

The Annual Craigmyle lecture is organised by the Catholic Union to commemorate the work of Lord (Donald) Craigmyle who served as President of the Union for many years. On Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2002 the independent crossbench peer, David Alton, delivered the following lecture at the House of Lords.

## **Faith in Education, Faith in Formation: Keeping Faith in a Changing World**

Lord Alton of Liverpool

It is a singular honour to be asked to give a lecture named after Donald Craigmyle.

A short while before he died Lord Craigmyle telephoned me at home and told me he had no particular reason for ringing other than to encourage me to go on with the various battles in which I was involved. I was very encouraged by that call and had always been grateful to Donald for the support he had given me during my time in the Commons.

There is a terrible predisposition in politics to denigrate. Throughout our lives we should try to be more like the disciple Barnabas, "the encourager." As President of the Catholic Union, Lord Craigmyle kept a keen weather eye on up and coming issues and he encouraged his troops, ensuring that the Catholic voice was always heard.

The time Donald and I spent together in the Lords was sadly all too brief and my greatest regret about the changes to the Upper House was that his son Tom was not here for longer. He made some excellent contributions and I know that he, Justin, and Kate and other members of the family continue to engage actively in our national life. I met some of Donald's grandchildren in Lourdes last summer and I know how immensely proud of them he would have been.

How we transmit our beliefs and our values to that rising generation is at the heart of what I will speak about tonight. How do we keep our faith, how do we remain faithful to the values of the gospel while living in a plural and diverse society? What are the implications for us as individuals and particularly for our schools? How are we to play our part as Catholic citizens in a changing world?

The prophet Isaiah contextualised that challenge for the Hebrews in declarations about communal justice and mercy and through the proclamation of a year of jubilee. Our Lord took up this call in the synagogue at Nazareth and as well as calling for personal change, Christ urged his followers to change the world by being "salt and light."

St. Paul understood the importance of belonging to civil society when he proclaimed that he was "a citizen of no mean city". At a gathering in these precincts, where Campion and More both stood trial for their faith, we can be very clear about where the clash between honouring the State and following our faith - "the king's good servant, but God's first" - can lead. For St Thomas More, Lord Chancellor and Speaker of the House of Commons, natural law, which was the law of God, took precedence over laws made by man. Natural law was the framework within which all human behaviour and political decisions had to be evaluated.

Here in Parliament, post September 11<sup>th</sup>, when we have not been obsessed with fox hunting, we have become preoccupied with terrorism and matters of national security. But for Catholics, the real threat is to our immortal souls rather than to our physical lives. The world may change but natural law does not and surely a far greater threat to our national life is posed by the horrific assault on human life, by our destruction of life-long familial commitments, and by the cult of materialism. For the Catholic citizen the "imago Dei" question is the supreme question. Every person is made in the image of God and entitled to have their dignity and worth upheld from creation until natural death - from the womb to the tomb.

Catholics have long been taught the importance of civic duty, although we are not immune from the general trend of disengagement. Last Thursday I spoke to sixth formers at Bedford School. Not untypically only two of them had ever thought about entering politics - and one of those had his home of Nigeria in mind.

Place this alongside the dismal turnout in elections - in one Liverpool ward it has fallen as low as just 6%; next Thursday in boroughs such as Burnley and Oldham we will probably see the election of Le Pen style racists from the BNP, their task made easier by mass absenteeism - and we get a glimpse of the challenge facing contemporary society.

The gospel does not offer us a debatable, amendable composite clause with options for loving our neighbour on days it suits us. We are given a clear command. It is an obligation.

Cardinal Hume spoke of our obligations to "one human family"; Cardinal Murphy O'Connor says "The Gospel invitation to love includes helping those in need and playing an active part in building a society of justice and compassion."

In the conclusion to their 2001 document, 'The Common Good', the Catholic bishops stated that: "Political involvement is an important part of Christian discipleship, which has at its core our relationship to the God who revealed

Himself in Jesus Christ and who calls us to Him in this life and the next. It is the task of all of us to seek to transform this world through prayer, witness and action."

