

# Educating The Soul

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*Writing Curriculum For Catholic  
Secondary Schools*

*Written by  
Larry Trafford*

*In Consultation With:*

*Institute for Catholic Education  
and  
Catholic Curriculum Cooperative  
-Central Ontario Region*

**EDUCATING THE SOUL**  
**WRITING CURRICULUM FOR CATHOLIC**  
**SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

**A Resource Tool**

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# EDUCATING THE SOUL

## Writing Curriculum For Catholic Secondary Schools

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# 1

## Ontario's Curricular Landscape

### 1.1 A Province in Transition

To suggest that we live in a time of change is perhaps our most obvious truism. For seldom has one feature of life so dominated an era's thinking, so dominated its self-understanding and operation, so dominated its worldview. Under the banner of change history is explained, the present reconfigured, and predictions about life made. In short, change is given pride of place as the most significant factor determining our age.

Hence, it is within the context of change that the government of Ontario has introduced its new policy initiatives for education, several of which have direct implications for the province's secondary schools. Under its slogan *Education Reform*, the government has proposed and implemented revolutionary changes in the areas of educational finance, school governance, curriculum programs and student assessment. Put simply, Ontario has become a province in transition.

These changes are both dramatic and striking. They include:

- a new system of educational governance and the restructuring of school boards as a result of the Fewer School Boards Act, 1997 (Bill 104)
- a new system of education finance (Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997)
- a new operational model for Teachers' Collective Bargaining (Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997)
- a new financial structure regarding taxation, school construction, Board borrowing and investment of funds (Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997)
- a new operational model for school councils (Program/Policy Memo #122, 1995)
- a new Ontario Elementary Curriculum
- a new provincial report card for elementary schools
- a new Ontario Secondary School Policy
- a new Ontario Secondary School Curriculum
- Ministry directions on teacher time in the classroom, class size, and increased number of instructional days (Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997)
- the establishment of the Ontario College of Teachers
- the establishment of the Education Quality and Accountability Office

From the government's perspective therefore, these initiatives constitute a vision for educational change, one that arises from its commitment to educational accountability, affordability, quality, and service. It is a vision predicated on certain beliefs about change, about the purpose of schools, about the nature of teaching and learning. In short, it is a vision that assumes a certain way of looking at life and the world. And no where is that worldview more evident than in the recent curriculum changes proposed for Ontario's Catholic secondary schools.

## 1.2 Changes in Curriculum Perspectives

Many of the changes proposed for the province's Catholic secondary schools fall into one of two categories.

The first is structural in orientation. It includes changes to the operational design of secondary schools and originates from sources such as the Royal Commission on Learning, meetings with provincial stakeholders in education, and written submissions concerning public consultation papers on Ontario Secondary Schools. The list of proposed changes includes:

- a four year program that begins in September '99
- streamed and credited Grade 9
- diploma requirements that identify 18 compulsory credits rather than 16
- mandatory community service of 40 hours
- a literacy test conducted before the end of grade 10
- changes to prior learning assessment options
- a teacher advisor system
- expanded co-operative education and school-to-work programs

The second is curricular in orientation. It includes changes that directly affect curriculum policy documents, course profiles, program delivery and services. These changes serve as portals to the government's vision of teaching and learning and originate from sources such as: i) public consultation documents addressing secondary school curriculum; ii) research papers in specific discipline areas written by Ontario university academics; iii) expert panels who produced Key Direction papers; and iv) a Ministry writing team who produced a paper entitled *Key Directions in Secondary Curriculum Development; A Synthesis of the Recommendations of 24 Expert Panels*. Proposed changes are as follows:

- the development of new secondary school curriculum policy documents (formerly known as subject curriculum guidelines) using a formal "Request for Proposals" bidding process;
- 1 curriculum policy document per discipline grouping (13) stating the required learning for that discipline area throughout the secondary school years and containing clear definitions of skills and knowledge;
- course profiles for each individual course offered in secondary schools, containing expected outcomes, assessment strategies and standards, instructional materials, support for exceptional students and adults, recommended resources, and suggestions for technological applications;
- menu of courses, including compulsory and optional, to change from present number to 219.

What distinguishes these categories is more than initiatives, however. They can also be distinguished as "carriers of meaning" as to the Ministry's educational purpose.

The operational changes, for example, require incremental adjustments to much of what is already in place within Catholic secondary schools. Granted, there may be disagreements among various stakeholders as to whether the proposed changes will bring about the quality education that the Ministry expects. There may also be difficulties in implementation. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the changes are fundamentally technical and generic in nature and pose no threat to the fundamental meaning and purpose of Catholic secondary school education.

When it comes to curricular changes, however, the initiatives are much more radical. They entail a dramatic re-tooling of beliefs, understandings, and attitudes concerning such matters as the purpose of schools, the image of the learner, learning expectations for secondary school graduates and a framework for curriculum design. They strike at the very soul of Catholic secondary schools. In short, these changes represent a shift in curriculum design and implementation so serious that they threaten the distinctive character and mandate of Catholic education itself.

### **1.3 The Challenge to Catholic Secondary Schools**

At least five factors can be cited from recent examples in the development of curriculum initiatives in this province to support this claim. Each factor poses its own challenge to the curricular future of Catholic secondary schools.

- **The "One Size Fits All" Factor**

- a) Provincial Curriculum Feature*

The Ministry is committed to producing generic curriculum policy documents and graduation outcomes (comprehensive results) for all students in the province. Although Catholic educators are often invited to participate in this process, i.e. given official representation on the development teams of the Curriculum Policy document process, the stated task of producing generic documents for discipline groupings prevents any explicit references to the distinctive character of Catholic school curriculum within the document itself.

- b) Curriculum Example*

An example of this factor in operation can be found in the publication of comprehensive results for Ontario secondary school graduates developed by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE). Comprehensive results refer to what students are expected to know, to do, and to value when they graduate from secondary school. Although CODE recognizes and supports publicly funded education in Ontario in all its realities - anglophone, francophone, public and Roman Catholic separate, the comprehensive results provide only a "one size fits all" vision of the secondary school graduate.

