Some Early Work in “Catholic Curriculum”

In the 1990’s, as Coordinator of the Mission and Justice Education Program in the Archdiocese of Sydney, I was privileged to be invited to form part of a team of educators within the Catholic Education Office in Sydney, who developed and implemented *A Sense of the Sacred*\(^1\), under the leadership of the then Director of Curriculum and Religious Education, Dr Therese D’Orsa. This was the first program of its kind in Australia, a genuine attempt to explore how the subjects taught in a Catholic school could be vehicles for learning that was in a league beyond the scope of the purely secular disciplines, legitimate and important though the disciplines were, rightly enjoying their own identity and integrity.

The question was then, and is now, a question specifically related to curriculum. **Can the Key Learning Areas Catholic schools offer through the curriculum be informed by Catholicity in a way that strengthens the mandate of Catholic schools to be both intrinsically good schools and at the same time distinctly Catholic?** Could the learning experienced be enriched through the Gospels of Jesus and the Mission of the Church in a way that would both preserve the innate integrity of the subjects taught, and also provide opportunities to grow in the Wisdom, Discernment, Understanding, Knowledge, Piety, Reverence, Awe and Wonder that are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit? Further, could the study of the subjects be actual means towards the development of the fruits of the Spirit for our students? These fruits would be shown in the development of habits and dispositions for living that are life-giving and conducive to happiness, according to the plan of God for human beings, uniquely made in God’s image and likeness. The dispositions and qualities include Right Judgment, Peace, Joy, Goodness, Kindness, Compassion, Forgiveness, Perseverance, Justice etc.

The Catholic Church has always fostered education in its many forms since the time Christ, the greatest of Teachers. Further, it could be asked, can the basic concepts that form the building blocks of sound learning according to the Catholic tradition be used as the basis for planning to teach the Key Learning Areas? *A Sense of the Sacred* set out to identify a set of key concepts: The Sacramentality of all Creation, Human Dignity, Communion, Reconciliation, Tradition.

As a basis for the program, the document *A Sense of the Sacred: Foundations*, was developed in the mid 1990’s, articulating the five key Concepts, and the accompanying Values and Outcomes that would underpin the program, together with rich Scriptural and Church Teaching documentation that inspired and legitimated the work. Research was conducted to explore how “Values Integration” or “Values Infusion” through the curriculum may have been trialled in other Catholic Educational contexts.

Fordham University in New York, and La Salle College Green Hills in Manila, were two Catholic educational institutions that had made significant attempts to link the Gospel and the school curriculum through the subjects taught. Members of the planning team visited La Salle in the early 1990’s and spoke with teachers who had worked with the Catholic Values Integration project. We were given text books staff had developed to accompany Science and other subjects. It needs to be noted that at this time the Philippines was a leading Catholic country in terms of work for justice, liberation of peoples, peace and the integrity of Creation. This reflected in Catholic education, which was seen as an agent for the Mission of Jesus to, “Bring Good News to the poor, and liberty to captives”. Wealthy westernised countries had and still do have much to learn from such radical Gospel responses through education.

With the Foundation document and some case studies as starting points, a group of secondary teachers drawn from across the disciplines, came together in a workshop setting. After working with the Foundations document and its basis in Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching and theological reflection, teachers were each invited to take a unit of work and plan to experiment with ways of “infusing” the Concepts and related Values, choosing rich resources that would carry these Concepts and Values, as articulated in A Sense of the Sacred within the units to be taught. Meanwhile the challenge remained to avoid any form of artificial overlay or indoctrination, and to respect the requirements of the official schools curricula of the time in New South Wales, as well as the integrity of the particular disciple being taught.

The subjects represented in this project included English and Mathematics, Business Studies, Economics, PDHPE, Science and Legal Studies. After six weeks, the teachers returned to share what they had discovered. In each case, they had identified the Key Concept/s from A Sense of the Sacred best suited to inform their planned unit of work, and the accompanying Values they hoped students would have an opportunity to develop through the learning sequence.

