

The common good: the inclusion of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools

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This paper offers that liberal and communitarian concepts of the common good are exemplified in the Catholic school's policy of the inclusion of non-Catholic students. In particular, the liberal concepts of personal autonomy, individual rights and freedoms, and the principles of fairness, justice, equality and respect for diversity – as democratic ideals – are evidenced in inclusion. Moreover, the communitarian concepts of the situated self, community values and mutual responsibility for Catholic and non-Catholic students and Catholic teachers are nurtured with inclusion. The conclusion reached by the paper is that Catholic schools, through the practice of inclusion, exemplify the common good in both the liberal and communitarian traditions and therefore serve as an exemplar for the wider democratic society.

Keywords: Catholic schools; common good; non-Catholic students

Introduction

The inclusion of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools has become a topic of concern in Canada, the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. That concern revolves around topics such as the loss of students from the public school system and hence a reduction in revenue for public schools (*Board of Trustees*; Canadian Catholic School Trustees), the possible threat to the ethos of the Catholic school (Francis and Egan 1986; Mulligan 1999) and the difficulty of maintaining the Catholic school as a faith community (Mulligan 1999). However, there are many positive aspects of inclusion (Donlevy 2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2008) which, as this paper will argue, provides an exemplar of acceptance of difference and social plurality in democratic society. It is the contribution of the inclusionary policy of Catholic schools to the common good which is the subject of this paper.

This paper is in two parts. The first part reviews the meaning of the term 'common good' historically and from the perspectives of liberalism and communitarianism. The second part reflects upon how inclusion from liberal and communitarian perspectives illustrates the common good in a pluralistic democratic society.

The common good

The history of the concept

The idea of the common good is not new but its meaning has varied throughout time. The ancients offered the idea that the common good resulted from a cultivation of the virtues and a legislatively good political order in the furtherance of the polis (Aristotle 350 BCE)

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and that the individual owed service to the state which was not associated with mere self-aggrandisement (Cicero 44 BCE: Miller 1996). Aquinas (1274) offered that ‘since all contraries agree in something common, it is necessary to search for the one common cause for them above their own contrary proper causes (I 49, 3; cf. I 2, 3; II–II, q. 58, 7 ad 2; Keys 2006).

In later years, the rationale for the common good was formulated as the giving up of freedoms one might have in a hypothetical state of nature in order to avoid the ‘nasty, brutish, and short’ life of an animal in the wild (Hobbes 1651). Later, the concept was articulated as the ‘greatest good for the greatest number’ (Bentham 1996; Mill 1859) or as minimal state interference in the individual’s freedom of action enabling the operation of the ‘invisible hand’ for the betterment of society (Smith 1776) or the fostering of individual autonomy free from the strictures of an oppressive society (Rousseau 1782).

In the modern world the definition of the common good is divided between two competing views: liberalism and communitarianism. Some might argue that the modern debate is, or ought to be, an ontological rather than a procedural debate (Taylor 1989) but a debate it certainly has become.

The modern discussion

Liberalism and the common good

How can a pluralist democracy in a globalised world achieve – if not social accord – at least the social toleration of differences? Surely, some might say, the twentieth century, with its sacrifice of individual rights in the name of the Volk or the dictatorship of the proletariat or the best interests of the collective, has shown that ‘the concept of a common good, valid for all mankind, rests on a cardinal mistake’ (Berlin 1959, 43).

In response, liberalism offers a refined definition of the common good as various shades of individual autonomy, universal freedoms and rights (Dworkin 1985), and values self-determination (Nozick 1974) with its focus upon the means to freedom rather than the ends of freedom (Rawls 1971). It is ‘[the] result of a process of combining preferences, all of which are counted equally (if consistent with the principles of justice)’ (Kymlicka 2002; Rawls 1988). Liberal neutrality, in terms of the state, ‘is simply the idea that there is no public ranking of the values of different (justice-respecting) ways of life’ (Kymlicka 2002, 218). However, while one strain of liberalism suggests that the state should remain neutral in the matter of an individual’s life choices (Ackernam 1990), another offers that certain values such as rational deliberation, civility, racial and gender equity, equal opportunity and justice as fairness are settled issues not open for discussion (Gutmann and Thompson 1990). Indeed, the determination of such societal-wide values in a liberal state has been suggested by some liberals as best determined by a collective interpretation (Sullivan 1990). Thus liberalism attempts to define the common good in terms of the individual while acknowledging the social nature of being human.

