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Non-Catholic Students Impact upon Catholic Students in Four Catholic High Schools

J. Kent Donlevy, University of Calgary

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the inclusion of non-Catholic students on Catholic students in four urban Western Canadian Catholic high schools. The study employs grounded theory as the methodology and focus groups as the method. The qualitative findings indicate that although inclusion was beneficial to Catholic students' sense of faith, appreciation of diversity and the school's faith community, the issue of orthopraxis overwhelming orthodoxy led to questions concerning religious relativism, perhaps in part due to inclusion, which has implications for the evangelization of Catholic students in Catholic schools.

Introduction

[1] The presence of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools, inclusion,[1] is a phenomenon that has caused concern in Canada (Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association; Saskatoon Board of Education; Mulligan), the United States (Hawker; Sataline), Australia (Catholic News), and the United Kingdom (Francis; Francis and Gibson). The reasons for this concern are many and relate to the various dimensions of inclusion. However, although several papers have been written on the phenomenon (Donlevy in press, 2002; Francis and Gibson; Francis; Hawker), there has not been any academic literature produced specifically relating to the effects of inclusion upon Catholic students. That area of inquiry emerged from a study by this researcher into the phenomenon of inclusion (Donlevy 2003). In that study, seventy-five Catholic students from four urban Western Canadian Catholic high schools participated in focus groups dealing with inclusion and revealed how they had experienced its impact. Three major themes emerged from that data: 1. the students' personal sense of their own faith; 2. an appreciation for diversity in various forms; 3. the experience of inclusion on the school as a faith community.

[2] Part I of this paper will briefly describe the study's methodology and method. Part II will detail the findings under each of the three major themes. Part III will briefly review the relevant church documents and the concerns with inclusion. Part IV will offer the author's thoughts on the significance of those findings to Catholic education.

[1] In the United States, the word inclusion is used to refer to matters dealing with special education: that is, the amelioration of the challenges facing students with disabilities. Therefore it may seem odd, if not inappropriate, to use the word inclusion with respect to non-Catholic students presence in Catholic schools. However, in Canada the terms most employed to refer to matters of special education are "resource room," "main stream," or simply "special education." The term inclusion is therefore not used in the same sense in Canadian pedagogy as in the United States. The author therefore asks for the American reader's indulgence for the Canadian usage of the term inclusion to refer to the inclusion of non-Catholic students within the Canadian Catholic schools that were the sources of data for this paper.

The Study

Inclusion in Saskatchewan's Catholic Schools

[3] Prior to 1964, Saskatchewan's Catholic high schools were not funded by the provincial government. Catholic families paid their municipal education taxes to the public school system and, if they wished their child or children to attend a Catholic high school, they paid tuition to the Catholic high school in addition. In 1964, after negotiations between the Government of Saskatchewan and representatives of the Catholic community, public funding, on parity with the public school system, was granted to Saskatchewan's Catholic high schools. There are no statistics to indicate that the number of non-Catholic students has increased in Catholic schools since 1964. However, the fact, as stated later in this paper, that Saskatchewan's public schools have now threatened litigation in order to seek compensation for the attendance of non-Catholic students at both the elementary and high school levels in Catholic schools, indicates that a threshold of toleration for inclusion, at least in a financial sense, has been reached by Saskatchewan's public school systems.

[4] The study was conducted in four urban Catholic high schools in the Province of Saskatchewan. The methodology employed was grounded theory (see Glaser) and the method was focus group research (see Vaughn). The pool of participants was composed of seventy-five Catholic students. Each school had three focus groups, one for each of grades ten, eleven, and twelve: grade ten, 24 (10 males, 14 females); grade eleven, 24 (12 male, 12 female), grade twelve, 27 (male 13, female 14). All participants, save one, had attended their high school from grade nine, and all participants had attended their schools' Christian ethics[2] courses during their years of attendance at their school. Each focus group session lasted one and one half to two hours, took place within the students' schools during regular class time, and was videotaped in order to provide audio and visual data for subsequent analysis by the researcher.

[5] A preliminary issue that quickly surfaced with students was, "how do we identify the non-Catholic student?" The participants expressed views such as, "I know because they are my friends [and] I know mostly everything about them." Where students were close friends, their religion, or lack thereof, arose as a result of conversation on other matters. It was very rare for any student to express the view that religion was a normal topic of conversation. As one student said, "Religion isn't something you talk about normally in the hallways." Moreover, most students interviewed did not equate the meaning of the word "religion" with the word "faith." The former was seen as conceptual, intellectual, rule bound, hierarchical, authoritative, judgmental, and divisive, whereas the latter was experiential and inclusive, in nature. "We try not to focus [upon] our religion . . . With our friendship . . . we're not going to judge other people for what they look like or what they believe in." The participants expressed the opinion, "you shouldn't base who you hang out with on what religion they are."

[6] In sum, it is fair to say that Catholic students whose close friends were non-Catholic self-disclose in the normal give and take of the relationship, but other than those situations or where self disclosure is made in classes, Catholic students do not consider who of their peers may be a non-Catholic. Once the identification question was resolved the student participants moved on to the issue of how they were affected by the presence of non-Catholic students in their schools.

