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## Catholic education and social justice in Europe

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This article focuses on two major issues in contemporary Catholic social justice: care for the poor and the inclusion of migrants and refugees. The care for the poor is examined in the gospels and in the contemporary articulation of the preferential option for the poor, drawing on the theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino. Pope Francis and his ‘preferential option for the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers’ is examined in some depth through some key writings and homilies. Care for the poor and the inclusion of migrants and refugees are explored in relation to Catholic education, primarily in relation to Catholic schools and Catholic support for other schools. Some key historical and contemporary figures who intervened in their local context and established schools for the poor and marginalised are identified and discussed. The article provides some concrete examples of the Catholic church providing educational support for migrant and refugee children and young people in contemporary Bulgaria and Hungary.

**Keywords:** Catholic education; social justice; option for the poor; migrant and refugee children

### Introduction

There are many different aspects of the relationship between Catholic education and social justice in Europe that could be successfully explored, discussed and analysed. Catholic education is a broad term and can refer to the different modes of formal education: early years education, primary (or elementary education), secondary education, Further education and Higher education. It can also refer to informal and nonformal Catholic education (McKinney 2021a). Social justice is an equally broad term, and a distinction needs to be drawn between social justice and Catholic social justice. Catholic social justice is rooted in the God given dignity of all human beings who are made in the image and likeness of God (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004). Catholic social justice covers a wide range of issues that can be summarised in the seven principal themes of Catholic social teaching: life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity and care for God’s creation (United States conference of Catholic Bishops 2022a). This article will focus primarily on Catholic schools and the

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commitment of Catholic schools to two major contemporary aspects of social justice: the care or option for the poor and the inclusion of migrant and refugee children and young people in schools.

The first section will examine the care for the poor that is mandated in the gospels and the Old Testament. This section will include the poverty of Jesus and the uncompromising nature of the Gospel of the Beatitudes. Section two will focus on the contemporary care for the poor that is identified as the preferential option, or option, for the poor. This will draw from the theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino. This will be followed by the third section which will highlight the care for the poor in Catholic schools, a care that is firmly rooted in the historical foundations of post Reformation Catholic schools. Section four will explore the preferential option for the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as articulated by Pope Francis. The penultimate section will discuss the inclusion of migrant and refugee children and young people in Catholic school and the support provided by the Catholic Church to other schools that try to integrate these children. This article will be completed with some concluding remarks.

### **The care for the poor in the gospels**

There are many examples of the mandate for the care of the poor in the Old Testament and some of the more striking passages remind the Jews of their own plight as the strangers and the marginalised, while they were in exile in Egypt (Exodus. 22:20-23). A major part of the ministry of Jesus in all of the gospels, is to remind the Jews of this scriptural mandate of care for the poor. There is a significantly consistent emphasis in the gospel of Luke on the mission of Jesus to those on the periphery, to the marginalised and the lost (Brown et al. 1978; Bovon 2002). This mission to the poor in Luke's gospel is expressed in the example of the poverty of Jesus and the concern of Jesus for the poor as expressed in the Gospel of the Beatitudes (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2022b).

There is some debate about the poverty of Jesus, but this is often focussed on the degree to which he lived in poverty rather than whether he was poor or not (Wodon 2018). There are three ways in which the poverty of Jesus can be highlighted. First, there are the circumstances around his birth. The annunciation was to a poor young woman, but one who was full of faith in God (Fitzmyer 2004). He was born in temporary accommodation in Bethlehem (this will be discussed in more detail below) (Brown 1997). Second, there is the issue of his socio-economic background. He grew up in a family which appears to have been engaged in carpentry, and possibly wider building work. At this time a very small percentage of people belonged to one of the elites (the rulers, the landowners and merchants). By contrast, the vast majority of the population were peasants, living and working in an agrarian economy (Fiensy 2010). Many of them worked as day labourers for subsistence wages, and most lived within very limited means (Matthew 20:1-16; Häkkinen 2016). Third, there is the itinerant lifestyle he adopts in his public ministry. Early on in the gospel of Luke, Jesus leaves his hometown of Nazareth after being driven out of the synagogue and the town (Luke 4:28-30). He never returned to Nazareth after this incident and, drawing on the information that is available in the gospel of Luke, he effectively had no permanent residence (Patella 2020). Further, he does not appear to have had any possessions.

