

WORKING DOCUMENT

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN MALTA

Reflections by the Catholic Community

**ARCHDIOCESE OF MALTA
SECRETARIAT FOR CATECHESIS**

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This document was prepared by Dr Adrian Gellel with the help of Mr. Lionel Chircop, Ms. Miriam Debono Curmi, the late Mgr George Deguara, Bro. Saviour Gatt, F.S.C., Rev. Dr Emanuel Magro, Mr. Emmanuel Micallef, Mr. David Polidano, Rev. Dominic Scerri O.P., Mr. Emmanuel Schembri, and Rev. Dr Carl-Mario Sultana.

Chapter 5, on Religious Counselling, was prepared by Mgr Joseph Pace and edited by Dr Gellel.

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations	5
Executive Summary	7
1. Premises	
1.1 Introduction	11
1.2 Method	11
1.3 Reasons and basis for change and consolidation	12
1.3.1 Maltese Signs of the Times	12
1.3.2 Local Challenges	15
1.4 Preliminary Notions	16
1.4.1 Religion	16
1.4.2 Education	18
1.4.3 Religious Education	18
1.4.4 Catechesis	20
1.5 Way Forward	20
2. Present situation of Religious Education	
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 Education in Malta	21
2.3 Legal framework for R.E.	22
2.4 The R.E. Cycles	22
2.4.1 Primary level R.E.	23
2.4.2 Primary Textbooks and Resources	23
2.4.3 Particular Concerns	23
2.4.4 Secondary Level R.E.	24
2.4.5 Secondary Textbooks and Resources	25
2.4.6 Particular Concerns	25
2.5 Teachers and their formation	26
2.8 Conclusion	26
3. A Vision for Religious Education in Malta	
3.1 Introduction	27
3.2 Catechesis and R.E.	27
3.3 Religious Education	29
3.4 Scope of R.E.	30
3.5 Principles for developing the aims of R.E	31

3.6	Aims of R.E.	32
3.7	The core values in the teaching of Catholic R.E.	33
3.8	A further note on R.E. in Catholic Church Schools	34
3.9	Conclusion	34

4. Implementing the Vision for Religious Education in Malta

4.1	Introduction	35
4.2	The establishment of a R.E. Office for Malta and Gozo	35
4.3	The Cycles and Syllabi of R.E.	35
4.4	Didactic support materials for the use in R.E.	36
4.5	Areas in need of immediate further attention	37
4.5.1	Teachers in the Primary	37
4.5.2	R.E. at Secondary level education	37
4.5.3	The R.E. teacher	38
4.5.4	R.E. in Church Schools	39
4.5.5	Other Religions	39
4.5.6	Modes of Regulation and other polices	40

5. Religious Counselling

5.1	Introduction	41
5.2	The present situation	41
5.3	The way forward in Religious Counselling	42

ABBREVIATIONS

- AŽ* ARĊIDJOĊESI TA' MALTA, Dokument tas-Sinodu Djoċesan, *Adolexxenti u Żgħażaġh*, Malta 2003.
- AG* SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Ad Gentes* On the Missionary Activity of the Church, 1965.
- CCC* *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- CT* POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979)
- CS* SACRED CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *The Catholic School*, 1977.
- DGC* CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *Directory General for Catechesis*, 1997.
- DP* PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflections and Orientations on Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 1991.
- DV* SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 1965.
- EA* POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, (22 January 1999)
- ECS* CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*, 2007.
- EN* POPE PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (8 December 1975)
- FR* POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*, (15 September 1998)
- KS* ARĊIDJOĊESI TA' MALTA, Dokument tas-Sinodu Djoċesan, *Knisja u Soċjetà*, Malta 2003.
- KM* ARĊIDJOĊESI TA' MALTA, Dokument tas-Sinodu Djoċesan, *Il-Kuntest Malti* Introduzzjoni għad-dokumenti tas-Sinodu Djoċesan, Malta 2003.
- LCS* CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *Lay Catholics in Schools. Witnesses to faith*, 1982.
- NA* SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration *Nostra Aetate* On the Relation of the Church to the Non-Christian Religions, 1965.
- NDC* UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005.
- PP* POPE PAUL VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, (26 March 1967)
- RDE* CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 1988.
- R.E.* Religious Education
- XK* ARĊIDJOĊESI TA' MALTA, Dokument tas-Sinodu Djoċesan,, *Xandir tal-Kelma*, Malta 2003.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Maltese society recognizes that it is its duty to educate and form children and adolescents holistically. It is precisely because of this desire that students are also taught in the religious, spiritual and moral dimensions.

At present Religious Education (R.E.), covers 7.8% of the whole compulsory education, 9.52% at the primary level and 5.71% during secondary education. The present syllabi and texts were designed in the 80's and in the 90's for the primary and secondary sectors respectively. The need and the will for change derive primarily from

1. the changes in society,
2. the changes in the composition and the lives of families,
3. the fact that Religious Education, as taught in schools, does not reflect the developments in theories and research in the fields of Education and Religious Education,
4. the changes that have occurred in the teaching profession, especially in the primary sector,
5. the will to move the emphasis from Religious Knowledge to Religious Education, where the affective education of students is taken more seriously, and
6. the will of the Church to be faithful to its Evangelizing mission.

Indeed the importance of R.E. for the Church stems directly from its purpose of existence of facilitating the actualization of the Kingdom of God among humans. Even though the line of distinction is a fine one, it is clear that, in today's context, R.E. is not Catechesis. While Catechesis is the maturation of faith of the disciples of Christ, the audience and the context of R.E. is increasingly a means for the Church to provide a service and to dialogue with society. Thus R.E. is easily placed within the pre-evangelizing and initial proclamation actions of the Church. R.E. contributes to the holistic development of students by providing the language and the skills to access and express their religious and spiritual dimensions. If designed and delivered well it may lead students from a non practicing background to start or continue their journey and will surely confirm students who have already initiated their faith journey.

Upon further reflection on the nature of R.E. in Catholic schools, one should be reminded that the distinctive and specific aims of the Catholic school lie precisely in its religious dimension. The promotion and the education of the human person holistically are at the centre of the educational project of the Church. Our aim is to help the human person become more human. Thus, in Catholic Schools, Religious Education is to be considered the principal subject which is in dialogue and interconnected with the other scholastic disciplines.

In the Maltese context the main goal of Catholic Religious Education is

- i. to educate the spiritual and religious dimensions of students, and
- ii. to encourage the development of a healthy relationship with Self, Others, Creation and God through Christ, the model and source of life for all humanity, and the only way to the Father.

Due to its scholastic nature, R.E. is to be developed according to the language and theory of education and it is to be guided by the principles of the Christian message.

Various initiatives are suggested in order to implement the vision and aims of R.E., namely,

1. the formal setup of a R.E. office which caters for the needs of all schools, teachers, students by promoting research, coordination of all available resources, preparation and design of syllabi and textbooks, ongoing formation of teachers,
2. the adequate provision of the R.E. Office with the necessary financial and human resources
3. the setup of permanent working groups composed of pedagogy and content experts within the R.E. Office to prepare and design didactic materials
4. to prepare and present, by the end of 2008, for the approval of the Maltese Episcopal Conference the syllabi for pre-grade and for the 11 years of compulsory education together with a strategy for the development and publication of textbooks and teaching aids,
5. to have a R.E. that forms students holistically by respecting the requirements of students, the changes in society and by being faithful to Christ, by giving priority to,
 - (a) the joy and gratefulness of life in its fullness,
 - (b) the development and formation of one's identity,
 - (c) educate in moral and ethical responsibility,
 - (d) live in community in respect of diversity and in true love of neighbour,
 - (e) contribute to understanding and construction of Maltese culture and identity,
 - (f) understand how religion sustains and contributes to the development of societies, in particular western society, through the arts, politics, sciences, education and philosophy,
 - (g) have a healthy knowledge of Holy Scriptures, Hagiography, the Sacramental life, Liturgy and Ecclesial life,
 - (h) educate the aesthetical sense, emotions, attitudes and values, and,
 - (i) have an understanding of other religions and be respectful of different worldviews,
6. to clarify the identity of the R.E. teacher
 - (a) by consolidating the process of the certification of suitability,
 - (b) through a sense of collegiality among R.E. teachers, by promoting and facilitating departmental meetings and regular professional ongoing development,
 - (c) by encouraging Spiritual Companionship for all R.E. teachers, and
 - (d) by introducing a system of mentorship.
7. to create policies in the area of language and assessment
8. to help students learn from and about other faith traditions during all cycles of R.E.
9. to initiation of negotiations for the updating of the Modes of Regulations, while confirming the principles of the agreement between Church and State

10. where this is not already the case, to raise the number of the minimum number of lessons in Church Schools to 3 per week
11. to discuss with Education authorities the possibility of having resident R.E. teachers in every primary school,
12. to restructure Religious Counselling in Schools and consolidate School Chaplaincies.

1

Premises

1.1 Introduction

Over the past years there has been an incessant awareness amongst members of the Catholic community of a need to define Religious Education and to revise and strengthen this scholastic discipline in school. The Local Synod has specified the need to

- i. clarify the distinction and complementarity between parish catechesis and scholastic Religious Education,¹
- ii. review and revise Religious Education texts,²
- iii. see that Teachers of Religious Education and Catechists have a more adequate and comprehensive formation,³
- iv. strengthen the process of the award of the certificate of suitability,⁴
- v. see that there is better provision for Religious Counsellors in Schools,⁵
- vi. see that more attention is given to a Religious Education that favours diversity, with particular reference to the diversity that exists in Christianity and other religions;⁶

1.2 Method

In April 2004 a subcommittee within the Secretariat for Catechesis, chaired by Dr Adrian Gellel, was set up to study the situation of Religious education in Schools and to respond to the Synod's directives. The members who have served for some time on the subcommittee were Mr. Lionel Chircop, Ms. Miriam Debono Curmi, the late Mgr George Deguara, Bro. Saviour Gatt, F.S.C., Rev. Dr Emanuel Magro, Mr. Emmanuel Micallef, Mr. David Polidano, Rev. Dominic Scerri O.P., Mr. Emmanuel Schembri, and Rev. Dr Carl-Mario Sultana.

Extensive research has been conducted in literature. After conducting a reflection and an in depth analysis on the changes in Maltese society, the subcommittee worked on a definition of Religious Education that reflects the needs of Maltese context. This was the most laborious task of all the processes. Indeed the literature is rich with different models. Although Religion is one of the oldest subjects taught in schools, and although the academic discipline that studies and proposes methods has been with us for almost two and a half centuries, there is no clear and well defined language. The reason for this *anomaly* lies in the continuous, and many a time drastic, changes that occur in religion, society and the relationships between religions, society and the individuals.

In August 2007, a first substantial draft was presented and discussed within the Secretariat for Catechesis. In September 2008, the document was once again discussed by three focus groups composed of academics, R.E. academic specialists and Educational practitioners. The draft was amended and corrected according to the comments received. During these past months the subcommittee worked on finalising the draft. The draft was once again presented to the Secretariat in April 2008.

¹ See *XK* nr. 13, 39.

² See *KS* nr. 74

³ See *KS* nr. 74; See *AŽ* nr. 38.

⁴ See *AZ* nr. 38.

⁵ See *ibid.* nr 40.

⁶ See *ibid.* nr. 31.