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[2] The Saskatoon (Saskatchewan) Catholic School District titles the high school course that deals explicitly with the Catholic faith as "Christian Ethics."

The Findings

Two Preliminary Issues

[7] Before proceeding with the themes that emerged from the data of the study, there were two preliminary issues that arose from the focus groups are important precursors to the themes. The first issue was that the school was the conduit of the students' faith and religion and the second was the participants' operative definition of faith and religion. In response to the question, "Do you encounter your faith in the schools?" One student replied,

> Yes, . . . We have a lot of events and things taking place . . . Because if you're at home you know, you are busy with your lives [and] sometimes you forget [to think about Church] and you don't have time set aside to pray. When you come to school [prayer] just comes naturally. You know, and it makes it easier to remember and to do rather than if you are at home and everyone's [coming and going] at different times . . . How many people have their whole family together at dinner time? When you get home, you just want to relax, but when you come to school [prayer] comes naturally and [it's] easier.

Several other students chimed in, "That's one of the main things we like." "Teachers give you time to pray and just think." "Yeah, they set aside time. That's very important." This was the general feeling expressed by all of the students in the various focus groups and it speaks to the busyness of the students' teenage lives. It was during these discussions that the bifurcation of faith and religion arose.

[8] Grade 10 students saw religion as distinct from faith. Their view was that religion is conceptual, dogmatic, rule bound, and a course to be studied.

> We just learn what's on a piece of paper . . . I have in my Christian Ethics class a sheet that tells me what we are going to do all semester . . . It tells me how we are going to know this better and understand and yet, we're not really understanding; its just saying, memorize this and there is a test on Monday.

[9] Grade 11 students seem to appreciate that although religion, if taught with passion by a teacher, may appear fact-based, it also reflected the firm belief of the teacher. This is possibly due in part to the fact that by Grade 11 students have experienced more than one Christian Ethics teacher. This position is appreciated by some students, who said, "He teaches with passion . . . he has real faith. Truth . . . He teaches it quite strongly . . . if you haven't heard it [it can be difficult] . . But for me it was good to hear." However, in general, at both the grade 10 and grade 11 levels, the term "religion" is perceived as a divisive or an exclusionary word, whereas the term "faith" is seen as unifying and inclusive.

[10] Grade 12 students, in most cases, also perceive a distinction between religion and faith. In comparing two Christian Ethics teachers in her school, one student said,

> She's just so enthusiastic! You will be walking down the hall and she'll come down singing and just so happy, so full of life its just amazing! . . . It seems like she's never mad . . . Now [the other Christian Ethics teacher] is a good teacher, but not as enthusiastic, and I find [he]. . . is focusing on things that aren't as important as other things [in class]; it's a major change . . . [the first teacher] is more along the line of helping and sharing faith and [the other Christian Ethics teacher] is more along the line of sticking to the curriculum and getting through it . . . She approaches faith

> more from a really intellectual level, and I think that a lot of kids in high school aren't ready for that yet, and I think [the first teacher] approaches it kind of like where we're at.

[11] A recurring theme for Grade 11 students was that faith was perceived as the spirit behind religious rules; this spirit was more important than the rules themselves. Faith was experienced as a feeling of enthusiasm, safety, security, and acceptance of others, as a unifying rather than a divisive term, but also, by some students, as not the knowledge of *The Truth,* but rather as a search by the individual for her or his own *personal truth*. In the latter sense, Catholic education was perceived as something far beyond merely providing the precepts of Catholicism.

[12] At its core, the faith that students speak of is very closely intertwined with their idea of community and mutual respect. It was based upon relationships with others and a cluster of actions: sharing materially and emotionally, caring about how the other person is feeling, supporting and receiving support when needed, acceptance of others regardless of race, color, or creed, working together for a purpose or merely hanging-out, or casually associating together. This cluster of experiences generated a sense of belonging and safety, both emotionally and physically. As such, faith is and can only be present or expressed in community. As one student recalled, "It's what you practice."

[13] Paradoxically, students also understood the verbal expression of faith, the system of beliefs that underlie the above actions, as a very personal matter not normally discussed with other students. As one grade 12 student said, "That's something I find people keep personal." The same sentiment was true for the students in all of the groups in the study. However, whereas students generally stated the private nature of their faith and the stringent nature of their religion, their beliefs which emanated from and were embedded in their religion's ethical values (honesty, fairness, inclusion, caring, acceptance, and love) were at the heart of their idea of community. One student put it,

> Sometimes I've had friends from other faiths ask me about my faith and I'll try to explain [so they can] determine the differences. My faith comes into play a lot in my conversations; indirectly those things will be expressed. They play an important part in what I say, what I do, and how I act and treat other people.

Expressions of faith as a communal experiential phenomenon were evident to all students particularly experienced in moments of crisis in their school.