Repeatedly Pope John Paul II's encyclicals have called us to engagement with the world and its culture. Marking the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul wrote in *Centesimus Annus*:

"From the Christian vision of the human person there necessarily follows a correct picture of society...the social nature of man is not completely fulfilled in the State, but is realised in various intermediary groups, beginning with the family, and including economic, political and cultural groups which stem from human nature itself and have their own autonomy, always with a view to the common good."

This is not a uniquely Christian view but secularists have a duty to understand this tradition and not to misrepresent it.

We would stand with Aristotle who said we are not to be "solitary pieces" in a game of chequers and that *aidos* - shame - would attach to the man who failed to play his part. Cicero said that virtue flowed from active engagement. De Tocqueville remarked that an impressive practical wisdom and power of judgement might be developed simply by participation in the affairs of society. And, as to why, we fail to do this T.H.Green understood the reason well when he wrote that "If the idea of the community of good for all men has even now little influence, the reason is that we identify too little with good character and too much with good things."

Put simply, perhaps using a suitably Catholic acronym, our civic duty as Catholic citizens is threefold: to be Active, Vocal and Engaged. This formation must take place within our families, our parishes and our schools. Those schools, which seek to keep the faith and to be faithful to the world around them, are currently under attack here in Parliament, and I know that Donald Craigmyle would have wanted an occasion such as this to be used to explore that question.

Next Thursday, the Education Bill - in which there has been a debate about how far schools should go in fostering common values and whether faith schools, in particular, help or hinder this process - reaches its committee Stage in the Lords. Further attempts will be made to interfere with the independence of church schools. One Party has said it will impose strict catchment area criteria, other parliamentarians want to impose quotas.

Sadly, the Government's stated support for the creation of more church schools to meet the overwhelming demand for them amongst the general population has led to howls of protest from an increasingly vociferous

secular lobby.

I would like to use this lecture - and I am sure Donald would have approved - to nail some myths about our Catholic schools and to underline three things:

Their ethos and sense of mission

Their academic rigour and success

Their inclusivity, and promotion of tolerance, respect for diversity and knowledge of our history.

What has been most striking about the ongoing debate concerning Church schools is how ill informed are the opinions of those seeking to undermine and destroy Catholic education. In the Commons, the prime movers in seeking to impose quotas on church schools - forcing them to take at least 25% of pupils who do not share the school's religious affiliation - were the former Cabinet Minister, Frank Dobson, and Phil Willis from the Liberal Democrat frontbench who imposed a three-line whip in favour of quotas.

Consider the following statements made in the House of Commons;

Alice Mahon, Labour; "...the admissions policy in most Church schools is built on a lie.....we must try to work towards a secular state education system that is bothered about education and not indoctrination."

Piara S. Khabra, Labour; "The idea of a faith school is a reactionary one. It has the capacity to hinder the progress of the good education that is suited to modern society, the economy and possibly even scientific progress."

Similarly, in the Lords, where we are due to revisit these matters at the beginning of next month, many of the statements made regarding church schools were breathtaking in their ignorance;

Lord Peston; "I do not wish to be cynical, but what I find astonishing is the number of parents who suddenly discover that they are truly religious in order to get their children into schools that do not let in rough boys, blacks or those sorts of people."

If some of the views expressed were ill informed, torn between inaccurate characterisations of church schools as elitist and selective and at the same time as backward and as a hindrance to economic and scientific progress, they were illiberal too. Catholics should wake up to the hard-line secular agenda that is being promoted and see this poison ivy for what it is.

Although current attempts to undermine or abolish Church schools are likely to be defeated, our opponents will not give up easily. Anyone who wishes to preserve Catholic education needs to understand the arguments which were advanced and exercise their vote in future elections with discernment.

Gladstone - whose Government, in 1870, introduced free education in Britain - liked to recall the proverb "Vox populi vox Dei" and in 1874 he wrote of the role of religion: "As to its politics, this country has much less, I think, to fear than to hope; unless through a corruption of its religion - against which, as Conservative or Liberal, I can perhaps say I have striven all my life long."

