



## **Lighting the Way**

**Religious Education at the Heart of the School**

# **Do We Know Where We're Going To? Has Religious Education a Future?**

**Paul Faller – Catholic Institute of Education**

## **Do You Know Where You're Going To?**

Theme Song from the film “Mahogany”

*Do you know where you're going to?  
Do you like the things that life is showing you  
Where are you going to?  
Do you know?*

*Do you get  
What you're hoping for  
When you look behind you  
There's no open door  
What are you hoping for?  
Do you know?*

## **Introduction**

In this presentation I would like to explore with you the future of Religious Education in our Catholic schools. But in order to look ahead with insight we need to remind ourselves of where we've come from, to take cognizance of the world we live in today, and to find a way forward that honours our tradition and yet lights the way for young people in our postmodern world.

Thus the three main parts of this presentation will deal with:

- A brief 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Religious Education
- A characterization of the world today as secular, global and postmodern
- Religious Education's response to this for today and the future

## **A Pilgrim People**

But first, let's look at ourselves for a few moments. Do we religious educators know where we're going to? Do we ever stop to think about our profession and its future? I say 'profession' because I believe that the survival of Religious Education in our world depends on it being able to give a public account of itself<sup>1</sup> and demonstrate its relevance, especially to those who would love to see its speedy departure from the school curriculum.

Seeing that Religious Education is being challenged, not only in South Africa, but elsewhere, as I will shortly illustrate, are we actively seeking ways to make it more relevant to the needs of our learners? If we see Religious Education at the heart of the school are we ensuring that its lifeblood reaches all its members? Or are we, like the ostrich, reacting to the challenges by putting our heads in the sand of an unreflecting and somewhat self-serving faith, not wanting to see that perhaps what we are doing is in need of revision and transformation?

We religious educators need to see ourselves as pilgrims on the way - a way that needs discernment. We need a vision of our destination, of where we should go, and such a vision can only be built on a knowledge of where we've come from. We shall shortly retrace the main steps along the way of Religious Education in the past century.

What is a pilgrim? One source describes it as 'a religious devotee who journeys to a shrine or sacred place, or one who embarks on a quest for something conceived of as sacred.'<sup>2</sup> To my mind, these descriptions fit, for the professional religious educator is ever searching for more meaningful ways to make the classroom a sacred space for all, regardless of their religious affiliation or persuasion.

Looking into the roots of the word reveals another important aspect of what it means to be pilgrim. A pilgrim is a foreigner, a person from abroad<sup>3</sup>, not one who stays at home amid the comfort of familiar things, but one who strikes out into unknown territory with a 'nostalgia for the infinite', in search of the place that is truly home. Here, of course, is a paradox. Nostalgia - the pain of longing for home - is usually seen as a retreat into the past. But here, home is in the future, and the heart of the pilgrim beats to Augustine's tune: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Do we remain in our comfort zones, or are we restlessly searching for a better, more meaningful way for Religious Education?

## Religious Education on the Way

Let us now briefly sketch the journey of Religious Education through the past hundred years or so in the Catholic milieu, noting the gradual shift in focus from the content of the faith tradition to the person who belongs to it, and then to the world in which the person lives. To understand these shifts it is important to understand that Religious Education "has never existed in a vacuum. The way in which it has been taught reflects the educational and theological mindset of a particular time."<sup>4</sup>

What we find at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an approach largely inward looking and defensive - a consequence of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation and Counter-Reformation. This is called the doctrinal or catechism approach. The advantages of this approach were seen to be: the clear presentation of Church teaching which ruled out any confusion as to what teachers should teach or what children should learn, and the ease with which one could assess whether

or not a particular body of material had in fact been learned. However, it presented to children answers they did not understand to questions they did not have. Furthermore, it was seen to be too theological for children. The concepts were too difficult, the language was adult in its orientation and what was learned off by heart had little connection with the lived experience of the children.<sup>5</sup>

In a certain sense, the doctrinal approach stressed the end point of a process in faith formation, a crystallization of experience. But what was the founding experience? In the 1950s Religious Education was strongly influenced by the kerygmatic movement which emphasised the biblical and liturgical roots of the tradition and the joy and the challenge of the good news centred on Jesus Christ, calling for a response of faith and commitment to God.<sup>6</sup> For a short while this approach was seen to be the panacea for Religious Education, but it gave too little attention to the situation of the human person.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the teaching of Vatican II had a profound impact as Michael Buchanan explains<sup>8</sup>.

