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Book Review

Gerald Grace. 2016. *Faith, Mission and Challenge in Catholic Education. The Selected Works of Gerald Grace*. London/New York: Routledge

This important and timely collection of the selected works of Professor Gerald Grace is part of the prestigious *World Library of Educationalists* series, published by Routledge. The purpose of this influential *Library* is to provide distinguished figures in the field of educational studies with an international platform for the further dissemination of their original thinking. The series affords academics in education an opportunity to bring together in a single volume the ‘highlights’ of their life’s work in a structured and accessible way. The opportunity of contributing a contemporary reflection on their ideas encourages the development of a critically reflective edge to one’s own scholarly output. How fortunate is the student of education, and indeed serving academic, whose university library has such a worthy collection on its shelves!

The inclusion of the work of Professor Grace in this highly prized series signals the esteem in which his contribution to educational studies, and Catholic education in particular, is held. As Francis Campbell, Principal of St. Mary’s University, London, notes in the Foreword: ‘This book marks Professor Grace’s outstanding contribution to the Catholic Church’s education mission as teacher, university lecturer and professor...’

Professor Grace has made it his mission to propose ‘Catholic education’ as a field of study worthy of its rightful place in the academy and not just an appendix to the wider life of the Catholic Church. In so doing, he has been without doubt one of the key, if not the key, figure in the landscape of Catholic education in the United Kingdom and the wider English-speaking world for over two decades.

Professor Grace’s work aims to bring to life the mission of Catholic education in the contemporary Church. The Second Vatican Council gave a new impetus to the work of Catholic education in that it energised those who wished to reappraise how to live as a Christian in a plural society. Although education was not a major theme of the Council, the post-Conciliar period saw significant and far-reaching developments in the Holy See’s established teaching on education. The work of the (Sacred) Congregation for Catholic Education provides the fertile terrain on which Professor Grace and other distinguished scholars (we think here, for example, of Graham Rossiter and John Sullivan) have consistently sought inspiration for their attempts to investigate the relevant *subsets* of the field of Catholic education. For Professor Grace, this includes but is not restricted to the following areas: Catholic school leadership, the concept of spiritual capital and what makes an effective Catholic school.

The volume brings together some of the most influential of Professor Grace’s pieces, grouped neatly under six broad themes: mission, spirituality and spiritual capital (Part 1); the preferential option for the poor (Part 2); faith-based schools, religion and academe (Part 3); concepts of educational leadership and concepts of educational ‘effectiveness’ in Catholic schooling (part 4); mission integrity (Part 5) and Catholic values, Catholic curriculum and education policy (Part 6). Each section has a number of articles / chapters which explore the themes from different perspectives. A most pleasing aspect of the book is found in the wealth of endnotes which offer clarifications and direction for deeper study of issues raised in the body of the text. There is truly something for everyone here!

As noted above, the *World Library* series allows each selected author to write an introductory essay. This intellectual autobiography (so to speak) gives context and shape to the body of work which follows. Professor Grace's contribution here is more than simply an introduction to the volume and a summary of his thinking. It is, rather, a critical and nuanced overview of the principal challenges facing scholars in the field of Catholic education today. What this means will now be examined by selecting chapters which bring to the fore some key themes of Professor Grace's work and hence can serve as the 'highlights' of the book.

Part 2 Chapters 4 and 5 explore how to understand and put into practice 'The preferential option for the poor'. Chapter 4 looks at the meaning of the phrase 'Catholic schools and the common good', much used in the relevant scholarly literature and policy documents. Chapter 5 looks at 'Educational services and the poor.' Both chapters make for challenging reading and ask deep questions about how well the Catholic community has responded to the call in *The Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977) for Catholic schools to offer their educational services primarily for the poor and those far from the faith. This brings into sharp relief the still pertinent questions of how we reconcile those who wish Catholic schools for Catholic children with the wider mission of the Church as provider of education for all.