1.3 Reasons and basis for change and consolidation

Society is changing rapidly. Information and Communication technology, together with the innovations in transportation have brought about a globalised and a glocalised society. No other era has ever seen the creation of so many communities, real or virtual, and the creation and storage of so much information. Any person living in the Western world has the possibility of entering into contact with vast forms of knowledge and relate with other humans. The world in which our younger generations are growing up is a world where even something that occurred five years ago seems distant history; a world where no one can image life without a technology that had been invented less than a decade ago. This has obviously its own positive and negative consequences.

Our world is a complex one, and no treatise can fully explain the reality that we live in. We shall here outline only some major factors which we deem important in analysing our present Maltese society. These, together with the analysis made by the local Synod, will help highlight the needs and the challenges that R.E. needs to respond to.⁷

1.3.1 Maltese Signs of the Times

The size of the population and the fact that Malta is a small archipelago at the centre of the Mediterranean are certainly two factors that have an impact on the everyday life of the Maltese. Statistics show that the population has been on the increase since the early 19th century. From the first official census under the British government in 1842 to the last one in 2005 the population has increased by 3.5 times.⁸ Malta is by far the densest among the 25 EU countries, with Malta having 1282.1 persons per km² as against the 480.3 persons per km² in the Netherlands which ranks second in the EU25.⁹

Over the past ten years there have been various factors which contributed to the change in the size of the population. First of all there has been a significant decline in birth rate. The National Statistics Office revealed that between 1994 and 2002 births decreased by 19.1%.¹⁰ Conversely the number of births outside marriage in 2006 stood at 22.2% as against the 1.8% in 1990 and 5.8% in 1995 of all registered births in Malta.¹¹ These figures certainly imply a change in the composition of the family and a change in values.

The population has also been effected by immigration. The 2005 Census reveals that 3% of the population residing on the island are not Maltese, but less than 2% of the child population are non-Maltese.¹² Between 2004 and mid 2006 there where 3588 persons who entered Malta illegally, during the same period the government was able to repatriate 2012 persons.¹³

Population and land size do influence one's everyday life. There are various signs that point to a still vibrant community life. The increase in the use of communication technology is an indication that most Maltese feel the need to communicate. A recent European survey has shown that Malta is amongst those countries that fare above the

⁷ See *KM*

⁸ See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Census of Population and Housing, Preliminary Report*, Malta: NSO 2007. p. xviii.

⁹ See *ibid.* p.27.

¹⁰ See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Changes in Maltese Society*, Malta: NSO 2004. p. 4.

¹¹ See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Demographic Review 2006*, Malta: NSO 2007. p. 21.

¹² 65.6% of foreigners are European, 24.5% are Libyan or from non Western countries and 9.5 are Americans, Australians or Canadians See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Census of Population and Housing, Population Vol. 1.*, Malta: NSO 2007. p. 9.

¹³ See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *World Refugee Day, News Release*, Malta: NSO 2006. p. 2.

European average in all communication sectors.¹⁴ A quick glance at popular internet communities such as hi5, MSN, Facebook or WAYN shows that there is a trend of also creating virtual worlds which may replace real ones. For instance by the second week of May 2008, there were around 62,000 thousand profiles of Maltese on the hi5 network, of which 33.9% are teenagers, 62.7% are 25 years old or younger.

From an economic point of view, between 1994 and 2002, Maltese individuals have increased their personal disposable income by 49.8%, but they have also started to borrow more money. Over the nine-year period, loans increased by 241.9%. It is interesting that the fastest growing rate in borrowing was related to consumer loans and not to home loans with an increase of 393.5% in the former and 205.9% in the latter.¹⁵ However the rate of growth in income did not compensate for the rate of growth in loans. The total loan-income ratio increased from 20.3% in 1994 to 46.6% in 2002. While this ratio doubled itself in the property sector it grew by more than three times in consumer loans.¹⁶

The standard of living and quality of life have been on the increase during these last decades. A recent European survey demonstrated that the Maltese consider themselves happy (94% as against the 87% average in the EU25).¹⁷ Similarly they are satisfied with the standard of living (87% as against the 83%) and quality of life (94% as against the 86% in EU25).¹⁸ It is evident that satisfaction with quality and standard of life potentially lead to a change in the employment of time and thus in a change in the mentality and attitudes of society. However, it also important to note that whilst, in general, Maltese may be happy with their standard of living and quality of life, 14.9% stand below the poverty line, with single parents, elderly people and children being amongst the most vulnerable groups.¹⁹

The Maltese seem to be consistent in the importance they give to the family. The family remains first amongst the most important values in their life, with health placing second and work and religion placing third.²⁰ Such results are consistent with other recent surveys where, for instance, World Value Surveys report that both in 1991 and 1999, Family, Work and Religion were the three most important values for Maltese in that order

¹⁴ 43% of the Maltese have access to the internet from their homes, while 100% have some form of telephony, with 80% having both fixed and mobile phones. Furthermore, according to local statistics, nearly 90% of all schools are connected to the internet, with all secondary school students and 84% of primary school pupils being exposed to the web. See Eurobarometer, *E-Communications Household Survey*, Brussels: European Commission. 2006 p. 5, 10, 41; see NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Survey on Information Communication Technology in schools*, Malta: NSO 2005. p ix.

¹⁵ When one analyses the percentage of consumer loans in relation to the total loans, one notes that there has been a steady increase in the share of consumer loans Distribution of loans between 1994-2002

Year	Consumer loans %	Home loans %	Loans %
1994	19.3	80.7	100
1995	25.3	74.7	100
1996	29.2	70.8	100
1997	26.4	73.6	100
1998	26.7	73.3	100
1999	28.6	71.4	100
2000	29.1	70.9	100
2001	30.7	69.3	100
2002	24.2	75.8	100

See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Changes in Maltese Society*, Malta: NSO 2004. p. 2.

¹⁶ See *ibid.* p.3

¹⁷ See Eurobarometer, *European Social Reality*, Brussels: European Commission. 2006 p. 5.

¹⁸ See *ibid.* pp.7-8.

¹⁹ See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Survey on Income and living conditions 2007* pp.1-2.

²⁰ See *ibid.* 15.

of preference.²¹ The latest Census reports that 3.3% of the total population aged 16 and over are separated while 0.7% have obtained an annulment or a divorce. When one calculates the number of separations as per total of the number of contracted marriages, one finds that 4.8% of those who entered in marriage are at present separated while 1% have obtained a divorce or an annulment. It is significant that the highest percentage of marriage breakdowns is in the 30-39 age bracket where 7.2% of all those who once entered into marriage are separated and 1.2% have obtained a divorce. Approximately, only 1.6% of the population has chosen to cohabit.²² Once again, when studying patterns in the different age brackets, one notes that the highest percentage of persons who chose to cohabit is in the 30-39 age cohort with 2.8% of the population.²³ However contrary to popular assumptions, only 18.7% of the separated and divorced choose to cohabit. Similarly only 5.9% of singles choose to live together without marrying.²⁴

Religion and religiosity permeate Maltese society. The enthusiasm by which the population has acclaimed the newly elected bishop of Gozo in December 2005 and the newly consecrated Archbishop of Malta in January 2007 are good indicators in this regard. The latest European Values Survey reported that 97.6% of the population claim to be Catholic.²⁵ It transpires that only a very small minority pertain to other religions or non Catholic denominations. Indeed one can hardly speak of religious pluralism. There are only 9 small non-Catholic Churches, one mosque with a community of approximately 3000, a Baha'i Faith community, a 300 person Hindu community, and a very small Jewish community.²⁶

A significant part of the population is involved in organizing and participating in local village feasts. In 2005, some 9000 persons were involved in the organisation of local village festas, and 5658 persons participated in Holy Week processions. In these last four decades, contrary to the predictions of previous sociological studies, there has been a growth in the celebration of feasts.²⁷ Boissevain explains that this is due to the growth of the economy and especially to the desire to reaffirm the bonds of community.²⁸ Debono Roberts claims that these *festas* have been appropriated by lay organizers who have tapped old religious symbols and artifacts in order to infuse solidarity, identity and a new religious sentiment which may not be completely in line with the formal religion offered by the Church.²⁹ The mixing of mundane and sacred elements in the *festas* point to accommodation of the sacred and the secular at a local village level.

²¹ See *European and World Values Surveys Four-Wave Integrated Data File, 1981-2004*, The European Values Study Foundation and World Values Survey Association. 2006

²² See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Census of Population and Housing. Population Vol. 1.*, Malta: NSO 2007. p. 154. (the approximate calculation has been worked after the 87,037 under 18 year old have been subtracted from the total population, multiplying by two the unmarried partners in every household and calculating the percentage from the relationship of the latter with the former.

²³ See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Census of Population and Housing. Population Vol. 1.*, Malta: NSO 2007. pp. 155.

²⁴ See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Lifestyle Survey 2003*, Malta: NSO 2003. p. 4.

²⁵ See *European and World Values Surveys Four-Wave Integrated Data File, 1981-2004*, The European Values Study Foundation and World Values Survey Association. 2006.

²⁶ See Amore K. (2005), *Civic participation of Immigrants in Malta*. Oldenburg: Carl Von Ossietzky Univerität. (online): <http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe/download/Malta.pdf> [21 January 2008].

²⁷ See NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Good Friday Processions 2005*, Malta: NSO. 2006a; see NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Festas 2005*, Malta: NSO. 2006b

²⁸ See Jeremy BOISSEVAIN (1990) *More Music for the Saints*. Religious feasts in Malta, in *The World & I*.

²⁹ See Ray DEBONO ROBERTS (2003), *Festa-Catholicism and Media Religion: The reproduction and transformation of the festa in Malta*, in *History and Anthropology* 14.

In Malta, the 2005 Mass attendance census showed that on a given day in November, 52.6% of the Maltese population attended Sunday Mass, which figure indicates a steady decline in mass-attendance over the past thirty years.³⁰ Even so, mass-attendance remains high by European standards. In 1999, the European Values Survey revealed that 74.7% claimed to be religious persons while, in 2006, the mean for a ten point Likert-scale item on the importance of God in one's life was 9.15.³¹ The Social Values, Science and Technology survey demonstrated that, when compared to their European counterparts, Maltese have the highest belief in God (95%), the lowest non-believing group (2%), and lowest group of believers in a life force or spirit (3%).³²

1.3.2 Local Challenges

The above overview is surely neither exhaustive nor conclusive, but it does give a number of indications. It is extremely positive that the Maltese feel satisfied with their life and that they still give importance to family and religion.

The increasing signs of an individualistic lifestyle seem to move hand in hand with the growing economy. Lower birth rates, more importance to leisure, increasing evidence of extra marital affairs, an increase of consumer loans are only a few signs of a growing individualistic mentality process which started in the mid-nineties.³³

Data at hand seems to point to the existence of a communitarian-individualistic divide with no clear borders. Indeed many Maltese seem to experience a fragmented lifestyle. In an analysis of the results emerging from recent Eurobarometer and European Values Survey, Abela concluded that there seems to be competing Maltese identities. On the one hand an inherited national identity which is related to people's attachment to the Church and religion and on the other a growing identity which is driven by individualised and secular values.³⁴

It seems that religion is more tied to a sense of nostalgia than being authentically rooted. A recent research amongst a sample population of 660 Maltese 18 to 30 year old youth seems to confirm Abela's assertions. While religious identity has surfaced as the most important factor, it also transpired that that the factor labelled as national pride, predicts one's religiosity.³⁵

³⁰ See DISCERN, *Sunday Mass Attendance Census 2005*, Preliminary Report, Malta: DISCERN. 2006.

³¹ See *European and World Values Surveys Four-Wave Integrated Data File, 1981-2004*, The European Values Study Foundation and World Values Survey Association.

³² European Commission, *Social Values, Science and Technology*, Brussels: European Commission. 2007.