*Dei Verbum made it clear that scripture and church tradition were not sources of revelation, but rather witnesses to it. The Constitution stressed that God was the only source of divine revelation and that revelation was an ongoing process that God initiated. The implications of this understanding of divine revelation contributed to the short-lived experience of the kerygmatic approach, which centred on revelation through scripture.*

And so the search for relevance continued. Already in the 1920s catechetical reforms in Europe had encouraged “starting with the child’s experience and working back to the catechism text,”<sup>9</sup> but it was the social revolution of the 1960s that led Religious Education to the anthropological or life-centred approach which completed the shift from a propositional understanding of revelation (the doctrinal approach) to a more personal one. Dermot Lane sums up this approach. While he is concerned here specifically with theology, his words apply equally to the practice of Religious Education. He speaks of

*an invitation to do theology in a new key: to explore the religious dimension of human experience, to discover in faith the reality of God as co-present in human experience, to situate the gracious revelation of God to the person within experience, to ground the activity of faith as a response to the experience of God and to live life more fully by participating passionately in the revelatory orientation of human experience. God comes to us in experience. We receive God in experience. Rather we find God, already there ahead of us, in human experience.<sup>10</sup>*

The life-centred approach, seen as a final answer, also had a limited span and it was not long before it was subjected to intense criticism. It ran the danger of becoming “so personalist in its orientation that humankind - not God - would become the centre of revelation.”<sup>11</sup> It was often seen as an easy way out for teachers as discussion and sharing became a favoured methodology. Strongly influenced by the growing discipline of psychology, Religious Education tended

to lose any rigour it might have had and encouraged an over-emphasis on the individual.

The Church's growing realisation that social justice is a constitutive part of the gospel provided the necessary corrective as the focus now turned to the person in society and the call to social awareness and action.

Let us pause here and take stock of the situation. The developments in Religious Education thus far described could be likened to the building of a house, room by room, but living in it while the construction is taking place. None of the rooms are abandoned along the way, but living becomes easier and more meaningful as the house grows. Similarly, all the approaches we have looked at briefly have validity, but none alone are sufficient in themselves. We are perhaps familiar with the work of Thomas Groome whose shared praxis approach in the 1980s tried to bring all the above-mentioned approaches together in a coherent whole. Space does not allow for me to elaborate here.

The social justice approach brings the world into the classroom, and we have to ask ourselves today 'What is this world?'

## The World Today

What are the features of the world we live in today? We can name secularisation, globalisation and postmodernity as three major phenomena that have had an impact on the understanding and practice of religion.

### Secularisation

In the first instance, secularisation refers to a view of the world that only takes into account the here and now and effectively makes the human sciences the only valid sphere of knowledge. The consequence of this is the marginalisation of religion in the public sphere, reducing it to a private affair. It follows that the spirituality of young people in such a milieu is often secular in tone and not so dependent on traditional religion or religious communities.

Many young people are believers but not belongers, 'spiritual but not religious'. Their religion is eclectic drawing on a wide range of resources: not the least significant is the world of film and television, and the entertainment and consumer industries which support it. In addition, personal freedom is presumed to be an absolute - at least in Western countries; balancing freedom and responsibility is often problematic. Furthermore, seeking identity is a major developmental task as Lieven Boeve points out. "In a detraditionalised society," he says, "every individual is charged with the task of constructing his or her personal identity. Traditions no longer automatically steer this construction process."<sup>12</sup>

### Globalisation

Secondly, the world we live in is fast becoming what we may term 'the global village'. Technological developments in communication and transport have shrunk physical distance so that events in one place very soon affect the rest.