More recently the former Liberal Democrat Education Spokesman, Don Foster, MP for Bath, made his Party's present position abundantly clear: "In an ideal world" he said "there would be no religious state schools. We would put a stop to the daily act of worship." He had obviously been reading his briefing from the British Humanist Association that states; "In our ideal society, religious belief would be a purely private matter, there would be no state religion, and the public arena, including schools, would be strictly neutral on religious matters." This is the antithesis of an outward looking, mission oriented approach to religion that was succinctly captured in 1951 by the Cambridgeshire Syllabus of Religious Teaching for Schools;

"..to teach Christianity to our children is to inspire them with the vision of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and to send them into the world willing to follow Him who was amongst us as one that serveth, because they know that in such service alone is perfect freedom."

During the recent Commons debate, Evan Harris, the Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, compared the teaching of religion in Catholic schools to the teaching of French or maths and with mock innocence said that anyone should be free to do it regardless of whether they had a religious conviction or not: "they militate against the best interests of pupils because they sacrifice the best teachers to the ones deemed religiously appropriate."

This outmoded secular claptrap was defeated at the end of World War Two. Catholic aspirations were properly met in what Estelle Morris, the Education Secretary, described as "the historic concordat between the state and the church" which would become the foundation of the 1944 Education Act.

That legislation was the fruit of a remarkable partnership between the Conservative R.A. Butler, an Anglican, and the Labour Party's Chuter Ede, a Free Church man. Butler was president of the Board of Education in the Coalition Government, and Ede was his Private Parliamentary Secretary.

Perhaps the most enlightened and important piece of twentieth century legislation, that Act contrasts sharply with the overly partisan, ill considered, meretricious and often contradictory changes which central government and local authorities have imposed on education in the fifty years which have followed. Among many other things it provided a small grant towards the cost of building church schools.

For his enlightenment towards the cause of Church schools, Archbishop Griffin of Westminster sent Butler a copy of "Butler's Lives of the Saints".

Although the communities that had to struggle against all the odds to raise four fifths of the capital costs were often extremely poor, parishes seized the opportunity of creating a network of schools where their children could receive a Christian education. This continues right through to the present day. Archbishop Vincent Nichols has correctly described our schools as the fruit of "a struggle" to which Catholic parents " have contributed financially for many generations".

Curiously the Church of England decided to significantly withdraw from education and of the 9000 Church of England Schools in existence in 1944, half closed. Yet because of self-sacrifice and extraordinary generosity the Catholic community has ensured that in total there are 6,384 religious primary schools and 589 secondary schools of differing denominations in Britain today, although all but 40 are Christian.

This has not gone unnoticed and it is why the Catholic schools have been the ones most targeted during recent parliamentary debates. It should not be forgotten that the Catholic Church, through its individual members, still pays for 15% of new building costs and of major repairs for its schools.

The well-rehearsed argument that taxpayers are funding Catholic and other faith based schools- "Rome on the rates" - to which they cannot gain entry is spurious. Catholics are taxpayers like other members of society. In fact, the contribution of the Church to the capital costs reduces the financial demands on the public purse.

Following the publication of Lord Dearing's recent report, the decision of the Church of England to create 100 new "faith" schools is a welcome recognition of the need to change priorities. Many people, some of only nominal belief, want an education that offers more than places in the academic league tables. The Church of England has 775,000 places in its primary schools but only 150,000 places in its secondary schools. Clearly there is an unmet demand that I know causes much distress to parents and children.

Many church schools are over-subscribed and parish priests provide affirmations of church commitment. But who is to say how deep another person's faith is - or to question their desire to return to it, or to prevent them from transmitting their beliefs to their children? Surely, it is preferable to have people returning to the church, even though in some cases their motivation may be slightly dubious, than to have them remaining outside in the secular desert. As Dom Aidan Bellenger rightly observes in his 2001 York Minster Lecture, entitled, "Christian Education"; "...in the shared worship of the schools and in the sacramental preparation they provide, the first glimmerings of a finding or a rediscovery of faith can be discerned."