- c) Curriculum Challenge*

If Catholic secondary schools were to use generic comprehensive results as indicators of what students are expected to know, do, and value when they graduate, they would, in effect, be suggesting that Ontario has distinct Catholic schools but with no difference. The challenge, therefore, is to produce comprehensive results more conducive to the purpose of Catholic schools.

- **The "Catch 22" Factor**

- a) Provincial Curriculum Feature*

This refers to the fact that the invitation by the Ministry of Education and Training to Catholic

education personnel to work on these provincial documents always has a cost. The Catholic education community loses out when it has no voice on provincial writing teams but even when it does, participation is perceived as tacit endorsement of provincial documents void of any language that points to a distinctive Catholic school curriculum. In other words, if Catholic educators helped to produce the curriculum then it must be appropriate for use in Catholic schools.

*b) Curriculum Example*

An example to substantiate the "Catch 22" factor can be seen in the recent development of the Language Curriculum document for the *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8*. Although Catholic educators contributed to the production of this document, no references are made to the importance of religious literacy or values in the learning of language.

*c) Curriculum Challenge*

The issue of language is a critical one. It is language that establishes a particular world of meaning, communicates a particular point of view and produces subjectivity. If the educational language operative within provincial curriculum guidelines does not recognize the Catholic character of its schooling, then this character is, in effect, irrelevant. The challenge, therefore, is to make explicit use of religious language and Catholic references in the writing of curriculum.

• **The "Values-Neutral" Factor**

*a) Provincial Curriculum Feature*

Education is never values-neutral. It always operates from a perspective; a set of assumptions as to life's meaning and purpose. These values are woven into the very fabric of curriculum development and implementation. They permeate the entire curriculum of the school and highlight the importance of principles for conduct, decision-making, and character formation. Historically, curriculum documents in Ontario have made explicit reference to values and their role in learning.

*b) Curriculum Example*

Recently however, specific references to what students should value have been removed from *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8*, documents in Language, Mathematics, and Science and Technology. Reference is only made to knowledge and skills necessary to be productive members of society. Quite often, "productive" is described in terms of effective functioning in the world of work.

*c) Curriculum Challenge*

The challenge for Catholic secondary schools then is to promote values formation as essential to curriculum matters, to sustain the use of a moral grammar that speaks of the transcendent horizon and splendour of moral truth and to provide curriculum that does not sever a moral framework built on the foundations of moral conscience, virtue, and social justice from



curriculum documents.

- **The "Market-Place" Factor**

- a) Provincial Curriculum Feature*

According to this viewpoint, schools are places where you learn to make a living not make a life. Or, as Canadian philosopher George Grants suggests, "where the purpose of the old education was to free men [women] so that they were out of the cave, the purpose today is to equip them to be successes in the cave."<sup>1</sup>

Education serves the public best when it is seen as an instrument of economic policy, as a business where communities become markets, students become clients, and parents become stakeholders. Accordingly, successful schools are those that prepare students for entry into the world's market place as demonstrated by high test scores and performance accountability.

Curriculum should give pride of place to job training and employment skills. And any school activity that is not designed to further this end doesn't count as worthy of attention or time; a point often made during budget talks when program support for the arts becomes less of a priority.

- b) Curriculum Example*

To illustrate this factor in operation, it is interesting to note that the Ministry of Education and Training published Requests for Proposal (RFP) for the development of curriculum policy documents by utilising the online service of MERX for electronic tendering. For the first time in Ontario's history, words such as outsourcing, tendering, bidder, deliverable, contract deadline have become part of curriculum development. Of equal interest is the fact that MERX is owned by the Bank of Montreal and that the bidding process for RFP was open to American parties as well.

- c) Curriculum Challenge*

Although there is a need for linkage between education and the employment sector, "a Catholic school can never be simply a place where students accumulate skills and information, a place where they learn to get ahead and sell their gifts on the open market."<sup>2</sup> If Catholic secondary schools were to do so, they "...would prepare students for nothing more than a shallow life far removed from the profound vision of life revealed in the gospel"<sup>3</sup>. The challenge is to keep curriculum priorities consistent with this vision.

- **The "Culture of Secularism" Factor**

- a) Provincial Curriculum Feature*

This refers to the cultural context in which education functions. It refers to the public forum that determines education's purpose, tone and curriculum focus. And the most pervasive influence shaping these realities today is the ideology of secularism.

Secularism, as a belief system, promotes values formation devoid of any reference to a transcendent reality or divine purpose. It argues that life can make sense without God. It feeds a spirit of human independence and challenges its followers to construct their existence as if God did not exist.

A culture of secularism abandons any serious effort to mediate life's meaning using religious language and symbols. Religious worldviews are no longer valued in public discourse; religious morals and ethics, beliefs and values are reduced to a private affair and merely tolerated. School systems that value revealed religion as the basis for moral and religious formation find themselves unable to participate as cultural actors in the public forum and are often replaced by advocates of consumerism, relativism, and self-promotion.

#### *b) Curriculum Example*

An example of this separation of religious references from curriculum documents can be illustrated by the fact that whereas the *Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9* released in 1993 to serve as the province's core curriculum document includes one reference to Catholic curriculum - a footnote on the bottom of the first page - the new *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8* documents (i.e. Language, Mathematics, Science and Technology) include none.

#### *c) Curriculum Challenge*

Catholic secondary schools, much like their public counterparts, want to be recognized for learning excellence. But Catholic education is imbued by more than just secular knowledge. It is imbued with another wisdom, one that listens to the voice of God's revelation and, in doing so, it glimpses another reality and another possibility for living.<sup>4</sup>

This reality is described in a language that is incarnational, sacramental, and ecclesial. It speaks of the human person as religious, upon whose heart is written the desire for God. It recognizes that humanity is not self-sufficient nor its own origin and destiny. It narrates a story of creation, sin, redemption, and hope. The challenge for Catholic secondary schools is to offer curriculum that serves as an alternative way of living to that of the ideology of secularism.