The ease of movement today means that communities in every corner of the globe are becoming multilingual, multicultural and multireligious.

## Postmodernity

Thirdly, we must take account of postmodernity, a cultural climate that reflects an openness to multiple views together with a reluctance to name any one view as the absolute truth. Richard Osmer and Friedrich Schweitzer identify three main elements<sup>13</sup>:

- (1) Radical pluralism is affirmed so that people are more open to diversity in all its forms. Adolescents find encounters with the other helping them move beyond the limitations and “destructive blindness” of their own cultures. Any attempt to impose order on plurality is considered an act of power and violence.
- (2) There is a heightened awareness of the risks involved in the pursuit of science and technology. They are no longer regarded as the saviours of the world. The solutions they offer normally come at a price: they create risks that go far beyond those facing the human community in any prior age. We can name, for example, weapons of mass destruction, pollution of the environment in various forms, genetic modification of plants, animals and human beings, global warming, AIDS, and acid rain. All of these go beyond the particular national community that gives rise to them
- (3) Personal identity is not achieved once during late adolescence but over and over. Individuals can no longer model their life-paths on those of their parents, since the world is constantly changing, giving rise to unforeseen opportunities and challenges. The path individuals will take cannot be found by looking at the patterns followed by their parents. Life, as it were, is no longer lived on solid ground but on a boat on a river flowing through uncharted lands.

Michael Paul Gallagher sees postmodernity as “an attempt to purify the modern inheritance.”<sup>14</sup> Where modernity left us lonely and without purpose, he says, postmodernity seeks to reopen the conversation about the ultimate goals of life. It is thus more open to religious horizons, and aims at wholeness to bridge the divisions that modernity gave rise to - reason from feeling, self from society, science from religion, man from woman, and theology from spirituality. So, from our point of view, postmodernity presents us with both positive and negative challenges.

[\[Discussion - What are the implications for Religious Education?\]](#)

## Implications for Religious Education

Osmer and Schweitzer<sup>15</sup> identify seven challenges that Religious Education must take account of if it is to “find new authority for itself.” They are all interlinked, and we summarise them here.

- (1) *Religion is confined to the private sphere*: Religion in traditional societies played the role of social integration and legitimatisation, serving as the “sacred canopy” under which all spheres of life were bound together into a meaningful whole. Now religion is located in the private sphere, and almost

takes on the aspect of a market commodity: religious communities must now persuade individuals that they have something to offer in answering existential questions, providing support in raising children, or meeting social needs.

- (2) *Society is uncertain of religion's public role*: Since religion has emerged as a differentiated subsystem it no longer provides integration and legitimatisation. Can congregations alone carry out educational tasks that, until recently, were shared by a broader spectrum of educational institutions which included the public school?
- (3) *The church is increasingly separated from public education*: Public education has gradually come to view religion as a purely private affair, a matter of personal preference and a choice best left to the individual.
- (4) *Morality and personal identity are separated from religion*: Religion may play a role in personal identity, but it does not easily serve as the integrative focus of the many "selves" and roles individuals adopt as they move through their everyday lives; similarly members of religious institutions find it difficult to integrate their faith with their behaviour in their various life spheres, because each sphere is organised around different moral norms. In public life, for instance, the Constitution and Bill of Rights become the highest moral authority, even though they may conflict with religious sensibilities. Thus Religious Education must argue and demonstrate explicitly that self-identity and morality are enriched and deepened when grounded in religion.
- (5) *The Church is unable to incorporate its youth*: There is a growing gap between the religious quest of the younger generation and a traditional church of older adults. The challenge before Religious Education and the church generally is to better understand why it has failed to incorporate its children and its youth into the church and how it might respond.
- (6) *There is a growing distance between the family and the church*: The role of the family in Religious Education is in decline: religious individualisation creates a an ever deeper gap between the family and the church
- (7) *There is a lack of an identity-shaping moral ethos*: "Where will children and youth encounter an ethos through which they will acquire the intellectual and moral virtues of a religious way of life? By ethos, here, we mean an ethic that is embodied in the practices of a community. Discussion of ethos in recent moral philosophy and Christian ethics has largely emerged out of the recognition that abstract ethical principles have little impact on the actual thinking and actions of persons unless they are lived out visibly in the relationships, models, and practices of a community with which individuals identify."

