

# Engaging Young People With Living Reality



## The Bishop Speaks

In my conversations with young Catholics from many different walks of life I find many of them have great faith and love in God and an eagerness to live good and fruitful lives as members of the Body of Christ, the Church. In the course of conversation it often becomes apparent however that many of them find it difficult to reconcile their faith with reason, to see how they can accept both religion and science.

How is it, for example, that so many people think the Church is opposed to science when the Church actually has the oldest scientific institution in the world – the Vatican Observatory? I think a part of it is because they do not know our story, our Tradition. I don't just mean our history. I mean being immersed into Catholic literature, art, thinking, and way of life.

These two important things – seeing how faith and reason fit together, and knowing our Tradition to see how our past has got us to the present – are at the heart of a radical new Senior Religious Education curriculum for Years 11 and 12 that will be launched later this year and will begin a staged rollout in schools next year. The course has been submitted to the NSW Education Standards Authority and we hope and expect to receive approval mid-year.

The new course called *Studies in Catholic Thought* is the fruit of a two-year project that I have been chairing on behalf of all the Bishops of NSW-ACT. The bishops were keen that the new course be designed on the liberal arts approach so that students are not simply examining the Catholic faith and way of life as outsiders looking in like scientists

examining creatures under a microscope.

Instead, we want the students to be able to study the Catholic faith from within the religious tradition, being immersed into the Scriptures, theology, philosophy, history, the texts and fine arts of our Catholic Tradition in order to come to a deeper understanding of God the Trinity, of Jesus

Christ as both divine and human, of the human person, of the Church, and of our place and role in the world.

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We wanted the new course to assist the students to embark on a wonderful journey into the great questions of life and thus to come to know themselves better too. We want our young people to develop critical thinking and moral reasoning and to be able to know, understand, celebrate, and live out their Catholic faith. I believe it's Divine Providence that this is happening precisely during the "Year for Youth". When we began this project two years ago we didn't even know there was going to be a Year for Youth in 2018.

The course is unapologetically Catholic and is designed to be robust and challenging to stretch our young people, navigating them into areas that they won't have previously studied. We hope the new course will help produce students who are not only well-formed in the Catholic faith but also critical thinkers who will not be afraid to stand separate from the crowd.

Currently in our senior high schools in NSW about 20 – 25% of students undertake Catholic Studies while the bulk undertake Studies of Religion in which students explore a number of religions and



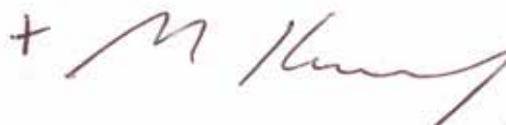
the place of religion in society. I believe there is need for such a subject, but I believe there is also a great need for our Catholic Youth to develop an adult faith and an adult understanding of their faith. I would hope and expect that one common senior Catholic Religious Education course throughout the state that is theologically based and that appeals to both the head and the heart will help to lift the profile and reputation of Catholic Religious Education amongst our students and our teachers.

*Studies in Catholic Thought* will be unique in that it is the first common course in Religious Education to be developed for all dioceses in NSW. It has been a long time coming. As early as 2009 the Catholic Bishops of NSW agreed in principle to taking a coordinated approach to Religious Education in senior high schools but the conditions at that time made it difficult.

In 2015 I raised the matter with my brother bishops because the circumstances seemed more timely, that is, the 6 existing Catholic Studies courses at that time had all been written over a decade ago and so

did not necessarily reflect the developments of the Australian Curriculum. Also, many of the other key learning areas had undergone extensive review in recent years. So why shouldn't we also undertake an extensive review of Catholic Studies, the most important subject in our schools?

By developing one common Catholic Studies course, which will now be known as *Studies in Catholic Thought*, the NSW Bishops look forward to a strengthening of the subjects appeal; the immersion of more young people into the richness of our Catholic Tradition; increased opportunities for cooperation and sharing between dioceses of resources and professional development.



**Most Reverend Michael Kennedy**  
Bishop of Armidale