

Intercultural Practices in Catholic Schools

1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2014, the General Assembly of the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC) decided to organise a survey on intercultural practices in the Catholic schools of the member countries. In December 2014, a first mail launched this survey, the first result of which were presented to the General Assemblies in March and September 2015.

The secretariats of Catholic education of 19 countries/regions¹ have answered to the questionnaire: Albania, Austria, Belgium Flemish Community, Belgium French- and German-speaking Communities, Bosnia and Herzegovina, England and Wales, Scotland, Spain, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland.

2. CONTEXTS

2.1. The general “religious”² context

2.1.1. Some figures

- The 19 answers state that the general context of society in which are the Catholic schools is a multipolar context structured by religions and other visions of life.
- More than 60% Catholics: In six countries, a great majority of inhabitants say they are Catholics: Austria (65.8%), Spain (67.8%) Ireland (84%), Italy (82%), Poland³ (87%), Portugal (79.5%).
- From 35 to 60% Catholics: In four others, an important proportion of inhabitants says they are Catholics: Belgium (43%), France (59.7%)⁴, Hungary (39%)⁵ and Switzerland (38%)⁶.
- From 34 to 16%: In the Netherlands, Roman Catholicism is the more important religion (26.3% of the population), while 17% say they are Protestant and 5% Muslim.
- Less than 15%: In five countries, the Catholic population is a minority: in Scotland (14%), in Albania⁷, Catholic people are a minority (10.5%) in a predominantly Muslim country (57%) with another Orthodox minority (7%); in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 15% of the population are considered as Roman Catholic (the Croats of Herzegovina) while 45% are Muslim (in Bosnia) and 36% Orthodox (the Serbs); in Romania, 86% of the population say they are Orthodox, 10% are Roman- or Greek-Catholics; in Scotland, there are 14% Catholics but 54% say they are Christian; in England and Wales, Catholics are no more than 9% of the population but 59,3% declare to be Christian, mainly Anglican.⁸

¹ In some countries, like Belgium, regions are very independent and organise their education system.

² The “general religious context” is determined by the part of the population, which calls itself from one or another religion and that which calls itself from other visions of existence.

³ Poland’s recent history explains that it is a homogeneous region in terms of cultural heritage linked with Christian values. The important impact of the Church has helped the country survive through critical times: from its disappearance from the map of Europe to the traumatic experience of 40 years Communism.

⁴ Next to 31.5% without religion.

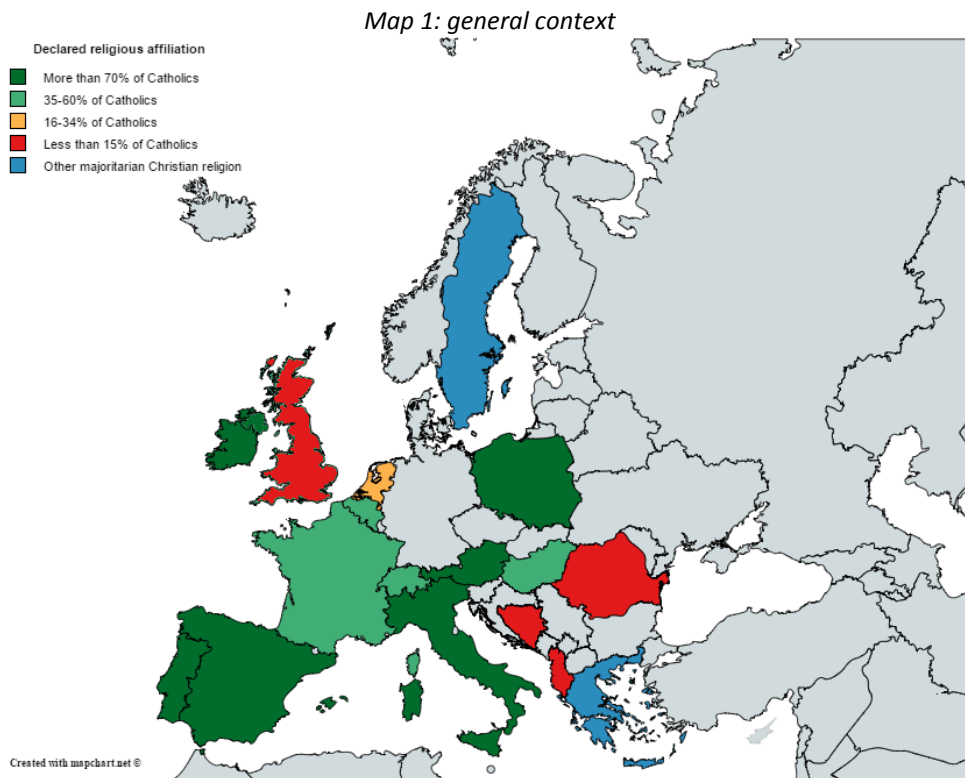
⁵ From the two rites: Latin and Byzantine.

⁶ Next to 26.1% reformed Protestants, 22.2% without religion and 12.4% from other religions.

⁷ In Albania, there are important differences in the percentage of Christians (Catholic and Orthodox) between the North and South of the country.

⁸ Anglicanism is the State religion in England. There is no State religion in Wales.

- Other majority Christian religions: In Sweden, a majority of inhabitants is Lutheran (70%). In Greece, 95% of the population are Orthodox Christians.⁹ The Catholic Church of Latin rite has about 50,000 believers¹⁰ in a population of about 11 million inhabitants, i.e. 0.5%.



2.1.2. Additional observations

- Decrease in the declared religious belonging:

It seems that the general context shows a decrease in the declared religious belonging. So, five answers indicate that the percentage of inhabitants declaring themselves to belong to the majority religion has decreased for the last 10 or 20 years: Sweden (from 95% to 70%), Belgium (from a high majority to 40%), Scotland (minus 11%), and Austria (from 73.35% to 65.8%). In the Netherlands, a recent survey (2015) reveals that 17% of answering people say that they believe in God, 25% say that they are atheist and 60% say that they “believe in something”, kind of “outside believers”. The answer of England and Wales mentions that in 2001, 71% of the population declared to be Christian but they were only 59,3% in 2011.¹¹

- Declarations of belonging and religious practice:

Most of the figures are based on more or less recent surveys in which people declare that they belong to one or another religion. However, between these declarations of belonging and the religious practice, there is sometimes an important gap. So, four other answers state that those who practise their religion are much less numerous than those who say that they belong to this religion: Sweden (lesser and lesser), Belgium (less than 10% practising and 43% belonging), Ireland (from 10 to 15% practising and 84% belonging) and Spain (the number of people practising is smaller than the number of those who declare themselves Catholics). Even in Poland, which the percentage of religious observance makes it one of the most religious countries in Europe, we find 40% practicing Catholics and 87% people saying that their belong to the Catholic religion.

⁹ At religious level, the Orthodox Church of Greece is autocephalous. The superior authority is the Holy Synod presided by the Archbishop of Athens. The members of the Synod are all Metropolitan bishops responsible for a Diocese. The Orthodox religion is the official religion of the Greek State and there is no separation between the Church and the State. Legally, the Church depends on the Ministry of National Education.