In Luke's gospel, there are numerous ways in which the theme of the poor and care for the poor is raised before the proclamation by Jesus in chapter four. The

annunciation by the angel Gabriel to Mary, the poor young girl, is in an un-consecrated space, compared to the previous message to Zechariah, the priest, in holy space (Luke 1:26-28). The Magnificat speaks of a reversal between the rich and the poor (Luke 1: 46-55). The preaching of John the Baptist that precedes the public ministry of Jesus includes references to poverty and to a commitment to the just distribution of goods (Luke 3:10-14). This prepares the reader or listener for the passage when Jesus reads the passage of scripture aloud in the synagogue and states that he has come for the poor (Luke 4: 16-21; Brown et al. 1978). In the sermon on the plain, Luke introduces the beatitudes. The gospel of the beatitudes (and curses, or woes) favours the poor and castigates the rich (Luke 6: 20-26; Kügler 2012; Houston 2015). This is not just a preference for the poor; it is a radical reversal of fortunes between the rich and the poor. This reversal is the same reversal that is a key feature of the Magnificat delivered by Mary, the first believer and first disciple and is a feature of parables such as the parable of the barn builder (12:16-21), the banquet (14:7-11) and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31; Fitzmyer 2004). This reversal can also be discerned in some of teachings of Jesus about care for the poor and the right use of possessions.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus provides a powerful story that demonstrates an uncompromising aspect of this reversal (Luke 16:19-31; Patella 2020). In the parable, the rich man is dressed in expensive purple clothing and dines sumptuously each day. Lazarus, the poor man, lay at his door and would gladly have eaten the scraps that fell from the table. These were the scraps eaten by the dogs that lick his sores. Lazarus longs for dog food and, by being licked by the dogs, becomes dog food. The rich man and Lazarus both die and there is a dramatic and, it has to be noted, a conclusive reversal of fortune. The rich man has now become the beggar and is tormented by flames while Lazarus is at the side of Abraham (Byrne 2000) Just as the rich man showed no hospitality to Lazarus, Lazarus is not allowed to show hospitality to the rich man. The distance between them in the after-life cannot be crossed. The rich man is reminded that he received many warnings: the Hebrew scriptures have plenty of passages about caring for the widow, the orphan, the needy and the stranger (McBride 1999). The holiness code and book of Exodus are quite emphatic that the exercise of this care is an integral part of the Jewish relationship with God and the way to remain in a right relationship with God (Exodus: 22:20-27; Leviticus: 19: 9-10, 33-34).

### **Contemporary care for the poor**

The care for the poor in contemporary Catholic contexts is often referred to as the preferential option for the poor, or option for the poor. These terms have been adopted in common usage by the Church from the Theology of Liberation and the Conference of South American Bishops (Abalos 1969; Gutiérrez 1971). Gustavo Gutiérrez is very clear that the theological understanding of contemporary poverty and deprivation is rooted in a close reading and interpretation of scripture. It also necessitates an acknowledgement that the option of the poor is integral to Christian discipleship:

Poverty as it is known to us today hurls a radical and all-encompassing question at the human conscience and at the way we perceive Christian faith. It constitutes a hermeneutical field that leads us to a rereading of the biblical message and of the path we should take as disciples of Jesus (Gutiérrez 1996, 41).

Caution must be exercised: this care for the poor, according to Jon Sobrino, is not to idealise the poor. Poverty remains a social evil and the lack of power of the poor and their exploitation by the rich must be recognised and challenged (Sobrino 2008). Gutiérrez argues that a resigned acceptance of the existence of poverty and the divide between the rich and the poor is not defensible:

For a long time, poverty was understood as a fate: some people are born poor, other people are born rich, and both must accept this fate. To be sure the duty of the rich was to be generous, but the underlying structure was not questioned. The assumption was that, for some, poverty is the will of God. We cannot accept this. Indeed to be for the poor is not to accept their poverty (Gutiérrez 2013, 29).