The Students' Personal Sense of Faith

[14] Emerging from the data of the study were four areas where inclusion impacted upon the Catholic students' sense of faith – intellectually, emotionally, philosophically, and in action required. Grade 10 students appreciated that having the opinions of non-Catholic students in classes provided a challenge to Catholic beliefs, "If you don't have someone to try your faith then your faith isn't strong enough . . . It straightens out your mind because other people have their own opinions." Simply stated, non-Catholic students ask questions about issues which Catholic students would not ask in class because they accept the assumptions underlying those issues. One grade 12 student said,

> It's good to have someone to challenge our faith, and to have someone to help make us stronger. If everyone was just Catholic, it would just be the same thing . . . Making us think about our faith is a good thing . . . It's shocking if you've been raised since you were a kid and its like, as if [you] were three and somebody said there is no Santa, and you're like, "What?" It's the same as how you'd feel at that point . . . It's

> shocking in a few ways. For one, you may be questioning yourself, because you're thinking like, "Oh! Maybe not everyone believes what I believe!" And there's definitely a conflict. And you wonder if people aren't on the right track maybe, and it's disturbing.

Another student related,

> People like the Church because the Church kind of does the work for them, it tells them what they can and can't do . . . I think the problem is . . . so many people are dependent on people that tell them [what to believe] . . . They like that security as opposed to when you go against the grain . . . you get a little flack here and there, but ultimately . . . it pays dividends . . . you're a better person, people respect you because you have stuck to your guns.

[15] Students expressed the view that inclusion alleviated the feeling that the Catholic faith could be accused of being a cult, that Catholic students were some sort of "Royal Family," or that Catholicism was only for the "cool." Students shared that inclusion helped to alleviate a future fear of the Other, as the encounter was taking place at school rather than after graduation. Lastly, inclusion evoked among many students, particularly in grades 11 and 12, empathy for the non-Catholic student's feeling of difference. Catholic students asked themselves, "How would I feel being in a minority? How would I want to be treated?" When a non-Catholic student was acting out with regard to a religious issue, several students empathized with her or his confusion and lack of direction. One student stated, "It's kind of like . . . with new people. You want to make them feel comfortable around the school and you don't want them to feel left out so you just . . . [talk with them]; it's not like feeling sorry for them." Another stated,

> I had one atheist friend who left the school because her family moved. She was in Christian Ethics. She was bitter about [being in that class] and she was not respectful towards the Catholic faith . . . she sat in the back of the class and made sarcastic comments . . . It was aimless rebellion . . . She was creating that feeling . . . there was no exclusion [of her] coming from us or any hard feelings towards her regarding faith . . . I felt really bad for her sometimes because she was obviously really confused and it seemed like she wanted answers, but she was going about it in the totally wrong way to get them, so then she just concluded that it all sucked.

Another student stated, "[I have a friend] in my class. He's angry a lot and he is an atheist. He talks like God is a joke. I feel bad for him cause when he dies all the stuff he says will come back to kick him in the head." Finally, one student said,

> Everybody has to practice their own beliefs, that's freedom of speech and [they] . . . should be allowed to come to school and express [their] . . . opinion. I kind of feel sorry for people who feel they are a minority . . . and they have to argue with everybody and be right about everything because it's them against everyone.

[16] The philosophical impact on the students' sense of faith may seem like a strange theme to have emerged from the student sessions, but the philosophical implication of the following sincere, emotional, and spontaneous comment from a student displays how he felt about inclusion and its meaning to his faith, which has major ramifications for the philosophy underlying the Catholic school.

> I just want to say that Jesus didn't come for the Christians. There weren't any. He came for the Gentiles . . . he came for the poor people of the time, the people who

> did not believe in God . . . He spent his life for those people. He lived for those people and not to convert them to Christianity. He wanted to convert them to love . . . I think that's this school . . . And other people who sort of embody the spirit of Jesus like Mahatma Ghandi, [who] all his life he spent trying, promoting unity between the faiths and he spent his time not with the other Hindus or Muslims trying to get along but he spent time with the untouchables.
>
> [If Christ comes again, is he coming back as a Catholic?] I'm sure he's not. I'm sure he's not.

[17] Beyond the intellectual, emotional, and philosophical impact of inclusion on a student's faith, there was also a fourth effect, the requirement of action. This was not a common element among all students – for example, it was not evident at all amongst grade 10 students – but it did present itself among thoughtful students in grades 11 and 12. Inclusion inevitably caused a thoughtful student to confront others' opinions, which in turn caused the student to defend that which she or he has assumed was correct. When that defense was vulnerable to the others' opinion, the journey began with what some students referred to as the search for truth that is carried out while in and through relationships with others in the school community. To quote one grade 11 student, "We need [non-Catholic students] to put into practice Jesus' teachings."

[18] Notwithstanding the above impact of inclusion, there are concerns expressed by some students that the intellectual and philosophical challenges that accompanied inclusion might have gone too far in their Catholic school.

> I think that's keeping an open mind. God is a very personal thing, even to different Catholics. God has many different faces. That's why the Hindu faith has so many different gods; they're all expressions of the one God, which is so difficult to understand. Part of the problem in teaching our faith is that God is a very personal thing and people come to know God in very different ways. I don't think you can say an expression of God is wrong when you are teaching. You cannot say to your students that your idea is not really correct and that this is the correct idea of God.

