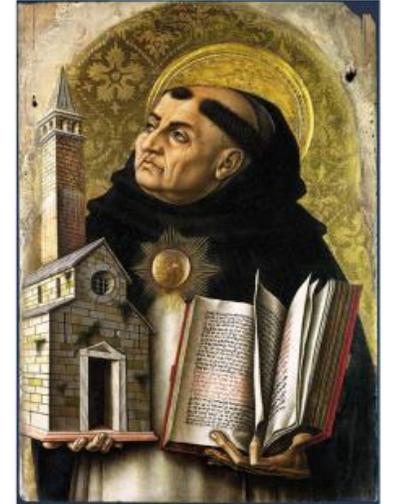




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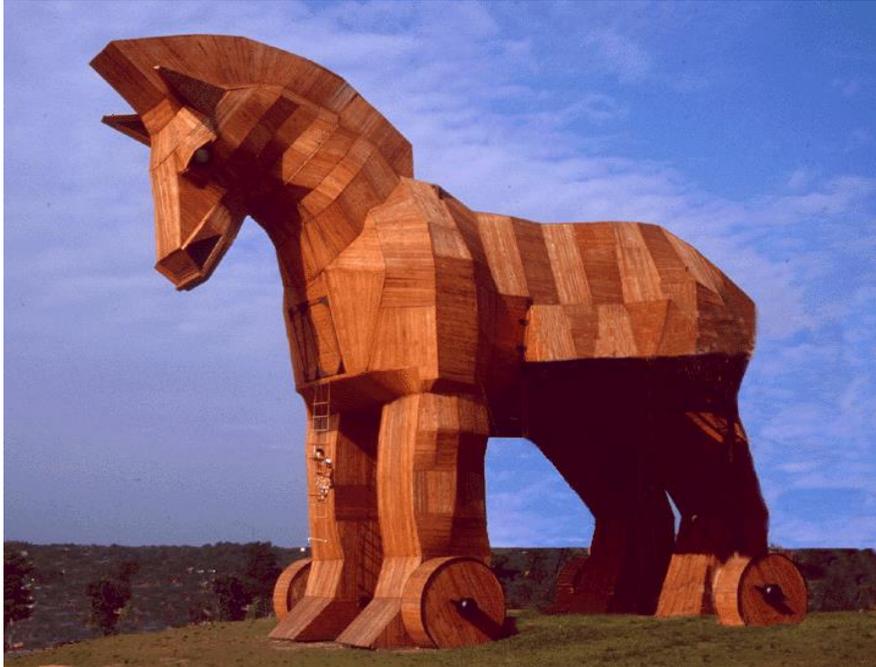
The Paradoxes of RE in Catholic Perspective

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2016 A-Level GCSE RE Reform

Blackadder v Michael Gove?



Jeremy Kyle v Michael Young?
Peter Vardy v TRS UK?
Ninian Smart v Sushma Sahajpal
Nicky Morgan v CBCEW

