

**RESURRECTION OR REINCARNATION?**

**COLLECTIVE WORSHIP IN ENGLISH SCHOOLS:  
EDUCATIONAL POLICY-MAKING IN A  
PLURALIST SOCIETY**

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**This work is original and has not been  
submitted previously in support of any  
degree, qualification or course.**

**Signed** Kathleen E. Bishop

**Date** Mar. 2nd 2001

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# GLOSSARY

Acronyms in frequent use in this work:

ALAOME	Association of LEA Advisory Officers for Multicultural Education
CEM	Christian Education Movement
CES	Catholic Education Service
CW	Collective Worship
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
ERA	Education Reform Act
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
KS 1	Key Stage 1 (5 - 7 year-olds)
KS 2	Key Stage 2 (7 - 11 year-olds)
LEA	Local Education Authority
LINC	Language in the National Curriculum
MET	Muslim Educational Trust
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NCC	National Curriculum Council
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education
SATs	Standardised Assessment Tasks / Tests
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
TES	Times Educational Supplement



## Resurrection or Reincarnation?

### Collective Worship in English Schools: Educational Policy-Making in a Pluralist Society

This work is a combination of theoretical and empirical research, charting a critical exploration of the role that Collective Worship traditionally played in the English education system during the last millennium. The theoretical perspective examines some of the relevant theological, historical, demographic and sociological issues, all in the context of values and ethics. The empirical investigation analyses interviews with politicians directly involved in the formulation of the 1988 Education Reform Act, namely Baroness Caroline Cox, Dr Graham Leonard the former Bishop of London and Mr Kenneth Baker, now Lord Baker of Dorking. Baker, as Secretary of State for Education, presided over the development and progress of the 1988 Act through Parliament. The views of these legislators are compared with those expressed in interviews with headteachers currently working in a multicultural area of Preston. The findings suggest that there is a lack of consensus over the nature and purpose of Collective Worship in county schools, where no assumptions may be made about religious or other beliefs held by either staff or pupils. The situation in the voluntary sector is different in that there is a justifiable expectation that staff and pupils should be supportive of the school's religious position. For this reason it was decided to restrict the main empirical research to a group of county primary schools, although the headteachers of a comprehensive school and a church school were interviewed by way of comparison.

The thesis presents an historical account of school worship in the past and present, and suggests that the current law is fundamentally flawed by the lack of clarity surrounding the subject. The final chapter posits a future where, on two or three days each week, pupils might engage in a short act of worship, albeit in a form very different from a traditional church service. Such acts would represent sustained exposure to each of the major world faiths found in England at the beginning of the 21st century, giving an insight into the experience of those who belong to that tradition. The justification for this position is that worship is essentially experiential, and that Religious Education without worship would be equivalent to learning the rudiments of music without handling a musical instrument, or trying to grasp the finer points of grammar without ever attempting a piece of creative writing. The experience of worship, appropriately presented, has the potential to contribute to pupils' spirituality, on which so much emphasis has been placed since the 1988 Act. A significant spin-off is that it also has the potential to demystify, in a practical way, the beliefs and practices of the different religious groups and to challenge negative attitudes based largely on the fear born of ignorance, leading eventually to a spiritually enriched, cohesive society in which difference is not merely tolerated, but welcomed and valued.

Signed Kathleen T. Bishop  
Date Mar. 2nd 2001



## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a chronological account of the role of worship in shaping English education in its past and present forms, and its potential future role in the 21st century. The opening chapter explores the concept of worship as a religious phenomenon. It draws on the work of theologians and educators, offering some working definitions to identify the context in which the arguments are presented. Chapter 2 paints, with broad brush strokes, the historical backdrop to the discussion. The inclusion of material spanning the last thousand years is intended to highlight the beginning of the new millennium. The focus is progressively sharpened during the course of the narrative, to reflect the emerging formalisation of the English education system from the middle of the 19th century onwards. The 1944 Act, viewed as a watershed in educational development, receives detailed attention in Chapter 3, particularly in terms of the sociological and demographic developments in England precipitated by the Second World War and its aftermath. Chapter 4 identifies significant milestones in curriculum development, including some transatlantic examples, from the 1960s onwards, in response to these changes.

Chapter 5 places the 1988 Education Reform Act in the context of the resultant shifts in educational philosophy and practice. It argues that the architects of this Act, together with the introduction of the National Curriculum, paid scant attention to fundamental changes in attitude and approach particularly towards Religious Education and Collective Worship. The thesis identifies a fundamental mismatch between what the legislators intended by the religious clauses in the Act, and how these clauses are interpreted by those immediately responsible for their implementation. Clear evidence of this mismatch is presented by the empirical investigation; the methodology for this aspect of the research is outlined in

Chapter 6, and applied to the structured interviews with a sample of headteachers. Chapter 7 presents an account of the unstructured interviews conducted with three eminent politicians from the House of Lords. The resultant discussion surfaces some of the post-1988 concerns. These later sections of the work (Chapters 6 to 8 and the four Appendices) contain the most significant and original material; these findings are towards the end because of the chronological nature of the thesis. They are intended to establish sound theoretical justification by placing the 1988 Education Reform Act in its historical context. The final chapter examines some current developments and suggests possible future approaches to school worship which aim primarily to safeguard the professional integrity of teachers and secondly to satisfy the legal requirements.

The empirical investigation was instrumental both in confirming and challenging some aspects of the theoretical perspectives discussed, particularly in Chapters 3 to 5. A careful study of the Hansard debates in the House of Lords around the passing of the 1988 Act offered a useful starting point. Two key protagonists emerged at this stage; although both practising Christians, they held very different views on the role of Religious Education and Collective Worship in the county schools of England. As members of the House of Lords, Baroness Cox and Bishop Graham Leonard had a profound effect on the development of the legislation; both agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of this investigation. Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education at the time of the 1988 Education Reform Act, was interviewed some time later, and transcripts of all three interviews are to be found at the end of this work. Their answers to the questions put to them gave unique insights into the thinking of three of the most powerful people at the heart of government; their diverse views offered much scope for reflection. This reflection was further enhanced by structured interviews given by a sample of headteachers and RE specialists in a multicultural area struggling to comply with the current law. It was apparent that an



ethnographic approach, based on structured and unstructured interviews, would have the best potential for eliciting the kind of information being sought in this investigation. The first part of Chapter 6 (the empirical methodology section) describes the approach in some detail. The findings suggested there was a fundamental mismatch between what the government saw as the purpose of Collective Worship and these particular headteachers' interpretation of its function.

Each chapter of this work explores aspects of worship and its role in human development, arguing that the religious dimension can be a significant part of the human capacity for spiritual awareness. It posits the view that an experience of worship, far from being an optional extra to Religious Education in the classroom, is in fact essential to understanding, since worship in some form is fundamental to all the major world religions. It challenges the perception that the primary function of school worship is to make pupils religious or moral, and argues that it has a much wider role, namely the cumulative enhancement of their capacity for personal reflection. Schools may influence life choices and offer spiritual and moral guidance, but the pupils' essential freedom to choose will be supported by exposure to a variety of enriching experiences. Informed choices can only be made with reference to other alternatives; the assertion that 'an open mind is not an empty mind' is no less true for being a cliché. Ways of tapping into the accumulated spiritual wisdom now available in Britain at the start of the third millennium are outlined in the final chapter. Worship in the English education system both past and present is described, evaluated and criticised in this work, especially in terms of its potential for the enrichment of the educational experience offered to young people.

A variety of research techniques was used, drawing on the work of historians, theologians, sociologists and educationalists in the need to present a balanced view

and an informed argument. A study of source material from the Hansard records of debates around the 1944 and the 1988 Acts contextualised the diverse views expressed at the time. The personal interviews with legislators and teachers provided the fine detail to what has evolved into a complex picture. The final chapter, intended as a glimpse into the future, offers some reflections and practical approaches based on sustained and varied professional experience.

This work is the culmination of a personal journey. It was a journey of discovery, a critical reassessment of long-held perceptions and cherished beliefs. It involved a series of explorations, including some cul-de-sacs and interesting diversions, a willingness to confront prejudices and to suspend personal judgement in the pursuit of a better-informed account. Earlier certainties were replaced by a healthy scepticism; some of the findings appear to challenge self-evident hypotheses. All the views encountered and the people interviewed in the course of this research had the effect of influencing my thinking in totally unexpected ways. The route initially mapped out for this journey was not the one eventually taken; it was infinitely more complex and demanding and all the more satisfying as a result. The resultant destination was not a clear vindication of beliefs held from the outset and never seriously questioned; it was an honest, if painful, reappraisal of long-held beliefs on the role of worship in human development.

As a practising Roman Catholic and a member of a religious order dedicated to education, I have daily experience of worship at both the individual and communal levels. My own education was conventional in every sense; the nuns at my convent school were for the most part dynamic, intelligent women, experts at tapping into adolescent girls' idealism and search for meaning. Catholic worship at that time was a powerful ally in evoking a sense of the ethereal; the Latin chant, the spiralling incense, solemn processions and handbells were a feast for



the senses, offering a glimpse of what devotional writers used to call the 'turrets of eternity.' I found it deeply inspiring. I was imbued with the conventional Roman Catholic view that all learning is holy because it is a search for truth and wholeness. So, for me, "every aspect of the pupils' learning is holistic because these beliefs permeate the whole curriculum and life of the *[Catholic]* school." (Martin 1999) In some RC schools the staff participate in a voluntary act of worship before the start of the school day, where they reflect on this spiritual dimension of their work. Every post I held in my teaching career was in the Roman Catholic sector, but the highly publicised discussions and controversy surrounding the RE clauses in the 1988 Act began to raise questions it had never previously occurred to me to ask, both in relation to my professional practice, but more particularly to that of colleagues in the county schools. What purpose is served by compulsory school worship? Can a civil law require people to worship? What are the ethical implications for staff and pupils who have no religious faith? Can schools be said to be worshipping communities? If the worship is not to be distinctive of any Christian denomination, what form is it to take? What is the position of faiths other than Christianity in a programme of school worship?

These questions, and the variety of responses they evoked, form the basis of this work. They inform, challenge and permeate the argument; the result is hopefully a reasoned and well-founded study of worship in English schools. Its nature and purpose in education, and its potential for the enrichment of a multicultural society, are explored at some length. The title, with its allusions to resurrection and reincarnation, is intended to take up the theme of Hull's classic work *School Worship - an Obituary*. (Hull 1975) and project it into the 21st century.

In 1988 school worship was put under the legislative microscope and perceived to be in danger of death by neglect. An injection of "muscular Christianity" (1) (Purves 1999) supplemented by an acknowledgement of the legitimate claims of other world faiths, effected a revival of the practice. This revival, originally pursued by the legislators as a resurrection of earlier (predominantly Christian) values and attitudes, has apparently become transformed (or reincarnated?) into a much richer entity, incorporating aspects of the accumulated wisdom of the main religious traditions found in Britain today.

The issues the work sets out to examine arise logically out of a systematic exploration of what worship is and why it has traditionally played such a prominent part in the education of the young. This in turn raises questions about the ethics of requiring adults and children who may have no personal faith to engage in worship, which is of its very nature a voluntary activity. Is there any relationship between voluntary corporate worship, such as that found in a church or other place of worship, and compulsory collective worship in schools? Is worship an adjunct to Religious Education or integral to it - a practical application of theoretical learning or an act of supreme hypocrisy? The effects of world faiths other than Christianity on the educational system are examined, not as a central issue as originally envisaged, but as a significant factor in the emergence of new forms of school worship. Ways of developing and extending these new forms are suggested, preserving the integrity of each faith as a separate entity rather than seeking to highlight such similarities and differences as exist between faiths. The thesis argues that this approach might, in a very

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(1) Purves describes collective worship in her children's public school as "heavy duty Anglican stuff." She records that it involves "quite a lot of laying of cutlasses on the altar on Remembrance Sunday" and hymns such as "Eternal Father, strong to save", nostalgic remnants of a "muscular Christianity" now largely disappeared.



real sense, contribute to the creation of a spiritually richer, more integrated multifaith and secular society which values pluralism.

The focus of the work is educational rather than theological, although there is of necessity a theological dimension. It arises from sustained experience of teaching and senior management at primary school level, teacher training and leading In-Service education sessions. Since worship is an essentially practical activity, it seemed appropriate to take steps to acquire a broader range of experience in church worship, limited (as mine was at the beginning of the research) mainly to the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions. It was informative occasionally to attend services of other Christian denominations, and while on holiday in Greece, to participate in Greek Orthodox worship. The main purpose at this stage was to savour the distinctiveness of each experience by attempting to remain as far as possible an impartial observer at each service. It soon became obvious that complete neutrality in any Christian context was unattainable; a fairly detailed knowledge of the Christian tradition made it possible to compare, contrast and make judgements on each experience. The various traditions emphasised different facets of Christian worship; preaching was central to some, music to others, and prayer ranged from the silent to the stridently vocal. A theoretical knowledge of the traditional form of Quaker worship is an inadequate preparation for an hour of complete silence and stillness. But even that was not unfamiliar; silent contemplation is a regular feature of convent life.

It became obvious that, in the pursuit of a more global understanding, it would be necessary to extend these explorations of worship beyond the Christian tradition. Contacts were made with Jewish and Muslim acquaintances through whom it was possible to gain access to acts of worship hitherto completely unfamiliar. The visits were widespread, ranging from a mosque in a converted Victorian house in Manchester to a purpose-built orthodox synagogue in

Liverpool. The Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, north London, offered an insight into the Hindu tradition, immensely enriching the theoretical knowledge already gained by study. In such varied environments it was virtually impossible to make the comparisons and contrasts which had proved less than helpful in the Christian context. The first reason for this was the language of worship; it became easy to empathise fully, perhaps for the first time, with the utter bewilderment that children must experience as observers at adult worship. The only way to begin to make sense of what was happening was to study the posture, actions and responses of the participants. The second reason why these experiences were so valuable was the structure of the services themselves; they were all totally different from any acts of worship previously encountered, and evoked a determination to delve more deeply into the faiths which inspired them. It was personal proof, if proof were needed, of the educational principle that first-hand experience is a prerequisite to genuine understanding. Atkins (1999) writing about the intrinsic value of learning for its own sake, asserts that "proper study begins at the moment when the student grasps why the subject is.....worthwhile, when he or she sees the 'point'.....Study involves a receptive element [and] contemplation...." Each question about the nature and purpose of worship opened up a plethora of possibilities, many of which are explored in this work.

## SUMMARY

The thesis gives a personal insight into the educational potential of school worship at the start of the new millennium. It is based on training in, and regular experience of, Christian worship at both the individual and communal levels, combined with an active teaching career enhanced by theoretical and empirical research. Conversations with three powerful politicians and a group of practising



headteachers are analysed, and the implications of the findings identified and discussed. The account of the empirical research (Chapters 6 and 7) and the different approaches to post-1988 worship outlined in Chapter 8 and Appendix 4 provide compelling evidence of a mismatch between legislators and educators as to its nature and purpose in a multicultural society.

The text is for the most part written in the third person, but where occasion demands, such as in the accounts of highly personal experiences and perceptions, this convention is suspended, as demonstrated above, and the first person is used by way of emphasis. The pre-1988 literature reviewed is presented in the past tense, with some exceptions in the case of classic texts, while the post-1988 literature is largely alluded to in the present tense. This was a deliberate decision, serving to highlight the 1988 Education Reform Act and its pivotal position in the argument presented. Acronyms and professional jargon are kept to a minimum and explained the first time they are used. Texts and authors have been carefully selected from a vast amount of literature on the educational process, usually because they epitomise, summarise or challenge views prevalent in their time. Hansard accounts of the House of Lords debates, which are cited extensively in Chapter 5.5, are identified sequentially as (H1) (H2) ff so as not to interrupt the flow of the text. Full reference details are given in the Bibliography. The occasional quotes from the House of Commons debates are referenced in the text itself, since they are relatively few.

The opening chapter is an exploration of the phenomenon of worship, where different perspectives are presented and discussed, and the implications for collective worship in schools are identified. It establishes a theoretical basis for the remainder of the thesis, which has theological, historical and sociological dimensions; its main focus, however, is the role of worship in county schools, particularly in the primary sector. The subsequent chapters (2 to 5) trace the



historical development of the role of school worship in English schools, while chapters 6 to 8 outline the current position as identified in the findings of the empirical research. Appendices 1, 2 and 3 are transcripts of the interviews with the legislators; these have been edited for the sake of clarity, but only where the speaker digressed from the subject. No alterations have been made to the substance of their discourse. Appendix 4 outlines an original programme of school worship which aims to combine the requirements of the law with the professional practice as discussed in the interviews with headteachers. It encapsulates various aspects of professional approaches already practised in some of the schools in the survey.

# CHAPTER 1 THE PHENOMENON OF WORSHIP

## 1.1 Some Definitions

What becomes immediately apparent in any study of what constitutes worship is that it is a multi-layered concept. The following statements may suffice to illustrate some of the range of interpretations. To von-Allmen (1965) worship is:

“the sphere where the mystery of creation, that is, the mystery of man and the mystery of things, finds the most authentic expression it can attain ...” (von-Allmen 1965:71).

For Davies (1994) it is:

“a form of sacred bafflement, a response to a mystery and a means of relating to it. It ... can lead individuals forward in their quest for understanding. It engages not only ... the rational mind but also the symbolic and emotional dimensions of existence” (cited in Holm 1994:7).

Hull asserted in 1975 that school worship expresses a fairly consistent understanding of the nature of worship. His own definition reflected this consistency as:

“an explicit, direct and appropriate response to God who has the right to the total loyalty of the believer” (Hull 1975:34).

So it is at the same time a mystery, an authentic expression and an explicit response, if all shades of opinion cited above are to be reflected. Certain basic features, however, are common to all acts of worship. According to Davies (1994) at its most fundamental level, it helps identify the central concern of a religion, pinpointing its meaning and focusing on the significance of people’s religious life. Without worship, the study of religion remains an abstraction with no relevance to human life. Cantwell-Smith (1963) argued that worship takes place where what he terms “cumulative tradition” meets faith. He went on to define cumulative tradition as that which encompasses doctrine, custom, ritual acts and the historical contexts of a



religion. These historical contexts would include a shared faith, memory and understanding, as in Judaism, where stories and significant events are regularly recalled in a formal setting. However, Cantwell-Smith also identified a different level of worship, whose focus is the awareness which an individual has of the claims of a particular tradition. It is at this level that most acts of worship take place in a school setting, exemplifying the essential difference between corporate worship, such as that offered by a faith group, and school collective worship, in a context where no commonality of belief or tradition can be assumed.

Jackson, however, (1997) takes issue with Cantwell-Smith's notions of faith and the cumulative tradition, and this on two fundamental counts. Firstly, he argues that this particular understanding of faith carries with it connotations of a personal relationship. In the Christian tradition from which Cantwell-Smith speaks, this personal relationship is with Christ, but this perception addresses only partially the "multifarious ways" (to borrow Jackson's own term) in which faith can be expressed. In other words, not all religions rely on a personal relationship; Buddhism is a prime example of this, since there is no Buddha "out there" to be worshipped. Jackson suggests that this perception is of limited value in a multifaith context.

Secondly, and perhaps more pertinent to this work, is Cantwell-Smith's concept of tradition. Jackson considers that to imply that there is consensus over the elements of a particular tradition is to over-simplify the issue. He implies that experience and environment will inevitably affect the way individuals perceive any given faith tradition and that even "insiders" to that tradition may hold conflicting views of the relative importance of its different elements. Jackson identifies Cantwell-Smith's lack of any overt social and political awareness, particularly in terms of power relationships, as contributing to his somewhat naïve concept of a cumulative tradition. Jackson endorses Said's view that

"it is an on-going imbalance of power that permits a politically and technologically stronger culture or group to *define* weaker groups, a point relevant to the radical right's portrayal of ethnic minority cultures in Britain as both uniform and alien" (Jackson 1998:63).

The influence of the radical right in this matter is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 of this work. But for the present purposes a broad definition of a religious tradition is useful, in spite of what Jackson calls the “fuzzy edges” of its interpretation. There are elements of the cumulative tradition which, according to some of the empirical evidence presented later in this work, (see particularly Chapters 7 and 8) are currently incorporated to good effect into school worship. These elements include music and silence, as well as some of the distinctive language of worship. Worship as a higher order human activity was explored by Smart in a seminal 1972 monograph. His views on worship as a concept offer a useful basis for discussion.

## **1.2 Smart and the Concept of Worship**

The activity of worship can be analysed on various levels, but a recurring theme is the range of entities that can be said to be the objects of worship. Can it be argued, for instance, that the word is being used in the same sense in the two statements “She worships her children” and “She attends Sunday worship”? The same problem arises in the common usage of the word “miracle” to denote an amazing event, as in the report of a child surviving a road accident “by a miracle”. Any similarity between this and the account of biblical miracles is difficult to find. Although the etymology of worship in terms of “worth-ship” has a certain appeal (and this finds its expression in assemblies which celebrate the successes of the school or of individuals), it is not sufficient to assert, according to Smart, that to worship God is merely to place a high value on him. Watson takes up this theme in a much later work and expresses similar misgivings. She considers it “an evasion and not a solution” to the problem, (Watson 1993:166) since in the context of educational legislation, worship invariably assumes a religious connotation. By the same token it could be argued that to describe mere chance, as in the case of the child’s survival, or even skilful surgery, as a miracle, is to distort the accepted understanding of the word, with its connotations of divine or supernatural intervention. The difference lies in the metaphorical as opposed to the analogical use of the word, a distinction which Smart is at pains to emphasise.



A metaphor can be defined as “a figure of speech implying but not specifically stating a comparison between two objects or actions”, while an analogy is more tentative, being described as “a likeness between two things *in certain respects*, something *partially* similar” (Oxford English Dictionary 1991, my italics). Central to this distinction is the intentionality of the act; one has to intend to worship, or work a miracle, for the act to be described as such with philosophical accuracy. This notion is embodied in the motto *Laborare est orare* (to work is to pray) by which members of certain religious orders seek to sanctify their daily work; the Benedictine dictum that “s/he who sings well prays twice” carries the same message. There is no logical connection between working, singing and worship, but the link is to be found in the intention. Smart makes the point that the act of reading the bible is not, *per se*, an act of worship, nor is the activity of meditation, unless it is undertaken with worship as its primary purpose. It would be possible to engage in either of these activities for any number of reasons, for intellectual or academic stimulus, for instance, or to relieve psychological tension. His later observations on the significance of silence in worship are another example of this idea. Silence is neutral in itself; it acquires its significance in being contextualised. A person may be silent in the presence of another because of anger, fear, love, boredom or a whole range of emotions. Pupils at a school act of worship, eyes closed, hands clasped in apparent rapture, may well be recalling events that have little to do with the lofty thoughts presented to them.

In his summary of what constitutes worship, Smart identifies certain elements. First, he says, it is relational; the very act of worship acknowledges the “otherness” of what one worships. In other words, he is suggesting that God would be God whether one worshipped him or not, and that worship, of its very nature, is directed to an entity outside oneself. This relationship differs from, for example, the aunt/niece relationship, which is interdependent. One cannot be a niece without an aunt. To a religious person, it is the nature of God to be essentially “other” and infinitely beyond human experience. The focus of worship is therefore a being or beings who are awe-inspiring. In his notion of the numinous, a concept to which Smart repeatedly returns in all his writing, he typically equates it with awesome. It could also have overtones of power, as in the statement “*Sine tuo numine, nihil est in homine*”, loosely translated in some Christian liturgy as “if thou take thy grace away,



nothing pure in man will stay". The more literal translation of *numen* carries connotations of a divine "nod" without which nothing is allowed to happen. This may be an oversimplification, but it is arguably a more dynamic interpretation of numinous in that God, and not the worshipper, is the focus.

The second characteristic of worship is the use of ritual. The most familiar rituals observed in school worship are bodily stillness, silence, closed eyes, joined hands and usually some attempt at reflection. Ritual in worship has as its focus the worshipper rather than the object of worship. Certain actions are said to predispose human beings to the reflection which Hull maintains is the "threshold of worship" (Hull 1975). Gestures which are meaningless in themselves have the effect of preparing the mind and body for certain activities. Such actions in various religious traditions include the covering of the head, ritual washing of the body, kneeling, prostration, clasping or raising of hands, prolonged chanting and sacred dance.

A discussion by Bernstein *et al* (1971) on the function of ritual in education throws further light on this issue. They argue that ritual in a school context can be categorised as instrumental or expressive. The shared values of a school are made explicit in its expressive culture, resulting in institutional cohesion; the instrumental culture, by contrast, is potentially divisive. The rituals of the expressive culture may be further subdivided in terms of their consensual and differentiating functions. The ritualisation, therefore, of a school assembly or act of worship, seeks to unite staff and pupils in a moral consciousness, and serves, according to the authors, to "recreate the past in the present and project it into the future". This function is exemplified in the practice of one headteacher in his interview (see Chapter 6,) of encouraging the pupils to "build a better school". If a child was deemed to have made a distinctive contribution to the life of the school community in any given week, s/he was publicly congratulated, and a paper brick was ceremoniously attached to a chart designed for the purpose. This "recreation" of the school and its projection into the future may exemplify what sociologists maintain is the underpinning of the norms and values held by unidentified dominant groups in the wider society. Some of the views expressed by Baroness Cox in her interview (see Appendix 1) and the work of the Hillgate group may serve to support the validity of



this claim. The religious education and collective worship clauses of the 1988 Act testify to the government's perception ( or "recreation"?) of the British as a predominantly Christian nation.

As well as fostering consensus, ritual also has a differentiating function. Groups within the school are segregated on the basis of age, sex, social function or some equally arbitrary category. The segregation has the effect of reinforcing attachment to, and distancing members from, specific groups. The social purpose of the ritual, therefore, becomes one of educating for diversity, and differences are emphasised at the expense of similarity. In a pluralist society, the response of any pupil to the school's expressive culture is likely to be ambivalent. If Christianity is presented as the predominant faith-stance, members of other faiths may perceive themselves, or be perceived, as marginalised or even excluded from the very culture of which they form a part. The strategy of lionising Christianity is seriously at odds with the shift in society, according to Bernstein, towards a social order based on co-operation rather than domination.

The **instrumental** function of school ritual focuses more on the control of pupils by social means. Their behaviour is channelled into what is considered acceptable in a section of society with which the pupils may not easily identify. However, the increasingly multiethnic nature of society means that the school's expressive culture in terms of shared values will be further challenged. Where formerly ritual has been used to establish social order and conformity, its evolving function may serve to question the values the expressive culture seeks to transmit. McLaren (1993), in his study of the place of ritual in a Catholic High School in Canada, makes the point that ritual, in both a secular and religious context, can serve both to reinforce and to undermine conformity. He identifies, for instance, what he calls "rites of rebellion", exemplified in the diversionary tactics devised by bored pupils during assembly. He also argues that the formal rituals employed at a school gathering such as an act of worship can enable participants to reflect on "their own processes of interpretation as well as their location in the dominant culture" (ibid p 49). The mood may or may not be one of reverence and subservience, such as McLaren describes, although the leader of an act of worship almost always adopts a stance of authority, while the participants listen in respectful silence until invited to respond.



At the same time, McLaren acknowledges that ritual can also be a mechanism for both understanding reality and for “experiencing ultimate reality”. In the latter connection he cites the work of Tillich (1960) who claimed that rituals (particularly of the religious variety) can “point to a reality beyond that which they signify, and thus enable students to participate in that reality” (in McLaren 1993:181). Grimes, in his extensive analysis of rituals of all kinds, includes some categories of religious ritual under his umbrella term “Ritology”. He cites, for instance, various rites of passage, festivals, worship and interaction rites in this context (Grimes 1985). These rituals are all to be found in any contemporary English primary school. The rite of passage, for instance, is marked by pupils transferring from the Infant to the Junior school, and from the Junior to the High school. The ceremony usually takes the form of a welcome or farewell ritual and includes gestures of friendship, gratitude for the past and hopes for the future. Some form of prayer is often included.

Rituals of Festivals in school serve to celebrate what is considered to be of importance for the pupils’ understanding; this would include the re-telling or re-enactment of the story attached to the festival, and ideally some visual or tactile reminder such as Diva lamps (Divali), a Menorah (Hannukah) or an Advent wreath (Christianity). Worship rituals, another of Grimes’s categories, include bodily stillness and a quiet and reverent attitude and make the actual engaging in worship possible for those who so choose. The DfE Circular 1/94 (see Chapter 8.2 of this work) would seem to remove this element of choice, however, in that it requires of pupils “more than simply passive attendance ... even though *on a particular occasion some of them may not feel able actively to identify with the act of worship*” (para 59, my italics). The implication is that an inability to identify with the ritual is envisaged as an exception. The last of these categories which impact on collective worship is that of the rites of interaction. During an act of worship, the strategies normally employed by teachers to exert their authority may assume quite different forms, although the obedience/authority relationship is still very much in place. A teacher quietly asking a restless child to “come and sit beside me” during collective worship is issuing a warning rather than an invitation. Eye contact between child and adult is more in evidence, since it would be unwise to draw too much attention to



inappropriate behaviour during a time of what Jackson *et al* (1990) call “directed silence”.

