THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY’S
SEX EDUCATION PROGRAM:
THE MEETING POINT
A CRITIQUE BY
THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS
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INTRODUCTION

The Meeting Point is a curriculum created to present Catholic students, 13–18 years old, with the ‘facts of life’. This collection of documents was compiled by the Pontifical Council for the Family, based on input from married couples in Spain and the Universidad Católica San Antonio in Murcia. The materials are free and include texts for students and teachers, activity books, and movie recommendations. The curriculum is designed to be offered in mixed male/female classes and provides material that incorporates modern psychology and modern pedagogy.

This document would be disturbing as sexual education in any context, but the fact that it is the product of a Vatican Pontifical Council is scandalous. The document communicates sensitive material through the use of graphic and immoral text and images (taken from secular, ‘teen’ culture), with the idea that this will resonate more effectively with young people.

In 1931, the Vatican was asked whether ‘the method called “sex education”’ could be approved. The Holy Office provided this answer:

‘No. In the education of youth, the method to be followed is that hitherto observed by the Church and the Saints as recommended by His Holiness the Pope.... The first place is to be given to the full, sound and continuous instruction in religion. Hence, no approbation whatever can be given to the advocacy of the new method even as taken up recently by some Catholic authors and set before the public in printed publications’.

This curriculum violates Church teaching on sexual education and is offensive to Catholic morals. In matters of sexual morality and in the context of this review, it will be helpful to remember the quotation of St Thomas Aquinas: ‘an action is good when good in every respect; it is wrong when wrong in any respect’.
THE POSITIVE CONTENT

There are some limited positive aspects of these documents. The following positive points are mentioned in the curriculum:

- The human person is either male or female – there no mention of gender theory.
- Men and woman are equal in dignity, but are different physically and emotionally – and complement each other through these differences.
- Purity is the ‘virtue that disposes us to treat our body with holiness and honour’.
- Modesty and chastity before marriage are mentioned as virtues.
- Self-control and self-mastery in relating to members of the opposite sex are deemed to be important.
- The importance of free will in the moral life is stressed.
- Concupiscence is mentioned as a ‘darkness prevent[ing] us from seeing the fullness of the person in a proper and complete way’.
- There is a brief condemnation of in vitro fertilization and brief mention of the ‘sanctity of life’.

THE NEGATIVE CONTENT

The small amount of aforementioned good in this program, however, is thoroughly corrupted by a large amount of evil. The curriculum contains the following negative elements:

- Sexually explicit and suggestive images are shown to children.
- Immoral movies are recommended for viewing and discussion – specifically, three R-rated films with explicit sex scenes.
- The role of parents in the sexual formation of children is minimized and the role of educators is maximized.
- There is no identification or condemnation of aberrant sexual behaviours – such as fornication, prostitution, adultery, contracepted-sex, homosexual activity, and masturbation – as objectively sinful.
- There is very little warning of the dangers of pornography.
- No distinction is made between mortal and venial sin.
- The documents make no reference to any of the Ten Commandments (including 6th and 9th).
• There is no warning about the possibility of hell and the eternal separation from God for committing grave sexual sins.
• There is no recommendation of the Sacrament of Confession after committing grave sin.
• Boys and girls are to be taught together in the same class.
• Boys and girls are to share together their understanding of phrases such as: ‘what does the word sex suggest to you?’ and ‘point out where sexuality is located in boys and girls’.
• The ‘process of arousal’ is discussed.
• Abortion is not spoken of as gravely evil, but only that it causes ‘strong psychological damage’.
• Misleading phrases, such as ‘sexual relationship’, are used to indicate not the sexual act, but a relationship focused on the ‘whole person’.
• The word ‘love’ is rendered meaningless: e.g., life’s purpose is that we are solely ‘made to love’; virtues are described as ‘strategies for love’; sins are described as ‘wounds of love’; the greatest evil is ‘living love badly’: modesty allows us to discover the ‘beauty of love’; etc.
• Heterosexuality is referred to as something to be ‘discover[ed]’.
• Homosexual (and virulently anti-Catholic) icons such as Elton John are used as examples of gifted and famous people (albeit not mentioning his activism).
• ‘Dating’ (as opposed to ‘courtship’) is suggested as a step towards marriage.
• Celibacy is not stressed as the supreme form of self-giving in human sexuality.
• There is no mention of Christ’s teaching on marriage.
• Human sexuality is treated as a separate subject instead of as something integrated into the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Church.

