



## INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

### A study guide for use by NSW Catholic schools

This study guide is for teaching staff in NSW Catholic schools as well as all who have responsibility for the education of the young:

- parents and those who represent families in schools
- teachers and associated staff
- episcopal commissions
- institutes and associations etc.

On 19 December 2013, with the approval of Pope Francis, the Congregation for Catholic Education issued a document entitled: *Educating to Cultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilisation of Love*. It is available at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/)

An introduction from the Cardinal Prefect of the Roman Congregation situates the document in the context of other statements on Catholic schooling, and provides important statistical and background information. This is available at:

<http://thewandererpress.com/our-catholic-faith/intercultural-dialogue-and-educating-for-a-civilization-of-love/>

### Summary of the document

This summary of the five chapters is provided with the caveat that the dense document should be read in its entirety for it is impossible to adequately summarise its contents, an appreciation of which presumes a more than passing knowledge of the profound principles underlying Catholic education.

#### Chapter 1: Background

A general description of culture, the plurality of cultures, the relationship of culture and religion, and specifically the Catholic religion and other religions.

#### Chapter 2: Approaches to pluralism

Cultural pluralism is a reality in today's world, and attitudes towards it vary. Relativism respects differences but separates them into autonomous spheres, aiming at passive co-existence, and rendering dialogue impossible. Assimilation melts minority cultures into the dominant culture.

Intercultural dialogue is not limited to strategies for the functional insertion of immigrants into the majority culture, nor to compensatory measures; nor does it merely celebrate diversity with stereotypes or folkloristic representations; but it is an educational strategy leading to deep-seated knowledge of the specific identity of different cultures, and aims at an integration of cultures in mutual recognition.

### Chapter 3: Some foundations for an intercultural approach

The Church teaches that the human person 'comes to a true and full humanity only through culture' (Vat.II: GS 53). There are values common to all cultures because they are rooted in the nature of the person. The person is essentially relational, requiring communion with God and with people. Love, freed from egoism, is the method and goal of life itself.

The human race is a single family working together in communion, and is not simply a group of subjects, monads, who live side by side. The 'radicalisation' of cultural identity tends to build little, closed, introverted worlds. It is the task of education to enable intercultural dialogue and mutual life-long learning in order to build the civilisation of love.

### Chapter 4: Catholic education in view of intercultural dialogue

Underpinning Catholic education is the pedagogy of communion which links 'love of education' with 'education to love'. The vocation of educators in a Catholic school is to be the first to love, to be credible witnesses in the eyes of the young. Love offered to all is the source of humanity's true humanisation. It is the opposite of all egoistic instincts to violence and war. Young people robbed of culture and faith risk dehumanisation, and loss of meaning and purpose.

The utterly essential and foundational gift of Catholic education is the witness to a constant, personal network of relationships marked by a dynamic intermixing (osmosis) between adults (teachers, parents, educational administrators etc.), between teachers & students, and between students. Such witness to human solidarity is the alternative to that state of rivalry which condemns people to be ever more incommunicado even though living in a globalised world.

### Chapter 5: The contribution of Catholic schools

This longest and perhaps most practical chapter deals with the ways Catholic education can promote intercultural dialogue. The greatest challenge is to develop a pedagogy which avoids 'identity' as a goal in itself (fundamentalism), which takes account of the growing multi-religious and non-religious components of society, but which remains true to the fundamental identity and vision of Catholic education. Catholic schools must reflect on and clearly recognise their own identity, because that which they can give is primarily that which they are. They have in Jesus Christ the basis of their anthropological and pedagogical paradigm, and must practise 'the grammar of dialogue' not as a technical expedient but as a profound way of relating to others.

The primary dialogue must be with families which have their own particular cultural dynamics. Catholic schools are by their very vocation 'Catholic', i.e. open to plurality and differences. Their educational programme must be *wholistic*, building a dynamic relationship with all forms of knowledge, and harmoniously merging study and life, enabling personal formation and the transformation of knowledge into wisdom of life.

However, the teaching of the Catholic religion needs to be distinguished from catechesis which promotes personal adherence to Christ, and growth in Christian life. The challenge is to provide a religious education which is not just a neutral study of comparative religions, but which makes the school a true laboratory of culture and humanity in which the significant contribution of Christianity (and specifically, Catholicism) is recognised, and students are equipped to discover goodness and grow in responsibility, to refine their critical sense, draw from the gifts of the past to understand the present better, and to be able to plan wisely for the future.