³³ In 1994, the late Prof Anthony Abela stated that,

the western European trend towards greater individualisation of family values, manifest in lower birth rates and higher divorce rates, is making its way gradually amongst certain professionals [...] People are more tolerant of individualized and liberal life-styles in society at large, though they often tend to emphasize more conventional life-styles for themselves.

The study conducted by Tabone a year later gives the same indications. There seems to be a new mentality with regards to family values that is emerging. Tabone reports that 30% of the Maltese families experience problems which "might be disturbing family solidarity and stability." However, the fact still remains that only 1.8% are divorced or separated and that only a small minority showed a constant rejection of family values.

Anthony M. ABELA, *Shifting Family Values in Malta. A Western European Perspective*, Floriana: DISCERN 1994. p. 38; See Carmel TABONE, *Maltese Families in Transition*, Malta: Ministry for Social Development 1995. p. 124.

³⁴ See Anthony ABELA, *Shaping a National Identity*, in *International Journal of Sociology* 35/4 2006. pp. 22-25.

³⁵ See Adrian GELLEL and Miriam DEBONO, *National Research amongst Maltese 18 to 30 year olds*. Malta: unpublished research report 2008.

It seems imperative that Religious Education does not only tackle the trends and evident challenges but that moves to empower with a critical sense and make the younger generations aware of the pitfalls of individualism and an economy-driven mentality and educates towards more communitarian values. One can easily conjure that issues related to the authentic self, family and social models, here and now mentality, and unsecured future due to the limited resources of the country, the over exploitation of the environment, globalisation and the aging population which will be economically dependant on the younger generations will be amongst the most pressing issues.

1.4. Preliminary Notions

It is important to elucidate some notions that are fundamental to this discussion, namely what this document understands by Religion, Education, Religious Education and Catechesis.

1.4.1 Religion

By their very nature humans are transcendental beings. In the most basic sense humans are transcendental beings, in that they go beyond the here and now and try to find and formulate meaning. It is precisely through religion that humans have mainly tried to find meaning. Religion seems to have appeared at the dawning of our species, the homo sapiens sapiens. The Sorcerer of Trois-Frères, The lion/man statuette from Hohlenstein-Stadel and burials are all indicative that the pre-civilised human being conceptualised symbol. It could be well conjured that with the advent of symbol, and particularly through religion understood in a wider sense, human beings have been able to transcend, order and give meaning in their every day life. It is precisely through these “tools” that humans have been able to perceive good and evil in nature, and to conceptualise the idea of the sacred and the occult, spirits, afterlife and gods.³⁶ Ultimately it has been through religion that humans have tried to find and construct meaning.

But religion was not only crucial for the evolution of the human species. It not only gave a means of understanding the universe and forming solid communities which would later evolve into civilisations, but it was also important in sustaining the human family. From primordial times it helped humans answer the fundamental questions of life and reasonable living.

Religion is the deposit of memory and wisdom of generations of human beings from ancient times. All present day religions can trace their origins to the first primitive religion. Religion is in continuous evolution moving along with the developments of the human community, and, for Christian believers, with the progression of Revelation that found its fullness in Jesus Christ. Religion can also be understood as the encyclopaedic memory of past generations pointing towards the good life and towards answers to questions of fundamental nature such as death, meaning and suffering.

The Maltese populations have always been rather religious. This is attested by the numerous Neolithic and Megalithic temples which date back to 7000 and 5000 years ago, and later by the temples dedicated to the Phoenician and Roman deities. Religion has played and still plays an important role in the everyday life of Maltese society. The testimonies that have been left and are still being constructed in the dimensions of time and space, both at communal and personal levels, are a clear evidence of this religiosity.

³⁶ See Roy A. RAPPOPORT, *Ritual and Religion in the making of humanity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999. pp.1-2.

For the past millennium the Catholic community in Malta was synonymous with the Maltese community. One's being a Maltese went hand in hand with one's also being a Catholic. Thus an understanding of Christianity is needed for one to understand Maltese language,³⁷ history,³⁸ cultural heritage,³⁹ local political history, the *raison d'être* of social policies and values. Catholicism has not only influenced the structure and way of life of the Maltese, but likewise the Maltese have adapted and emphasized certain aspects of religion, thus influencing its theology.⁴⁰

But apart from building a Maltese identity, the Catholic religion has been indispensable in sustaining the individual and his/her family in material, moral and spiritual matters. Maltese still feel that religion plays an important part in their lives.⁴¹ It is therefore not surprising that almost all Maltese feel that they get comfort and strength from their religion.⁴²

Catholicism has also been vital in imprinting in the Maltese community the evangelical values of love, solidarity, social justice and forgiveness. These have been fundamental in the building of strong families and well-knit communities.

Religion is not only the holder of past, through memory, and present, through personal and community practice and through the definition of identity, but it is also a pointer to the future. Most religions, and the Christian religion in particular, hold Hope as central to their systems of beliefs. As the ancient Greeks held in their theology, after Pandora had freed all diseases, sorrows, vices and crimes that afflict humanity from the box given to her by the envious gods, Pandora also liberated Hope. Thus according to the ancients, Hope followed misery in order to aid struggling humanity and point towards a happier future.⁴³ Christian hope has sustained the community throughout the centuries especially in difficult times.

³⁷ Alexander Borg states that the Maltese language, developed from an Arabic dialect, has been unreceptive to further influence from Arabic language due to religious factors. The Christian factor has influenced the Maltese language in such a way that it side-stepped the cultural impact of Islam. Furthermore, a number of words and common phrases have a clear theological connotation. The words "qawsalla," "hekk Alla jrid," "allahares," and "xifajk" are only some of Maltese words/phrases used in daily conversations. See Alexander BORG, *Language*, in Henry FRENDO and Oliver FRIGGIERI (eds.) *Malta, Culture and Identity*, Malta: Ministry of Youth and Arts 1994. p. 30.

³⁸ For instance see Henry FRENDO, *National Identity*, in Henry FRENDO and Oliver FRIGGIERI (eds.) *Malta, Culture and Identity*, Malta: Ministry of Youth and Arts 1994. pp. 1-25.

³⁹ For instance see Mario BUHAGIAR, *Il-pittura f'Malta u l-identità nazzjonali*, in Toni CORTIS (ed.), *L-identità kulturali ta' Malta*, Malta: Dipartiment ta' l-informazzjoni 1989. pp.1-16; see Leonard MAHONEY, *Architecture*, in Henry FRENDO and Oliver FRIGGIERI (eds.) *Malta, Culture and Identity*, Malta: Ministry of Youth and Arts 1994. pp.125-141; see Anthony PACE, *Cultural heritage values as expressions of Identity: the Maltese context*, in Catherine C. VELLA (ed.), *The Maltese islands on the move, A mosaic of contributions marking Malta's entry into the 21st century*, Malta: Central Office of Statistics 2000. pp. 249-253.

⁴⁰ In this respect, there is an urgent need for an evaluation of how the Maltese have experienced and formulated their religion throughout these past centuries. Such exercise would be important in the effort to contextualise theology.

⁴¹ While 75% of the female Maltese respondents have qualified religion as very important in their life only 26% of female Europeans have answered in the same manner. Similarly, while 58% of the Maltese male respondents feel that religion is very important in their life only 18% of their European counterparts feel the same way. See Anthony M. ABELA, *Values of Women and Men in the Maltese Islands, A Comparative European Perspective*, Malta: Commission for the Advancement of Women 2000. p.49.

⁴² The 1999 survey revealed that 90% of respondents get comfort and strength from religion. The response was slightly less than the 94% of the 1984 respondents. Nonetheless, there is a marked difference between Maltese respondents and their European counterparts. See Anthony M. ABELA, *Values of Women and Men in the Maltese Islands, A Comparative European Perspective*, Malta: Commission for the Advancement of Women 2000. pp.186, 197, 198.

⁴³ See H.A. GUERBER, *Greece and Rome*, London: Bracken books 1986. p.21.

1.4.2 Education

In their quest to understand themselves and the world around them, humans have endeavoured in educational activities. Education has always played a fundamental role in the development of the human community, but it is only recently, with the introduction of compulsory schooling that society is witnessing enormous advances in its way and standard of life.

The Catholic Church has been, and still is, at the forefront in the promotion of the education of the human person. This is most notably exemplified by the institution of schools from early medieval times, of cathedral schools and the development of universities. It is in this urge to promote the development of the full person that various members of the Church throughout the ages have felt the need to found congregations, movements and associations responsible for formal and/or non formal education. The Catholic Church continues to contribute through its many educational institutions at all levels worldwide.

Some sixty years ago, Jacques Maritain emphatically stated that the main aim of education is the full formation of the human being. The other aims of education, such as, among others, transmitting the cultural heritage and preparing for social life and good citizenship, are essential but nonetheless corollary ends.⁴⁴ In a similar manner, the Commission set up by UNESCO for the study of development in Education, understood, that the aim of development is the complete fulfilment of man, in all richness of his personality, the complexity of forms of expression and his various commitments – as individual, member of a family and of a community, citizen and producer, inventor of techniques and creative dreamer.⁴⁵

This principle was once again reiterated in a UNESCO report. The commission set to reflect on education and learning in the twenty-first century, insists that in order to be successful, education needs to organise itself around four fundamental ways of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and live with others and learning to be. These four pillars emphasise

- i. the need to know and therefore the need for the ability to acquire knowledge,
- ii. the need to be able to apply this knowledge and therefore the need that knowledge should contribute to the development of the economy,
- iii. the need for knowledge and acceptance of others, and
- iv. the need for self-realisation.⁴⁶

Whilst, in principle, there seems to be agreement on holistic education, different governments with different ideologies put emphasis on different aspects depending, many a time, on the definition they give to the human person and to their conception of *paidéia*.

1.4.3 Religious Education

A simple review of the present literature reveals that there is no one Religious Education but a plurality of Religious Educations.⁴⁷ Since Religious Education finds its

⁴⁴ See Jacques MARITAIN, *Per una filosofia dell'educazione*, Brescia: La scuola 2001. pp 59-61, 228-229.

⁴⁵ See Edgar FAURE, Felipe HERRERA, Abdul-Razzak KADDOURA, Henri LOPES, Arthur V. PETROVSKY, Majid RAHNEMA and Fredrick CHAMPION WARD, *Learning to be, The World of Education today and tomorrow*, Paris: UNESCO 1972. p.vi.

⁴⁶ See Jacques DELORS (et al.) *Nell'Educazione un Tesoro. Rapporto all'UNESCO della Commissione Internazionale sull'Educazione per il Ventunesimo Secolo*, Armando Editore, Roma 1997. p. 89-89.

theory in both pedagogy and theology and since there is no single pedagogical theory nor a single theology, one finds myriads of Religious Educations.⁴⁸ Indeed there is no single terminology for the subject, and where terms exist they often acquire different meanings. 'Religious Education', 'Religious Knowledge', 'Religious Studies', 'Catechesis', 'Christian Education', and 'Religious Instruction' are only some of the overlapping terms used in the area.⁴⁹ Some refer specifically to the ecclesial context but in most cases the terminology is not tied to any particular context, ecclesial or scholastic. Maybe this situation is partly the result of the Churches' inability to distinguish clearly between the aims of such instruction in communities of believers and in schools.