This transmission of culture by instrumental means, as in Bernstein’s model, however, carries inherent dangers for the future of school worship. He argues that continuity in this transmission may “only be obtained at the cost of a false yesterday or a mythical tomorrow” (Bernstein *et al* 1971:174). Collective Worship, whether Christian or not, is not an appropriate vehicle for turning the nation back to religion. At best it is a “unique kind of experience, one which is analogous to faith worship but still retains the openness and integrity of learning” (Gent 1989:9).

There is a certain amount of overlap in the other characteristics of worship as identified in Smart’s monograph. He reiterates the function of ritual as expressing the superiority of the Focus, citing examples from various world religions to make his point. He examines, for instance, the cult of the Buddha, which, in spite of the custom of the faithful to lay flowers in the temple in his honour, cannot be described as worship in the conventional sense, since the accepted teaching, already noted, is that there is no Buddha “out there” who can be worshipped. The action has significance for the faithful but has no function of giving honour to the Buddha. It is a pledge of their own intention to attain the state of *nirvana* by emulating him. Another example, not examined by Smart, is the custom, common to many religions, of adopting a submissive or inferior stance in relation to the focus of worship; the Muslim practice of touching the ground with the forehead, the bowing of the head and lowering the eyes in Christianity, and the sacredness of the very name of God which characterises Judaism, illustrate this idea. There may be more than mere considerations of convenience in the common practice in primary schools of having pupils sit on the floor for an act of worship, while the leader typically stands. This practice has some resonance with Bernstein’s notions of the maintenance of power and authority.

Finally, Smart explores the notion of praise as an element of worship. While acknowledging a certain overlap, he makes a distinction between the two, and draws an interesting comparison between them. Just as one can use “worship” in a metaphorical sense, as in the example “she worships her children”, one can also use



“praise” on at least two different levels. An adult can praise a child for working hard or showing consideration, but the very act implies a superior/inferior relationship. But the use of the word “praise” in connection with worship has the opposite connotation. In praising God, a believer is acknowledging her/his own inferiority. A further distinction to be made is that one can praise other persons in their absence, but the act of praising God is an acknowledgement of his presence. Moreover, it is always addressed to him, and never indirectly. Smart concludes his remarks by asking the question “Could one worship without praising?”. He implies that one is impossible without the other.

A different model of worship, which is a useful point of comparison, is offered by Underhill in her classic work dating back to 1936. Her exploration owes as much to metaphysics as Smart’s does to philosophy, but an interesting convergence is found in her description of it as “all the expressive acts and humble submissions of men”, (Underhill 1936) echoing Smart’s comments on the ritual of worship being “part of the subservience”. She argues that the perfection of worship lies in what she calls “disinterested delight” in the Creator, and by association, in the work of creation. This delight has God at its centre, and it is his “presence and incitement”, not human needs and wishes, which evoke it. For her the two concepts of worship and prayer, although interdependent, are not synonymous. There may be some comparisons to be drawn here between worship and meditation as identified in Smart’s model. As Underhill has it, “one offers, the other asks”, that is to say, both prayer and meditation are to some extent self-regarding, whereas worship looks beyond itself; it is, in the truest sense, disinterested.

What is striking about Underhill’s model is the totality of commitment on the part of the believer that it demands. While she is speaking from an almost exclusively Christian standpoint, (and some of her assertions are a little extravagant, to say the least), the reader is left with a powerful image of the relationship between God and the human race, that “stooping down of the Absolute to disclose himself within the narrow human radius” (Underhill 1936). The response to the awareness of this relationship finds its expression in all the world religions, and offers the possibility of exploring another dimension of human consciousness. The choice to worship or not cannot be validly made by anyone who has not been made aware of its



possibility. School worship, when presented with due regard for the voluntary nature of the activity, offers pupils the opportunity to experience, even if only vicariously, the nature and purpose of worship in human life.

This is not to ignore the fact that there is a very real tension between worship understood theologically and worship in an educational context. The 1970 Durham Report, the findings of a major research project commissioned by the Church of England, recognised this tension. However, it made little attempt to address the implications in a consistent, positive manner beyond acknowledging that worship has “diverse origins” and evokes a “diversity of human reactions” (para 296). It then went so far to admit that “attendance at an act of worship does not necessarily imply or presuppose total personal commitment to the object of worship” (para 298). Dearden and Ayer, on the other hand, had earlier highlighted the fundamental elements of worship, including a belief in the existence of a deity, and a conscious attempt to honour him. On this basis they had already concluded that school worship in its traditional form was indefensible as an educational activity. According to Dearden, “prayer and worship are hollow, meaningless activities unless certain beliefs are held about the object to which they are addressed, namely God” (Dearden 1968). These two polarised positions were apparently irreconcilable, but Hull’s 1975 analysis of the problem threw further light on the matter.

### **1.3 School Worship – an Obituary?**

Hull’s work, ominously entitled *School Worship – an Obituary*, discussed the educational paradoxes involved, in terms of the openness with which other areas of the curriculum are traditionally approached. Whereas classroom RE is characterised by objectivity and an attitude of inquiry, worship of its very nature implies an acceptance of a particular view of reality. In support of this assertion he quoted Williams who, in 1951, had advocated that “in school worship the claims of the church must always be kept clearly in sight” (Williams 1951:149). For Hull, the ethical problems were intensified by the numbers, even in 1975, of pupils from non-Christian backgrounds. He suggested that one way for their adherents to preserve their religious identity would be to withdraw from the act of worship, an option

endorsed by the 1944 Act (see Chapter 3.7 below). Hull rejected this option in his work, seeing it as potentially divisive and contrary to the role of assembly as “a cohesive agent in a mixed society” (1975:89). He observed that most non-Christian parents did not avail themselves of this right in any case. The interviews with the headteachers in the empirical investigation (Chapter 6.7.2) indicate that this observation was as true in the 1990s as in the 1970s.

This fact then raises the question of participation as compared to mere attendance. Pupils are put into the position of either insincerity, where they appear to address a God they do not acknowledge, or of inconsistency. Hull went so far as to suggest that their personal faith might be subverted in the resultant confusion. Worship, he claimed, was:

“the expression of one’s total loyalty to certain values: as the values diverge, worship loses its totality” (Hull 1975:90).

He went on to discuss a possible strategy which later became widespread, that of the careful selection of material from other faiths, so long as the ideas presented were consistent with Christian values. The advantage of this practice would be that it would leave the way open for all present to continue worshipping, but in the search for consistency it might also present an inaccurate or even distorted view of the faith in question. A common example of this is the habitual linking in some schools of the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah with the Christmas festival. The main justification for this seems to be that both festivals occur in December, and links are made between Hanukkah lights and Jesus as the “light of the world”. In fact there is little to connect the two festivals; Hanukkah is a relatively minor festival in the Jewish calendar, (albeit popular with children) whereas Christmas is one of the major festivals in a Christian context. The Hindu festival of Divali suffers a similar fate, the tenuous link being the time of year it is celebrated. These festivals have little in common, except perhaps the theme of light to raise the human spirit in the darkest days of the year. One of the respondents in the headteachers’ interviews (see Chapter 6.7.2) had evolved a compromise to address this precise problem.



Another strategy identified by Hull is that of selecting ideas, not for their similarity to Christian beliefs, but for their function in expressing what is central to any given tradition. Here he was referring to those aspects which embody what is typical and characteristic of the religion in question, but saw the dangers in adopting the “Differences” approach as much as in highlighting the “Similarities”. It becomes less and less possible to worship if at least some semblance of commitment is absent; the exercise of focusing on differences could compromise that openness of mind in which worship could take place. A third strategy, of which Hull was again highly critical, is that of replacing traditional school worship with a variety of religious ceremonies which would include “ingredients from all faiths”. Although this has a certain intellectual appeal in that all the participants would be aware that their faith had equal value with others in the community, Hull argued that this strategy, by freeing school worship from the dominance of one religious tradition, would in effect allow it to “fall into the embrace of all of them together ...” In his 1975 work he viewed the variety of styles within schools as an “insuperable obstacle” to collective worship. His later work, notably in 1989 and 1995, adopts a more positive stance towards its educational potential.

Where Hull’s 1975 work gave voice to a growing unease as to the educational purpose of the activity, Watson (1987) took a very different view, arguing that the exposure of pupils to worship is a conscious attempt to lead them to an understanding of what it is like to be religious. She went on to suggest how these experiences could be translated into an educational context, making a strong case for the entitlement of all pupils to regular opportunities for worship. She argued that no-one could or should be obliged to “explore avenues which open up something of the wonder and richness of life. But ... the school is not doing its job unless it opens them up for people to see” (Watson 1987:190). She developed the theme of justifying the continuation of collective acts of worship by suggesting that there were at least two levels of participation in the experience. The first would be fully participatory on the part of the pupil or teacher who happened to be a believer and disposed to worship; the second would offer an extension of the “range of experience and understanding”.



Watson further argued that “religion will never yield its secrets to external analysis”, and that pupils are more open than adults to new experiences and not so concerned about commitment to them. She cited the example of someone approaching a poetry reading session with the conviction that “this is a waste of time”. This immediately precludes the possibility of the recital speaking for itself; the mind is closed to the potential the experience offers. Actual participation in worship, far from encouraging dishonesty of thought, helps pupils to base their views on reality rather than preconceptions, whether positive or negative. Watson went on to claim that school worship, prepared and led with openness and integrity, could be a “valuable *anti*-indoctrinatory device, challenging the prevailing assumptions”. It offers an opportunity for pupils to explore and possibly challenge the ideas and attitudes they might have absorbed through their life experiences. Although she continued to stress that at least two levels of participation are possible, she asserted that all pupils, of whatever age, need constant encouragement to explore and reflect independently, and frequent reminders that either conformity or mindless resistance will compromise that independence. The educational potential of school worship will be thereby safeguarded. This independence of thought, which was not a feature of earlier models of education, came into its own in the 1960s, when many established educational practices were increasingly called into question.

#### **1.4 Goldman, Fowler and the cognitive approach**

One of the most influential researchers in the field of religious education at this time was Goldman, who explored human religious development in Piagetian, cognitive terms. His findings, although admittedly more relevant to the RE curriculum than school worship, nevertheless have implications for how the latter is organised and presented. Using a set of pictures with religious themes, he interviewed young people between 6 and 15 years. He found that their thinking about religious concepts developed in a series of stages, similar to those posited by Piaget. His first stage, that of pre-religious thought, is characterised by egocentricity and monofocalism. At the egocentric stage, (about 7-9 years) children tend to judge events solely from their own standpoint; the skill of empathy has yet to be developed. Monofocal thinking means that they generalise from particular events they see as important. He records an example of this: a six-year-old who had been told the Christmas story confidently



asserted that “God goes down to land at night to see shepherds and talk to them.” Goldman discovered that the children he interviewed were able to use the language of formal religion without understanding it, and Bastide (1987) warned teachers not to be misled by this apparent facility. By contrast, Hay’s findings in the 1990s suggest that many children no longer even have access to the language of formal religion, let alone facility in it (Hay 1998).

At the second stage, that of sub-religious thought (about 7-9 years) the fantasy world is less obvious and the thinking becomes more pragmatic. A 9-year-old boy, asked what he thought Jesus meant by the reminder “Man does not live by bread alone” (Mt 4:4 / Dt 8.3) hazarded a guess that “you should take something else with it, like butter?” In a later stage of sub-religious thought (about 9 – 12 years) children’s understanding is still limited by the concrete nature of their thinking. Goldman did, however, detect a move away from a superhuman to a supernatural understanding of God. Moreover, he suggested that a dualistic view of life develops, whereby children draw a distinction between the world of religion (which they hear about) and the real world (which they experience). For most, according to Bastide (1987) this is the beginning of the process which will lead to a rejection of religion. A typical example of this is when children try to reconcile their understanding of the Genesis story of Creation with that of other explanations they have read of the origins of the universe. Fowler, whose work in the 1970s built upon and extended that of Goldman, posited his ‘Stages of Faith’ (1981) which again put religious and spiritual development firmly in the cognitive domain, an approach which has been criticised by Hay *et al* (1998) for its lack of attention to the experiential element in the process.

The task of leading Collective Worship in the primary school is therefore a sensitive one. Since the presentation of sincerely held religious beliefs as ‘facts’ is indoctrination, it could be argued that their portrayal as ‘misguided fantasies’ is equally unethical. Jackson *et al* (1990) make a similar point in their discussion of “successful worship. Appropriately presented, it is educationally justifiable if it allows for:

“a range of intellectual and emotional responses *of which worship can be a part.* It can play an important role in a

child's personal journey of discovery. That may or may not lead to a belief in God" (Jackson 1990:225. My italics).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the concept of worship and some of the educational implications for teachers. For educators throughout history, Jackson's notion of this "journey of discovery" has not been without its pitfalls, mistakes and difficulties. The next two chapters of this work highlight historical landmarks along the route, offering a broad overview of the evolution of school worship during the last thousand years. Chapter 2 identifies the major observable trends in English education, paying particular attention to the increasing formalisation of the system during the 19th and first half of the 20th century. Chapter 3 discusses the 1944 Act as a major landmark in educational history, and examines some of the social, demographic and religious developments in the post-war era in terms of their impact on the education system. Chapter 4 outlines some of the post-war developments in the school curriculum, particularly from the 1960s onwards. Many of these developments were in response, either directly or indirectly, to the major demographic changes evolving in British society.



## CHAPTER 2

### A THOUSAND YEARS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

1000 – 2000 A D

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the historical role of religion in the English educational system, especially in recent years when the practice of organised religion is in sharp decline in the West, possibly more than at any time in history (Brierley 1991). The main focus is the practice of daily collective worship in schools, which is enshrined in tradition because of the religious basis of education from the earliest days, when the ecclesiastical authorities saw it as their divine prerogative to “Christianise and civilise the people” (Curtis 1968). All education was, therefore, organised to serve this primary objective, and many customs and practices still to be found in contemporary schools (and compulsory worship is a prime example) are rooted in traditions which have long since fallen into disuse. The logical solution to these anomalies would be to abolish them altogether, as some powerful organisations regularly advocate. An alternative approach would involve a more reflective evaluation with a view to adapting and retaining those practices with genuine educational potential and discarding the rest. The ability to learn from the past while planning for the future is a major educational enterprise. Carr, (1951) whose observations are worth quoting at length, expresses this task in terms of “looking forward intelligently into the future,” and being “also prepared to look back attentively into the past ...” He goes on:

“The function of the historian is ... to accept [the past] ... to isolate and illuminate the fundamental changes at work in the society in which we live and the perhaps age-old processes which lie behind them. A historically minded generation ... looks back, not indeed for solutions which cannot be found in the past, but for those critical insights which are necessary both to the understanding of its existing situation and to the realisation of the values which it holds” (Carr 1951:9)

The following summary of the influence of religion on English education examines some of those “critical insights”, especially in terms of elementary schooling. The

evolution of other sectors, such as the public schools and the universities, receives some attention since all developments are interdependent. But it is the education and religious formation provided in the early years of learning which is the main focus of this chapter, as in the rest of the thesis.

In the opening chapter of his seminal work on the history of education in Great Britain, Curtis offers the following observation:

“The important fact, so often forgotten in modern times when the State plays such a predominant part in education, is that the English schools were the offspring of the Church, which regarded them as one of its chief instruments in Christianising and civilising the people ” (Curtis 1968:3).

## 2.1 Education in the Service of Christianity

There is a well-documented connection between the Christian church and all levels of the English education system, dating from the introduction of Christianity to Britain. The implicit connection between church and school is encapsulated by Leach in his assertion that “the (*first*) schools were annexed to, or rather were part of, the foundation of the churches.” (Leach 1915) It could be argued that church and school were virtually indistinguishable. Since the church assumed responsibility for providing the only organised system of education, it followed that it exercised complete control over the schools, and the vast majority of teachers were clergy. Their aim, because of their calling, was to educate the pupils in the tenets of Christianity, and one of the principal duties of the local bishop, as well as supervising his diocese, was to be teacher and guardian of orthodoxy. It was generally considered that the only essential learning the pupils needed was the ability to “read the scriptures and say their prayers”. (Stokes 1998) The local clergy, whose own education was fairly basic, and who, according to Lawson (1978) “doubtless shared the illiteracy and rustic habits of the population at large,” were therefore held largely responsible for the decay of learning among the English before the Norman Conquest.



## **2.2 Education as Christian evangelisation**

Christianity is an evangelising religion; that is, its adherents set out to convert others to their way of thinking. This practice has its origin in the New Testament where Christ instructs his followers to “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mk 16:20) Taken to its logical conclusion, this injunction confers the duty on believers to convert all those with whom they come into contact. In the aftermath of the Norman Conquest there was an influx of members of continental religious orders such as the Benedictines and the Franciscans, who established schools in England. Some of these schools were monastic and trained recruits for the religious life; others were similar to the existing grammar schools, and staffed largely by secular teachers. The grammar schools began to establish a reputation as feeders for the universities, while other establishments were addressing the more elementary needs of the population. These were known as song-schools and reading-and-writing schools. The former trained young men to sing in the church services and the latter existed to prepare boys for the song schools; the education offered was therefore geared to the study of scriptural texts and the learning of prayers.

## **2.3 The influence of Humanism and Secularisation**

The role of education as the main vehicle for the promotion of Christianity was, predictably, challenged by the twin movements of the Renaissance and the Reformation. During the Renaissance there was a radical, though gradual, shift away from the divine to the human, from preparation for the next world to an understanding of the present. The humanist view of life began to permeate the curriculum; Greek was increasingly taught in the public schools, together with Latin and Greek literature. The training of the mind in Christian doctrine was superseded

by the cultivation of the intellect for its own sake. The greater accessibility of books brought about by the invention of printing meant that pupils were no longer reliant on oral instruction or the exposition of crucial texts by their teachers alone. However, even though Christian evangelisation ceased for a time to be the principal aim of education, religious observance was still a powerful influence in the conduct of both universities and schools. It was as though the zeal to convert had been replaced by a determination to impose uniformity of religious practice, particularly in the content and style of worship. Lawson (1978) records that "Schoolmasters were obliged ... to hold daily prayers in school and to attend church with their scholars ...". Teaching, therefore, continued to be officially regarded as an essentially religious activity, and the curriculum was imposed in a deliberate attempt, according to Stone (1964) to "inculcate habits of discipline and obedience", leading to the establishment of a compliant and orderly society.

Even the poor in the rural areas did not escape the attentions of the authorities, being provided with what were known as the 'petty' schools. In these establishments pupils were taught to read and write by means of the horn-book, "followed by the primer and catechism" (Lawson 1978:112). Curtis offers an interesting insight into these teaching aids, maintaining that the primer was a kind of prayer-book, containing the Lord's Prayer and explanations of the Creed as well as basic instruction in literacy. The horn book was a simplified version of the primer, the text being printed on a card which was attached to a wooden base, the whole being protected by a sheet of horn. Reading was taught for the purpose of extending the pupils' religious knowledge by the study of the Bible and works of Protestant piety. Religious uniformity was seen as paramount for social order; it is therefore unsurprising that in villages without a school, the local church building was used for the purpose. All pupils were taught together in one room, although they were divided into forms or benches ranged along the walls. This may well be the origin of the term 'forms' to refer to different classes, especially in the grammar schools. The teacher sat at the top end on a dais with the older pupils, much as the celebrant at a religious service sits apart from the congregation but surrounded by acolytes.



## 2.4 The Rise of Puritanism

In spite of the requirement to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles which totally repudiated Roman Catholicism and much of what it stood for, religious dissenters were particularly influential in the universities of the early 17th Century, where critics of the established order advocated a radical reform of the system. Collinson (cited in Lawson 1978) records their denunciation of the universities as “seminaries of anti-Christ ...” and their increasingly strident call for alternative universities to counteract the allegedly harmful effects of Oxford and Cambridge. Although a few such establishments were initiated, notably in London and Ripon, they were for the most part unsuccessful, and Oxford and Cambridge continued their monopoly of the field of higher education. The constituent colleges, however, acquired their own distinctive ethos, and Emmanuel in Cambridge gained a formidable reputation as one of the most overtly puritanical, characterised by a zealous moral supervision of the students. One such student, Richard Kidder (cited in Robinson, 1922) records with pride that “... tutors examined their pupils very often ... before prayers, on the study of that day ... There was strict notice taken of those who absented themselves from prayers, and great encouragement given to those who were pious and studious ... (Lawson 1978:141). Puritanism is generally regarded to have been a major influence in popularising Bible reading and the spread of scriptural belief, largely through its patronage of educational resources for all strata of society. The puritan conviction and motivation in this was that the Bible [or more accurately, the truth, (cf. Jn 8:32)] “set all men free” and that all therefore had the right to read it for themselves.

The militant puritanism which led to the abolition of the monarchy, the House of Lords and the hierarchy heralded the dawn of yet another period of educational upheaval. Notions of real equality and democracy flourished, however short-lived, although the financial support of many free schools disappeared as a result of the suppression of the local hierarchy. The proceeds of the confiscations of the bishops' estates, were, according to Lawson, probably used to support Cromwell's army rather than the schools. So, in spite of the high hopes of the puritan idealists, very little real progress in educational reform was made during this period, schools having changed hardly at all. However, Jordan, in his work *Philanthropy in England*,

claims that, because of earlier 'revolutionary' developments, educational opportunities for all were more widespread at this time than ever before (Lawson 1978:162). Aldrich, for instance, asserts that contemporary theorists such as Comenius, Hartlib and others were strong in support of elementary schooling for all, girls and boys alike. "Curricula were to be made useful and interesting, and learning to become a pleasure rather than a pain" (Aldrich 1982:69). This approach contrasts sharply with earlier attitudes, where "pain and physical punishment (amply justified by biblical authority) were regarded as indispensable for guiding the young to virtue" (Lawson 1978:49).

Once the monarchy and the House of Lords had been reinstated, a concerted resistance to the puritan influence was mounted. Under the terms of the Act of Uniformity in 1662 all teachers were required to subscribe to a declaration of conformity to the beliefs and liturgy of the Church of England, but by then it was too late to stem the tide of dissension. The licensing of teachers was vigorously pursued, and nonconformists of any persuasion risked loss of livelihood or even jail if they persisted in their convictions. Undeterred, many established their own academies, mostly in rural areas, where they taught a more liberal curriculum until they attracted the attention of the local authorities. When this happened they would move on and set up elsewhere. The pupils in these schools studied trigonometry, and as well as the more traditional subjects, "... instruction in navigation was given when desired ... the easier parts of Astronomy ... and the general system of the Universe." In their final year, however, "morality and Christian evidences" still loomed large in their studies (Curtis 1969:116). This broader curriculum was an attempt to prepare the students for a variety of professions. Sacheverell, a high church parson, in a scathing attack in 1709 described these academies as "schismatical universities" (Lawson 1978:167). This perception seems to have persisted in the public mind in spite of the Toleration Act of 1689 which gave freedom of worship to protestant nonconformists. In spite of attempts to restore the Anglican influence on the nation's schools, the process of diversification was too far advanced to be reversed.



## 2.5 The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

Dent (1952) maintains that the real starting-point of the English public system of education was in 1698 when the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (the SPCK) was formed. Its lofty aim was to provide a free education for every child, regardless of creed or class, up to and including university level. The curriculum, however, was designed to prepare the pupils for a life of service and to form in them “habits of industry and virtue” (Smith 1931). The basis of their learning was moral and religious discipline and they were constantly reminded of their humble origins. The children’s well-known assembly hymn, *All things bright and beautiful*, originally included the following verse:

“The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate  
God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate ...”

(Mrs C F Alexander 1818 – 1895)

The objective of preserving the status quo by means of education was still very much in evidence. The hope, according to a 1732 document, was that “the children of the poor, instead of being bred up in ignorance and vice to an idle, beggarly and vagabond life, [would] have the fear of God before their eyes, get habits of virtue, be inured to labour and thus become useful to their country ...” (Lawson p 188).

The children of the poor were admitted to these Charity Schools on condition that their parents were prepared to co-operate with the authorities in hearing their children “repeat their Catechism and read the Holy Scriptures ...” They were to “use Prayers morning and evening in their families, so that all may the better be informed of their Duty, and by a constant practice thereof, procure the blessing of God upon them.” (From a 1708 document, Lawson p 183). But the movement was relatively short-lived since there was a real fear of the economic and social consequences of overeducating the poor. The Earl of Newcastle had expressed similar misgivings more than fifty years earlier, warning that “the Bible under every weaver and chambermaid’s arm hath done us much hurt ... (ibid p 179). Possibly Christ’s concern for the poor and oppressed had begun to acquire dangerously topical overtones.

By the 1780s enthusiasm for the charity school movement had virtually disappeared, and hard manual labour, to which the children of the poor were no strangers, emerged from the domestic into the public arena. The changes leading to the Industrial Revolution are claimed by Lawson to be “the turning point in the evolution of Education in England” (Lawson 1978: 220). There was a demand for child labour in the rapidly developing industrial towns, and concern was expressed that Sunday, the children’s one day off, should be used for furthering their education. Thus the Sunday School Movement was born. These establishments were from the outset undenominational, but became heavily influenced by Wesley and the Evangelical Revival which was then taking place in the Established Church. At first the curriculum was varied, although literacy was still taught with the aim of preparing pupils to read the Bible, but with the passage of time its content became almost entirely religious (Curtis 1969: 199). Although, like the charity schools, they were a relatively short-lived phenomenon, the Sunday Schools were significant in that they paved the way for a more organised system of universal popular education. “The idea of education for the poor sprang from a religious impulse,” wrote Kay-Shuttleworth many years later, “... it regarded the school as a nursery for the Church ...” (ibid p 201).

In 1811 the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church was founded. Schools for this purpose were established in all parts of the country, their primary aim being to provide a course of moral training based on Christian principles, and “to confer on the Children of the Poor the Inestimable Benefit of Religious Instruction, combined with such other Acquirements as may be suitable for their stations in life ...” (Kennington District School 1824, cited in Lawson p 243). Their popularity is documented in statistics which record the rapid rise in pupil numbers, from 8,620 in 1812 to over 346,000 by 1830. (Curtis p 208) One of the most noteworthy developments at this time was that pupils were treated more humanely than in any previous régime; this might in part have accounted for their growing popularity. There were, according to an 1816 Select Committee Report in London, “no rewards or punishments. The children were governed, not by severity, but by kindness ...” (Lawson 1978:247), and the curriculum included such subjects as natural history, geography, singing and dancing



in addition to the more established areas of religious knowledge, reading, writing and arithmetic. David Stow, a Scottish educationalist, who had for some time been working to improve living conditions for the poor of Glasgow, founded in 1826 the Glasgow Infant Society. He had a visionary approach to the training of teachers for what became the first Infant Schools. He saw the need for “an entirely new machine for the moral education of society in towns and manufacturing villages,” (Stow 1840) believing that the prevailing teaching methods (learning by rote, memorising incomprehensible passages and similar practices) were wasteful and ineffective. The domination by the church of the educational system was at last experiencing its first sustained challenge, largely on account of the social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. The report from the Select Committee before the passing of the 1820 Education Act was loud in its praise of the liberality of the new National Schools, where “the church catechism is only taught, and attendance at the established place of public worship only required ... of those whose parents belong to the establishment.” (Education of the Lower Orders, 1818:56) In this statement, according to Curtis, the famous Conscience Clause of the 1870 Act had its origin (Curtis 1969).

## **2.6 The 1870 Education Act**

After the General Election of 1868, the Liberals were returned to power with an increased majority, and the country entered a phase of intensified social and economic reform. Mr W E Forster, a respected northerner in a strong social conscience and an active interest in education, was returned as Member for Bradford and was appointed Vice-President of the Education Department. He was the son-in-law of Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School from 1828-42, of whom Curtis (1968) maintains:

“Perhaps Arnold’s greatest influence was due to his truly Christian character and example. He thought of the school as a Christian community whose centre and inspiration was the school chapel ...” (*op.cit.* p 147).