Ontario's curricula landscape as outlined in *Education Reform*, therefore, cannot be endorsed by Catholic secondary schools without destroying their self-identity. Simply stated, the challenge to Catholic secondary schools is to develop, produce and implement a curriculum for secondary schools that is Catholic in purpose and character.

## 2

# The Distinctive Purpose of Catholic Education

## 2.1 Educational Purpose and Catholic Schools

Educational purpose explains the "why" of schooling. In doing so, it provides educators with a reasoned and clearly stated direction from which to review, develop, and implement school curriculum. The most common terms used to define educational purpose are: initiation, human growth, citizenship, and preparation for the world of work.

Initiation refers to those deliberate, planned experiences in a school designed to transmit certain values, knowledge, and skills. This transmission is best expressed within disciplines that help organize knowledge into academic subjects (e.g. history, mathematics, and science). To be initiated means to be literate within these domains and to use their discourse as a basis against which new truths can be gathered and assimilated. This literacy is best achieved through the training of the intellect.

Human growth makes reference to education as a process of self-actualization and formation. From this vantage point, the purpose of education is to focus on the needs and attitudes of the individual. It systematically plans for the personal and social needs of the learner's growth and development. Emphasis is placed on self-expression and the development of the learner in age-appropriate ways. Opportunities for learning are related to life experiences both within and beyond school life. These opportunities draw out the natural capacities in each person and facilitate the growth of the whole child based on that child's experience.

Citizenship refers to civic duty and responsibility. It describes the purpose of education in terms of learning about and acquiring an affection for one's country. It includes knowledge of one's civic history and discussions of such democratic rights as freedom, equality, due process, and public service. It plans for the development of social skills through co-operative learning strategies, critical thinking, and the integration of social issues (i.e. poverty, racial and gender equality, community building, environmental rights, cultural diversity) into the learning process.

Preparation for the world of work recognizes that one of the primary purposes of education is to prepare learners for the changing workplace. Consequently, there needs to be a strong link between Catholic secondary schools and the employment sector. For as fewer jobs are to be found in the manufacturing of goods and more in the delivery of services and communication field, Catholic education must provide solid training in a core body of knowledge and employability skills consistent with a world driven by electronic information sources and a global economy.

As to the question of the "why" of education, therefore, Catholic education recognizes the validity of these various claims. Indeed, the "why" of Catholic education includes features of each. Where it differs, however, is in the pride of place it gives to its religious purpose in general and its Catholic character in particular.

The purpose of Catholic education is to sponsor "the integral education of the human person through a clear educational project of which Christ is the foundation."<sup>5</sup>

Such a purpose can be described in general terms as an "education of the soul". The features of this educational purpose can be set forth in response to three foundational questions, namely, what does Catholic education proclaim, what does it provide, and what does it promote?

## **1. What does Catholic education proclaim?**

- **a view of life that is God-centred**

To begin with, Catholic education proclaims that there is a God. It believes there is a divine reality, an ultimate mystery that is both creator and sustainer of life. It believes that informing the learner about God and humanity's relationship with God is essential to any educational process.

Critical to this belief is the proclamation that this divine reality invites relationship, a relationship that is personal and intimate. To that end, Catholic education informs the learner that the basis of self-worth is rooted in the fact that all persons are children of God. Human dignity and worth are not determined by wealth, power, or social prestige but by God's constant love for us.

This love is at the heart of human interaction as well. This social dimension directs learning towards issues concerning the nature of the human family, the building of community, and the importance of justice and peace education. It is best stated in the Gospel imperative to love God and neighbour as one does one's self.

- **a view of person that is Christ-centred**

Catholic education also proclaims that Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise. It is the person of Jesus Christ who fully reveals the nature of God's love. It is his Gospel that provides the values from which all human relationships are developed. Catholic education not only informs the learner about Jesus Christ - his life, passion, death, and resurrection - but also infuses the values of his Gospel into all aspects of its curriculum.

- **a view of community that is Church-centred**

Likewise, Catholic education understands its purpose as communal in nature. Its community, known as the Church, is the assembly of Jesus' followers, inspired by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is this community that sponsors and "bodies-forth" Christ's spirit-in-the-world. Its members are initiated into this assembly through baptism, shaped by its proclamation of the Word, strengthened and nurtured by its sacramental actions, and called to conversion through moral witness to Gospel living.

It is this Church community, one that consists of home, school, and parish that accepts responsibility for educating the young in the way and service of the Gospel.

- **an educational philosophy based on Christian humanism**

Catholic education believes, as St. Irenaeus suggests, that the "glory of God is humanity fully alive". In this sense, Catholic education believes in a humanism that accords dignity and freedom to human activity but also recognizes a distinctive worldview in which this human activity takes place.

It is a world created and sustained by God's love, imbued with the sacramental presence of a God made manifest in material and sensual ways. It is a world both fallen and redeemed, blessed and broken. It reveals the reality of evil and sin and the healing power of grace. It is a world wherein humanity is created with a natural desire for union with the Creator who is at the core of human existence.

For these reasons, Catholic education proclaims that the religious dimension of human experience is at the heart of its educational purpose; a purpose whose essential features suggest that what God is most like and what human beings are called to become can be found in the life, message, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is from this foundation that an educational framework for curriculum design emerges for Roman Catholic secondary schools.

## **2. What does Catholic education provide?**

- **knowledge illuminated with the light of faith**

In Catholic education, intellectual development is encouraged and such growth includes both academic and religious literacy. Learners are informed of the various ways human knowledge has been critically understood, classified into subjects and disciplines, and passed on from one generation to the next.

The mind and its capacity for rational analysis are seen as gifts from the Creator to be used and enjoyed. The training of the intellect ensures that all knowledge can be scrutinized and the divine and the human more deeply understood. In this sense, knowledge is illuminated with the light of faith.