For the purpose of this document, 'Religious Education' refers to the subject as taught in schools. Indeed, this terminology seems to be the most apt for the scholastic setting since it brings together the two worlds of Religion and Education. While it is true that both terms have broad connotations, it is also true that it is this richness of meaning and the dialogue between the two disciplines that can benefit students most. In the context of a class, Lee prefers to use the term "Religious Instruction" viewed as part of the wider Religious Education, which is understood as a life-long process. Whilst it is true that Religious Education is a life-long process it is precisely the richness in the term "education" that can enrich the discipline in the scholastic context. A review of the meaning of the words "education" and "instruction", as given by the Oxford English Dictionary, is revealing. The term "instruct" seems to be older than the word "education". Introduced in 1477, it meant to pile, to build up. This term was soon connected with teaching, thus understood as to impart knowledge (1506) and to furnish with knowledge (1526). On the other hand, the word "education" immediately referred to the systematic way by which a person has been brought up (1531). This term was soon related to schooling (1588). While in the seventeenth century it was seen as systematic instruction (1616), in the nineteenth century it was related to the formation of character, intellect and morality (1860). From the Latin e-ducere, to lead out, education implies helping or equipping what is already inherent in a person to come to the surface. This understanding is more consonant with the contemporary philosophies of the sciences of education, in that one does not try to add information to the person but to help the person make the best use of what is already within him/her. It is thus evident that the word education has a broader meaning. Whilst instruction can be seen as impersonal transmission of knowledge and skill, education can be understood to be more holistic and participatory, dealing not only with the cognitive element but also with the affective and conative dimensions.⁵⁰ In Religious Education, the educator does not try to add religious information but to help or enable the spiritual and religious dimensions to be expressed.

⁴⁷ See Ronald H. CRAM, *The future of Christian Religious Education in an era of shrinking transcendence*, in *Religious Education* 96/2 (2001). p. 168; and see R.M. THOMAS, *Religious Education*, in Lawrence J. SARA (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Sociology of Education*, Oxford: Pergamon 1997. p. 144.

⁴⁸ For an illustration of the theologies and pedagogies that influence the formulation of Religious Education see Randolph Crump MILLER (ed.), *Theologies of Religious Education*, Alabama: Religious Education Press 1995; and see Michael GRIMMITH (ed.), *Pedagogies of Religious Education. Case studies in the research and development of good pedagogic practice in R.E.*, Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmons 2000.

⁴⁹ For a better understanding of the development of terms referring to the area of Religious Education during the twentieth century see Gabriel MORAN, *Religious Education*, in Mircea ELIADE (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*. Vol. 12, New York: Macmillan Publishing 1987. pp. 318-323.

⁵⁰ See Michael James LEE, *The shape of Religious Instruction. A social science approach*, Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press. pp. 6-8; see C.T. ONION (ed.), *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. Volume I. A-M*, London: Oxford University Press 1944³. pp. 584, 1019.

1.4.4 Catechesis

On the other hand a definition of Catechesis is somewhat more straight forward. As one of the Church's ministries of the Word of God, Catechesis is the education and formation in the Christian faith. Its final goal is to help the individual enter into full communion with Jesus Christ,⁵¹ and through Jesus Christ with the Tri-Una God as well as with the Christian Community. Consequently, the appropriate context of Catechesis is always the faith community.⁵² Catechesis has to do with believers and accompanies them in their confession and profession of faith. Catechesis invites to mature in faith. Thus Catechesis is the systematic support given by the faith community to those of its members seeking to grow in their faith – such support involves the sharing of the content of the faith, its meaning for the believer and its implications for his/her everyday life, and the opportunity to take part in meaningful communal celebrations of the faith.

This condition is most of the times difficult to fulfil in the classroom context. Although most students have been baptized, they might not be in contact with the faith community. One can assume that there are a considerable number of students and families who can be described as culturally Catholic but who have not as yet made a clear and conscious decision of living the Catholic faith to the full. Furthermore, one needs to take into consideration that in an increasingly pluralistic society, the primary goal of the school is to educate responsible citizens who contribute to personal and community welfare and development, social cohesion, economy.

1.5 Way forward

On the basis of the above challenges, there is a need for a document that discusses the nature and goals of Religious Education and its relationship with Parish Catechesis, and reviews Religious Education by offering practical guidelines and principles for the next seven years.⁵³ The present document will

- i. provide a definition of Religious Education in today's context,
- ii. define the relationship between Parish Catechesis and Religious Education,
- iii. provide the goals of Religious Education in schools,
- iv. give practical guidelines for the preparation of syllabi, textbooks, teaching manuals and resources for Religious Education
- v. define the role of the teachers of Religious Education, and
- vi. clarify the role of ancillary services.

⁵¹ See CT 5; See DGC 80-81.

⁵² See DGC. 78-79.

⁵³ See XK nr. 39

2

Present Situation of Religious Education

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter intends review the present practice in the area of Religious Education. This will give the opportunity to evaluate and eventually consolidate and/or reformulate Religious Education in schools.

2.2 Education in Malta

The Maltese State understands that it has the duty to educate and form the child fully. This belief is reflected both in the Education Act and more specifically in the National Minimum Curriculum. The Education Act specifies that it is the duty of the state,

- (a) to promote education and instruction
- (b) to ensure the existence of a system of schools and institutions accessible to all Maltese citizens catering for the full development of the whole personality including the ability of every person to work; and
- (c) to provide for such schools and institutions where these do not exist.⁵⁴

It is clear that the drafter's intention is to provide for the education of the whole person even if there is an emphasis on the productive side of the ordinary life of the individual. This, however, should not be surprising since it seems to be a common preoccupation in the aims of various educational programmes.⁵⁵ However, in stating the aims of Maltese education, the National Minimum Curriculum⁵⁶ specifies that,

the educational community generally agrees that a dynamic curriculum should provide an educational experience which:

- (1) promotes fundamental values among students;
- (2) facilitates their holistic development;
- (3) motivates and prepares them to be lifelong learners,
- (4) enables them to live a full and productive life in a shrinking global village;
- (5) prepares them for the world of work, where change is a fact of life.⁵⁷

Throughout the document, which outlines the curriculum at primary and secondary levels of schooling, there is a clear indication of the desire to help students to develop their full potential in all the dimensions of their life, including the religious, spiritual and moral.

It is precisely because of the desire to educate the human person fully that Religion finds its place in the curricula and syllabi of many countries. There are obviously many perspectives to religion. For millennia it has been the cornerstone of civilisation, if not one

⁵⁴ *Act No. XXIV of 1988. An act enacted by the Parliament of Malta. An act to consolidate and reform the law relating to Education in Malta*, Valletta: Department of Information 1988. art. 2.

⁵⁵ The UNESCO report on Education for the Twenty-first century, clearly puts the production aspect as one of the four main pillars of education. See DELORS (1997). p. 79, 82-85.

⁵⁶ The National Minimum Curriculum is established through article 18 (1) of the Education Act 1988.

⁵⁷ *Inwelledu l-Gejjeni Flimkien, Kurrikulu Minimu Nazżjonali*, Floriana, Malta: Ministeru ta' l-Edukazzjoni 1999. p.23.

of its most active instigators and motors. But religion is not only a means of understanding and interpreting human society but it is also a means of self-development. Religion is a means through which one can formulate and clarify the major existential and basic questions. Similarly, it is through religion that the vast majority of the world population finds sense in their life and develop an understanding of how to live the good life. In this sense the National Minimum Curriculum

recognises that knowledge of Religion is in itself essential for the moral and spiritual development of a society around values that lie at the heart of social conviviality and understanding.⁵⁸

2.3 Legal Framework for R.E.

In Malta, Catholic R.E. is guaranteed in State Schools by the Constitution and by the Education Act.⁵⁹ In practice, almost all compulsory age schools, whether state or private provide for Catholic R.E,⁶⁰ which is regulated by the Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta.⁶¹ The latter Agreement specifies that it is the responsibility of the Maltese Episcopal Conference to establish the teaching methods, programmes, and texts for students.⁶² It is, however, the Education Officer of Religion within the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) who is to promote the subject and to implement the policies of the Maltese Episcopal Conference and the DQSE.⁶³

2.4 The R.E. Cycles

The Religious Education programme is divided in four major cycles, two in Primary Schooling and two in Secondary Schooling.

First Cycle	Year 1 – Year 3
Second Cycle	Year 4 – Year 6
Third Cycle	Form 1 – Form 3
Fourth Cycle	Form 4 – Form 5

Officially, the language of instruction at all levels is Maltese. However there are a small number of independent and Church schools that teach Religion in English. In these cases, most schools continue to follow the Syllabi set by the Archdiocese and offer students translated notes of the Maltese textbook.

Formally, if one calculates the time allotted by the Agreement stipulated by the State and the Holy See, R.E. should cover 7.8% of all compulsory education.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ See MALTA. HOUSE OF THE REPRESENTATIVES, *Constitution of Malta*, 1964. art. 2 (3); see MALTA. HOUSE OF THE REPRESENTATIVES, Chapter 327, *Education Act*, 1988. art 20 (2).

⁶⁰ Indeed there are only 3 schools that do not provide Catholic R.E. due to religious and/or philosophical reasons.

⁶¹ See *Accordo tra la Repubblica di Malta e la Santa Sede per meglio ordinare l'istruzione e l'educazione Religiosa Cattolica nelle Scuole statali*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81. 1989.

⁶² See *ibid.*. art.2.

⁶³ See *Modes of Regulation on Catholic Religious Instruction and Education in State Schools*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81. 1989. Section III, art. 3c.

2.4.1 Primary Level R.E.

According to the Modes of Regulation, at Primary level, Religious Education is to be allotted at least two and a half hours (the first half an hour of the day).⁶⁴ This means that Religious Education should take 9.5% of schooling hours.

The syllabus at the Primary level determines that the goal of Catholic R.E. is to help students become aware of the love of God for human beings. Consequently it promotes the understanding and practice of natural law and encourages students to love God and every creature.⁶⁵ The six textbooks covered during primary schooling endeavour to reach this goal by focusing on the following topics:

1. God
2. God loves me
3. Jesus
4. The Church: the family of God
5. The Holy Spirit
6. Throughout the year with the Lord

2.4.2 Primary Textbooks and Resources

The first edition of the textbooks was published between 1983 and 1987. In the following years various editions were published, the latest in 2004. However the content and methodology remained unchanged. The present textbooks are printed in full colour with few photos and a number of drawings.

Each book is divided in a number of short chapters, most of which are intended to be covered in one week. Each chapter is normally introduced with a full page drawing and a title. The drawing is intended to introduce the topic by connecting to pupils' prior knowledge or experience. Then the chapter is divided in three other sections, namely a narrative from Christian or Biblical Tradition, an invitation to reflect and call to act accordingly. At the end of the chapter, pupils are presented with a number of short questions and answers intended to summarise the content.

All textbooks were supplemented by a teacher's guidebook. However, it has been observed that in various instances this guidebook is either the accompaniment of some old edition or worst still is missing completely.

The textbooks are being accompanied by a student's workbook to facilitate learning. In most schools these workbooks have taken the place of the original textbooks in the first two years of Primary Education.

2.4.3 Particular Concerns

As already noted in the introduction to this section, it seems that although the Agreement and the Modes establish certain practice, there seems to be ill ease amongst a number of administrators and teachers to continue to sustain Religious Education in its traditional and official status.

There is a growing number of teachers who feel uncomfortable to teach Religion. This is the result of various factors. A major reason for this situation might be the fact that the younger generation of teachers is no longer as able to comprehend religious language

⁶⁴ See *Modes of Regulation on Catholic Religious Instruction and Education in State Schools*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81. 1989. Section I, art. 4.