Forster, whose own educational philosophy was a judicious blend of idealism and realism, began by familiarising himself with such educational provision as was then available for the children of the poor. The National Education League, formally established in 1869, was the direct result of concern for either a non-sectarian or a totally secular educational system. The League, though centred in Birmingham, had its predecessors in Lancashire, notably Manchester and Salford. Manchester in particular had a well defined policy of co-ordinating the efforts of religious and secular educators, considering voluntary provision alone to be inadequate. The league “wanted local boards to be set up in all districts, education to be compulsory, and free *and unsectarian* schools to be founded ...” (Lawson 1973:315, my italics). The league’s support was Liberal and non-Conformist.

Forster, who was brought up in the Quaker tradition, became an Anglican on his marriage to Jane Arnold, later becoming an “undogmatic low church Anglican” (Copley 2000:58). He was in sympathy with the league’s aims, but diplomatically decided not to antagonise the church authorities, who were still the main providers of free education. Curtis (1968) cites examples of extremely unsatisfactory establishments in Leeds and Liverpool, but Forster was apparently unwilling to take drastic action until suitable alternatives could be provided. He aimed instead to “complete the present voluntary system, to fill up gaps ...” (ibid p 276) School Boards elected by town councils were established with the aim of filling these gaps; where the local provision was deemed satisfactory, no steps were to be taken. In order to qualify for public funding the existing schools had to comply with certain conditions: they were to be efficient and open to inspection, and they had to respect a conscience clause. This was particularly important in the provision of religious education. This clause, which gave parents the right to withdraw their children from religious instruction at either the beginning or the end of the school day, was underpinned by an amendment formulated by Mr Cowper-Temple. This stipulated that in the new Board Schools “no religious catechisms or religious formulary, which is distinctive of any particular denomination, (*should*) be taught ...” This was intended as a safeguard against any attempt on the part of teachers, to convert the pupils to any specific Christian tradition, however well-intentioned such attempts might be.



The 1870 Act was instrumental in surfacing very different approaches to education. Lawson argues that the main concerns of the church in the denominational schools centred around “religion, politics, power and finance,” maintaining that the church authorities were more concerned with “godliness and godlessness” than with the pupils and their education. The new School Boards, by contrast, sought to introduce the notion that the local school was a communal responsibility and a cradle of democracy. Kay-Shuttleworth’s earlier vision of the school as “a nursery for the church” (cf. 2.5 above) seemed to be fading. Universal education as a worthwhile end in itself, rather than as a means to an end, was emerging as a real possibility.

The government, meanwhile, was bitterly divided on the subject of religious instruction, and many non-Conformists supported the suggestion that all state-aided schools should be unsectarian. Mr Forster, however, argued passionately for the retention of biblical teaching in all schools, asserting that “the English people still cling to the Bible, and no measure will be more unpopular than that which declares by Act of Parliament that *[it]* shall be excluded from the school ” (Curtis 1969:277). Dent (1952) reiterates this conviction, going so far as to claim that public education *should* be on a religious basis. The Elementary Education Act of 1870, therefore, was a workable compromise; it allowed the voluntary system to co-exist with the state system of education. It did not, as is commonly supposed, introduce either free or compulsory education but paved the way for both. Although by the end of the century, the Church of England still provided the majority of school places, the number fell into steady decline, so that by 1939 it accounted for less than a third, such was the scale of the increase in the number of state schools established. There being no other standard model of school buildings around the turn of the century, the new schools tended to mirror the ecclesiastical style in design. Many were simply large open spaces (similar to the nave in a church) furnished with desks (rather than pews) with a large platform (high altar) at one end. Some larger schools were provided with a gallery (equivalent to a belfry), and the school day was punctuated and controlled by bells. Windows, often Gothic in shape but lacking the stained glass, were set deliberately high so that the pupils would not be distracted by extraneous activity.

## **2.7 Religious Education and the Dual System**

The co-existence of Board Schools and the voluntary schools during this period was much more problematic at the end of the 19th century than at present. Under the terms of the 1870 Act there was a scheme for the transfer of voluntary schools to the School Boards, but Forster apparently overestimated the number which would opt to transfer (Curtis *op. cit.*) This fact offers an interesting parallel with government overestimations at the time of the passing of the 1988 Act, when schools were given the option of transferring from Local Authority control to that of central government. (See Chapter 5.3.3 of this work) At the end of the 19th century, the newly-constituted School Boards, which were the forerunners of the Local Education Authorities, were of their very nature individualistic. Educational provision, based as it was on local conditions, was understandably piecemeal, and a few School Boards (57 in all) decided on a totally secular education, considering Religious Instruction and observance (i.e. corporate worship) the responsibility of the clergy. The voluntary schools, however, continued to view their role primarily in terms of “training up people in godliness and honesty” (Lawson 1978). Many were, however, in serious financial difficulties because of the general decline in church attendance and there was bitter disagreement at every level over what one contemporary observer described as the “tyranny of the State church over the life of the land” (Davis, cited in Lawson 1978:369). Elementary education, originally conceived as something provided for the working class, was profoundly affected by social conditions and institutional problems.

## **2.8 Towards a National System**

Other aspects of the 1870 Act were, moreover, being increasingly challenged, partly on account of the administrative anomalies it created. There were at the time some 2,500+ School Boards and nearly 800 School Attendance Committees (Curtis 1968), a totally unsatisfactory situation which predictably gave rise to what the Bryce Commission described as ‘chaos’. This commission was established in 1894 to



examine the state of secondary education. It was chaired by Mr (later Viscount) Bryce; the report of its findings aimed to rectify many of the anomalies created by the 1870 Act. Curtis (1968) cites the infamous 'Payment by Results' clause in the 1860 Revised Code as being largely responsible for the decline in professional creativity in secondary education. The Bryce Commission stressed in its report that education had to concern itself with much more than the "mere rudiments of knowledge ... it is a process of *intellectual training and personal discipline ...*" (Bryce Report 1895: 135/136 [my italics]). One of the most far-sighted recommendations was that elementary and secondary education should be combined under the same department, so that the whole educative experience could be organised as a sequential process. The example cited above, pertinent to this work, of the prevalent lack of cohesion is that 57 of the 2,500 School Boards had no provision for RE or worship in the schools under their jurisdiction. (Betts 1998) Whether this omission was by default or related to local opposition on conscientious grounds is difficult to ascertain; what is clear is that this anomaly particularly "sowed the seeds of much later confusion in religious education" (Durham Report 1970 para 13).

The Bryce Commission set about bringing order out of chaos by recommending in 1895 the creation of a central authority for education, but it was not until 1899 that the Board of Education came into being. One of this board's first tasks was to seek to ensure that the education offered by every school was of a comparable standard. The Durham Report also records the fact that by the 1880s the voluntary schools had been experiencing increasing financial difficulty; where they spent an average of 8s 6½d per annum on each pupil, the School Boards could afford to spend 19s 0¼d. "It was apparent that some further legislation would be required if the voluntary schools were not to become sub-standard" (Durham Report 1970 para 14). Accordingly the archbishops of Canterbury and York approached the government in 1895 with a request that the grants for voluntary schools should be increased; their concern was that in any new Education Bill the religious character of education should be preserved. This concern was reflected in the Bill of 1896, when government grants to voluntary schools were increased, in spite of fierce opposition from the Liberal Party and the non-Conformists.

## 2.9 The Balfour Act of 1902

This Act, whose main architect was Robert Morant, (although Balfour, as Prime Minister, steered it through parliament) followed one of the recommendations of the Bryce Commission in taking educational administration out of the hands of the School Boards by creating 333 local education authorities (LEAs). The Board Schools became council schools and were designated as provided schools because the buildings were provided by the LEA. The voluntary schools were termed non-provided, since the buildings belonged to other bodies. A co-ordinated system of elementary, secondary and technical education was inaugurated by the 1902 Act, Lawson (1978) recording in this context that “state intervention was in society generally being more actively advocated and tolerated.” Although this Act has been described as opening a new chapter in English education, it was also responsible for creating bitter animosity directed towards the non-provided schools in respect of R I (Religious Instruction,) and a campaign of passive resistance by non-Conformists continued, according to Curtis (1968) for many years. Its major weakness, however, seems to lie in its perception of secondary education. The educational background of its architect Morant was Winchester and Oxford, so his ideas were rooted in the public school mould, and the newly-constituted secondary schools were conceived along traditional lines. The curriculum was demonstrably geared to the needs of the minority destined for university or a professional career (Curtis 1968). As for the elementary schools, Eaglesham (1956) maintains that the Act “helped to contain, to repel, and in some respects to destroy the upward striving” of these establishments. He also holds that both Morant and Balfour held traditional educational values and entertained similar doubts about the “abilities of the masses ” (Lawson 1978:372), Although Eaglesham’s charge that Morant aimed at, and achieved, a standstill in elementary education is difficult to accept entirely, the fact was that by 1904 it had apparently become a “training in followership rather than leadership ...” (ibid. p 380) Morant’s ethical views are encapsulated in the first paragraph of the 1904 Code for Public Elementary Schools in the assertion that its purpose was to assist “both boys and girls, according to their different needs, to fit themselves ... for the work of life.” In spite of the implication that the path of each pupil’s life was predestined (and therefore limited), Morant does seem to have been something of an innovator, albeit in the mode of some of his philanthropic forebears. He established the school



medical service, for instance, since he was convinced of the importance of healthy physical development for effective learning. He also encouraged teachers to experiment with new teaching techniques, and gave much attention to teacher training.

The earlier elementary curriculum was supplemented by what were called 'class subjects', namely grammar, history and geography; by 1903 some schools were offering French, drawing, science and even Latin. Physical Education was beginning to be taken seriously, and there was limited provision for pupils with special educational needs. In many provided schools the Bible was read aloud to the pupils for about half an hour at the beginning of the day in the belief that the very act of listening "would produce beneficial results" (Hull 1975:13). Hull, writing about the religious dimension of state education during this period, maintains that very little distinction was made between RI and worship, since far from being planned as a response to what was taught in RI, worship was in fact the teacher's *first* objective. The teaching was intended to nourish and make intelligible the corporate worship (still, at that time, referred to as the 'observances') in which the pupils were obliged to participate. The RI lesson took the form of rote learning; certain hymns were specified, together with the major tenets of Christianity, which the child was required to recite on appropriate occasions. However, Hull's critique of RI syllabuses published about this time led him to conclude that "with their lists of hymns and prayers [*they*] were ... directed towards the inspectors rather than towards the teachers." (ibid p 14) Many school inspectors at that time were clergymen, and all were "men of respectable origins and of university training" (Roberts 1961). As such they would presumably seek to approve the content of what was being taught. Consideration of the pupils' needs and perceptions of the process was as yet, apparently, an irrelevancy.

## **2.10 Religion in the State System**

In the 1920s there was, however, a shift in thinking which can be described as radical. The recently published Hadow Reports with their emphasis on experience rather than the learning of facts, may have partly accounted for the trend towards a more child-centred approach. Unfortunately the effect of this shift was short-lived

in the school context. The movement which Hull describes as “the new religious education” can be traced back as far as the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. However, it took the next ten years to effect the transition from the straightforward application of the Bible to the “great and simple truths of Christianity” to the conviction that if pupils were imbued with Christian ideals which had relevance to their daily lives, society would eventually change for the better. The earlier model of religious instruction was clearly failing in this endeavour. For the first time, serious consideration was given to schools as the ideal nurseries of the new biblical learning. There was an unprecedented interest in biblical scholarship at this time, and this was seen as an opportunity that schools could not afford to ignore.

For a variety of reasons the ideals engendered by this movement failed to permeate schools, and pupils, instead of being supported in their personal search for meaning, continued to be instructed in Christian beliefs without reference to their application to everyday life. This practice arguably reflected the anxiety of Christian educators, in the short time available, to ‘preach the Good News’ in its entirety and leave the pupils to apply it to their lived experience for themselves. In this they were supported by texts such as the one in which St Paul the apostle instructs the early Christians to “proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it” (2 Tim 4:1). However, Agreed Syllabuses written in the 1930s bore messages which owed more to political than to religious dogma, with their emphasis on the work ethic and the promotion of the common good. This would appear a somewhat insensitive emphasis in view of the appalling level of unemployment at the time (22% in 1932). The ideals of independent thought and personal inquiry had apparently been sacrificed on the altar of expediency and pragmatism. It is a matter for speculation as to whether this was cynical social engineering or inspired foresight, preparing the country to unite against the very real threat of fascism which was gaining ground in Europe throughout the decade.

Hull argues very strongly that education cannot exclude reference to an ideology like fascism, even though fascism “if it gained the upper hand, would destroy education.” Given its potential for such destruction, it is surprising to find the bishop of St Albans asserting in 1944 that “the Nazi principle of education is sound.” The point he was making was that educators must be passionately convinced of the importance



and relevance of their message and be systematic in the organisation of its transmission. He was implying that religious education, if it is to be effective, has to be taught with equal enthusiasm; the crucial difference is found in the teacher's willingness to be challenged and to allow the learners to reflect and use their own judgement. The chaotic state of education, particularly in the early years of the Second World War, rendered the task of the teacher doubly difficult but at the same time more urgent, than at any time in England's history. The old established order was about to change for ever. As one contemporary writer put it:

“There was never more need than today for a searching examination of values upon which our lives as individuals and our life as a people should be based ... The British personality retains all its force and charm, but today it is sadly misdirected ...” (TES 30 Oct 1943).

## **Conclusion**

The increasing formalisation of the English education system took place in a period of accelerating change. One of the main influences in the process seems to have been the gradual decline in religious belief and commitment observed in the population as a whole, and the increasing involvement of the state in the curriculum and in educational organisation generally. The following chapter presents an analysis of the 1944 Act and its role in revitalising English education at the end of the war. It argues that major demographic developments, interacting with a range of social and economic variables, produced a constantly evolving environment (Davie 1994) calling for ever greater flexibility in the education system.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE BUTLER ACT AND POST-WAR DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS

#### 3.1 The Struggle for a Unified System

Maclure (1994) describes the '44 Act as the “Act of Faith amid the heat of battle” (TES 6 May 1994). It is generally agreed that it changed the face of education, with its visionary social objectives and wider opportunities for all. In practice, as the foregoing section indicates, educational approaches during the inter-war years were not the most innovative, especially in the elementary schools. This was in spite of fresh ideas emanating from the Hadow Reports of the 1920s and from the continent in the writings of progressive thinkers like Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori, who argued in their different ways that education was about self-realisation and learning by experience rather than by instruction. English education remained firmly committed to the “path of mechanical obedience” (Lawson 1978) instead of enabling the learning process to evolve into one of “earnest inquiry” (Hull 1975). This was due partly to economic constraints, since new resources were difficult to obtain, and attempts to update school buildings were severely affected by the major financial crisis of 1931. The variable quality of elementary teachers added to the difficulty of improving educational standards. Lawson records that less than half the teaching force in the inter-war years had received any kind of professional training. Hull’s comparison of the Agreed Syllabus for Cambridgeshire, the 1924 and the 1939 editions, demonstrates the slow decline of the more progressive trends and the return to the more traditional approach. This reversal is encapsulated in what he calls the “democratic omission and the christological addition.” A paragraph in the 1924 document referring to personal autonomy in the matter of ethics is replaced in the 1939 version by a reminder to teachers of their responsibility in *moulding the spirituality* of the child (my italics). The christological (i.e. Christ-centred) dimension, which appears in the 1939 edition, is expressed for teaching purposes as the teacher’s role in “quicken[ing] the pupils’ admiration of that unique personality (Christ’s) and filling them with a desire to know Him better ...” (ibid p 21)

In the years immediately prior to the 1944 Act, this concern to revitalise the traditional approaches to RE and school worship found expression in a series of



articles entitled “What is Religious Education?” printed in the Times Educational Supplement during 1943. The authors were eminent theologians and educationalists of the day, who expressed a strong general conviction that the nation’s children ought to be educated in the Christian traditions of their forebears. There was an entirely understandable concern to reinforce the cohesion and identity of the British nation which had risen to fever pitch during the worst years of the war. The contemporary perception of British society had become synonymous with Christian values of decency, honesty and fair play, or what one commentator describes as “residual Christianity” (Cox and Cairns 1989) and owed very little to obscure dogma and biblical exegesis. Yet the authors of Agreed Syllabuses were still, as Hull clearly demonstrates, approaching their task with the assumption that pupils were to be convinced of the truth of Christianity’s claims. There was apparently no sustained movement to alter this rationale in the provisions of the 1944 Act.

### **3.2 Laying the foundations**

A study of the background to the Act is essential to a greater understanding of its impact as a major agent of change. H C Dent (1944), editor of the Times Educational Supplement throughout the war and for a while thereafter, offers an informed contemporary account of the making of the Act. He recalls that it was the first of several major measures intended to revitalise Britain after the Second World War. He maintains that Mr R A Butler, who was then President of the Board of Education, was responsible for much of the content of the Act, although in this he is at variance with Barber (1994) who casts Butler in the role of supervisor, while educationalists worked on the details. The key reforms included the creation of the three-part system of primary, secondary and further education, and the expansion of the powers and responsibilities of the LEAs. Butler’s greatest personal achievement, according to Maclure (1994) was to secure a religious settlement, details of which are summarised in the following sub-section (3.3).

The Board of Education’s reputation among politicians was not good. It was traditionally seen, according to Sir John Simon, as “the outpost of the Treasury” (ibid p 36). Both Dent (1944) and Musgrave (1968) record that between 1902 and 1944

the Board never actually met. It was, therefore, timely that under the 1944 Act the title of Minister of Education came into being; the erstwhile President assumed the office of a Minister. In a White Paper entitled *Educational Reconstruction* which had appeared in 1943, Butler emphasised that “legislation can do little more than prepare the way for reform”, recognising the fact that the success of such a massive enterprise as a radical revision of the education system would depend heavily on public approval and support.

Barber also maintains that the whole enterprise had a clearly-defined democratic focus to counteract fascism. Contemporary sources (e.g. Dent and Spencer) assert that education was in dire need of reform, since no large-scale investment had been possible in the economic climate of the 1930s. Butler, who has been described as a radical Conservative, found in James Chuter Ede, the Labour Parliamentary Secretary at the Board of Education, a staunch ally and a tireless supporter of his proposed reforms. In fact, Barber observes that Butler enjoyed more support from the Labour Party than from his own throughout the making of the Act. The day after his appointment as President of the Board of Education he wrote optimistically to Chuter Ede of “the opportunity we have to give the educational system ... a real helping hand”. (Barber 1994:37) By contrast, Churchill, the Prime Minister, who was fully occupied with the progress of the war, was less enthusiastic, making it quite clear that the reform of education was very low on his list of priorities.

### **3.3 The Social and Political Context of the '44 Act**

Churchill was, however, enough of a politician to realise that the promise of a better world after the war was important for the nation's morale, although he was wary of interfering in the education system, remembering only too clearly the controversies over the voluntary schools before the First World War. He insisted that nothing was to be done that could in any way divide the nation; the reorganisation of RE was a particularly sensitive issue. Butler, however, after his appointment, set about “planning, consulting, listening and persuading” in his plan to restructure the whole educational system. (Maclure 1944) He seems to have been outstandingly successful in his concern to involve all interested parties in the planning process.



The wartime McNair Committee, established to study the supply of teachers, reported in 1944 that “the nation as a whole has woken up to the deficiencies of its public educational system ... we are witnessing one of the most widespread and insistent of popular demands for its reform.” (Lawson 1978) RE was given special attention in the Norwood Report of 1943, which reported a “genuine demand that there shall be *an opportunity* for religious education in all schools” (my italics). The Act in its final form made it more than an opportunity; it became a legal requirement for the first time. Section 25 of the Act stated that “the school day in every county school and in every voluntary school shall begin with collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance”. Lawson recalls the regret of the Norwood Committee that “of the agencies of Christian education, the home has very generally ceased to be the place of religious instruction ... the churches were often very scantily attended, and only the schools could supply the deficiency”. One particularly significant assertion, in view of subsequent events, was that “the National Union of Teachers accepted that the overwhelming majority of the people of this country and of the members of the teaching profession wished religious instruction to be given in state schools” (ibid p 417). The origin of this anecdotal evidence is not identified.

Perhaps the most sensitive and contentious of issues addressed by the 1944 Act was the position of the non-provided schools, which were still co-existing with the provided schools under the Dual System. (Under the terms of the 1944 Act the provided schools became officially known as County Schools.) It has already been noted that the Board Schools far outnumbered the non-provided schools by 1939, and the fact was that the latter were finding it increasingly difficult to keep pace with the reorganisation of secondary provision. They were for the most part all-age schools and, given their financial constraints, they were able to offer only 16% of their pupils any kind of secondary schooling, as compared with 60% of their provided school counterparts. (Lawson 1978) The 1944 Act addressed this disparity by a new arrangement, arrived at by Butler’s negotiations with the Anglican Archbishop William Temple. The voluntary sector was offered either ‘controlled’ or ‘aided’ status. In the case of the former, the local authority met all the school’s expenses, thereby limiting their independence. The latter option of ‘aided’ status involved joint funding, with a proportion of the necessary finance being provided by the local authority, and the rest by voluntary funding from the church. The Anglican schools

were for the most part willing to accept controlled status, being in the strong position of belonging to the Established Church. The Roman Catholic hierarchy, however, voiced serious objections through their spokesman Cardinal Hinsley. Their main concern, it seems, was the potential loss of such autonomy as their schools had previously enjoyed, especially in RE. They were determined to retain control of the religious formation of young Roman Catholics and asserted the right of their schools to provide denominational instruction and worship within their own tradition. They therefore opted for aided status in spite of the financial implications, a situation that still applies to most RC schools today.

### **3.4 The 1944 Act as a corporate achievement**

It is clear that the 1944 Act was the culmination of protracted and painstaking consultation with parents and teachers, negotiations having begun as early as 1941. Butler and Chuter Ede collaborated in travelling the country together or separately, eliciting opinions and ideas as to the best way of structuring the reforms. In the matter of RE, still the only compulsory curriculum subject to appear in the final draft, they sought the views of all the major Christian denominations and tried to reflect all shades of opinion. It could be argued that this was a major triumph of democratic legislation; it was negotiated rather than imposed. Maclure, however, (1994) maintains that it became fashionable in Thatcherite Britain to trivialise Butler's achievement as embodying the "discarded weaknesses of consultation and consensus". The perception of consultation and consensus as weaknesses is difficult to justify. Dent (1969), in discussing the statutory obligation to hold a daily act of worship, noted the concern expressed by teachers' unions on the matter, adding that in this "they received very considerable public and parliamentary support". This was not, as might be supposed, a reluctance on the part of teachers to organise or lead school worship; Lawson's anecdotal evidence is itself at odds with that perception. Dent recalls that they were protesting against what seemed to them "an unnecessary and humiliating compulsion". Chuter Ede, however, justified this compulsion in the Commons by maintaining that



“There is a general recognition that even if parents themselves in the course of life have encountered difficulties that have led them into doubts ... they do desire that their children shall have a grounding in the principles of the Christian faith.” (Hansard Mar 10 1944)

It seems he was not prepared to leave what he considered a vital element of education merely to the goodwill of the profession; it had to be in the Statute Book. The fact that both Butler and Chuter Ede were devout Christians, albeit from different traditions, made it virtually impossible for them to perceive society in anything but Christian terms. The clauses on RE and worship therefore had to be conscientious in every sense.

### **3.5 The political climate**

Under the terms of the 1944 Act the Minister of Education was given wide-ranging powers. A particular phrase in the Bill gave rise to much concern and parliamentary discussion. It was contained in the clause which put the national policy for education *under his control and direction* (Section 1). There was a general unease that this made the Minister in effect a dictator (in theory if not in practice), and concern was expressed that some form of limitation of his powers should be built into the provision. Butler, determined though he was to make the whole process democratic, resisted this suggestion, arguing that some form of central authority was vital for national cohesion. In this he was supported by Sir Percy Harris, the leader of the Liberal Party, who argued vehemently that “the Minister should be armed with full power and authority to force education authorities up to one common level”. (Hansard Dec 15 1943) This seems to have convinced most MPs, some of whom were aware that the local authorities in their constituencies were less than satisfactory in their provision for education, either through negligence or lack of funds. Dent does concede, however, that there is a need for constant vigilance on the part of Parliament and the general public that the potential for educational dictatorship should never be allowed to materialise. He expresses complete confidence in the power of the parliamentary process to prevent this. (Dent 1969)

The Act aimed to leave teachers in control of the curriculum, and Butler was determined that their professional judgement was to take precedence over all other considerations. The stated objective of the whole reform was to provide equality of opportunity. The new Education Bill had its first reading on December 15 1943. The raising of the school leaving age to 16 was opposed by the government, including Butler himself, but Hansard records that 25 Tory ministers voted with the Labour Party. This number included one Peter Thorneycroft, who was at that time, according to Barber (1994), a “young Tory reformer”.

### 3.6 RE and School Worship in the 1944 Act

Section 23 of the Act made it clear that secular instruction in all county schools and most aided schools was under the control of the LEA. In the county schools this also applied to RE and Worship; in the voluntary schools the governors and managers were charged with this responsibility. Section 25 required Religious Instruction to be given in every county school and every voluntary school. It went on to specify that **the school day in every county school should begin with collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance.** This clause formalised what was already accepted practice, although this was the first time that the act of worship was made obligatory. The conscience clause, whereby parents could insist that their children did not attend, was honoured in the tradition of the 1870 Act. The worship took place at the beginning of the day, after registration, so that pupils could be marked present but entitled to absent themselves from worship in accordance with the wishes of their parents. No teacher could be required either to teach RE or lead an act of worship, and was not to be disadvantaged as a result of exercising this right. The clauses were interesting for what they did not specify. The fact that worship was to be offered **on the part of pupils**, rather than by their being observers or having prayer said **on their behalf**, presupposed a vigorous, active faith in God and a willingness to engage in corporate worship. Religious belief, if not actual commitment, was assumed; such an assumption was unwise, to say the least. The timing and the frequency of the acts was carefully stated, but no attempt was made to suggest their content or form of delivery, nor was any account taken of the ages and aptitudes of the participants.



Again, under the terms of Section 27, **Religious Instruction was to be given regularly to all pupils**, but neither the type of instruction nor the precise intention of ‘regularly’ was explained. Perhaps most significant of all, the word ‘Christian’ is not mentioned in connection with either RE or worship. One hypothesis is that this omission was out of deference to the few Jewish schools which then existed, but the more likely explanation is that widespread ignorance of world faiths other than Christianity meant that none was even considered as appropriate material for a syllabus of Religious Instruction. Hull (1975) records the optimistic appraisal of the Act by Braley, a contemporary churchman, as follows: “I believe we ought to regard the Act as a great victory for Christian principles – a sure and certain proof that the work of the Churches has not been such a failure as many people represent it to be.” (Hull op.cit. p 24)

The formalisation of the Agreed Syllabus, (the statutory document produced by LEAs for the guidance of teachers in their county schools) was addressed in the requirement that **“Every Local Authority was to make or adopt one properly made by another authority.”** (Section 28) In this task, an LEA might, if it wished, set up a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE). This freedom was in widespread use already, and was later reinforced by the Fifth Schedule of the Education Act of 1946, under the terms of which the composition of the Council was to be representative of:

- ◆ such religious (*ie Christian*) denominations as, in the opinion of the authority ought ... to be represented
- ◆ except in the case of an area in Wales of Monmouthshire, the Church of England
- ◆ such associations representing teachers as, in the opinion of the authority, ought ... to be represented
- ◆ the authority

The powers of the Local Authority, particularly in relation to RE and Worship, were substantial, as the terms of this Schedule demonstrate.

Hull (1975) maintains that the studied use of the term Religious Education in the 1944 Act was an extension of the more limited notion of Religious Instruction, since the former implies an intention to encompass the whole religious experience, that of classroom learning and the act of worship. However, one of the difficulties surrounding this Act was that crucial assumptions were made on very flimsy evidence. Teachers were charged with “imposing a collective consciousness” (Cox and Cairns 1989) when clearly no such consciousness existed. The mismatch between the intentions of the legislators and the reality of the classroom is an ongoing problem in the education system, perhaps even more so today than just after the war when the nation had been united against a common enemy. Another tacit assumption was that British society was still largely Christian, even if only in the nominal sense. The fact is that church-going had been in steady decline since the turn of the century, when religious ideas and strictures were increasingly being questioned, possibly due to the greater access to education enjoyed by increasing numbers of the population. The notion of the post-Christian era is by no means a modern phenomenon.