The status quo is not defensible because the favouring of the rich is not the will of God. The theology of the poor as espoused by Sobrino and Gutiérrez in liberation theology may appear to be uncompromising. However, they are consistent with the uncompromising messages of passages in the gospel of Luke such as the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and of the barn builder (Luke 12:16-21). Gutiérrez also frequently draws from the equally uncompromising judgment of the nations in Matthew 25: 31–46 (Gutiérrez 1971, 1983, 1991, 2012).

### **The care for the poor in Catholic schools: historical and contemporary context**

The series of documents on Catholic education that commences with *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) continuously highlight the importance of the care or mission of Catholic schools to the poor (Pope Paul VI 1965). Arguably the key documents that address the care for the poor are: *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965); *The Catholic School* (1977); *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997); *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* (2002) and the most recent document: *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (2022). There are, of course, some hard questions about the rhetoric of the aspiration to provide a preferential option for the poor and the actualisation of the option in Catholic schools. Wodon points out that Catholic schools, on a global basis, are more prevalent in low to middle-income countries (Wodon 2022). This does not necessarily indicate that Catholic schools serve the poor. There are major issues around the sustained funding of Catholic schools and their survival if there is no access to any form of state funding. Catholic schools that are private and require parents to pay fees, however small, may be justified as financially expedient but create a disjuncture between the vision of the preferential option for the poor and the practice in schools (Grace and O’Keefe 2007).

While fully acknowledging these serious challenges, the remainder of this section will focus on some successful aspects of the historical and contemporary mission to the poor. In many parts of Post-Reformation Europe, Catholic schools were founded with a number of specific purposes. These purposes often included an initiative to educate the poor: to provide some basic skills in literacy and numeracy, to provide a possibility of escaping poverty and to educate them in the Christian faith. This service or ‘mission’ to the poor was understood to be a manifestation of the Christian (and Jewish) tradition of care for the poor and the marginalised that is understood to be at the heart of Catholic social justice.

Some of the best-known examples of initiatives for educating the poor can be traced to the histories of the work of prominent figures and innovators such as St

John Baptist De La Salle (1651-1719), St Julie Billiart (1751-1816) and St John Bosco (1815-1888). These educators founded religious communities that aimed to educate the poor. This work continues in the Lasallian, Notre Dame and the Salesian schools (Brothers of the Christian Schools 2020; Salesian Education 2022). Aside from these well-known figures, there are many other examples of those who founded schools for the poor. St Joseph Calasanz (or Calasantius), for example, founded schools and the religious order of the Piarist Fathers in Rome in the 16th and 17th centuries. One of the claims made about St Joseph Calasanz is that he founded the first popular and free school in Europe for the poor children (Scolopi 2022). His educational initiatives for the poor can be summed up in ‘piety and letters’. While this may seem inspiring and a good example of social justice in action to some contemporary readers, he faced some serious opposition for providing free education to the poor. This free education upset the socio-economic balance and the sensitivities of the period. There were similar challenges for St John Baptist De La Salle, St Julie Billiart and St John Bosco. St John Baptist de La Salle also faced serious opposition for providing free education for the poor in Reims, France (Tristano 2017; LaSalle 2021). St Julie Billiart endured a serious conflict with the Bishop of Amiens which resulted in a relocation to Namur, Belgium (Murphy 1995). St John Bosco faced considerable official misunderstanding of his mission to the poor in Italy (Mowles 1988; Fitzgerald 2018).

Perhaps one of the best, and probably unique, examples of a radical commitment to the poor in the twentieth century is the school of Barbiana, founded by the Catholic priest Don Lorenzo Milani in Northern Italy (Martinelli, Borg, and Mayo 2007). This school was not a confessional Catholic school and was open to everyone. He too was subject to serious criticism for this, as his model of a school did not cohere with the prevalent models of Catholic schools of the time. This school was open from 1954 to the late 1960s, closing with the death of Don Lorenzo in 1967. The Barbiana school was operating as the idea of the preferential option for the poor began to emerge from Latin America.