⁶⁵ See Dipartiment tal-Kurrikulu, *Religjon –Sillabu tal-Primarja*, (online): http://www.curriculum.gov.mt/docs/syllab_pr_religionrationale.pdf [15 December 2006].

or is not familiar with religious tradition. Thus it becomes rather difficult for younger teachers to expand and develop 2 ½ hrs of lessons on the basis of 4/5 pages.

It must be admitted that after 20 years from their original publication, the present textbooks present a number of major difficulties in Primary Education. In the first instance the syllabi and level descriptors are not written in comprehensible educational language. Objectives are vague and consequently difficult to achieve. Often the objective is just the theme of the textbook's chapters. Another major problem in the writing of objectives stems from the fact that while it is evident that it was in the drafters' intention to include both cognitive and affective domains of learning there is an imbalance in favour of a cognitive approach thus giving preference to religious knowledge rather than religious education. Furthermore, spiritual education is almost completely absent. In this case scenario it is not surprising that a considerable number of teachers just emphasise learning by rote especially by focusing on the question and answer section at the end of each chapter.

The present textbooks present the material in the scantiest manner. While such mode of writing was acceptable and comprehensible two decades ago when society was more influenced by and acquainted with religion, this is no longer sustainable. A society which is becoming increasingly secular finds it hard to comprehend religious language and is surely very much less acquainted with Religious stories.

Other issues that stem from textbooks are related to the mode in which language is presented, the prior knowledge required by pupils and the overlap with catechesis in parishes. There are various instances where the textbooks are not gender inclusive and do not account for different modes of cultures or subcultures. Furthermore, the language used does not always reflect the needs and language of today's society. For instance the insistence on presenting God only through the Fatherly image neglects the fact that a growing number of children have a negative experience of family images and models. Moreover, the majority of pupils do not have the background knowledge required for the subject. It seems that religious formation in the family has changed in such a way that children are no longer acquainted with religious and spiritual symbols and stories. They are never or they are only rarely made sensitive to the spiritual and religious language present in everyday life.

2.4.4 Secondary Level R.E.

The purpose of R.E. during the first cycle of Secondary education is to help students mature in their religious, more specifically Christian, dimension, within the context of the school's aim of forming the person globally.⁶⁶ During the first three years of Secondary Education, R.E. aims to help students evaluate in an objective and critical way the Christian message, to construct an answer to the existential dimension of life and equip them with the necessary skills to critically evaluate Maltese culture and identity.⁶⁷ Apart from objectively appraising reality through the Christian perspective, during the last cycle, R.E. aims at helping students understand the relevance of the Christian message for their lives

⁶⁶ See KUMMISSJONI KATEKETIKA NAZZJONALI, *Sillabu tar-Religjon għall-Klassijiet I, II, III - Prinċipji gwida*, Malta: Kummissjoni Kateketika Nazzjonali (undated). p.1.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*

and give answers to the most basic and existential needs adolescents may experience.⁶⁸ In both cycles, Christ is presented as the centre of the Christian message.

According to the Modes, schools are expected to allot at least one and a half hours of R.E. per form, that is, two lessons per week. This means that R.E. is, normally allotted 5.7% of the curriculum.

During the first cycle of Secondary Education, teachers are expected to cover the topics related to

1. Jesus
2. The Christian Community
3. Christian Living

During the second cycle, teachers are expected to go through the topics related to God's plan for full development for the human community and for the individual.

2.4.5 Secondary Textbooks and Resources

The present textbooks replace a series of books published by the National Catechetical Commission during the 70's and which were still in use up till the mid 90's. With regards to the new series, the first books to be published were those of Forms IV and V, published in 1994 and 1995 respectively, whilst the other textbooks were published between 1997 and 1999. Compared to the previous series, the present textbooks are more bulky but are more pleasing to the eye. Each textbook is accompanied by a teacher's guide, which explicates the objectives and rationale of each chapter together with a number of suggestions how to develop the scheme of work and the lesson plans. Although one may find much to criticize, from an educational level, the present textbooks are of great educational value. The development of objectives, the use and level of Maltese, the choice of images, the layout of the text and the logical structure of the content are among the textbooks' strongest qualities.

2.4.6 Particular Concerns

However, there are growing difficulties in R.E. One of the major issues that needs to be tackled immediately lies in the overly theological and cognitive content. The problem lies in the fact that the student textbooks include additional notes that were originally intended for teachers. The level of the content is most of the time too difficult for a substantial amount of students, especially those who are in the lower streams of secondary education.

With the new reforms in schooling, more and more students are being taught in mixed ability classes. The text is not flexible enough and teachers do not find the necessary support to teach students with different learning aptitudes. Not all schools provide the teachers' manual. Furthermore, most activities in the teachers' manuals tackle verbal learning approaches. It has been observed that in most cases teachers desire more up to date ideas and resources. On the whole, it seems that teachers of Religion feel left alone and not supported well enough by the institutional Church. They feel that they are well supported by Education authorities, but feel unsupported by society in general.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See KUMMISSJONI KATEKETIKA NAZZJONALI, *Sillabu tar-Religjon għall-Klassijiet IV, V - Prinċipji gwida*, Malta: Kummissjoni Kateketika Nazzjonali (undated). p.1.

⁶⁹ See Mandy PISANI, *How do Religious Education teachers in Maltese secondary schools perceive their own role?* University of Malta, unpublished B.Ed (hons) dissertation 2008.

2.5 Teachers and Their Formation

Religion in schools has always been taught by a practising Catholic believer. The 1988 Agreement and the additional modes established that, besides academic qualifications, the Religion teacher should also be a person of serious Catholic conviction who lives in accord with what s/he is to teach.⁷⁰ In this regard the Maltese Constitution specifies that such requirements are neither inconsistent nor in contravention with any laws on discrimination.⁷¹ Similar provisions may also be found in other European countries, such as for instance Italy.⁷²

At present those wishing to teach Catholic Religion must get a Certificate of Suitability issued by the Bishop of the Diocese. Through this certificate, the Bishop is the guarantor of the teacher's moral and religious conviction and competence to teach religion and to represent the Catholic Community. The Modes stipulate that, unless the Bishop of the Diocese finds an objection, all Primary school teachers can teach Catholic Religion.

At present Primary teachers are employed in schools after they obtain a B.Ed (Hons) with a specialisation in Primary Education. These teachers follow 10 study-units in the pedagogy and methodology of Religious Education at Primary Education. On the other hand, almost all teachers who have been issued the Certificate of Suitability in these last years have either obtained a four year B.Ed (Hons) with a specialisation in Religious Education, or a bachelor's degree with at least 60 credits in Theology together with a one year P.G.C.E or a Masters in Theology together with a recognised pedagogical course. B.Ed (Hons) students have to follow at least 48 credits in Theology and 20 credits in the pedagogy of Religious Education.

2.6 Conclusion

The situation in schools definitely calls for a revision in the contents, methods and materials currently in use in R.E. The changes in that occurred in Maltese society and culture, together with the developments in the areas of Education should serve as basis for the development of new syllabi and supporting structures.

⁷⁰ See *Accordo tra la Repubblica di Malta e la Santa Sede per meglio ordinare l'istruzione e l'educazione Religiosa Cattolica nelle Scuole statali*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81. 1989 article 2, and See *Modes of Regulation on Catholic Religious Instruction and Education in State Schools*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81. 1989. Section I, art. 2.1.

⁷¹ See MALTA. HOUSE OF THE REPRESENTATIVES, *Constitution of Malta*, 1964. art 45 (9).

⁷² See *Accordo di revisione del Concordato lateranense tra la Santa Sede e la Repubblica Italiana*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 74. 1984

3

A Vision for Religious Education in Malta

3.1 Introduction

The primary mission and essential purpose of the existence of the Church is to proclaim the Good News, and to facilitate the actualisation of the Kingdom of God amongst humans until the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷³

In these last decades the universal Church has renewed its understanding that the vital core of the new evangelization must be a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery.⁷⁴

With Pope Paul VI, the Church has widened its concept of evangelisation more than just proclaiming Christ to those who do not know Him. For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.⁷⁵

Thus, the Church has come to understand evangelisation as all its activity, comprehending fully Christ's order to his disciples to preach, to baptise, to celebrate the sacred mysteries, to be his witnesses, to teach, to love and to make disciples of all nations.⁷⁶

The teaching of Religion in schools has always been understood as forming part of the Church's mission to proclaim Christ and his message to the young. A better understanding of the role of schools and a deeper awareness of the changes that are occurring in our society leads the community of believers to reflect and better define the meaning of Religious Education. Such reflection cannot go against the Church's primary task of announcing the Word of God, source of life for all humanity.

It is imperative that the nature and role of Religious Education is clarified. This will help to better define Religious Education in the Maltese Context and eventually delineate the aims and objectives of Catholic R.E. throughout compulsory education.

3.2 Catechesis and R.E.

Changes in society have brought about a distinction between Religious Education in Schools and Catechesis in parishes. Up till, very recently, all throughout the Catholic world, Religious Education in schools was not understood as being different from parish catechesis. The Catechism of the Church was the main textbook used in schools and it was

⁷³ See EN 14, 18.

⁷⁴ EA 66.

⁷⁵ EN 18.

⁷⁶ See Mt 16, 15; Mt 22, 19; Mt 28, 19-20; Jn 15,12 and Acts 1,8.

almost praxis that teachers would also be priests or consecrated persons. Changes in society, but more importantly developments in the theory of Education, have led to a better understanding of the role of R.E. as scholastic discipline. Although the theories of R.E. as an academic subject have started to develop in the late eighteenth century, it is practically only in the second half of the 20th century that models of R.E. have been put forward.⁷⁷ All though the academic world, the identity of R.E. is still in its infancy and thus a language proper for a theory and method of R.E. is not always easily grasped.

Within the circles of the Catholic Church there has been a constant developing understanding of R.E. All post-Conciliar Church documents agree that Religious Education is not synonymous with Catechesis. Catechesis is understood to be wider than R.E.⁷⁸ The nature of R.E. is defined by its context within the school, and thus by its very vocation, to dialogue with other disciplines, facilitating the dialogue between Culture and the Gospel, and hopefully influence the formation of character, and the formation of worldviews and social imaginary of students,⁷⁹ especially on issues related to ethics, memory, religion, existence and relationships.⁸⁰

In these past three decades the Church has started to understand the relationship between Catechesis and Religious Education as one of distinction but at the same time complementarity.⁸¹ The division between Catechesis and Religious Education is a fine line distinction which many a time baffles those who in practice have to design syllabi and textbooks. If one is not extremely careful, one may easily fall into the trap of either doing catechesis in the classroom or, on the other hand, present a subject that is arid from the formational aspect. If one is to respect the student in his/her totality, one cannot ignore the religious and faith dimension of students. Just as it is impossible for good catechesis not to enrich the knowledge dimension of the disciples of Christ, it should be equally impossible for well delivered Religious Education not to form students in their totality, including to strengthen or to initiate students in their encounter with Christ.⁸²

The principle of complementarity between Religious Education, given in schools, and Catechesis, mainly done in parishes and catholic associations, should be retained and strengthened but the principle of distinction between the two areas should be made clearer. Catechesis aims at educating the faith of the person within a *faith community*, Religious Education aims at helping the student to clarify the basic human religious and spiritual questions and needs, and at equipping the student to live the transcendental dimension in the context of the *learning community*. Whilst in the former, the individual is invited to build a

⁷⁷ See Pietro BRAIDO, *Lineamenti di storia della catechesi e dei catechismi, Dal "tempo delle riforme" all'eta degli imperialismi (1450-1870)*, Leumann (Torino) 1991; See Michael GRIMMITH (ed.), *Pedagogies of Religious Education. Case studies in the research and development of good pedagogic practice in RE*, Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmons 2000.