### **3.7 The implications for teachers**

School worship in such a context was problematic in both form and purpose. The requirement was that it was **not to be distinctive of any particular denomination** (Section 26) was inserted, again in the Cowper-Temple tradition of 1870. This meant that school worship according to the Book of Common Prayer or based on the Quaker model of silent reflection or any other distinctive mode of adult worship was proscribed, since such acts might conceivably attract the pupils towards one tradition rather than another. While it was clear what form was not to be used, no positive guidelines were offered as to what would be acceptable. This was welcomed as allowing a degree of autonomy to those responsible for the preparation of an act of worship, but it could also be perceived as an evasion of responsibility to give practical support. The focus was predominantly on the rights and duties of religious



bodies to establish patterns of worship which might or might not be already in the pupils' experience. The assumption that "the experience of truth is all-pervasive and that this Christian experience is open to all in an educational setting" (Cox and Cairns 1968) had yet to be seriously challenged. Cairns maintains that the opportunities to explore the personal values of the nation's children in post-war years were not taken up, thereby denying the population as a whole the chance to express and celebrate the newly-emerging culture. The Martin and Pluck research carried out in the 1970s surfaced the results of this denial. They claimed that most (*school pupils*) had little idea of religious belief and regarded religion as something "irrelevant to their lives, something suitable only for young children and the superstitious". (Cox & Cairns 1968:40)

However, even given the constraints under which the new Education Bill was introduced, its first reading on December 15 1943 was well received by the Commons. W C Cove, the Labour MP for Aberavon, a former miner who later became President of the NUT, summed up for the Opposition, including the following observation: "The Bill provides the answer to the secularisation of the century by requiring an act of worship and an Agreed Syllabus". The LEA was to be the power-house of the Butler reforms, focusing on the mental, moral and physical development of the community in its area. Butler had demonstrated his confidence in, and dependence on, local government for the implementation of the changes. "In spite of the occasional hiccups, the Bill completed its report stage in the Lords on Wednesday, July 12 in much the same form as it had left the Commons ..." (Barber 1994:105) On August 3 1944, three years after Butler had been appointed President of the Board of Education, the Bill received the Royal Assent. Sir Percival Sharp, in the August 4 edition of Education magazine, offered this tribute to Butler: "To few statesmen is given that friendly tact, that absence of overt demonstration of force and power, which have marked the passage of the Act" (Sharp 1944).

### **3.8 School Worship post-1944**

In the post-war years the daily act of worship remained fairly predictable in essence; there would usually be a hymn, a reading from the bible or some commentary on

biblical material, followed by a corporate response in the form of prayer or prayers. The Lord's prayer was a standard inclusion. The official description of this exercise was Corporate Worship, a term which has given rise to much debate in more recent times. Representatives of faiths other than Christianity have argued that their presence was largely ignored by such terminology; the idea that religious worship in Britain could be anything other than Christian was never recognised in the final wording of the Act, although such recognition did feature in the 1943 parliamentary discussions. Jews, Muslims and Hindus had long been established as faith groups in mainstream society, but this perception of Britain as almost exclusively Christian persisted in the minds of the legislators in spite of all evidence to the contrary. This attitude is epitomised in an observation found in a 1946 manual of school worship, which asserts that "all schools established by the LEAs are undenominational ... their pupils are drawn from many denominations of Christianity, with *perhaps a small minority of non-Christians ...*" (my italics) (Hull 1975:26)

The use of the term Corporate Worship was problematic even in 1944. Church attendance continued to decline, and reformers such as Bradlaugh (1833-91) had long been opposed to the retention of RI, and by implication school worship, on the grounds that they were indoctrinatory (Durham Report 1970). Most pupils were not, apparently, familiar with the experience or practice of worship except at school. Corporate worship, by definition, implied a commonality of belief and conviction such as that found in a church congregation, and it was clearly inaccurate to imply that school pupils, even in 1944, symbolised such commonality. There was, however, a quite different agenda driving the preliminary discussions, one which Lord Butler identified at a much later date (November 15 1967) as that of a nation on its knees at the height of a war, when divine intervention seemed to offer the only hope of survival. He reminded his audience that the Act was "put through ... with the bombs actually raining at the time, and the sentiments and the emotion of the day must not be forgotten ..." (Hansard vol 286 No 8 para 713) Although for whatever reason, school worship was endorsed by the 1944 Act, the question that remained largely unanswered was its justification and purpose in times of relative peace and prosperity. The school, according to Hull (1975), continued to be regarded as a Christian community and engaged in exclusively Christian worship until about 1965,



when social and demographic changes were beginning to impinge on public awareness.

### **3.9 The Fourth R – The Durham Report**

A significant milestone in the development of thinking about the role of religion in county schools was a major initiative of the Church of England. A commission was set up in 1967 to examine the state of RE and worship, under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Durham. The basis of this investigation was both philosophical and pedagogical. Many earlier assumptions about British society were being increasingly called into question, and scientific discoveries were apparently challenging many of the claims made by religion. The population was by then predominantly urban, the hardships of unemployment were virtually forgotten, and popular culture was dominated by science and technology. There was, according to the Report, an increasing cynicism, especially among the young, which viewed religion as neither right nor wrong but simply irrelevant. Theologians themselves fuelled this agnosticism by openly questioning some of the basic teachings of Christianity. Robinson's 1963 work *Honest to God*, the aim of which was to urge Christians to adopt a rational, reflective approach to their belief and practice, was popularly perceived as an attack on Christian orthodoxy. Later theological and scriptural works, such as *Image Old and New*, and *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* are cited by the Durham Report as having contributed not only to the debate but also to the confusion.

In addition to the philosophical issues, pedagogical changes were transforming the schools, particularly in the primary sector. RE teachers could no longer impose their authority on the basis of Christian orthodoxy, since it had lost much of its credibility for a variety of reasons. Through their research among young people, academics such as Loukes (1961) and Goldman (1964) helped to develop new ways of structuring the RE curriculum, and by implication the acts of school worship, which were more appropriate to the pupils' stage of religious development. The

experiential approach replaced many of the more formal methods. In the light of these developments the 1967 Commission expressed concern about the shortage of properly qualified RE teachers who could bring to their subject all the academic rigour of their colleagues in other disciplines. The Durham Report outlined the arguments for and against the retention, particularly of school worship, in the face of ecclesiastical and secularist convictions which were to all intents and purposes irreconcilable. It is axiomatic that the Report itself, produced as it was by a distinguished group of Christian educationalists, was already favourably disposed to school RE and worship, but it offered an impartial critique of the educational implications before proceeding to answer those advocating the complete secularisation of state schools.

The Commission argued that worship is an essential feature of all religions and that its neglect or abolition would render any RE programme incomplete. It would be comparable to studying the score of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony without ever listening to a performance, or analysing the technique of the Impressionists without examining a painting by Monet. The Report further asserted that the arguments for the retention of worship enjoyed general support among parents, even those who professed to having no religious faith. For whatever motives, they were unwilling to deny their children access to an area of experience into which they themselves might be unable to enter. This sentiment echoed Chuter Ede's comments in 1944, (cited in 3.4 above,) and implied that there had been no radical shift in parental attitudes on the matter. They were, according to the Report, acknowledging the fact that human beings have a need to grapple with life's complexities and to celebrate and reflect on personal and emotional experiences. A need was also identified to mark in some significant way certain key events, not only Christmas and Easter, but weddings and funerals of national significance. A coronation, for instance, is an overtly religious ceremony, and the proceedings of parliament have a spiritual dimension, however perfunctory.

The arguments against requiring school pupils to engage in what could be construed as a hypocritical act relied heavily on the Christian element. School worship presupposed the validity of Christian tenets and the practice of prayer, whereas secularists argued vehemently for the preservation of strict neutrality on religious



questions. The ethical and practical objections were based on the notion of indoctrination, and the open-ended nature of metaphysical inquiry was emphasised. It was also asserted that, since much school worship was hastily organised and inappropriately presented, the whole endeavour could be counter-productive and deter pupils “from participation in the worship of the Church in later adult life”. (Durham Report para 291 c) Worship was seen as an interior state or attitude; legislation for attitudes was unworkable and therefore pointless.

The Commission countered these claims with a persuasive argument which posited two essential elements of worship, the **expressive** and the **didactic**. There is no evidence in the Report of the origin of these two elements; the chairman, Ian Ramsey, the Bishop of Durham, records in his preface merely that the work of each sub-group represented broadly the “collective thinking” of the Commission. (Durham Report p xii) An appreciation of the different functions of both elements is essential to an understanding of their arguments. Any worship offers a means for worshippers to express their response to God through joining in ritual acts: (this is the **expressive** dimension). The nature and quality of the response will vary greatly from one individual to another. This is particularly pertinent to a church congregation; there is no way of assessing the depth or significance of the response of individuals or indeed why they are there at all. They may be spectators of, or participants in, any given action. The **didactic** or teaching dimension is more easily quantified in an educational as compared to a religious context, in that a teaching element is invariably present in an act of worship. This includes the telling of stories, re-enactment of significant events and the exposition of scriptural texts. The assumption in 1944 was apparently that both the expressive and the didactic elements were present, whereas the reality may well have been that the exercise was largely didactic and often irrelevant.

Mindful of the objections raised, the Durham Commission drew attention to the communitarian nature of the school population. Their report claimed that the school was a microcosm of the larger society of which school is a part. This claim immediately draws attention to the diversity of belief, and lack of it, to be found in society as a whole. They frequently alluded to the need to create “community cohesion” stressing shared values, the acceptance of authority and the “regular

performance of community acts or rituals”. (para 301) The notion of community rituals has already been introduced in this work (see 1.2 below) In this connection they make a clear distinction between Assembly (the most commonly-used term for what was still officially Corporate Worship) and the act of worship, a distinction which continues to give rise to confusion to this day. Professional experience and the popular media suggest that teachers very seldom use the term Collective or Corporate Worship in connection with the daily gathering, preferring the less formal description of Assembly. It is clear that in the minds of the legislators the two activities are related, but distinct from one another. The Durham Report puts it as follows:

“It would be quite possible for the school assembly to be a wholly secular ceremony ... an expression of the school’s corporate life, an agency for transmitting ideals ... But this would not be an act of worship” (para 294).

The writers were less clear on what could be described as worship in the traditional sense, but they did imply that it cannot solely be defined as a religious ritual whereby participants respond to the God in whom they believe. They suggested that there are various levels of participation. For one person it may be the expression of a deep personal faith; for another it may represent the acknowledgement of the “mystery of Being” (para 296). For a third it may surface a restlessness and evoke a search for inner peace. Each of these, according to the Report, has genuine value without presupposing total personal commitment to the object of worship.

### **3.10 The Durham Report – some perspectives**

Hull (1975) offers a detailed critique of the Report’s findings on school worship. He questions, for instance, the notion that it is necessary for pupils to engage in worship in order to understand what it is like to be religious. Although worship is an integral part of Christianity and many other faiths, this does not of itself justify its inclusion in the school curriculum. Hull distinguishes between studying and engaging in worship. An appreciation of the significance of worship in the lives of believers is, he maintains, better achieved by meeting and talking with religious people, visiting



places of worship and observing religious rituals. He also highlights the essential skill of the teacher in selecting material which is educationally acceptable, arguing that “just as some content of religion is suitable for schools and some is not, so some means of introducing religion are legitimate and others are not” (Hull 1975:97). He points out that the Durham Report appears to contradict itself on what constitutes worship. Para 296 asserting that “worship cannot solely be defined as a religious ritual whereby believers respond to the God in whom they believe” is difficult to reconcile with the statement in para 298 that “it can only be worship if it is indeed the appropriate response of creature to creator”. At the heart of Hull’s concerns is the tension between worship and education. While RE is open-ended and exploratory, worship, in his words, “assumes the truth”.

He also finds the division of worship in terms of two functions inadequate, maintaining that its didactic function is totally different from open-ended classroom inquiry. He goes on to add a third function of worship, which he calls the affirmative. The participants are never simply spectators; either overtly or tacitly they affirm the “assumptions on which the worship is based”. (ibid p 99) He also draws attention to an interesting paradox: while the Agreed Syllabuses control the content of classroom RE there is no parallel control (at least there was not until recently) over the form and content of Collective Worship. His suggestion of Agreed Syllabuses for the latter, which he instantly dismisses as “psychologically impossible” has since been taken up by some LEAs, albeit in a form different from that of the RE syllabus.

### **3.11 Post –War Demographic Developments**

An issue to which the Durham Report gave scant attention was that of world faiths other than Christianity. It devoted only six of its 577 paragraphs to these, although it did concede that there was a need to study them within the context of the culture from which they evolved and in which they were practised. The Durham Commission rejected outright what it called the “indifferentist and essentialist standpoints” whereby all religions could be treated as being equal in value. It defined the indifferentist approach as the suggestion that “no prophet or religious teacher is necessarily of greater value than any other,” (para 121) and the essentialist

as the claim that behind all religions is an essential truth, namely “to know which is the best and purest religious knowledge one can attain to.” It went on to reinforce the distinctiveness of Christianity in that “the Christian derives his faith from a unique event.” It recommended that students of other world faiths should, therefore, remain willing to “explore the reasons why Christian claims and beliefs are considered to be distinctive.” (para 12) This somewhat condescending stance recurred in the section on the future of school worship, where county schools with a large proportion of Jewish pupils were considered to be faced with “a special problem.” (para 314) The perception of other cultural, ethnic and religious groups in society as problematic seems strangely at odds with the world-wide, all-inclusive embrace of Christianity.

The Report, did, however, raise crucial issues, which Copley (1997) analyses within the social and economic context of the 1970s and 1980s. Unemployment was an increasingly serious problem and the “spectre of racism” (ibid p 96) haunted social and industrial relations, manifesting itself in National Front meetings and race riots in Bristol, Notting Hill and Toxteth. The post-war immigrants were widely suspected of depriving the indigenous population of employment, leading to mutual resentment and social unrest. The attitude of the mainstream Christian churches was apparently to see ‘other religions’ as mission targets (ibid p 96) or to ignore them altogether. Traditional Christian churches were, however, being superseded by new forms of spiritual experience, such as Transcendental Meditation, Krishna consciousness and what Copley maintains was a concern with improving the ‘self’. The Free Churches suffered the greatest decline, although Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism also noted a marked reduction in church attendance.

Copley maintains that the Durham Report was ahead of its time, in its assertion that “acquaintance with other men’s religions .....can itself broaden not only the pupils’ religious but also their international understanding” (para 264). It also broke new ground in acknowledging that pupils might legitimately decide against the claims of the Christian faith. (para 123) Whether the Report was seen as partisan because it was a church initiative, or whether the political will to change the status quo was lacking, Copley (1997:99) considers that it did not receive the support it was entitled to expect from Government. Teachers trying to promote in their pupils an



appreciation of religion adopted a variety of strategies, based on a perception of RE as an exploration, and pupils' opinions were actively sought. Suspicion of the confessional approach, which Copley maintains was viewed as the antithesis of educational, and cited as 'cultic indoctrination' (Schools Council Working Paper 36 (1971:73) gave way to an undogmatic, phenomenological approach. The attempt to transcend the purely informative in the study of religion might involve pupils in witnessing an actual religious festival or ritual for themselves; it was essentially experiential and pupils found it genuinely stimulating.

In 1978 Grimmitt provided what might be construed as a job description for RE teachers, comparing them to shopkeepers with wares they are anxious for customers to "examine, appreciate and even 'try on' but not feel under any obligation to buy.....(Grimmitt 1978:26, in Copley 1997:113). Cooling, in a BJRE article a decade later (Cooling 1986), highlighted the shortcomings of the shopkeeper analogy by drawing attention to two inherent implications. First, it suggests that all wares are equally valid and worthy of 'trying on' (Copley 1997:113) and second, it raises suspicions that some 'under the counter' items, such as religious fundamentalism, may be hidden from the potential buyer.

In 1982 Hull described an RE curriculum which had the potential to be "impartial but not arid, personal but not proselytizing" (in Copley 1997:121) He had witnessed the emerging dichotomy between bible-centred RE and child-centred thematic teaching, and considered both approaches incomplete. In the previous year (BJRE 1981) he had argued that the inclusion of world religions other than Christianity in the RE curriculum offered more possibilities than problems. This conviction was endorsed by the Swann Report of 1985 as contributing to a deeper appreciation of the "religious dimension of human experience and the plurality of faiths in Britain." (Copley 1997:125) Religious pluralism had long been the daily lived experience for many urban communities, but an awareness of the social and religious implications was slow to evolve. The Swann Report was instrumental in surfacing some of these issues.

Britain had, of course, experienced substantial demographic developments long before 1970, and the religious map in the immediate post-war situation was very

different by the time the Durham Report was published. The face of Britain is constantly changing; from the Picts, Normans and Saxons of earlier times to the groups that have entered Britain since the Second World War, British society has been shaped and enriched by variety and diversity. The members of these diverse communities are by no means all practising religious believers, but their social and family customs may have their origins deep in the religion of their forebears. The main religious groups which are included in the study programme of most current Agreed Syllabuses are outlined below in terms of their geographical background and distinctive features. Those features which have immediate impact on the school population are explored in greater detail later in this chapter (3.13 ff).

Two typical examples of Agreed Syllabuses will serve to illustrate the multifaith approach. Sefton LEA's publication, entitled Religious Education in the Basic Curriculum, appeared in June 1992. It provides frameworks for the teaching of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism in Britain, all of which should have been covered by the end of compulsory schooling. The Liverpool Syllabus, published in April 1994, specifies that Hinduism and Judaism should be studied by pupils at KS 1 (5-7 year olds) and Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism at KS 2 (7-11 year olds.) In the later years, these same faiths are to be studied in greater depth. A working knowledge of the origins and customs of these diverse religious groups is as essential for RE teaching as is a sound background knowledge of any other subject taught. An RE co-ordinator who was interviewed in the course of the empirical research had made a point of acquainting herself with the world faiths represented in her school, and involving local religious leaders such as the Imam in the RE work covered by her pupils. Community cohesion in that school was therefore positive and misunderstandings were quickly rectified, providing an apt illustration of the contention that religious diversity, handled sensitively and with integrity, can enrich community relations.

### **3.12 World Faiths in Britain**

“The perception of difference as something to be celebrated rather than to be played down is obviously a crucial concept



for any community that has.....been a minority group wherever it has found itself. It is also perhaps an important attitude of mind for a multicultural society” (Lawton 1990:71).

### 3.12.1 The Jewish Community

There has been a Jewish community in Britain since before the Middle Ages, and Bruce (1995) maintains that this is because conditions here were more favourable for Jews than in the more overtly anti-Semitic parts of Europe. In most Eastern European countries in the 19th century they were obliged by law to form Ghettos, although this did not apply in Britain. Some historians (Armstrong 1997, Betts 1999) maintain that the policy of allowing Jewish immigrants to settle where they liked, made it easier to target them for religious conversion. Armstrong makes reference to the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews, also known as the London Jews Society, which was formed early in the 19th century. She explains that the founders were

“....inspired by an old millennium dream. St Paul had prophesied that all the Jews would be converted to Christ before the Second Coming, and an increasing number of British Christians felt that they had a duty to fulfil this prophecy.” (Armstrong 1997:351)

The Jews unsurprisingly resented this initiative, choosing instead to form geographically close-knit communities for social and religious reasons. Because of this, almost a third of Britain’s Jewish population is to be found today in north-west London, another sizeable group in the north-west of England, particularly Manchester, and a third around Glasgow (Bruce 1995:74). According to Brotz (1994) British Jews have been wrestling with problems of identity since the 1950s, just as other minority religious groups in Britain have experienced since that time. The Jewish community is in decline, partly on account of “marrying out” (whereby a Jew marrying a non-Jew effectively cuts her/himself off from the group) and partly by the number who are choosing to emigrate to Israel. This decline is exacerbated by the fact that Judaism is largely “inherited rather than acquired” (Bruce 1995), and the traditional Jewish belief that the only true Jew is one born into the group. (Brotz

1994) It follows from this that those who move away cannot, as is possible in other faiths, be replaced by converts.

Internal diversity within Judaism itself is a clear indication that, like any other ancient religion, it cannot remain unaffected by intellectual and cultural developments in the secular world. In Britain, as in Israel, three main traditions can be recognised. These are known as the **Orthodox**, the **Liberal / Conservative** and the **Progressive / Reform** strands of Judaism. The differences in religious observance are such that it would be as risky to generalise about their significance as it would be to explain the diversity in Christian or Muslim observance. This is why, when trying to encapsulate for educational purposes what is basic to any world faith, it is important not to perceive or speak of it as if it were one cohesive entity. A Progressive Jew asserts that his tradition is an authentic response to the changing conditions of western society. (Bayfield 1990) He welcomes many aspects of this society, such as the defence of human rights, cultural pluralism and the scientific advances which enhance the quality of life. He does, however, deplore what he call the “dethronement of God and the enthronement of humanity,” and particularly the “uncritical faith in science and scientific knowledge.” (*ibid* pp 42-43)

While valuing their distinctiveness, Progressive Jews do not seek to preserve it by separating themselves from the wider community. British Jews are, in the main, more religiously observant than the rest of the population, possibly because Jewish laws permeate every facet of the life of the individual and of the community. (Bruce 1995) Tradition and a sense of history are vitally important in Judaism, and cultural solidarity, underpinned by religious observance, is an effective strategy for survival in a minority community. There are Jewish schools in the major areas, but their continued survival as a religious entity seems uncertain, in spite of the fact that a 1992 survey indicated that a third of Jews attend synagogue every week. (Bruce 1995:76) The centre of worship is the home, and religious laws permeate every aspect of the observant Jew’s life. The highlight of the religious Jew’s week is the celebration of Shabbat, which is observed from sundown on Friday until Saturday evening. It is a family time with its own rituals and family customs. Judaism is a monotheistic faith; for a Jew, God is one, and the Torah (the first five books of the bible) fundamental to Jewish belief and practice. Freedman, (1986) however, is at



pains to remind non-Jews of the diversity of British Jewry, and warns against the dangers of presenting an idealised or stereotypical image of the Jewish way of life.

### 3.12.2 The Muslims

The British Muslim community, which came into prominence in the post-war years, is now by far the largest religious group after Christianity. The government of the day, facing an acute labour shortage from 1946 onwards, sought the help of the Commonwealth countries in filling vacant posts. The global distribution of Islam is immense, but the majority of Muslims in Britain came originally from Pakistan, others from North Africa, the Middle East, India and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). In 1961 half the Pakistanis were young adults who had come to find work, so it follows that most of today's British Muslims were born in Britain. Islam, like Judaism, is monotheistic; God is one, and for a Muslim Mohammed is the last and the greatest of the prophets. The Muslim holy book is the Qur'an (literally 'recitation') and prayers are said in Arabic. Observant Muslims require their children to learn Arabic, and Saturday schools are set up by the religious authorities for this purpose. According to Bruce (1995) most Muslims from the Indian sub-continent still regard residence in Britain as temporary, and many send their children back to their country of origin for long periods to reinforce their traditional culture. British Muslims are a disparate group in their backgrounds and level of education; it is therefore inaccurate to group them as though they were one cohesive community. The two main branches of Islam are the **Sunnis** (who form the majority) and the **Shi'as** whose religious observance is more strict. Bruce maintains that these strands owe their origin as much to history as to religious observance. "Distinctiveness," he asserts "is a matter of the wider culture.....the life-styles of the Gujarati farmers are not those of urban and urbane East African doctors" (Bruce 1995:83). The word Islam means 'submission to God' and almost all male Muslims express this submission by attending corporate prayer in their local *mosque* (place of worship) on Friday, the holiest day of the week.

Most of the British Muslims originating from East Africa, especially Uganda, are well-educated professional or business people, whereas many of the migrants from Bangladesh or Pakistan have a relatively impoverished farming background. The majority of them live in London, the West Midlands, Manchester and parts of Yorkshire. (Nielsen 1992) Religious observance is strict; older children, for instance, will be expected by their parents to keep the long fast of Ramadan even while in school, and the dietary laws are clear. The men go alone to the mosque for congregational worship and the women pray at home. Muslim girls, therefore, will be unfamiliar with the public worship and rituals of the mosque. As with Jews, Muslim family ties are strong and the celebration of annual festivals such as *Eid-el-fitr*, at the end of Ramadan, is a family occasion.

Young British Muslims have written movingly about the tensions inherent in living out their faith in a largely secular society (Nielsen 1983). The rule which requires Muslims to recite prayers five times a day, for instance, was described by one young student as “practically impossible” to keep. He acknowledged his belief in “a higher being”, however, while emphasising, quite significantly, that “people would say I am scientifically inclined”. It was as though he already saw religious faith and science as logically incompatible. In comparison with their western counterparts, Muslim women and girls in particular are subject to restrictions of dress and behaviour which can create tensions, especially for those working outside the home. Women students, for instance, may envy the freedom of their non-Muslim friends to socialise and dress as they please; marriages are still usually arranged by the parents of the young people concerned. The headteacher of a single-sex comprehensive school who was interviewed in the course of this research had a high proportion of Muslim girls on roll. Their parents required an all-female environment for the education of their daughters as far as possible, so as to comply with the customs and traditions of Islam. Siddiqui (1990) argues that Muslims will have to make a conscious effort if they are to survive as a distinctive community in their own right. They are in the process of establishing their own schools and obtaining parity of funding with other schools with a religious basis, such as the Jewish or Roman Catholic foundations. A major concern for minority groups of any kind is to strike a balance between the preservation of cultural and religious identity and the necessary integration into a pluralist society. Education plays a vital role in creating and maintaining this



balance, since a sound knowledge of major religious traditions, including one's own, is a powerful antidote to cultural assimilation and the inevitable loss of a distinctive identity. It could be argued that a society is enriched by diversity based on a form of integration which respects and values differences; assimilation, by contrast, values uniformity of belief and practice, particularly that of the dominant culture. In such an environment, non-conformists of any persuasion are likely to find themselves on the periphery. A recent research project, discussed below, (3.13) identifies the potential benefits of integration in enhancing the self-esteem of religious minorities.

### 3.12.3 The Hindu Faith

Like Muslims, the first group of British Hindus, as members of the Commonwealth, were invited to Britain after the Second World War to support the impoverished labour market. They originated from the northern Indian regions of Gujarat and the Punjab. The second group arrived some twenty years later from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, when immigrants were no longer welcome there on account of the Africanisation policies then being implemented in those countries. (Bruce 1995) Many of the Hindus from Africa were, like the Muslims before them, over-qualified for the posts available to them on their arrival, since they were professional people. As a way of life, Hinduism has been shaped by the many religious traditions of India. No one person or creed can be said to be responsible for the founding of Hinduism; Hindu perceptions of God are complex, and worship focuses on a variety of images. They are not required to attend a place of worship, although there were at least 130 Hindu temples in Britain at the last count (Brierley 1991). These are the cultural centres of the Hindu community, where public ceremonies such as the welcoming of a new child take place, and traditional festivals are celebrated. As with other faiths outlined, most worship is offered in the home, where a shrine to a favoured deity is the focus. This deity is viewed as a manifestation of the one God, Brahman, who is, according to Hindu tradition, called by many names (Bastide 1987). The Hindu way of life is based on strict principles; many Hindus are vegetarians, smoking and alcohol are taboo and regular fasting is practised. The caste system, although officially outlawed, still influences the organisation of the community, manifesting itself in different sects within Hinduism. As with Islam, the differences within Hinduism owe more to culture than to religion. Bruce (1995) maintains that in all

major religious traditions the notion of class is influential in shaping doctrine and ritual. Hinduism holds that caste membership is hereditary, and many castes have their own deities and rituals. Bruce, however, does concede that Hindu temples in Britain today are likely to be multi-caste and multi-ethnic; the sheer cost of separate provision for each group would be prohibitive.

#### 3.12.4 Sikhs in Britain

The Sikh presence in Britain also stems from the Commonwealth immigration policies after the war. Sikhism, the youngest of all world religions, originated in the Punjab region of India from which most Sikhs came to find work, and later from East Africa and other Commonwealth countries of that time. They settled in urban areas such as London, (where there is a large community in Southall) Birmingham, Glasgow, Coventry and Wolverhampton. Theirs is a disciplined way of life, and one of their beliefs is that “a good Sikh is a saint and a soldier” (Bastide 1987). They revere Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539 AD) as their founder, and have roots in both Hinduism and Islam. Sikhism was founded to resolve the tension between these two great faiths. It reacted, for instance, against elitist notions of class and caste, and traditional structures which excluded women. Sikhs honour God as the true *Guru* (or religious teacher) and all other gurus, of whom there were ten, as the human instruments through whom he speaks. Their holy book is the Guru Granth Sahib, a copy of which is the central focus of each *Gurdwara* (or temple) and most Sikh worship consists of the reading of the Granth and the singing of hymns. The book is accorded the highest respect as though it were a living person. The most distinctive feature of a traditional Sikh is the turban, which is necessary because observant Sikhs do not cut their hair. For a variety of practical reasons this custom is gradually diminishing, although it is still respected as a symbol of religious commitment. At their religious initiation, Sikh males are given the name *Singh* (lion) and females the name *Kaur* (princess). Owen Cole (1989) asserts that Sikhism is an intensely democratic religion. It is lived out in terms of a strong family life, honest, hard work and practical charity to those in need, all underpinned by the practice of private meditation and corporate worship. Although Sikhs pray at home and some even have a special prayer room in the house, congregational worship is valued for its contribution to cultural cohesion. Bruce (1995) records that the first Gurdwara was



opened in Putney as long ago as 1911. Like the Muslim mosque and the Hindu temple, the gurdwara is more than a place of worship; it is a cultural centre used for many purposes to support and promote the Sikh way of life.