## Voices from Abroad

The challenges posed by Osmer and Schweitzer play themselves out not only in cultural attitudes but also in political decisions. When in a difficult situation, as Religious Education in South Africa is today, it is somehow comforting to know that we are not alone in our struggle to maintain a vibrant and relevant practice.

In England, where RE is of a high standard and well-resourced, there is a growing uneasiness because of a move by government to exclude it from the list of subjects that will be recognised for university entrance. This, many fear, will have an adverse effect on RE at lower levels.

In Ireland, the existence of the public Catholic school is being questioned by that country's Human Rights Commission which points out that "almost all national schools in Ireland have a Roman Catholic or Church of Ireland ethos, with just over 2% of schools being inter-denominational or multi-denominational and none that are non-denominational."<sup>16</sup> This means that parents who do not wish their children to have religious instruction (sic) in the school have little or no chance of accessing a suitable public school. This is seen as an infringement of human rights even though the right of withdrawal from classes may be invoked since, in a school with a religious ethos, "religion may informally permeate the school day" and the right to withdrawal will not necessarily "insulate such pupils from receiving religious education informally during the rest of the school day."<sup>17</sup>

In Scotland, again because of political pressure, the University of Glasgow is collaborating with Queen's University, Belfast and King's College, London, in a research project called 'Does Religious Education Work?' The project aims to establish whether Religious Education *does* make the kind of contribution to religious understanding that many teachers, academics, professional officers and politicians would like to see.

I shall later conclude this presentation with a few messages from around the globe addressed to this conference. They will illustrate the pressure that religious educators are under everywhere, and offer us some encouragement.

## On the Home Front

We are, of course, aware of the uncertain future of Religious Education in our own country. Religious Education, as we know it, was effectively struck from the public school curriculum in the 90s and, despite having Deeds of Agreement in place that protect its provision, its presence in many of our schools has become invisible. The shifts in the National Curriculum that will occur through the introduction in 2012 (Foundation Phase and Grade 10) and 2013 (other grades) of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) will further complicate our task as there is a very uneven treatment of religion in these very prescriptive directives.

- In Foundation Phase Life Skills there is no specific reference to religious realities. There are themes in a newly named area, Beginning Knowledge that could lend themselves to integration with religion in the hands of a skilled, sensitive and committed teacher. However, to all intents and purposes, religion is not addressed.
- In Intermediate Phase, by way of contrast, there is a detailed programme of Religion Education of one hour per week. Our greatest challenge might lie here since the directives set out what must be taught from week to week. There will thus be a great temptation to abandon the Catholic school

Religious Education curriculum in this phase. (The CIE will provide some guiding suggestions before this is introduced in 2013.)

- In Senior Phase, Religion retreats again almost entirely into the shadows. One hour per year (!) is given to random religious topics under the rubric ‘Constitutional rights and responsibilities’.
- Finally in The FET Band, as in Senior Phase, religion gets a small look in of 1, 2, or 3 hours in the year depending on grade, this time under the rubric ‘Democracy and human rights’.