The Mathematics teacher was engaged in teaching a unit on Quadratic Equations for Year 10. The basic overarching and guiding concept chosen was “Human Dignity”. The aim was to introduce this concept and offer opportunities for the development of accompanying Values of Compassion, and Empathy, together with habits and character dispositions of Kindness, Peace, Patience, Forgiveness, Generosity etc. The methodology (pedagogy) used was to plan for group tutoring within the Maths class, so that students had the opportunity to both assist and be assisted, taking the time and having the patience to enter into the needs of one another, and move beyond their individual need to succeed. The brightest students, in addition to being moved forward into more challenging work, were invited to “tutor” those who were struggling with the concepts, both reinforcing their own understanding and cultivating an understanding that “To whom much is given, much is expected in return”. The students were invited to reflect on their experience of working collaboratively rather than individually and explore the value of that in reflection on the unit of work.
The English teacher used the Shakespearean play *Macbeth* being studied to make links between the themes of the play and the themes of the great religions related to good and evil, drawing on the key concepts Tradition, Reconciliation, Communion.

The PE teacher made explicit links between care of and respect for the human body and the understanding from Scripture (Tradition) that the body is the “Temple of the Holy Spirit” and humans are “God’s work of art”, known and cherished by God and made in God’s image.

The Geography teacher chose the Key Concept, “Sacramentality of All Creation” as foundational in planning a unit on Sustainability in Agriculture. If earth is sacred, a precious gift from God, how should it be cultivated, impacted upon by humans? What are the implications? What does “Stewardship” as opposed to “Exploitation” mean? Case studies from Caritas Australia of projects that funded land regeneration projects in South America were used as key resources.

**The Australian Curriculum**

At the time of my arrival in 2009 as Director of Catholic Education in Tasmania, the Australian Curriculum was about to be rolled out. Some of our teachers were involved in the development of the Shape Papers and early versions of the English, History, Mathematics and History Curricula. One teacher had worked on the Sustainability Framework. Teachers were excited at the prospect of having an online, interactive, well-resourced and researched curriculum. There was early talk about the implications for specifically Catholic schools. Should curriculum implementation be approached differently in that context?

**A “Catholic Curriculum” for the Present?**

At the time, Jim and Therese D’Orsa were engaged in preliminary thinking about their proposed book on Catholic Curriculum. At the National Catholic Education Commission level (NCEC) the sub-committee for Religious Education had proposed that there be a national strategy to respond to the the Australian Curriculum in terms of Religious Education and Studies of Religion. Professor Peter Hill of ACARA had asked the question of Commissioners in late 2009, “What response is Catholic Education going to make regarding Religious Education?” Educators were thinking more widely than Religious Education and asking, “Should there be a national approach to explore how our Catholic Identity could inform all areas of the Australian Curriculum?” Is there a specific approach to teaching and learning based on the various curricula that is distinctive, indeed potentially enriching, through the added influence of our Catholic worldview, with its beliefs about human anthropology and the universe as God’s Creation? These were important questions, not yet addressed in any systematic way by the Catholic Church in Australia, but of great interest in isolated pockets of Catholic Education, and growing more widely in interest each year.

**There is an increasing realisation that Catholic schools do not simply “adopt” secular curricula prescribed by government, but enrich them through the wealth of learning**

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and human and divine wisdom that flows from our Catholic Faith, and from the
variety of other Faiths and spiritualities that are part of the heritage of our students,
who are drawn from such a variety of cultural and faith backgrounds.

In Tasmania, there was enough interest from staff to ask could Therese and Jim D’Orsa
to be invited to present a workshop on Catholic Curriculum to our Office and schools
staffs.

Their work on Catholic Curriculum, cited earlier, had been published and purchased
by our Catholic Education Office in 2012, and a number of members of staff had read
the book with interest. The D’Orsa’s previous work, Explorers, Guides and Meaning
Makers: Mission Theology for Catholic Educators3, pointed out the significant function
teachers have in helping students find meaning for life through their learning. Extracts
from this work had been used by the Office Leadership Team to stimulate their
thinking and reflection about leadership and learning in a Catholic schools context, as
we developed our Learning Platform4 to guide all schools in their curriculum planning
and pedagogy.

