Conclusion

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Shaping the field of Catholic Education Studies

By way of concluding observations, it is important to make explicit what has been repeatedly hinted at throughout the various chapters in this book. Namely, the way in which the shape or focus of research in Catholic education has been given a discernible direction by Gerald Grace. There are a number of themes in this firm steer in the direction of research that deserve to be pointed out. The first is the importance of empirical study in relation to Catholic education. Grace's seminal 2002 work demonstrated the importance of carefully conducted fieldwork when researching Catholic education. It is sustained empirical research which Catholic education needs, rather than pious platitudes or uncritical descriptions. Grace has used his position of executive editor of the journal *International Studies in Catholic Education* (ISCE) to repeatedly publish research which is empirically robust. In bringing this sort of work to the attention of the readers of ISCE, he is providing an ongoing model of what effective research in Catholic education needs to be like. These are models which the newer generations of researchers in *Catholic Education Studies* are able to both emulate and build upon in their own research.

A second theme must be the significance that Grace attaches to the 1977 guidance document issued by the *Congregation for Catholic Education* in Rome, known as *The Catholic School*. Referring to this document has over the past two decades become almost a mantra for Gerald Grace. He has repeatedly described the 1977 document as the 'foundation charter' or universal *mission statement* for all Catholic schools. To be more precise, it is not the whole of this lengthy guidance document but rather paragraph 58 which is so central according to Grace. Within this paragraph, there is a particularly inspiring sentence that declares 'first and foremost the Church offers its educational service to the poor or those who are deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith'. There is an alignment between Catholic education and what we have come to know as the *option for the poor*. Grace has used both his public presentations and role as editor of ISCE to repeatedly draw attention to this sentence from the 1977 document, arguing that it represents a

commitment in Catholic education to those who are poor. Permeating throughout every volume of ISCE are articles which highlight social justice, or Catholic social teaching, or liberation theology, or an analysis of Catholic education in less economically developed parts of the world. This consistent editorial emphasis can be traced directly back to the importance Grace attaches to the vision embodied in this sentence in paragraph 58, and the way it demonstrates the importance of social justice and inclusion in relation to Catholic education.

Another noticeable editorial emphasis that has sought to shape Catholic Education Studies has been Grace's care to ensure the voices of female researchers are properly recognised. Wherever possible, he has tried to ensure the beginnings of gender balance in all the editions of the journal. In addition, Grace does not shy away from what some might consider to be controversial issues, such as the ordination of women as Catholic priests. In commissioning an article on this issue, he wanted, as editor, to provide teachers and students in Catholic schools and universities with the opportunity to consider arguments in favour of the ordination of women, as well as those against. He wanted ISCE to be a critical and probing arena of academic scholarship. An important part of this is the willingness and openness to be self-critical on the part of those who advocate for Catholic education. For Grace, it is a priority to avoid relying on apologetics and the defensiveness that wants to protect Catholic education against any and all critical voices, especially internal ones. What Grace wanted to bring about – and has achieved through ISCE – is a forum for genuine academic and well-researched dialogue about Catholic education, including any weaknesses alongside its strengths. In 2016, at the invitation of the European-based *International Catholic Journal of Education* (EDUCA), Online, he wrote on the importance of Catholic education and principles of openness.

Giving honour where it is due

Gerald Grace deserves to be praised for his achievements in relation to Catholic education. He is responsible for much new thinking, new research and new scholarship in what is now a firmly established field of international study. Much of this is not just down to his ability as an accomplished academic with a sixty-year career. Rather, it is the wider aspects of who he is as a person which have been the crucial factor in fulfilling his mission.

His Catholic Christian faith (which recognises the importance of 'works' as well as faith) chimes perfectly with his academic convictions in relation to the sociology of education. Grace has become someone who has learnt over life how to combine compassionate socialism with academic integrity and a living faith. He has given generously of his time, in what was supposed to be years of retirement, to respond to what has been his mission in relation to Catholic education. If it were not for those intangible qualities in Grace's personality, far less would have been achieved for Catholic education. It is Gerald Grace's

charm, kindness, joy of life and above all, commitment, which has allowed him to work so well with others, and nearly always bring out the best in them.

However, in many respects none of what Gerald Grace has achieved since 1997 would have been possible had it not been for his pre-retirement career. Gerald Grace entered the field of Catholic Education Studies as an accomplished and firmly established scholar within the Sociology and History of Education. Thus, when he approached those, such as Professor Peter Mortimore to ask for a base for the *Centre for Research and Development in Catholic Education* (CRDCE) in 1997 or the executives at Routledge in 2009 to argue for a brand-new journal, he did so as a highly respected academic and colleague. Alongside his time and ability, Gerald Grace put his considerable academic reputation at the service of Catholic Education Studies.¹ In many respects, the contributions to this volume are an apt testimony to both his achievements and the qualities of Gerald's character. All the contributors felt deeply honoured and pleased to be able to contribute to this book.

Note

- 1 Professor Grace has always insisted, in various dialogues about the growth of Catholic Education Studies, that it was the creative work of Professor Anthony Bryk in the USA that brought a paradigm change to the whole field in 1993. 'Anthony Bryk is the true Founder of the modern field of Catholic Education Studies' (Grace).

References

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