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The

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CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

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6. In view of the fact that religious beliefs and practices are very complex issues and take considerable time to absorb and appreciate, it seems incredible to propose that children in a primary school should be encouraged to engage in 'inter-belief dialogue'. This is a very challenging project for professional theologians in various religious traditions, so why could primary school children be expected to engage in such an exercise when they are only beginning to learn something basic about their own beliefs? What is being proposed reads more like a recipe for confusion and the end result might well be greater religious intolerance rather than less.
7. This discussion document shows no awareness of how complex issues of truth, meaning and values are for contemporary people. There is an assumption that there is some neutral ground onto which children (and adults) can be moved so that conflictual positions can be erased and peace guaranteed. On the surface it looks acceptable to say that children should be educated with regard to justice and human rights. However, when it comes to deciding what constitutes justice and rights in particular situations, who will be deciding what is just and right and on what basis? For example, will it be tolerable only to teach that there are limits to the rights to life – that those who have serious physical deformities do not have the right to life beyond the womb or that those whose medical care is too expensive or burdensome do not have such rights? The superficiality of the assumptions in the paper and the lack of recognition of the complexities of the issues under discussion render it totally unsatisfactory as a basis on which to proceed.
8. Practically all teachers in primary schools are agreed that there is serious curriculum overload at the moment. Nevertheless, while discussing the possible options for the introduction of ERBE, the document seems to favour at least some discreet time being allocated for these topics. This immediately adds to the burden of the timetable and curriculum. If the DES were to insist on ERBE being taught, the existing religious education in faith-based schools would be an inevitable casualty. In view of the fact that religious and moral education are already being offered in these schools, not to mention their inclusive (genuinely catholic) nature, why burden them with adding another religious and moral dimension that is not only extra but, worse still, actually inimical to any faith-based education programme – one that is in its foundations doctrinally atheistic and morally relativistic?
9. The document shows no grounds on which the current faith-based schools are deficient in terms of religious tolerance

- or moral probity. There is no due recognition for their achievements to date, all of which could be counted to outweigh the achievements of any other government agency in welcoming and accommodating children from ethnically and religiously diverse backgrounds. There is more concern to honour the Toledo Principles than there is to honour the noble achievements of teachers, boards of management and patrons of our own schools who, over the past twenty-five years or more, since significant numbers of emigrants arrived in the country, have been the heroes and heroines of tolerance and inclusiveness.
10. Insofar as there are schools where there is no religious education offered then it may be useful to have an element in the curriculum that discusses religions and ethics. This could be sited in the place otherwise allocated to religious education in faith-based or other schools. However, what might be offered needs much more consideration than has yet been given to the topic.

Missals and Migrants. *Fr. Alan Hilliard, Chaplaincy Service, Dublin Institute of Technology writes:*

Maybe it is a strange comparison to make but I never imagined myself comparing the New Missal with the plight of migrants in Europe.

September 2011 saw the introduction of the New Missal to the Irish Church. The Missal was the English translation of the New Roman Missal introduced by Saint John Paul II when he was Pope in 2002. Those who favoured the new translation rejoiced in its publication sending a signal that the former English translation was too colloquial. On the other hand, those who found the New Missal an unnecessary imposition were vocal in their discontent. Others, including senior members of various Episcopates and the Curia, wondered who started all this meddling and were more intrigued by their motivation.

A cursory glance of Irish websites shows extensive meetings or 'gatherings' to brief clergy and pastoral groups on the importance and significance of the new translation. The magazine *Intercom* gave monthly updates on the new translation. Veritas, the publishing arm of the Bishops' Conference, created a DVD reinforcing our call to 'oneness' through the liturgy and particularly our newfound 'oneness' via the new translation.

The *Association of Catholic Priests (ACP)* became militant in its reservations about the new translation. There were numerous

meetings and discussions on the subject. One of the most recent postings on their website is the results of a survey entitled 'Survey of Clergy: Views on the New Missal' telling us that many of the priests consulted would like a new revised Missal which would inevitably involve more meetings, discussions and indeed a lot more words.

