

THE IDENTITY OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL FOR A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE

Congregation for Catholic Education
(for Educational Institutions)

Vatican City 2022





At the World Congress Educating today and tomorrow. A renewing passion, organized in 2015 in Castel Gandolfo by the Congregation for Catholic Education and attended by the representatives of Catholic schools of every order and level, **one of the most recurrent and topical issues in the general debate was represented by the need for a clearer awareness and consistency of the Catholic identity of the Church's educational institutions all over the world.**





At the same time, the Congregation for Catholic Education has been confronted with cases of conflicts and appeals **resulting from different interpretations of the traditional concept of Catholic identity by educational institutions in the face of the rapid changes that have taken place in recent years**, during which the process of globalization has emerged in parallel with the growth of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.





Pope Francis said,
“We cannot create
a culture of
dialogue if we do
not have identity”.



Pope Francis observed in re-launching the Global Compact on Education, *“To educate is to take a risk and to hold out to the present a hope that can shatter the determinism and fatalism that the selfishness of the strong, the conformism of the weak and the ideology of the utopians would convince us [that it] is the only way forward”.* Only a strong and united action by the Church in the field of education in an increasingly fragmented and conflict-ridden world can contribute both to the evangelizing mission entrusted to her by Jesus and to the construction of a world in which human persons feel they are brothers and sisters, because *“Only with this awareness of being children, that we are not orphans, can we live in peace among ourselves”.*

Chapter 1: Catholic Schools in the Mission of the Church

➤ The Church, mother and teacher



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- ✓ The Church is the mother who generates the believers, because she is the bride of Christ. Almost all Council documents draw on the Church's motherhood to unveil her mystery and her pastoral action, and to extend her love to an ecumenical embrace of the "children separated from her" and to believers of other religions, reaching out to all people of goodwill.
- ✓ The icon of the Mother Church is not only an expression of tenderness and charity, but also holds the power to be a guide and a teacher. The Pope Himself has associated the denomination of mother to that of teacher, because this Church, *"the pillar and ground of the truth (cf. 1 Tm 3,15) was entrusted by her holy Founder [with] the twofold task of giving life to her children and of teaching them and guiding them – both as individuals and as nations – with maternal care. Great is their dignity, a dignity which she has always guarded most zealously and held in the highest esteem"*.

Chapter 1: Catholic Schools in the Mission of the Church



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- ✓ As a consequence, the Council affirmed that *“To fulfill the mandate she has received from her divine founder of proclaiming the mystery of salvation to all men and of restoring all things in Christ, Holy Mother the Church must be concerned with the whole of man’s life, even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling. Therefore, she has a role in the progress and development of education. Hence this sacred synod declares certain fundamental principles of Christian education especially in schools”*.



- ✓ This clarifies that the educational action pursued by the Church through schools **cannot be reduced to mere philanthropic work aimed at responding to a social need, but represents an essential part of her identity and mission.**

The “fundamental principles” of Christian education in schools

In its declaration *Gravissimum educationis*, the Council offered a set of “fundamental principles” regarding Christian education, especially in schools.



In the first place, **education, as the formation of the human person, is a universal right:** *“All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share”.*

The “fundamental principles” of Christian education in schools



- ✓ **Since education is a right for everyone, the Council called for the responsibility of all.** The responsibility of parents and their priority right in educational choices rank first. School choice must be made freely and according to conscience; hence the duty of civil authorities to make different options available in compliance with the law. **The State is responsible for supporting families in their right to choose a school and an educational project.**
- ✓ **For her part, the Church has the duty to educate** *“especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men, of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unfailing solicitude, of assisting men to be able to come to the fullness of this life...”*

The “fundamental principles” of Christian education in schools

- ✓ **Another fundamental element is the initial and permanent formation of teachers.** *“The Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world. Intimately linked in charity to one another and to their students and endowed with an apostolic spirit, may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher”.*



The “fundamental principles” of Christian education in schools



The success of the educational path depends primarily on **the principle of mutual cooperation, first and foremost between parents and teachers, making it a point of reference for the personal action of their pupils, in the fervent hope that** *“even after graduation [teachers] continue to assist them with advice, friendship and by establishing special associations imbued with the true spirit of the Church”.*



The “fundamental principles” of Christian education in schools



- ✓ As far as Catholic schools are concerned, the conciliar declaration represents a turning point, since, in line with the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*, **it considers the school not so much as an institution but as a community.** The characteristic element of the Catholic school, in addition to pursuing *“cultural goals and the human formation of youth”*, consists in creating *“for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity”*.
- ✓ To this end, the Catholic school aims *“to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities”*, as well as *“to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith”*. **In this way, the Catholic school prepares pupils to exercise their freedom responsibly, forming an attitude of openness and solidarity.**

The dynamic profile of the Catholic school identity



The Catholic school lives in the flow of human history. It is therefore continually called upon to follow its unfolding in order to offer an educational service appropriate to the present times. **The witness of Catholic educational institutions shows on their part a great responsiveness to the diversity of socio-cultural situations and readiness to adopt new teaching methods, while remaining faithful to their own identity.** By identity we mean its reference to the Christian concept of life.



