

## INTERVIEW WITH DAVID FINCHAM, SENIOR LECTURER AT ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY



*Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon*

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### EXCERPTS:

- “Gerald has long been critically engaged in the educational debate with regard to challenges facing leaders within Catholic schools in a secular and market-driven society. His work not only ... confronts ... the implications of these challenges, ... but he also offers practical encouragement and guidance.”
- “His work and his reputation as a leading international scholar ... has been a major influence on the Catholic community worldwide. He is a leader and exemplar in the field of Catholic education.”

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

I am Dr. David Fincham. I have been involved in Catholic education for over forty years as an English teacher in a Catholic secondary school, Head of Year, Head of House, First Deputy Headteacher and Acting Headteacher.

Formerly a Programme Director of the MA in Catholic School Leadership programme at St Mary's University, I now lecture on that programme and supervise doctoral researchers.

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

I first met Gerald at St Mary's in 2006 when he was the External Examiner for the MA in Catholic School Leadership but I was already familiar with his work.

#### **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 David Finchman, Senior Lecturer and Senior Fellow at St. Mary's University (Twickenham, London). 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 has long been critically engaged in the educational debate with regard to challenges facing leaders within Catholic schools in a secular and market-driven society.

His work not only exposes and confronts with credibility the implications of these challenges in an accessible academic language but he also offers practical encouragement and guidance for those negotiating the dilemmas facing leadership at the level of 'the chalk face'.

His work and his reputation as a leading international scholar in the context of Catholic education has been a major influence on the Catholic community worldwide. He is a leader and exemplar in the field of Catholic education.

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

I began my doctoral research in Catholic education in 1996. During the course of my studies, like many others, I became familiar with Gerald's work and, in particular, from its inception in 1997, the work produced by the Centre for Research and Development in Catholic Education (CRDCE). When I completed my doctoral research in 2002, my supervisor drew attention to Gerald's ground-breaking work, *Catholic Schools: Mission, Markets and Morality*, which had recently been published, and he advised that, before submitting my thesis, I should include some references to this publication.

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

I had the privilege of being invited to meet Gerald at his home. He took the opportunity to show me various souvenirs and presents that he had collected on his travels to various countries around the world, where he would speak at international conferences. In his house, there were many and diverse statues, icons, and other artefacts of a religious nature on display.

On the wall of the stairway, in ascending order, there was arranged a series of images of the stations of the cross. I studied them for a few moments. He then asked me if I had noticed anything unusual about them. It felt like a test. I mused reflectively (afraid of revealing any ignorance on my part) and offered tentatively: 'Are they all there?' After a pause, he nodded. He confirmed that two of the images were missing.

He then regaled me of the story of how these images had come into his possession. He had been invited to Buenos Aires to give a presentation at an international conference. During his time in the city, he was escorted by a driver called José, who acted as both guide and translator, and accompanied by a religious sister, who had been given permission from her Superior to travel there with him.

On one occasion, José took Gerald and the religious sister to a well-known market in the city, where they spent the morning looking at the commodities and wares that were on sale. On one of the stalls he came across the images of the stations of the cross and, through José, he made some enquiries. José negotiated a price on Gerald's behalf but the price the stallholder was asking was too high.

The religious sister discouraged Gerald from pursuing the matter as she said that the images were too expensive. But Gerald persisted and, on further inspection, he pointed out to José that the set was broken – two of the images were missing. José therefore resumed his conversation with the stallholder and negotiated a new (and significantly lower) price, which Gerald was then pleased to meet.



Photo: Gerald Grace and David Finchman.