The source of this illumination is divine revelation, God's self-disclosure as found in Sacred Scripture and in the teachings of the Catholic Church. In Catholic education, the commitment to maturity of mind and academic excellence is always in reference to God's revealed wisdom as to life's purpose and meaning.

- **values formation through Christian community**

Values formation, or what is sometimes referred to as affective learning, is also intrinsic to the educational purpose of Catholic education.

In the classroom, the teaching of Gospel values is part of the learning process. Gospel values

refer to the guiding principles of a way of living incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ. These include such values as community, hope, faith, courage, character, honesty, and love.

Likewise, values formation takes place through a learning environment and school culture that is visibly religious. A school's culture refers to its way of doing things; it refers to the values and activities considered meaningful within that learning environment. A school's culture is part of the curriculum whereby students learn which values, attitudes, and activities are considered important within the school.

Visible signs of a Catholic school culture include:

- i) space and time for the celebration of the liturgical year of the Church and for spiritual growth, both personal and communal. Examples would include Advent and Easter and celebrations of Christmas and Easter;
- ii) opportunities for prayer and participation in the sacramental life of the Church. These include retreats, morning prayer, grace at meals, and the celebration of Mass in the chapel when available. It also includes the community's pastoral response to life's tragedies such as illness and death;
- iii) religious symbols such as the crucifix are present and explained so that their meaning is clarified to members of the community. Other examples include the use of religious banners, art and school decorations and religious artifacts.

Through its learning environment and culture, therefore, Catholic education provides a curriculum for values formation rooted in a community that shares common values, beliefs, and practices.

### **3. What does Catholic education promote?**

- **moral and spiritual formation**

The formation of persons as moral agents and spiritual beings is critical to an understanding of the educational purpose of Catholic education.

Catholic education, as an agent for social justice and peace, promotes a view of human life best described as a vocation and a call to ministry. This vocation is to actualize the human potential toward a fullness of life, to become whole persons as God intends.

This view of Catholic education as transformational is both personal and social, moral and spiritual. Personal transformation is a calling to become more Christ-like in one's relationship with God, self, others, and creation. Social transformation is a calling to work for the reign of God.

Within Catholic schools, for example, this may involve participating in acts of charity such as food and clothing drives for those in need; a commitment to volunteering one's time and talents in helping the aged or disabled; and/or a deeper appreciation of the need for self-renewal both within the Church and social structures through social witness and political activity.

- **skills development for peace and social justice**

Catholic education also promotes the development of critical skills and the integration of social issues into the learning process. To this end, learning includes a moral and ethical framework from which to discuss current social concerns such as abortion, euthanasia, world hunger and the interconnection between issues of justice and peace and the call to ministry in Jesus' name.

In summary, the distinctive purpose of Catholic education can be summarized as follows:

- to direct the learner to the person of Jesus Christ as the centre from which relationships with God, self, others, and creation unfold;
- to provide learning that is holistic and links moral and spiritual development to the life experiences of the learner;
- to promote a way of life rooted in the Christian call to discipleship and service.

## **2.2 The Curriculum Mandate of Catholic Secondary Schools**

With this in mind, it is now possible to address the curriculum mandate under which Catholic secondary schools operate.

Since Catholic secondary schools are committed to learning excellence, its curriculum must meet the same educational needs of learners as those in secular secondary schools, especially in the areas of academic training, personal and social growth, skills development and career preparation. Thus, Catholic schools should be able to offer young people the means to acquire the knowledge they need in order to find a place in society which is strongly characterized by technical and scientific skill. In many cases, therefore, the writing of curriculum to meet such needs will be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Training.

But Catholic secondary schools can never operate solely from Ministry curriculum documents. To do so would be to forfeit the Catholic character of its educational mandate - a mandate that clearly states that the essence of education is that it be religious. Moreover, to accept generic Ministry guidelines as viable instruments for meeting this distinctive purpose of Catholic education is to abandon the very curricular foundations necessary to support the governing metaphor of Catholic secondary schools, namely, educating the soul.

# 3

## Foundations of a Catholic Curriculum

Foundations of curriculum refers to that matrix necessary for the building of a curriculum framework. Foundations serve as reference points of understanding, as principles of operation from which curriculum writing and design are derived. For Catholic secondary schools, these foundations consist of a working definition of Catholic curriculum, its distinctive features, and a vision of the learner accordant with the educational mandate of Catholic education.

### 3.1 A Working Definition of Catholic Curriculum

Curriculum can be defined from various perspectives. The term is commonly used to refer to that which directs teachers about content (i.e. the written curriculum). These directions include courses of study, guidelines, manuals and resources. Other perspectives related to this usage include such terms as "recommended", "taught" (i.e. the curriculum actually instructed by teachers in the classroom), "tested", and "learned" (i.e. the actual knowledge base acquired by a student).

Curriculum, however, is much more than policy documents and support materials. At its core, it reveals fundamental beliefs and values about the nature, task, and specific character of the educational enterprise. It incarnates the vision of education from which it originates and the end towards which education is directed. It presupposes and involves a definite understanding of what it means to be human, of how to live together, and the wisdom necessary to sustain life on this planet. The key component that gives direction to curriculum matters is the educational vision which shapes it. And that component is a worldview.

It is imperative, therefore, that Catholic curriculum be defined in these terms. To limit curriculum to Ministry definitions such as "a plan for student learning which is implemented in schools"<sup>6</sup>, is to reduce curriculum to little more than society's latest educational menu, solely pragmatic and utilitarian in nature, and void of any effective and convincing interpretation of existence.

Hence, for Catholic secondary schools, curriculum is best described, in its broadest sense, as a worldview shaped by the Catholic conversation about life's meaning and purpose. It is a distinctive worldview committed to the enterprise of educating the soul.

### 3.2 Distinctive Features of Catholic Curriculum

Reference to a distinctive worldview suggests that those who are Roman Catholic see the world in a unique way.

This worldview recognizes that the divine is at work in all that surrounds us and attention to this sacred order is critical to the Catholic ethos. Hence, a Roman Catholic vision understands that humanity is created in the image of God, created with dignity and freedom and yet capable of choosing contrary to God's design. And so, celebration of life and its bodiliness and sensuality is balanced by recognition of human sinfulness and the need for forgiveness.