¹⁰ With the number of migrants, it could amount to about 300,000 believers.

¹¹ In 2001 on the contrary, 14,8% said they had no religion, while they were 25,1% in 2011; and from 2001 to 2011, the number of people who said they belonged to another religion (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, Buddhist) has lightly decreased.

These observations question religious practice. They suggest that the current religious practice is, still often, a legacy of the past.

- **The process of progressive religious effacement:**

Six answers mention the fact that society in their country experiences a process of progressive effacement of religious elements and references to give the public area a secular, non-religious, non-sacred character: Sweden, Belgium, Scotland, Hungary, Portugal and Spain. While the answer of France speaks about a pluricultural and plurireligious model of French secularism (*laïcité à la française*), which is challenged by a sharp increase in communitarianism, and seriously reinterrogated since the terrorist Jihadist attacks in January 2015.

2.1.3. Elements of analysis

2.1.3.1. The weight of history

The 19 answers attest that the general context of society in which are the Catholic schools is a landscape in which religions are present with other visions of life. The configuration of religions in this area is the result of several phenomena, but seems closely linked with the history of the countries or regions. Some main historical moments probably explain the current configuration. Therefore, we can assume that:

- The 1054 East-West Schism explains the development of the Orthodox rite, essentially in Greece and Romania, but also in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Albania.
- The development of the Ottoman Empire towards the North and West, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and their presence in the Balkans until the 18th century explains the development of the Muslim religion in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, the threat of the Ottoman Empire on Austria most likely explains the attachment of a large part of the Austrian population to the Catholic religion.
- The Protestant Reformations of Luther (started from Germany, it has spread out to the North of Europe with which Germany had important trade exchanges) and Calvin (started from Switzerland, it has reached France, Calvin's native country, then the Netherlands, Germany and Scotland) in the first half of the 16th century explain that, more massively in the North of Europe (Sweden) but also in the West (Netherlands, France, Switzerland) and the East (Hungary), there is a part of the population declaring to be Protestant, even though in these last four countries, the Catholic religion remains the most important religion.
- The Counter-Reformation in the second half of the 16th century probably explains the great percentage of inhabitants declaring to be Catholic in Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Italy.
- The Act of Supremacy in 1534, which separated the Church of England from Rome, explains the important proportion of Anglicans.
- The opposition to the Anglican schism in the first half of the 16th century partly explains the great percentage of inhabitants declaring to be Catholic in Ireland and Scotland.
- The recognition of the Catholic religion as State religion in Poland at the end of the 18th century is a factor explaining the very important Catholic majority of this country.
- Decades of Communism have marked Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Poland, Romania. This domination has had contrasted effects: in Poland, it has rather reinforced the Catholic identity; while in Romania, it has devastated the Catholic intelligentsia.

2.1.3.2. Two recent phenomena

Two phenomena that are more recent can explain a certain re-composition of the religious landscape:

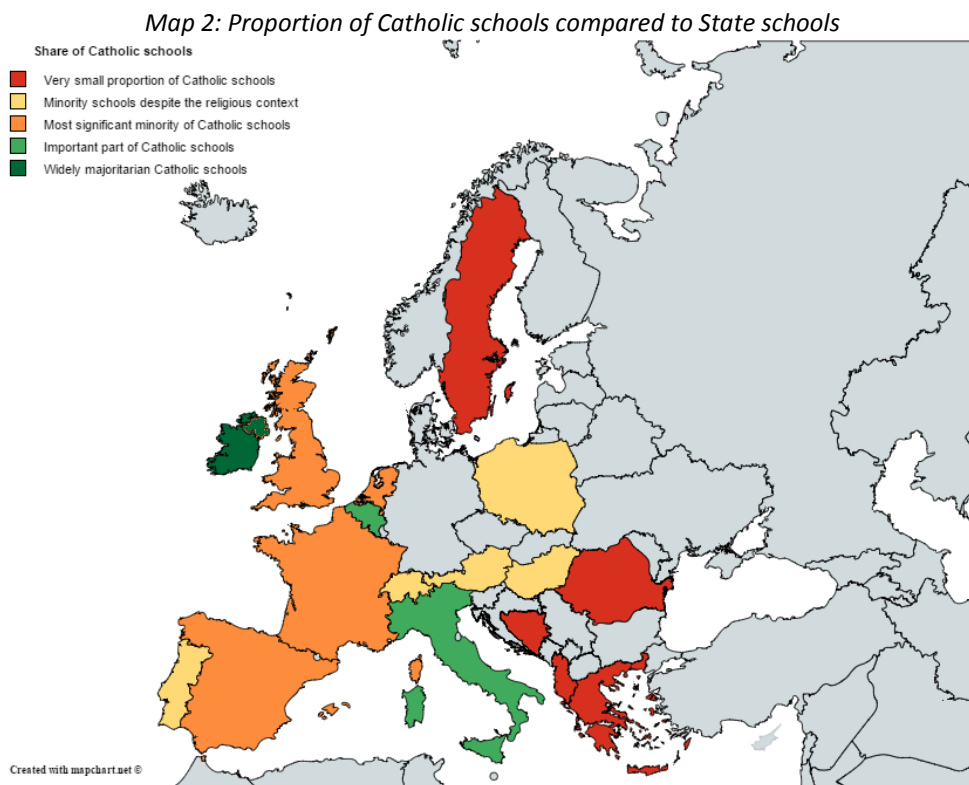
- The secularisation of a more and more important part of society. If this phenomenon is older in France, the cradle of the Enlightenment philosophy, according to the answers, it also occurs in other countries like Sweden, Belgium, Scotland, Hungary, Portugal and Spain.
- More or less recent, and even very recent, migrations explain the presence of an increasingly important part of populations declaring to be Muslim, where they were pretty non-existent, like in Belgium, France, Netherlands and to a lesser extent, in Italy and Greece. These migrations also bring along new Catholic populations, especially from Sub-Saharan Africa, towards these countries and the North of Europe (Sweden, Norway).

2.2. Proportion of Catholic schools compared to State schools

2.2.1. Some figures

- In five countries, the proportion of Catholic schools is very small: Sweden, with only three Catholic schools (among 4,912); Albania, since the Catholic schools welcome 1.14% of the school population (with important regional differences); Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there are 14 Catholic schools (1.52% of the schools). The proportion of Catholic schools in Romania and in Greece (32 Catholic schools in a total of 13,588) is quite small, too (+/- 0.5%)¹².
- In five countries, despite a largely Catholic context, Catholic schools are a real minority: Poland (2.5%), Portugal (2.5%), Austria (6.25%), Hungary (6.5%) and Switzerland where Catholic schools welcome about 1% of the school population.
- In England and Wales, the proportion of Catholic schools (2142, i.e. a little under 10% of all schools) corresponds to the proportion of the population that declares being Catholic.
- Catholic schools are a more significant minority in Scotland (20%), France (20%), Spain (18% of the schools and 25% of the school population, with regional variations) and the Netherlands (30% of the primary schools and 25% of the secondary schools).
- In two other countries, they represent an important portion of the educational system: 39.3% in Italy and 48% in FR Belgium¹³.
- Catholic schools are largely a majority in FL Belgium¹⁴ (68%) and Ireland (50% of the secondary schools and 91% of the elementary schools).

