devout Catholic Christianity being presented rather than a reflection of the spiritual life of people who consider themselves Catholic but may not reflect a particular cultural practice of Catholic Christianity which was of a traditionalist or pre Vatican II form. There was also reference to children who are associated with Catholic life but not in a particularly religious way. This was more directly framed in terms of the recent between different expressions of Catholic life with the teachers saw as a textbook expression which is at variance from the pupil's expression. Here the textbook, with its approval by the exam board, being a carrier of the curriculum.

Wasn't there a picture, it's the section that's about the Eucharist. And they have somebody receiving the Host on the tongue as a picture which even just on the small things like that, I know it's not a huge deal but it's...

I think the whole thing came across as in terms of the text book, in terms of what we were given as our syllabus, as a group of people who seem to think that our Catholic schools are entirely populated by very committed Catholics and that this would be their world and they would be happy to do this. And actually, that is simply not the case, even in schools that have a majority Catholics are not necessarily practising Catholics. So we're trying to engage students who may be from atheistic backgrounds, from different Christian backgrounds, from other religions, or just lapsed Catholic families who are apathetic towards it all, to something that is very Catholic. [Participant 2 agreed with by Participant 3]

There is a perceived swing towards a traditional or conservative representation of Catholic Christianity which is also bound up with the use of a key word, Magisterium.

Well we'd never have done Magisterium Teachings in that way and when we did the Sacraments it would have been sprinkled across the 3 years, fitting in with what particular theme we were doing. [Participant 1]

We wouldn't have used the word Magisterium [Participant 2]

We're only saying this a lot because this is what the exam spec says. [Participant 2, agreed with by Participant 1]

The use of Latin phrases was also identified as an illustration of a more traditionalist representation of Catholic Christianity (Latin is associated with the pre-Vatican II Mass and the traditionalist interest in the Latin Mass which was made more possible by changes introduced under Pope Benedict XVI). Catholic debates around Latin are linked to ecclesiological debates about the Church and the recent history of the Church, sometimes portrayed as a liberal – traditionalist binary, which contrasts Pope Benedict XVI with Pope Francis.

Or even explain two teachings from the writings of Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses*. It's the fact that they even didn't write against the heresies, you know, they'd made it that language. [Participant 2]

They used the Latin. [Interviewer]

Yes. [Participant 2]

Yes and *Imago Dei* there's another good example, my lot have just done an abortion question on that and they can engage with that but they can't engage with that. Why it doesn't say image of God I don't know. [Participant 1]

So they're not...? [Interviewer]

Well that's just how the question has been worded. [Participant 1]

So the question uses the Latin, the *Imago Dei*... [Interviewer]

Yes. [Participant 1]

This interpretation of a move towards a more traditionalist representation of Catholic Christianity was seen as an emphasis on the exam approved textbook with consequences for images and contemporary ethical issues now contested in Catholic media. In the following prolonged exchange the teachers revealed a sense of frustration that a certain account of a more devout *practicing* Catholicism dominating the curriculum, and this was in part manifesting itself through the exam board authorised published textbook. This became specifically important around the issue of sexuality and gender where there is a socially conservative formal teaching that is not in sync with contemporary social mores and human rights legislation on same sex relationships in the UK, and a matter of debate within the Catholic Church as a result of a change in approach to these debates by the Pope which has led to open disagreement about the pastoral approach to sexuality and gender.

Yes. And I think our approach has always been, I would always like to think that the student feel that RE is taught here, that we're not telling you what you need to believe, that you're engaging in an open forum. But even the textbook, the [anonymised] text book for that particular section, the pictures for same sex marriages, it's just dreadful. [Participant 1]

We're probably a little bit sensitive to it, but in terms of things like homosexuality, if you really do want to have the opportunity to have an open debate and in terms of our well received policy and responding to LGBT stuff and all those sorts of things,

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this for us is a new area of exploration. And this is really not helping I don't think.
[Participant 1, Participant 2 and 3 agree]

I just want to if you don't mind, bearing in mind all the confidentiality side, is your perception of that textbook that it leans towards one particular end of the church's spectrum?" [Interviewer]

Yes. [Participant 2, Participant 1 Agrees]

Because obviously receiving on the tongue is actually quite a minor practice, it's common practice in the UK, although there has been change nevertheless, so your perception is it sort of sits on the more traditional end of the spectrum? [Interviewer]

That's exactly how it comes across. You do sort of look at 'what was the group of people who did this'. Do you feel that? [Participant 2, agreed with by Participant 1]

....