Part 3 Chapter 8 explores why, in Professor Grace's eyes, a sustained and interdisciplinary study of Catholic education is needed. This chapter was originally published in the inaugural edition of the journal *International Studies in Catholic Education* in 2009 and serves as a 'mission statement' for the journal. Professor Grace proposes three reasons why the Church needs sustained high-quality research in Catholic education: i) to provide ideas and inspiration to improve the work of Catholic education; ii) to appreciate and realise the 'rich potential of international cross-cultural learning and iii) to provide the resources necessary to meet the challenges of secularisation. Those aspirations remain relevant for those working in the field today. A crucial comment comes at the end of the article: 'The work of Catholic education is crucial to the renewal of the faith and of the Church itself.' This is indeed playing for very high stakes and underlines in clear terms why it is important for the wider Church to invest, both in financial and personnel terms, in supporting its many educational networks. (I could easily see this short sentence as the title of a student assignment.)

Part 4 Chapter 11 moves on to the question of leadership in Catholic schools. It is now a given in contemporary educational circles that the effectiveness of an educational community depends largely on the quality of its leadership. In consequence, governments and educational policy-makers are very keen to offer a range of theoretical and applied pathways for the education of the next generation of school leaders. Leaving to one side the question of whether leaders can be prepared solely by 'licence', Catholic educators must grapple with how best to form the next, and indeed, current crop of Catholic school leaders. Professor Grace is beautifully controversial in his assertion that the uneasy relationship between faith and research could stem from Church leaders' fear that the results of research have the potential to be 'disturbing to the faithful'. Indeed! Nonetheless, we see here the need for formation processes which are clustered around the concept of 'theological literacy'. Given recent technological advances, is it not time for the Catholic Higher Education institutions and related school networks across the world to harness our rich resources to allow access to the best of thinking and practice in the field? This would be a fine first step to realising the vision outlined in this volume by Professor Grace.

Part 6 Chapter 14 deals with the place of Catholic social teaching in the secondary school curriculum. The article explores the challenge of retaining ‘mission integrity’ in the Catholic school in the face of demands from the educational agencies of the contemporary nation state. It is here that we find a case-study of how the aims of Catholic education challenge, and in turn are challenged by, the increasing footprint of performative outcomes in educational policy. Professor Grace addresses this important issue by proposing *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI’s 2009 Encyclical, as a suitable text for reflection on how best to underpin the catholicity of schools. Of course, a Catholic school with social justice as a curriculum imperative must also be an example of social justice in its mode of operation. In following this line of reasoning we encounter the following question: to what extent are the bulk of contemporary Catholic schools in a position to alter substantially their curriculum in order to align its life and mission with the radical demands of Catholic social teaching? Professor Grace is aware that we have not made much progress in this respect: if Catholic schools wish to challenge seriously the prevailing *technicist* approaches to education, ‘such cultural action is essential.’ This is truly a challenge for today.

The book is an invaluable resource for those working in the field of Catholic education. Teachers, school leaders, academics, chaplains and clergy will all profit from the insights offered. The scholarly rigour underpinning the various offerings, while wholly expected from an author of such distinguished pedigree, reminds readers that studies in Catholic education cannot be parked in a comfortable side street away from the main body of academic traffic. The book is an invitation to raise our game: ‘there is much to be done, why not do it?’ perhaps encapsulates the rationale!

It is to be hoped that an increasing number of Catholic teachers develop an interest in the theoretical foundations of their work. The Church would do well to find ways of supporting those who wish to do higher studies in this field. While there remains much to be carried out empirically, the context provided by robust philosophical and theological study is essential as a means of holding on to cultural memory. The work contained in this volume should be required reading for those on leadership pathways in Catholic education as well as for academics seeking to build bridges with scholars in the social sciences. Is it perhaps asking too much for Catholic school leaders to use this collection for staff development? Is there scope to use this material as part of a broader and intellectually coherent rationale for Catholic education which is not tied to the soulless performative targets of the nation state but offers a radical, wisdom-centred vision of education, open to all, but especially to those on the margins of society?

To conclude, the launch of the journal *International Studies in Catholic Education* in 2009 offered an international and interdisciplinary focus to the work of the vast networks of Catholic schools which existed across the globe. Professor Grace’s work was and remains the inspiration of the journal. The decision to publish the journal reflects the immense potential of the field of Catholic education as a phenomenon to be studied, as we have seen. Too often we hear of faith-based education in negative terms, described crudely as indoctrination, not education. Professor Grace has done all Catholic educators a great service in showing that it is possible, if not essential, for Catholic education to take its rightful place at the table of educational studies. It is up to the new generation to build on this legacy. Now to work...

Dr. Leonardo Franchi
School of Education
University of Glasgow