In diagram form the situation looks as follows:

PHASE	TREATMENT	TIME ALLOCATED
FOUNDATION (Gr R-3)	no specific reference to religious realities	none
INTERMEDIATE (Gr 4-6)	a detailed programme of Religion Education	1 hour per week
SENIOR (Gr 7-9)	random religious topics under the rubric ‘Constitutional rights and responsibilities’	1 hour per year
FET (Gr 10-12)	random religious topics under the rubric ‘Democracy and human rights’	1, 2, or 3 hours in the year depending on grade

## Religious Education’s Response

How will Religious Education in the Catholic school respond to the global and local scenarios sketched above? What will serve to change the public perception and the perception of youth who are readily influenced by current cultural trends? And, perhaps, we should not forget that the challenge doesn’t only come from without: many - perhaps most - teachers do not feel equipped to deal with the current classroom situation effectively. Harold Horell<sup>18</sup> talks of the vulnerability of religious educators who may often be “as perplexed, or perhaps even more perplexed by the realities of contemporary life than the people we strive to educate.”

An analogy might help us to consider the options that are available. If Religious Education is a boat on the river of life driven by the currents of secularisation, globalisation, and postmodernity, then there are at least three ways of negotiating these currents:

- (1) Religious Education might moor itself to the river bank, refusing to go anywhere, thus making itself increasingly irrelevant.

- (2) Religious Education might use the oars to guide itself in a controlled way downstream, thus constantly adapting itself to current circumstances while remaining true to its vision.
- (3) Religious Education might give the current free reign, allowing itself uncritically to go with public opinion.

In order to counter the trivialising tendencies or loss of meaning and value in our world today, religious educators need to be people of hope who point to the positive potential of the present. Religious educators need to foster a belief in “four fonts of hope”: (1) hope in the various religious communities that are open and willing to change in response to these challenges; (2) hope in the continued viability of some of the practices and deep symbols of religious faith; (3) hope in the youth they educate; and (4) hope in themselves. Horell suggests, in addition, that educators who are “immigrants” to postmodern culture need to be guided in making sense of and responding to it by the youth who are born into it. In turn, educators will help youth to view the currents of cultural change within the light of the wisdom of their faith traditions.

So what shall we do with our boat on the river? I don’t think many will contest the wisdom of the second option - to go with the current but with guiding oars. But what will this mean in practice?

I think the key, as Michael Burke pointed out in his address at the 2008 National Conference in Durban<sup>19</sup>, is to embrace the kingdom vision of Jesus who was not first of all concerned about doctrines and structures, but about people. Religious Education needs to develop and share “a vision of healthy humanity underpinned by the vision of a God who loves us unconditionally.” Doctrines and structures have their importance but only insofar as they help us to a fuller humanity.

In today’s world, then, Religious Education needs to accompany the human family on its journey down river, not grudgingly but with enthusiasm and encouragement, being the first to acknowledge and cherish any and every new development in the human adventure that bring us nearer to our ultimate goal.

We often say that the Catholic school is open to all. But do we have second class citizens - also known as non-Catholics? This can be particularly evident in the way we offer Religious Education. Regardless of our students’ religious identity, or lack thereof, do we truly say to them: “Wherever you are on your journey, we welcome you.”<sup>20</sup> And do we then follow this up by making sure that our Religious Education is relevant to and enriching for all?

By way of example let us explore a few curriculum areas briefly. Thomas Aquinas argued that truth, beauty and goodness are transcendental values. By this he meant that they transcend other qualities - we ultimately judge everything according to these criteria. So I have chosen three areas that correspond to these values, namely Theological Education, Education by Arts and Education for Personal Growth and Relationships.

## Theological Education

In the doctrinal approach we described above, the teaching of the Church was the starting point and the definitive answer to whatever question might be posed. Theological Education, on the other hand, should somehow begin with the big questions that young people ask today: Why am I here? Is there a purpose? Where am I going to? Is there a God? Who is my neighbour?

Through this curriculum process - Theological Education - we should enable students to think, and not try to make them think what we or the magisterium think. Certainly, what the Church teaches is offered, but not as the definitive end product; rather as the clay to shape a unique and personal response. This is important in a globalised multi-religious world where young people are aware that the definitive beliefs of their tradition are opposed by others. Awareness of difference is essential for coming to terms with and embracing one's religious heritage in freedom, and in the process we would certainly encourage this.

