

# Spanish prelates say class teaches alternatives to traditional values

MADRID, Spain – Spanish church leaders have said a new government-mandated class teaches alternatives to traditional values.

Cardinal Antonio Canizares Llovera of Toledo said the elementary and high school curriculum “does not respect what parents want for their children.”

Requiring the class, which was designed by the Spanish parliament to teach democratic and constitutional ideals, takes away a parent’s right to decide the moral education of their children and gives that right to the state, while imposing a single-value system for all, Cardinal Canizares said Oct. 2 in an interview with the Spanish COPE radio station.

The class, called “Education for Citizens and Human Rights,” is required at both public and private schools.

Cardinal Antonio Rouco Varela of Madrid, president of the Spanish bishops’ conference, said in September that “the subject signifies a problem for the Christian conscience” because it teaches an alternative to traditional values in highlighting issues like abortion and same-sex relationships.

Both cardinals pointed to an article in the Spanish Constitution that guarantees the right of parents to ensure their children receive “religious and moral formation in accordance with their own convictions.”

Auxiliary Bishop Antonio Martinez Camino of Madrid, the bishops’ conference spokesman, said Oct. 8 that even if the class were to have a Catholic orientation the bishops would still be against it because “imposing the Catholic morality on all Spaniards goes against the social doctrine of the church.”

But supporters of the class argued that it familiarizes students with the Spanish Constitution, prevents social dysfunction and teaches tolerance, solidarity and peace.

Adela Cortina, ethics and political philosophy professor at the University of Valencia, said Oct. 6 that criticisms of the class were an “attack against common sense.”

Ms. Cortina added that in 2002 the European Commission recommended the promotion of “citizen ethics” to form “more responsible and just people.” Stressing the importance of teaching students to avoid destructive paths, Ms. Cortina said there is a “European worry” that “the good ... students end up picking up a rifle and killing classmates.”

Spain’s Supreme Court is expected to decide in May whether to let students opt out of the class on the basis of conscience.

Meanwhile, regional courts have ruled both for and against giving parents a choice. In some cities, the judicial rulings give students temporary alternatives to attending the class, such as community service.

Pending the high court’s ruling, Catholic schools plan to adapt the material to Catholic ideology. The Archdiocese of Madrid, for example, has created a guide to help teachers address sensitive issues such as homosexuality.

Marta Cesteros, a teacher at Salesianos Atocha, a high school and elementary school in Madrid, told Catholic News Service Oct. 10, “The basic problem is not that the material imparts certain beliefs but the simple fact that it opens the door to (answering) moral questions in classrooms.”

Spain’s National Catholic Federation called the class an “ideological experiment” that does not transmit knowledge but implants convictions.