Professional Learning in “Catholic Curriculum”
In March 2012, all Education Staff within the Catholic Education Office attended a two-
day seminar on Catholic Curriculum in Hobart, facilitated by Therese and Jim D’Orsa
and based on their key text cited above. Following this, all Principals and their
leadership teams attended the two-day seminar in Launceston.

Working Party
In the weeks and months that followed there was much informal exchange of thinking
and response to the initial seminars. The feedback from the two workshops was
analysed and a Catholic Curriculum Working Party was set up. Its membership
included interested volunteers from senior Catholic Education Office staff in Mission
and Education, Leadership, and Schools Service, a Primary Principal, and two
secondary Coordinators of Mission and Religious Education. Meetings of the Working
Party took place during 2013 to discern the implications for us in Catholic Education
across Tasmania and how we could respond to the challenge to offer a genuinely
Catholic Curriculum.

The work of this group built on the feedback from participants at the two-day
workshops, as communication via blog and email developed from April onwards.
Some of the feedback and suggestion included deep reflection and resulted in
informal, exploratory papers being written and circulated on the meaning and
implications of Catholic Curriculum.

At the initial meeting of the Working Party in April we posed the following questions:

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Publishing, Victoria
http://www.catholic.tas.edu.au/
1. What are your thoughts/feelings now regarding “Catholic Curriculum” after a space of some weeks since our two-day seminars?
2. What is your sense of where we need to go from here?
   In 2013? In 2014 and beyond?

The responses to these questions took into account the history of our journey so far, including:

(i) The work of the seminar days and feedback from participants

(ii) The intent of two of our TCEO Strategic Goals for 2013, based on the Strategic Directions 2013-2016, *One in Mind and Heart*. These Goals were to:
   
   “Deepen educational leaders’ understanding of the authentic nature of our Catholic identity as expressed in leading the Catholic Curriculum” (Catholic Culture and Ethos)

   “Implement the goals of the federal government National Plan for School Improvement, informed by our Catholic ethos” (Learning)

(iii) Take account of the “busyness of schools” in implementing our overall Strategic Goals

(iv) The Catholic Identity Project: A number of our schools and the Catholic Education Office had taken part in the Leuven Catholic Identity Surveys in collaboration with the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne and the Catholic Schools Office of South Australia. An enduring question overhung much of our discussion during engagement in the Project: how can we enable richer, wider and deeper dialogue in our schools about our Catholic Identity?

(v) Continued reflection at our meetings on the resources from the earlier Catholic Curriculum seminars.

**Further Exploration of “Catholic Curriculum”**

Concurrently with this thinking, the Team Leader for Mission and RE, Tony Brennan, together with staff theologian, Dr Drasko Dizdar, were developing a course for teachers, titled “Wisdom Pedagogy”, which explored the theological, scriptural and pedagogical aspects of what could potentially develop as a “Wisdom Capability”, to be acquired by students through all the learning processes that make up the life of the Catholic school.

The Scriptural extract from the Book of Proverbs (8:22-31), describing the gift of Wisdom as follows was used as the introductory scripture Reflection in their

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6 The Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (ECSIP), conducted under the auspices of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Limited, began in 2006. Didier Pollefeyt is Vice Rector for Education Policy at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium and leads of the Project.

7 Wisdom Pedagogy. Power Point Presentation available from MRE, Catholic Education Office, Hobart. Phone 0362108888
workshops with teachers.

Wisdom was born before the earth was made.
The Wisdom of God cries aloud:
The Lord created me when his purpose first unfolded, before the oldest of his works.
From everlasting I was firmly set, from the beginning, before earth came into being.
The deep was not, when I was born, there were no springs to gush with water.
Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I came to birth; before he made the earth, the countryside, or the first grains of the world’s dust.
When he fixed the heavens firm, I was there, when he drew a ring on the surface of the deep, when he thickened the clouds above, when he fixed fast the springs of the deep, when he assigned the sea its boundaries – and the waters will not invade the shore – when he laid down the foundations of the earth, I was by his side, a master craftsman, delighting him day after day, ever at play in his presence, at play everywhere in his world, delighting to be with the sons of men.