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2.2.2. Elements of analysis: links between religious presence and establishment of Catholic education

Thus, the religious landscape of the 19 countries or regions that answered to the survey is the result of their history. However, the establishment of Catholic education is not necessarily parallel to the establishment of religions in these 19 countries or regions.

¹² That can be explained by the strong persecution of Catholics during the Communist period, which has decimated the Catholic intelligentsia. It is only in the recent years that we have seen a rebirth of Catholic schools.

¹³ FR Belgium = French- and German-speaking Communities of Belgium.

¹⁴ FL Belgium = Flemish Community of Belgium.

We notice that:

- There are countries or regions where the establishment of Catholic education corresponds to the religious landscape: Sweden and Greece, where the small number of Catholic schools corresponds to the small minority of Catholics; Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, England and Wales, where the proportion of Catholic schools corresponds to the proportion of the population declaring to be Catholic.
- There are those where this establishment only partially corresponds to the religious landscape because the proportion of population declaring to be Catholic is more important than the proportion of Catholic schools: Scotland, France, Spain and Italy.
- There are those where there is no correspondence at all: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland and Hungary.
- It happens that a long proximity with the Catholic Church inspire the educational projects of State schools, Poland and Italy are good examples of this. But this fact carries with it the danger of a decline in the Catholic character of the education system in these countries, since the State, under pressure of the secular part of civil society, escapes from the Catholic sphere. The removal of crucifixes in Italian schools is probably the sign that this process is running.

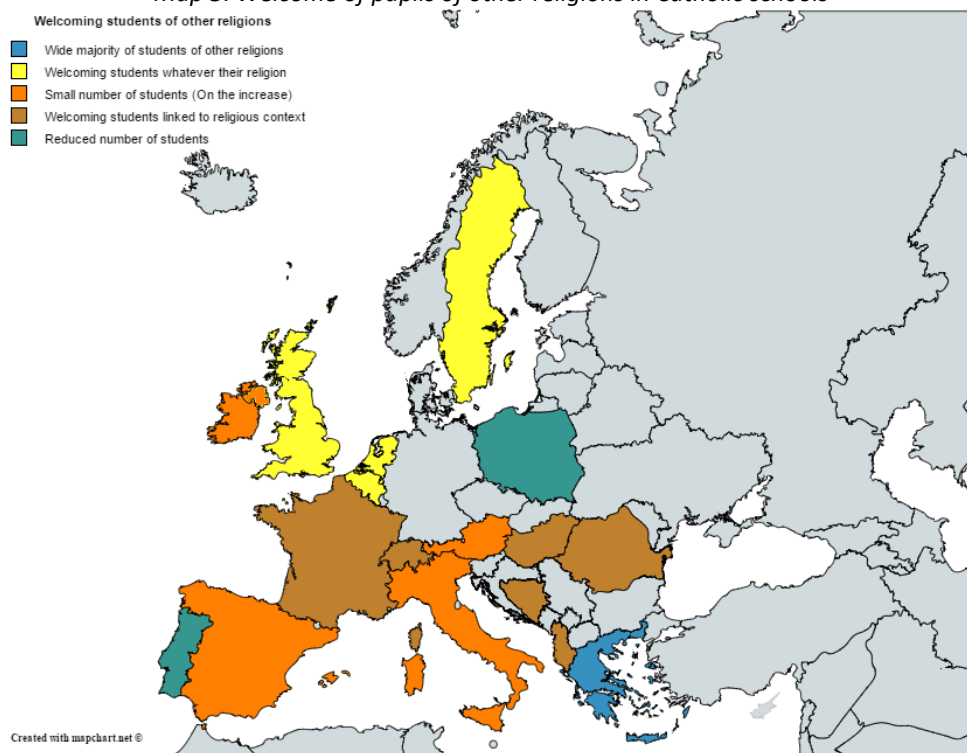
2.3. Welcoming pupils of other religions in Catholic schools

2.3.1. Some figures

- Greece is a special case since the total of pupils in Catholic schools amounts to 7,327 but only 365 pupils are Catholic.
- In five countries, Sweden, Scotland, Netherlands (what is true for Catholic schools is also true for Protestant schools), Belgium, and England and Wales (all Catholic schools are funded by the State, which means the great majority of them), Catholic schools are considered as a functional public service and are legally obliged to welcome all children whatever their religion, as far as they subscribe to the educational project of the school. It is thus frequent, even very frequent, to welcome pupils from other religions. The answer of the Netherlands even specifies that according to the small proportion of believers in the whole population, Catholic pupils are clearly a minority in the Catholic schools.
- In Spain, Italy, Ireland and Austria, the number of pupils from other religions welcomed in Catholic schools has increased for the last 10/20 years, a phenomenon connected with immigration waves, particularly in Ireland (coming from several countries) and Italy (coming from the North of Africa and the Middle East).
- In five countries, according to the population breakdown, it is normal to welcome pupils from other religions: in Albania, Orthodox and Muslim pupils¹⁵; in Romania, Orthodox pupils; in Hungary, Calvinist and Lutheran pupils. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Catholic schools are open to children from other religions and are the only multi-ethnic and multi-denominational schools. The answer of Switzerland says that it is normal to welcome children from other religions and that Catholic schools show an open and tolerant attitude, giving priority to ethical aspects and values.
- The answer of France indicates that the Catholic school is Catholic through its project and not through its recruitment: it welcomes pupils from all horizons.
- In Poland and Portugal, the number of pupils from other religions is small (even very small in Poland), but they are treated in the same way as Catholic pupils. Their spiritual freedom and religious practices outside the school are respected.

¹⁵ In the North of the country, the number of Muslim pupils tends to decrease as fully free Koranic schools are created.

Map 3: Welcome of pupils of other religions in Catholic schools



2.3.2. Elements of analysis

In all countries, it is common that Catholic schools welcome pupils of other religions. Welcoming all is in the heart of the educational project of Catholic education. It is on the basis of this principle that Catholic schools in France welcome pupils of other religions. In general, the proportion of pupils of other religions in Catholic schools is directly related to the religious landscape:

- The more homogeneous Catholic the religious landscape, the smaller the proportion of pupils of other religions can be (Poland, Portugal).
- The more heterogeneous the religious landscape (Albania, Romania, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland) or homogeneous Orthodox or Protestant (Greece, Sweden), the higher the proportion of pupils of other religions can be.

In some countries or regions (Spain, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Austria), the number of pupils of other religions in Catholic schools is increasing because of the recent migrations.

The fact that Catholic schools are considered a functional public service in some countries (Sweden, Scotland, Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and England and Wales) contributes to a welcoming of all. This observation suggest the following hypothesis: the better Catholic education is subsidised by public authorities, the more it is submitted to official constraints and especially the welcoming of all. When there is no funding by public authorities, Catholic education's identity is more noticeable and the schools more homogeneous. In such cases, the schools may choose their public and require that the beliefs of the families applying to enrol their children meet those promoted in the educational project of the school. The welcoming of all is no longer an obligation but a choice.

3. EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES¹⁶

3.1. Practices of interreligious dialogue

3.1.1. General remarks

The answers of Sweden, FR Belgium, Italy, Austria and Switzerland indicate that because Catholic schools are open to pupils from other religions, the daily “living together” creates contacts and exchanges between pupils from different religions. The answer of Bosnia¹⁷ specifies that, according to the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of the school, parents can choose between a class of Catholic religion, Islamic or Protestant religious education, and a course of ethics. A lesson of history of religions is common and compulsory to all pupils. No other school in the country proposes such a large and rich programme.

Conversely, the answer of Poland specifies that this question does not concern the country. It is rather toward the deepening of the Catholic identity, that schools and educational teams are led, in order to be witnesses to Christianity for those who belong to other religions or those without religion.

In the Netherlands, according to the diversity of population in Catholic schools in general, the question of interreligious and intercultural dialogue is inevitable. Nevertheless, the implementation of such dialogue is a problem for three reasons: (1) since few schools have a class of religion in their curriculum, there is a lack of teachers of religion. One of the consequences is that there are few experienced or expert resources to approach this dialogue in a positive way. Even if recent events have revived interest for religious issues, schools are poor for treating them; (2) material supports and pedagogical tools are often missing. Either teachers do it themselves or they use products that they find in publishing houses, with the danger that such houses are influenced by fashion; (3) at the same time, the national government tries to convince the schools that hesitate to create a course of citizenship. But this perspective is based on a concept that makes a large place to the autonomy of the subject at the expense of collective interests.

The answers of Ireland, Portugal and FL Belgium refer to brochures or Websites giving lots of examples of practices: Ireland: http://www.jmb.ie/images/stories/Manual-Other_Faiths_opt1.jpg
Portugal: <http://www.arigatouinternational.org>
FL Belgium: http://www.kuleuven.be/thomas/page/_or
http://ond.vvksso-ict.com/vvksomainnieuw/voet/voet.htm#_Toc343848269

Given the few resources available in Romania for formation initiatives, members of the Spanish Federation of Catholic Education have played a role of pioneers in Romanian land. Every year, there is a formation week on the educational project, the responsibility of the headteacher, or other topics like the class of religion, intercultural and interreligious education, etc.

In addition to these general observations, one finds in the answers examples of experiences enabling dialogue between differences.

¹⁶ The document of Scotland does not answer this question. The answer of Spain is completed with a file mentioning several experiences of this type in different schools.

¹⁷ The answer of Bosnia and Herzegovina specifies that all examples given in the rest of the document are coming from the Catholic School Centre of Sarajevo.

3.1.2. Initiatives within the school

- Preparation and participation in the world day of prayer, including all religions.
- In Romania, the different Christian Churches organise yearly the “*Octave of Prayer of all Christians*”.
- In Austria: “Prayer for Peace”. This is an event, which is organised every year and brings together in a single prayer “Voices of Christianity Islam and Buddhism”, texts of each religion, and the preparation of which provides opportunities for exchanges and dialogue.
- The Albanian school Maria Ndiemetare in Shkoder allows Muslim students to arrive after the Gospel sharing proposed to Catholic students. Muslim students often ask to take part in it and show sometimes more enthusiasm than Catholic students.
- Extra-curriculum activities – competitions, excursions, art programmes – on the occasion of the main religious feasts.
- In Romania, a training seminar for trainers has led to the production of a book “*Education for Religion and for Diversity Culture*”.
- In Greece, with highlights such as the feast of Virgin Mary or the feast of the congregation’s founders, Catholic and Orthodox pupils prepare and participate together in celebrations.
- In France, we underline two initiatives:
 - (1) Itinerary of Religious Culture: elaborated by *Médiaclap* Editions in the service of French Catholic Education (*Kim & Noé Culture*).
 - (2) The Calendar “Learning to Be” is a unique pedagogical tool developed in cooperation with the SGEC (French General Secretariat of Catholic Education) in 2006, of which the objectives are:
 - Making children and young people aware of life values and encouraging them to implement these values in everyday life: non-violence, compassion, prayer, respect for difference, forgiveness, service to the poor, etc.;
 - Informing on the great witnesses to peace (Mother Theresa, the French Abbé Pierre, Gandhi, the Dalai-Lama, etc.);
 - Giving an opening to religious culture, transmitting the values of peace and respect for each religious tradition, in the spirit of the gatherings in Assisi initiated by Pope John Paul II.
- In Switzerland, the dialogue is organised in the class of ethics or religious education.
- In England and Wales, among many others, we underline the following practices:
 - A series of assemblies led by students from the different religions present in school where they explain from their own perspective some key aspect of their tradition;
 - A shared celebration of the festivals of other religions within school “World faiths” week where different classrooms are set up as exhibition spaces for each of the world religions represented in school, with pupils from these religions as expert guides to the artefacts, music, images or food.

3.1.3. Initiatives toward the outside of the school

- Visiting other religions’ places of worship: Protestant temples, mosques, synagogues, Hindu temples, Buddhist temples.
- Humanitarian projects for more or less far regions, and awareness raising of social, economic and religious differences.

3.2. Practices of dialogue around the signs and symbols of religion

Some countries specify that they are not, or just a little, concerned by this question:

- The answer of Poland stipulates that this question does not concern the country.
- In Greece, it is difficult to start a dialogue on the respective signs of religions since the pupils do not have this experience (few children from religions other than Christian in the Catholic schools).

- The interreligious question does not actually exist in Hungary. As there are very few Muslims and Jews, pupils wearing the veil or the kippah are rare in schools, and virtually nonexistent in Catholic schools.
- The answer of the Netherlands specifies that there are no religious symbols in most Catholic schools. In some places, it is even forbidden for pupils and teachers to show signs or wear clothes expressing a religious affiliation.

On the contrary, other countries propose practical examples:

- In Sweden, the question of the veil came up automatically through the fact that young Muslim girls wished to wear it at school. This question is controversial. Some families of Christian refugees, who fled Muslim countries where they were persecuted, are hostile to the wearing of the veil. The educational teams decided to make it a lever to teach respect for all others and to show tolerance. But it is not easy.
- Following the introduction of crosses in the classrooms of a new building, classes of the 3rd and 5th years focused their reflection on the meaning of the cross through the realisation of a video that can be watched on *Youtube*. They really made an effort to work on the symbolism and find a unifying sense to the presence of crosses in the classrooms: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cck4Cl3Uq8g>.
- The special feasts of other religions are discussed in the life and schedule of Catholic schools.
- The Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians is an event that allow dialogue about the meaning that people from different religions attribute to their respective sign.
- In Austria, the preparation of the event “Voices of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism” makes a work on religious symbols possible.
- The visit of worship places of other religions enable to discover and understand the meaning of their symbols.
- In the Advent time, in FR Belgium, a teacher of religion built an enormous crèche, like a sheepfold, in the hall of the school. Great parents came with the children and found this very interesting, because the shepherd plays an important role in their culture, and that opens to dialogue.
- In Albania, only two Catholic high schools are officially authorised to show religious symbols. Unofficially, we find these symbols in other schools without that affecting Muslim pupils.
- In England and Wales, the new GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) religious studies examination (at age 16) requires a study of the religious significance of cultural forms of expression; this includes this sort of study from the perspective of two religions. Similarly, in religious education classes, the signs of religious identity are explored and the pupils, as ambassadors of their religion, share with the rest of the class what the objects mean to their tradition.