The dynamic profile of the Catholic school identity



A distinctive feature of its ecclesial nature is that it is a school for all, especially the weakest. This is testified to by the *“establishment of the majority of Catholic educational institutions to the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged. It is no novelty to affirm that Catholic schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling...”*



The witness of lay and consecrated educator



Another important aspect, increasingly relevant to achieving the integral formation of students, is the witness of lay and consecrated educators. The work of the lay Catholic educator in schools, and particularly in Catholic schools, ***“has an undeniably professional aspect; but it cannot be reduced to professionalism alone. Professionalism is marked by, and raised to, a super-natural Christian vocation. The life of the Catholic teacher must be marked by the exercise of a personal vocation in the Church, and not simply by the exercise of a profession”.***

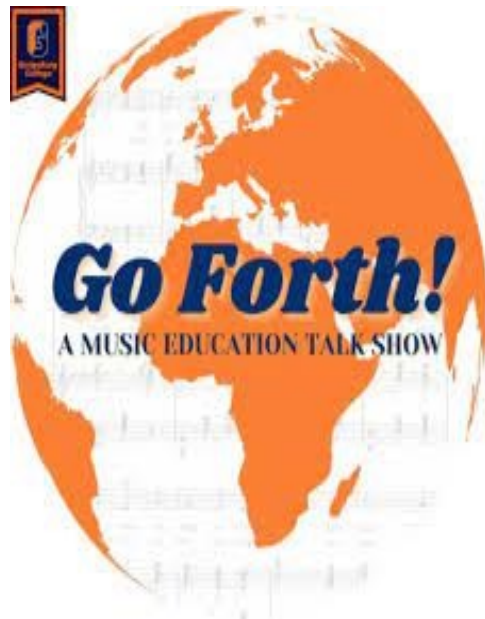


Educating to dialogue



- ✓ Today's societies are characterized by a multicultural and multi-religious composition. In this context, ***“Education contains a central challenge for the future: to allow various cultural expressions to co-exist and to promote dialogue so as to foster a peaceful society”***.
- ✓ For the Catholic school, a great responsibility is to bear witness. *“The Christian presence must be shown and made clear, that is, it must be visible, tangible and conscious. Today, due to the advanced process of secularization, Catholic schools find themselves in a missionary situation, even in countries with an ancient Christian tradition”*.
- ✓ ***In addition to bearing witness, another educational component of school is knowledge.*** School has the important task of bringing people into contact with a rich cultural and scientific heritage, preparing them for professional life and fostering mutual understanding.
- ✓ ***Accompanying pupils in getting to know themselves, their aptitudes and inner resources so that they can make conscious life choices is of no secondary importance.***

An education that goes forth



In the face of contemporary challenges, echoing the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis recognizes the central value of education. It is part of the wide-ranging pastoral project for a “Church that goes forth”, *“standing by people at every step of the way”*, making her presence felt in an education *“which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values”*.

Education as “movement”

- Education consists in a polyphony of movements. First of all, it starts with a **team movement**. Everyone collaborates according to their personal talents and responsibilities, contributing to the formation of the younger generations and the construction of the common good.
- At the same time, education unleashes an **ecological movement**, since it contributes to the recovery of different levels of balance: inner balance with oneself, solidarity with others, natural balance with all living beings, spiritual balance with God.
- It also gives rise to an important **inclusive movement**. Inclusion, which “is an integral part of the Christian salvific message”, is not only a property, but also a method of education that brings the excluded and vulnerable closer.
- Through it, education nurtures a **peacemaking movement** that generates harmony and peace.



Educating to the culture of care



- ❑ The family relationship extends to educational institutions, which are called upon *“to pass on a system of values based on the recognition of the dignity of each person, each linguistic, ethnic and religious community and each people, as well as the fundamental rights arising from that recognition. Education is one of the pillars of a more just and fraternal society”*.
- ❑ The culture of care becomes the compass at local and international level to form people dedicated to patient listening, constructive dialogue and mutual understanding.
- ❑ **In this way, a *“fabric of relationships for the sake of a humanity capable of speaking the language of fraternity”* is created.**

CHAPTER II: THE ACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROMOTING AND VERIFYING CATHOLIC IDENTITY

- ***“The educational mission is carried out in a spirit of cooperation between various parties –students, parents, teachers, non-teaching personnel and the school management – who form the educational community”.*** These and other responsible parties, who through their work promote and verify educational projects inspired by the Church’s teaching on education, act respectively at various levels.
- The educating school community
 - Members of the school community
 - ✓ Pupils and parents
 - ✓ Teachers and administrative personnel
 - ✓ School leader
 - ✓ Educational charisms in the Church - Institutional expression of the charism



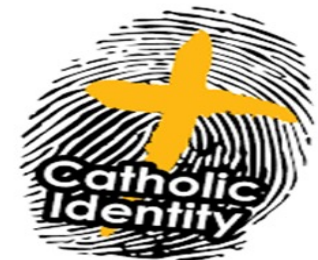
CHAPTER III: SOME CRITICAL ASPECTS

✓ The Congregation for Catholic Education notes that in the appeals lodged, very often there is a conflicting perception of the Catholic identity of educational institutions.