In September 2015 Pope Francis asked every parish in Europe to take in a family of refugees. Earlier, in 2013, when visiting the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) 'Astallia' Centre in Rome on 10 September he asked that empty convents and religious houses be used to house refugees whom he described as 'the flesh of Christ'. Unlike various responses to the introduction of the New Missal the response to the Holy Father's request has caused great silence to descend upon most of our land. Some may claim that this comparison is unfair or unsuitable. There have been very few meetings, if any. There haven't even been softer 'gatherings' and there have been very few publications or videos to lead on this issue. A wise friend once said to me, 'Sure it only takes a straw to show the way the wind blows'.

Once upon a time the Church worked well with the energy and spontaneity of people's goodness. On many occasions the Church marshalled good will into mission and change. This energy made governments quake as the energy was often based on a sense of what was right and just rather than what was expedient. The present Refugee Crisis shows new trends in our Church. Parishes who have indicated that they are willing to respond to the Holy Father's appeal have at times been told that agencies are dealing with this matter. Whereas this maybe in some part necessary it raises questions about the role of the faith community in the mission of the Church to the world which is at the heart of the theology and spirituality of Vatican II and indeed a core theme of Pope Francis.

Maybe it is an unfair comparison but words about words are easier to deal with than words that take flesh. The words of the liturgy are powerful and transformative words and are not to be undervalued in any way. However the world and its institutions have always had more difficulties with the Word made flesh.

Amoris Laetitia. Patsy Lee, Villa Nova, Billis, Cavan writes:

'What was given to me was taken out of a treasure chest of received and unquestioned tenets and teachings.... This was to presume that thinking and living and spirituality would not alter, nor change, nor develop, nor evolve.'

John F Deane: *Give Dust a Tongue*

The Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* by Pope Francis is intended as both guidance and advice. Its intention is to encourage those who are in love within the family to make it a joyful experience. He is gathering together the findings of two Synods on the Family and adding some of his own thoughts.

This is a long and complicated document that is not likely to be read by the average family. So, it is over to our local Church to give us that guidance and advice. After all, it is addressed equally to Joe Soap, Catholic, and to all the Officers of the Church.

I found the document tough going from the start because of its churchy and biblical approach. The number of quotations and references proved distracting, if not annoying. Maybe I, and others, prefer straight talking in plain English when being told something important by my Church.

The roots from which this document grows are planted early on in the text with Genesis and the union of Adam and Eve. No scope is allowed for not believing in Adam and Eve. There is no room for the scientific origins of man dating perhaps hundreds of thousands of years.

Okay, I appreciate that Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden are all about a stormy relationship that set in between man and God somewhere in our story. I suppose that the story does prepare us for the complexities of human and family living.

Along the way the Catholic Church stepped in to regulate the family and it's all in there in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. So, what's new about *Amoris Laetitia* then? While deferring to the teachings on family and love in the Catechism, Pope Francis feels that 'this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it'.

Does he then give controversial or safe interpretations?

Francis clearly states that 'the conjugal union' is ordered to procreation by its very nature'. In other words, it is intended to create babies. *Humanae Vitae* is referred to as the authority on this. He concludes that 'no genital act can refuse this meaning'. So, contraception is banned, inside and outside of marriage. I imagine that in a world, Catholic and otherwise, that uses millions of contraceptives, this holding of the line is controversial. Not surprisingly, and perhaps disturbingly, the Pope later makes the bold statement, 'Large families are a joy for the Church. They are an expression of the fruitfulness of love'. This will create echoes of an archived clerical attitude in Ireland that might well be left in the past. He does add that social and demographic realities should be taken into account as well as 'their own situation and legitimate desires'. Anyone like to give a homily on those words? Clearly contraceptives are not envisaged here, so what is the picture?