As well, Roman Catholicism's deep sense of community allows for the affirmation of different races, nations, and cultures. It recognizes that to be Catholic is to be open to truth and grace wherever it may be found.

Of equal significance is the importance of human reason as a means of understanding reality in all its forms. The mind and its capacity for rational analysis are seen as gifts by which reality can be scrutinized and the divine and human more deeply understood.

And lastly, Roman Catholicism preserves and re-presents the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as the cornerstone of life's meaning.

The Catholic character of this worldview, to paraphrase Thomas Groome, acknowledges:

- a positive anthropology that understands the human person as created in God's own image and likeness;
- a sacramental cosmology where God's presence is found in the ordinary and the world is viewed as gracious and meaningful;
- a community-oriented sociology where human relationships function for the common good;
- a tradition-bound history which forms the basis of personal and communal identity and advocates a critical appreciation of its role in human formation;
- a wisdom epistemology committed to holistic knowing.<sup>7</sup>

In turn, the distinctive features of Catholicism that connect this worldview to the foundations of Catholic curriculum, are as follows:

### **1. Worldview - Presence of God**

To suggest that the worldview of Catholicism is God-centred is to affirm the existence of God and the belief in a divine reality, that God is the author and creator of all life.

This is to recognize that humanity is not self-sufficient nor its own origin and destiny. It is to view life and its ultimate purpose as ordered toward union with God. God took the form of human in the person of Jesus Christ. In accepting the mystery of the Trinity, Catholics believe that God is transcendent as well as incarnate.

- **Curriculum Connection: Its Spiritual Feature**

Human nature is, at its core, a spiritual affair. Learning that takes seriously this spiritual dimension seeks to nurture and foster a deeper relationship with the ground of our being - with God. A Catholic curriculum, therefore, directs learners towards spiritual growth in the forms of religious knowledge, virtuous living, and the skills and attitudes necessary for spiritual discernment and decision-making.

## **2. Worldview - Dignity of the Human Person**

Each person is a reflection of God. The basis of self-worth is non-conditional; it originates in God's love and invitation to personal relationships. Human dignity and worth are not determined by wealth, power, or prestige but by the fact that one is a child of God.

- **Curriculum Connection: Its Humanizing Feature**

Learning that is humanizing encourages a positive outlook on life and engages the learner as an active agent in the process. It assists in the development of the learner's gifts and abilities and enables growth toward human freedom and responsibility. It provides the learner with access to various forms of knowledge as found in the humanities, arts, and sciences. It considers the search for truth as that which assists in personal and social well-being. In Catholic curriculum, the fullness of this truth concerning this purpose is found in the person of Jesus Christ and his gospel.

## **3. Worldview - Call to Life in Community**

Each person is called to live and build community. No self stands alone. Rather, the very nature of existence is social in terms of our relationship both with God and with others as witnessed to in the most fundamental of social structures, the family. This social dimension directs Catholic curriculum toward issues concerning the nature of the human family, the building of community, participation in Church activity, and service for the common good.

- **Curriculum Connection: Its Ecclesial Feature**

Learning that supports community living believes in co-operation over competition, inclusion over exclusion, and social service over personal gain. It also believes in educating for the common good, in forming character whose virtues include honesty, courage, and integrity. Catholic curriculum contributes to this notion of community, especially in its ecclesial form, by providing a learning environment that nurtures the bond between people who share a common set of beliefs and practices and who symbolize that bond in shared ritual practice.

## **4. Worldview - Reverence and Stewardship of the Planet**

Catholicism claims that the material world is a channel of God's grace. It is the cosmic medium of God's spirit. As people grow in awareness of the causes and effects on ecosystems, Catholics are called to promote life forms and to confront the forces of evil, which threaten the preservation of these forms. This combines social responsibility and concern for others with a desire to live in harmony with nature, and emphasises the interrelatedness of all life forms on the planet. It also promotes values such as sustainability and equality.

- **Curriculum Connection: Its Transformative Feature**

Transformative learning promotes a view of human life best described as a vocation and a call to ministry. This vocation is to actualize the human potential toward fullness of life, to become whole persons as God intends. In Catholic curriculum, such learning is both personal and social. Personal transformation is a calling to work to become more Christ-like in our relations with God, self, others, and society. Social transformation is a calling to work as agents of social change, especially concerning issues of justice and peace, economic and cultural oppression, and in the Christian tradition of discipleship and service.

## **5. Worldview - Call to a Specific History**

Each person is born in a particular historical time and each generation faces the challenge of constructing meaning in relation to its history. Today's present challenge takes place within a perspective that connects local concerns to global ones, a perspective that calls for both short-term and long-term attention. Knowledge of history and tradition, both secular and sacred, helps to shape future life and work in this inter-related world. So too does the ability to analyse global issues, to show respect for diverse cultures, and concern for the human family. It is within such a history that Catholics are called to witness to the "good news" of the Gospel and relate its life-affirming message to the times.<sup>8</sup>

- **Curriculum Connection: Its "Apostolic" Feature**

Learning to read the signs-of-the-times is a critical component of faith formation. It requires the ability to apply and transfer knowledge, to recognize patterns in events and information, and to hold in balance local and global affairs, personal and political issues. It is a necessary feature for those who choose to look at life from a gospel perspective and "build the body of Christ" in the world. In this sense, Catholic curriculum is an ontological affair, it molds the very "being" of learners - both who they become and how they live in an interdependent world. And the challenge it poses is one of discovering the connection between the values of the gospel and those of the present age.

### **3.3 Vision of the Learner for Catholic Curriculum**

It is from these foundations then that a distinctive vision of the learner for Catholic secondary schools develops. This vision acts like a compass; it provides a reading to ensure that the foundations of Catholic curriculum are aligned to the educational purpose of learning. It provides direction as to what knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and actions should be considered in the design and implementation of Catholic curriculum.