So if I was to say 'The textbook is more Benedict than Francis' is that not fair, is that unfair? [Interviewer]

I think it would be easy to say that. And it's just for things like homosexuality, the students would be sensitive to that. So they would be sensitive to those particular messages. And for us the kind of what the struggle is, which again we've been talking about quite a lot because of reviewing the policy at the moment, what the church teaches about homosexuality ok what that is - to discuss that with students - we can say what that is. But then it's dealing with their responses. [Participant 1, agreed with by Participant 2 and 3]

There is a heightened degree of focus around same sex relationships due to changing statutory requirements for relationships education required by the UK Government of all schools in England (DfE 2020) which accord with human rights legislation around same sex relationships and gender. The teachers wanted to give adequate time and space to explore an issue of controversy and concern for young people.

A further area of a perceived traditional representation of Catholic faith was in liturgy (worship and ritual) which are markers for a considerable disagreement and debate in Catholic Christianity. There is an ongoing debate since (now Emeritus Pope) Benedict XVI's encouragement of Mass in Latin, since the contentious process of the reform of the Mass in English which some perceived to reintroduce traditionalist elements. Those changes in the conduct of the Mass were seen by some as a reflection of a shift in Benedict's approach to the Church away from the Vatican II expression.

Pictures of receiving communion on the tongue provoked this sequence from a number of the participants:

Wasn't there a picture, it's the section that's about the Eucharist. And they have somebody receiving the Host on the tongue as a picture which even just on the small things like that, I know it's not a huge deal but it's... [Participant 2]

I would say all of our students that have done their first Holy Communion when they were 8, that wouldn't be there. [Participant 1]

That wouldn't be the experience. So your feeling is that the kind of Catholicism being represented does not really match the kind of let's call the different sorts of ways of being Catholic that is experienced in life? [Interviewer]

No. And I think none of our students, and I imagine students across the board, their experience of Catholicism is a very post-Vatican II experience of Catholicism with a focus on social justice, on modern ways of worship, on all of those sorts of things. And that I don't feel is particularly reflected in the course; these things are touched on, if you look at the music bit it was plain chant, traditional hymns, psalms and then contemporary worship music as a kind of add-on at the end. But the focus seems to be a lot on these more traditional ways. And most of the students I've taught I played them some plain [chant?] they'd never heard it! It's not their world to listen to plain chant. [Participant 2]

The curriculum was seen as expressing an overly authoritarian account – one some felt was out of step with contemporary Catholic Christianity in ecclesial and theological terms, as well as one that was unfamiliar to those pupils in the practices of religiosity presented.

4. “I feel like I am failing them” [Participant 3]

The seriousness of some remarks expressed a deep sense of professional duty around teaching and the aims of religious education which included the spiritual dimension of human flourishing that the teachers had, and their own fears and frustrations in being able to support young people as they would like. Here, one participant expressed a profound sense of distance between the curriculum authorities and the young people.

I just don't feel that this course at all links with teenage spirituality, that's the thing. I think there's a complete gulf between what this course is expecting us to deliver and where the students are coming from in their world. It's almost like it's been put together by academics that really do not understand teenagers, that's how I feel. [Participant 3, agreed with by Participant 1 and 2]

In addition there is criticism of a certain authoritarian account of the curriculum.

It's also a particular type of – it's church academics, I think. It's not kind of university people, it's a particular strand that says if we just tell people stuff we'll be fine, and we just know that isn't so. And I think because of the amount that we've got to do, that doesn't give us that flexibility that we would probably normally – you know, we use our own in our school and people who are teaching in other schools, you need a bit of space to do it in the way that you feel you can engage your students. [Participant 1, agreed with by Participant 3]

For one participant this was a point of acute frustration as they perceived this to be the cause of a disconnection that then manifest in the classroom. The sense of 'losing the class' in the

following extract suggests a teacher's frustration when the collective dynamic of a lesson falters and fragments, but also a deeper sense that this loss undermines the education.