When latter day Robespierres have searched our consciences and imposed their quotas "by dictat", as one MP (John Burnett) put it, what will they have succeeded in destroying?

According to Dr Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, "denominational schools have a great strength. Often they have a clear ethos that gives consistency and power to the lessons they teach." He adds that a survey of 34,000 teenagers in England and Wales, carried out by the Jewish Association of Business Ethics, found that children educated in such an ethos "are less likely to lie, steal or to drink alcohol illicitly...the evidence is that teaching about the morality of everyday life does make a difference." The recent debates have taken little account of the unique nature of Christian education - such as its incarnational character. About this, Dom Aidan said:

"A Christian education, like prayer, should lift up the heart and mind to God. It should also remind us that the Christian life is about holy dying as well as about holy living.....only in eternal life with God, as Dante reminds us, will Christian education find its true end."

Imposition of arbitrary quotas will undermine ethos but also undermine the self-governance which allows church schools to determine their own composition. An average of 20% of pupils in Catholic schools are not Catholic. Our Catholic school populations reflect the diverse communities they serve. Our opponents may highlight dioceses such as Liverpool, Salisbury and Westminster where demand for places in Catholic schools is extremely high and where over ninety per cent of pupils are Catholic but these dioceses are the exception rather than the rule. For example, in the Birmingham diocese 27.1% of the pupils are non Roman Catholic, in Clifton the figure is 30.1%, in Hallam 32.6%, in Plymouth, 39.5% and in Wrexham 24.9%. Everyone knows that in some situations (and in certain areas we may be approaching this) the character and ethos of the schools can be radically altered if the proportions become too unbalanced. Schools must remain free to decide these things for themselves.

If quotas led to Catholic children being excluded from church schools because the school was no longer free to determine its numbers this would be a disgrace. So, such a policy is not merely ill informed and illiberal, it is also discriminatory.

The Catholic Church has demonstrated its willingness to relinquish schools where demographic trends and the needs of the local community indicate that alternative provision is needed.

In many areas where it has been the wish of the school trustees, the governing bodies and the local community, and space has been available, Catholic schools have welcomed pupils from beyond the Catholic community. This collaborative response to local circumstances is better than national prescription founded upon the ultimate aim of doing away with church and "faith" based schools altogether.

Church and "faith" based schools, particularly our Catholic schools, are something that we should be proud of. Too often our opponents force us on to the defensive and as a result we can neglect the positive aspects of a religious education, especially the role they play in the local community and in the formation of individual citizens.

As I explained at the outset, there are three particular aspects of our church schools that I want to highlight.

The first, and by far the most important, is their mission and ethos. The vast majority of parents who choose to send their children to church schools wish to ensure that the faith and values that are supported at home and through the church are reflected in the teaching, organisation and ethos of the school. As the Education Secretary Estelle Morris recognises, "...the strength of faith schools for those who have a faith is a shared value base - a sense of purpose, mission and being." I believe that this is the principal reason why church and faith based schools remain so popular.

Our children must be made aware of the religious heritage that has shaped our political, economic, social and cultural life and institutions. Church schools do not seek to disguise the values and ethos they seek to promote from parents and children.

By the same token it is important to realise that non-church schools are not 'neutral' on what I described as the "imago dei" question. Nor should they be neutral in the values and ethos they embody and promote. Secularism itself is not neutral or objective. An education system founded upon a wholly secular ethos and mission is not as benign as the opponents of



church schools like to portray it.

The triangle between home, parish and school is still the bedrock of our Catholic educational provision.

The second positive aspect of church and "faith" based schools is their academic success. Frank Dobson has claimed that "no sound evidence" exists that religious schools perform better, a charge demolished by the publication of Ofsted's latest report on the standards and quality of education. Catholic schools, for example, were disproportionately highly represented amongst schools named for their academic success.