This often stems from the interpretation, which is not always correct, of the term “Catholic” and from the lack of clarity regarding competences and legislation.

✓ Divergent interpretations of the term “Catholic”. The basic problem lies in the concrete application of the term “Catholic”, a complex word that is not easily expressed by means of exclusively legal, formal and doctrinal criteria. **The causes of tensions are mainly the result on the one hand of a reductive or purely formal interpretation, and on the other of a vague or narrow understanding of Catholic identity.**

THE MEANING OF
CATHOLIC ✓



CHAPTER III: SOME CRITICAL ASPECTS



➤ Clarity of competences and legislation

- ❖ Sometimes critical situations around Catholic identity arise out of a lack of clarity about competences and legislation. In these cases, **it is necessary first of all to maintain a fair balance of competences, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.** This principle is based on the responsibility of each individual before God and distinguishes between the diversity and complementarity of competences.
- ❖ **Statutes** play an important role in ensuring the necessary clarity.
- ❖ **The legal and competence issue** affecting Catholic educational institutions also arise as a result of the double regulatory framework: **canonical and state-civil.**
- ❖ In addition, for the sake of clarity, **Catholic schools must have either a mission statement or a code of conduct.** These are instruments for institutional and professional quality assurance. They must therefore be legally reinforced by means of employment contracts or other contractual declarations by those involved having clear legal value.

CHAPTER III: SOME CRITICAL ASPECTS



➤ Some sensitive issues and areas

- ❖ First of all, the choice of teaching, non-teaching and direction personnel. **Taking into account the different contexts and possibilities, it is necessary to formulate clear criteria for discernment regarding the professional qualities, adherence to the Church's doctrine, and consistency in the Christian life of the candidates.**
- ❖ Conflicts also occur in the disciplinary and/or doctrinal field. These situations can bring discredit to the Catholic institution and scandal in the community.
- ❖ There are also cases in which State laws impose choices that conflict with **religious freedom and the very Catholic identity of a School.**
- ❖ Problems can arise within the local Church as a result of differences of opinions among the members of the community (Bishop, parish priest, consecrated persons, parents, school leaders, associations, etc.) concerning the viability of the school, its financial sustainability and its position in the face of new educational challenges.

Encounter and convergence to consolidate Catholic identity

- ❑ Catholic identity should be a place of encounter, a tool promoting the convergence of ideas and actions. In this way, different perspectives become a resource and a foundational principle for the development of methodologies suitable to solve possible critical issues and find shared solutions.

- Being builders of unity
- Being generators of development processes
- Being developers of real and lasting solutions

Finally, according to the principle that the whole is greater than the part, those working to resolve natural tensions within the Church must consider the consequences that even a single conflict can have for other areas and levels of the Church. **The exercise of prudence is therefore paramount and reliable.** Any possible solution decided and applied must be considered in a long-term perspective so as not to impair the fruitful and trusting possibility of collaboration between people and institutions. **They are called to walk together to enable the Church to provide the world with her educational service.**





- ✓ In publishing this Instruction on the Catholic identity of educational institutions, in a spirit of service the Congregation for Catholic Education intends to offer a contribution for reflection and some guidelines to help share the missionary transformation of the Church, because ***“it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions , without hesitation, reluctance or fear”.***



Conclusion

- ✓ Pope Francis, in addressing the theme of the encounter among faith, reason and the sciences, emphasizes that *“Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture, even in those countries and cities where hostile situations challenge us to greater creativity in our search for suitable methods”*.



Conclusion

- ✓ The Congregation for Catholic Education expresses its deep gratitude for the solicitude and efforts of those involved in educational institutions and hopes that the Catholic identity profile of the educational plan will contribute to the creation of a global compact on education to *“rekindle our dedication for and with young people, renewing our passion for a more open and inclusive education, including patient listening, constructive dialogue and better mutual understanding”*.



Questions for Spiritual Conversation

1. What according to you are some of the Catholic identity issues affecting the Schools today especially the Jesuit Schools in your region?
2. In light of these exhortations, this Instruction, starting from the essential criteria which mark the Catholic identity of schools, how can we renew the identity of the Catholic Schools all over the world in order to respond to the new regional & global challenges positively and effectively?