Don Lorenzo was bitterly opposed to the prevalent social inequalities of the time, exacerbated by the neoliberal society and the increase in deadening consumerism and materialism. He adopted an austere lifestyle, and he was heavily influenced by his deep study and radical interpretation of the scriptures (Borg and Mayo 2006). Lorenzo was convinced that low levels of literacy created a major barrier for the poor. One of his main aims was to educate the poor to be able to participate in society rather than play a passive role. While he may have been influenced by Socialism, he was highly critical of the bitter rivalry between the Catholic church and the Communist Party, as he felt neither of these two bodies served the needs of the working class. He attracted impoverished pupils who had not completed school and many of whom had been educationally marginalised by the experience of school. The school was open from 8.00 in the morning till 7.30 in the evening and was open every day of the year. There were long periods of study as he tried to bridge the cultural divide for the pupils. Don Lorenzo was undoubtedly a controversial figure and the Barbiana school is possibly more often praised for promoting a critically engaged pedagogy rather than a Catholic vision (Mayo 2015). Nevertheless, Borg and Mayo (2006, 24) establish the importance of this school:

... the Barbiana School privileged the ‘weak’ and those labelled as ‘failures’. The Barbiana School is an example of how educational institutions, especially those run by the

Church, can consciously choose to educate the least privileged as part of a genuine option for the poor ...

Further, the Barbiana school and the work of Don Lorenzo embodied one of the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching: that the outreach to the poor, the marginalised and the lost is not restricted to those who share the Catholic faith, but to all in need.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, a greater awareness of the different effects of poverty experienced by children and young people emerged. This included widespread food poverty, digital exclusion or digital poverty, uniform poverty and the challenging circumstances of young carers (children and young people who have to care for family members while attending school) (McKinney 2022). These affected many children in Catholic schools throughout the Europe and the rest of the world. There is evidence of interventions to support the children and young people in Catholic schools but, nevertheless, there are hard challenges ahead in sustaining this support through a time of economic recession. The pandemic and the move to online or hybrid learning and teaching served to highlight the widespread manifestation of digital poverty. Apart from the immediate effect of the lack of devices and access to online teaching and resources, there are long-term implications for children and young people from backgrounds of poverty and deprivation who may have lost extended periods of their school education (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2021). The Catholic Church in the European Union strongly emphasised the effects of the pandemic on these children in their Contribution to the European Education Area (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2022).

### **Pope Francis and the preferential option for the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers**

Throughout Europe there are increasing numbers of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and people who are internally displaced. There are complex reasons for migration, but the attraction of improved socio-economic conditions is an important factor. Refugees and asylum seekers have left their country because of warfare, conflict or persecution and internally displaced people remain in their country of origin but have had to relocate for the same reasons (Council of Europe 2022).

Pope Francis has demonstrated a ‘preferential option for the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers’ in his actions, writings, homilies and speeches (Tan 2019). This is especially the case in *Fratelli Tutti* (Pope Francis 2020). In chapter four he provides a template for the kind of welcome and treatment that should be experienced by migrants:

Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. For ‘it is not a case of implementing welfare programmes from the top down, but rather of undertaking a journey together, through these four actions, in order to build cities and countries that, while preserving their respective cultural and religious identity, are open to differences and know how to promote them in the spirit of human fraternity’ (Pope Francis 2020, section 129).

He also spoke on the plight of the migrants, refugees and displaced persons (and victims of trafficking) in his Message for the 108th World Day of Migrants and



Refugees (2022). He aligns care for these groups to the conditions for being a member of the Kingdom of God (Pope Francis 2022):

No one must be excluded. God's plan is essentially inclusive and gives priority to those living on the existential peripheries. Among them are many migrants and refugees, displaced persons, and victims of trafficking. The Kingdom of God is to be built *with them*, for without them it would not be the Kingdom that God wants. The inclusion of those most vulnerable is the necessary condition for full citizenship in God's Kingdom.

He expands on this by drawing on one of the well-known passages in Matthew's gospel that explores the Christian duty of care for the poor:

Indeed, the Lord says, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me' (*Mt* 25:34-36).