Justification of this approach is offered by Rawls (1971) through his hypothetical ‘original position’ warranting the framing of basic societal rules of fairness and a societal conception of the ‘right’ which ensures universally accepted rights protecting individual freedom in a liberal society. If discord is evident one seeks an ‘overlapping consensus’ (Dworkin 1987) on at least some basic rights which, by consensus, can produce fundamental agreement in a democratic society. If no consensus is possible, Richardson (1990) suggests that a political accommodation – a *modus vivendi* – may be possible among divergent communities within a society for reasons of practical accommodation. Whether or not the issue of value incommensurability among communities can be adequately

addressed by the above is open to question. Indeed, perhaps, Berlin (1958) is correct in saying that this conundrum is never to be totally resolved as it is the tension between the autonomous individual and social pluralism which is inherent to a free democracy. It is certainly true that those who are marginalised, especially historically, within a society ‘may well require...political and legal recognition’ (Wolf 1992).

In sum, liberalism offers that ‘the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it’ (Rawls 1971, 560) and posits the necessity of freedom of choice for those ends in order to develop the autonomous individual. It is the neutrality of the State in relation to such individually chosen ends that allows for the individual’s self-determination and indeed the right to revise choices. As Kymlicka states, ‘What is central to the liberal view is not that we can perceive a self prior to its ends, but that we understand ourselves to be prior to our own ends in the sense that no end or goal is exempt from possible re-examination’ (2002, 225). As such, the individual can detach him- or herself from communal values and exercise individual judgement, the primary pursuit being not the exercise of that freedom but the particularity of the value chosen.

There is another school of political thought which offers an alternative to the liberal concept of the common good: communitarianism.

Communitarianism and the common good

‘The common good is conceived of [by communitarianism] as a substantive conception of the good life which defines the community’s “way of life”’ (Kymlicka 2002, 220). It is a theory which offers that society exists prior to the individual and that it creates the individual’s social self. Indeed, because society pre-exists the individual, it provides continuity of the life-world, allowing individuals a place and time within which to function and exercise their capacities through interaction with others, resulting in interdependence. From this interdependence flow the ‘primordial sources of obligation and responsibility’ (Selznick 1986, 5). To be sure, the ‘me’ exists as a separate entity from the collective, but the other part of the person, the ‘I’, exists as the agent of ‘reflective morality’ (1986, 3). In that sense it moves beyond the ‘individual endorsement’ of liberalism (Dworkin 1987, 16–17) as the communitarian self seeks ‘social confirmation’ (Kymlicka 2002, 278). In what seems in contradiction to liberalism, communitarianism holds that we ‘all approach our circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity....Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles’ (MacIntyre 1981, 204–205; Kymlicka 2002, 220). It is this sense of morality, or of what is good, held as a community value that transforms a community from a mere association or grouping of individuals, from *Gesellschaft* to *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 1887). It is the community’s values, the individual’s social context, which set the authoritative horizon, which in turn sets the parameters of the individual’s goals (Sandel 1982, 183; Taylor 1979, 157–9). The ‘thin social order’ of liberalism gives way to the reality of the ‘thick social order’ of the encumbered self which does not preclude that there is a process of transformation upon rational reflection, and hence changing one’s goals, between the socially constituted self and the I (Sandel 1982, 183).

It is this ‘feeling of commitment to a common public philosophy...[which] is a precondition to [a] free culture’ (Kymlicka 1990, 122–3). Those in the community have a responsibility to defend the common values when they are under attack by others from within because failing to do so would result in the ‘debasement and decay’ of the community’s values and ultimately the community itself (Dworkin 1985, 230).

In communitarianism, individuals’ freedoms and rights are not denied but are circumscribed and flow from the peace, order and good government of the community with

enforcement – at its best – through persuasion and social opprobrium. Such an approach is possible because interrelationships are the grist to action within society. To be an outcast is so restrictive to individuals that they will, theoretically, stop the offending behaviour (Etzioni 1998, xii).