The Gifts of the Spirit were introduced to teachers: Awe, Reverence, Courage, Knowledge, Understanding, Discernment, Wisdom. Wisdom was introduced as the culminating and integrating gift: “Wisdom is integral to a life that is true, good and beautiful. It is the seventh and culminating gift of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the advocate and helper, the feminine divine”.

Links were established between the Cardijn “See, Judge, Act” methodology, introduced through the D’Orsa seminars, and the exercise of these gifts. Wisdom is to be acquired through the exercise of the gifts, and bears the Fruits of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Goodness, Self-Control etc. Further, a developed “Wisdom Consciousness” informs all understanding of Creation, as explained by Gerald Schroeder, Jewish Scientist, with Weizmann Institute in Israel, who wrote,

The discoveries of science, those that explore the molecular complexity of biology, and those who probe the brain/mind interface, have moved us to the brink of a startling realization: all existence is the expression of an all encompassing wisdom that pervades the universe. Every particle, every being, from atom to human, appears to have within it a level of information, of conscious wisdom. The information just appears as given, with no causal agent evident, as if it were an intrinsic facet of nature.8

In addition to this work on Wisdom as an integrating concept, the introductory Reflection for one of our planning meetings with the Working Party, drew on an extract from Evangelii Nuntiandi (Parag. 18), which explains the acquisition of Wisdom, using the language of evangelisation, of missiology, whereby the human heart, and the culture are “affected” by the Gospel.

For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: “Now I am making the whole of creation new.” But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.  

In a presentation to teachers entitled Catholic Education: A Gospel Way of Life and Learning, founded on the Person of Jesus Christ, the following quotations were introduced by the Director, as illustrations of the Church’s intention that Catholic Education should link Faith and culture through learning.

In the Catholic school’s educational project, there is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom. The various school subjects do not present only knowledge to be attained, but also values to be acquired and truths to be discovered. All of which demands an atmosphere characterised by the search for truth, in which competent, convinced and coherent educators, teachers of learning and life, may be a reflection, albeit imperfect but still vivid, of the one Teacher.  

“The Catholic school pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school. What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. It tries to guide the young people in such a way that personality development goes hand in hand with the development of the "new person" that each one has become through baptism. It tries to relate all of human culture to the good news of salvation so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the students will gradually come to learn about the world, about life, and about the human person”. 

Hence our work in formation supported the journey of exploration of how we could address the “Catholic Curriculum”, and prepare both a framework to underpin the work, as well as plan appropriate formation for teachers who would implement it in schools.

A Fourth Priority and an Eighth Capability?

At the second meeting of the Working Group in June, we began to think seriously about the possibility of including an additional Priority (Catholicity) and an eighth General Capability to the Australian Curriculum framework, as a way of addressing the

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9 Evangelii Nuntiandi, Parag. 18
10 The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium Parag. 14
11 Declaration on Christian Education Parag. 1 (Vatican II)
specifically Catholic nature of education in our schools. Feedback from workshop
groups during the Launceston seminar with Principals and school leadership teams,
had strongly endorsed this.

At the time of writing, there are three existing Priorities in the Australian Curriculum
that address the specific contemporary needs of the Australian educational culture:
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders history and cultures; Sustainability; and Asia and
Australia’s Engagement with Asia. The Working Party was unanimous in agreeing that
a fourth Priority, Catholicity can be assumed as a given for a Catholic Educational
system and should be formally included as a Priority within the Australian Curriculum
as we implement it in Tasmanian Catholic schools.

The Strategic Directions document for Tasmanian Catholic Education 2013-2016, One
in Mind and Heart articulates a strong commitment to ensure that Catholicity
pervades every aspect of the life of the system and the schools, including the formal
and informal curriculum.