3.3. Practices of intercultural dialogue

- In France, two initiatives can be emphasised:
 - (1) Theological Café: for children in the classrooms of the diocese of Lille. A time for exchange and conditional pluriculture about a theme prepared by assistants in pastoral work with the teaching staff of the school.
 - (2) The Association ENQUÊTE, recognised by the Ministry of National Education: in France today, religious questions are often source of tension between communities that feed on mutual ignorance and lack of understanding. ENQUÊTE seeks to promote the “living together” and especially the discovery of secularism in order to facilitate the acceptance of the beliefs of each other, including atheism. ENQUÊTE develops play tools for discovering religious facts, for the attention of children (7-11 years old), under a secular and non-denominational angle. The aim is to enable the children to better understand the environment in which they live (speaking about construction of time, space, practices or symbolism), and to plant the seeds for making them able, once teenagers or adults, to talk about these questions in a peaceful way. ENQUÊTE has opted for two complementary approaches, the game and the immediate environment of the children (issues to which they can be confronted in their daily life), and works on several tools:
 - Workshops hosted by schools and social centres in Paris, Nogent sur Marne, Lille, Marseille and Lyon;

- A game “The Tree of Challenges”, proposed to primary teachers to enable them to deal with these topics in the framework of the programmes, and also to parents, educators or other team leaders;
 - Trainings to be able to talk about these topics with children, including eLearning courses;
 - A resource Website for finding tools;
 - A research-action work to make an assessment of secularism and religious facts in primary schools in France;
 - And eventually, complementary tools: sound ballads, illustrations, commented pieces of art, cartoons, etc.
- In Portugal, the Instituto de Promoção Social in Bustos develops an education and intercultural and social awareness project: “Make it Possible”.
 - In Hungary, the intercultural question especially arises in the relationship between gypsies (the Roms) and the other inhabitants of the country. As for a concrete example: in a school of Budapest, a teacher organises visits to a gypsy community in a village not far from the capital city. During the visit, the pupils play with the Rom children and help them do their homework. This aims to overcome prejudice.
 - Several answers mention the following practices:
 - Visiting Auschwitz, the Struhof, the Caen Memorial.
 - Participation in shows based on the dialogue of differences.

3.4. Elements of analysis

These examples of intercultural and interreligious practices show in abundance that the educational project of Catholic education contributes significantly to the formation of the citizen, and transversally to the various courses. It makes it in different ways:

- By promoting a duty of humanity, the one of remembering the suffering of some categories of population and commemorating the involuntary sacrifice of victims. This also implies the oral duty of States to recognise their responsibilities and thus tends to remedy the collective amnesia;
- By the constant effort to make differences, both cultural and religious, enter into dialogue. Who says dialogue says desire to discover different opinions, behaviours, habits;
- By concrete meeting or discovery approaches, either by inviting witnesses of other religions or by visiting places or communities of other religions.

This desire for openness to differences, concretely experienced, has two consequences: it invites pupils and students, and through them their parents, but also all members of the educational teams:

- On the one hand, to replace the prevailing individualism by a concern for the common good. By encouraging meetings and visits, Catholic schools send a clear message to all pupils: they invite them not to withdraw into themselves or into their identity. One must “make society” and build it all together.
- On the other hand, to deepen the reasons for this fundamental option from the tradition that founds it. Indeed, getting in relation, going on the paths to meet each and every one, whatever their condition or affiliation, is at the heart of Christ’s approach.

4. INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN THE PROGRAMME OF CATHOLIC RELIGION

4.1. Catholic religious education at school

4.1.1. In 16 countries or regions, teaching the Catholic religion at school is possible

It is even compulsory in Catholic schools (2h or 2h ½ per week), and is sometimes possible in State schools if parents ask for (Belgium, Austria, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain). In Italy, Poland and Portugal, a Concordat between the State and the Church has established provisions. The answer of Hungary stipulates that Protestant pupils can have their own class of religion thanks to an agreement signed in 2006 between the Hungarian Bishops' Conference and the leaders of the Calvinist and Lutheran Churches. In France, in the Catholic schools of Alsace-Moselle (under Concordat), teaching the Catholic religion is possible.

4.1.2. In three countries, teaching the Catholic religion at school is not or hardly possible

- In Sweden, it is forbidden for Catholic schools to teach religion by other means than giving “information on” Catholicism, and that may not be during school time. After school time, catechesis can be organised if parents wish so.
- In Albania, only two Catholic schools are authorised to organise a class of religion. In all other schools, whatever public or private, there is only a class of ethics. In these two schools, it is a lesson of religious culture in which an important space is given to discussion and dialogue. Children and families are satisfied with this, because knowledge of other religions is something precious in a multireligious context.
- In France, except for Alsace-Moselle, teaching the Catholic religion at school is impossible.

4.2. The programme of Catholic religion

4.2.1. In 16 countries or regions, the Bishops' Conference establishes the programme of religious education

In 16 countries or regions, the Church, the Bishops' Conference, establishes the programme, sometimes with the necessary approval of public authorities (Scotland, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Romania). In the Netherlands, even if this goes against the constitutional freedom of education, the inspectorate controls the democratic nature of religion classes to avoid community drift or radicalisation.

In England and Wales, the bishops require that at least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to religious education as the “core of the core curriculum”, from which all other subjects flow. Religious education in Catholic schools is inspected exclusively by the diocesan bishop.

Given the few resources available in Romania for formation, the European Committee for Catholic Education, in cooperation with the *Lumen Vitae* Institute in Brussels, has taken several initiatives for the training of teachers of religion and for the realisation of handbooks of religion

4.2.2. In three countries, the whole school curriculum is decided by the State

Here too, the situations of Sweden and France are different since the school curriculum is decided by the State and must be implemented in all schools. In Albania, the schools that are authorised to organise a class of religion may establish the programme. Other Catholic schools organise a class of ethics, which also deals with religious themes. The headteachers ensure respect of religious differences. In all cases, the classes of religion and ethics are not given by lay people but by religious sisters and priests.

4.3. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the programme of Catholic religion

4.3.1. Dialogue¹⁸ between the Catholic identity and other visions of existence in the programme of Catholic religion

In countries where the Bishops' Conference establishes the programmes of Catholic religion, these programmes have an intercultural dimension allowing dialogue between the Catholic identity (largely developed) and other visions of existence. This is an explicit competence to develop, which is present in the programmes of all levels. Some even explain that dialogue is at the heart of the dynamics of the class of religion.

The answer of England and Wales notes that this question appears to confuse the separate questions of intercultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue. It also specifies that population, in many Catholic schools, is far more multicultural than in other types of schools.