Thus, unlike liberalism *simpliciter*, which posits the primacy of autonomy and individual rights with few social restrictions – the thin social order, communitarianism offers that a necessary precondition to freedom and rights is a society that possesses common values which justify many reasonable restrictions on the individual in order to protect those values – the thick social order. Bellah states:

A good community is one in which there is argument, even conflict, about the meaning of the shared values and goals, and certainly about how they will be actualized in everyday life. Community is not about silent consensus; it is a form of intelligent, reflective life, in which there is indeed consensus, but where the consensus can be challenged and changed – often gradually, sometimes radically – over time. (Bellah 1998, 16)

Communitarianism is about individuals living in community where they maintain their individual free will but where their personage is formed through a common language, values and concepts that in turn frame reality and cause them to relate to that world and the people in it with the values of the community.

The common good described in the liberal and communitarian traditions is a powerful display of the human intellect as it attempts to resolve issues of great import to democratic societies which, due to globalisation in its economic, political and cultural aspects, seem at times fractured and divided among themselves.

Inclusion and the common good

Liberalism and inclusion

The inclusion of non-Catholic students into Catholic schools makes a contribution to a conception of the common good as it serves as an exemplar to a democratic society conflicted by the difficulty of embracing the good as expressed in both liberalism and communitarianism.

Catholic schools recognise the crucial significance of the individual's conscience not only through Church documents which ensure the students' right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion but also in practice (Congregation 1982, para. 42). A recent study of non-Catholic students in a Catholic high school (Donlevy 2008) found such freedom expressed in that ultimately, although the school provided the opportunity and prompting for an encounter with the religious or spiritual aspects of life, it was up to the student to choose to enter into that encounter. A non-Catholic student said, 'I think it's whether you want to take the opportunity of the Catholic high school or not'. Two other non-Catholic students stated, 'I opted not to immerse myself in it' (Donlevy 2008) and:

Catholic high school helped me discover who I was. It helped me – like kind of being all by myself [as a non-Catholic in a classroom] it helped me deepen my strength and it helped me deepen my relationship with Christ and it helped me ask those questions that I'd never asked before but I wanted to ask....It really helped me to strengthen my relationship with Christ. (Donlevy 2008)

It is the 'overlapping consensus' of the values of dignity, equality, fairness, justice, respect for others, which are found in all faiths, that provide basic value cohesion for all within a

Catholic school. Catholic schools do not seek to evangelise the non-Catholic student but to invite the student to experience the Catholic reality within the school. The non-Catholic student may choose her or his faith and the liberal principle of revisability is honoured within the Catholic school. It is a matter of respect for and exercises of the individual's conscience, which is sacrosanct.

The Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) stated that the Church has:

the greatest respect for those students who are not Catholics...[and teachers] should be open at all times to authentic dialogue, convinced that in these circumstance the best testimony that they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is seeking God according to his or her own conscience. (Congregation 1982, para. 42)

Moreover, the idea of a symbiotic relationship and reciprocity in the meeting of faiths, as opposed to religions, between the Catholic and non-Catholic students was stated by a grade 12 Catholic student.

You feed off each other, and if all your feeding [is from the] 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. (Donlevy 2003)

In that encounter there is an opportunity for all students to grow spiritually. A grade 10 Catholic student 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...[my] life. [I think] Oh yeah! That would be an interesting way to praise God' (Donlevy 2003). A grade 12 Catholic student related, 'It's good to have someone to challenge our faith, and to have someone to help make us stronger' (Donlevy 2003).

It is the presence of non-Catholic students, and thus the relationships which Catholic students have with their non-Catholic friends in the school, which demands that the Catholic student listen and accept the 'Other' for who they are as persons and thus live the ideals or beliefs of acceptance, understanding and respect. To quote one grade 11 Catholic student, 'We need these people [the non-Catholics] to put into practice Jesus' teachings'. The above quotations give strength to Seeley's finding that, of the non-Catholic students she interviewed, 'none felt excluded for their religious beliefs' (2000, 82) and further, as Maritain says, the Catholic school 'invites not submission but dialogue and encounter' (1962, 54).

The democratic values of respect, fairness, justice and inclusion are deepened and separated from the mundanity of the day-to-day life of students and teachers through prayer, liturgies and Mass in the school. As one Catholic student stated, '[Mass] puts or tries to put the emphasis on something else [rather than the secular]. I think that it gives people sort of something else to think about besides the normal stuff, bigger and more important than just...grades' (Donlevy 2003).

The quotations above indicate that the Catholic school community, through inclusion, displays a rejection of sectarianism that is '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' and 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' (Groome 1998, 42, 44).