### 3.12.5 Buddhists in Britain

Buddhism is the main religion of South East Asia and the Far East. British Buddhists, with their Commonwealth connections, arrived here from Hong Kong, and the majority of the Vietnamese boat people who have settled in Britain are Buddhists. Their faith originated in India over 2,500 years ago; it is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama who became the *Buddha* (literally the Awakened or Enlightened One). As with all other world faiths, different strands have developed; the first kind to arrive in Britain was the **Theravada** tradition, which originated in Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka. The other main strands are the **Vajrayana** tradition from Tibet, and the largest group, which predominates in the rest of the world, is the **Mahayana** school. British Buddhists are to be found in all kinds of environments in addition to London and Birmingham, including the rural areas of Dumfries, Northumbria, Sussex and Wales (Morgan 1990).

Buddhists, unlike the adherents of some other world faiths, do not believe in a creator God; the Buddha is revered as a holy man whose teachings are to be honoured but he is not considered to be divine (Westhill College 1993). Some devout Buddhists, however, meditate before an image of Buddha, and meditation plays an important part in their lives. The Buddha taught that human suffering is the result of greed and the search for pleasure. By learning to think, behave and meditate in a certain way, people can learn to control such desires and thus achieve serenity and happiness. They share with the Hindus the notion of *Samsara*, which has been described as 'wandering without a purpose.' (Morgan 1990) It refers to the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth (or reincarnation) in which they consider all unenlightened beings are imprisoned. Meditation is the way by which people break free from this cycle of *Samsara*; it is the boat or raft by which the enlightened ones are steered safely through the tumultuous currents of greed, hatred and ignorance. The ultimate destination is

*Nirvana*, which is peace after the storm and freedom from the relentless agonies of rebirth. Buddhist teaching is clear on this point: to attain Nirvana people do not necessarily have to be Buddhists, but they do need to discover or be shown some kind of path (Morgan 1990).

### **3.13 Faith traditions in a Multicultural Tradition**

The five faiths outlined above represent the major non-Christian traditions to be found in Britain at the beginning of the 21st century. The government of this country, having encouraged immigration to solve the acute labour shortage after the war, then reversed this policy so that by the 1970s immigration had virtually ceased (Keene 1998). This short-term solution to a practical problem had profound social effects, not least on the education system. Significant numbers of children were arriving in school with little or no knowledge of English language or culture, and there was an uncomfortable suspicion among the indigenous population that the newcomers were changing the face of Britain for ever. The tragic effects of this social unrest and the resultant legislation have been well documented elsewhere, (e.g. Holmes 1994, Jacobs 1998).

The Anglican church addressed the issues in a 1985 report entitled *Schools and Multicultural Education*, expressing the hope that schools, particularly church schools, could become “important centres of reconciliation among peoples of different races and creeds” (Francis 1987:39). The majority of the committee responsible for the Swann Report *Education for all* (1985) reviewing all the arguments for and against separate provision for ethnic and religious groups, expressed reservations about any kind of separate provision, seeing them as contributing to the existing divisions within society. However, six of the committee members perceived this conclusion as an attack on the voluntary schools and the role of the churches in the provision of education. They believed that “positive assistance should be given to ethnic minority communities who wish to establish voluntary aided schools.....” (Francis 1987) Such was the furore surrounding the deep divisions among the Swann Committee members that Sir Keith Joseph, then Secretary of State for Education, gave an immediate assurance on the afternoon of 14



March 1985, that the government did not “wish in any way to call into question the present dual system of county and voluntary schools.” Francis (1987) points out that this unequivocal endorsement of the 1944 provisions “adds a new sharpness and immediacy to the debate about the future of church schools within a multicultural society.”

It was, of course, incumbent on all schools to develop a curriculum accessible to all groups represented in the community. If preparation for life in a pluralist society is a serious aim of education, multicultural issues, given the escalating rate of change experienced in all spheres of life, stand in need of constant review. Hartnett and Naish (1987) offer a critique of contemporary texts on multiculturalism (by Modgil *et al* 1986) and anti-racism (Willey 1984). They pose a series of challenging questions about the notion of a multicultural curriculum, of which multifaith education is a significant part. Perhaps the most pertinent in this context is the following:

“What exactly are the linkages between multicultural education and the cultures of ethnic minority groups and the dominant (white) culture? Is the lack of multicultural education damaging not only to ethnic minority children but to white children too?” (Hartnett and Naish 1987:367)

If the word ‘religious’ is substituted for ‘white’ in this extract, the argument assumes immediate relevance in the context of RE and Collective Worship. Leaving aside for a moment the distinction to be made between multicultural and anti-racist education, the writers take issue with the lack of clarity they find in the arguments. They point out, for instance, that the range of issues that multicultural education is claimed to address is not specified; many of the problems to which Modgil *et al* and Willey refer could apply equally to class and gender. Hartnett and Naish point to the wider context of the political, economic and social realities, of which racism is only one symptom, and make a powerful case for educational studies to become truly independent so as to enable teachers to “pursue serious and controversial issues” (Hartnett & Naish 1987:368). In the current educational climate, with its declared commitment to equal opportunities, this independent pursuit of controversial issues

takes on a new urgency. My own opinion is that there is more to be gained from developing a systematic multicultural curriculum than from devising anti-racist strategies. It would be a gross over-simplification of the issues to describe multiculturalism as proactive and antiracism as reactive, but the distinction encapsulates a fundamental truth. Multicultural education is about valuing diversity, while antiracist measures seek to change behaviour and eventually attitudes. The question posed by Hartnett and Naish "Multicultural education: paregoric or panacea?" identifies some of the inherent complexities. In particular they argue the case for different minority groups to have a more direct influence on the kind of schools and society they want. The findings of a recent research project designed to increase local influence in multifaith education suggest some answers to the paregoric / panacea question.

Nesbitt (1998) outlines an ethnographic study of young people's experience of their religion at home and in school. Her observations provide an interesting insight into how the religion of young Hindus and Sikhs (and presumably other world faiths) can be presented in school in such a way as to enhance their ethnic identity and self-esteem. She argues that an effective programme of world faiths, portrayed sensitively and with sound background knowledge, has the potential to integrate experiential learning in the home with the more theoretical approach in school. Nesbitt posits for reasons for engaging in empirical research into how successful integration can be addressed.

First, she argues that the religious nurture of young people experienced in the home can be deepened and supported by an encounter with their tradition from a different perspective. Conversely, the absence or inappropriateness of such an encounter is "formative in young people's perception of their tradition" (Nesbitt 1998:102). She turns next to the problems created by text-books which carry inaccurate or incomplete information, evidence of stereotyping or dated perceptions, all of which can inhibit learning. This, according to Nesbitt, is one of the most powerful arguments in favour of ethnographic research, so that teachers become increasingly aware that religion, like language, is a living organism and therefore subject to constant change. The most obvious spin-off from this particular piece of research was that the young Hindus and Sikhs involved were encouraged by the fact that their



tradition was being taken seriously by ‘outsiders’ (i.e. teachers) who did not share their faith but whose respect they valued. Nesbitt argues that all these factors are likely to lead to a narrowing of the gap experienced between religious nurture and school RE and worship.

The numbers of British Hindus and Sikhs are such that their respective faiths are likely to feature in any RE programme, and there is usually some reference to them in school worship. The young people in Nesbitt’s study reported that most of the encounters they had of worship in their own tradition were in the primary school. The faith nurture they experienced at home was affirmed and strengthened by the fact that their teachers were acknowledging and talking authoritatively about their tradition. One young Hindu expressed it as follows: “You obviously feel proud when someone talks about your religion” (Nesbitt 1998:105). The pupils also became the links between the school and the local community, being invited to share their unique experiences of their religion and culture with the rest of the school. Parents, too, became involved in the process, providing resources such as family videos and acting as scrutineers of RE text-books for accuracy of content. The main advantage of checking key texts is that it challenges the tendency to stereotype or generalise about the tradition in question, since it emphasises the lived reality of religious observance. The teachers involved in Nesbitt’s ethnographic research therefore found themselves better able to relate to their Hindu and Sikh pupils, and more confident in the presentation of their respective faiths. This, in turn, was instrumental in integrating their pupils’ religious nurture, RE, Collective Worship and social interaction in school. While, therefore, it is no part of the RE teacher’s brief to promote or nurture religious commitment (except in a church school) there is a legal responsibility to take account of the diverse experiences and family backgrounds of their pupils. The ethnographic approach to multifaith education in this context, far from being either a paregoric or a panacea, is revealed as a genuine attempt to value this diversity.

### **3.14 Valuing Diversity**

In this chapter the issue of diversity within individual faiths has been discussed, and the inappropriateness of generalisations emphasised. An awareness of those features

of religious observance and social practices within faith groups which impact on the school community on a daily basis is vital to the creation of a truly multicultural curriculum. These features include language, food, dress, religious observance and family traditions. An open-ended exploration of some of these issues makes no assumptions that all members of a multicultural community are practising believers, or that they adhere to the customs of their forebears. But some aspects do apply, and an awareness of, and a respect for, the origins of different lifestyles is a sound basis for unity in diversity. In this respect schools, instead of mirroring the wider society of which they are a part, can demonstrate that pluralism is not only possible but beneficial for all concerned. They “have a crucial part to play in challenging stereotypes and encouraging positive attitudes” (CEM 1996:38).

As long ago as 1976, Pring argued strongly that the ways of thinking and operating that pupils bring to school with them are vital elements in the learning process. He believed that school knowledge traditionally took little account of these skills in pupils who already had “a complex scheme of things, a set of beliefs (*and*) a style of life” (Pring 1976:84). When applied to religious or ethical beliefs his notion of the ‘ordinary’ or ‘commonsense’ ways of thinking emphasises the need for such thinking to be made more reflective and systematic by the educational process; an example of this is found in Nesbitt’s research discussed in the foregoing section (3.13). What had previously been commonsense or taken-for-granted knowledge for those pupils was enhanced by the reflective, systematic approach adopted by the school. One contemporary way of examining the commonsense knowledge of different ethnic groups within a school is to form general categories such as language, food and the other issues mentioned above which, although not in themselves discrete or mutually exclusive, at least focus on some of the inherent complexities. A typical example of this approach is Keene’s 1998 work *Examining Four Religions* for GCSE students.

Many RE text-books (e.g. Watson 1993, Bastide 1987, Grimmit 1978,) combine Smart’s model of the six theoretical dimensions of religion (Smart 1968, 1979) with the existential (i.e. the practical or ‘lived’) approach. This combined approach is successful insofar as it fosters respect for, and understanding of, religion in all its forms. Slee (1989) however, sounds a note of caution in adopting this approach. In



stressing that religion is so complex that it takes a lifetime to “come to know.....even one tradition,” she goes on to warn against two extremes. Her warnings are worth quoting at some length:

“The needs of squeezing religions into manageable units can easily lead to unhelpful emphases on the superficial, the external and the exotic on the one hand, or the conservative, the established and the institutional in religious traditions on the other.....The inevitable over-simplification, if not actual misrepresentation of the richness, complexity and dynamism of religious traditions can be deeply offensive to religious believers and can even lead to charges of racism” (Slee 1989:130).

The CEM, however, adopts a more sanguine approach, pointing out that no RE specialist could, or should, be expected to know all there is to know about any faith; a willingness to learn alongside the pupils is a more realistic way to create a school community which genuinely values diversity. Their assurance that “we (i.e. members of the Christian Education Movement) have found that an honest apology and a genuine smile go a long way to heal any hurt inadvertently caused” (CEM 1996:5) is more encouraging and certainly more creative than ignoring multifaith issues altogether.

## CHAPTER 4

### CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT 1960 - 1988

#### Introduction

In the foregoing chapters, some of the effects of the profound changes in British society (the arrival in England of immigrants from all areas of the Commonwealth, the challenges to Christian thought and increasing secularisation, for example) have been identified and discussed. The rate of change, escalating as it did after the war and gaining in momentum each decade thereafter, could not have been anticipated. In this chapter the effects of these changes, particularly on the school curriculum, are explored. The curriculum is initially examined as a whole entity, since the changes brought about by the 1988 ERA and the National Curriculum affected all areas of the curriculum; RE is therefore integrated into this context. Reference is made to the work of experts in international curriculum development, exemplified in such writers as Williams, Schon, Stenhouse, Fullan and Hargreaves. These writers were selected from a vast body of research as their work encapsulates a visionary approach underpinned by realistic awareness of the implications for teachers. Their philosophies, each in their own way, underline the importance of continuous evaluation of educational practice and curriculum innovation in a democratic society. At the end of this section, a case study by Cogan and Derricott applies some of these issues to contemporary developments.

#### 4.1 Williams: *The Long Revolution*

In a major work on education and British society, Williams (1961) argued that “in our time we have settled to saying that the improvement of our culture is a matter of extending our national education”(Williams 1961:145). In a major work entitled *The Long Revolution*, he identified three main aims or purposes of education. In his analysis it exists to pass on, first, the accepted *behaviour* and *values* of society, second, the general knowledge and *attitudes* appropriate to an educated person and third, a particular skill by which to earn a living. Williams recognised that these aims overlap and that the general pattern of culture may be subject to change, in



response to the demands of a developing society. Williams held that the ideal of education as a universal right, epitomised in the views of the “public educators” and to a certain extent the “old humanists” of the 19th century, have in fact been realised in the 20th century. He expressed serious concerns, however, about the successive failure of the British education system to adjust to cultural changes, citing the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution and the growth of democracy to illustrate his point.

Among his recommendations for a reformed curriculum, Williams outlined an approach to the humanities curriculum (the study of ourselves and our environment) not in terms of separate subjects but as integrated knowledge drawn from a variety of disciplines. He recommended that students be introduced to at least one other culture, including its language, history, geography, institutions and arts. Among its “institutions” it seems logical to incorporate some insights into the religion or religions practised in the culture being studied. When those religions are integral to the students’ own culture, such a curriculum has a wider purpose, since it has “social as well as cognitive perspectives” (Lawton 1975). Williams’s main thesis in this work, and to a certain extent in his earlier work *Culture and Society* seems to be that educational change typically fails to keep pace with social and cultural change. He called for a common curriculum based, not on 19th century models, but on the contemporary realities of a democratic, industrial, multicultural society. Such a society is not, and can never be, static; the school community both reflects and influences developments in the wider society. When the rate of these developments escalates dramatically and the curriculum no longer reflects the realities of the learners’ lived experience, the education process is likely to lead, at best to apathy and at worst to alienation. This was one of the problems with which Schon grappled almost thirty years ago.

#### **4.2 Schon: *Beyond the Stable State***

In his 1970 Reith Lectures on the effects of change, Schon posited the view that a point has been reached where social institutions are perennially unstable and that rapid change is endemic (Schon 1971). He argues strongly for a climate of learning

systems which are capable of bringing about and managing their own continuing transformation. In the context of the educational system, this would involve an extensive analysis of what would carry the greatest potential for success, examining the **rate, scale, degree, continuity and direction** of curriculum development. These dimensions are fundamental to the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act and the evolution of the National Curriculum. (see Chapter 5) One of the contentions of this work is that, in the RE curriculum at least, little or no account was taken of the countless ways in which the population had altered since 1944, and the government still acted on the basis of untested assumptions, for instance that Britain was still a predominantly Christian country. Educational policy, therefore, was re-defined in such a way that the religious clauses of the 1988 Act were in some measure little more than a reinforcement of those of the 1944 Act, notwithstanding the occasional references to religions other than Christianity.

Yet Schon's 1970 ideas on the successful implementation of policy in a learning system are apposite in this context, when he asserts that curriculum changes cannot take the form of "pre-defining policy and causing it to fan out from the center. Central may provide first instances which are take-off points for transformation" (Schon 1971:161). If "central" is applied to the Conservative government in power at the time of the 1988 Act, it is apparent that policy was very definitely pre-defined and centrally controlled. The first major issue Schon discusses in terms of curriculum change is the fact that any innovation typically centres around a particular ideology, or, to be more precise, a particular leader or group of leaders.<sup>1</sup>

In the normal course of the democratic process the role of these leaders will be changed, but in the interests of continuity the changes they have initiated will have to be implemented, possibly in a slightly modified form. An example of this process can be observed in the fact that the present Labour government, while continuing to support the drive to raise standards in schools, rapidly altered the policy on Nursery

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<sup>1</sup> In the British context the emergence of what became known as the New Right is examined in Chapter 5.2 of this work.



Vouchers which had been a source of controversy since its introduction by the previous government. The major innovations of the '88 Act, such as the regular testing of pupils at predetermined stages, the publication of test results and the identification of so-called "failing schools" are being even more vigorously pursued. This is entirely in line with Schon's assertion that "the introduction of new ideas tends to be accompanied, in a new administration, by sharp and frequently shifting pressures for performance *now*" (Schon 1971:172).

He also makes the point, so pertinent to the British situation, that it is unwise and potentially damaging for the government of the day to take on the role of experimenter for the nation since the need for change is ideally rooted in what he calls the "periphery" (i.e. in the educational system itself), where good practice tends to be disseminated among practitioners, and policy is formulated on the basis of successful innovation. The government becomes the facilitator rather than the controller of society's learning. Schon's work, so aptly entitled *Beyond the Stable State*, (1971) argues that the center-periphery model for the development of the educational system is in decline as it is becoming increasingly unworkable. The direction of change, which in this model is from central government to the periphery where the changes are implemented, depends for its credibility on a "stable, relatively simple message which can be spread uniformly over a periphery" (ibid p188). The complex social, cultural and demographic changes already discussed in this work, which continue to escalate with increasing rapidity in Britain at the beginning of the third millennium, make such an approach impossible. The counter-pressures for participation and a degree of control at the local level will, unless ignored or over-ridden, result in a weakening of central control. Schon posits a modification of this process, which he calls the constellation effect, whereby central policy allows itself to shift in response to movements at the periphery, while retaining overall control at the centre. However, at the time of writing, (2000) there is no evidence that central government is willing to contemplate such a strategy, arguably for two very compelling reasons, identified below.

If this model were to be adopted, two hazards would immediately become apparent. The first is that the control group (in this case central government) would become increasingly out of touch with developments as to lose control of events altogether.

This has to some extent already happened in an ecclesiastical context with the older established Christian denominations. The hierarchy formulates and attempts to implement policy which is largely ignored by those at the periphery whose compliance is assumed but rarely sought. This perhaps goes some way to explain the somewhat draconian measures that were put in place by the government at the time of the passing of the '88 Act. A typical example of such measures is all the legal strictures surrounding the administration of the national tests or "tasks" as they were initially described. If unpopular and ill-conceived policies are implemented with the force of law they will be observed, but their credibility will not thereby be enhanced. Law has the power to change behaviour but not necessarily attitudes.

The second hazard to be considered in the process of decentralisation is that local agencies, in this case the LEAs, could become increasingly autonomous and accountable to no-one but themselves. Schon's solution to this lies in the creation of informal networks, which have traditionally enabled people to achieve their objectives when the formal organisation has been lacking in support. "With the loss of the stable state, *ad hoc* networks become a permanent rather than an interim expedient" (Schon 1971:192). Central government, by contrast, in 1988 attempted to shift the focus of autonomy from the LEAs to the school governing bodies by the creation of Grant Maintained Schools, a strategy which met with only limited success.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This was an interesting reversal of the recommendations of the 1895 Bryce Report (cf Section 2.8) whereby School Boards were abolished and LEAs established.



The succeeding Labour government, although abolishing the Grant Maintained status as originally conceived, nevertheless kept up the pressure on LEAs by including them in the OFSTED process of inspection, and publicising their perceived weaknesses and failures. A climate of competition based on fear of penalties is far from ideal in the establishment of greater accountability for local standards.

#### **4.3 Stenhouse: *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development***

Educational accountability and responsibility for local standards are also recurring themes in the prolific writings of Lawrence Stenhouse. Unlike Schon, however, Stenhouse is interested in educational initiatives and innovation. His 1975 work *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* can be regarded as a landmark in identifying the complexities of developing a curriculum appropriate to a constantly changing society. He expresses strong views on the notion of culture as an intellectual commodity, and holds that “education exists to give people access to cultural groups outside their own” (Stenhouse 1975:8). In a study particularly pertinent to the multicultural issues explored in my own work, Stenhouse analyses the problems and effects of teaching about race relations. He asserts that neither the problems nor the effects of such teaching are likely to be similar in “a rural school in Lincolnshire and a multi-racial school in Derby” (ibid p.136). One of the stated aims of the particular Humanities Project to which he refers was to develop respect for varied traditions. This puts into sharp focus his view that it is at school level that the problems and possibilities of curriculum and organisation are logically addressed. Even the Local Authority, let alone central government, could not have the detailed knowledge necessary to implement effective policies in an area as sensitive as race relations. Therefore, according to Stenhouse, successful teaching is dependent on the development of the professional skill and knowledge of the teachers.

He goes on to identify some of the existing barriers to curriculum innovation, highlighting the most intransigent as that of control. Almost all innovations involve changes in methods and ways of working, and Stenhouse readily acknowledges the real concerns of teachers about threats to control and order in the classroom. In response to these reasonable concerns, he stresses the importance of effective

leadership in the management of conflict in the school. If an anti-racist programme succeeds in surfacing racist attitudes, the way forward lies in confronting the effects rather than in denying or ignoring them.

Another potential barrier to change in Stenhouse's analysis is what he calls the problem of **justification**. The overarching need to justify the power that schools wield over their pupils leads to the adoption of a position of moral rectitude. So, for instance, a teaching programme exploring worship in one of the major world faiths would need to be defended in terms of the time allocated to such a programme, its usefulness to the learners and above all, the relevance of the experience to their daily lives. If any change in the school's practice or approach is advocated, this may call into question established practice, leading in turn to uncertainty as to the school's moral stance on the curriculum as a whole. Stenhouse suggests that schools find it difficult to live with ambiguity, or what a Schools' Council document had earlier identified as "common uncertainty in the face of many problems" (1965:22).

A further barrier to be overcome in curriculum innovation in Stenhouse's analysis is that of teachers' perception of their **identity**. Teachers, particularly of older pupils, rely heavily on their subject knowledge and professional skills; changes to existing practice inevitably mean a period of insecurity and of learning along with the pupils. This professional need to keep control of events may lead to a resistance to change in any form because of fears over personal competence. Allied to this is the most intractable barrier of all: the school's **organisation**. For any major curriculum change or innovation to have any chance of success, experience suggests a gradual implementation, starting with possibly a class or year group and supported by rigorous evaluation. Stenhouse argues that most curriculum changes have implications for what he calls the internal politics of a school, and can pose a challenge to the hierarchy of status and power. The management of curriculum changes was, for Stenhouse, "a matter of orchestrating these different voices and negotiating the right to experiment ..." Fullan, (1982) writing about the Canadian experience, explored in more detail the many "different voices" of educational concern, and his conclusions have implications for the future of curriculum development in Britain.



#### 4.4 Fullan: *The Meaning of Educational Change*

Fullan's two major works on curriculum innovation, the first entitled *The Meaning of Educational Change (1982)* and the sequel *The New Meaning of Educational Change (1991)* neatly span the period immediately before and after the 1988 Act. The second work, separated from the first by nine years' experience of, and reflection on, curriculum innovation, is by no means a reiteration of the observations of the first. Fullan analyses in his original work the dynamics of the curriculum process in terms of the philosophical, national, local and individual dimensions. His central argument is that nobody really understands the implications or long-term effects of most educational changes, which he describes as multidimensional. This means that some aspects are efficiently implemented while others are neglected. In the English National Curriculum this neglect was at its most obvious in RE, and this for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most compelling reason was the widespread indifference to religious matters already addressed by the Durham Report (cf 3.9 of this work). There was an unprecedented emphasis on the content of what was to be taught in schools, while the teaching process received scant attention, except that certain teaching styles and strategies were dismissed or trivialised on the basis of rumour or anecdotal evidence. For instance, the Alexander, Rose and Woodhead Report on primary education, published in 1992, deplores the "highly questionable dogmas which have led to excessively complex classroom practices" (para 3.2). Vague, unsupported references to "clear evidence" which confirm the Report's findings (para 3.4) add more heat than light to the debate about the shortcomings of primary practice. The implications of this emphasis on content are acknowledged succinctly by Fullan when he asserts:

"Reliance on the textbook may distract attention from the behaviours and educational beliefs critical to the achievement of desired outcomes ..." (Fullan 1982:58)

He also maintains that many educational changes in the past have been put in place without any clear consensus as to their specific purpose. The National Curriculum with its many revised versions may be said to exemplify this phenomenon. His analysis of the four characteristics of change is fundamental to an understanding of

his argument. These he identifies as the **need, clarity, complexity and quality** of the changes.

Fullan argues that the **need** for change must originate in the agents of change themselves. Teachers who are aware of a shortfall in their achievements with the students are more likely to display what Rosenblum and Louis (1979) called the readiness factor, and that the perceived relevance of the proposals has a direct effect on the extent and success of the innovation. In connection with **clarity**, he accepts that it is an essential component, but counsels against an oversimplification of the issues, leading to a “false clarity” or superficial understanding. Genuine clarity can be achieved only when due attention is given to the process of innovation.

This has direct relevance to Fullan’s notion of the **complexity** of the proposed changes. He maintains in this connection that “more” is necessarily “better”, citing the work of Berman (1980) which can be summarised as “little ventured, nothing gained” (Fullan 1982:59). Berman and McLaughlin had similarly found in 1977 that “ambitious projects ... typically stimulated more teacher change than projects attempting less”. If this were Fullan’s major indicator of success, the National Curriculum, given its complexity, is potentially the most successful innovation in the history of British education. His observations on **quality**, however, sound a note of caution in this regard.

Perhaps his most significant comment is that

“inadequate quality ... can be the result when adoption decisions are made on grounds of political necessity or perceived need without time for development” (Fullan 1982:59)

The political climate in which the National Curriculum was launched was one of expediency and the need to convince the electorate of the government’s claim to be “driving up standards”. The time factor and the speed with which proposals were implemented, issues which are explored in the following chapter, owed more to the impending election than to the urgency of the reforms.



In 1991, the sequel to Fullan's work on educational change was published. In it he reiterates his view that "more is better" and that, although simple changes may be easier to implement, they do not, under normal conditions, make much difference. However, the environment in which the curriculum innovations were introduced has undergone a radical transformation. The complexity of the task, with which he had already grappled in his earlier work, has been intensified in the intervening years to the point where simple change is no longer an option. The social and cultural developments, as well as technological advances and the notion of the global village combine to make the task infinitely more complex, nowhere more so than in the understanding of the values and customs of the many cultures with which British society has been enriched. Unity in diversity is paramount if democracy is to continue. Fullan offers an analysis which identifies some of the "multilevel, complex system-oriented innovations" which profoundly affect the way change is received in the local environment; in the case of curriculum change, this would be in the schools. Translated into British terminology, the four major agents in the process of change are **Central Government, the Local Education Authority, Headteachers and teachers.**

When changes are initiated by **Central Government**, Fullan records that most attempts "seem to fail" because they are not adequately understood or thought through. Where there have been several far-reaching innovations the result is likely to be increasing apathy, suspicion or resistance on the part of those required to implement them, regardless of how potentially beneficial these changes may be. The only remedy for what Fullan calls this developing incapacity for change is for central government to pay serious attention to understanding and managing the factors necessary for successful innovation. These factors presumably include ongoing communication, consultation and an acknowledgement of professional expertise; these were conspicuous by their scarcity during the passing of the 1988 Act.

