



## Rt. Rev Philip Tartaglia Bishop of Paisley

### **Meeting of RE Specialists**

#### **Diocesan Centre Paisley**

**18<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

#### **General Remarks**

I want above all today to encourage you in your task of delivering Religious Education in our Catholic High Schools. I know you will be responsible for a wide range of services across this remit: planning the curriculum, resourcing it, teaching it, monitoring it, assessing it, and developing it.

You will also be responsible for motivating and assisting colleagues to play their part in the delivery of RE, and while most of these will be very ready to play their part, some may feel out of their depth and others might be reluctant for one reason or another.

I recently had the honour of being present at and addressing the latest CHAS Conference. I have to say that I was very impressed with their commitment to Catholic Education, and they certainly left me with the impression that they value their RE staff unreservedly. I think you should not have any hesitation in calling for their support in the delivery of the RE curriculum and in the advancement of the Catholic ethos of the school.

You also have the responsibility of helping the young people in your schools to respond to the RE curriculum and take it seriously, and, an even more serious and difficult task, to understand, appreciate and live their Catholic faith both in the school and outside the school. There is therefore a lot of your remit which is not just the professional delivery of a service or of a curriculum, but is also vocation and witness. It has to do with your own faith, your belonging to the Church, your Catholic life, your own prayer, devotion and service.

For all of this you have my thanks and admiration. In all of this you have my encouragement, my support and my prayers. A tangible expression of my support is the commitment of the Diocese of Paisley to assign priest chaplains to our High Schools, no matter the strain it puts on our human resources, and to be available whenever invited to visit your schools to celebrate Mass or to participate in other events.

I confessed to the CHAS Conference that I have a high and noble vision of Catholic schools as communities where teachers and young people engage in heart and mind with their Catholic faith as prayer and liturgy, as sound doctrine and wisdom, as an enlightened way of life, and as the best possible basis and motivation for service to humanity and especially to the poor, the weak, the defenceless and to those who need our help most. This is my vision of Catholic schools. I refuse to accept that it is unrealistic or far beyond our grasp. We need a rich and specific vision of that kind to take us ever forward, to fulfil our obligations to our young people in Catholic schooling, and to continue to justify the presence of Catholic schooling in the public sector.

### **Some Challenges for RE Today**

I see the challenges for Catholic Education in general and for RE specifically in this diocese and elsewhere today as including the following:

1. The emergence of what might be called “culture” has cast a particular light on Christianity in general and possibly on Catholic faith in particular. Christianity has had unchallenged hegemony in western thought and education for centuries. Now we live in a multi-cultural society. Other cultures have to find legitimate expression and inclusion in our society, and this is a prominent idea in politics and in social decision-making, and it affects education and schooling. An unintended dimension of this imperative of social inclusion is that it may give added encouragement to the aggressive secularist voices which would disallow Catholic schooling in any case, and now appears to have a reason which comes from the moral high ground. All of this is major challenge, but also a golden opportunity, for the Church and for Catholic schooling. Christianity makes some non-negotiable claims about God, about Christ and about God’s purpose for the salvation of humanity and of the cosmos. In this context the danger is that in the minds of our young people, and not just our young people, all religions are reduced to a couple of common general categories, such as tolerance and equality and liberty, which have more to do with post-Enlightenment philosophy than with the Word of God, or with any other religious text or tradition. The challenge and the opportunity for RE is to present intelligibly the specificity of Catholic Christianity and the kind of inclusiveness of humanity in Christ which brings peace and understanding, which fulfils God’s purpose in Christ for the human race, and which satisfies the legitimate human aspiration to build a world in which everyone is welcome irrespective of race, religion, or gender status.

2. Everyone today prizes freedom and individual liberty and choice, and we would not have it any other way. The problem is that this almost unlimited personal freedom induces people to adopt lifestyles which totally contrast with the vision of humanity which is central to Catholic Christianity. Many of our people and young people have bought into this idea of freedom which causes a disastrous dualism between what they believe and profess, and how they live. The challenge for the Church and for RE, is to show that the human ideal of freedom is fully met, and indeed enhanced, and brought to its fulfilment, by our faith in Christ. Christ is the image of the free man. We find our true freedom in God and we find our full maturity in Christ and in his self-sacrificing love. The way to freedom is the Gospel. A fully Christian life is a fully free life. To instil this vision of freedom is at the very heart of evangelisation.

3. In our day, there has been a well-documented demise in religious observance. A smaller percentage of Catholics attend Mass now than at any time in the last 100 years (it would seem). There is a dichotomy between faith and life, and between worship and life. Sometimes people who should know better say they are not too worried about (the lack of) bums on seats. They are more worried about making a difference. It would be unwise to pander to this false and unwise dichotomy. It is a religious pathology which makes a virtue out of a failure. It affects all our people, but some would say especially the young. I see lots of wonderful things happening in Catholic schools where religious and liturgical activity is integrated with initiatives of Christian service. Yet away from school, many young people never see the inside of a Church. This is not a simple phenomenon, and there are many reasons for this. But clearly it is a major challenge for RE programmes to show the essential relationship of love of God and love of neighbour (the theme of Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical letter *Deus est Caritas*) and of Eucharist and life.

4. In order to meet these challenges in our Catholic High Schools we need to have a number of things in place: good leadership in our Catholic schools; committed Catholic teachers all through the school; endorsement of the Charter for Catholic Schools by all teachers; a well-resourced and run RE department; an RE curriculum and resources which can meet the challenges of today; opportunities for continuing personal and professional development in faith for Catholic teachers; effective chaplaincy with a priestly presence; a welcoming attitude towards those in the Catholic school community who are not members of the Catholic Church and respect for their rights; and ideally, but probably the least measurable element of this list, productive liaison with family and parish.

5. Finally I know that our Catholic schools pride themselves on their ethos, that tangible-intangible quality and atmosphere which comes from a shared understanding of the dignity of every human being not just as human but also as being created in the image and likeness of God and as having being re-created in Christ through faith and baptism. This ethos has shown consistently that it has the remarkable ability to welcome and care for those members of the Catholic school community who are not Catholics or who come from ethnic and cultural minorities in our societies, and this is in some ways a test of the depth of the ethos Catholic school. The RE department must be in the forefront of establishing, sustaining and supporting this ethos. I also encourage the RE departments to foster whole-school Catholic ethos in areas which may not be within your remit more narrowly understood: appropriate religious iconography in classrooms and staff rooms and public areas; due regard for religion in awards' ceremonies and in celebrations of the achievements of the school; and due expression of the Catholic religious tradition in music festivals and in art displays for civil authorities, for parents and families, and for the public.

May God bless you in your work.

Philip Tartaglia  
Bishop of Paisley  
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