It is interesting to note that, as mentioned above, this is a passage that is often used by Gutiérrez. Pope Francis has used the plight of the holy family as they fled to Egypt, as outlined in the infancy narrative in Matthew's gospel, as an example of the pain and suffering experienced by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (Pope Francis 2013, 2021). He points out that Jesus as a defenceless infant has experienced this pain and suffering at first hand:

The family of Nazareth suffered such humiliation and experienced first-hand the precariousness, fear and pain of having to leave their homeland. Still today many of our brothers and sisters are forced to experience the same injustice and suffering. The cause is almost always the arrogance and violence of the powerful. This was also the case for Jesus (Pope Francis 2021).

As Jesus has experienced the suffering of the migrant at first hand, he is in solidarity with the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers throughout the world.

Pope Francis (2017) has also commented on the movement of Joseph and the heavily pregnant Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem (McKinney 2021b). Both Matthew and Luke agree that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Laughlin 2006). In the infancy narrative of Matthew's gospel this is simply stated: 'when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea ...' without providing an explicit reason for the holy family being in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1). However, in the infancy narrative in Luke's gospel the movement has been prompted by the requirements of the census (Luke 2:1-3). Pope Francis points out that this was a major upheaval for Joseph and Mary and that they arrived in a place that was not expecting them and did not welcome them:

And there, where everything was a challenge, Mary gave us Emmanuel. The Son of God had to be born in a stable because his own home had no room for him. 'He came to what was his own and his own people did not accept him' (*Jn* 1:11). And there, amid the gloom of a city that had no room or place for the stranger from afar, amid the darkness of a bustling city which in this case seemed to want to build itself up by turning its back on others ... it was precisely there that the revolutionary spark of God's love was kindled. In Bethlehem, a small chink opens up for those who have lost their land, their country, their dreams ...



They are temporarily homeless, and this is arguably a foretaste of the lack or a permanent residence Jesus would experience in later life in his public ministry.

### **The inclusion of migrant and refugee children and young people in Catholic Schools**

Migrant children in Europe usually belong to families from a low socio-economic background, and this, as has been mentioned, is often one of the main reasons for the migration (Oberdabernig and Schneebaum 2017). There is some evidence that the majority of migrant children in Europe achieve a higher level of education than their parents. This is tempered by the fact that many of the parents have not been educated to a very high level. This means, as Oberdabernig and Schneebaum comment, that the threshold for improvement in the second generation is not very high. Religious identity can be an important factor for the migrants, though this too can be complex. Some of the Albanian migrants in Florence, Italy, for example, were able to rekindle the Catholic faith that had been suppressed by the communist regime. Others who had no religious background adopted the Catholic faith (Vathi 2015).

There is mixed evidence of the integration of migrants and refugees in Catholic schools and some research demonstrates that Catholic schools do not always ensure greater achievement for migrant children, for example in Flanders (Agirdag, Driessen, and Merry 2017). However, there is evidence of successful integration of migrant children in Catholic schools in England and Scotland and other parts of Europe (McKinney et al. 2015; Manzoni and Rolfe 2019). This section will focus on some of the successful interventions to integrate children into Catholic schools, and the support provided by the Catholic Church to help other schools integrate migrant children. These successful interventions are mostly within national contexts where migrant children and their families are not welcomed by the state and by much of the populace.

The Roma population is one group of people who have been the victims of discrimination and segregation in many parts of Europe for some considerable time. The vast majority of the Roma people in Europe live in central and eastern Europe. Unicef points out that around two-thirds of the 10–12 million Roma people in Europe live in these two parts of Europe (Unicef 2022a). Roma children are more likely to drop out of school and often lack basic skills in numeracy and literacy (Unicef 2022b). Catholic schools in some parts of England have a strong track record in integrating Gypsy, Roma and traveller children (GRT) (Catholic Education Service 2022a, 2022b). In some Catholic schools, there can be 25%, or more, of the children in the GRT community in the school. The approach taken in the Catholic schools is firmly rooted in some of the key principles of Catholic Social Teaching (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004). It is to recognise that all people are made in the image and likeness of God and that the school community avoids commonly held negative perceptions and stereotyping.