⁷⁸ See EN 44.

⁷⁹ The term "social imaginary" as understood by Charles Taylor as "the way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings... it is carried in images, stories, legends, etc... the social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy." See Charles TAYLOR, *Modern Social Imaginary*, Durham: Duke University Press 2004.

⁸⁰ See DGC 73.

⁸¹ See DGC 73; see LCS 56; see RDE 69; Fleming points out that the first time the issue of distinction and complementarity is put forward in Vatican documents is the LCS. He comments that such position reflects the influence of the work of R.E. theorists and researchers. See G.P. FLEMING, *Catholic Church documents on Religious*, in Marian DE SOUZA, Kathleen ENGBRETSON, Gloria DURKA, Robert JACKSON, and Andrew MCGRADY (eds.), *International Handbook of Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education*, The Netherlands: Springer. 610-620.

⁸² See RDE 69.

deeper relationship with God, in the latter the student acquires critical understanding and the ability to use and develop religious and spiritual language.

In this scenario, although Religious Education forms part of the Church's Ministry of the Word, in today's society, it is also increasingly becoming more part of the Church's Diakonia (service). Our world yearns for meaning. However, contemporary society finds it difficult to translate this yearning in a concrete language. This is specifically so where the religious and spiritual dimensions are concerned. As part of its service to society, the Church needs to contribute towards the understanding and development of those tools that have sustained and contributed to the development of different generations of Maltese individuals and communities. Similarly, the Maltese Catholic Community is duty bound to help individual students access, understand and take advantage of the wisdom that different generations of believers have put together in the quest to live the good life and develop a healthy relationship with Self, Others, Creation and God.

3.3 Religious Education

As part of its obligation to educate students holistically, the school has the duty to provide for the development and education of every student's transcendental dimension. For millennia, the transcendental dimension has been expressed through religions. The historical developments within Western society have led to a re-evaluation of the experience of the sacred. Secularisation, Post-Secularisation, De-Sacralisation and the co-existence of various religions have inevitably led to a re-evaluation of the teaching of religion in various European Countries. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, with the exception of France, Ukraine and Slovenia, none of these countries consider removing Religious Education from the curriculum. Due to the ineffable nature of spirituality and due to the religious changes experienced by society, there are various models of teaching religion. The models depend very much on the history, culture, religious tradition/s and politics of the country and/or region.⁸³

⁸³ A brief overview of the situation of R.E. in the Western world makes one realise that every state deals with the subject according to the historical and cultural milieu of the national community. Almost all European countries with the exception of France, Ukraine and Slovenia have R.E. included in their curricula. The United States is another Western country which does not have R.E. as part of the curriculum of the public school. The reasons behind such exclusion are different. In the case of France, Religion Education is left out from the curriculum of the public school on the basis of the secular tradition and philosophy of the country. On the other hand, the United States put emphasis on the separation between Church and State and not on its secularity. However in both circumstances there is an open discussion on the need to introduce the subject or some form of religious studies in schools. Difference also prevails in the aims and models held not only in the various European countries, but also in the specific Landers, Cantons and regions. For instance, while the U.K. has a long tradition of multi-faith R.E., Italy, Austria and some Landers in Germany, amongst others, have a long tradition of Catholic R.E.

See Peter R. HOBSON and John S. EDWARDS, *Religious Education in a pluralist society. The key philosophical issues*, London: Woburn press 1999. pp. 131-160; see Flavio PAJER, *L'istruzione religiosa nei sistemi scolastici europei: verso una funzione etica della religione nella scuola pubblica*, in *Seminarium XLII/2* (2002). pp. 401-447; See Flavio PAJER, *Multifaith education in the Europe of tomorrow: a civic responsibility for universities and schools*, in Bert ROEBBEN and Michael WARREN (eds.), *Religious Education as Practical Theology*, Leuven: Peeters 2001. pp. 191-216; see Peter SCHREINER, *The Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions of Education: National, Regional and International Constitutional and Legal frameworks*, in DE SOUZA Marian, ENGBRETSON Kathleen, DURKA Gloria, JACKSON Robert, and McGrady Andrew (Eds.), *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education. Part 2*, Netherlands: Springer 2007. pp 857-868; see Peter SCHREINER, *Religious Education in the Europe*, 2005; see Peter SCHREINER, *Religious Education in the European Context*, in Lynne BROADBENT and Alan BROWN (eds.), *Issues in Religious Education*, London: Routledge Falmer 2002. pp. 86-98.

Just as humans express their communication potential through languages, similarly humans tangibly express their spiritual and transcendental dimension through religion. Catholicism has been the language through which countless Maltese generations have expressed their spirituality, have been sustained and have constructed meaning and identity. Besides any legalistic consideration it is mainly for this reason that Malta continues to adopt a denominational model of religious education. Through educating in the grammar and literature of Catholicism students get access to the language of their community and their ancestors. The cultural and historical uniqueness of the Maltese experience continues to reaffirm the validity of a denominational approach to religious education.

As a scholastic discipline, Religious Education contributes to the holistic development of the student by providing the language and the skills to access and express their religious and spiritual dimensions. As a discipline it does not require students to have made a conscious commitment of living the Catholic faith. In this context Religious Education becomes part of the Pre Evangelising and the initial proclamation activity of the Church. It gives the possibility and the liberty to students pertaining to families who have not made a conscious and deliberate choice to become more acquainted with the Catholic message. It may encourage students to question, to start or continue their faith journey within the context of the faith community. On the other hand, it may serve as a means of ongoing formation and parallel formation for those students who do effectively live their Catholic faith.

Religious Education, therefore, is to be considered and treated as any other subject taught in schools.⁸⁴ It aims at providing students with a clear understanding of Christianity as professed by the Roman Catholic Church as well as at facilitating a holistic development of the students' life. By providing an intellectual approach to the content and the various expressions of the Christian faith, Religious Education supplies students with the language and skills to access, comprehend, express and evaluate their religious and spiritual dimension and the culture and society in which they live. The proper context for Religious Education is the school community.

3.4 Scope of R.E.

From a pedagogical point of view, the school is committed to the holistic formation of its students. In this respect R.E. contributes in three particular ways. First, it helps students to better understand their cultural identity (history, art, literature, customs, etc.) which, in Malta, is heavily signed by Christianity. It also helps students to better understand their neighbours who have chosen the principles of the gospel as the basis of their lives. Secondly, R.E. helps students to better understand their own identity. Through R.E. students can appreciate and better understand the fundamental problems (life, death, creation, procreation, meaning, etc.) and find answers to the questions which have always been asked by humanity and answers of which have always been sought in and through religion. Thirdly, it helps students to critically question society and find their place in it. R.E. has to educate students regarding the dignity of the human being and the responsibility of each individual towards others for the building of a better society and a better world.

From a theological perspective there are also three parallel arguments for the R.E. programme within the school system. First of all, R.E. helps the student to come into

⁸⁴ See GDC 73.

contact with the variety of traditions which exist in Christianity (theological –biblical, doctrinal, moral; spiritual; liturgical etc.). With reference to the fundamental questions of humanity, Christianity helps the student to better understand the message of salvation for humanity while assisting him/her in his/her research for the ultimate meaning of life. Finally R.E., should be able to help the school in its mission to re-evaluate society and regenerate it. The message announced by Christianity is after all a message which aims towards a new and different world. The fact that it proclaims the advent of the kingdom of God amongst humans and calls everybody to convert is essentially a call to critically re-evaluate one's society and to build one that is more just.⁸⁵

R.E. is intrinsically related with promoting the Good of the human person. Although dealing with the cognitive dimension, R.E. is also directly concerned with the affective and conative dimensions of the human individual. In this way it fulfils its commitment to the education of the person as a whole.

3.5 Principles for developing the aims Religious Education.

The aims of R.E. must be congruent and must ensue from the general aims of education, the Christian message and from a methodical understanding of human nature. Its main contribution lies in the total formation of the human person, where being precedes doing. Whilst R.E. forms part of the Christian Community's ministry in society, its identity is mainly understood in the realm of Education. The language of learning and instruction should be the primary language used in R.E. If R.E. is primarily understood as a discipline formed and developed exclusively in the ecclesial context, the subject risks irreversibly entering a ghetto reserved to irrelevant scholastic disciplines. There needs to be a healthy and balanced dialogue. On the one hand, due to its religious nature, R.E. must draw its wisdom from Theology, including the reflections made by the believing community at different periods. This wisdom should draw attention on guiding principles, directing and sustaining development, and build a theology of action. On the other hand, Theology should humbly acknowledge that it is not competent in the art and science of teaching and learning. It is not equipped to understand the nature of learning, make predictions about effective and efficient learning, investigate and meet student needs, develop didactic methods and verify desired outcomes.

In our context, the aims of R.E. should be congruent with the aims of education established by UNESCO, by the European Union and by the Maltese state. However this should in no way mean writing aims that go in direct contrast with the liberating and loving force of the Word of God.

Thus, Religious Education should contribute to student's

- i. enrichment and understanding of society,
- ii. ability to critical appraise politics and economics and be empowered by an ethics induces social justice,
- iii. capability to live with others, and
- iv. enhance students' potential to develop fully.⁸⁶

Similarly, in line with the three aims of the Council of Education of the European Union which emphasize on the development of the individual, society and economy,⁸⁷

⁸⁵ See. METTE (2002) p. 19-23.

⁸⁶ See Jacques DELORS (et al.) *Nell'Educazione un Tesoro. Rapporto all'UNESCO della Commissione Internazionale sull'Educazione per il Ventunesimo Secolo*, Armando Editore, Roma 1997. p. 89-89.

Religious Education is called to contribute in varying degrees to each of these objectives. In the first place Religious Education does and should contribute to the development of the human person since humanity is our main concern.⁸⁸ However one should be aware, that our understanding of the human person is wider from the one present in the report of the European Union. In the latter report, emphasis is put on the economy and society, so much so that in specifying how the individual is to realize his/her potential the council states that individuals are to “realise their potential as citizens, as members of society, and as economic agents.”⁸⁹ The fulfilment of the individual is not seen on its own but as a subset of citizenship, membership of a society and an economy. On the other hand, it is our belief that the starting point should be the formation of the human person for the sake of his/her intrinsic dignity and value. This, however, will inevitably lead to an education that comprises state, societal and economic concerns. This position is more holistic and less utilitarian.

Secondly Religious Education also contributes and should continue to contribute to the development of society and fostering social conviviality, thus promoting tolerance and respect. The commandment of Love as understood and lived by Jesus Christ is the basis for good living and social cohesion. Religious Education also contributes to the formation of personal and social identity. If the educational system were ever to ignore the religious and the spiritual from its curriculum it would be accepting religious illiteracy and thus promoting an inaccurate, partial view of civilisations. It would be fuelling the false assumption that religion is a private endeavour and therefore irrelevant to the building of a community.

Thirdly, although indirectly, Religious Education should also contribute to the economic development of society. Except for a very few exceptional cases, R.E. does not better the prospects of employability but it can equip students with an ethic which is essential for the economy market. As future workers but also as consumers, students need to be equipped with knowledge and skills which enable them make right and conscientious choices. Putting the human person first in any decision, including economical one, is an imperative for development in any sector or dimension.

3.6 Aims of R.E.

Thus, in the Maltese context the main goal of Catholic Religious Education is

- iii. to educate the spiritual and religious dimensions of students, and
- iv. to encourage the development of a healthy relationship with Self, Others, Creation and God through Christ, the model and source of life for all humanity, and the only way to the Father.