What marks a school's attention to intercultural dialogue are the ways it integrates students of varying backgrounds, enables interaction among peers and adults, and respectfully recognises the other person's culture and emotional situation.

Finally, the document recognises the ecclesial nature of Catholic schools which in their core identity are linked with the Church hierarchy, guaranteeing orthodox Catholic instruction by teachers of right doctrine and probity of life.

## Workshopping the document

### 1. The challenge

In this age of globalisation and multiculturalism, a central challenge for Catholic schools is to develop a pedagogical vision which enables intercultural dialogue and mutual recognition of values without compromising specifically Catholic cultural identity.

‘The generating nucleus of every authentic culture is constituted by its approach to the mystery of God in whom alone does a social order centred on the dignity and responsibility of the human person find its unshakeable foundation.’ Saint John Paul II

#### Discussion starters:

- What do we understand by ‘globalisation’, ‘culture’, ‘multiculturalism’?
- Comment on the Pope’s statement that ‘every authentic culture is constituted by its approach to the mystery of God’. Can an authentic culture be ‘secular’?
- How would we describe the culture of our school community?
- How would we rate the relative importance of the following to the culture of our school community: religion, academic learning, sport, music, social activity, etc.?
- What are the obvious ‘sub-cultures’ within our school community? (e.g. indigenous, migrant, etc.)
- Would we classify the following groups as ‘sub-cultures’: Catholic, Protestant, practising/non-practising (Catholics/Protestants), non-religious, anti-religious, etc.
- How do we identify/handle discrimination, racism, vilification, bullying, etc.?
- In what sense do we, or do we not, have a right to be critical of others?

### 2. The vision

The Catholic school’s primary responsibility is to witness to the centrality of the human person who becomes who they are through relationships with others. The aim of education is to affirm an integral humanism in order to build up a civilization of love. Underpinning Catholic education is the pedagogy of communion which links ‘love of education’ with ‘education to love’.

Catholic schools must reflect on and clearly recognise their own identity, because that which they can give is primarily that which they are. They have in Jesus Christ the basis of their anthropological and pedagogical paradigm, and must practise ‘the grammar of dialogue’ not as a technical expedient but as a profound way of relating to others. It is the primary task of the educators of the young to promote the civilisation of love, not just a vague solidarity, but the universal love of Christ permeating all humankind.

#### Discussion starters:

- Life: How do our children learn to share the joys and sorrows of others of different cultures, and sub-cultures, within our school?
- Works: What do we do in and out of school to promote integral humanism (i.e. full human development of our children), and how do we measure the outcomes?
- Theological dialogue: How do our children learn about others’ religious beliefs and customs?
- Religious experience: In what ways do our children have ‘religious experiences’? How are these relevant in our school where the majority of students are not regularly attending religious services outside the school?

- Is the vision of a 'civilisation of love' practical or attainable, or is it just a utopian, illusory ideal; what Marx might call 'pie in the sky'?

### 3. The way

The school community is a place of encounter and dialogue, particularly with the family which is the primary community. Respecting the family's culture and listening carefully to the needs it finds, the school becomes a true experience of intercultural relationships, lived out rather than just spoken about. The educational programme must be *wholistic*, building a dynamic relationship with all forms of knowledge, and harmoniously merging study and life, enabling personal formation and the transformation of knowledge into wisdom of life.

However, the teaching of the Catholic religion needs to be distinguished from catechesis which intentionally promotes personal adherence to Christ, and growth in Christian life. The challenge is to provide a religious education which is not just a neutral study of comparative religions, but which makes the school a true laboratory of culture and humanity in which the significant contribution of Christianity (and specifically, Catholicism) is recognised, and students are equipped to discover goodness and grow in responsibility, to refine their critical sense, draw from the gifts of the past to understand the present better, and to be able to plan wisely for the future.

#### Discussion starters:

- In what way can we say that our Catholic school is an educational community that makes Christ its foundation?
- How is religious education different from catechesis (i.e. faith formation)?
- Most students do not regularly attend parish Mass or other religious services outside the school. Does our school have a responsibility to conduct catechesis and enable children to grow in their personal relationship with Christ? For whom is this done, and what are the limits of the responsibility? How is the freedom of all children and their families respected?
- How does our religious education programme differ from a study of comparative religions?
- How does our school community receive, respect and seek to understand and integrate students of different cultural backgrounds?
- What intercultural experiences are offered within our school community, and how do we promote healthy interaction among peers and adults?
- How do teachers respond to the challenge to witness to the love of Christ, or, as the documents puts it, the first to love, to be credible witnesses in the eyes of the young.

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