You know what I think upsets me, is I walk into the classroom and for the majority of students I feel like I am failing them, that's what upsets me. People like this, I just sit there thinking what are you doing in this room and what can I do for you. Because I am losing you, I'm losing you as we're going through the course and it really irritates me. [Participant 3, agreed with by Participant 2]

For two participants this sense of professional frustration manifests in a loss of the focus on the kind of education benefit because of the focus on a certain kind of academic study.

All the guilt. And they are working their socks off trying to do this and still coming out with 1s, or 2s maybe, because it's just too hard for them. [Participant 2, agreed with by participant 1 and 3]

It's just horrendous. [Participant 3, agreed with by participant 1 and 2]

It was clear that the kind of educational benefit that the teacher saw as crucial in religious education, did not fit into the kind of educational benefit needed, in the view of teachers, by some of the children they taught.

5. Science and religion

A final theme related to the presence of creation in the curriculum and the associated science and religion debates. Despite some misgivings a teacher commented on student enthusiasm around the focus on creation in the new curriculum,

Well funnily enough, the year 9s I saw them last before seeing you, I asked them to do a green pen review as to how they feel about their understanding of unit 1, Creation. Quite a few of them said they really enjoyed looking at Creation because they'd never thought about it in that way. [Participant 3]

It also gives an insight into the life of a teacher of RE who is Catholic, and a concrete example of a general level of ignorance around Catholic compatibilism, and scientism in the community. The teacher is expressing something of this communication failure.

Most of my friends are atheists and a lot of them are quite vocal about being atheists and I see an awful lot of yeah but it's religion against science. I am being told constantly by my friends that I don't believe in science. And I spend a lot of my time arguing with my friends that I do believe in science. I don't think it's the church telling them they don't believe in science, I think it's the non-church telling them that they don't believe in science. The church isn't telling enough on this therefore are they right. [Participant 6]

In the focus group the public interest in science and religion emerges in the pupil interest in the Creation narrative and also an observation around something that has been sparked in children at primary school and left unresolved.

It might be a very small thing but it is interesting when you hit these topics like with year 7 we talked about it this year, the shock and surprise when they find out that the Catholic church doesn't teach a literal 6-day creation, and even from students who come through Catholic education. And I think possibly that when they've gone to primary school they know the story at face value, this is the story of Creation, and then it's the first time they're hearing this idea that this might be poem or parable rather than science text book. So I don't know whether there is also a possible issue in terms of how we deal with the bible stories right from the beginning. But then I'm not a primary school teacher. How you would do that with children of that age group I don't know. But it's possible. [Participant 2, agreed with by Participant 3]

There was a recognition that among Catholic families an understanding of the metaphorical interpretation of Creation would not be widespread. Literalism might be more common.

It's also received faith of the family and how they talk about these things or speak about them at home. I don't know how many adult Catholics you would go to and ask does the Catholic Church teach a literal understanding of Creation how many of them would get the right answer. I think it would be a low percentage. [Participant 5]

The teacher here is describing a reflection on upbringing where there was a givenness towards compatibilism and science education. It simply was not necessary to focus on any perceived problem with the Creation accounts because of an implicit but not articulated metaphorical understanding of Creation.

Also as a child growing up my mum would have said no it doesn't, we believe in science, that would have been the response to it. But it would never have dawned on me to ask that question and for many years I grew up thinking well I am Catholic and I do believe this but I don't believe that really happened, I believe in my own head and my head made that into a parable. But nobody had ever told me it was a parable you know, and then as an adult I was then told actually the teachings of the church are exactly what you believe. I was oh! [Participant 6]

But would your mother even have known to give you that at that time? [Participant 5]

This expression also illuminates the process of non-formal faith learning in the teacher's own home and a reflection of the significance of that learning for their own formation. It is an example of the kind of teaching the faith that happens in the domestic setting, between mother and child, and how significant that was in the absence of an ordered curriculum. The phrase "nobody had ever told me it was a parable you know" touches on an imprecision in authorised Catholic teachings around Creation where there is no formal specific agreement on precisely what kind of truth Genesis has. There is no definitive statement that the Creation account is not to be believed as literal, probably in part due to the place Creation has in the doctrine of original sin. Nevertheless, the contemporary compatibilist position of Catholic understanding on science and religion is more suited to a metaphorical, apiritual and symbolic understanding of Genesis.