Through these goals, Religious Education also seeks to contribute to

- i. the development and formation of one’s identity,
- ii. moral and ethical responsibility,
- iii. live in community in respect of diversity and in true love of neighbour,
- iv. contribute to understanding and construction of Maltese culture and identity,

⁸⁷ EUROPEAN UNION, EDUCATION COUNCIL, *Report from the Education Council to the European Council. On the concrete future objectives of education and training systems*, (12 February 2001). p. 4.

⁸⁸ See PP 13.

⁸⁹ EUROPEAN UNION, EDUCATION COUNCIL(12 February 2001). p. 7.

- v. contribute to the understanding of how religion sustains and contributes to the development of societies, in particular western society, through the arts, politics, sciences, education and philosophy, and
- vi. a healthy knowledge of Holy Scriptures, Hagiography, the Sacramental life, Liturgy and Ecclesial life.

The one Word found in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and the experience of innumerable believing communities, inherited from the Jewish Community and which have continued to be developed by the Catholic Church over the past two millennia will be the main corpus of the language used in R.E.

3.7 *The core values in the teaching of R.E.*

In view of the above aims, the new R.E. syllabi will seek to promote the following fundamental values:

- **Love** – understood as the distinctive feature of the Christian. It is by loving one another that the disciples of Christ are recognised.⁹⁰ The love of neighbour shown to us by God in Christ is to be preceded and empowered by the love of God – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind.”⁹¹
- **Equality in diversity** – understood in the spirit of the biblical message that all human beings have been created different (e.g. male and female) but equal in the image of God. This is indeed a reflection of our being created in the image of God. Just as our God is three unique individuals so our God is One with all individual persons being equal. The God of Christians is the celebration of unity in diversity. Individual differences are the reflection of God’s eternal and infinite nature. On this point Aquinas states that no one creature can adequately represent God’s goodness. Difference is needed in order for God to communicate his goodness to creatures.⁹² Therefore, **Diversity** is appreciated first and foremost as the expression of the different gifts the Spirit gives to different individuals for the good of all. The **equal respect** due to all human beings needs to be expressed in other values such as **inclusion, social justice and democracy**.
- **Persons in community** – understood in the sense that each and every human being is an individual person with particular gifts, talents and inclinations that need to be recognised and appreciated in the quest of forming one’s own identity and realising one’s own self in the light of God’s plan for one’s life and, therefore, in the light of the person as in community with other persons. One’s own gifts, talents and inclinations need to be developed for the **service** of others. Here, the values of **responsibility and solidarity especially with the weakest** need to be highlighted, too.
- **The family** – understood as the lifelong God-sponsored covenant of love. The values of **commitment, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, fidelity and true self-giving love** need to be transmitted as the basis of any sound and fulfilling marital relationship.

⁹⁰ See Jn 12: 34-35.

⁹¹ *Lk* 10: 27.

⁹² See Robert Joseph SLAVIN, *The philosophical basis for individual difference according to saint Thomas Aquinas*, Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America 1936. p. 150.

- **The culture of life** – understood as the commitment for the respect and defence of human life from conception till its natural end. The value of the culture of life extends also to the respect due to life in all the natural environment.
- **The cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance** as the human virtues that empower persons to freely practice the good, for one’s own and others’ benefit. These virtues have to be particularly incarnated in the Maltese context
- **Faith, hope and love as Theological Virtues**, gifts of God that empower human beings to live life to the full by disposing them to live in the everlasting relationship with the Holy Trinity, which the ultimate goal of every human person. The recent teachings in the encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI will be the guiding light for the proper understanding of these virtues.

3.8 A further note on R.E. in Catholic Church Schools

Without prejudice to the principles stated above, one should be reminded that the distinctive and specific aims of the Catholic school lie precisely in its religious dimension.⁹³ The promotion and the education of the human person holistically are at the centre of the educational project of the Church. Our aim is to help the human person become more human.⁹⁴ Thus, in Catholic Schools, Religious Education is to be considered the principal subject. Religious Education should also be integrated with the other curricular subjects and extra-curricular activities of the Catholic schools. The principles anthropo-centricity in the Christian message and that of dialogue should be the main principles of policies adopted with regards to the teaching of Religion in the school. Thus R.E. should in no way be presented as disinterested in everyday and fundamental human realities and experience. On the other hand, religion, religiosity, and religious piety should not be over emphasised. Paul’s recommendation not to “exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart,”⁹⁵ should be extended to all educators of young people.

More than in any other school setting R.E. in Catholic schools should balance the cognitive dimension with education of feelings, relations, attitudes and values. The ultimate aim is to bring students to value and live an intimate relationship with each person of the Blessed Trinity.

3.9 Conclusion

Having clarified the scope, Goals and aims of Religious Education for the next years it is now important to clarify how this vision is to be implemented at various levels and in various contexts.

⁹³ GE 8; CT 69; CS 1.

⁹⁴ ECS 12; CT 35-36.

⁹⁵ Col 3: 21.

Implementing the Vision for Religious Education

4.1 *Introduction*

The Community of Believers is duty bound to share the joy of the message and life of the Risen Christ. Because the God of Jesus Christ is the God of life, and life in abundance,⁹⁶ the Catholic community is to collaborate with the learning community in all possible ways, especially by consolidating and offering the best possible R.E. so that students may grow holistically.

4.2 *The establishment of a R.E. Office for Malta and Gozo*

The vision outlined in the previous Chapter, and the will to consider R.E. as a priority for the Church in Malta, should lead the Church to invest in the development of R.E. by acquiring the necessary tools in order to form teachers, educate students and strive for excellence in the context of scholastic education. The first immediate initiative is the formal establishment of a R.E. Office.

The main aim of the R.E. Office will be to promote excellence in the education of the religious, moral and spiritual dimensions of the students. This Office will develop, evaluate, support and implement policies, syllabi, formation programmes for teachers and didactic aids for R.E. carried out in schools. The Office will ensure coordination on all levels, and also make the best use of the limited human and financial resources available. The R.E. office will be coordinated by the Director for R.E. who will have the duty to administer and co-ordinate the work in his/her office (including convening Boards under his/her responsibility). S/he will be expected to contribute to the development of R.E. nationally, particularly through co-operation with governmental, ecclesial and non-governmental institutions and services.

The Maltese Episcopal Conference shall endeavour to publish the terms of reference and the modes of operation of the R.E. Office and appoint the Director of R.E. by the end of 2008. The Director of R.E., together with the members of the office, will then present the strategic plan for the implementation of the vision for R.E. for the period 2009-2015 to the Episcopal Conference after consulting and receiving the approval the appropriate Church bodies.

4.3 *The Cycles and Syllabi of R.E.*

Among the first duties of the R.E. office will be the drafting of syllabi for the consideration and approval of the Maltese Episcopal Conference. The core values shall be reflected in the different cycles of R.E. Each cycle will seek to transmit as much as possible all of the core values in a way suitable to the particular age and level of the recipients involved.

The cycles will be organised thus:

⁹⁶ Jn 10: 10.

Pre-Primary Education (Kindergarten)

Primary Level Education (two cycles):

Early Years	-	Years 1-3
Junior Years	-	Years 4-6

Secondary Level Education (two cycles):

Pre-adolescence	-	Forms 1-2
Middle Adolescence	-	Forms 3-5

Besides the general aims and the core values that will form the basis of all the syllabi, each cycle of R.E. will have its own specific aims. In preparing syllabi, due attention should be given to the need for balance between the cognitive and the affective domains of knowledge

4.4 *Didactic support materials for use in R.E.*

The textbooks to be used in R.E. will need to provide a certain level of flexibility to the teacher. Textbooks could be planned to include a number of compulsory chapters, but they would also give the possibility to teachers to choose a number of topics from a selection of optional chapters. Another option to consider, especially for the secondary level, could be that of having one textbook per cycle which would cover the core themes of the syllabus with supplementary booklets. These will cover the core themes more extensively and also deal with additional optional topics.

The textbooks will have to cater for the different learning needs and aptitudes of students, including gender, intelligence, styles of learning and other differences that have an impact on the learning process. The language used should reflect accurately the expected literacy levels of the age concerned. Great care should also be given so that the language used is inclusive and sensitive to the difficult social situations some of the recipients might be coming from.

It is believed that additional didactic materials should be provided to support the students' learning process. A website intended for the students could be developed, which website would ideally also provide educational games for the students to enjoy while deepening their understanding of the topics covered in the syllabi and, to some extent, inculcating through play the core values outlined above.

Another website should be developed for the teachers of R.E. Such a website should encourage teachers to develop, use and share resources in a spirit of true communion and service.

The teaching manuals for R.E. would include suggested schemes of work, a choice of learning activities that can be used in class, and additional references corresponding to the content to be covered in the syllabus. An approach that helps the teacher to adapt to the particular requirements of the students in the particular class will be preferred. The teaching manual would ideally be available online, through the website referred to above, and be updated regularly to include reference to the resources developed and shared by the teachers themselves.

The rights and duties of the parents or legal guardians in the field of the Religious Education of the children under their care should be recognised by the authorities and by

the professionals involved. In recognition of these rights and duties, the development of a publication that can support and inform parents about the Religious Education of their child, and promote cooperation between the School and the family is being proposed.

Didactic materials will be prepared by teams within the R.E. office. These teams shall be composed of persons bringing expertise in educational sciences, theology, and Religious Education.

It is believed that R.E. needs to be contextualised. For this reason, all schools are to follow the syllabi and use the materials published by the R.E. office. Due attention shall be given to the issue of language. While the primary language of instruction in R.E. should be Maltese, it is also true that a minority of students learn more if taught in English. Therefore, after ascertaining the viability and sustainability of such an initiative, the R.E. Office will translate materials into English.

4.5. Issues needing urgent attention

Although there have been various developments in Education and in our societies, it must be admitted that the Church has been slow to respond to these changes this has created a situation where there are various areas in need of immediate attention.

4.5.1 Teachers in the Primary

In view of the ever-changing Maltese culture, it has been pointed out that more and more children are being taught Religion at the Primary Level by teachers who might not be practising Christians or who might have even rejected the Christian faith outright. This situation renders the teaching of Religion a problem for the teachers in question and more so for the sons and daughters of those Christian parents who rightly expect from the education system support and formation in the religious aspect as well. It might be the right time for the education authorities to consider the introduction of School based subject teachers of R.E., who would work to support the primary class teachers in their School and teach the subject instead of those who do not feel comfortable teaching the subject because of the problems referred to above.

4.5.2 R.E at Secondary level education

At the Secondary Level, the possibility of smaller R.E. classes should be seriously considered, first and foremost by the Church school sector in the hope that its success would lead to its emulation in the other sectors too. A smaller group scenario would enable the learning process to become more personalised and of a more formative nature.

The teachers of R.E. at the Secondary Level need special support in view of the nature of the subject they are teaching. This support is not only needed on the professional level with regard to ongoing training in content and methodology, in the same way as for teachers of other subjects, but also on the level of ongoing spiritual formation so that they would be able to sustain a lifestyle coherent with what they are teaching. Ideally, the State, Church, and Independent educational authorities should accept that the teaching timetables of R.E. teachers be set in a way so as to allow them take part in the above-mentioned formation and co-ordination programmes during school hours. In practice this would mean that an agreed afternoon be left free for R.E. teachers' departmental meetings, at school and/or College level and for on-going formation programmes. The R.E. Office should discuss this possibility with the educational authorities, present long-term plans and draw up a sustainable policy in this regard.