It is stated in the Goals of the document that we commit to:

Provide for rich, ongoing formative opportunities for enhance leadership of self, of others and of the Catholic community, to provide for authentic Catholic Education into the future.

Provide students with rich, personalised learning opportunities, imbued with our Catholic worldview, inspired by Gospel values, and responsive to the national educational agenda.

Deepen an authentic understanding of our Catholic identity, its scope, its heritage and its significance, and how we can deepen that within Catholic Education and beyond.

General Capabilities, a key dimension of the Australian Curriculum, are addressed explicitly in the content of the learning areas. They play a significant role in realising the goals set out in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008) that all young people in Australia should be supported to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.13

The Melbourne Declaration identifies essential skills for twenty-first century learners – in literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT), thinking, creativity, teamwork and communication. The Declaration describes individuals who can manage their own wellbeing, relate well to others, make informed decisions about their lives, become citizens who behave with ethical integrity, relate to and

13 The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008. Available at:
communicate across cultures, work for the common good and act with responsibility at local, regional and global levels.

The General Capabilities of The Australian Curriculum encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that, together with curriculum content in each learning area and the cross-curriculum Priorities outlined above, will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. They complement the key learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework – that children have a strong sense of identity and wellbeing, are connected with and contribute to their world, are confident and involved learners and effective communicators.

The Australian Curriculum lists the seven General Capabilities as: Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking; Information and Communication Technologies; Personal and Social; Ethical Behaviour; Intercultural Understanding.

We had begun to ask: Is there another General Capability that empowers the learner to respond to God’s plan for them and for the world, that can be learnt within, but not confined to, a specifically Catholic school environment?

Early thinking asked, would “Discernment” describe what is needed in a learner’s life to apply the lens of spirituality and/or faith, to every aspect of their learning, both at school and in later life? Would the capacity to “Link Faith and Culture” through learning be a way to name the additional Capability?

Discernment involves knowing reality, reflecting on that reality with a spiritual lens, in the light of Faith, and then arriving at a decision, conclusion or action that is consistent with the Fruits and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts filled the life of Jesus the Model for Catholic educators. He “grew in wisdom, grace and understanding” the scriptures tell us. In other words, He was a learner growing towards maturity, towards the “fullness of life”. He could claim, “I am the Truth, the Way, the Life”. Surely discovering the Way, the Truth, the Life is the ultimate life goal of all learners. Through the seminars early in 2013 on Catholic Curriculum, we had explored methods for discernment, including the classic Cardijn model.

The Catholic Curriculum Working Group took account of the rich and diverse thinking and exploration that had taken place since the initial seminars in March and its work plan developed as follows:

To plan towards providing a system wide Strategy within Catholic Education Tasmania that will provide for:

- A formal “Catholic Curriculum” Framework document for guidance of teachers. This would include Understandings and Concepts to underpin work with schools and would need to be “user friendly”. This framework would include an additional Priority (“Catholicity”) and an additional General Capability (“Wisdom” or equivalent).

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• Opportunities for greater understanding of the meaning and implications of a “Catholic Curriculum”. This would include development of a methodical, long-term plan for Formation and Professional Learning, closely aligned with the overall Professional Learning and Formation provisions of the system of schools.

The proposed framework, to be developed early in 2014, would assist a group of teachers who would be invited to join a pilot project in 2014. These teachers would work with the Mission and Religious Education Team and the Curriculum and Pedagogy Team within the Office. They would develop and trial units of work, taking account of the additional Priority and the additional General Capability, and based on The Australian Curriculum in English, History, Mathematics, Science, Geography and PD Health.

There would be support for TCEO educators, principals and teachers in implementing the “Catholic Curriculum” in their school culture and learning programs. This support would need to be aligned with and embedded within the existing structures we have to support quality learning, eg. School Improvement Process, Teacher Development and Review Processes, Leadership Programs, Spiritual Formation, Principal Standards Implementation, Accreditation. The professional learning would follow the good practice models of network structure and Office support, based on the work of Helen Timperley.16

The Future
There remains much to be done. So far we have undertaken to first steps of:

1. Commitment to “Catholic Curriculum” as central to Catholic Education and a Key Strategic Direction towards 2016
2. Development of basic Understandings in Catholic Curriculum for Leaders through Professional Learning around “Catholic Curriculum” (School and system Leaders).
3. Commitment to alignment of “Catholic Curriculum” with all major existing and future initiatives related to Teaching and Learning: Formation, Professional Learning, Curriculum Implementation, School Improvement.
4. Committed staffing to carry forward the “Catholic Curriculum” imperative into 2014 and beyond.