It seems a paradox that for some non-Catholic students the Catholic school is a spiritually liberating experience. Yet, as a non-Catholic student participant stated with respect to the following regarding prayer, liturgies and Mass in the school:

there was a Christian influence there and its something important to me...you can talk about [God] without being afraid [of] political incorrectness...[of being] offensive to someone else....That's an issue nowadays...what if there is someone in the room who isn't a Catholic or Christian? (Donlevy 2008)

Another related how she felt about morning prayer in the school, 'the more that you're exposed to that [the idea of God] the more you're reminded [of God]. Whether it's through morning prayer or Mass...I think that helps bring you back on to the right path, it's a reminder about what's important' (Donlevy 2008). A third non-Catholic student was asked by the researcher, 'Did going to a Catholic high school affect your faith?' The student responded, 'Yes, definitely. You're taught in a way that you develop yourself spiritually' (Donlevy 2008).

In sum, the liberal values of basic rights and freedoms for individuals, the development of a critical sense and the individual's autonomy, the revisability of one's positions, as well as the enhancement of fairness, justice, respect for others and the dignity of the individual are arguably sought to be fostered in the Catholic school and are exemplified by the inclusion of non-Catholic students within the Catholic school community. Moreover, the idea of an overlapping consensus of values is evident. This is what should be expected in Catholic schools as, unlike other legitimate institutions, the Catholic school is, as the Catholic Church says, 'open to all'.

Beyond liberalism, the Catholic school demonstrates to the wider society its conception of the communitarian common good.

Communitarianism and inclusion in the Catholic school

The Catholic Church, as with communitarianism, sees the crucial importance of the experiences of past generations and their legacy of values (Vatican II 1965, para. 5). Within the school, the systematic formation of students takes place, and, in that process, students experience the meaning and truth of their personal experiences (Congregation 1977, para. 27). It is the sharing of the same vision, the same values and thus the same educational norms within the school community that makes the school Catholic (1977, para. 3). The Catholic school, besides the ordinary pedagogical goals, transmits the values of faith and reason to its students.

The Church holds that teachers in Catholic schools (Congregation 1982, para. 6) 'bring to life in the students the *communitarian* dimension of the human person...[as] every human being is called to live in a community, as a social being, and as a member of the People of God' (1982, para. 22, emphasis added). Within the school community, the norms and values of students in the faith are formed by those who teach and interact with them, including fellow students. This transmission of faith is in concert with the transmission of culture and knowledge as seen through the faith. Thus the Catholic school is of the thick social order and, similar to communitarianism, 'Christian faith, in fact, is born and grows inside a *community*' (Congregation 1977, para. 30, emphasis added). The Catholic school seeks to produce students who have experienced the implicated self and, as Selznick noted, 'The morality of the implicated self builds on the understanding that our deepest and most important obligations flow from identity and relatedness' (1986, p. 7). Further, it is the anchored rationality of communitarianism, solidly fixed in concrete reason that is 'in part,

the funded experience of the political community' (1986, 14). The latter is comparable with the Church's position that truth is not the result of consensus but rather a flow from 'a consonance between intellect and objective reality' (John Paul II 1998, para. 56).

This community is experienced by its members in three ways (Foster 1982): (1) through rituals and symbols connecting to the community's past that is acknowledged and shared (1982, 56); (2) through bonding relationships with 'institutional structures, customs, and kinship networks' (1982, 56–7) that guide through trust and mediate people in their relationships with others; and (3) through experiencing 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' (1982, 58). In these spontaneous moments of community, members experience the spaciousness of time, the intimacy of the transcendent and the transformation of the immediate (1982, 58).

The Church's belief is that the crucial communitarian element of the Catholic school is a sense of belonging due to the common experience of history, belief and purpose, experienced in the present. Flowing from that belief, the Catholic school has the task of transmitting to students, by various means, the specific norms, values and beliefs of the Catholic faith. That transmission seems to be effective 'not so much through formal religious instruction class but rather through the closeness of the Catholic community that the experiences of attending Catholic school generate' (Seeley 2000, 167).

This is especially true during times of crisis within the school. As a grade 12 Catholic student said:

During moments of school crisis the school community gels, both Catholic and non-Catholic students. 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. (Donlevy 2003)

It appears that a communitarian understanding of community permeated the group and crystallised at least in expression at times of crisis, yet difference is accepted and allowed to flourish in a respectful social atmosphere. It is this 'communal emphasis regarding human and Christian existence' (Groome 1996, 108), evidenced by inclusion, which stresses the *virtue of solidarity* (John Paul II 1988, para. 9) among those in the school community.