To that end, a "vision of the learner" embodies desired expectations and envisions who the learner will become as a result of one's learning experience. As conceived by the Institute for Catholic Education, the vision of the learner most consistent with the education purpose of Catholic education is one of:

- A discerning believer formed in the Catholic Faith community who celebrates the signs and sacred mystery of God's presence through word, sacrament, prayer, forgiveness, reflection and

moral living.

- An effective communicator who speaks, writes and listens honestly and sensitively, responding critically in light of gospel values.
- A reflective, creative and holistic thinker who solves problems and makes responsible decisions with an informed moral conscience for the common good.
- A self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner who develops and demonstrates their God-given potential.
- A collaborative contributor who finds meaning, dignity and vocation in work which respects the rights of all and contributes to the common good.
- A caring family member who attends to family, school, parish, and the wider community.
- A responsible citizen who gives witness to Catholic social teaching by promoting peace, justice and the sacredness of human life.<sup>9</sup>

It is from the distinctive foundational matrix of a Catholic worldview, curriculum features and vision of the learner then that the framework for Catholic curriculum for educating the soul is fashioned.

# 4

## Catholic Curriculum Design

The starting point for the design of any provincial secondary school curriculum framework begins with learning expectations that define what all students are expected to know, to do, and to value when they graduate from secondary school in Ontario.

Once derived, these provincial expectations create a common reference point from whence curricular decisions can be made concerning program planning, instructional strategies, evaluation, and assessment. Given the distinctive nature of the foundations of Catholic curriculum therefore, it should come as no surprise that this common ground is Catholic in character as well and contributes to educating the soul.

Expectations or outcomes for graduates of Catholic secondary schools incorporate the distinctive features of Catholicism's core understanding of the human condition as found in its worldview. Hence, Catholic education views human life as an integration of body, mind, and spirit. Rooted in this worldview, Catholic education fosters the human search for knowledge as a lifelong spiritual and academic quest. The expectations for Catholic graduates, therefore, are described not only in terms of the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the world of work or postsecondary education but in terms of values, attitudes and actions that adhere to the foundations of Catholic curriculum as well.

### 4.1 Provincial Expectations of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate

The provincial expectations of the Ontario Catholic school graduate as identified by the Institute for Catholic Education are as follows:

#### 1. a discerning believer formed in the Catholic Faith community who:

- illustrates a basic understanding of the saving story of our Christian faith
- participates in the sacramental life of the church and demonstrates an understanding of the centrality of the Eucharist to our Catholic story
- actively reflects on God's Word as communicated through the Hebrew and Christian scriptures
- develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic social teaching and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity and the common good
- speaks the language of life... "recognizing that life is an unearned gift and that a person entrusted with life does not own it but that one is called to protect and cherish it" (*Witnesses to Faith*)
- seeks intimacy with God and celebrates communion with God, others and creation through prayer and worship
- understands that one's purpose or call in life comes from God and strives to discern and live out this call throughout life's journey
- respects the faith traditions, world religions and the life-journeys of all people of good will

- integrates faith with life
- recognizes that "sin, human weakness, conflict and forgiveness are part of the human journey" and that the cross, the ultimate sign of forgiveness is at the heart of redemption (*Witnesses to Faith*)

**2. an effective communicator who:**

- listens actively and critically to understand and learn in light of gospel values
- reads, understands and uses written materials effectively
- presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others
- writes and speaks fluently one or both of Canada's official languages
- uses and integrates the Catholic faith tradition, in the critical analysis of the arts, media, technology and information systems to enhance the quality of life

**3. a reflective and creative thinker who:**

- recognizes there is more grace in our world than sin and that hope is essential in facing all challenges
- creates, adapts, evaluates new ideas in light of the common good
- thinks reflectively and creatively to evaluate situations and solve problems
- makes decisions in light of gospel values with an informed moral conscience
- adopts a holistic approach to life by integrating learning from various subject areas and experience
- examines, evaluates and applies knowledge of interdependent systems (physical, political, ethical, socio-economic and ecological) for the development of a just and compassionate society

**4. a self-directed, responsible, life long learner who:**

- demonstrates a confident and positive sense of self and respect for the dignity and welfare of others
- demonstrates flexibility and adaptability
- takes initiative and demonstrates Christian leadership
- responds to, manages and constructively influences change in a discerning manner
- sets appropriate goals and priorities in school, work and personal life
- applies effective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, time and resource management skills
- examines and reflects on one's personal values, abilities and aspirations influencing life's choices and opportunities
- participates in leisure and fitness activities for a balanced and healthy lifestyle

**5. a collaborative contributor who:**

- works effectively as an interdependent team member
- thinks critically about the meaning and purpose of work
- develops one's God-given potential and makes a meaningful contribution to society
- finds meaning, dignity, fulfillment and vocation in work which contributes to the

- common good
- respects the rights, responsibilities and contributions of self and others
- exercises Christian leadership in the achievement of individual and group goals
- achieves excellence, originality, and integrity in one's own work and supports these qualities in the work of others
- applies skills for employability, self-employment and entrepreneurship relative to Christian vocation

**6. a caring family member who:**

- relates to family members in a loving, compassionate and respectful manner
- recognizes human intimacy and sexuality as God given gifts, to be used as the creator intended
- values and honours the important role of the family in society
- values and nurtures opportunities for family prayer
- ministers to the family, school, parish, and wider community through service

**7. a responsible citizen who:**

- acts morally and legally as a person formed in Catholic traditions
- accepts accountability for one's own actions
- seeks and grants forgiveness
- promotes the sacredness of life
- witnesses Catholic social teaching by promoting equality, democracy, and solidarity for a just, peaceful and compassionate society
- respects and affirms the diversity and interdependence of the world's peoples and cultures
- respects and understands the history, cultural heritage and pluralism of today's contemporary society
- exercises the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship
- respects the environment and uses resources wisely
- contributes to the common good

Graduates of Catholic secondary schools are expected to have achieved clearly stated standards that demonstrate learning success in these areas. All disciplines share responsibility for helping students to apply, extend and refine these expectations, but certain discipline specific areas may have primary responsibility for introducing and developing them.