THE EXPLICIT & SUGGESTIVE CONTENT

The explicit and suggestive content of these documents constitutes the primary objection to this curriculum. The images described hereafter are inappropriate for adults, let alone children. However, given that these are specifically designed for children, we condemn this gross perversion in the strongest possible terms. Although some images are occasionally used to explain something negative, there is no Catholic justification for using them in this context. Here are some examples of the objectionable material:
• A photograph is shown of a young couple posing in front of a statue of two people engaging in sexual activity. The statue is meant to interpret the interior thoughts of the couple.
• A different sculpture showing a sexually explicit embrace is used as a discussion point.
• A magazine advertisement of fruit depicted as women’s breasts is used to demonstrate sexual innuendo in advertising.
• A magazine advertisement for a hand-held computer game depicts an obviously nude couple embracing in bed, with a sexually suggestive tagline.
• A story used as a point of discussion uses vulgar phrases including, ‘pick up some chicks’, ‘get laid’, ‘hook up’, and refers to a potential woman in sexual conquest as ‘my trophy’.
• A photograph of an extremely immodestly dressed woman (in an extremely immodest pose) dancing provocatively with a man is used as a point of discussion.
• A photograph of American President Barack Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy blatantly looking at a woman’s buttocks is used.
• A photograph of a scantily-clad prostitute actively soliciting a client through the window of a car is shown without context.
• There is occasional use of somewhat obscured screen-shots of pornographic websites.
• The program specifically requests that questions about sex be discussed with boys and girls mixed together.
• A photograph is shown of an elderly couple having a drink in a café with a sexually explicit image of a nude couple on the wall behind them. Youths are asked in this activity: ‘Which of the two couples is having a sexual relationship?’
• An image of fully nude (and anatomically correct) male and female statues are to ‘lead the youth to recognize sexual difference’.
• The most infamous image from these documents shows unmarried, young men and women setting up camping tents together. One man is touching a woman’s buttocks and another woman has her hand on another man’s upper thigh.

LACK OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
More subtle, although nonetheless important, is the failure to stress the role of parents in educating children about human sexuality. It must be stated clearly that, although the document does not specifically deny parents’ participation in the sexual education of their children, it clearly stresses institutional education instead. This is a departure from the Catholic concept of subsidiarity and previous Church instruction on the matter.

- In the 518 pages of the program, specific parental involvement happens on one occasion, namely, when students are told to ‘ask your parents and grandparents to show you photographs of when they were children and young adults, and look at the changes together’.
- Classroom teachers, however, are tasked – more than 40 times – with explaining, describing, discussing, supervising, moderating debate, and reviewing materials with the students.
- Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, stated that the ‘uniqueness of the project’ consists in that it ‘combines attention to teachers and to the young person or adolescent’.
- Monsignor Carlos Simón Vázquez, the Council’s undersecretary, said, ‘an entire inner pedagogical articulation is impregnated by the teacher-pupil dialogue, presented as one of the assets of this project that can be implemented at different stages of the life of the young’.

