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## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION WITHIN THE MALTESE SCHOOL**

In Malta, the Catholic Church has a right to teach the Catholic Faith in all schools. As it is, the Church authorities are satisfied with the syllabus, but are dissatisfied with the results.

There are not many students who grow to be committed Catholics. Most young people are involved in the Parish only until their Confirmation at the age of twelve years. Only a small percentage of them involve themselves in movements and groups after they leave school.

Parents who are more liberal are not really happy with the strictly Catholic syllabus. They consider it to be too narrow and prejudiced, and would wish it to reflect the multi-cultural reality which Malta has become. In addition, there still seems to be an over-emphasis on the cognitive aspect, especially because there is a written exam at the end of each academic year and this is always based on memory.

On the other hand, the more strictly Catholic parents are afraid that their sons and daughters are not really getting a Catholic upbringing. Their complaint would be that the teachers are not inspiring enough, that the syllabus is boring, and that their sons and daughters are not growing into practicing Catholics, despite the fact that they are receiving a Catholic Religious education, which means that there must be something wrong. In short, it seems that both the Catholic Religious Education which young people are receiving at school and the Catechesis which they are getting from the Parish is not having the long-term effects which is desired: the

involvement in the Liturgy is quite poor and the values have become ever more liberal, particularly among the young.

The solutions which people offer are divided. Some would say that we ought to focus on the syllabus. Here, opinions diverge. Some would say that the Catholic Religious Education syllabus should remain Catholic, but that the topics chosen should be more interesting and captivating for a young audience. Others would say that the current syllabus is too strictly Catholic. They would insist that the Catholic Religious Education syllabus should be changed, that other religions play a more important role in the syllabus, and that the syllabus should reflect the multi-cultural nature of our society, which would also include the non-religious.

Others would say that we ought to focus on the textbooks. Complaints about the textbooks are always forthcoming. We have just produced new, attractive textbooks, created by the Secretariat of Catechesis within the Church Curia. However, some people complain that these new textbooks have gone from the extreme of overload of information to a superficiality and shallowness that makes them practically useless. Some people would say that the picture of Catholicism which the books present is too diluted and superficial.

Others would emphasize that we ought to focus on the quality of the teaching which takes place during the Catholic Religious Education lessons in Schools, particularly within the Primary Sector. Here, our younger teachers are often antagonistic. They feel unprepared to teach Religious Education, and would rather not do it if given the option.

This is a huge concern for those who love the subject. Some teachers simply skip the subject, although it is on the timetable, since they would rather extend the lessons in Maths, English and Maltese than teach religion.

Most Catholics involved in Education would agree that teachers who are not believers themselves are not able to communicate the faith efficiently, and that such non-believing, or even antagonistic teachers, should be replaced by peripatetic specialist teachers.