In OSTED's annual report 2000/2001 HMCI's list of "particularly successful schools" included a high number of Catholic schools. 90 secondary schools were listed and of these 15 were Catholic; 206 primary schools were listed and of these 42 were Catholic. When one considers that Catholic schools provide ten per cent of schools nationally it is clear that Catholic schools are included to a higher proportion than their overall share of the maintained sector.

This success story emanates largely from the visionary commitment of the bishops and church congregations of the previous two centuries and is continued by the Catholic clergy, parishioners and families who continue to give vital support and funds to Catholic schools, often in difficult circumstances. Contrary to some claims, our schools contain a representative share of children from deprived backgrounds. For example, pupils in Catholic schools have very similar average school meal entitlements to those of pupils at community schools, as too do pupils in other religious schools.

When highlighting the success of church schools we should also not forget the vital role played by the teachers in these schools. Imagine then some of their dismay when their union, the NASUWT, recently voted to oppose the creation of single faith schools arguing that they would encourage more social fragmentation. What a vote of confidence in the work of its members!

And yet if we wish to see the continued success and expansion of religious, but particularly church, schools, the training of Christian teachers must be a high priority. As Dom Aidan Bellenger observed in his York Minster Lecture, "We have been careless in maintaining the pool of such teachers....Too often, religious knowledge and understanding, remain immature and childish while other disciplines grow in sophistication and self-confidence". We must strive to correct this without delay.

This formula for success should be extended to other faiths. As Catholics we have managed to successfully provide a distinctive education for our children combining both the secular and religious aspects of education to enable them to play a full role in society. Is this not what the Muslim community now seeks?

As Clare Ward MP noted in the Commons, "...we should extend the opportunities for an increase in the number of faith schools to more religions and ...they should be encouraged by the Government's guidelines to work closely with other schools of faith and no faith, in the belief that religions promote in society the basics of good citizenship, values and standards."

What society has a right to expect is that shared values such as belief in democracy, the cherishing of our national institutions, the upholding of law, and concern for the wider community, will all be fostered in faith schools. Our Catholic schools already do this and we should be more emphatic in underlining this.

The third positive aspect of religious and church schools that it is worth rejoicing in is that they are inclusive - that they are beacons of tolerance, respect for diversity and knowledge of our history.

Alice Mahon captured the arguments of many of those opposed to the expansion of religious schools when she argued that "the most important thing we can do is to help them (children) to live together in understanding - not segregated and attending different schools. We shall then have a more cohesive and decent society". Critics point to the situation in Northern Ireland and the riots last year in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford as proof of the "divisive" nature of church schools. Bland and inaccurate assertions are made that the facts do not bear out.

Take the north of Ireland. According to a spokesman for the Northern Ireland Centre for Integrated Education, an organisation that works to educate Catholic and Protestant children together; "Our segregated education system has not delivered our troubles - that's rubbish. Sectarianism is the lava below the surface, and whether we had an integrated school system or not, that lava would erupt". I have been in discussion with Bishop Walsh, the Bishop of Connor and Down, about seizing the opportunity that now exists in the north of Ireland, to develop programmes of good citizenship that can draw people together in a practical way.

What about Oldham, Burnley and Bradford? As MPs from the north have pointed out, the riots in these towns and cities involved children from non-

integrated non-religious state schools. Paradoxically, given the number of immigrants who are Catholic, and the more extensive nature of catchment areas, our schools are usually beacons of social integration.

Catholic, and other church or religious schools are part of the solution to the civil disturbances in the north of England and other areas, not part of the problem. As I heard recently from Catholic teachers in Oldham, these schools place a great premium on preparing their children for active citizenship and the responsibilities this entails. To suggest otherwise illustrates profound ignorance of what goes on in church schools.

From September all secondary schools - including church schools - will be required to teach citizenship. Writing in *The Sunday Times* last weekend Chris Woodhead said this was likely to be time wasting and distracting. Although I am personally opposed to citizenship becoming a mandatory subject in the national curriculum I strongly believe that education should be about the formation of the whole man or woman for life in the world around them. Our Church schools have a superb track record in this respect and it betrays a spectacular ignorance of what takes place in these schools to pretend otherwise.