## Education by Arts

I spoke above about 'shaping the clay of our inheritance' and this brings me to a consideration of the arts - that area of the school curriculum that runs a close second to Religious Education as a thing of no real importance. And if Art is sidelined, or optional - often the case in high school - then Religious Education needs the more so to embrace it and make it its own. In any event is it not true that in all great civilisations, religion has mothered the arts? Our CORD curriculum document puts it this way: "Artistic activity, because of its openness to the infinite, belongs to the same level of consciousness as religious awareness."<sup>21</sup>

In his Letter to Artists in 1999, Pope John Paul II said: "In order to communicate the message entrusted to us by Christ, the Church needs art." He goes on to say that "beauty is a key to mystery and a call to transcendence. It is an invitation to savour life and to dream of the future." This echoes the thought of Fyodor Dostoyevsky who said that "beauty will save the world."

Mimi Farrelly-Hansen rests her book *Spirituality and Art Therapy* on two premises: "that art making is inherently spiritual and that spirituality is an important ingredient in therapy or becoming more whole." Given the often traumatic experiences of young people in our country, and an often desperate search for meaning and identity, it seems evident that exposure to beauty in the arts, and involvement in creative activity can help in a significant way towards the healing that is necessary.

## Education for Personal Growth & Relationships

Thirdly, in the area of personal growth, let us explore for a moment the value of goodness. The Catholic Bishop of Southern Africa recently published *Life to the Full* - pastoral guidelines for the teaching of sexuality education in Catholic schools. Given the AIDS pandemic, the commoditisation of sex, the sexual abuse of women and children and other such grave ills, it is not surprising, as

the document points out, that sexuality is often presented as a problem to be solved rather than a gift to be appreciated, celebrated and enjoyed.<sup>22</sup>

To make our sexuality and the Church's teaching in this regard truly good news, we will need to work at the following aspects which the guidelines point out:

- We need to develop a personal appreciation and celebration of our own sexuality. We need to be spiritually and emotionally mature. (p 22)
- We must act in ways that respect the beliefs and practices of the Catholic community. (p 22)
- We need a sound theology - knowing what the Church teaches and understand the moral reasoning that gave rise to these teachings. (p 14, 22)
- We need to develop an effective approach that takes into consideration stages of growth (p 14), that honours confidentiality and facilitates participation in moral debates in a firm, yet non-judgemental way. (p 22)

We have briefly explored aspects of three curriculum areas. However we need to refresh our vision of all the processes involved in Religious Education and to steer them into ways that make our offering more creative, engaging and liberating. And our vision will be illuminated by the light of a multi-religious classroom with which we will have more and more to engage.

Our policy document, *Fostering Hope*, acknowledges this multi-religious classroom reality when it describes the aim of Religious Education in the Catholic school as “to nurture in its students their *personal gifts of faith* so as to bring awareness, growth, true freedom, and healing into their daily lives.”<sup>23</sup> Over the next while our search will be for a classroom approach that truly realises this aim - that allows us to say the words I have already quoted: “Wherever you are on your journey, we welcome you.” It is true that many of us are on the way, but we need the help of others to see beyond our limited horizons. Researchers in the field such as Chris Hermans of the Netherlands describe a process of inter-religious learning<sup>24</sup> that serves to develop the religious self in dialogue with others of different traditions.

Complementing this, and perhaps closer to what we seek, is an approach to inter-religious dialogue, described by Gerard Hall<sup>25</sup>, that encourages the attitudes of faith, hope and love - corresponding of course to the theological virtues. This seems to fit if the aim of Religious Education is seen as the development of those capacities that open a person to the transcendent, namely the innate God-given gifts of faith, of hope and of love.

## The Challenge

Are you up to the challenge that I have tried to spell out in this presentation? Do you believe that RE can make a vital difference? Do you trust that life in God will give it space? And how much of your lives will *you* give to it? How will you respond to the question that Mary Oliver<sup>26</sup> the poet poses?

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?*

Will you give it to the growth of Religious Education?