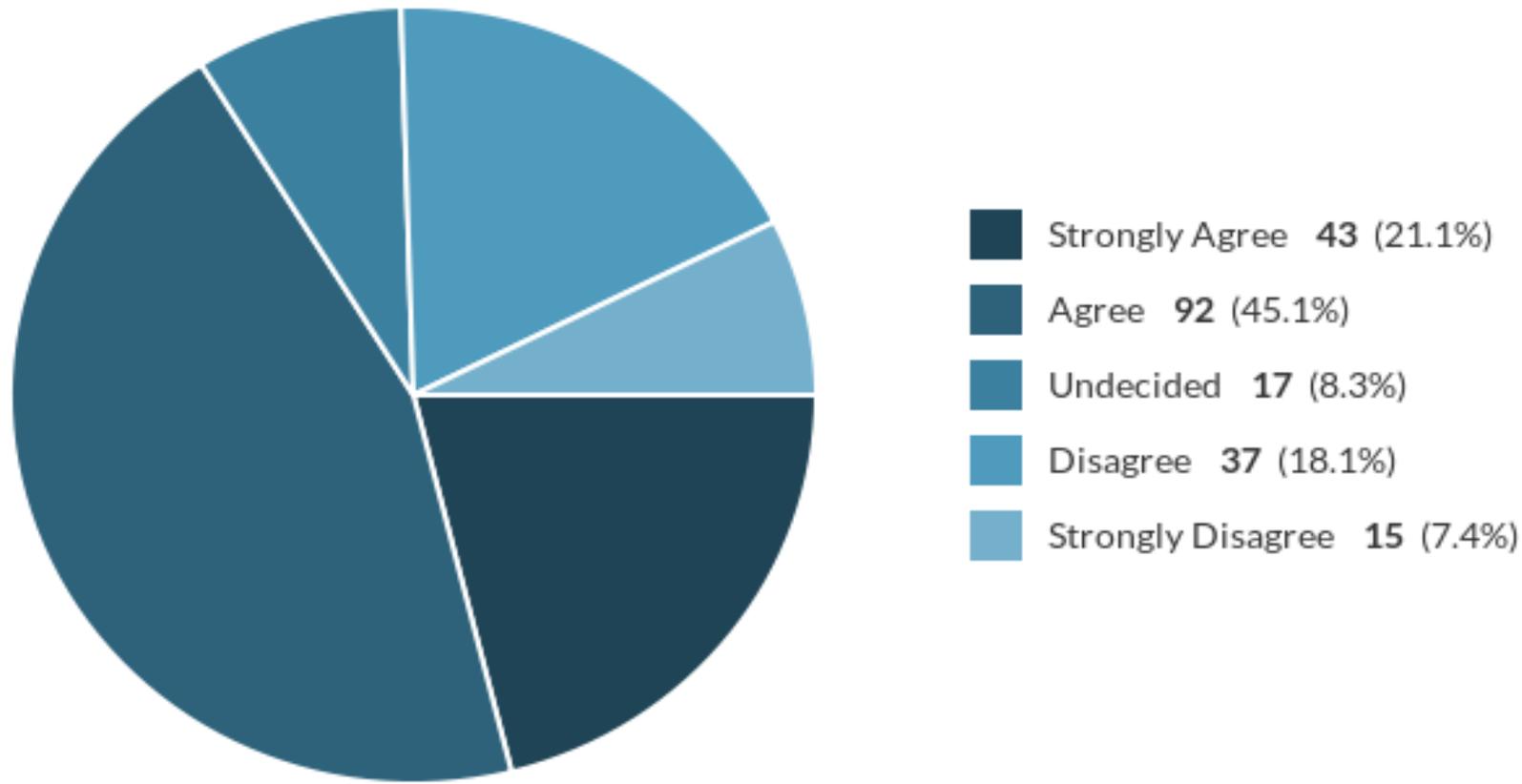


CREDO Research Project

- Schools – 3 Pilot & 18 others – Senior Leaders, Heads of Dept., R.E. Teachers, Focus groups of Pupils. Varied in terms of geographical, social, gender, ethnic & attainment mix but curriculum neutral (equal numbers of AQA/Edexcel/Eduqas)
- Subsequent follow up in light of examination cycles.
- Synthesizing the responses – ‘x good – however – y not so good’ – seemed to point to four key tensions not simply present in the reform but in the subject *per se*.
- This paper is an attempt to reconcile these legitimate tensions using the Catholic paradigm of paradox whereby an apparent contradiction points to a deeper truth.

Accessibility v Rigour

- Credibility of RE – *cri de coeur* across the piece
- Cf. RE Commission consultation/ ATCRE 2020 Mary Myatt
- Has it raised standards? Yes, *but*



Accessibility v Rigour

- Problem - equal in difficulty *vis a vis* other subjects 😊 but 75% dissatisfied with outcomes for LPAs 😞
- To ponder: Egalitarian issues re exams, entries & engagement acute in RE but present in other subjects e.g. Chemistry/ Music.
- Solutions? BTec RE? See/judge/act – Walk>Talk?
- Return to the Bible? Story is truer to its nature and to our nature – cf. John's Gospel, Tolkien, Narnia

Creed v Critique

Classically posed as 'Faith v Reason' - tension is *perceived* opposition between Catholic theological propositions *vis a vis* philosophical enquiry, science & pursuit of truth.

Although Creeds are *the consequence* of critical reflection, they appear as non-negotiable dogmas to be accepted – anathema to the adolescent mind.



Creed v Critique

Adolescent mind is God given – critical - binary

Created order, is, however, paradoxical – cf. light

Stands to reason (sic) that the deeper truths will have same characteristics

Note also how Plato –relied on story for his epistemology, his ethics and his eschatology

Ensure pupils are involved in the conversations of theology as well as creedal conclusions

Ensure that transcendence, art & imagination are not screened out

Truth v Doubt

Most of all, perhaps, to acknowledge in a critical context the sovereignty of paradox which is at the root of the created order, defies our simplistic binaries and is the essential grounding for any mind wishing to ponder a Virgin Birth, an incarnate Son, a salvific death, the Trinity, sacraments & the Kingdom of God where the least are greatest.