**4.2 Discipline Specific Learning**

Catholic education recognizes and respects the autonomy of the different academic disciplines and the learning methodologies proper to them. These disciplines are not to be seen as subservient to the educational purpose of Catholic secondary schools but inspired by it.

Each discipline area has a core of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It is the responsibility of these disciplines to specify their subject specific expectations in relation to the foundations of Catholic curriculum. In other words, when appropriate, evidence of the Catholic character of

learning should be visible in the core requirements for each discipline area within Catholic secondary schools.

### **4.3 Cross-Curricular Learning**

Learning also occurs across disciplines. Although the methodology may differ, the learning of such knowledge and skills as literacy, numeracy, technological competence, research skills, and critical thinking can be found in multiple disciplines.

These cross-curricular requirements create the opportunity for integrated learning where students are encouraged to practise using their skills and knowledge in one field to learn in another and to relate their learning to real-life situations. What this means is that students develop the ability to make connections between what they already know with that of new ideas and concepts from several related discipline areas and apply this newly created knowledge to the tasks of problem solving and constructing meaning.

Likewise, cross-curricular learning allows Catholic secondary schools to integrate the distinctive features of Catholic curriculum into all discipline areas. It allows for a comprehensive approach to the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that include the features of a Catholic worldview and its application to educating the soul.

### **4.4 Curriculum Policy Documents: Function and Role**

The task of aligning graduation expectations for Catholic secondary schools with those of discipline and cross-curricular requirements will be greatly assisted by the curriculum policy documents presently being written by the Ministry. These policy documents, 13 in English language schools, replace previous subject guidelines and serve as the basis for secondary school curriculum in the province.

In order to better meet the needs of students who will be graduating and living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the guidelines are designed to serve three functions.

The first is explanatory in nature. Connections are made between the discipline area and its function in the world of the twenty-first century, especially in relation to advances in technology and developments in the workplace. Connections are also made with related elementary curriculum, other discipline areas, career and anti-discrimination education.

The second is descriptive in nature. The policy document describes what is meant by a credit (i.e. 110 hours of classroom instruction), how compulsory credits differ from elective credits, program considerations concerning the role of technology, evaluation and assessment strategies, teaching and learning strategies, the use of resources, and models of delivery.

The third is organizational in nature. Types of courses, for example, are organized according to postsecondary destination whether to university, college, or the workplace. Learning expectations are also organized into:

- Strands (the major organizers for a course)
- Overall expectations (the generic knowledge and skills that students are expected to



- demonstrate on completion of the course)
- Specific expectations (the knowledge and skills related to the overall expectations in a strand)

When completed, these policy documents will play a critical role in providing Catholic secondary schools with the necessary tools for the design and implementation of Catholic curriculum. Their presence will ensure that a number of the provincial expectations for graduates of Catholic secondary schools will be met. Given the absence of any reference to the Catholic character of this project, however, and given the fact that these expectations do not originate from expectations designed for Catholic secondary school graduates, they fall far short of achieving the educational purpose intrinsic to the mandate of Catholic secondary schools. Simply put, Ministry curriculum policy documents say little about educating the soul.

# 5

## Course Profiles for Catholic Secondary Schools

For this reason then the most critical step in the development of Catholic curriculum for Catholic secondary schools has to do with Course profiles.

As presently defined, Course profiles serve a role similar to that of Course Outlines under OSIS. They act as a “map” for teachers concerning discipline-specific learning. They provide a rationale for the course, an organizational structure of its content (i.e. units and topics), major teaching and learning, evaluation and assessment strategies. Also included are instructional resources and materials.

It can be suggested, therefore, that whereas the Ministry Curriculum policy documents describe the “what” of learning (i.e. discipline-specific expectations and course organization) and teachers are expected to provide the “how” of learning (i.e. the mechanics of course delivery), Course profiles articulate the “why” of learning. They answer the question of why this course is being offered and why this course serves the function of meeting both discipline-specific expectations as well as those provincial expectations towards which discipline-specific learning contributes. When it comes to the writing of Course profiles for Catholic secondary schools, therefore, it is imperative that the Catholic character of curriculum permeate each stage of the writing process.

### 5.1 Course Profile Building Blocks

This can be achieved when, along with the Ministry Curriculum Policy Document, Course profiles are designed using the following building blocks: i) reference documents on the nature of Catholic curriculum, ii) Catholic Curriculum Unit Planner Template, and iii) Unit Instructional resources and materials that complement Catholic curriculum.

i) Reference documents refers to those professional materials that address the distinctive nature of Catholic curriculum. Suggestions include:

- *Curriculum Matters* (Institute for Catholic Education)
- *Writing Curriculum for Catholic Schools* (Institute for Catholic Education)
- Board Documents (i.e. *Learning With Faith: Our Catholic School Identity* - Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board)
- *Catholicity Across The Curriculum* (Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association)
- *Secondary School Reform Process Report* (Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association)
- *This Moment of Promise* (Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops)

What makes these documents so valuable to writers is their effort to guide the process of curriculum writing from the basis of the foundations of a Catholic worldview. In *Writing Curriculum for Catholic Schools*, for instance, Section 1 of the document defines how theological and philosophical principles can find a demonstrable expression in curriculum materials:

The uniqueness of Catholic curriculum is demonstrable in learning opportunities and materials which intentionally:

- Support, invite and enhance the faith life of students as a relationship with God the Father, through the Son, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit;
- Involve students in community, especially the community of the People of God, Church;
- Challenge students to examine and explore their lives in relation to specific gospel values as reflected in Church teachings;
- Encourage and enable the development and use of individual gifts and abilities for the service of the whole community, the Church and society;
- Offer a view of life, which despite suffering and evil, remains hopeful because it is rooted in God's promise and love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and
- Call students to celebrate the signs and mystery of God's presence among us through liturgy and sacrament, personal prayer, reflection and moral living.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, a document such as *Catholicity Across the Curriculum* suggests a number of ways in which Gospel values can be infused into Course profiles across disciplines in secondary schools.