However, there is no mention of the historical view of the Church on this matter. To stress how cautiously sex education must be handled, it is worth quoting the Church over the years:

- Pope St Pius V: ‘In explaining this [sixth] commandment, the pastor must have a prudent reserve. He should treat the matter with delicacy, and with fewer words rather than more. For there is reason to fear that detailed explanation of how one can transgress against this commandment can actually be conducive to such transgression, by stimulating – even unwittingly – the very passions which this commandment would restrain’.
- Pope Pius XI: ‘Far too common is the error of those who, with dangerous assurance and under an ugly term, propagate a so-called sex-education, falsely imagining they can forearm youths against the dangers of sensuality by means purely natural, such as a foolhardy initiation and precautionary instruction for all indiscriminately, even in public; and, worse still, by exposing them at an early age to the occasions, in order to accustom them, so it is argued, and as it were to harden them against such dangers’.
Pope Pius XI: ‘False also and harmful to Christian education is the so-called method of ‘coeducation.’ This too, by many of its supporters, is founded upon naturalism and the denial of original sin; but by all, upon a deplorable confusion of ideas that mistakes a levelling promiscuity and equality, for the legitimate association of the sexes. The Creator has ordained and disposed perfect union of the sexes only in matrimony, and, with varying degrees of contact, in the family and in society.’

Pope Pius XII: ‘All Catholic educators, worthy of the name and their mission, are fully aware of the overwhelming importance of supernatural forces in man’s sanctification. But even the principles so wisely explained by our predecessor, Pius XI, in the encyclical Divini illius Magistri, regarding sexual education and the related problems, are pushed aside with a smile of compassion: Pius XI, it is said, wrote these things twenty years ago for his own times! The world has gone a long way since then!’

Pope John Paul II: ‘Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance whether at home or in educational centres chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents’.

CONCLUSION

The Meeting Point does not incorporate Church teaching on sexual education and is harmful to children in its violations of Catholic morality. The curriculum’s use of explicit words and images, its capitulation to secular morality, its failure to instruct on the nature and effect of sin, and its derogation of the role of parents in the formation of their children make this document totally unacceptable. The Knights of Columbus Fr Kenneth Walker Council #16076 strongly condemns this curriculum and cannot recommend it. We reject this collection of documents in toto and vociferously condemn the offensive material it contains. We recommend that the documents are completely rewritten – with the perennial teachings of the Catholic Church as the source of wisdom on these sensitive matters.
APPENDIX:
SAMPLE OF ORGANIZED CATHOLIC REACTION

The Cardinal Newman Society: ‘We find that The Meeting Point represents a significant break from the traditional approach to Catholic instruction and learning about human sexuality. It makes frequent use of sexually explicit and morally objectionable images, fails to clearly identify and explain Catholic doctrine from elemental sources, including the Ten Commandments and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and compromises the innocence and integrity of young people under the rightful care of their parents’.

Dr Rick Fitzgibbons, psychiatrist and director of the Institute for Marital Healing: ‘In my professional opinion, the most dangerous threat to Catholic youth that I have seen over the past forty years is the Vatican’s new sexual education program, The Meeting Point. My immediate professional reaction was that this obscene or pornographic approach abuses youth psychologically and spiritually’.

Christine Vollmer, founding member of the Pontifical Academy for Life and founder of the Latin American Alliance for Life: ‘[The Meeting Point has] fallen into the trap of thinking that using material of a rather crude and sexy variety will awaken the interest of adolescents. Sadly, these will have either the effect of arousal or of turning off the kids, and many parents will feel disappointed or even betrayed by this surprising error in the program’.

Judie Brown, president of the American Life League: ‘It’s bad enough when Planned Parenthood pushes perverse forms of sex education into our schools. For the Vatican to jump on that bandwagon is a nightmare scenario. Someone must be asleep at the wheel, and it’s high time for them to wake up!’

Dr Thomas Ward, founder and president of the National Association of Catholic Families and a Member of the Pontifical Academy for Life: ‘I find it monstrous that an official arm of the Church would not only create a sexual education program for teens but one that bypasses parents as the primary educator of their children’.
John Smeaton, CEO of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children and co-founder of Voice of the Family: ‘In the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis included a section titled the ‘need for sex education.’ Pro-life and pro-family leaders warned at the time that the wording of the pope’s appeal, and his failure to uphold the rights of parents in this section, risked playing into the hands of powerful international agencies that were pushing damaging sex education programmes. Now, three months later, we see the pope’s own Pontifical Council for the Family releasing a programme filled with problems’
REFERENCES