The recent history of the Roma people in Bulgaria indicates that they have been the victims of marginalisation and often concentrated in certain areas in poor housing (Ripka 2017). Further, the Roma children have been discriminated against in school education (Ringold 2000). A significant number of the Roma children and young people (possibly as high as 70%) in Bulgaria attend local schools that are poorly equipped, over-crowded and the children are often taught by unlicensed teachers (Shyrokonis 2020). Many of the young Roma people leave school early and are married young, working or living on state benefits (Flaherty 2018). This

means that they only have a basic education and many leave school with no academic qualifications. A good example of an intervention that includes a Catholic school is in the city of Star Zagora. In this city, the Salesians have been supporting the Roma community since 2008 (Salesiani Don Bosco 2022). They have worked hard with the young people in the Roma community and encouraged them to remain in school to secure a more sustainable future for themselves and their future families. The Salesians recently constructed a new school that is adjacent to the city's Roma district (Agenzia Info Salesiana 2020). In this example, the Salesians are continuing to live out the commitment to the poorest and most marginalised in society.

Another good example is in Hungary, where the Jesuit Refugee Service has focused on supporting the inclusion of refugee children in schools (Jesuit Refugee Service Europe 2021). They tried to ensure that the language acquisition of refugee children was maintained throughout the challenging period of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Jesuit Refugee Service provided aid to schools that struggled to provide adequate support to refugee children, due to a lack of resources. This support included helping with language classes for unaccompanied minors in Fót. Unaccompanied minors are children under 18 years of age who are separated from their parents or carers (Ferrara et al. 2016). They have often fled war, conflict or human rights abuses. These children are particularly vulnerable and prey to the dangers of 'sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse' (Devi 2016). The EU and individual nations have been criticised for not ensuring effective policy interventions to protect these children (Fraguito 2019; Iusmen 2020).

The Salesians in Bulgaria and the Jesuits in Hungary have demonstrated a commitment to the care or option for the poor by working to support these migrant and refugee children. These are very vulnerable children who belong to households of poverty and education. The Salesians and Jesuits are providing practical examples of the preferential option for the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. They are following the template of Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*: 'to welcome, protect, promote and integrate' (Pope Francis 2020). They are accomplishing this by ensuring that the children are properly educated, by supporting their language skills and by striving to help them secure a better future. The Salesians and Jesuits in these two contexts are ultimately providing an exemplary commitment to the vision and enactment of Catholic social justice, which is deeply rooted in the mandate for the care for poor and the marginalised in the gospels.

### **Concluding remarks**

The scale of the subject *Catholic Education and social justice in Europe* is very broad and this means that this short article is necessarily limited in its approach. The aim of the article was to provide a context for the discussion and an introduction to some of the key themes that emerge from an initial scoping. The two key themes that were selected were care for the poor and the inclusion of migrant and refugee children. These have been discussed within the context of the scriptural mandate of care for the poor, the marginalised, the excluded and within the historical and contemporary mission for Catholic schools to care for the poor. Some historical and contemporary concrete examples have been used and some very well-known figures have featured. However, there has been a strong focus on lesser-known figures such as St Joseph Calasanz, Don Lorenzo Milani and some of the work undertaken by the Salesians

in Bulgaria and the Jesuits in Hungary for migrant and refugee children and young people has been highlighted.

One of the intriguing points to emerge has been the comparison between the opposition to Jesus in his radical call to the poor and marginalised and the opposition and challenges met by the historical and contemporary Catholic educators featured in this article. The four saints and Don Lorenzo were dedicated to the education of forgotten and marginalised poor children in different countries in Europe in different periods of time. The four saints and Don Lorenzo faced serious challenges to their work in educating the poor. Their work was misunderstood, and they were perceived to have upset the accepted norms of the society of their time. The Salesians in Bulgaria and the Jesuits in Hungary are facing similar challenges. They are helping the marginalised migrant and refugee children in environments that are unwelcoming and discriminatory towards the children and their families. As disciples, they have followed the example of Jesus in the mission or option for the poor, and they too have experienced the misunderstanding, opposition and even, in some cases, the rejection that he experienced.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Notes on contributor

*Stephen J McKinney* is a professor in the School of Education in the University of Glasgow. His research focusses on Catholic education and social justice, the history of Catholic education and the impact of child poverty on school education. He has a special interest in the relationship between scripture and theology (especially the preferential option for the poor) and Catholic education.

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