In response, another student said,

> I agree that open-mindedness is important in a Christian Ethics classroom, but I also think that there is a really fine line between great discussions and open discussions where almost every Catholic belief is . . . thrown out the window just for the sake of a good discussion . . . My experience with some of my teachers, even though the discussions might be really intriguing, is that Catholic values are not enforced [in class discussion]. Everyone interprets God differently . . . [but] I still don't know if being that open minded is really beneficial to the God of Catholic education. The Catholic school is not meant to be a [religious] neutral zone.

Lastly, one student remarked,

> I think the job [of the Catholic school] is not to give us an understanding of Catholicism not to make us doubt it, but I think absolutely that the job of our teachers is to give us a strong Catholic faith, and in order to have a strong Catholic faith you have to ask questions and you have to be encouraged to ask questions . . . you have to be encouraged to go, "Is this wrong? This could be wrong." These are the things you have to search because that kind of search, asking yourself those questions from both sides can only lead you to the truth.

An Appreciation for Diversity in Various Forms

[19] Catholic students' understanding of their faith and community and their sense of the Other were expanded by inclusion. In grade 10, students saw religion as a book of rules and things to remember, but by grade 11 students began to speak of the spirit of their faith differently where understanding, acceptance, and respect for others, especially non-Catholics, and their views and their religious beliefs was demanded by their Catholic faith. Students perceived religious diversity as a reflection of what they would encounter in the "real world" after graduation.

[20] It is also fair to say that for Catholic students, inclusion caused them to consider that the very idea of community meant diversity and thereby required all members to consider the importance of understanding and accepting others' differences and treating all members as valuable in themselves. There was a clear understanding that in community, it is the humanity of the person that binds people, especially in times of crisis, not their religion.

[21] The concept of opportunity was significant both for the non-Catholic students to grow in understanding the Catholic faith and also for the Catholic students to practice their faith. Students said,

> Non-Catholic people help me grow my faith not so much that they share views . . . not that I'm going to convert, I'm still Roman Catholic, but they make me view something different in your life. [I think,] Oh yeah! That would be an interesting way to praise God. I was actually pleasantly surprised yesterday in particular at our Reconciliation [Celebration]. I was sitting around and several people I know who are non-Catholics [were there], but I didn't feel distracted whatsoever and I felt that they were paying the utmost respect with what was going on . . . Yesterday, I especially felt like, Wow! This is really nice to have this whole group of people, even though we might not share the faith in religion, we're all doing this as a community. Yeah. I was really pleasantly surprised by the behavior of everybody as a whole.
>
> You feed off each other and if all your feeding [off of] . . . people . . . Who are the same as you, that is good, but it can only offer you so much. But when you have people with different views – different beliefs – it heightens yours and it brings them up at the same time so everyone just grows . . . maybe not in the same direction of growth, but you will grow to a better understanding and more mature life.
>
> That's a beautiful thing – that's a beautiful thing! It really bothers me when people have ideas and they are not expressing them, questioning things that have always been taken for granted. Not only does [questioning] help to nurture our faith, but it expands our minds too.

[22] Religious diversity within the Catholic school has attached to it the demand, as seen by many Catholic students, that they practice what they had learned and believed as fundamental to their faith: welcoming, understanding, acceptance, and respect for the non-Catholic student. One participant stated,

> If you have non-Catholics, you can benefit from that because, if all people were the same and you had an outsider, then you wouldn't want to be snobby to them saying they weren't good enough to be around – so it gives you the opportunity to practice your faith in accepting people.

The practicing of one's faith was particularly seen in students' friendships that went beyond difference: accepting people as they are.

[23] For the students, diversity was accompanied by certain necessary elements for the community to function: understanding, acceptance, respect for the other people's basic humanity, and their right to have differing beliefs and opinions from the majority. Diversity also challenges the students, and one might say inculcated as sense of obligation, to practice what was preached, or at least have been taught: respect – a multilayered term used so often by almost all students in every grade level and from every school. This seems consistent with O'Keefe's finding in the United States that "religious diversity in the schools enhances racial justice."

Experiencing inclusion in the School's Faith Community

[24] Before examining the students' sense of faith community, it is necessary to describe a "code word" used by students in all of the schools. "Respect" is a term used by students to reflect many different meanings. The word is multilayered in nature and is associated with a cluster of meaning, including empathy, concern, fairness, justice, understanding, honesty, reciprocity, and acceptance. The specific meaning in play at a particular time depends upon the time, place, and persons involved. The term is deeply connected with expectations and a sense of morality for students. This variation in meaning is clear as students speak of respect for and respect to. In response to the question, "should the Catholic school allow non-Catholic to enroll in the school?" a student responded,

> I wouldn't have much respect for the Catholic system if they didn't let people in because of their faith . . . You're supposed to respect people. What kind of respect are you showing people if you're out if you're not Catholic? Catholicism is based on your faith and respect. Respect is a big priority of faith; if you're [excluding people] how are you respecting others?