**The Local Education Authority.** According to Gold and Miles (1981) and Smith and Keith (1971), the Local Authorities, who are best placed to apply their knowledge of the priorities and conditions prevalent in their communities, are frequently ignored by central government. The divide is not, in the case of the

British experience, primarily geographical; it is more likely to be a cultural divide, reflecting the ethnic mix of the area. The government's insistence, for example, on the predominance of traditional Christianity in the Collective Worship clauses of the ERA is likely to be perceived as equally inappropriate in Birmingham as in Bolton, and equally acceptable in rural Sussex as in the Lake District. The crucial factor is the composition of the local population. Local authorities have to make decisions on the basis of the needs of their immediate communities; this is a potential source of conflict with central government. In the 1980s the Conservative Party made political capital out of the fact that many of the local authorities that had been identified as unsatisfactory were Labour-controlled. The measurable academic achievement of any given school is likely to have a high negative correlation with the proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities whose first language is not English. But the social and cultural factors were typically subsumed into the political context as though they were identical. According to Fullan (1991) "certain ... decisions have to be settled before energy can be turned into implementation". The documentary evidence that any negotiation of this nature took place between central government and the local authorities is difficult to find.

Goodlad's (1975) and Sirontnik's (1987) notion of the school as the "unit of change" acquires a particular significance in Fullan's analysis in that the role of the **headteacher** is crucial to the success of the proposed change. The psychological and sociological implications of leading a group of professionals through the requirements of the 1988 Act, with its far-reaching reorganisation of school finance and admission policies as well as curriculum changes, are obvious. Headteachers, aware that their role was changing radically with an unprecedented rapidity, relied on their staff more and more as they grappled with the daily practicalities of change. The executive and co-ordinating role of the curriculum leader came into its own, and the earlier (1987) findings of Berman and McLaughlin were confirmed as headteachers began to function primarily as administrators. Fullan's main concern is that headteachers traditionally have little preparation in managing change efficiently at the school level. The end result of this lack of preparation is likely to be a feeling of inadequacy; this is compounded by the fact that such professional insecurity cannot safely be communicated to the staff.



The teachers, by contrast, fare better in Fullan's analysis, in that they share the insecurity engendered by the changes. He maintains that "collegiality, open communication, trust, support, learning on the job, getting results and job satisfaction and morale are closely related" (Fullan 1991:77). He paints an optimistic, if somewhat idealistic picture of successful schools as powerful models of "work environments that stimulate continuous improvements". Professional collaboration, until relatively recently not a major concern of class teachers, is now recognised as the main strategy for survival in the 1990s and beyond.

#### 4.5 Hargreaves: *Changing Times*

Andy Hargreaves, a Professor of Education in Ontario, takes up the theme of collaboration in his 1996 work *Changing Teachers, Changing Times*. In this work he explores the implications of the restructuring of learning beyond collaboration; he argues that, since most existing approaches to educational change have failed, a new model must be developed, so as to break the cycle of resistance to desired reforms. He bases much of his argument on the findings of Sarason (1990) who identifies two major factors in the complex task of restructuring. For curriculum change to have any chance of success, it must be accompanied by teacher development and an enhanced professionalism. In British schools there was a proliferation of in-service training for teachers, particularly in the high-profile curricular areas like English, Mathematics, Science and Technology. The possible reasons for this are discussed in a later section (4.7). There was good quality in-service provision for RE, but it was to be found mainly in the denominational sector; many teachers, therefore, were poorly equipped to take on the challenge the RE clauses of the ERA presented. The second crucial factor for success in curriculum innovation, according to Sarason, is the challenge of existing power relationships within schools, among students, their parents, teachers and headteachers. This, he believes, will eventually result in a radically different educational process. This is the definition of restructuring that Hargreaves goes on to discuss.

He begins by echoing Schon's concern about change which emanates from the centre to the periphery, whereby teachers implement the goals set for them by others. This process is exemplified in the practice, prevalent in the early 1990s, of speaking of

teachers as the “deliverers” of the curriculum. He distinguishes between **vision** and **voice** in the sense that dissident voices, in the form of struggles for professional autonomy, may go unheard in the drive for conformity to predetermined goals or objectives. The predominant vision is that of the headteacher, and all that is required of the staff is consensus. On a larger scale, this vision may be that of the local authority for all the schools under its jurisdiction, or central government’s vision of an educational system to compare with those of other nations.

“With *visions* such as this, teachers soon learn to suppress their *voice*. Management becomes manipulation, collaboration becomes co-optation ...” (Hargreaves 1996:250)

His argument for a creative tension between vision and voice is difficult to refute.

Another source of tension is that of trust, which Hargreaves regards as central to the creation of collaborative relationships. This trust can be invested in processes as much as in people; in fact, changes of key members of staff mean that trust invested exclusively in individuals, however visionary or charismatic, is no longer an option. The danger arises when the bureaucratic process (for example a record-keeping system) becomes so inflexible that the interests of persons find themselves “blocked by the inertia of procedure” (Hargreaves 1996:253). The complicated arrangements for administering the SATs (Standardised Assessment Tests) are a case in point. The establishment of a judicious mixture of trust in people as much as in processes is, according to Hargreaves, central to the restructuring of education.

A further potential dichotomy lies between **structure** (particularly of the school curriculum) and the **culture** of the school. Structural changes may underestimate the network of relationships within the school community which underpin many of the existing practices, and thereby overestimate the power of structural changes to alter or eradicate such practices. Whitty and Edwards (1994) make a similar point, emphasising the importance of not overplaying the role of central government in the consequences of their reforms. “Teachers’ beliefs and practices are grounded ... in structures and routines to which they have become attached ...” (in Hargreaves 1996:256). The cultures that are rooted in particular structures can either facilitate



or block curricular progress. Hargreaves believes that the answer does not lie in choosing between structure and culture in the process of reform, but in the systematic fostering of networks, collaboration and the sharing of expertise within and beyond the school. This is the sharp contrast to the prevalent British school culture, and in society as a whole, which is one of competition rather than co-operation.

Perhaps the most serious tension discussed by Hargreaves is that between **processes and purposes**, by which he means the establishment of ethical principles which underpin collaboration and restructuring. In the course of collaboration, teachers in affluent areas may have very different priorities from those working in more disadvantaged communities. In this context it is vital to identify the source of the choices made for a particular school or area. He cites as an example of this the “imposition of Judeo-Christian values on multi-faith communities” (Hargreaves 1996:259). He makes a strong case for teachers, in the interests of their professional integrity, to take a central role in restructuring their work. He asserts that as “the rules of the world are changing, it is ... the basic structures of school and schooling ... that must change with them” (ibid p.262). In the implementation of the post-1988 curriculum, British teachers have played a minor role in the restructuring of their work. Instead of using their professional skills in managing those changes, they are themselves being “managed”. Politicians ignore at their peril the dynamics involved in effective change.

#### **4.6 The Dynamics of Change**

Schon’s analysis of curriculum change, discussed above (4.2) identified five crucial dimensions for successful curriculum development; they are the **rate, scale, degree, continuity and direction** of this development. These dimensions, though obviously interdependent, can be examined separately with reference to the introduction of the National Curriculum, which heralded a period of unprecedented change. What is immediately apparent is the imbalance among these dimensions; the **rate** of its progress was rapid but, as has been indicated, the **scale** of consultation was extremely narrow. Far from feeling involved in the process, many skilled and experienced teachers became demoralised, frustrated and anxious that their

professional concerns were being ignored. Yet in 1988, Haviland was stressing that the new Bill was “the most important and radical piece of legislation in the history of English education. It is vital that its proposals should be debated as widely as possible ...” (Haviland 1988). Logic would suggest that wider consultation would ensure more measured and considered rates of change, but the rate at which the changes were introduced reduced teacher involvement to a token gesture. As a result, the degree of change was superficial rather than fundamental; Haviland pointed to the likely effect of the combination of the proposed changes with their attendant complications.<sup>3</sup> The relative lack of continuity with existing practices resulted in confusion and the almost total alienation of the teaching body required to implement the new Orders. The direction of the changes gave arguably the greatest cause for concern, since it was neither linear nor cyclical but retrograde. It is no coincidence that the rallying call to the electorate was of the need to “return to basics”, and the nostalgia for a notional “golden age” of learning.

#### ***4.7 A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform***

Cogan and Derricott, in a joint case-study relating to the effects of educational reform on the content and status of the humanities curriculum, posit that those subjects are being used as a vehicle for “encouraging views about the importance of industry, enterprise and the creation of wealth” (Mss p.25). This is entirely in line with a 1983 American report “A Nation at Risk” which argued that the United States was losing its competitive edge in the global economic sector, and that if the educational system was at least partly to blame, future reforms to the curriculum should focus on making the nation competitive again. To this end the report advocated a basic common curriculum, performance standards, a shared set of unspecified “American” values and the right of parents to choose the kind of school they wanted for their child (Mss p.3). Cogan and Derricott wryly observe that “there is not a great deal of multicultural or global perspective in this view of the world ...”

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<sup>3</sup> An example of a typical conflict of interest was the inclusion of pupils with Special Needs into mainstream classrooms and the potential effects on a school’s test results.



(ibid p.7), and go on to assert that “politicians do not like global issues and their attendant values being considered within the curriculum” (ibid p.25). The emphasis on testing and performance standards also means that those areas of the curriculum which are not assessed tend to be given low status and are often neglected. Moreover, religion in Britain has long been regarded as a private matter, and this perception militates against any form of assessment or evaluation of progress in this area. But it is not religious commitment but awareness that can be assessed with appropriate objectivity. In terms of the core curriculum, pupils can be assessed as articulate, literate and numerate; the term “religiante” has been coined to signify the level of religious awareness they have reached, along with facts about Christianity and the other faiths they have studied. Yet, in an interview given in connection with this research, (see Appendix 3) Baker, who in 1988 was Education Secretary, explained that RE was not made part of the national curriculum as he did not feel it appropriate that it should be subject to curriculum review “and examined all the time”. It might be more realistic to suspect that the concept of education as a market place would hold in scant regard an area like religion which has little marketable value.

In the mid-1980s, however, the government was placing much stress on the re-establishment of earlier standards and the endorsement of historical attitudes in the search for a better educated Britain. In the introduction to the 1987 Education Reform Bill, the Education Secretary reminded his audience that religion in English schools had been secured in statute by the 1944 Act, and that the new Act would reinforce its position as a compulsory subject. In 1993 a report by the Free Church Federal Council pointed out that

“... the early interpretations of the (religious) clauses (of the 1944 Act) did carry an assumption of *evangelical* and *confessional* emphases which in 1944 were regarded as proper provisions in a Christian country, but which, in the kind of society to which we now belong, and with present educational insights, would be called into question”.  
(Culham College Institute 1996:13, italics mine)

There was apparently a naïve assumption on the part of the government that while in other areas profound changes were affecting the life of the nation, religion alone remained static and untouched. In the parliamentary discussions in the House of



Commons on the proposed educational reforms it was therefore given scant attention, as any perusal of the relevant debates will testify.

#### **4.8 Research and Curriculum Development in Religious Education**

Throughout the period covering the 1960s to the 1980s and beyond, the content of the school curriculum, as has been demonstrated, was under close scrutiny, nowhere more so than in the primary sector. Concern about educational standards tended to focus on two crucial areas, those of allegedly declining standards in literacy and numeracy, and the appropriateness of the curriculum content for life in the 21st century. Even Alexander *et al*, in their extensive report on primary curriculum organisation, (1992) acknowledge that the question of “standards” rising or falling is “vexed” (para 25). Milestones in this ongoing debate include the so-called Black Papers of the 1960s and 1970s, with their assertions about the shortcomings of informal teaching methods, and the more measured conclusions of HMI in the Curriculum Matters series of the 1980s. Their report on the curriculum from 5 to 16 (1985) endorses the need for flexibility in grouping pupils for learning, a variety of educational experiences and “the opportunities ... to match learning tasks to the characteristics of the pupils” (para 21). This recognition of the need to match the content of the curriculum to the pupils’ ages and aptitudes has its roots in the educational research which underpinned informed educational practice, particularly in the post-war period. Much of this research into how children learn was conducted in the context of Piaget’s model of developmental psychology.

The following researchers into religious development are included in this chapter because their work was instrumental in effecting profound changes in approaches to RE and school worship, particularly in the primary sector. As representatives of three consecutive decades, Goldman in the 1960s, Smart in the 1970s and Fowler in the 1980s, together encapsulate many developments in the field of RE. There is passing reference to the work of other researchers, but the main focus is on the work of these three, highlighting the increased knowledge of cognitive development and its impact on the RE curriculum. Many of their contemporaries are of equal significance in the emergence of RE as an academic discipline, but the insights of



these three are useful tools in the task of introducing children to the experience of worship. Smart was also instrumental in extending the academic study of religion in England beyond the bounds of Christianity; his model is therefore doubly relevant to the theme of this work. Schon and Williams, whose work emphasised the fact that change was escalating with each decade, can be said to have contextualised the research into RE and school worship, presented as an integral part of the evolving curriculum.

#### ***4.8.1 Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence***

Ronald Goldman, writing in the 1960s, was one of the most respected researchers into Religious Education during this era. He was concerned to give RE a firm foundation on which future learning could be built. His starting points were the misunderstandings of religious ideas which formed in children's minds, believing that these, unless recognised and discussed, could prevent young people from developing any further understanding of the subject. On a trivial level such misunderstanding, largely caused by the use of vocabulary unfamiliar to the child, can seem amusing to parents and teachers alike. "Our Father which art in heaven, Harold be thy name" and "lead us not into Thames Station" witness to the child, not having had the meaning of "hallowed" or "temptation" explained, making valiant attempts to make sense of unintelligible statements s/he is encouraged to utter. More serious misunderstanding is unwittingly caused by a use of scriptural texts inappropriate to the child's level of understanding. What concept of God is given to a child exposed, for instance, to such familiar stories as Noah's ark or Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac – that God is vengeful and capricious as well as all-powerful? (In the course of informal conversations with undergraduates I myself have met several apparently intelligent, well-adjusted individuals whose religious understanding seems not to have progressed beyond nine years of age.) What Goldman, in common with mainstream scripture scholars, was at such pains to stress is that the bible was written for adults, and the nuances and subtleties of texts such as those cited above are beyond the understanding of young children. In pursuit of hard evidence of the impressions young people may carry with them into adulthood, Goldman interviewed 200 pupils aged between 6 and 15 years. His findings are



well documented in his 1964 work *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*, which was followed in 1965 by *Readiness for Religion*.

Goldman's work was heavily influenced by the findings of Piaget, and he, too, concluded that children's ability to understand religious concepts developed in a series of stages. Goldman's five stages of religious development closely correspond with Piaget's stages; like Piaget, he recognised that all ages are mental rather than chronological ages. Writing in an almost exclusively Christian context, he concluded that the bible is to be used with extreme caution in Religious Education if the teacher is to provide "stepping stones not stumbling blocks" to further development, (to borrow Grimmitt's famous analogy) and the learner is not expected to "unlearn" anything at a later stage. Bastide (1987) identifies two major factors in cognitive development which make the task of the RE teacher particularly sensitive, namely the egocentricity and monofocalism of children's thinking.

Children at the egocentric stage make judgements solely from their own standpoint. Goldman reported that when such children were asked, in connection with the Burning Bush narrative (Ex.3:6) "Why was Moses afraid to look at God?" one respondent thought it might be that "God had a beard and Moses did not like beards". (The mental image of God for many adults is typically an old man with a long white beard.) When asked what they thought Jesus meant by the statement "Man does not live on bread alone" (Dt.8:3/Mt.4:4) children still at the concrete stage of thinking tended to reply "You should take something else with it, like butter". Goldman came to the conclusion that throughout the primary years, children's concept of God is of a superhuman rather than a supernatural being; God remains powerful but unpredictable, rather like an eccentric and temperamental headmaster. In Goldman's findings the traditional notion of prayer, a familiar feature of school assemblies, had a magical quality. The children he interviewed were convinced that prayer always "came true" unless they had been badly behaved or had failed to ask politely. It would be interesting to replicate this research in the 1990s and trace any development in young children's thinking over the last thirty years.



#### **4.8.2 *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion***

Ninian Smart, whose 1972 monograph on the concept of worship was discussed above, (see 1.2 of this work) formulated four years earlier a structure for the study of religion which has implications for introducing pupils to the experience of worship. In a move away from the traditional ‘confessional’ approach, whereby religious beliefs are presented as proven facts, he set out to develop curriculum materials which adopted a more open-ended phenomenological stance. This approach required teachers and students alike to suspend, as far as possible, their own preconceptions of a given faith and try to enter into the experience of a member of that faith. The mind-set which evaluates one faith as being ‘better than’ or ‘not so good as’ another, or engages in the time-honoured search for similarities and differences among faiths, would be inappropriate in Smart’s model. Smart, perhaps more than any other RS researcher of his time, is credited with having pioneered the “world religions” approaches to religious studies and extending the field far beyond the bounds of Christianity (Fitzgerald 1990, Jackson 1998). Yet he did not, in fact, use the term in his earlier work, preferring instead to write about “the major religions of the world”. This is more than a mere semantic distinction, since Jackson (1998) suggests that Smart’s main criterion for including a faith in a course of study is the number of adherents rather than its cultural transferability. This is a most compelling argument for studying each faith as a discrete entity in its own right, a theme which is developed in more detail in the final chapter of this work.

Smart’s six dimensions of religion, namely the doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential and social elements, may be applied as effectively to school worship as to classroom RE, as the following observations seek to demonstrate. The seventh dimension, which he added in 1989, encompasses the material and artistic expressions of religious belief. Every religion has its **doctrinal** dimension, a body of doctrine or beliefs which have at their centre a particular vision of ultimate reality. The worship associated with that faith will reflect that unique vision. Bastide (1987) offers a timely warning about the different interpretations of those doctrines which undoubtedly exist among adherents; these will be more literal or symbolic according to the stage of development reached by the individual. Any teacher who asserts confidently that “all Sikhs believe this” or “all Jews avoid that” is on dangerous



ground. The approach has of necessity to be tentative, or the teacher runs the risk of regressing to the dogmatic approach rejected by Smart.

In the second dimension, described as the **mythological**, the teacher is on safer ground. The term myth carries connotations of fantasy or even deception, but in its literal sense it means simply a story, its origin being in the Greek noun *muthos*. Stories relating to significant events in a religious tradition may be described as mythological without casting doubt on their ultimate truth. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, for instance, the story of creation as told in the Book of Genesis is held by believers to be presenting a profound truth. For strict fundamentalists the six days of creation are literally true, in spite of conflicting scientific evidence. For another group, the term 'days' is symbolic; it could refer to generations, centuries, millennia or any period of time. For other believers the crucial question is not 'is this account literally true?' but rather 'what is its message?' In the context of school worship, where no personal belief can be assumed, the central teaching of the Genesis account is that God created everything and that everything he created is good. The participants are expected neither to affirm nor deny the teaching; they are asked simply to acknowledge it.

The **ethical** dimension, whereby followers of the faith in question are required to lead their lives in a certain way, can be represented in an act of worship in such a way that participants may be enabled to reflect on their own attitudes. A central tenet in Hinduism, for instance, is a respect for all living creatures, which leads many to be lifelong vegetarians. The current generation of young people is arguably more aware of environmental issues than most of their parents were, and a focus in the context of worship on the Hindu notion of reverence for life might open the way for new insights on the subject. One of the functions of worship is to suggest alternative ways of approaching a familiar problem.

The **ritual** dimension refers to the activities in which worshippers engage in the practice of their religion. According to Bastide (1987) it is the "shop window" of a religion, and is closely associated with the stories told of significant events in the history of a religious group. In Judaism the annual re-enactment of the Passover (Ex.14) is an example of this process. The notion of ritual has acquired in certain



quarters a pejorative sense, a sequence of actions which is formal, meaningless and irrelevant to everyday life. At its worst, religious ritual can certainly degenerate into empty observance, but at its best it has the power to promote and deepen the understanding of the participants in its appeal to the emotions. The communal re-enactment of familiar stories has a cohesive capacity, establishing a strong sense of group identity and solidarity. Drama and music, incorporated with skill and sensitivity in school worship, can promote more empathy for, and identification with, the characters in a story than the mere recounting of their adventures ever could.

Smart's notion of the **experiential** dimension is closely allied to that of ritual. Bastide (1987) argues that feeling is at the core of religion, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the experience of worship. At its best it involves the whole person, with intellect, emotions and physical responses all playing their part. It is not for the teacher to evaluate or even anticipate those responses; any profound experience evoking awe, wonder or a sense of mystery, whether or not in a formal religious context, is intensely personal and unique to the individual. As well as being a personal experience, collective worship also conveys a powerful sense of the **social** nature of the occasion. This probably accounts in part for the persistence of the term "assembly" to describe school worship, and endorses the findings of the structured interviews (see Chapter 6) which established that formal prayer was given a much lower priority than the building of a united school community. The social dimension of religion is concerned with the corporate nature of religious institutions; it is therefore logical that the corporate nature of the school community, in the absence of a common religious identity, should be reflected in its collective worship.

The **material** and **artistic** dimension, with which Smart completes his analysis, has perhaps the most obvious implications for school worship, particularly in the primary sector. Visual and tactile experiences are powerful media for learning, particularly for pupils at this stage of development. In connection with the aesthetic and creative areas of learning and experience, HMI (1985) highlighted the importance of developing the capacity of pupils to "respond emotionally and intellectually to sensory experience". The same document asserted that the promotion of this development "involves the exploration and understanding of feeling and the processes of making, composing and inventing". Such exploration would lay the



foundations for “personal, imaginative, affective and often practical responses to sensory experience” (HMI 1985:17, para 36). Each of these responses has obvious implications for an experience of worship. For primary school pupils, therefore, those of Smart’s dimensions of religion particularly appropriate to an experience of worship are the social, ritual, mythological, material and artistic aspects. This emphasis on the positive aspects of religious faith does not minimise the negative effects of institutional religion and its potential for political and social control. These issues have their place in the RE programme, where the effects can be explored in an atmosphere of openness and objectivity. However, if worship is to be regarded as an expression of all that is best in a religious tradition, what is presented will logically reflect the high ideals it espouses.

### 4.8.3 *Stages of Faith*

James Fowler, writing in 1981, also expressed an interest in the social, ritual and mythological aspects of faith development, asserting that “we are all endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith”. The key issues this assertion raises are what he meant by “capacities” and “faith”. In his major work *Stages of Faith* he defined “faith” as a way of constructing or interpreting experience, rather than an adherence to a religious belief system. “Capacity” for him implied a propensity towards trust and the formation of loving relationships, in the course of which the individual passes through carefully defined stages of development. As with Schon, whose work was explored at some length earlier in this chapter (4.2), Fowler adds an international perspective to the discussion; working in Harvard, Boston College and the Faith Development Centre in Emory University, he formulated his six-stage theory. Like Goldman, he was profoundly influenced by the work of Piaget, and like Smart he believed that “faith is interactive and social; it requires community, language, ritual and culture” (Fowler 1981:xiii). His conclusions are not without their critics, notably Grimmitt (1987) and Slee (1996) but his ideas are directly applicable to classroom RE, and more particularly to ways of introducing pupils to an experience of worship.

He identified a pre-stage in infancy called **Undifferentiated** faith, where the beginnings of trust, courage, hope and love are either nurtured or damaged. If early



experiences are characterised by excessive indulgence, neglect or inconsistency, these capacities, to use Fowler's own word, may fail to develop in later life. He called Stage 1 the **Intuitive-Projective** phase, typical of the two to six-year-old. As Goldman also observed, children of this age exhibit the egocentrism common at this stage of their development, readily identifying with characters in narratives. They frequently confuse reality and fantasy, although Fowler himself preferred to speak about 'imagination' rather than 'fantasy' which carries, he argued, connotations of make-believe and unreality. This is a significant distinction in view of his reservations about some kinds of faith formation he had witnessed in certain religious traditions, where children were subjected to horrific images of hell and damnation as a warning against wrongdoing. He saw the birth of the imagination, however, as one of the strengths of this stage of faith development, and stressed the importance of a careful choice of stories, together with an atmosphere of openness, where children feel free to express the images they are forming. He also warned against well-meant attempts to expose children only to the positive, "sunny and cheerful" sides of life. By introducing negative images in the controlled environment of stories the teacher can support children in dealing with their fears of death, desertion by their parents or any of the unnamed terrors common at this age. Imagination is at its most active at this stage, producing long-lasting images with which the child will have to deal in later life; Fowler believed that the necessary skills for this process are best introduced at this time. A key curriculum document, produced by HMI in the same decade, carried a similar message in terms of linguistic and literary education. It spoke of the need for pupils to "explore other people's experiences" in order to be able to "modify and extend their own" (HMI 1985:21 para 48). The writers recognised the role of literature in extending pupils' understanding and sympathies and in developing judgement. "Subjects such as history already use literary sources freely", it pointed out, "and many others could do so with advantage" (*ibid* p 23 para 51). This work strongly endorses the use of story in a variety of forms in acts of worship; this theme is revisited in the final chapter of this work.

Following the birth and nurturing of the imagination, Fowler next identified the **Mythic-Literal** stage of faith development, where children begin spontaneously to distinguish between the real and imaginary aspects of their lives. Again, he saw



stories as powerful tools in this necessary transition. While stories at Stage 1 can provide models for children to identify with their own experience, the next phase is an extension of this function. Stories of great adventure, exploration or heroic deeds, offering them a wider, more comprehensive perspective on life and human endeavour, enrich both their imagination and their experience. “What if ...?” questions begin to emerge, offering glimpses of what *might be* as well as what *is*. Fowler, influenced as he was by Piaget’s perceptions, believed that even at this stage children are still incapable of conceptualising these new ideas, or linking them with their own experience. His use of the term literalism to define this stage indicates his belief that reflection and generalisation belong to a later developmental phase. Piaget’s views on the inability of young children to think and reason in abstract terms were later challenged, notably by Donaldson (1992), and experienced teachers can testify that some are well able to recognise and appreciate concepts such as peace, justice and forgiveness.

Fowler called the next stage that of **Synthetic-Conventional** faith, beginning at puberty and continuing into early adulthood. It is characterised by a growing ability to construct as well as to imagine the hypothetical. God, if he still figures in the young person’s consciousness, has to make the transition from earlier images of an all-seeing, all-powerful, remote being, to one who can satisfy the adolescent’s need to be known and understood. At this stage it becomes possible to distinguish between religion as an extremely organised force, and a personal faith as a basis for action. The movement from this stage, to Stage 4 or the **Individuative-Reflective** faith, is characterised by a willingness to accept responsibility for one’s commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes. Fowler believed that many adults do not progress beyond Stage 3, and experience personal conflict when their life choices apparently break conventional religious laws (Grimmitt 1987:175). These two stages offer a close comparison with Kohlberg’s 1963 analysis of moral development, where the individual ideally progresses from conforming to the rules and expectations of others (heteronomy) to the formulation of personal ideals which govern the individual’s actions (autonomy). Kohlberg, too, observed that many people never progress from heteronomy to autonomy; their actions are always driven by the opinions and expectations of others (Downey and Kelly 1978).



However, if the transition is successfully made in a religious context, the way is open for Fowler's fifth or **Conjunctive** faith to develop, aptly described as a "multilevel approach to life's truth". It recognises that the stories, symbols and doctrines of each faith tradition are merely partial glimpses of complete reality, and is therefore ready to engage with unfamiliar ideas in the quest for ultimate meaning. Fowler argued that this willingness implies neither a lack of commitment to one's own tradition nor a "wishy-washy neutrality". On the contrary, it witnesses to an open-minded security which refuses to see differences as threatening, and recognises that the insights of others can extend and enrich one's own perceptions. It comes as no surprise to learn that, in Fowler's model, this stage is rarely reached before middle life.

Stage 6, which he described as "exceedingly rare", is reached when a person's faith frees her/him from all social, political, economic and ideological considerations. Defined as **Universalising** faith, this stage is distinguished by the fact that the individual is often perceived as subversive of the structures by which human society is governed. Fowler observed that the few who reach this stage typically die at the hands of the powerful; examples include Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. They do not set out to be saints, or strive for personal perfection, it is simply that they cannot function in any other way. This stage also finds a parallel in Kohlberg's model in his final, and equally rare stage, these few individuals are so secure in their own moral code as to be prepared to adhere to it in the face of the fiercest opposition, even to the extent of preferring to die rather than compromise their principles.

