

Ryan Mc Aleer is a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven and a member of the Research Unit Systematic Theology and Study of Religions. He is undertaking research to address the current context of his country - with implications for informing learning and teaching in the Diocese of Ballarat. Ryan's work is concerned with:

Dialogical Theology and Catholic Education: Towards a Shared Future in Northern Ireland



Hands Across the Divide by Maurice Harron, Derry, Co. Londonderry, Northern Ireland, UK.

Ryan summarises his research in the following...

While the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement of 1998 brought an end to three decades of political violence in Northern Ireland, religious sectarianism still marks many aspects of the region's society. The education system has recently come under particular criticism for hampering progress in the promotion of a shared society, since Protestants and Catholics remain, largely, educated separately. With little prospect of structural change and no appetite on the part of faith-based schools to question the status quo, this project aims to challenge and enable Catholic education to engage more directly and sincerely in this debate, with an openness to reimagining how Catholic education might be best delivered in the current, socio-cultural context. A 'mission text' with recommendations for Catholic schools will be presented. The central thesis of this project argues that by understanding dialogue as a core and essential concept of theology, it can help recontextualise Catholic education in N. Ireland in a way that embraces the challenges of a post-secular, post-Christian context, while also actively contributing to the aspirations of the peace

process. Theology, understood as essential dialogical, will offer a solid foundation for a reappraisal of the 'Catholic Dialogue School', as already practiced in countries like Belgium and Australia, but also a theological foundation that is culturally and politically plausible in a post-conflict, religiously divided society such as Northern Ireland.

The central research question of the project is: **to what extent can understanding dialogue as an essential concept of revelation help recontextualise Catholic education in a way that is both theologically legitimate and culturally plausible in the current post-secular, post-Christian, and post-conflict context of N. Ireland?**

Considering the state-of-the-art, the practical challenges for Catholic education in Northern Ireland today invite a theological, systematic response.

I hypothesise that a renewed understanding of the category of dialogue is both the theological and contextual key for meeting these challenges.

Only by understanding theology as essentially dialogical and relational can it offer a sound foundation with which to recontextualise Catholic education in Northern Ireland; one which allows Catholic education to respond to the challenges of a post-secular and post-Christian context, as well as being open to reimagining education in Northern Ireland in a way that positively contributes to the vision of the ongoing peace process following the end of 'The Troubles'.

Source: KU Leuven

Ryan's research speaks to our efforts throughout the diocese, both to learn about dialogue in the Catholic setting and to practice it authentically, to invite and enable others into that space for meeting God and each other.

Gina