The answer of Hungary states that it is especially in the last year of high school (upper sixth) that the programme includes the theme of ecumenism and the great world religions.

EXAMPLES:

- The pedagogical relationship method aiming to make pupils partners in the search of meaning, and the interactions developed between them;
- The treatment of questions of existence, toward which turn the crossed looks of sciences and human sciences, diverse religious and philosophical traditions, and the resources of Christian faith. Example: Working on the question "Violence legitimate or not?", reflecting on the various forms of violence (media, technology,...), discovering violence in various cultures and religions, reflecting on the "violent" words and acts of Jesus;
- The meaning of religious feasts, Catholic and others, is discussed in the class of Catholic religion;
- Inviting secondary education pupils to participate in seminars that promote interreligious dialogue, or proposing to their teachers formations showing the interest and respect to have for the traditions, customs, signs, symbols or languages of other religions;
- A progressive and coherent process, throughout the school curriculum, of the development of the competence to enter into understanding of other religions and into dialogue with those who practise these religions: from the nursery school, then the primary school, then the first degree of secondary school and finally, the high secondary school;
- Exchanges and debates with witnesses of other religions invited in the classroom during the class of Catholic religion;
- In the framework of the class of Catholic religion, visit of other religions' worship places;
- Pupils build a "religious corner" in the classroom with their teacher who proposes them to bring some objects important for them or for their religion. Pupils bring a Koran or other objects. The Koran is presented with the Bible.
- In England and Wales, all Catholic religious education programmes must cover teaching about Judaism and the other major faiths, as well as an understanding of other Christian denominations, and how these relate to the Catholic faith. In the schools where there are non-Catholic pupils, this is done in such a way as to encourage ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Often pupils who are active in other religious traditions bring added richness to this dialogue.

The answer of Poland specifies that this question does not concern the country.

The answer of the Netherlands refers to the general remarks already mentioned in relation with the examples of practices.

¹⁸ Given their situation, Sweden and France logically did not answer the following questions.

4.3.2. Knowledge of different cultures and confrontation of points of view in the programme of Catholic religion¹⁹

The document of FR Belgium stipulates ‘yes’, but not in a systematic and comparative approach. It does it in a confrontation of points of view from a question of existence. It is not only about “talking about” other religions, but also about giving the floor to other religions and philosophies, within the class of religion and within the school, through living witnesses, documents and the word of pupils from different beliefs.

All answers confirm that the meeting with other religions and cultures, and the discussion of different points of view are an integral part of the programme of Catholic religion. At all levels and in all forms of education. This programme aims to develop the Christian moral act, attentive to the common good and the care for others. It aims to develop the pupils’ sense of responsibility towards the person, the community and the world.

EXAMPLES:

- This approach is confirmed by the testimony of a Belgian French-speaking teacher: *“In religion, the parts of a thematic are harmoniously organised around the existential roots, the cultural inputs, including the point of view of other religious or philosophical traditions and the resources of Christianity. All pupils express their opinion in the respect of our common values; they have thus been my allies for years in debates that want to be democratic. Together, we share our interrogations and I realise that mine also are theirs. Together, we walk on the long path of the reason based on the respect for others, listening and spirit of tolerance. Together, little by little, we try to build more just and equitable world in which nobody will stay on the station platform”.*
- The faith experiences of other religions lived by pupils are discussed in the class of Catholic religion.
- In England and Wales, because of the make-up of the schools, religious education classes encourage a dialogue between the different points of view. The question of intercultural dialogue, however, is not primarily the job of the religious education curriculum. It is rather the responsibility of the whole school, both within curriculum subjects and activities outside them.

The answer of the Netherlands refers to the general remarks already mentioned in relation with the examples of practices.

5. THE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN THE PROGRAMMES

5.1. Programmes other than those of religion in Catholic schools

5.1.1. The Belgian exception

Only Belgian Catholic schools have the freedom to establish their own programmes, in the respect of the skills base, common to all schools. When reading these programmes and seeing them implemented, we notice that far from impeding intercultural practices, this freedom significantly favours them.

5.1.2. In the other countries

In Sweden, Ireland, Austria, Portugal, Romania, France, Bosnia and Herzegovina, programmes others than the programme of Catholic religion are elaborated by the State (by the 10 cantons in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the Catholic schools must follow them.

¹⁹ The documents of Scotland and Spain do not answer this question.

This is also the case in Italy, Poland, Hungary and Spain. But in Italy, a great freedom is left to schools to adapt the programmes to their educational project, while in Spain, a small autonomy margin is left to schools to complete their study plans. In Poland and Hungary, the State defines the fundamental elements of the programmes needed for the preparation of external evaluations. However, some freedom margins are left to schools (in Hungary, 10% of time): Catholic education uses these margins to provide learning opportunities to children and young adults concerning the individual as a person, personal development, moral values, preparation to family life, cultural heritage and recent history.²⁰ However, it is more to strengthen the Catholic identity.

The answer of Switzerland states that the objectives have to be achieved, which only leaves limited space for specific programmes for Catholic schools.

The answer of the Netherlands refers to the general remarks already mentioned in the examples of practices.

5.2. The place given to the knowledge of the different cultures in the programmes other than those of religion in Catholic schools

The answer of Switzerland stipulates that the programmes others than the one of Catholic religion give place to the knowledge of other cultures.

This is also the case in Italy where all subjects of the first cycle plan to develop the competence to understand oneself and to understand the others, and the competence to recognise and appreciate the different identities, cultural and religious traditions, in a view of dialogue and reciprocal respect.

In Spain, there is in the programmes a space for the discovery and study of other cultures, approached under different points of view: historical, artistic, literary, religious...

In FR Belgium, traditionally the programmes of the course of human sciences are those that initiate to the knowledge of different cultures in their historical or geographical (physical geography or human geography) dimension. The programmes of the course of French give place to the discovery of authors from other cultures. The programmes of the course of modern languages always invite to the discovery of the cultural spaces in which the languages are used. The programmes of the course of ancient languages do the same, and the contact with ancient cultures, if it cannot lead to physical meeting, can still lead to reflect.

The answer of the Netherlands refers to the general remarks already mentioned in relation with the examples of practices.

EXAMPLES:

- The answer of Switzerland gives as examples: exchanges between students and heterogeneous classes.
- In Romania, each school is a Christian school that has as main objective to associate the acquisition of knowledge, integral formation of young people and transmission of the Gospel values, harmonious cooperation and reciprocal respect; each school is open to all pupils, without any exclusion because of religious convictions or social situation. Orthodox, Muslim or Jewish families begin to opt for Catholic schools for their children, because these schools are more attentive to the moral formation of young people.
- In Italy, the educational teams in elementary schools are encouraged to make the presence of children from different cultures and religions be an efficient lever of pedagogical action for intercultural dialogue.

²⁰ The answer of Poland also stipulates that the major problem of Catholic schools is gender ideology, to which they resist by educating educational teams and parents.