Ours is a time that is fraught with many difficulties but blessed with great opportunity. As we near conclusion, let us take note of the words of Christopher Fry.

### **A Sleep of Prisoners**

*Dark and cold we may be, but this  
Is no winter now. The frozen misery  
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;  
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,  
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.  
Thank God our time is now when wrong  
Comes up to face us everywhere,  
Never to leave us till we take  
The longest stride of soul we ever took.  
Affairs are now soul size.  
The enterprise  
Is exploration into God.  
Where are you making for? It takes  
So many thousand years to wake,  
But will you wake for pity's sake!*

And with Walt Whitman, having a vision and a purpose, we can summon the courage to sail forth into our future - the future of Religious Education.

### **From Passage to India**

*Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,  
Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,  
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,  
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.*

*O my brave soul!  
O farther, farther sail!  
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?  
O farther, farther, farther sail!*

## **Do You Know Where You're Going To?**

Theme Song from the film "Mahogany" (Reprise)

## **APPENDIX: Messages from Abroad**

### **Ireland**

Greetings fellow workers in the field of Religious Education! Often it seems like we fish and toil all day and catch nothing or only earn a penny. But let us remember that the effort is never about us. The promises made by God will be fulfilled. The Kingdom will come and we will be gifted beyond our wildest dreams. Sursum corda!

Regards

Brendan O'Reilly  
National Director for Catechetics, Ireland

### **Scotland**

Dear Colleagues,

Let me offer warm greetings from a chilly and wet Scotland. I am taking this opportunity to send you my best wishes for your forthcoming regional conferences, 'Lighting the Way'. Having spent the last 3 years leading a large scale national ethnographic study of religious education provision in different schools across the UK I am very clear that the subject is under increasing pressure to deliver on a wide ranging and demanding agenda; and all this with very modest or more likely dwindling, resources. I am sure that you, my colleagues in South Africa, face many of the same challenges we do here in the UK. Indeed, during my various privileged visits to South Africa I know too well that we share many of the same stresses and strains. And, as finances becomes ever more squeezed, politicians often seek to underfund areas of education that they consider discretionary and which don't contribute to economic growth in the obvious way they would like. Often they misunderstand the importance of religious understanding and literacy to the well-being of complex multicultural societies. Those involved in developing high quality, intellectually demanding and personally stimulating RE assume a tremendously important task on behalf of not only the educational but the whole community in furthering our understanding of what it is to be human living in community. As you undertake your deliberations and reflections I wish you every success.  
Kindest wishes

Professor James C Conroy  
University of Glasgow

### **Germany**

As far as I had the opportunity to get to know your situation of teaching RE in the Catholic schools of South Africa, I can imagine that it is not easy to do one's job day after day without seeing things change much in a direction that would correspond more with the biblical vision of the reign of God. Also in the east of

Germany (after centuries of socialism) the situation of RE teachers is not easy, and it has not improved much in the 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. None the less together with these teachers, who have organized themselves in a professional society in the east of Germany and joined the “Deutsche Katecheten-Verein” (a society on the national level and on the level of dioceses), I find that it’s worth meeting regularly (at least once a year) for further studies, to experience community with other RE teachers and to encourage one another.

For your daily struggles I ask God to give you abundant power and creativity. On the basis of your love for the children and young people entrusted to you, and your trust in God, I’m sure that it’s worth the struggle to endure until we experiences more of the closeness of the kingdom that Jesus announced and gave his life for.

Yours  
Prof. Dr. Monika Scheidler  
Dresden University

## USA

Blessings and welcome to all of you who gather to listen to and heed the Spirit's Words among you as you work and serve in preaching and teaching the Word of God and the rich heritage of our religion, and as you seek to read the revelation of the Spirit of God at work in the world, especially in your land of South Africa in all its richness and diversity, its struggles for the future, in hope and solidarity with all your people.