Criticisms of Fowler's theory centre on his failure to provide the empirical basis of his theory, preferring, as he did, to develop the educational, theological and pastoral implications of his findings (Slee 1996). Grimmitt expressed concern at the size and composition of Fowler's original sample, describing his respondents as "400 subjects confined to America ... overwhelmingly white ... largely Christian ..." (Grimmitt 1987:175). It is beyond doubt, however, that his theory offered food for thought to any teacher involved in RE and school worship, in that it provided a structure for the study of faith development in pupils. Fowler's own heavy emphasis on adolescent pupils, and the relative scarcity of follow-up research conducted in the primary

sector, meant that early faith development continued to remain something of a mystery to many practitioners. This fact, and the speed with which the National Curriculum was conceived and implemented, ensured that demographic changes and the resultant religious issues were overtaken in the mid-1980s by political considerations. The focus of the following chapter, therefore, is the 1988 Education Reform Act and its aftermath. It argues that neither demographic changes nor educational research had much influence on the formulation of the Act, and that this fact had far-reaching repercussions for those who were required to implement it.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented an overview of curriculum development, suggesting that there were fundamental changes in society as a whole, but particularly in the western world. The following chapter argues that the haste with which the National Curriculum was designed and prepared took little, if any, account of these developments, and that crucial decisions on its implementation were made on the basis of political, not educational expediency.



## CHAPTER 5

### POLITICS, POWER AND THE 1988 EDUCATION REFORM ACT

#### Introduction

The main focus of this chapter is the 1988 Education Reform Act and the origins of the National Curriculum. It argues that the government paid scant attention to the many changes in British society as outlined in the foregoing chapter of this work, pursuing instead its own agenda based on power, control and its view of education. Religious Education and Collective Worship are examined in the context of the whole Act. Maclure, in a contemporary critique of the 1988 Act, identifies some of the concerns underpinning what was arguably one of the most radical educational reforms of this century:

“It could be observed, with justification, that the (*education*) system which had been developed since 1944 failed to produce a homogeneous standard of service: its chief characteristic was its patchiness ... What the Education Reform Act did was to dispose of the ideology of the Local Education Authority as the principal provider (*and*) offered an alternative ideology, with the emphasis on *opportunity*, not equality ...” (Maclure 1988:xiv).

When Kenneth Baker became Education Secretary in 1986 he immediately set about establishing a centrally controlled curriculum, effectively reversing those provisions of the 1944 Act which ascribed curricular control to the Local Education Authorities. The official rationale for this radical shift (at least at the level of rhetoric) was to direct power away from the “providers” (the LEAs and the teachers) and put it in the hands of the “consumers” (parents and pupils) (Haviland 1988, Leonard 1988). Two years earlier, Kogan had argued that the “strong professional leadership of local authorities and powerful teacher association membership of such bodies as the Schools Council, for a long time went unchallenged” (Kogan 1986:20). The 1987 Conservative Manifesto seized the political initiative to launch this challenge, and this for a variety of reasons, not all of them being directly connected with education. (see particularly the Bishop of London’s comments, Appendix 2)

## **5.1 Baker, Thatcher and the genesis of the National Curriculum**

In its final form the 1944 Act had been the result of long and painstaking consultation with parents, teachers and the general public; it was negotiated rather than imposed (see 3.2 above). By contrast the 1988 Education Reform Act was very much a product of politicians; although under the terms of the Act the Secretary of State for Education was required to consult “widely” and refer his proposed reforms to the new appointed National Curriculum Council, the reality, according to Haviland, (1988) was rather different. Maclure, in his introduction to Haviland’s findings, himself describes the consultation process as a “scrambled affair”. The discussion papers were sent out at the beginning of the 1987 summer holiday, and the Bill was scheduled to be presented to the House in November. In spite of this there was apparently a “flood of comment”. At least 20,000 replies were received, according to Haviland (1988); these merely added to the burden of those ministers and civil servants already engaged in drafting the Bill. Although Baker, in his speech to the Commons on 1st December, described consultation as “a very open, public process” the fact that the teachers’ concerns were apparently ignored or trivialised was a source of anger and frustration to the profession. There was no evidence of the government’s stated commitment to “build upon the professionalism ... and imaginative approaches developed by the many fine and dedicated teachers throughout our education system” (Baker’s speech to the Commons, Dec 1st 1987). The pre-defined nature of educational policies came under the critical scrutiny of religious and multicultural groups, teachers and academics, who were justifiably uneasy about much of what was being imposed. Their concerns were wide-ranging, and by no means restricted to religious issues.

### Religious authorities:

The Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference in 1988 expressed grave concern about the utilitarian, pragmatic and competitive flavour of the Act, which they considered a “poor and hazardous basis for the design of the curriculum” (Haviland 1988:15). They were equally critical of the arbitrary selection of Mathematics, Science and English as “core subjects”, since the term core was never defined, not were its



origins identified. Brighouse and Moon suggest that in the pre-election period, Thatcher expressed some concern about the degree of prescription required for the National Curriculum, and believed that only English, Mathematics and Science should have detailed guidelines. This might have been where the idea of “core subjects” originated. Baker is rumoured to have convinced her of the need for more widespread control “(ibid p.22).

However, the Catholic Bishops’ perception of the role of the curriculum in developing attitudes, relationships and moral and spiritual values, was, in their opinion, given scant attention, and the idea of education for responsibility totally absent. In similar vein, the Muslim Educational Trust presented a strong case for religious studies to be included in the core subjects, since they believed the principles underlying the formulation of the National Curriculum to be “clearly secular and materialistic in their policy implications” (Haviland 1988:96).

#### Multicultural groups:

The lack of recognition of the implications of the multicultural, multiethnic and above all, the multifaith nature of society in the Act also caused serious concern among those groups whose identity was apparently being ignored by the Act. The Association of LEA Advisory Officers for Multicultural Education (ALAOME) made particular reference to the provision of equal access to provision “*regardless of ethnic origin*”, when they argued most strongly that schools should be “*mindful*” of such origins (Haviland 1988:46/47). This was necessary so that due account might be taken of pupils’ backgrounds and experiences. In fact these considerations did eventually feature in those sections of the Act relating to RE and Collective Worship, but not in the English Curriculum Orders, where children whose mother-tongue was not English might thereby be seriously disadvantaged. The Muslim Educational Trust (MET) welcomed the recognition of Welsh as a separate language, and argued for a similar emphasis on Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Greek, Turkish and Persian.

The Commission for Racial Equality expressed similar concerns, in that the Swann Report’s observations on the pluralist nature of England’s national culture did not



feature in the wording of the Act. The Commission argued that the declared objective of preparing pupils for citizenship would be possible only if the implications of such pluralism were to be addressed. They stressed the importance of including in any working-parties people with practical experience of multicultural and anti-racist curriculum development. This recommendation went largely unheeded. This fact has particular ramifications for the forms of testing that were eventually adopted. The Commission highlighted the problem of devising any testing free from cultural bias, to minimise the possibility of disproportionate numbers of ethnic minority pupils being identified as low achievers (Haviland 1988:95). This fear, according to recent statistics, appears to have been well founded. Gillborn (1997), while acknowledging that children of Indian descent fare better than other Asians, asserts that Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils “generally do less well academically than white children” (cited in TES 31 1.97). It was, as one Association observed, “ironic that while the professional expertise of teachers was being denied, that of the tester found uncritical acceptance” (Haviland 1988:85).

Notwithstanding these serious concerns, legislation was put in place at an unprecedented rate. Baker remained firm in his conviction that the establishment of a National Curriculum was the key to raising educational standards. In her memoirs Prime Minister Thatcher makes it clear that she was the prime mover in the enterprise (Thatcher 1993). Her chief concern was political rather than educational; having experienced fierce opposition from a small number of left-wing dominated local authorities, she set out to curb their power by means of educational reforms. In her presidential address at the Conservative Party Conference in October 1987, she claimed that children “particularly in inner cities, had had a true education “all too often snatched from them by hard-left education authorities and extremist teachers” (cited in Simon 1988:18). Simon went on to suggest that this was a populist attack, supported by the tabloid press, on local government as a whole. Thatcher herself recognised that it would be “no easy matter” to change for the better what happened in schools. She wanted the DES to establish a new basic syllabus for English, Mathematics and Science, while recording with disarming candour that she had no wish “to put good teachers in a strait jacket”. She was disappointed in the findings of those to whom Baker entrusted the drawing up of the National Curriculum, since their educational philosophy turned out to be different from her own.



In his own memoirs Baker wryly recalls the deep suspicion of the educational establishment towards the idea of an imposed curriculum driven by a commitment to reducing the power of the Local Authorities. In the TES of 16 October 1987 the editorial mood was one of indignation, denouncing Thatcher's arguments as "intellectually disreputable". The arguments in question related to her conviction that the curriculum was being manipulated for political ends by "left-wing local authorities, teachers and pressure groups" (Thatcher 1993:591). However, the stated commitment to remove ownership and control from professionals and LEAs, and restore it to parents and governing bodies, has in fact resulted in even greater centralisation, where "bureaucrats, technicians and politicians" exercise the real power (Carr & Hartnett 1996:174).

Baker continued to pursue his objective with singular energy and determination. He appointed selected academics, while ignoring many distinguished experts, to study and report on the different areas of the curriculum; when their conclusions diverged from his own views he merely appointed other experts. He disagreed, for instance, with the findings of the committee headed by Sir John Kingman, on standards in English, concluding sadly that "it appeared that even the guardians of standards had become infected with fashionable nonsense" (Baker 1993:191). Professor Brian Cox, one of the co-authors of the Black Papers of the 1970s on the alleged decline in educational standards, was another of Baker's appointments, this time to draw up a teaching programme in English. Baker was again disappointed with the report from his working party, recording that "it was not as helpful as I had hoped over the teaching of grammar, and the Attainment Targets set ... were too vague" (ibid p.201). Ball (1995) records a series of newspaper articles in which Cox, initially hailed as the "one-time scourge of the 'progressive' teachers" was somehow transformed during the short lifetime of the working party (May/October 1988) into a position where he was under attack for "rejecting traditional methods of teaching 'standard' English" (The Observer, 20 Nov 1988). Ball notes Baker's personal interest in, and views about, the teaching of English as a key subject in the "political education" of the masses (Ball 1995:205). So Baker's disappointment with the working party's final report was almost identical to Thatcher's own reaction, although at that stage (October 1988) she was becoming increasingly anxious to get the reforms implemented with all speed.



All this was in the context of Baker's own anxiety, as Thatcher observed, to "take as many as possible of the teachers and Her Majesty's Inspectorate with us in the reforms we were making" (Thatcher, 1993:593). In the face of this concern the following assertion in connection with the work of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) seems curiously incongruous:

"The fact that it (*the TGAT report*) was welcomed by the Labour Party, the National Union of Teachers and the Times Educational Supplement was enough to confirm for me that its approach was suspect ..." (Thatcher 1993:595).

According to Ball (1995) this climate of suspicion had been gaining momentum for the last twenty years. The "New Right", being part of a much wider political ideology, profoundly affected educational debate, tending to see comprehensive education, for instance, as "a threat to standards" or as a "dangerous progressive innovation" (Lawton 1980:94). Carr and Hartnett (1996) assert that Britain's gradual economic decline, culminating in high unemployment and price inflation, particularly in the 1970s, gave rise to simplistic "explanations" in which the education system was held responsible for many of society's ills. "All that was needed", went the argument, "was a return to the traditional values and beliefs of the past" (Carr & Hartnett 1996:125). Yet these authors maintain that the philosophy of the New Right, with its belief in historical tradition and resistance to change, was itself a product of two conflicting political ideologies, those of conservative thought and nineteenth century liberalism. In educational terms, these two ideologies would appear to be polarised on the subject of religion. Conservative thought espoused the notion of human imperfection which needed to be kept in control by the strong, authoritative leadership which organised religion seemed to offer. Liberalism, on the other hand, valued the freedom of the individual above the demands of religion and social order. This tension goes some way to accounting for the contradictory elements observable in the New Right movement. They concur, however, in their insistence on the need for authority and order, and the control of "public sector professionals who have a vested interest in the continued growth of that sector" (Carr & Hartnett 1996:134). The teachers in maintained schools, as examples of public sector professionals, were once again under critical scrutiny.



## 5.2 Education and the rise of the New Right

Ball (1995) maintains that New Right ideology began to take shape in the late 1960s with the publication of the first of the Black Papers by Cox and Dyson. This series of right-wing, populist pamphlets covering the period 1969 to 1977 set out to influence public opinion on progressive education and the comprehensive system. Sexton, in an interview recalling the context in which the Black Papers were written, identifies the drift towards the “re-emphasis of individual freedom ... that things worked better if you let people run their own show” (in Ball 1995:23). Callaghan’s much-acclaimed Ruskin Speech in 1976 appeared to endorse the concerns surfaced by the Black Papers, and the so-called Great Debate on education was launched.

These concerns revolved around three major themes, first, the alleged decline in academic standards and second, the damaging effects of a left-wing teaching force. The third theme, that of indiscipline, the loss of traditional values (for instance the primacy of the family unit and a sense of nationhood)<sup>1</sup> and a social climate of alienation and moral decay was, according to the new orthodoxy, directly attributable to the other two. The Black Papers and the New Right movement were set on what Ball (1995) identifies as a radical “deconstructive/reconstructive” course, a return to a non-existent golden age; in this process it was apparently considered expedient to divide the interested parties, such as parents and teachers, so as to produce false polarities. Parents were set against teachers, and scholarly research was challenged by the popular media, as though their particular perceptions were mutually exclusive (Kenway 1987).

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<sup>1</sup> Ball (1995) argues that the linking of family and nation, morality and law, was used as an attempt to reinforce the authority of government, and that the notion of “social discipline” took precedence over individual freedom (Worsthorne 1978). The emphasis on nation also had the effect of portraying cultural variation (such as religious diversity) as a “problem” (Ball, 1995:40).

The scene was set for a radical reconstruction of the education system, based on principles reiterated in successive Education Acts (1980 and 1986) of **choice, competition and organisational styles** developed in industry. These three interrelated principles are outlined below, since they help to elucidate some of the less overt political issues surfaced by the 1988 Education Reform Act.

### **5.3 Education Reform and the New Right**

#### **5.3.1 Choice**

In 1987 a right-wing organisation known as the Hillgate Group produced a booklet entitled *The Reform of British Education*, in which the primacy of parental **choice** in the education of their children was repeatedly stressed. Baroness Cox, a member of this group, took up this theme in an interview at the time (Ball 1995) claiming there had been a radical shift in opinion and in the political climate, a “sea change” brought about by increasing parental dissatisfaction with what was reportedly happening in mainstream schools. She was merely reflecting the false polarity of reasonable parental expectations set against the domination of “powerful bureaucratic interest groups” (Hillgate 1987:1). The rhetoric of this argument led inevitably to the identification of what Ball describes as the “sacred” and “profane” values. These polarised educational issues such as parental choice (sacred) against producers (*i.e. teacher*) control (profane), cultural heritage against “new subjects” and tradition against multiculturalism (Ball 1995:45). The evaluation and assessment (or, more accurately, testing) of teaching and learning was seen as a powerful tool in the endorsement of parental choice and the control of teachers. The Hillgate group proclaimed the effectiveness of publicising examination results in the increasing formalisation of teacher accountability and parental control.

#### **5.3.2 Competition**

National tests, presented as a means of ensuring parity of experience in the educational process, also provided evidence for market comparisons and consumer



choice. They placed parents in the role of consumer in the educational marketplace, competition replaced collaboration among teachers, and pupils were identified as successes or failures. The supporters of testing also argued that competition would raise “standards” but while, in an industrial context it is practical to eliminate or discontinue a product of dubious commercial merit, such a strategy was not an option for schools. As one teacher commented, referring to “unproductive” pupils (i.e. those whose test results fell below the notional norm) “we can’t change or get rid of them” (Bowe *et al* 1992:58). The fact that test results were most problematic in those areas where English was not the first language of the majority of pupils meant that the status of these schools was, and continues to be, adversely affected. Problems resulting from low morale among teachers and the marginalisation of pupils were inevitable. A more recent element of competition, that of linking teachers’ salaries with the test results achieved by their students, reduces education to the memorising of facts. In January 2000 the government published its proposals for Performance Related Pay for teachers, based partly on pupils’ examination results, due to take effect from the following September. It has already been argued in this work that the decline in professional creativity in the last century was directly attributable to the Payment by Results clause in the 1860 Revised Code. The experience of learning *from*, as compared to *about* religious belief, by engaging in worship, for instance, has no immediate value in a test-driven system. Circular 1/94, by contrast, asserts that Collective Worship “should aim to provide the *opportunity* for pupils to worship God, to *consider* spiritual and moral issues and to *explore* their own beliefs” (Circular 1/94 para 50, my italics).

### 5.3.3 Organisational Styles

In a commissioned report to the DES, Coopers and Lybrand (1988) outlined, in addition to choice and competition in the education system, “a new culture and philosophy of school **organisation**”, based on an industrial model (Ball 1995). Under this new system, the governors of a school effectively became the Board of Directors and the headteacher the Chief Executive. The school’s budget became the ultimate responsibility of the governors, together with accountability to the consumers (the parents) for profit and loss in the form of test results and resources. Therefore, though the curriculum was national, accountability was a local matter. In



a speech made in 1990, David Hart, the General Secretary of the NAHT, viewed with scepticism the persistent rumours that the government was intent on transferring the powers of the LEAs to “twenty-seven and a half thousand self-governing institutions” but acknowledged that some members of the New Right would like to bring about the abolition of the LEAs (Ball 1995:68). These rumours offer an interesting comparison with the Balfour Act of 1902 (See 2.9 above) which transferred the powers of educational administration from some 2,500 School Boards to 333 LEAs. This was an attempt to rectify some of the administrative anomalies of the 1870 Education Act.

Bowe et al (1992) summarised the innate tensions of schools as self-governing institutions as being between the demands of education, management, the budget and marketing. In theory at least, these tensions should have been less acute in RE and worship, since they continued to be locally organised as before. However, the ways in which the tensions peculiar to these areas of the curriculum were managed depended largely on the priorities of individual headteachers and their governors. They were being required to market and promote aspects of the educational “product” for which, in some cases, neither they nor the consumers had much enthusiasm. By 1994 an NAHT survey had claimed that 79% of all schools found the government’s expectations for RE and Collective Worship unacceptable. This, and other concerns, although also expressed earlier by respected professional bodies, went almost unheard at the time the National Curriculum was being formulated.

#### **5.4 RE, Worship and the Basic Curriculum**

Throughout the academic year of 1987-88 the outline of the National Curriculum continued to take shape, described in official documents as comprising core and foundation subjects. In the case of English primary schools, these subject areas were defined as mathematics, English and science (the core subjects), and history, geography, technology, music, art and physical education (the foundation subjects). These, together with the provision of Religious Education for all registered pupils, represented the minimum educational entitlement, and were therefore identified as the basic curriculum. Sections 1 to 25 of the Act define in great detail the role of a balanced and broadly based curriculum (Section 1 [2]) in promoting the “spiritual,



moral, cultural, mental and physical development” of pupils and preparing them for the “opportunities, responsibilities and experiences” for adult life. Religious Education appeared first in the wording of the Act. For a Prime Minister who repeatedly and publicly affirmed her religious faith, Thatcher was uncharacteristically silent on the matter of the RE curriculum. Baker, when he turned his attention to it, was apparently given a free hand. (See Appendix 3 for a transcript of his interview.) He was informed that certain aspects of the 1944 Act were being largely disregarded, notably the daily act of worship. It had in many cases become an exclusively secular gathering centring on administrative matters supplemented by moral exhortations. He was theoretically committed to providing a curriculum which addressed the spiritual as well as the mental and physical development of all pupils. To this end he gave the RE curriculum the unique status of being part of the basic curriculum (and therefore a legal entitlement) but not a National Curriculum subject. It was intended to be, he recalled, “definitely *primus inter pares*” (Baker 1993:207).

There was, however, grave disquiet among the representatives of the mainstream churches about this apparent marginalisation of RE and worship; they saw it as an endorsement of the weakening of religious commitment in society and of “the slide towards secularism” (Maclure 1988). David Konstant, Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds, an outspoken critic of the proposed reforms, argued that the virtual relegation of RE to the sidelines of the National Curriculum could do “grave damage to our (*national*) educational system” (ibid p.17). There was a general unease among the Catholic hierarchy about the almost exclusively utilitarian values of the proposals, in contrast to their conviction that educational process should “serve and nurture *the whole person*” (Catholic Bishops’ Conference 1988 [my italics]). Members of the House of Lords were no less concerned, but arguably for slightly different reasons, about the way the religious provisions of the 1944 Act had fallen into disuse. A study of some of their debates reveals a variety of opinions as to the objectives of RE and school worship.

## 5.5 The House of Lords and the Education Reform Act

When the Education Reform Bill came to the Lords from the Commons in April 1988, the members recalled with regret the high hopes of the 1944 Act. References were made, in various speeches and questions, to the similarities and differences presented by these two milestones in the educational life of the nation. R A Butler, who is generally regarded as the main architect of the 1944 Act, had the foresight to realise that a massive restructuring programme would be needed after the war, that the world would never be the same again, and that Britain would need a well educated workforce if she were to regain her former influence on world affairs. The Lords at the time of the 1988 Bill were dismissive of the claim reputedly made by Baker, as Secretary of State for Education, that he was a latter-day Butler. It seems an extraordinarily pretentious claim, if indeed it was made; in the 1980s there was no devastation remotely equivalent to that suffered by the country during the second world war, and no politician displayed any vision of the country's educational future that was apparent in Butler's reforms.

It has been emphasised in this work that it was one of the main strengths of the 1944 Act that it aimed for a general consensus, with parents, school governors and the public being consulted on its form and content. Butler and Chuter Ede, (Home Secretary at that time) toured the country separately, talking with all interested parties, paving the way for the changes they were hoping to initiate. By contrast, the 1988 Act was imposed; no attempt at consensus was made, and the doubts and anxieties of professionals as to the wisdom of many of its proposals went unheeded. Many serving teachers regarded it as one of the most unpopular Acts ever passed. On 18th April 1988, Lord Glenamara went so far as to declare that he did not trust the government "this increasingly right-wing government, with that amount of power over the minds of our children" (H 1). References were frequently made in the Commons to the concern of parents about the low standards in the schools, yet Baroness Blackstone pointed out that "the government continually ascribe views to parents for which there is not a scrap of evidence" (H 2). This suggestion that anecdotal evidence was being fabricated to support increasingly unpopular measures is difficult to refute, since no dissenting voices were allowed to alter the outcome of the discussions.



Lord Addington's prediction, made in July 1987, that "our (*education*) system is about to undergo a radical change" was echoed repeatedly and with increasing anxiety in many quarters in 1988, especially in terms of the autonomy enjoyed by professionals. He went on to assert that "we are to have a National Curriculum which will lose some of the flexibility which has been a major strength" (H 3). No one could have foreseen the almost total erosion of flexibility which was to characterise the first few years after the 1988 Act, resulting in the denigration of professionalism and the demoralisation of skilled teachers. Lord Thurlow's conviction that "the schools have become concerned in purveying knowledge" (H 4) although also voiced in 1987, was in fact a summary of the effect that the Orders which launched the National Curriculum were to have in the schools. His belief that "they (*the schools*) have forgotten the larger responsibility to instil understanding" only became a reality with the passage of time, and with the increasing pressures imposed by a content-led curriculum. Lord Peston's plea (H 5) that "in considering the education of our children we really ought to have more faith in the children themselves and also occasionally show a bit of faith in their teachers" seems largely to have fallen on deaf ears. In Haviland's view, the government felt it necessary to "bring the teachers to heel" by imposing reforms with the force of law (Haviland 1988).

RE and Collective Worship in schools were, and continue to be, highly contentious matters. There is in the National Curriculum debates an ambivalence which defies analysis, since every contributor to the discussions spoke from his/her own experience of religion in school, rather than from the perspective of state schools of the 1960s and beyond, when religious education underwent a radical shift in content and approach. The driving forces of this necessary shift are discussed elsewhere in this work (see especially 3.8 ff). At one extreme of the continuum was the assertion by Lord Houghton of Sowerby on May 3rd 1988 that "there is no such thing as religious education. There is indoctrination, which is a different matter altogether" (H 6) and at the other, there were the reminiscences of the Earl of Halsbury, made in February of that year. He recalled in commendable detail that "at my prep school we had prayers before breakfast every morning, and of course evening prayers on Sundays. When I went to public school I found the same régime ..." (H 7). There



was no evidence here of any awareness of the climate of contemporary schools or of current educational practice. The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus summarises the development in the following observation:

“A generation ago the purpose of RE in county schools was to nurture the pupils in the Christian faith, but ... in the present circumstances it is directed towards developing a critical understanding of the religious and moral dimensions of human experience.” ( City of Birmingham 1975)

The Earl of Arran was one of the few participants in the debate who showed an awareness of the implications for RE and school worship in a multicultural, multifaith society. He reminded the Lords that “We are no longer a predominantly Christian nation, and our schools reflect the multifaith nature of Britain” (H 8). This is why the distinction between corporate and collective worship is so significant, since the term corporate suggests as commonality of thought and intention. In terms of worship is also implies a unity of belief and practice, which is clearly inappropriate in the context of a state school. Collective, on the other hand, describes a gathering more attuned to that found in the maintained sector; pupils attend a school for a variety of reasons other than religious, and a climate of unity in such a gathering should be addressed from that perspective.

Lord Orr-Ewing’s perception of what was happening in state schools was expressed in February 1988 in his regret that “the 1944 Act (*vis à vis Collective Worship*) now appears to be totally disregarded by over 90% of schools” (H 9). He did not specify in what respect the terms of the Act were being disregarded, nor did he identify the source of his statistics. It is tempting to speculate whether this was another example of anecdotal evidence quoted to endorse a personal perception. Lord Thurlow, again in February, voiced a more pertinent concern when he asked “Would (*worship*) not be more effective in transmitting the values that we cherish and respect to leave it to the discretion of teachers and governors to decide what form the transmission should take? It is no good trying to push Christian forms down unreceptive throats” (H 10). He was consistent in his conviction that education is about far more than the direct transmission of knowledge and facts; without a climate of reflection and understanding the process is relatively meaningless.



## 5.6 Baroness Cox, Dr Graham Leonard and the Christian emphasis

Some peers continued to remain determined to re-establish what they regarded as Christian education in Britain. Dr Graham Leonard, who was at that time Bishop of London, took it upon himself to form a working relationship with Mr Baker for a base-line from which to work. They both refer to this fact in their respective interviews (Appendices 2 and 3). Leonard was one of the 26 Anglican bishops entitled to sit in the House of Lords, and he took his duties seriously, making a point of informing himself on the central issues of any forthcoming debate. His biographer recalls of this time that “some of the peers who were militant for Christian education might have lost everything had it not been for the reconciling hand of Leonard” (Peart-Binns p.245). The discussions surrounding this issue were protracted and Leonard played a major role in the outcome. Alves (1991) asserts that Leonard’s was “the key speech of this debate” (Alves 1991:169).

When it was first mooted in the early phases that RE should be given the status of a foundation subject, the proposal was resisted in the House of Lords. It was felt that such a measure might compromise the existing freedom to organise RE on a regional basis. This freedom allows for arrangements to be tailored to the needs of the local community, under the auspices of the local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) whose membership represents the various faith communities in a given area. Locally Agreed Syllabuses, prepared by the SACRE, reflect this diversity. The decision to retain this quasi-autonomous status was made on April 18 1988, when RE was confirmed as *primus inter pares* with the foundation subjects.

Baroness Cox (see Appendix 1) argued vociferously on several occasions in the House of Lords that there was a real danger in what she saw as “the confusion of multiculturalism, multi-racism and multifaith religious education” as reflected in the Agreed Syllabuses (H 11). She maintained that schools had failed to provide the Christian-based education required by law, and that pupils were being denied the opportunity to study and worship in the Christian tradition which was their spiritual birthright. Her much-quoted reference to the multifaith “mish-mash”, which was the way she suspected that world faiths were being addressed in the nation’s schools, added little to the debate apart from denigrating the skills of professionals. Her



assertion that RE teaching by faith leaders was better than “half-baked presentation” (*sic*) was possibly indicative of her perception of the teaching profession, although she was right in assuming that there is more to religion than can be gleaned by objective study alone. Baroness Blatch echoed the dismissive “mish-mash” description in her phrase “the mixing-bowl approach”, (H 12) while Lord Ashbourne claimed, also in February 1988, that “children’s ... bodily needs are generally fairly well met; their mental needs are met in some degree depending on circumstance, but their spiritual needs are scarcely met at all. Thus at the end of his (*sic*) formative years the child is quite unbalanced” (H 13). If this somewhat depressing and completely unsubstantiated appraisal of the régime in the nation’s schools were to be verified, an educational revolution would appear to have been long overdue.