- In a recent article, Dutch Professor Marike van Kouwen describes two pedagogical methods for a “natural learning” of the dialogue: a comparative study of religions (developed by Henri Rijkssen) and a method based on the comparison of cultural models (developed by Hans Dalhuijsen). Thanks to this model, pupils learn to perceive in a positive way the intentions and behaviours of the others.
- In FR Belgium – Witness: *“In human sciences, we carefully look at human rights and freedoms, examining the history of the rights that we have acquired with so many struggle. We reflect on the authoritarianisms that have made the world turn vile, we discuss humanism in its most beautiful aspects, we look at men here and elsewhere who live in unworthy conditions, we talk about globalisation with its lot of progress but also of injustice”*. Still in FR Belgium: a formation module is proposed to primary and secondary teachers. It has been created by the group *“Les Voisins”* (the neighbours): a “reflection-action” group on intercultural dialogue at school, in partnership with the Theatre-Action, the Christian Centre for Relationships with Islam *“El Kalima”*, the Brussels Centre of Intercultural Action, and the Diocesan Service of Elementary Education in Brussels-Brabant.
Objectives: discovering tools and methods to optimise communication in the classrooms and with families.
Methodology, based on games and exercises:
 - To reflect and work on the notions of code, norm, taboo, beliefs and values.
 - To learn not to be self-centred and become more aware of one’s system of values.
 - To decipher, starting from witnesses, some cultural or religious expressions.
 - Presentation of “Iceberg”, an analyse tool inspired from Margalit Cohen-Emerique.²¹
 - Use of the propositions of Dennis Gira²² in *“Le dialogue à la portée de tous – ou presque”*.

6. A PARTICULARLY RELEVANT PRACTICE²³

As a conclusion, the people who answered to the survey were invited to point out a practice implemented in schools, which they consider particularly relevant to meet the challenge of intercultural dialogue. In fact, we notice that few answers focus on a practice as a conclusion. Here are the answers as they were expressed.

6.1. Albania

The answer does not identify a practice but expresses some considerations regarding the generalisation of a class of religion in education. The National Commission of Catholic Education in Albania is not favourable to this idea. It considers that cultural and ethical formation of teachers could lead to the risk that some teachers could manipulate or misinform children.

6.2. England and Wales

There are such a range of different situations, different mixes of intercultural and/or interreligious contexts, and many different strategies and examples of good practices, that it is not possible to highlight just one practice. Further details can be found in *“Catholic Schools and Other Faiths”* and *“Meeting God in Friend and Stranger”*, both documents published by the Bishops’ Conference.

6.3. Austria

Intercultural dialogue is at the heart of the Catholic schools’ project. It is not necessary to highlight one specific project.

²¹ Margalit Cohen-Emerique is Doctor in Psychology, expert in intercultural relation and communication.

²² Dennis Gira is a French from North-American origin Theologian, searcher and writer. Expert in Buddhism, he is Professor Emeritus at the Paris Catholic Institute.

²³ The document of Scotland does not answer to this question.

6.4. Belgium FL

The answer of the Flemish Community of Belgium reminds the heart of the educational project of the Catholic School in Flanders. It is formulated in terms of project for tomorrow through the “*katholieke dialoogschool*” (Catholic dialogue school) concept. What is it about?

At the crossroads of education, Church and society, the Catholic dialogue school welcomes every person, whatever his/her religious or philosophical background. Without exception, it invites all pupils (boarders, trainees, students), parents, staff members, organisers to participate in its educational project. From its Christian inspiration, the Catholic dialogue school wants to help each of them meet the challenges, mobilise themselves and be aware of their responsibilities.

- **As a school**, it is convinced that quality education is more than just instruction. Education forms individuals as free persons, competent and in solidarity with the others, who can find a meaning for their life and their life in society. “Learning to learn”, “learning to work”, “learning to live (together)” go hand in hand in the school. Their formation prepares children, young people and adults for the more and more complex world of today and tomorrow. They learn to explore this world and prepare themselves to take their place with commitment, critical mind and creativity. This school is an inclusive school. It is attentive to the unique talents of each pupil, with particular attention to those in difficulty.
- **As a Catholic school**, it works from the fundamental experience that man and world are both a gift and a task. Involved in a network of relationships with other human beings, with the whole society, with the world, human freedom is a given freedom, calling for responsibility. Confident that the most profound mystery of reality is love, the school takes this love – such as described in the Bible and such as incarnated by Jesus – as a guide to education, life and life in society. The Christian hope that emanates from this love and the faith in resurrection guide the school in its objectives and working.
- From this vision on man and world, **the Catholic dialogue school**, in this time of philosophical-religious pluralism, invites everyone to seek for dialogue with the other, with the whole man and with all men. To that end, it gathers Christians, Muslims, Jews, other believers, and non-believer humanists with those who want to find a meaning for their life and life in society. By sharing with everybody, each one learns to shape its own identity, and by discovering this identity, to reflect on it and deepen it. From its own mission, the school then expresses, in a contemporary and open way, the Christian voice in this exchange. It creates therefore a space for speaking for those who have difficulties to express themselves.

Making school in this way requires a profound commitment of all and provides space for growth and diversity. Through this dialogue, the Catholic school enriches itself and renews its Christian inspiration in the current context. From the tradition in which it works and in dialogue with its environment, the Catholic dialogue school wants to be a training place for living (together) in a world characterised by diversity and difference. Learning, in a critical and creative way, to confront with what is our own and what is different, what unites and what differentiates, enables people to contribute to an open, meaningful, tolerant and sustainable society, where there is a place for everyone – a world of which God Himself dreams.

6.5. Belgium FR

The answer of French-speaking Belgium does not really concern a practice but rather a way to live one’s profession in a Catholic school.

Testimony of a teacher of Catholic religion: *“Every day we are alert, we refuse the exploitation of men by their brothers, we are vigilant about abuse of power, extremism of all kinds and intolerance. And, believe me, if tomorrow I would live my job as a passage in many classrooms without soul, without reflection on the world around me, confined in my certainties, my books, my programmes, my knowledge, I will abandon this profession. I have chosen it because it is deeply human, because it allows young people in difficulty to give meaning to their live, because it allows to be alive, because it allows to meet wonderful people who make me grow every day...”*

We invite adult and young people to think about what “living together” implies: “it is good that I exist, it is good that you exist, and it is good that we exist together”. We invite young people, our youngsters, to preserve the treasure that is democracy, to be attentive to everything that could make us lose our freedoms, so fragile, and that we yet believe acquired forever”.

6.6. Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 1300 students, 800 are in elementary school, 250 in gymnasium and 220 in a medical higher institute. In compulsory education, one third is neither Catholic nor Croatian, and in higher education, there were last year a little less Croatian students (104) than Muslims (110) and Serbs (18). These figures show that we speak here about a true co-existence and multi-ethnic population. This also a sign and the confirmation of the possibility and necessity to live together and develop intercultural dialogue.