There is a story I share from the north of Europe where it is often pitch dark for a good portion of the year. I had done a few talks there and was staying with the local pastor who lived above the town on a hillside. It was early December - the darkest, wettest and coldest time of the year, and I stood at a great window and looked down on the town. I could see next to nothing. And then there was a flicker of a light - out of nowhere it seemed.

I wondered what it was; ...and then a minute or two later, another; every couple of minutes there was a flicker of light. There seemed no rhyme or reason...here, there, ragged bits of light but eventually I could see faint outlines of the town. I was fascinated and stood at the window for nearly a half hour, and then the pastor joined me in silence.

As we watched, he said: Isn't it marvelous? I often watch this every night. I asked him, What is it? I have no idea - the lights? And he said, It's the lamplighter: we have gas lamps and every evening he walks about and lights them, but he never takes the same route. He just starts in a place and then zigzags around the town. It's beautiful. Whenever I stand here and watch I remember the words of a poem I learned when I was young by John Ruskin, an Englishman. It goes: "You will always know where the Christians have been by the trail of light they leave behind."

I remember my time in South Africa and the marvelous folk I was privileged to meet and share the Word of God with and this is how I remember you all - by the many inter-lacing trails of light you leave behind. May you be LIGHT scattered and yet bound together across your great expanse of land - bound to the universal church - here in New Mexico in the southwestern part of the United States [as far away as one can go on this earth] and with all the beloved children of God and preachers/bearers of the Gospel. Blessings and Peace. As we say here: Vaya con Dios. May you always go with God, and that way we will always know where you are - together with us.

Shalom, with peace, Megan (McKenna)

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<sup>1</sup> See I Peter 3:15

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/pilgrim>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=pilgrim&searchmode=none>

<sup>4</sup> Maura Hyland. 2006. 'Religious Education since Vatican II: Significant Voices' in *Vatican II: Facing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Dublin: Veritas, p 146

<sup>5</sup> See Hyland, op cit, p148-150

<sup>6</sup> Hyland, op cit, p 150

<sup>7</sup> See Kevin Treston. 1993. *A New Vision of Religious Education*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, p 26

<sup>8</sup> Michael Buchanan. 2003. Survey of Current Writing on Trends in Religious Education. *Journal of Religious Education* Vol 51 No 4, p24-5

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 26

<sup>10</sup> Dermot Lane. 2003. *The Experience of God: An invitation to do theology*. Dublin: Veritas, p 14

<sup>11</sup> Treston, op cit, p 27

<sup>12</sup> Lieven Boeve. 'Communicating Faith in Contemporary Europe' in John Sullivan (ed). 2010. *Communicating Faith*. Catholic University of America Press, p 296

<sup>13</sup> Richard Osmer & Friedrich Schweitzer. 2003. *Religious Education between Modernization and Globalization*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans, p 32 & 68-72

<sup>14</sup> Michael Paul Gallagher. 1997. *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, p 91

<sup>15</sup> Osmer & Schweitzer, op cit, p xii-xix, 42-46

<sup>16</sup> Joint Conference IHRC-TCD School of Law Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective Saturday 27 November 2010, Trinity College Dublin, par 48

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, par 50

<sup>18</sup> Op cit

<sup>19</sup> *Looking Ahead: The South African Context and its Implications for RE*, May 2008

<sup>20</sup> Sr Edith Prendergast. *Arise! Sent to Lead with Passion*. National RE Congress, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, October 2007

<sup>21</sup> *CORD Curriculum*, p 235

<sup>22</sup> *Life to the Full*, p 8

<sup>23</sup> *Fostering Hope*, p 5

<sup>24</sup> *Participatory Learning: Religious Education in a Globalising Society* (2003). Brill: Leiden

<sup>25</sup> Inter- or Intra-Religious Dialogue?

[http://www.acu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/225393/Hall\\_Inter\\_or\\_Intra-Religious\\_Dialogue\\_GH.pdf](http://www.acu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/225393/Hall_Inter_or_Intra-Religious_Dialogue_GH.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> *The Summer Day*