



**PASTORAL LETTER OF BISHOP BRYAN BAYDA, CSsR
To Parents, Administrators, Staff and Students of Catholic Schools
The Cross of Christ – A Symbol of Truth and Love Revealed**

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.
Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”
John 18:37-38

The search for truth is common among us since we know that somehow truth can give us meaning in life. It helps us make sense of our world and our lives. Some simply equate their perception of reality (subjective truth) with objective truth. Others seek truth while guided by faith and reason, an approach that looks to divine revelation as essential in the search. A person’s properly formed conscience plays a vitally important role in this pursuit of truth. When we seek the truth about human dignity, it must be carried out with true Christian charity. In this case, charity can mean saying something that is difficult for a person to hear but it is said with love.

Unfortunately, in our contemporary society, seeking the truth about human dignity has become confusing for some. For example, what does it say about human dignity when someone actually *subjects* another person to their viewpoint? Human dignity is, in fact, diminished or negated when a version of ‘truth’ *imposes* rather than *proposes*, *enforces* rather than *inquires*. Forcing another person to submit to a version of ‘truth’ is coercion. I believe this is at the root of the struggle for those in Catholic schools, regarding Pride symbolism.

Truth is not merely the product of human thought, deduction or perception. *Jesus* is the Way, the Truth and the Life. For Christians, and particularly Catholics in our education system, truth is the Person of Christ in the teachings of His Gospel. Truth is a ‘person revealed,’ not merely a ‘conclusion reached’ after a debate or discussion aimed at making life more bearable. While reason plays an important role in the search for truth, regarding relationships with God and with one another, faith in Christ is indispensable in that search. As Pope Benedict wrote in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est- (God is Love)*: “From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore, helps it to be ever more fully itself.” Some claim to know the Truth, but perhaps a more wholesome goal is to know Jesus?

The rich young man in the Gospel of Matthew (19:16-25) asked Jesus what had to be done to enter eternal life. Jesus looked at him with love and told him. The man, however, found it difficult to let go of earthly ambitions. He had many possessions and rejected Christ’s invitation to see earthly life as a preparation for heavenly life. He struggled with letting go of possessions and following Jesus, which meant embracing his challenges and his crosses. Jesus says in the Gospel of Mark, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mk 8:34). Jesus says, “Everyone *who belongs to the truth* listens to my voice.” We belong to the Truth since our lives revolve around God. The Truth possesses us! Not the other way around.

Clarity is needed, not confusion. Symbols that clarify are needed, not symbols that confuse. Bundling numerous contradictory ideas or values that are not in harmony with Gospel values causes confusion, and that is why the Pride symbols may be seen as controversial.

Jesus, who is Truth, loves all people. We are created to belong to the Truth and to grow in the fullness of virtue, which is always *proposed*. Consequently, we are invited to recognize ourselves, first and foremost,



as children of God, well before we identify ourselves in subsequent ways. A person's infinite worth is based on God loving them. The Catholic Church supports and teaches this, even if some Catholics fail to understand or demonstrate this. The Cross of Christ symbolizes this mystery of love which is put before us, something into which we are invited to perpetually enter more deeply. It is not a riddle to be solved. It is a symbol of redemption for all people. Christ redeemed their dignity and continues to do so despite suffering and struggle. The crosses we bear in our personal lives must be modeled on and inspired by our Crucified Lord, who suffers all, and bears all, forgiving and freely offering Himself for all. With the Cross, and His glorious resurrection, Christ imparts hope to all!

Thus, I agree with the statement of Archbishop Damphousse of the Archdiocese of Ottawa, who addresses this point in his presentation to the Ottawa Catholic School Board on May 25, 2021:

We know that flags can have many meanings. The Gay Pride flag is not just about inclusion. It is a political statement that endorses behaviours and lifestyles contradicting the Catholic Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person. Our Catholic schools, and those who represent the participants in our Catholic schools, have a duty to uphold and promote what the Catholic Church teaches. Everyone in the Catholic school system has made a conscious choice to be part of it knowing what our values are and what they entail. We contradict our values and undermine the distinct identity of the Catholic school system if we pretend to endorse political ideologies at odds with our Catholic faith. This causes division. I am really concerned about the spiritual well-being of our community.

In conclusion, I offer my prayerful support to all those involved in Catholic education, particularly parents, administrators, staff and students alike, who do their utmost to follow the Truth of Christ as professed in the Catholic Church. We seek and adhere *to* the Truth. Truth is not relative and something that conforms to human thinking. That is what it means to carry our crosses. I encourage all those who seek the Truth to bear their crosses in a loving manner when encountering one another or when encountering symbols that confuse and promote values contrary to the truth of Christ. Truth must always be sought in a context of love and openness to the Spirit of Truth, a person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Let us, therefore, have courage to speak the truth with love, abiding in love. As defined by God, may we profess: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (*1 Jn 4:16*).

Given in Kenora, Ontario, May 30, 2021