6.7. Spain

The answer of Spain ends with the promise to send soon a summary document of some experiences of Catholic schools in intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

<http://www.esuelascatolicas.es/pedagogico/Paginas/ProyectoEgeriaparalaintegraciondelalumnadoinmigrante.aspx>

6.8. France

Association “*Coexister*” (coexist): intuition, active coexistence, lived through common work, unity in action, at three levels in 20 local groups: through dialogue, solidarity and awareness. In each of these hubs of activity, different projects, programmes or events are proposed, with different ways to create a link based on religious diversity. Further than these three main poles of activity experienced in local groups, the national team also proposes formation and common life projects.

Dialogue – The dialogue pole aims at a better knowledge of oneself and the others. One can organise a visit of worship places, a debate, a lecture, a festive dinner, an exhibition or a movie screening. Everything is good to find a reason for discovering what makes the other different from me.

Solidarity – The solidarity pole aims to provide service experiences to young people who do not share the same identity or the same belief. When they say “I am” or “I believe”, they agree not to agree. But when they say “I do”, they do it together in favour of general interest. With elderly people, homeless people or orphans, through blood donation, collection of clothes or toys, the solidarity pole makes people focus on a common objective, whatever their differences.

Awareness – The awareness pole provides workshops and tools to fight against prejudice. By meeting pupils, students or managers, the youngsters of “*Coexister*” can testify to their experience within a group and hold high the message of active coexistence in the service of the “living-together”. Through very specific educational tools, they also can contribute to decoding the principle of freedom of conscience and religion, learning secularism, and deconstructing clichés for religious motives.

Formation – Since the action of a movement like “*Coexister*” requires strong knowledge of the religious fact and intercultural management, a training plan was established, which aims to meet the dual necessity to develop a common culture among its members and to enable them to acquire the competences needed for the specific mission entrusted to them. So trainings are proposed in different subjects: the religions represented in France, secularism, complete social skills on the position of interreligious dialogue, precise expertise on the implementation of projects developed by people under 35 years old and, finally, intercultural tools.

6.9. Greece

A school pastoral team organises in each school celebrations, formation sessions, and events for Catholic and Orthodox pupils. This concerns all pupils and even the staff members of the school. Another point to stress is Ecumenism. Our schools are ecumenism flagships; it is a richness; something that unites us as Christians; a tradition to continue and develop. We are concerned by keeping our own character: “the ecumenical mission of a Catholic school in a majority Orthodox environment”. This ecumenism is lived in everyday life, in mixed families (a Catholic spouse – an Orthodox spouse) that are quite numerous; it is experienced in its true dimension: the richness of two spiritualities and two traditions. We must add that the Catholic schools are, for the Orthodox environment of the country, one of the rare poles of knowledge and approach of the Catholic Church in Greece.

6.10. Hungary

In Hungary, the challenge of the intercultural dialogue is not relevant.

6.11. Ireland

The Irish Catholic schools are not just schools for Catholics. The practice that they would like to emphasise is the welcoming invitation to students of other faiths and none to join Catholic schools. The parents of such students are made aware that the school philosophy and practices are based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In most cases, such families are happy for their children to participate in all aspects of the life of the Catholic school.

6.12. Italy

In all Italian schools, public or private, the presence and use of a multicultural and interreligious calendar allows every person and every community to feel recognised, and gives opportunity to all to enter into intercultural dialogue.

6.13. Netherlands

The testimony of Michael Buyckx²⁴ is a good conclusion to the answer of the Netherlands. Michael Buyckx is classical philologist, theologian, professor of religion and deacon. He explains that he wishes to make a journey with his pupils. Combining personal subjects and more cognitive themes, this journey is less a cognitive discovery of religions than a deepening of what we believe. If in this class of religion, an atheist deepens his atheism, the objective is achieved. This research is based on the basic concepts of life and death, human dignity, shame, community, transcendence, forgiveness, exclusion, future and “knowledge of the heart”. The aim is to form citizens capable of developing an ethical opinion.

6.14. Poland

Intercultural dialogue challenges education to assume complete responsibility of cultural and religious identity, the identity of Catholic school based on Christ. It launches the challenge to create a school identity that supports students, teachers and parents as well. If we do not maintain and respect our own identity, such intercultural dialogue cannot be honest and coherent. Catholic schools must provide intellectual and spiritual formation in a responsible way, and base this on the teachings of both St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

6.15. Portugal

The visit and study of worship places of other religions lead to a reflection with the pupils on the value of intercultural dialogue for constructing peace.

6.16. Romania

An example of good practice developed by the National Catholic Colleges of Romania is the fact that the beginning of each school year is a liturgical feast in which participate all actors involved in education: pupils, teachers, priests, administrative personnel and other guests.

6.17. Sweden

The “Nations Day”: one day a year, we highlight a language, cultural or national community. The parents of the given community plan the programme for the day. It includes cultural activities (dance and song), learning activities (example: how to count?), a discovery of the history and geography of this community and, the most popular, a discovery of typical food.

6.18. Switzerland

Heterogeneous classes, exchanges of students speaking another language and coming from other regions or countries.

²⁴ Michael Buyckx is a Classical Philologist, Theologian, Professor of Religion and Deacon.

7. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

7.1. The challenges

On the basis of the present initiatives, detailed in the previous chapters, a question is inevitably raised: what are the future issues and challenges for Catholic education in Europe?

The religious landscape of the countries and regions that answered to the survey has constantly been reconstructed under the pressure of historical mutations. In a globalised world, in which movements of populations, ideas and cultures are probably accelerating, this development will continue inevitably. Indeed, the migration flow concerning the 18 countries/regions that participated in the survey is not ready to dry up. The rich ageing Europe will remain for a long time an attraction pole for young populations of the poor countries surrounding it.

We thus can assume that the future landscape will go toward increasing heterogeneity. Meeting this heterogeneity is undoubtedly the tomorrow's challenge for Catholic education. Making differences enter into dialogue through intercultural and interreligious practices is therefore today one of the basic principles of the educational project of European Catholic education. The many examples of diverse and original practices mentioned in the answers to this survey show that to meet this challenge, Catholic education in the different countries is not resourceless. Everywhere, especially where the necessity was most acute, Catholic education has shown intelligent creativity and generous inventiveness.

However a question remains: How not to "loose our soul" while allowing the dialogue of differences and encouraging the intercultural practices promoted by the Church today? How to hold together openness to all and rootedness in Christian belief?

This is a question to which Catholic education has been confronted in some countries sooner than in others, and the solutions proposed until now suggest three ways to meet the current challenges.

7.2. Three ways to meet the challenges

7.2.1. Exchanges of teachers

In accordance with the teachings of Christ, the first way suggests to go and meet the others, to establish dynamic interpersonal relationships. It is through visiting others, experiencing concretely the practices of intercultural and interreligious dialogue developed by others, that the sharing of resources will be the most fruitful.

7.2.2. Formation sessions

Following the same logic, formation sessions allow the sharing of experiences and expertise, and can help those who do not yet see the way to follow. Such formations will have a double objective:

- (1) To deepen our identity.
- (2) Within our identity, how to meet the difference.

7.2.3. International colloquium

The aim of an international colloquium is to establish a community of views, a community of ideas on the analysis of the different situations of Catholic education in Europe regarding the question of the interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and the actions to take for meeting the future challenges in this matter.