The solidarity above is reflected in the democratic value of acceptance of the Other, as evidenced in the words of a grade 10 and of a grade 12 Catholic student.

If you have non-Catholics [in the school] you can benefit from that because...then you wouldn't want to be snobby to them saying they weren't good enough to be around...it gives you the opportunity to practice your faith in accepting people. (Donlevy 2003)

On our Grade 12 retreat we were there for a couple of days [and] you kinda get to know these [non-Catholic] people....It was really neat how we could all connect. Some people came back really thinking about the faith and not so much letting the Catholic rules getting in the way. Like the more important stuff like seeing God in other people. (Donlevy 2003)

Nuzzi states that 'every aspect of society is being touched in some way by the increasing cultural diversity of the...population, multicultural sensitivity will be a special challenge for

religious educators in the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity' (2004, 78). Here again, a Catholic school exhibited sensitivity to the pluralist reality in its school through the words of a school principal faced with a large number of Muslim students: 'We try to be sensitive to their [Islamic students'] religion's holidays and to the fact that their dress is not in line with how the other kids dress. We point out in the classes that variety is acceptable and to be honoured' (Donlevy 2003).

Catholic teachers may also be deeply affected through inclusion, and by such acceptance of diversity and plurality within their school, as exhibited by the following comments by two Catholic teachers:

[non-Catholic] kids...faith has been made stronger by having that [non-Catholic] individual in my class, and my faith and my knowledge has increased tenfold since the beginning of this semester, because I'm on my toes, more aware, and having to explain the Catholic faith more because he's in my class . . . He challenges everyone in the class, for good though. At the beginning of the class, it was annoying. I'll say it was annoying! He stimulates conversation, and if anything, I'm more excited to go to my church on Sunday. (Donlevy 2003)

When you have a non-Catholic kid, who you know is non-Catholic, come to you and ask you to pray for her family, you know you've done something beyond just Catholicism. There's more to it than just being Catholic. (Donlevy 2003)

Bryk, Lee and Holland sum up a major aspect of communitarianism within the Catholic school as evidenced by inclusion. They state:

schooling demands an impassioned rationality shaped by a vision of the common good, a vision that itself is always open to challenge and clarification. Such an education is accomplished through inspiration, not coercion, through dialogue, not dogma. It involves not only classroom teaching but also participation in a communal life that exemplifies its values. (Bryk, Lee and Holland 1993, 320)

In sum, the communitarian idea of the common good, with its concepts of the situated self, the importance of the community's values and history, the importance of relationships, social solidarity, the importance of *Gemeinschaft*, respect and interaction with the other and the need for the ethic of care expressed beyond the self, is evidenced in the Catholic school particularly through its practice of the inclusion of non-Catholic students. As with liberalism, the individual's conscience is of prime importance but, for the Catholic school, the person's conscience does not reside within the solitude of the individual but rather calls the person to his or her personal interior temple wherein natural law exists and where God resides as counsellor (John Paul II 1993).

Once can conclude that, as Bryk, Lee and Holland state, 'we discern nothing fundamentally undemocratic about Catholic school's educational philosophy of person-in-community and their ethical stance of shaping the human conscience toward personal responsibility and social engagement' (1993, 341). Moreover, as Langan states, 'Catholicism provides one pattern of what the effort to combine communitarian and liberal values might look like' (1990, 113).

Conclusion

This paper has offered that the liberal and communitarian concepts of the common good are exemplified in the Catholic school's policy of the inclusion of children of other faiths. In particular, the liberal concepts of the development of personal autonomy through critical

rational thought, freedom of conscience and religion, the principle of revisability and the crucial importance of teaching the young about fairness, justice, equality and respect for diversity – as democratic ideals – are evidenced in inclusion. Moreover, the communitarian ideals of the importance of the individual developing within a community's historical context, values and with an understanding of the importance and responsibility owed to others because of personal conscience was stated. The conclusion reached by the paper is that inclusion exemplifies the common good both for liberals and communitarian ideals and could therefore serve as an exemplar for the wider democratic, pluralistic society.

Notes on contributor

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