

INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD FRANCHI, LECTURER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW



Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

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EXCERPTS:

- “Gerald’s work on religious /social capital is fundamental to the essence of Catholic education: What drives us? What is it we wish to communicate? How can we best communicate to others that which we have received? These are perennial questions but Gerald has forged a path which draws on insights from other ways of thinking about education.”
- “Gerald was one described to me fondly as the man who never knowingly left home without a tie...”

Could you briefly introduce yourself and explain what your work on Catholic education entails?

I work in the School of Education in the University of Glasgow, Scotland. We are the 4th oldest university in the Anglophone world (founded in 1451). The University, the Bishops’ Conference and the Scottish Government are in a partnership to support Catholic teacher education in our institution. My academic interests are in this field. I teach on a wider range of programs at undergraduate, masters and doctoral level.

How and when did you first meet with Prof. Grace and how did you interact with him over the years?

I first met Gerald when he came to the University of Glasgow for the launch of the St. Andrews Foundation for Catholic Teacher Education in 2013. I had been appointed as the first Director of the Foundation and invited Gerald to be one of the speakers at our inaugural event. The principal speaker was Archbishop (now Cardinal) Gerhard Müller. Since then we have kept in touch by email and participated together at various events. I was especially delighted when he agreed to speak at the London launch in 2018 of one of my edited books, *Reclaiming the Piazza II*, at St Mary’s University, London.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? This interview is with Leonard Franchi, Lecturer at the University of Glasgow. The interview is part of a series in honor of Professor Gerald Grace’s retirement from St Mary’s University.

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How do you see Prof. Grace's main contributions to practice or research in Catholic education?

Gerald's main contribution, I would say, is the example he gives of diligence and hard work. He could have stepped back and had a 'normal' retirement but he decided that the mission of Catholic education was too pressing for that. We must thank him for this example.

In what way did Prof. Grace influence your own practice or research in Catholic education?

Gerald's work on religious /social capital is fundamental to the essence of Catholic education: What drives us? What is it we wish to communicate? How can we best communicate to others that which we have received? These are perennial questions but Gerald has forged a path which draws on insights from other ways of thinking about education. This has encouraged me to consider just what the essence of dialogue is when applied to Catholic education.

How can Catholic education scholars make sure that their research is useful to practitioners?

This is a great question.

First, it is important to say that one of the serious challenges to the research-practice nexus today is the paywall and the expensive academic book. If research is not readily available to read, then it too easily becomes an arcane discipline reserved for the select few. To address this, scholars should work with publishers who offer

reasonably-priced volumes. (Gracewing is a great example.)

Second, there is a need to engage in formal and informal dialogue with practitioners in schools to explore how the research-practice nexus should look like. Working together, we can offer something fresh which will have a positive impact on our young people.

What are for you the most critical areas of future research in Catholic education, and why is that?

There are many candidates for this list. I would place teacher formation near or at the top. This is the medium by which critical issues such as educational poverty, climate issues, the nature of the human person, and the role of religion in society can be studied in the depth they deserve.

What is your advice for graduate students who may be interested in conducting research in Catholic education?

Talk to various people about your broad ideas and then focus on a particular project. Don't rush into it and make sure that you find suitable supervisors. Then just go for it!

Is there a personal anecdote of your interactions with Prof. Grace that you would like to share?

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Photo: Gerald Grace at the launch of Leonard Franchi's book *Reclaiming the Plaza*.