The participants of the study agreed that participation in Christian Ethics by non-Catholics is stimulating, but "its one thing to speak your mind, for sure its okay for him to say what he wants, but he just has to respect the Catholic religion if he is going to be here."

[25] Catholic students of all grades expected non-Catholic students at the school's religious services to have respect for them during the liturgies. This meaning varied somewhat from minimal respect, passive attention and avoiding distracting actions, to maximum respect, paying attention and participating in the service, i.e. assisting in the biblical readings or Intentions of the Faithful, or in seeking a blessing when the Eucharist was distributed.

[26] Students believed that demanding respect is reasonable because "you have a choice to come to this school [and] if you are at a Catholic school you could at least show [minimal] respect: being quiet during services." There is also an element of reciprocity in the students' use of the word. Referencing the presence of non-Catholic students when school prayer is being said, a grade 10 student said, "Some [non-Catholic students] are disrespectful of prayer before class. They should respect us by not disturbing us when we pray. We respect them. They don't have to say the prayer." This implied *quid pro quo* resonates with the Catholic students' sense of fairness. The non-Catholic is given the privilege to attend the Catholic school, but if respect is not reciprocated, such argues for the disruptive student going to a public school.

[27] It would be patently unfair to place disturbances by students in Christian Ethics or at school liturgies solely, or even primarily, at the feet of non-Catholic students, and in fairness Catholic

students did not do so. Students of all grades in all schools were fully aware that not only can they often not tell who may be Catholic or non-Catholic but further,

> it could be Catholic students talking, not involved in the Mass. It's not that I'm a good Catholic boy, so because I go to church, I'm going to sit and be attentive. It's not like that. We're all kids. I think if you put a bunch of kinds in the same room no matter what it is, watching a play or going to church, there's talking or just action going on no matter what!

Interestingly, one student commented,

> I think the [disruptors] we're talking about, I don't think they're the non-Catholics. There is a large majority of the people who we are talking about, who dispute our religion and stuff, I don't think they're non-Catholics. I think, like their parents are Catholic, but [they] are the people who are disputing, the people who are non-practicing Catholics.
>
> There are people in my English literature class and they're Catholic . . . But they dispute it and say that God is garbage and that you don't have to follow the Commandments. They're Catholic, but they just don't believe it.

The actual disturbances during Christian Ethics classes or at school liturgies seems to be most prominent with grades nine and ten.

> I think grades nine and ten are really bad for that because you got all these punk-ass grade nines [and tens] who think they know everything . . . You get a lot of those kids who [say], Oh I don't believe in any of that crap, I'm not going to subscribe to your faith, I'm not going to respect you for that . . .
>
> I don't think the people who are disrupting . . . are saying, I'm so-and-so religion and I strongly believe in . . . But we have the Moslems and the Buddhists. It's not the Buddhists who go against the Catholics and also say, I don't believe in that or whatever, it's the ones who I think were Catholic or were brought up Catholic, and I definitely think it's some of them, and definitely not all the non-Catholics.

[28] Students split the idea of community into two dimensions. First, community is bounded by geography or physical connection. Second, community is a lived experience; manifest in deeply emotional moments of epiphany which, when those moments were related to the Catholic faith as in a liturgical celebration following a crisis at the school, impressed upon students the opportunity to experience solidarity. Indeed, the liturgical services provided a focal point for the attention of all of the students and staff of the school, beyond a social or pedagogical reason, for gathering together. At those moments of school crisis the school community gels,

> We'll come together and get down on our knees and pray . . . [even non-Catholics] get together [with us to] mourn the loss . . . They're still coming together in the same way we are . . . they're just participating in a bit of a different activity . . . even though they don't know it, they're still praying – they might not do it by crossing themselves . . . But honestly, I think in their head they're saying . . . we need some answers for this . . . I think they're entering a level that we enter when we pray . . . The faith community is like battling the crisis that's happening outside . . . or inside the community.

[29] Beyond large scale gatherings there are other times when individuals in the community act in socially acceptable and laudatory actions, as would those in an empathetic community. A grade 12 student related,

> What I've seen mainly is . . . you don't see somebody alone in a corner at the school crying . . . If someone leaves the classroom for some reason . . . having a really rough time, there's always going to be [someone to] go after them, one or two other people who are there, talking to them, trying to get them through it.
>
> We are all here just [to] take care of each other no matter what the problem is. We all watch over each other and that's what part of being a Catholic is . . . making sure that everyone feels safe.

Faith and community have a symbiotic relationship, which like a holographic image, is real, conveys meaning, but is difficult to grasp and is viewed differently depending upon the perspective of the viewer.

[30] Lastly, inclusion seems to impact the wider faith community as it widens the gap between parish and school. How? As the number of non-Catholic students increases, the number of families who are not part of the local parish and its ethos increases. Therefore the traditional trinity of school, home, and parish may no longer be a viable concept as the basis for a school-based faith community. This may have unexpected consequences that are yet to be identified, but which impact the Catholic student and her or his family as members of the wider Catholic parish faith community.