Developing good citizenship should be a *sine qua non* of education and should be an integrated part of everything a school does. Having a separate subject heading in an already over-loaded curriculum takes a good thought and turns it into another fumbled initiative. Sadly, this is not for the first time. For instance, only in Britain would we turn community service into a punishment to be dispensed by the courts. And in another piece of gobble-de-gook one Minister recently suggested that voluntary service should be made compulsory. Doesn't that rather miss the point?

We do not need a dirigiste approach by central government. Rather we need to focus our schools on the "imago Dei" questions, and on to how we serve one another and participate fully in the affairs of a free society. This is best learnt through practical experience rather than in classes on civics or the British Constitution, and it is something in which many of our Catholic schools already excel. Across 600 schools on Merseyside - and now in two other boroughs in the north west - my University, Liverpool John Moores, has pioneered a successful citizenship award programme which has encouraged hundreds of young people to engage in activities where they give something of themselves to others. Church schools have been to the fore in promoting this endeavour.

The Government's expectation that teaching citizenship will foster commonly shared civic values is doubtless well-intentioned but already

overburdened teachers will not see it as a priority and it is likely to be seen as an irrelevance and may bring the whole concept into disrepute.

The reality is that Church schools nurture good citizenship. Another reality is that they are engaged in the life of the local community and while upholding their ethos and beliefs they include others of different traditions.

Church schools should not be made the scapegoat for the ills of society. We need to address issues surrounding urban development, housing allocation policy, employment and racial discrimination before we start laying the blame at the door of religion. Pupils who attend church and religious schools return home to a community when they leave the school gates. They live in streets and play with other children who may or may not go to the same church or school.

Efforts should be directed towards improving the situation of those who live in these communities.

Faith schools should be encouraged to work closely with other schools - those of faith and no faith - in promoting greater social cohesion. So many are already beacons of social integration. It is a misconception that Catholic schools are like little educational islands that do not mix with others in the educational or wider community.

So many of our pupils and teachers play a full and active role within their local education authorities. Catholic schools have been enthusiastic participants in initiatives such as the setting up of specialist schools and sharing expertise under the beacon school arrangements. Our hope must be that other schools, including new church and religious schools, will follow suit. The solution does not lie in their abolition or a dilution of their sense of mission and ethos.

In this lecture I have sought to do more than deconstruct the arguments of those opposed to church and religious schools. I have also sought to stress the overwhelmingly positive contribution that church schools, and in particular Catholic schools, have made, and will continue to make - if allowed, to the promotion of good citizenship.

Archbishop George Beck of Liverpool, one of the dominant figures in English Catholic educational policy in the middle years of the twentieth century, declared at the Second Vatican Council that "Neither the Church nor Catholic parents wish to claim a monopoly of special treatment from civil governments". Rather, all we seek is the right of every parent "to bring up his children in his religious belief and according to his conscience".

Sadly, we live in an age when we are called to defend this right. Forewarned is forearmed. To ignore the threat would be folly.

Church, but more particularly Catholic, schools have a vital role to play in educating the citizens of tomorrow. If these schools are given the freedom and necessary resources to fulfil this role then, as Archbishop Nichols has said, the citizens they educate "will know their own beliefs, will draw a generosity of spirit and of public service from those beliefs, and will bear the fruit of profound respect, and tolerance, for others."

This is a message which society at large needs to hear. Hobbes and Locke, John Stuart Mill and Isaiah Berlin, still less Marx or Hegel have little to say to us about how to build or sustain such relationships, or how to protect families or communities. Yet these are the questions which trouble people today.

In promoting good citizenship, church schools are most definitely part of the solution to the problems that confront contemporary society, and I know that Donald Craigmyle would have been raising his voice in their defence. We need to keep our faith in this changing world; and we need to keep our nerve. Education and formation will make for better citizens and that will make for a better world for all of us.