This feeds back to the starting point of this article and the discussion around sacred text. If there is not the space to develop a hermeneutical literary around spiritual and symbolic reality and meaning in texts (rather than an implied or state literal and historical understanding) then

there is a missing language which would assist the nuanced reading of Creation necessary to sustain the compatibilist expression of Catholic Christianity.

6. Conclusions

This paper has sought to draw out, with some contextual referencing, as much as possible from the expression of teacher's themselves. The data lead the research to consider many questions about the introduction of a new exam by government and the consequences for a school in which there is an academically strong and dedicated team of teachers some of whom were also religiously committed to the religion they were teaching.

This gives an insight into a team of teachers and their collective consciousness and the interaction dimensions of personal worldview, secular and religious responsibilities, to authorities and to students. Of course these are busy teachers, expressing the kind of feelings of being overwhelmed by the introduction of a new curriculum which requires substantive change. Teaching as a profession in England is one where teachers feel frequently overwhelmed.

It is possible that their perspectives will change once they have finished teaching through the new exam and also possible they will find alternative strategies to counter some of the elements they were concerned with.

This collective team might be misinterpreted as more liberally minded teachers who are resisting a more conservatively framed curriculum account of Catholic Christianity, a reflecting of a competing tension between lived religion and spirituality and authorised or approved accounts of religion. However, the teachers themselves were diverse in their Catholic and religious identities.

The data also gives some insight into the collective consciousness around the personal, formational and intellectual understanding of the aim of RE. They show rich and complex conceptualisations of RE which is not translatable to a simplistic professional-confessional binary. They are fully aware of diversity within Catholic Christianity, in terms of relative difference of belief and practice (orthodoxy and orthopraxy). They express a deep commitment to their students above all else in helping the negotiation between the world experience of those students and their own spiritual identities, and in the mediation between a society in which social mores toward sexuality and gender are changing and a tradition with a more socially conservative understanding of those social mores.

They are literate theologically and ecclesialogically and are hungry for students to experience depth and meaningful engagement with the subject matter. They are professional agents analysing the consequence of the secular assessment structures and theologically reading these structures to identify limitations and opportunities. They are clearly aware of their balance of responsibilities to the young, to the Catholic education authorities and to their secular educational responsibilities. This was clear from the way they spoke about sexuality and gender where they clearly took seriously their civic duty under the statutory requirements to maintain the human rights framework that recognises and affirms non heterosexual relationships and orientations.

They are also honest about their own worldviews and where they sit in relationship to those responsibilities and it is clear that the major debates in the Catholic Church are framing the

discussion in this RE department. The teachers sense of responsibility is perforated by their worldview. They express theological/ecclesiological/spiritual responsibility.

The data also reveals elements of contradiction in their own sense of knowledge, discipline, propositionality and a quality of the RE lesson which is somewhat mysterious, an aspiration for a kind of education that has a deeply personal dimension, yet is also academic, though the boundaries of those categories are not worked out (and indeed may not be entirely clarifiable). It also reveals the significance of a set of key questions of professional importance for RE teachers in Catholic schools:

1. Should exams in Catholic Religious Studies reflect an authorised devout account of Catholic faith or a representation of actual Catholic life? This is question of the lived religion debate (ref).
2. How should RE curricula in Catholic schools reflect diversity of Catholic life in belief and practice?
3. What is the appropriate balance between breadth and depth in the content studied?
4. What is the right balance between (i) personal, reflective, exploratory discussion, (ii) argumentation and debate and (iii) content acquisition in RE?
5. What place should sacred text scholarship, and any other kind of scholarship, have in RE curricula, and how should that scholarship be assessed?
6. Can a better understanding of the relative balance of understanding a teacher's professionalism be established to make sense of teacher duties to pupils, secular authorities and worldview authorities responsible for school ethos?

This study found that all of these questions were of significant importance to the collective consciousness of this RE department in a Catholic school in England.

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