#### ii) Catholic Curriculum Unit Planner Template

This is a tool designed by the Catholic Curriculum Cooperative - Central Ontario Region for the purpose of developing units. It provides teachers with an electronic template from which to complete the following tasks in unit planning:

- an overview of the key concepts taught in the unit
- the critical knowledge, skills and values to be developed and assessed throughout the unit
- key learning experiences suggested for the unit, formative and summative assessment strategies
- various suggestions for program modification
- major resources and reference materials necessary to teach the unit

The use of such a tool allows curriculum writers to use results-based language and performance-based standards in their unit and assessment plans. Moreover, it allows curriculum writers to articulate the Catholic character of their unit plans by making explicit reference to learning outcomes and activities that incorporate a Catholic worldview.

#### iii) Unit Instructional Materials and Resources

The building of Course profiles for Catholic secondary schools will also require instructional materials and resources conducive to achieving learning outcomes consistent with both discipline-specific and Catholic graduation expectations. Such resources will include various forms of media (i.e. print, recorded, video, electronic text), community outreach experiences, career opportunities and learning partnerships. It is critical that resources for Course profiles be selected that support the main tenets of a Catholic worldview.

## 5.2 The Writing Process

With these building blocks in place, the task of writing Course profiles for a Catholic secondary school becomes one of selecting writers to “flesh out” the Catholic character of curriculum. Two guidelines need to be considered at this stage of the process.

The first is that writing teams should include members with a degree of knowledge of both the subject discipline (e.g. science) and the connection between that discipline and the Catholic worldview (e.g. the moral and ethical issues of natural resources). Although formal training in theology is not a pre-requisite, a working knowledge of the reference documents mentioned earlier is highly recommended.

The second is that a validation checklist should be provided for Course profile writing teams to determine whether or not the Catholic character of the course is evident explicitly or implicitly. This list could include questions such as:

- Are major Church documents available and utilized to ensure authenticity in course content when appropriate?
- Are current social issues (i.e. racism, abortion, violence against women) recognized and taught in the course from a Catholic moral and ethical perspective?
- Will this course assist students to develop loving relationships with self, God, others and creation?
- Will views be expressed in this course about communities, the interrelation of peoples, nations and cultures of the world, the Church, other churches, faiths or religions?
- Will this course promote the values and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth in the lives of the students?
- How will this course present a God that makes claims on us?
- Are the skills being taught in this course consistent with behaviour suitable to a Catholic worldview?
- Is there evidence of a wisdom epistemology operative in this course?
- Does this course invite students to develop critical skills concerning a culture of secularism?
- Will this course address the interior life of students and nurture their spiritual lives?<sup>11</sup>

## 5.3 School Implementation Action Plan

At present, the question of who will write Course profiles for Ontario Catholic secondary schools and co-ordinate this process is yet to be answered. Preliminary considerations include:

- Ministry of Education and Training writing teams
- Consortia writing teams
- Subject Council Association writing teams
- Board writing teams
- School writing teams

When all is said and done, however, the task of implementing these Course profiles will continue to reside with school curriculum leaders, namely, department heads and classroom teachers. It will be their task, along with the school’s administration team, to develop a local action plan for

implementation of the new curriculum.

As all teachers know, however, implementation of Course profiles means a lot more than just transmission of knowledge, values, and skills. Learning is about connections and no where is this connection more critical than in the role of the teacher as mediator of life's meaning and purpose. The degree to which educating the soul is a constitutive element in classroom learning determines whether the Catholic character of Course profiles becomes a reality for students. It determines the degree to which Catholic education nurtures students' intellectual and moral growth within the religious heritage of the Catholic tradition or whether the secularism so dominant in their culture remains their first curriculum.

In many ways, educating the soul is a spiritual art. Course profiles for Catholic secondary schools serve as "tools of mediation" which invite teachers to read the signs-of-the-times and to scrutinize what is going on in contemporary life from a Gospel perspective. In doing so, teachers can offer an alternative to the values of secularism and its messages that only the fittest survive, that happiness consists of material acquisitions and that technology is inherently good.

In their place, classroom teachers can offer a spiritual vision of life, one that invites students to what Pope John Paul II calls "the common effort to build the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice, and liberty"<sup>12</sup>. It is an invitation to participate in a conversation about life's meaning and purpose, an education of transcendence "beyond facts into truth, beyond self-interest into compassion, beyond despair into the love required to renew the community of creation"<sup>13</sup>. And it is this capacity to live as spiritual beings that is the soul's preeminent expression and the heart of educating the soul.



## Endnotes

1. George Grant, "The Teaching Profession in an Expanding Economy", (unpublished address, 1955).
2. Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, *This Moment of Promise*, p.16.
3. Ibid. p.16.
4. See Father John van den Hengel's Ontario Catholic Education: Its Philosophical Context in *Curriculum Matters*, Institute for Catholic Education, p.37, 1996.
5. Congregation For Catholic Education, *The Catholic School On The Threshold Of The Third Millennium*, p.37.
6. Draft Document of Ontario Secondary Schools, 1998.
7. See Thomas Groome's *Educating For Life: A Spiritual Vision For Every Teacher and Parent*, published by Thomas More Press, 1998.
8. See Merylann "Mimi" J. Schuttloffel's article The Catholic Elementary School Curriculum: Elements of Coherence. *Catholic Education - A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, Vol. 1, #3, March, 1998, pp.295-305.
9. A separate brochure containing these Provincial Graduation Expectations will be published by ICE in the fall of 1998.
10. See *Writing Curriculum for Catholic Schools: A Framework*, published by Institute for Catholic Education, 1996 for a list of these questions.
11. Ibid. p.3-10.
12. Pope John Paul II, Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>, 1995.
13. Palmer, Parker, *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, (U.S.A.: Harper Collins, 1993) p.13.

## **Acknowledgments**

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