With all the extensive challenges that have accompanied the past four years in education nationally, and the change fatigue that can accompany rapid and wide change, there remains a sense of energy and excitement around our Catholic Identity in Tasmanian Catholic Education. Our Faith is our major inspiration and motivation for good. It enables us to see with the eyes of Jesus Christ and the spirit of Vatican 11. We are called to read the Signs of the Times: and address these through education, shining the lens of the Gospel on everything we do and plan for learning in our schools. Catholicity is not narrow and limiting; it opens us up to the Mission of

God in the world, to “bring the Good News of Creation to the ends of the earth”, in
the tradition of our Church and with the Spirit of Jesus who announced His own
Mission in Luke 4:16 as to:

- Bring Good news to the poor
- Freedom for the prisoners
- Recovery of sight for the blind
- Set the oppressed free
- Proclaim the Year of the Lord’s Favour

This is the Pearl of Great Price and the Treasure Hidden in the Field that brings to life
the work we do through student learning that is based on a relevant, rich and
meaningful curriculum fully informed and transfused by our Catholicity. Our Mission
as Catholic educators is wide and broad enough to welcome all who come to us from
Catholic or other Faiths, or none, and to offer our students and staff a way of thinking
and living that can address the serious challenges of our own time, both personal and
societal, with spiritual energy and sound religious teaching.

(Participation) flourishes in a climate of dialogue and mutual respect, in an educational
setting where all are assured of being able to increase their capacities to the full, with
the constant aim of pursuing the good of all. In this way, a constant climate of mutual
trust, availability, of listening and of fruitful exchange can be developed, which must
characterize the whole period of formation. Classes, which aim to give expression both
to life and thought, are geared to creating a constant dialogue between teachers and
students; enhancing the personal contribution of students in the common search for
knowledge; and giving rise to interdisciplinary teaching, with the contribution of
teachers of various disciplines.

Parag. 59 Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools Living in Harmony for a Civilization
of Love

62. Catholic schools’ educational programme foresees an harmonious meeting and
merging of study and life. This allows students to enjoy a quality formative experience,
enriched by intellectual research in the various branches of knowledge and, at the
same time, a source of wisdom due to its context: life nourished by the Gospel. In this
way, one avoids the risk of an education that fails, in the first place, to foster the
individual’s whole formation. In fact, “school is one of the educational environments
in which we develop through learning how to live, how to become grown-up, mature
men and women who can travel, who can follow the road of life ... It helps you not
only by developing your intelligence, but also by an integral formation of all the
aspects of your personality.”

Schools must not be a hiatus in life, purely artificial places dedicated solely to
developing the cognitive dimension. While respecting the students’ individual
timeframes for reaching maturity as well as their personal freedom, schools must
assume responsibility for helping the students to understand life’s social and cultural
situations. Schools must also encourage the students to take on responsibility for improving these situations. Moreover, given schools’ attention to the whole person and to all human experience, they do not limit their responsibilities to the merely didactic. Schools also care for many other aspects of the students’ lives, in informal ways (parties, fun moments, etc.), formal ways (presentations from informed guest speakers, discussion times, etc.) and religious experiences (times for liturgy and spirituality, etc.)

65. For a Catholic school, examining its curriculum leads to strengthening what is specific to its nature. It means strengthening the particular way it serves individuals, using the tools offered by culture. Thus, the school’s programmes can be effectively harmonized with the school’s original mission. One cannot be content merely with an up-to-date didactic offering that simply responds to the demands deriving from the ever-changing economic situation. Catholic schools think out their curricula to place centre-stage both individuals and their search for meaning. This is the reference value, in view of which the various academic disciplines are important resources and take on greater value to the extent that they are tools for educating. From this perspective, what is taught is not neutral, and neither is the way of teaching it.

