

Prof Tom Groome's Visit to
Mater Dei Centre for Catholic Education
6th March 2017

Slide 1

- Can We Educate for Faith?
- Thomas Groome

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- In Church, scandals that betray Gospel and Catholic faith
- Divisions, revisions, and tensions – e.g. around Vatican II; Pope Francis
- Millennials question rationale for “beliefs”
- Skepticism of post-modern era re institutional authorities, meta-narratives and reason alone

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- Challenges and (Irish) Hopes for Religious Education
- A historical and contextual note!

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- Blessings in contemporary consciousness: has alerted us to biases and prejudices
- Sexism, racism, homophobia, unregulated capitalism, etc.
- Helps Christians reclaim “recessive genes” for human rights, social justice, care for environment

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- Ireland of old – an *enchanted* world; now *disenchanted* in *secular* age); three instances of secularization (Taylor):
 - Separation of Church and State – wise arrangement
 - Drop off of religious practice – many “have faith without belonging” (Davey)
 - New “conditions of belief” marginalize faith; offer alternatives like “exclusive humanism”

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- Disenchantment ever confronted by *thin* moment/places/people of God's presence
- Subtraction theory: faith recedes before reason/science – has proved false; 85% of world claims some religion
- Clear - belief and unbelief are “takes” on ultimate questions; both challenged
- Might be opportunity for chosen faith through renewed appeal to heart's desires

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For Reflection and Conversation:

- What do you name as major challenges to educating for Christian faith in Ireland today?
- What might be deep & particularly Irish sources of hope for faith?
- Faith embers to be lit?

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- *Center on Jesus Christ:* New awareness of centrality of Jesus to Catholic faith: we have largely overlooked "historical Jesus"
- Core: not Bible, church, commandments, sacraments, dogmas, but "At the heart we find a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, only Son from the Father"^(CCC #426)

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Irish Embers: *Consider:*

- generosity to the poor
- commitment to social justice
- sense of community
- love of nature
- positive outlook on life
- faith response to death
- poetry, story-telling, conversation

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- *Jesus of History*, walked roads of Galilee, preaching reign of God's love, mercy, compassion, peace, justice. To love God, neighbor as self – even enemies
- Worked miracles to heal sick, feed hungry, drive out evil
- Fulfilled Is 61:1 as in Luke 4:16-22
- "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" (Heb 12:2)

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*What Faith to Teach
The "Heart" of it All?*

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- *Christ of Faith*, God among us; revealing who and how God is for us
- By death & resurrection, conquered sin, social & personal, even death
- With us always; by "abundant grace" can live *as disciples to his way*
- Jesus, the Christ, is then the interpretive lens for every aspect of Christian faith

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- Jesus can appeal to *eros* and *logos*, hungers of heart and good reason. Hunger:
- For *Love* – within the ambit of God's unconditional love; made in image of Love to love and be loved – with whole being
- For *Happiness* - through compassion & mercy, peace and justice; "happy are . . ."
- For *hope* – by grace, God's reign can be "done on earth as in heaven" – can deliver from evil

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- *For Reflection and Conversation*
- Your response to centrality of Jesus Christ to Catholic Religious Ed.?
- How might emphasis shift in the content of your catechesis?
- In your pedagogy?
- How to appeal to hearts as well as heads?

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- For *affirmation*; so often - "your faith has saved you" – people's own agency
- For *purpose and meaning* "you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world" (Mt 5: 13-14) - place prepared for us!
- For *life* – "have it to the full" (Jn 10:10)
- For *inclusion and community*: outreach and welcome to all – favor for poor, children, women; all welcome to table

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A Life to Faith to Life
Approach to Religious
Education

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- Taught for a *living faith - alive, lived, & life-giving* for self & others. Embodied for life of world (Jn 6: 51)
- Discipleship to *the way* he modeled "I am the way, truth, and life" (Jn 14:6)
- Engages whole person; head, heart, and hands; Gospel as fresh water springing up to eternal life (Jn 4)

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- Can teach faith traditions: To learn *about*, learn *from*, or to *become* (Grimmitt)
- RE curriculum of Catholic school: to persuasively access the truths & spiritual wisdom of Christian faith – at least to learn *from* - disposing students, as appropriate, to embrace as their identity

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- Requires a pedagogy that engages students' *everyday lives*, their generative themes and hearts' desires
- Then accesses scriptures and traditions of Christian faith (or whatever), in ways that invite integration into life as spiritual wisdom and dispose to consider for faith identity

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- Note Teacher at work (Luke 24: 13-35)
- Joins company & walks with them
- Elicits their story & (shattered) vision
- Shares the Story & Vision of the faith community – with persuasion; and waits
- For them to “see for themselves”
- Return to a life of *living* faith

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- Can be inspired by pedagogy of Jesus; be consistent with how he taught; described as teaching 150 times
- Appealed to both *logos* and *eros* - reason and desires of people's hearts: God's reign
- Constant intent of his teaching was to integrate life and faith into *living* faith
- Overall pedagogy was to lead people from *life to Faith to life* in faith.
- Did so by:

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- Teaching any religion or faith tradition
- Need to engage students' lives with real life themes and issues
- Access the spiritual wisdom of Christian (or Muslim, etc.) Story and Vision as pertinent
- Encourage to “see for themselves” and embrace its spiritual wisdom for life

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- Engaging people's everyday lives; fishing, farming, parenting, baking, etc.
- To reflect on their reality, often to “see” in a whole new way
- Taught his Gospel “with authority” (Mk 1:22) – persuaded by *reason* and *desire*
- Encouraged people to “see for themselves” with personal conviction
- Invited to decisions for life – to follow his wisdom way as disciples

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- Movements of Shared Christian Praxis*
- Can imagine this *life to Faith to life* approach as an engaging focusing and activity; then five pedagogical movements as follows:
 - Focusing act: Engage with a real life or life-in-Faith theme as the curriculum

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LIFE → FAITH → LIFE

- M.1: Invite expression from praxis/experience around theme
- M.2: Encourage reflection & conversation (reason, memory, imagination)

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- Focusing: Engage with life or life-in-Faith theme

LIFE M.1: Invite expression from praxis of theme
M.2: Critical reflection (reason, memory, imagination)

FAITH M.3: Persuasive access to Story/Vision

LIFE M.4: Encourage appropriation, integration
M.5: Invite to decisions - to at least "learn from"- spiritual wisdom for life

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LIFE → FAITH → LIFE

- M.3: Persuasive access (reason and desire) to Story/Vision of Faith tradition for theme, group, context

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For Reflection and Conversation

- Your own response to a *life to Faith to life* approach? Agreements, reservations, additions?
- What did you learn in school today? How to put it to work in your own vocation as religious educator?

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LIFE → FAITH → LIFE

- M.4: Encourage people's appropriation, integration, seeing for themselves
- M.5: Invite to decisions - at least learn *from* its spiritual wisdom; dispose to choose as identity

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- Remember: God only requires us to "Do the best we can" (*Didache*)
- Then, God's grace is always at "high tide" – and "God gives the increase" (1 Cor 3:7)
- See *Credo* High School curriculum (from Veritas)

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Thomas Groome, Professor of
Theology and Religious
Education, Boston College and
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Century Center.

For further reading see Groome,
Will There Be Faith (Veritas, 2011)