Summarizing the Themes

[31] In general, the presence of non-Catholic students heightened, challenged, and made concrete the students' sense of faith, diversity, and community. The personal faith of the participant students was influenced by inclusion with the hallmarks being an intellectual challenge to religious beliefs, an emotional sensitivity to those in a minority position, the feeling that their faith was inclusive, a philosophical confusion resulting from the challenge posed by the apparent experiential sameness in the effect of different religious beliefs on people as exemplified through contact with non-Catholics, and a practical impetus to put into action religious beliefs when in relationship with non-Catholic students.

[32] Diversity in religion, culture, dress, and other forms was seen as beneficial by Catholic students. It produced a challenge to assumed beliefs, and an opportunity to practice the ethical values of compassion, understanding, and acceptance of the Other, and in return provided an opportunity for Catholic students and teachers to be the recipients of those attributes from non-Catholic students and their families. This tended to produce a sense of "us together" rather than "us-them."

[33] The school as a community was seen by all of the participants as the conduit of their faith as it provided a regularly scheduled time of reflection and prayer in their busy lives. The community embodied the attribute stated above where the markers were a sense of belonging, acceptance, solidarity, inclusiveness, and safety – all of which became crystallized and palpably manifest in times of crisis in the school.

The Church Documents and Concerns with Inclusion

[34] Before proceeding to discuss the meaning and significance of inclusion on the Catholic student participants in the study, it is helpful to provide a context for that discussion. Therefore in this part of the paper I will briefly state the Catholic Church's invitation to non-Catholic students and the

concerns expressed in the literature regarding inclusion. Thereafter, in Part IV, I will offer an interpretation of the meaning of inclusion to the participating students and to Catholic education.

The Invitation to Non-Catholic Students

[35] Catholic education is by definition inclusive in nature. Vatican II stated that schools where non-Catholic students were present were considered "very dear to her heart" (1965b: ¶9) and that "no one . . . is to be forced to embrace the Christian Faith" (1965a: ¶2, 9). Subsequently, the Congregation for Catholic Education reiterated that "the Catholic school offers itself to all, non-Christians included" (1977: ¶85), and John Paul II, noted the ecumenical dimension of catechetics (1979: ¶32).

[36] In the 1980's the same Congregation reminded Catholic schools to "have the greatest respect for those students who are not Catholics . . . [to] be open to authentic dialogue . . ." (1982: ¶42). However, by 1988, the Congregation had changed its tone somewhat on the topic of inclusion. It reiterated the invitation and that "The religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected," but went on to say,

> On the other hand, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law (1988: ¶6).

In 1997 the Congregation restated that Catholic education is "open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified educational project" (1997: ¶16).

The Concerns with Inclusion

[37] The idea of inclusion sounds positive, but there have been dissenting voices. Francis and Gibson suggest, "the presence of non-Catholic pupils may . . . have a deleterious impact on the overall school ethos as reflected in the attitude toward Christianity of the student body as a whole (18)." Moreover, in regard to the school as a faith community, Francis and Egan state,

> It is considerably more realistic to modify the theory underpinning the Catholic school system to take into account the presence of non-Catholic pupils, pupils from non-practicing Catholic backgrounds, and non-practicing pupils, than to attempt to refine enrollment policies to ensure that Catholic schools more truly represent a community of faith (600).

[38] The Canadian Catholic Schools Trustees' Association notes that inclusion has become a major issue in Saskatchewan in 2004-2005, as public school districts seek financial compensation for the loss of students to Catholic school systems,

> The urban public school boards in Saskatchewan have challenged the government's funding of non-Catholic students attending Catholic schools. This ongoing constitutional challenge would have major implications for Catholic schools not only in Saskatchewan but possibly Canada-wide, should a decision be reached to fund only Catholic students in Catholic schools. Catholic provincial associations and [Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association] are working closely with Saskatchewan Catholic School Section on this important issue.

Moreover, the Saskatoon (Saskatchewan) Board of Education wrote the Saskatchewan Minister of Education a letter dated October 9, 2001 stating, amongst other things, its concern regarding the deleterious impact that a Catholic high school was having upon the public school system in that "at least 300 non-Catholic students attend St. Joseph [the Catholic high school] . . . We are also concerned that our elementary school enrolments . . . suffer because some non-Catholic parents have decided to start their young people in Catholic elementary schools . . ." In Western Australia, the Catholic Bishops have restricted the level of non-Catholic students to twenty-five percent of the student population in an attempt to address the issue of Catholicity in Catholic schools.

[39] Mulligan echoes the above concern as he believes that the inclusion of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools, "is a concern common to Catholic educators in Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta" (182). He offers four reasons for this difficulty: 1. the mission of the Catholic school is to evangelize Catholic students, not to persuade non-Catholic students to join the Faith; 2. school policies require non-Catholic students to accept all Catholic dimensions of the school programs in order to discourage attendance by non-Catholics for mere reasons of convenience; 3. evangelization is not school wide nor all inclusive as non-Catholic students can not receive the sacraments; and 4. religion teachers are hindered in their religious mission:

> How can a teacher, in the same religion class, help students who have an active faith to grow in knowledge and deepen in commitment; try to help the un-churched Catholic students to discover new meaning in the church and faith they have definite but tenuous ties to; and respect a significant number of students for whom Catholic faith is a foreign language that they have no, or next to no, interest in learning about? (183).