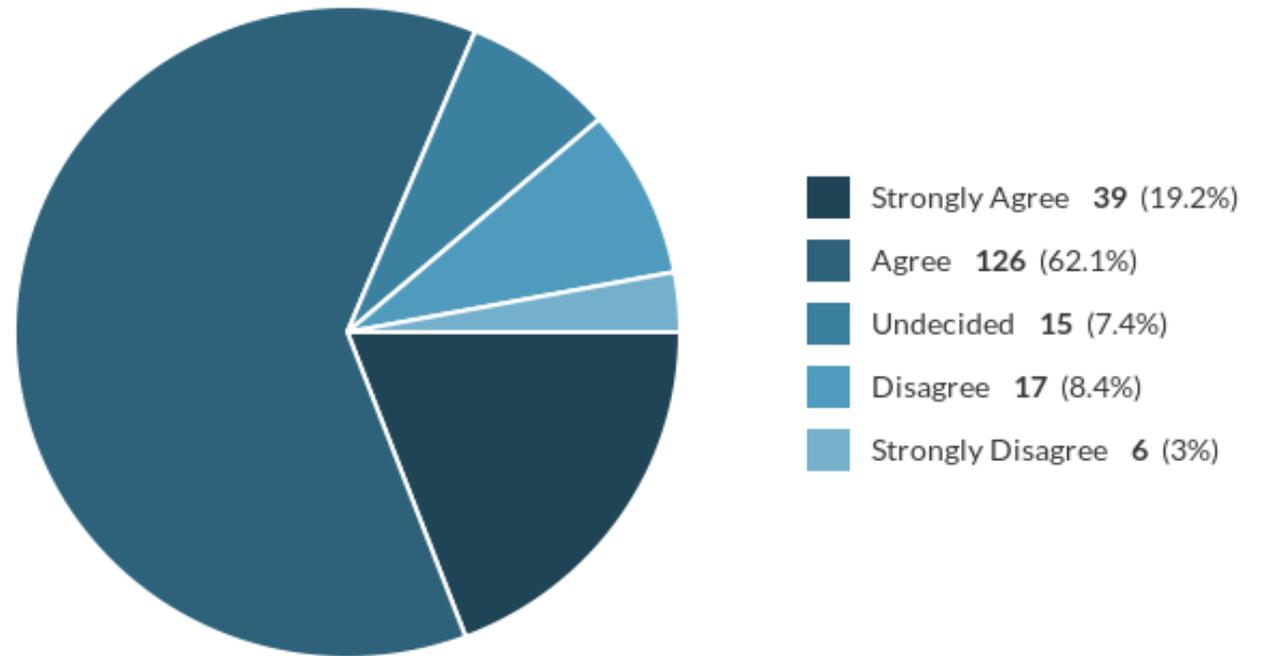
Exclusivity v Inclusivity

Simple equation – faith based schools must have exclusivist tendencies and foster prejudice

Simple answer – exclude faith based organizations from policy making in RE

Simple consequence – the privileging of the agnostic position whereby faith convictions are pathologized.

In Catholic schools – second religion reform – strongest positive



Exclusivity v Inclusivity

No such thing as a neutral position

‘Non-religious’ does not necessarily mean ‘not interested’ and ‘relevance’ a dubious benchmark. Many school subjects have this challenge – why should ethnic minority pupils study British history still less classical civilization?

Ironically, study of non-religious viewpoints are the only compulsory ones vouchsafed by the DfE.

To exclude belief communities from decisions on RE is like excluding native speakers from language curricula (Paul Barber)

People fervent in one faith maybe more likely to be interested in another.

Othering is something to be challenged by followers of Christ – the Incarnation forbids it. Facilitate dialogue – ‘RE safe place to discuss difference.’

Information v Formation

False opposition

A subject with academic aims can have deliberate secondary aims or accidental side effects

Other subjects have similar issues – English literature & Shakespeare

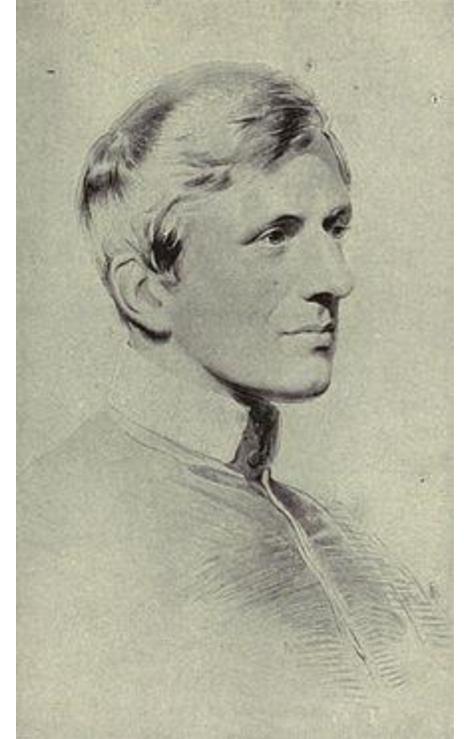
Increasing problem is the 'like-dislike' binary of social media

Gone from Marshall McLuhan's global village to a global bedroom

RE as a place for maturation and nuanced debate, information and formation = noble aim

Newman: *Idea of a University*

Sovereignty of theology is inclusive not exclusive
The word 'God' is a theology in itself, indivisibly
one, inexhaustibly various, from the vastness and
simplicity of its meaning. How can we investigate
any part of any order of Knowledge and stop short
of that which enters into every order? All true
principles run over with it, all phenomena converge
to it; it is truly the First and Last' (*Idea* II:3)



**RE is less like the periodic table – more like a meadow full of possibilities.
Resist the urge to tidy up because the tensions mark the space in which it flourishes
Paradox of Christ – 'both and' 'divine and human' is *the* paradigm for the subject**