At the Secondary Level, R.E. teachers are often expected to cooperate with the school's Religious Counsellor and the administration in the organisation of liturgical celebrations and other activities of a spiritual/religious nature. Many Church schools and even schools in the other sectors have set up a team for the Religious/Spiritual Development of their school. These teams are often made up of the Religious Counsellor, a member from the Senior Management Team, the teachers of R.E. and, at times, other teachers with Christian spirituality at heart. This practice is to be encouraged and the authorities should even promote it by taking into account the need of such a team to meet regularly on a regular basis and providing for this in their timetables. Such a contribution to the school's holistic curriculum should be acknowledged as part of the workload of the teachers involved.

4.5.3 The R.E. teacher

The identity of the R.E. teacher is tied with the nature of the subject s/he teaches. Teaching is both a profession and a vocation. The specific call of the R.E. teacher does not only come from the human community but also from his/her being a Christian.

The Church recognises and is grateful for the work and the dedication of teachers. R.E. is not only communicated in and through lessons but mainly through the relationship that the teacher builds with his/her students. Teachers and students form part of a learning community where learning is encouraged and where the holistic development of the person is taken care of. In this sense, the teacher is not only interested in the cognitive development of students but in all aspects of personhood, including the moral, spiritual, emotional and religious characteristics. Due to the explicit nature of R.E. which specifically aims at educating the affective dimension of students, the R.E. teacher is called, and is therefore responsible, for building healthy relationships which lead to educate for the Good Life.

Recognising the important role of the R.E. teacher the Church wants to be more present in the ongoing personal, spiritual and professional formation of R.E. teachers. This will be specifically done through the development of programmes aimed at addressing the spiritual and personal dimensions, the cognitive content and the pedagogical methodologies of teachers. Secondly, the R.E. Office with the help of the Education Officer/s for Religious Education should introduce a system of peer mentorship, where senior teachers support younger staff. Through particular programmes and guidelines, teachers would be invited to reflect and discuss issues that do not only concern professional matters but that are also at the core of the very nature of a R.E. teacher, such as the issues of vocation, personal well-being, and ongoing formation. If such a system is introduced, more individual meetings should be planned at the beginning of the teachers' career. Teachers should be introduced to the teaching of R.E. not only through seminars but most importantly through the experience of belonging to a real community that cares. Additionally, R.E. teachers should be introduced and encouraged to find a spiritual companion who can help them in their spiritual journey. The R.E. Office will compile a list of spiritual companions who are suitable and available. Finally, more attention should be given to the Certification of Suitability. The Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta and the Code of Canon Law require that any person who teaches Catholic R.E. should be in possession of a Certificate of Suitability

issued by the local bishop.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the Maltese Constitution stipulates that the requirement that Catholic R.E. is taught by a person professing the Catholic faith is not in contravention with any discriminatory practice.⁹⁸ At present the two dioceses have different practices in the way of certifying suitability. It is desirable that a common policy is established. The process of issuing the Certificate, and the process of continuous evaluation of the Certificate of Suitability needs to be revised and strengthened. For this purpose, the Episcopal Conference will issue a new ordinance regulating the process of issuing and the ongoing evaluation of teacher's suitability. Such a practice would not only ensure the quality of teachers in schools but most importantly it would become a process whereby the individual teacher is sustained and appraised by the Catholic Community.

4.5.4 R.E. in Church School

Currently two lessons per week are reserved for Secondary Religious Education in terms of the National Minimum Curriculum.. This has been found to be insufficient for the proper coverage of the material in the present syllabi. Greater attention will be given in the setting up of the new syllabi so that this problem would be avoided. The introduction of the system of core (obligatory) and extension (optional/elective) material will make it possible for teachers to choose from the syllabus according to the particular parameters within which they have to work. Where, however, it is possible for students to have three R.E. lessons a week this should be the case. Church schools, in particular, in line with their specific identity, should seek to offer their students a minimum of three R.E. lessons a week.

Given that in Catholic Church Schools, R.E. has a central role, the administration of the school will see that R.E. teachers meet with other subject teachers at least once per term to discuss means of collaboration and dialogue between subjects.

4.5.5 Other Religions

Unfortunately the 2005 Population Census did not include an item on the religious adherence of the population living in Malta and so there is no accurate date on this matter. Surveys have always indicated that between 95-98% of the population claim to be Catholic. However, as already outlined in the first chapter, there are minority communities composed of Muslims, Hindus, Protestant, Orthodox, members of Christian sects, members of the Baha'i Faith and Jews. There are also indications that there is a very small Wiccan/Neo Pagan community and a small, though probably growing, number of individuals who claim to have no religion.⁹⁹ Similarly, up till now there is little data about the religious composition of school populations.

However, while there is no doubt that almost all students come from a Catholic background this should not mean that students should not learn about and learn from other faith communities. Even though as Catholics, we believe that Christ is the fullness of

⁹⁷ See *Accordo tra la Repubblica di Malta e la Santa Sede per meglio ordinare l'istruzione e l'educazione Religiosa Cattolica nelle Scuole statali*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81. 1989. art.2, see *Modes of Regulation on Catholic Religious Instruction and Education in State Schools*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81. 1989. Section I, art. 1-3; See *Code of Canon Law*, Canons 804 and 805

⁹⁸ See MALTA. HOUSE OF THE REPRESENTATIVES, *Constitution of Malta*, 1964. art. 45 (9).

⁹⁹ See for instance Adrian GELLEL and Miriam DEBONO, *National Research amongst Maltese 18 to 30 year olds*. Malta: unpublished research report 2008.

God's revelation, we also believe that other religions and cultures hold "seeds of the Word."¹⁰⁰ Other faiths

command our respect because over the centuries they have borne witness to the efforts to find answers "to those profound mysteries of the human condition" (NA 1) and have given expression to the religious experience and they continue to do so today.¹⁰¹

In today's world it is of utmost importance that students are not only knowledgeable of other religions but that also to learn from the beauty and goodness of other faith traditions and recognise the "seeds of the Word" in other religions. Thus it is important that every cycle of the R.E. programme is sensitive to the diverse ways in which human beings throughout the millennia have expressed the spiritual dimension.

4.5.6 Modes of Regulation and other policies

Almost two decades ago, the Maltese State and the Holy See signed an agreement establishing the principles and methods of implementing the principles of the teaching of R.E. in state schools. In 2003 the Holy See and the Maltese Government amended the Modes in order to make it possible for lay R.E. teachers to serve as Education Officers and for the introduction of a Co-ordinator of Religious Counsellors. Without renouncing and changing the principles already agreed upon, the Changes in Maltese society and the vision proposed by the present document calls for the initiation of new discussions in order to update the Modes of Regulation on Religious Education.

Together with a rethinking on the Modes of Regulation there is a need for new policies in the area of, amongst other, Assessment Procedures. In these past years there have been various teacher and parents who have questioned the utility and validity of having examinations in Religious Education. Literature and experience in other countries has demonstrated that it would be unwise to do away with examinations. On the other hand, the present practice of mainly assessing the lowest levels of the cognitive domain needs to be changed. Assessment does not only aim at grading students but it primarily aims at evaluating the learning process and at helping students and teachers to ascertain learning.

¹⁰⁰ AG 11.

¹⁰¹ DP14

Religious Counselling

5.1 Introduction

Educating students for life takes place within the context of the whole school environment and not only in the classroom. In any school system the commitment to education stems from the spirit of all those partners who contribute to the educational welfare of students, so that the potential of the students will be attained in such personal, social and spiritual values of the school ethos. If these values permeate the life of the school on a daily basis they are more likely to be effective in the present and future lives of its students.¹⁰² In this regard, the presence of the “Religious Counsellor” (Chaplain) in every school for the “religious animation and moral guidance of students, as an essential part of their Religious Education”¹⁰³ is of great importance.

5.2. The Present Situation

The Religious Counsellor takes care of the spiritual and pastoral life of the school. By acting in supportive manner, the Religious Counsellor accompanies each person in the school community and represents the concerns of the Church especially among those who wish to celebrate and deepen their faith and have one among them who is a caring and spiritual presence.¹⁰⁴

At present, the Religious Counsellor is an ordained minister entrusted with pastoral care. The presence of one Religious Counsellor, sometimes two in the larger schools, working at least four hours a week, is ensured in every State, Church and Independent School. Post Secondary Schools have a full-time Chaplain. Primary and Pre-Primary Schools are supposed to be catered for by the Parish Priest of the place where the School is situated. In view of the growing spiritual needs of young people and the diminishing numbers of the members of the clergy the services of Religious Counsellors in schools are obviously inadequate.

In most schools several teachers and other members of the staff, out of their concern for the spiritual and pastoral needs of the school population, usually cooperate with the Religious Counsellor and the administration in the organization of liturgical celebrations and other activities of a spiritual/religious nature. Several Schools have also set up a team for the spiritual/religious development of the school. In other schools the Religious Counsellor is regularly invited to participate in meetings of the School Pastoral Care Team, focused on areas such as students at risk, staff development and school development programmes, referral services and procedures, and bereavement support.

¹⁰² See IRISH BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, *Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students*, 1999.

¹⁰³ *Accordo tra la Repubblica di Malta e la Santa Sede per meglio ordinare l'istruzione e l'educazione Religiosa Cattolica nelle Scuole statali*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81. 1989.

¹⁰⁴ See Luke MONAHAN, *The Chaplain*, Ireland 1998.

5.3 *The way forward in Religious Counselling*

The relationship between the Church and the school is not something new. Various members of the Catholic Community, ordained ministers and committed lay persons, have sustained, encouraged, consoled and formed students in schools. This has been done through liturgy, various spiritual and religious activities but most importantly through their presence and availability.

In order to improve the service provided by the Church it is being suggested that by the end of the 2008, the Co-ordinator of Religious Counselling in collaboration with the Office of R.E. prepares a Policy document for Religious and Spiritual Counselling in Schools.

It is being suggested that the policy document restructures Religious Counselling by first of all establishing defining the proper role of Religious Counselling. Secondly it is being suggested that the Church establishes an Office responsible for the spiritual formation of students, teachers and their families. Among others this Office would be expected to

- i. supervise and support individual schools and individual Religious Counsellors in the spiritual formation of the school community,
- ii. offer formation to individual school pastoral teams, and
- iii. offer specific activities (for instance, para-liturgical celebrations, half day retreats) for individual schools or same area schools.

The Office should include two separate teams, one for the Primary sector and another for the Secondary Sector. These teams should take a holistic pastoral approach, promoting new methods of spiritual formation, and educating the learning community's experience and understanding of Self, Others and God. Sacramental practice is only part of spiritual formation. Attention to community building, the importance of service, self love and love of others should be at the basis of any spiritual formation programme.

Secondly it is being suggested that the number of Religious Counsellors is reduced to a minimum of seven fulltime ordained ministers and a number of consecrated religious and lay persons. The Dioceses should encourage all Religious Counsellors to follow post-graduate courses in Spiritual Companionship.

The Church should initiate dialogue with Education authorities in order to restructure Religious Counselling in such a way that the work of many teachers is recognised and consolidated. Through the valuable contribution of all support structures, Religious Counselling may well develop in true and proper School Chaplaincies. This development will bring together people, with different vocations and tasks in the school community, into partnership and collaboration, in response to their Christian vocation, whether this be as committed lay persons, as priests or as religious.

A Chaplaincy Team, working in a collaborative manner will give an excellent Christian witness and example, and combine to develop ideas among people, particularly the young, of the many ways in which they might serve the Church.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ BISHOP'S CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES, *Chaplaincy, the Changes and Challenges*, 1996.