[40] Jelinski found similar concerns among Saskatchewan's Catholic school administrators. He examined the procedures, practices, and policies for admission into Saskatchewan's Catholic schools and noted the comments of in-school administrators regarding the perceived difficulties associated with the admission of non-Catholic students. Among those comments: if the number of non-Catholic students is too great, the reason for existing as a Catholic school is destroyed; the addition of non-Catholic students to non-practicing Catholic students put a heavy burden on Catholic teachers; the watering down of Catholic teachings to accommodate others weakens the Catholic schools reason for existing; once non-Catholic students are admitted they never get reevaluated to determine if they should remain in the system; younger children do not feel part of the sacramental preparation process and it can be traumatic for them (50-54). In England and Wales, McClelland noted that an episcopally approved secondary school project dealing with religious education, "in its anxiety to cope with increasing numbers of non-Catholic children seeking entry to Catholic schools, has lost sight of the schools' theological *reason d'etre*" (156-57).

The Significance of the Findings for Catholic Education

[41] The findings of this researcher are that inclusion is in itself, at least at the estimated level[3] of 30% experienced by the participating schools in this study, not detrimental to Catholic students' faith experience in the Catholic school. If one assumes that the schools in this study formed a faith community, Catholic and non-Catholic students being critical participants, then is that a different type of faith community than is commonly expressed by writers in Catholic education? Certainly,

[3] The participating school district for the study refused to release the number of non-Catholic students in its schools for political reasons.

this study notes similarities to those understandings that there is more than one type of faith community other than confessional in nature.

[42] Foster refers to a community of faith as,

> a people whose corporate as well as personal identities are to be found in their relationship to some significant past event. Their reason for being may be traced to that event. Their response to that event shapes their character, confirms their solidarity, and defines their identity. Their unity is expressed through their commitment to that event, and their destiny is revealed in the power of its possibilities . . . from a Christian perspective, however, the formative power of an event takes place through the initiative of God . . . The community takes shape through the accumulating responses of men and women to God's continuing action (54).

Foster suggests that a community of faith is experienced in three ways: 1. we experience through rituals and symbols our connection to the community's past, which we acknowledge we share; 2. we experience bonding relationships with institutional structures, customs, and kinship networks that we trust to guide and mediate us in our relationships with others; and 3. we experience a spontaneous moment of egalitarian commonality with others where participants are not known to one another by their roles, jobs, or positions, but in the commonality of their submission to the power of the moment (56-58). In these spontaneous moments of community, members of the community experience the spaciousness of time, the intimacy of the transcendent, and the transformation of the immediate (58). O'Neill characterizes a faith community as existing, "when people in a school share a certain intentionality, a certain pattern or complex of values, understandings, sentiments, hopes, and dreams that deeply condition everything that goes on, including the math class, the athletic activities . . . everything" (32). There is no doubt that, in general, the experiential nature of faith communities was experienced by the Catholic students in conjunction with their non-Catholic schoolmates. In other words, the faith community manifest through orthopraxis was present.

[43] It appears that inclusion heightens and intensifies the reflectivity of Catholics students' vis-à-vis both the commonality amongst the many Christian and non-Christian faiths in the experiential affective realm and the acceptance of fundamental humanistic values. The presence of the Other demands respect, challenges the beliefs of the Catholic student, and demands action respecting the application of Catholic values – which is consonant with O'Neill's findings (49). As Francis and Gibson note, the assumption of a homogeneous faith community is incorrect when inclusion is combined with the un-churched Catholic students, and hence, as Mulligan notes, there is concern regarding the school's ability to evangelize Catholic students. It appears that the participating Catholic schools addressed the issue of inclusion with both sensitivity and responsibility, which in many respects has well served their Catholic students. However, this may have unintentionally upset the balance between catechetical orthodoxy and orthopraxis in their schools.[4]

[44] It was evident in the student focus groups that subjectivism and indeed religious relativism held strong sway in students' religious beliefs. These findings may be as a result of the focus in their schools' Christian ethics programs being on the experiential nature of the Catholic faith without an

[4] Rummery writes of catechesis and religious education in a pluralistic society. He separates catechesis and religious education, much as the students in this study separated faith and religion, and further, he holds that it is orthopraxis that is the strength of Catholic evangelization within the Catholic school.

unpacking of those experiences using a specifically Catholic perspective. Moreover, as was consistent with the findings of the effect of inclusion upon Catholic teachers in the same schools (Donlevy in press), differences are dealt with at the school level by what Rawls calls the "method of avoidance." He says, "We try, so far as we can, neither to assert nor to deny any religious, philosophical or moral views, or their associated philosophical accounts of truth and the status of values (12-13). As Hollenback says, this method is employed "to neutralize potential conflicts and to promote democratic social harmony" (93). The conclusion must be that the issue of inclusion deserves closer attention not only at the academic and administrative levels of Catholic education but also at the front line of Catholic education, the Catholic school.