66. It has been said that we live in a knowledge-based society. However, Catholic schools are encouraged to promote a wisdom-based society, to go beyond knowledge and educate people to think, evaluating facts in the light of values. They educate people to take on responsibility and duties, and exercise active citizenship. Among matters taught specifically in Catholic schools, pride of place must be given to the knowledge of different cultures, with attention given to helping the students encounter and compare the various cultures’ many different viewpoints. The curriculum must help the students reflect on the great problems of our time, including those where one sees more clearly the difficult situation of a large part of humanity’s living conditions. These would include the unequal distribution of resources, poverty, injustice and human rights denied. “Poverty” implies a careful consideration of the phenomenon of globalization, and suggests a broad and developed vision of poverty, in all its various forms and causes.[62]

67. A good curriculum can merge theoretical lessons with presentations from informed speakers, where life-experiences are presented in light of faith’s view of the world. A good curriculum can also contain practical experiences for sharing and assuming responsibilities.

The two poles are directed towards each other: lessons are informed by hearing about the life-experiences; knowledge becomes experience; and experience acquires the force of a cultural offering, of proclamation.

In teaching the various academic disciplines, teachers share and promote a methodological viewpoint in which the various branches of knowledge are dynamically correlated, in a wisdom perspective. The epistemological framework of every branch of knowledge has its own identity, both in content and methodology. However, this
framework does not relate merely to “internal” questions, touching upon the correct realization of each discipline. Each discipline is not an island inhabited by a form of knowledge that is distinct and ring-fenced; rather, it is in a dynamic relationship with all other forms of knowledge, each of which expresses something about the human person and touches upon some truth.

68. Schools are challenged by the multicultural make-up of their classes. They must be able to rethink what is taught; the learning methods; their own internal organization, roles and relationships with families; and the social and cultural context where they are to be found. A curriculum that is open to the intercultural perspective presents the students with a study of civilizations that were previously unknown to them, or were remote from them, but which now are brought to their attention, as well as being brought much “closer” thanks to globalization and modern means of communication, crossing barriers of space and ideological defences. Teaching that aims to help students understand the reality in which they live cannot ignore the aspect of encounter. On the contrary, teaching has the duty to favour dialogue, as well as cultural and spiritual exchanges.

69. On the didactic level, schools must present their own intercultural concerns while remembering the two levels of learning: the cognitive and the relational-affective. On the cognitive level, schools develop the contents of the curriculum: areas of knowledge to be taught and skills to be promoted. On the relational-affective level, schools develop attitudes and ways of talking about others, teaching the students to respect diversity and take different viewpoints into account, cultivating empathy and collaboration.

74. Moreover, it must be pointed out that teaching the Catholic religion in schools has its own aims, different from those of catechesis. In fact, while catechesis promotes personal adherence to Christ and maturing of the Christian life, school teaching gives the students knowledge about Christianity’s identity and the Christian life. Thus, one aims “to enlarge the area of our rationality, to reopen it to the larger questions of the truth and the good, to link theology, philosophy and science between them in full respect for the methods proper to them and for their reciprocal autonomy, but also in the awareness of the intrinsic unity that holds them together’. The religious dimension is in fact intrinsic to culture. It contributes to the overall formation of the person and makes it possible to transform knowledge into wisdom of life.” Therefore, with the teaching of the Catholic religion, “school and society are enriched with true laboratories of culture and humanity in which, by deciphering the significant contribution of Christianity, the person is equipped to discover goodness and to grow in responsibility, to seek comparisons and to refine his or her critical sense, to draw from the gifts of the past to understand the present better and to be able to plan wisely for the future.”[67]

Finally, it counts that the teaching of religion is a field of study in schools. This gives it status, placing it alongside the other disciplines in the school's curriculum, in a necessary interdisciplinary dialogue and not as a mere appendix