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## **TEACHING OF RELIGION IN STATE SCHOOLS**

Reference is made to what the President of the Malta Union of Teachers is reported to have said about the teaching of religion in state schools (Times of Malta - October 10, 2014). Mr Kevin Bonello said that “It was scandalous that the Education Department did not have control over the religion classes syllabus, but this was instead in the Curia’s hands”.

The fact is that there exists an Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Malta on Catholic Religious Instruction and Education in Church Schools, signed in 1989.

Article 2 of this Agreement states that: “The teaching of the Catholic religion must be in conformity with the doctrine of the Church, following the syllabi and methods established by the Maltese Episcopal Conference, to which belongs also the right to draw up or select the students’ text-books and the teachers’ guide”. Why such an agreement is considered to be “scandalous” is very difficult to understand. The responsibility lies on the Maltese Episcopal Conference and not “in the Curia’s hands”. Members of the Church Secretariat for Catechesis are in regular contact with the Education authorities in order to continue improving on the curricula and the materials offered to Maltese students of religion.

The MUT President is also reported to have said that “Some details in religion classes are irrelevant, and these, just like details in other subjects, can be done away with so that we can teach students these skills”. It is strange why Mr Bonello pin pointed religion classes when he also labelled as irrelevant “details in other subjects”. By way of information, the President of the MUT knows that the same article of the Agreement states that “The said teaching will be given a status and an importance equal of the other principal subjects of the school programme.”

It is acceptable and most welcome that interested persons and organisations, like the MUT, put forward well thought and concrete suggestions. The competent authorities are prepared to listen with an open mind in the best interest of the students.