[45] I do not suggest that Catholic schools should, or even could, retreat into a confessional mode of education, although for some (Donlevy in press) it would be preferable to the dualistic or pluralistic models referred to by Arthur (227-33) and explained by Morris.[5] Certainly there is always the concern that the Catholic school not engender what Groome calls *sectarianism*: "a bigoted and intolerant exaltation of one's own group that absolutizes the true and the good of its members, encouraging prejudice against anyone who has [an] alternative identity – especially immediate neighbors" (42), nor a *parochialism*, which "reflects a narrow-minded, self-sufficient, and insular mentality that closes up within itself, is intolerant to or oblivious of other perspectives, and conceited about its own" (44). Yet in Catholic schools, the position may be taken that a willingness to hear and understand other voices and perspectives, Christian and non-Christian alike, while espousing within the Catholic school the theological singularity of one's own faith, are not incommensurable.

[46] Religious relativism is not consistent with the Catholic faith (John Paul II 1998) and, arguably, its genesis is based, at least, upon on a false Christology and anthropology (see Australian Bishops; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2000a, 2000b; Ratzinger and Messori).

> Many catechists no longer teach the Catholic faith in its harmonic wholeness . . . rather they try to make some elements of the Christian patrimony humanly "interesting" (according to the cultural orientations of the moment). Hence it is no longer a catechesis that would constitute a comprehensive, all embracing formation in the faith, but reflections and flashes of insights deriving from the partial, subjective anthropological experiences . . . The result . . . has been a disintegration of the *sensus fidei* in the new generations, who are often incapable of a comprehensive view of their religion (Ratzinger and Messori: 72-73).

Eleven years after this initial statement, Cardinal Ratzinger twice reiterated his concern (1996a, 1996b).

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[5] Morris encapsulates the models saying,

> Those adopting a dualistic approach seek to serve a Catholic faith community but separate their religious and educational functions, regarding them as two distinct and unconnected activities . . . some promoters of the pluralistic model assume that single faith schools are inappropriate for children living in a pluralistic society. Consequently, for both groups, Catholic faith and practices are presented as one of a number of possible alternative "life stances" which pupils are encouraged to explore and, possibly, accept. Such a school would seek to attract pupils of a variety of faiths and possibly, those who have no religious affiliation . . . the confessional school . . . seeks a synthesis of faith and culture and looks to sustain and develop the faith community, together with the home, and the parish, to transmit a specific Catholic vision of life (379).

> There has been a collapse even of simple religious information . . . What is our catechesis doing? What is our school system doing at a time when religious instruction is widespread? I think it was an error not to pass on more content. Our religion instructors rightly repudiated the idea that religious instruction is only information, and they rightly said that it is something else that is more, that the point is to learn life itself, that more has to be conveyed. But that led to the attempt to make people like this style of life, while information and content were neglected. Here, I think, we ought really to be ready for a change, to say that if in this secular world we have religious instruction in all the schools, we have to assume that we will not be able to convert many in schools to the faith. But the students should find out what Christianity is: they should receive good information in a sympathetic way so that they are stimulated to ask: Is this perhaps something for me? (1996a: 126).

[47] It is true that the primary Church documents stress that "family catechesis precedes . . . all forms of catechesis" (John Paul II 1979: ¶68), and that some Catholic writers have questioned the catechetical role of the Catholic school (O'Leary and Sallnow) based upon, amongst other things, Kohlberg's theory of moral development. It may also be true that "a captive audience is no guarantee of successful catechesis; in fact, the result is only too likely to be a generation of lapsed Catholics . . ." (Chadwick: 36). Nevertheless, if this study's findings are found to be the case in other Catholic schools, then there must be a concern regarding the future of Catholic students' development in not only the Catholic faith but also the Catholic religion, to use the students' bifurcated terminology, in Catholic schools. The experiential aspects of the Catholic faith are surely crucially important, but is not also an Archimedean Point provided by catechesis, from which to interpret those experiences thorough the lens of the Catholic faith? Moreover, if such is a concern, then when an apparent lessening of catechesis is combined with the heightening of challenges to the student's faith due to inclusion, then the evangelization of the Catholic student (churched and un-churched, and unbelieving) may be put at risk. If this is so, this should cause alarm to those charged with the responsibility for the spiritual enterprise and ethos of the Catholic school.

[48] In the United States and other jurisdictions, where a great financial sacrifice is required to send a child to a parochial school, this concern may be ameliorated by the clear and committed desire by non-Catholic parents to seek pedagogical and ethical succor within a Catholic school for their children. However, such may, arguably, not be the case with a publicly financed Catholic school, such as in the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario where there is no such financial sacrifice. It appears that inclusion raises the important issue, "at what point, if ever, does inclusion make evangelization of the Catholic student unlikely, if not impossible?" What appear to be at stake are not only the ethos but also the *raison d'etre* of the Catholic school.

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