Hansard, for the period April to June 1988, records what was probably the most significant debate in the Lords on RE and Collective Worship, in view of the controversy it has engendered ever since. A spirited discussion between Dr Leonard and Baroness Cox centred around the untested assumption, also prevalent in 1944, that Britain remains a predominantly Christian country. When the 1988 Bill arrived in the House of Lords for debate, the only direct reference to RE was to be found in clause 6.1, enjoining that “Section 25 (2) of the 1944 Act (relating to compulsory religious instruction) is complied with”. Clause 93, however, required that “all pupils shall take part in an act of collective worship”. On 3rd May four amendments were put before their Lordships for consideration. It was at this stage that Baroness Cox began to call for an insertion of the words “predominantly Christian” in the clause relating to worship. She was ably supported by David Renton, and together they recruited the support of Alec Douglas-Home, Peter Thorneycroft (who has already been mentioned in connection with the 1944 Act) and John Boyd-Carpenter. The Duke of Norfolk represented the Roman Catholic interests and the Chief Rabbi those of the Jews, with particular reference to the denominational schools. The House of Bishops, whose spokesman was Dr Leonard, were uneasy about the strong Christian emphasis being advocated, being sensitive to the implications for non-Christian religious groups if the law appeared to marginalise or exclude them.

Matters came to a head on 12th May 1988. The pro-Christian group tabled a motion that collective worship should be preceded by the word “Christian”, and the House



was to divide for a vote. Thus the school worship clause began to assume what was to be its final form, first by a change in the wording from Collective Worship to Collective Christian Worship. Much misunderstanding remained, so the matter was again debated on 22nd June. Lord Elton was still of the opinion that “Christian worship and education should be provided for Christian children, and appropriate arrangements be made for children of other faiths” (H 14).

The bishops, with the approval of the Archbishop of Canterbury, opposed the motion on ethical grounds, well aware of the possible consequences if the national press were to report that the House of Bishops had voted “against Christian worship”. Dr Leonard, in an interview given for the purposes of this research, (see Appendix 2) spoke of his dilemma during this debate and of his relief when the matter was finally resolved. He pointed out that harmony in a multifaith school might best be safeguarded by attention to certain basic principles. He maintained that the tradition of worship is a part of the educational process and celebrates the values within the school community. Provided it is appropriately organised with due regard for school accommodation and does not fragment the pupils into the different faith groups they represent, it could be endorsed and “warmly welcomed” by their Lordships. Dr Leonard, who, according to his biographer, “did not engage in adversarial politics”, (Peart-Binns 1988:245) demonstrated considerable tact and sensitivity by tabling key amendments to highlight the honoured place that the bishops felt Christianity should have in the RE curriculum. Clause 93 thereby achieved its final form, and worship was now required to be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” (7.1). This was supported in the Act by a clarification of what was intended by the expression “broadly” and went on to offer guidance on what latitude was to be interpreted by “wholly or mainly”. “Mainly” seems to imply an alternative to “wholly”, a distinction which many of those responsible for school worship, namely headteachers and school governors, have seen fit to interpret in their own way. The studiedly imprecise wording has preserved some vestiges of professional autonomy.

Leonard’s biographer notes that the Education Bill returned to the Commons in 1988 “somewhat mauled by the Lords” (Peart-Binns 1988:245) but the Government accepted the substance of his amendments. Colin Alves, who, at the time of the

Bill's passage through Parliament was Secretary to the General Synod Board of Education, offered in 1991 the following optimistic critique of this section of the Act:

“What the Act has in fact achieved is the establishment of religious education (including the provision of school worship) as an essentially educational activity ... incorporating within the *one* curriculum for *all* pupils a proper exploration of *all* faiths. If it happens thereby to contribute to nurture in one particular faith, well and good, but that cannot, must not, be its prime purpose.” (Alves 1991:173).

By alluding to “a proper exploration of all faiths”, Alves raises the question of how this exploration can be organised, particularly in the experience of school worship. Ways of interpreting Clause 93 are outlined in the final chapter of this work.

### **5.7 The Collective Worship clauses of the 1988 Act**

RE and worship were therefore endorsed as essentially educational activities. Beattie (1992) summarises the curriculum implications as follows:

- i) Religious education was reaffirmed as a compulsory part of the curriculum for all pupils, subject to the traditional provisos (ERA 1988, 8 [2]).
- ii) The religious traditions of Great Britain were affirmed to be “in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other religions represented in Great Britain” (5.8 [3]).
- iii) A daily act of Collective Worship was reaffirmed as required for all pupils (subject to the traditional provisos) (6 [1]).
- iv) Worship was required to reflect “the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination” (7.3) but see (vii) below.
- v) Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs) were now required in all LEAs (11.1).
- vi) SACREs were to approve Agreed Syllabuses of Religious Education (11.1 [a]).
- vii) SACREs were also empowered to consider requests from headteachers that worship should in certain circumstances not be “broadly Christian” (12.1).



Beattie (1992) argues that these provisions constituted a “package” (Bishop Leonard’s own word), steering a middle course which sought to avoid three undesirable possibilities: first, the “mish-mash” or multifaith approach, second, a purely intellectual or descriptive approach, and third, a secularist approach in which religion would be isolated from education as being “not a proper concern for state schools” (Beattie 1992:9). For Beattie, however, many vital questions remain unanswered: the “middle course” was defined in terms of what it is *not*, and furthermore that it was a middle ground of ecclesiastical experts rather than of the general population. Lord Houghton asserted at the time (May 1988) that it was still unresolved as to “whether we shall have a multi-racial society or a fully integrated British people ...” (H 15). The Bishop’s “package” however, was accepted as a workable compromise, although some concerns remained (see Leonard’s comments, Appendix 2)

The requirement of daily worship remained, but Section 6 (2) offered a flexibility of timing which the 1944 Act did not. It was now no longer compulsory to hold it at the beginning of the school day, nor was a single act specified. **“The arrangements ... may, in respect of each school day, provide for a single act of worship for all pupils, or for separate acts ... for pupils in different age groups.”** This is seen by commentators, notably Leonard (1988) and Hull (1989) as a welcome recognition of the constraints under which many schools operate, particularly in the secondary sector, where there is, quite simply, no assembly hall or any other venue large enough to accommodate all the pupils at once. Added to this is the time factor. Such an assembly would be prohibitive in a comprehensive school of any size; the time and logistics of gathering the whole school together on a daily basis would be indefensible. (In a public or boarding school setting where there is a school chapel on the site, such a requirement would present less of a problem.) The grouping of pupils was required to be in accordance with the school’s organisational policies, in form or tutor groups, year or house groups operative in the existing structure. A comprehensive school headteacher interviewed in the course of this study saw this flexibility as an acceptable compromise, but suggested that quality provision was patchy, depending on the skill and enthusiasm of those responsible for the delivery of

the act of worship. The Act proscribed the grouping of pupils on the basis of their religious tradition since it was claimed that this was potentially divisive. Graham Leonard, in his interview, however, took a completely different view. He argued that “if you start with the idea that religion is divisive you’re going to communicate that idea right through everything. If on the other hand you look for the unifying things ... that *we all worship God*” ... (my italics) “but we don’t understand him in the same way,<sup>2</sup> then you can have your breakdown into smaller groups without communicating a sense of division”. This kind of ambivalence may go some way to explaining the current unease about the purpose of school worship.

Section 6:6 made it clear that school worship “**must normally take place on the school premises**”, and that the daily requirement must be met even if the pupils were taken, for whatever reason, to a public place of worship on any given day. In the course of a Religious Education programme it is common practice in many schools for pupils to visit a place of worship of the tradition they are studying. They may be examining the architecture or artefacts, interviewing key personnel or sketching stained glass windows, but as this does not constitute active worship the requirement of a school assembly remains.

Section 7 of the Act introduced a series of what might be called “special provisions”, some of which continue to give rise to much misunderstanding and controversy. The 1944 Act gave no guidelines as to the content of either classroom RE, except that it had to be in accordance with an Agreed Syllabus, or of school worship, except that it should not be “**distinctive of any particular religious denomination**” (1944 Act, Section 26). No advice was given, however, as to what *would* be acceptable. The 1988 Act was no more helpful in its terminology; in fact the studiedly imprecise wording merely added to the uncertainty. Sub-section 7:1 enjoins that worship “**shall be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character**”, and goes on to

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<sup>2</sup> It is not clear here whether the respondent is referring to human beings in general or to people of different faith groups. In the light of his ensuing comments, the latter explanation is the more likely.



attempt to clarify what is by any standards a clumsy and obscure statement. 7:2 expands on the use of the word “broadly” and sub-sections 7:3 and 7:4, discussed in detail by Hull (1989), deal with the intention behind the expressions “wholly or mainly”.

Hull is of the opinion that if acts of school worship are to be Christian at all, they are required to be “wholly” or “mainly” so under the terms of the ERA. He argues that this offers local flexibility and that no act is required to be wholly Christian. He maintains that “wholly” and “mainly” are offered as alternatives, and that a school may choose one or the other in choosing a pattern of Christian worship. Not every act needs to comply with the requirement (to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character), provided that **“taking any school term as a whole, most such acts ... do comply”** (7:3). This specification has led to legalism in the form of setting percentages for school worship, such as providing 51% with a Christian basis and 49% based on other faiths (cf Taylor 1989:39). Such a literal interpretation could become mechanistic and potentially limiting, and Hull recommends that schools proceed “in a general spirit of freedom and tolerance”, (Hull 1989:19) with due regard for local circumstances.

The term “broadly” as used in the legislation to denote Christian traditions, may similarly be perceived as offering flexibility or material for theological debate, since there is a lack of general agreement as to those broad traditions. Denominational issues aside, school worship is of a broadly Christian character if it reflects the broad traditions **“of Christian belief”**. There is little denominational consensus about these broad traditions. “The character”, therefore, “is to be found not in a presentation or an application or a rendition but in a reflection” (Hull 1989:17). Other commentators, notably Taylor (1989) have identified this phrase as particularly problematic, although one of her respondents refers to it as a “delightfully vague phrase for which we should be truly grateful” (Taylor 1989:39). In Taylor’s research among LEA advisers there was widespread uncertainty as to whether the law required the majority of acts to be broadly Christian, or whether, within each daily act, the character of the worship itself should be broadly Christian. Such legal niceties make for interesting speculation beyond the scope of this work.



No definition of what the “**broad traditions of Christian belief**” encompass was offered, and the absence of such a definition made for further confusion. It was not the broad traditions of Christian *worship* that were the focus, but of Christian *belief* itself. The main difficulty here is that denominations within the Christian tradition hold such widely divergent interpretations of dogma that consensus on all but the most basic tenets is virtually unattainable. Such tenets include the conviction that Jesus Christ was sent by God to show the human race how to live, and the primacy of the Gospels as a reliable account of his life. Interpretations of the more mysterious aspects of the life of Christ, such as the Resurrection, the virgin birth and his miraculous cures, are as varied as the traditions which espouse them. Little is to be gained, therefore, in trying to interpret with any degree of precision what was meant by the legal reference to the “broad traditions”. The general consensus seems to be that it referred to the myriad ways in which British culture has been shaped over the centuries by Christianity. These ways include material from art, music, literature, laws and culture, all underpinned by a respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each human being. It is axiomatic, however, that this respect is by no means unique to Christianity. Another aspect of the legislation which was highlighted in Taylor’s research is that Christianity itself is “a multiracial, global faith with thousands of denominations practising in different ways and with different interpretations”. The difficulties in complying with the law in this regard are thereby compounded.

The most radical departure from the requirements of the 1944 Act was the 1988 injunction that worship had to be “**educationally appropriate**” (ERA 7.4). This appropriateness was dependent on a number of “**relevant circumstances**”, as outlined in 7:5, and referred mainly to the “**family backgrounds**” of the pupils concerned and their “**ages and aptitudes**”. It was legally acceptable, with official sanction, for the Christian element to be disregarded, but not for the educational appropriateness of what was provided to be ignored. Many pupils would have had no experience of Christianity or worship of any kind in their family background, so the onus was on the school to provide a form of worship that was as accessible and acceptable to those with experience as to those without. Pupils whose background is in a tradition other than Christianity are therefore equally entitled to a recognition of the validity of their experience. One of Taylor’s respondents described her/his ideal of school worship as a form which:



“... recognises that Christianity is a faith, not a certainty; which does not deny that others may have legitimate insights into the nature of reality ... which does not compel observance of ritual ... and does not assume that all present are committed Christians ...” (Taylor 1989:41/42).

Section 7:5(b) required that the “ages and aptitudes” of the pupils should be the main criteria for the nature of the experience offered. The fact that schools and units for pupils with Special Educational Needs were exempted from the requirement of worship witnessed to the complexity of organising educationally appropriate experiences in this area. A significant current phenomenon is the development of programmes of worship for pupils with Special Needs. These programmes rely heavily on tactile and other sensory media, with a minimal use of words for conveying meaning. Worship with young children is also more visual in its approach and builds on their life experiences of love, awe and curiosity. These strategies are intended to lay the foundations, more suited to older pupils, for the reflection highlighted in Section 7:2 of the Act.

There are those, and Watson is among them, who see in the present legislation a fair compromise showing political and educational astuteness. Her argument is based on

“the undoubted impact of Christianity on the kind of society which has developed in the West, and the appropriateness of children who grow up in this society understanding something of Christianity”. (Watson, B 1993:160).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined some of the theories underlying the Education Reform Act, detailed its main provisions for RE and Collective Worship, and explored the claims made by the main architects of the National Curriculum. The following chapters compare the differing perceptions of the legislators and those immediately responsible for the implementation of the law: the teachers.

## CHAPTER 6

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

### Introduction: Qualitative or Quantitative Research?

So far in this work, the investigation of the place of religion, and particularly religious worship, has been pursued on a predominantly theoretical basis. The historical roots of the practice have been explored, and earlier professional practice informed by personal experience in a limited number of schools. It was imperative at this stage of the work to gain a wider perspective on the current issues, especially in terms of the controversy provoked by the 1988 Act concerning the nature and purpose of Collective Worship. The next task, therefore, was to create a research model capable of eliciting the kind of information I was seeking, namely how the law was shaping current professional practice, and how this compared with the intentions of the politicians responsible for its formulation.

Such a methodology needed a sound theoretical basis which could be tested against the empirical findings. Given the complexity of the human activity identified as worship, the selection of an appropriate research methodology for the empirical part of this investigation was multifaceted. The traditional dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative investigations hinges on what is intended by the term measurement (Hammersley 1986). He argues that researchers such as ethnographers offer no viable alternative to what he calls the “standard model” of measurement. This model involves the establishment of predetermined categories which are unambiguous and consistently applied. Strauss and Corbin (1990), however, describe qualitative research as that which “produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification”. Intelligence tests, attitude scales and systematic observation schedules, all of which are the tried and tested tools of quantitative scientific inquiry, did not immediately recommend themselves as means to a deeper understanding of this particular theme. It was vital, therefore, to design a model which would yield the maximum potential for exploring



in some depth the relevant abstract concepts, and linking them with particular circumstances. Measurement in this context needed a totally different approach, so I examined a range of qualitative research strategies to assess their suitability for this project. Those which seemed the most appropriate are summarised below, and I have identified the relevance of existing research methodology for my own investigations. The resultant eclectic model, outlined below, drew upon aspects of various theoretical approaches, without being restricted to any one perspective to the exclusion of all others. Ethnography, Case Studies, Interviews, Discourse Analysis and Grounded Theory receive particular attention, however, since they all featured in the research model. The two interrelated disciplines of Interviews and Discourse Analysis were central to this model, and for that reason are examined in some depth.

**Ethnography** was appropriate because two very different environments, namely those of professional educators and politicians, were to be studied. It was important to compare and contrast the different perspectives of the participants in the empirical research so as to begin to identify their priorities. I was very familiar with the world of school, but the culture of politicians was completely unknown territory for me.

**Case Studies**, in this work, of headteachers and politicians in their working environment, provided a rare opportunity to engage in qualitative research without long-term involvement with the subjects. It was therefore important to ensure complete accuracy in reporting, since there were no plans in the research programme for a return visit to any of the participants.

**Interviews**, both structured and unstructured, seemed the best way to elicit the kind of information I was seeking. Since the group of headteachers had much in common, not least in the kind of environment in which they functioned, structured interviews with open-ended questions would seem to offer a sound basis for comparison. The politicians, however, presented a variety of opportunities for exploring the issues, and were all persuasive communicators. Unstructured, or more accurately, semi-structured interviews were therefore selected as having the best potential for the purposes of the research.

**Discourse Analysis** was a discipline of which I had had very little previous experience. I had originally imagined it to be similar to the analysis of written texts, which I had used in earlier empirical research, but I soon became aware of the infinitely more complex nature of spoken discourse, with its nuances, subtleties and anomalies. The work of Lemke (1995) and Van Dijk (1997) was helpful in clarifying some of the issues involved.

Finally, the pioneering work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) on **Grounded Theory** was particularly useful in terms of codifying the wealth of information all the interviews produced. Without such coding, the task of analysis would be virtually unmanageable, and there is always the danger of overlooking some vital data if the coding is too rigid. For this reason the coding, which is detailed below (see 6.5.3) was used as a framework rather than a basis, i.e. it had to be capable of structuring the analysis but flexible enough to be adapted where necessary.

The five main components of the resultant model are now discussed separately, and their relevance to this particular research project identified.

## **6.1 Ethnography**

The task of designing a model to elicit particular information has for some time been a particular concern of ethnographers such as Douglas (1967) and Mehan (1973) who each challenged the findings of quantitative researchers on different topics. At the heart of this concern was the tenuous link between the key concepts, such as “social integration”, for instance in the research on suicide, and the data presented. Mehan’s work, interrogating the findings of achievement tests, identified a weakness in how the students interpreted the test questions. The main fact to emerge was that too many variables in quantitative research will call into question the validity of the findings, however carefully the data are gathered. This is because it is specifically designed to emphasise the causal relationship between variables; too many variables will therefore compromise the value-free framework in which the researcher purports to operate. Qualitative researchers, particularly ethnographers, by contrast, stress “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the



researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin et al 1994:4).

However, to suggest that quantitative methods are objective and that qualitative methods are subjective is to over-simplify the issue, thereby doing a disservice to both. Hamilton (1994) maintains that qualitative research evolved as a direct result of what he calls “an eighteenth century disruption” in the application of quantitative methods. Descartes’s seminal work *Discourse on Method* (1637) has long been hailed as fundamental to the development of scientific theory. He argued for a refocusing of the “certainty and self-evidence” of mathematics in the search for truth. (1968 ed. p 31) This absolutism did not gain universal approval, even in his own time, and was increasingly challenged in subsequent centuries. Kant (1724-1804) is arguably the foremost critic of what came to be known as Cartesian objectivism. His contention was that human knowledge is based on understanding, and he made a further distinction, originating in the Aristotelian tradition, between theoretical and practical knowledge. This distinction gave rise to a further subdivision between “scientific reason” and “practical reason”. In its simplest form, this means that whereas science is governed by strict laws, social research is governed by “autonomous principles which man applies to himself” (Ermath 1987:42).

No research is totally value-free, and the ethnographer’s degree of studied objectivity will determine the value of the findings. Ethnology itself, defined as a “scientific study of human races”, especially in relation to cultures and customs, offers a wide range of interpretations. Ethnographers inevitably bring their experiences and perceptions to the empirical research and, more crucially, into the interpretation of the findings. In studying the role of worship in a school context, it was necessary to acknowledge and consciously distance myself from an understandable propensity to value worship as a worthwhile activity in its own right, and try to enter into the perceptions of others who may have no such convictions. There has in recent years, however, been a move away from Atkinson’s (1994) description of positivism, namely the view that social research should adopt scientific methods such as the rigorous testing of hypotheses. It was the French writer, Auguste Comte, who originally introduced the concept of a positivist philosophy whereby he dismissed the notion that any metaphysical or theological claims could form the basis of valid

knowledge. In the positivist tradition, the term “knowledge” can only be applied to that which is founded in “reality” as “apprehended by the senses” (Carr and Kemmis 1986:61).

The shift away from positivism reflects the ethnographic viewpoint, which argues that the positivist approach fails to capture the complex nature of human social behaviour. Pollard’s 1984 research, for instance, examining the relationship between teaching styles and social differentiation, was able successfully to explore the effects of such widely different indicators as reading levels, seating position and friendship choices in his investigations (Hammersley 1986). Pollard recorded his findings in a variety of ways, using documentary evidence, interviews and observation. Hammersley examines these findings under the broad criteria of the accuracy of description, the generalisability of the descriptions, the content of validity and the construct validity. It would seem appropriate at this point to explore these criteria in the context of my own investigation, so as to establish some points of reference in the evaluation of the findings.

#### **6.1.1 The Accuracy of Description**

Hammersley identifies two levels of accuracy. At the most basic it is vital to establish that the respondents really said, or did, what was ascribed to them. In the case of audio-recordings, the accuracy of the transcription must be without question; if the researcher is taking notes, the possibility of inaccuracy is obviously greater. At a deeper level there is the danger of formalising the intentions and attitudes of speakers solely on the basis of what they say. What must obviously be taken into account is the human desire to impress or please the listener. When interviewing headteachers I had to be aware of the professional need to present the school in an acceptable, even a favourable light. Account must be taken of this need, if the researcher is to avoid presenting an idealised version of the reality described.

#### **6.1.2 The Generalisability of the Descriptions**



Pollard refers in his findings to the “typical behaviour” and “stable perspectives” of his respondents. This presented me with particular concerns, since I was conducting single structured interviews with each respondent; I had no means of checking whether their responses accurately reflected their characteristic attitudes or not. Neither was it part of the research design to compare the headteachers’ perceptions with those of their staff or pupils. I had decided to focus on the philosophical and professional perspective of those organising and leading the act of worship. Under such circumstances, generalisability (or ascribing similar views to other headteachers) would be inappropriate, not to say foolhardy.

### 6.1.3 Content Validity

Hammersley maintains that content validity is based on a common understanding or a working definition of key concepts, a consensus which ethnographers typically do not demonstrate in their accounts. He cites in connection with Pollard’s research, not what is commonly understood by progressive or traditional teaching, but the aspects of those teaching styles that produce the effects in which Pollard is interested. In the context of my own investigation, this lack of consensus is thrown into sharp focus when the purpose of worship is explored; each respondent identifies different priorities.

### 6.1.4 Construct Validity

Construct validity is an important aspect of measurement in all research. The basic issue is how accurately it measures “the concept or component of a concept” it is designed to examine (Hammersley 1986:56). Pollard’s research, based on “traditional” and “progressive” teaching styles, (an example of a basic concept) raises questions about why teachers adopt certain classroom practices (a component of this concept). Here the researcher is concerned with the intention underpinning the practice. In establishing this, the structured interview as a research tool comes into its own, since it offers the opportunity for researchers to probe perceptions, clarify assertions and possibly surface their own untested assumptions, in the search

for greater understanding. An example of such an assumption might be that a woman head would be more positively disposed towards the practice of prayer in school worship, since the vast majority of regular churchgoers are women. (In fact, six female and five male teachers were interviewed. There was no discernible gender difference in their attitude towards prayer in school worship.) Another assumption might be that prayer was as central to any act of worship at school as it is in church. Again, this proved not to be the case in the minds of the teachers. The establishment of construct validity in what was addressed in the interviews was therefore a major concern.

Two typical, interrelated questions to establish validity in the context of worship would be "*What is it for?*" (content validity) and "*Why do you present it in the way you do?*" (construct validity). In my research the first issue was carefully analysed while the second was addressed only superficially, thereby surfacing a potential weakness. Answers to the first depended on the respondent's philosophical convictions, such as the creation of a positive ethos. Answers to the second centred upon pragmatic and pedagogical considerations, such as the availability of space and the choice of content appropriate to the participants.

## 6.2 Case Studies

"Case study," according to Stake, "is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied." (Stake 1994:236) An essential element of the traditional case study is that it is long-term; the researcher is involved with a group or an institution over an extended period. This in itself offers both opportunities and constraints. In educational case-studies, which may be qualitative or quantitative, the opportunities range from the establishment of lasting relationships between the researcher and those researched, to the development of innovative teaching programmes. The constraints include sensitive issues such as confidentiality and the ownership of data (Walker 1986). There has recently been a move towards case study methodology which is committed to a rapid communication of the findings, which has obvious benefits in the study of classroom or whole school practice. Tension is created between the need for long-term involvement in the quest for accuracy and the benefits of short-term study followed by immediate feedback. If, as Walker asserts,



“case study is the examination of an instance in action” (Walker 1986:189/190), it follows that its main function is to offer insight into specific instances, events and situations. (Walker 1986:189/190) It enables the researcher to test out hypotheses and to formulate new theories based on the findings. This research tool offers the researcher the opportunity of reflecting on what is studied, and of modifying her/his own preconceptions as a result. This was particularly pertinent in my own empirical investigations; what I had considered to be central issues in, for example, worship in a multifaith area, in fact proved peripheral and almost incidental to the main concerns. Stake encapsulates this phenomenon as follows:

“Case researchers enter the scene expecting, even knowing, that certain events, problems, relationships will be important, yet discover that some actually are of little consequence” (Stake 1994:240).

Stake identifies three types of case studies, which serve different purposes, categorising them as Intrinsic, Instrumental and Collective; their functions overlap, but taken together they can all be viewed as a study of the particular.

### **6.2.1 Intrinsic, Instrumental and Collective Case Studies**

Stake categorises as intrinsic any study undertaken because one wants a better understanding of a particular case; the interest resides in the particular, not in any similarity it shares with other cases. It is not pursued in order to shed light on a given problem, such as drug abuse among the young, or the changing role of the headteacher. Its purpose is not primarily theory-generating either, although a new perspective may well be the result. Its interest lies solely in the particular school, clinic or individual in question. In the instrumental category, however, the case takes a secondary role, because it is pursued in order to gain further insight into, or verify, an evolving theory. The theory is therefore the major focus. Unlike the intrinsic variety, the instrumental case may be viewed as typical of other cases. The two categories are not mutually exclusive but they do reflect the changing nature of the researcher's interest as the research progresses. It would be possible, for instance, for a study to begin as an intrinsic inquiry, with no intention of generating theory, and evolve into an instrumental tool to refine or modify an existing theory.

Stake's third category of case study is what he calls the collective variety. Here the cases to be studied are selected on the basis of a set of common characteristics, or because the researcher believes they will lead to a better understanding of the issue in question. The collective case study, therefore, is also instrumental. My research project, where a number of schools were selected on the basis of their location and ethnic intake, would seem to fall into the instrumental / collective category.

### 6.2.2 Case Selection

Instrumental and collective casework requires the careful selection of cases to be studied; indeed, according to Stake, "nothing is more important than making a proper selection ..." (Stake 1994:243) The initial intention was to investigate the effects of the 1988 Act in relation to school worship in multifaith areas. For this reason an area of Preston was chosen where there was a settled community comprising a variety of ethnic groups. The schools selected had to be of the maintained variety, and this for two reasons: First, it was intended to explore the professional approach to worship of teachers who had possibly no religious faith on which to draw, and therefore no first-hand experience of religious worship either individual or corporate. Second, as most of my own teaching experience was gained in denominational schools, I was familiar with the role played by the church and the worshipping community in the provision of RE and Collective Worship in those establishments. The main purpose of this part of the investigation was to identify the basis on which these legal requirements were addressed in county schools.<sup>1</sup> Although the original interest in the effects of the 1988 Act on schools in multifaith areas remained, much more fundamental considerations emerged, such as questions on the purpose of school worship, its educational potential and its contribution to the spiritual development of the individual.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the headteacher of a church school in the area was interviewed by way of comparison, and her responses surfaced such different priorities that they would have made a study in themselves. As Stake observes "often it is better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a magnificently typical case". (Stake 1994:243)



This part of the research eventually followed the route outlined by Stouffer (1941), who maintained that

“Case researchers seek out what is both common and what is particular about the case, but the end result regularly presents something unique.” (cited in Denzin et al 1994:238)

His classic route, which I adapted for my own purposes, takes the researcher through logical stages. The following summary, based on Stouffer’s model, suggests the parameters of this work and conceptualises the relevant issues:

1. *The nature of the case*, in this instance, the educational justification of school worship in a multifaith environment.
2. *Its historical background*: the role of religion in the formation of the English educational system, and the steady increase in the secularisation of society.
3. *The physical setting*: (i.e. the environment forming the backdrop to the interviews) an urban setting with a multiethnic population.
4. *Other contexts, including economic, political, legal and æsthetic*: the impact of government policies on demographic developments, (patterns of immigration, for instance) and educational legislation.
5. *Those informants through whom the case can be known*: these included members of the House of Lords, headteachers and an RE specialist.

### 6.3 Interviews in Qualitative Research

If interviewing is, as Fontana and Frey (1994) suggest, both the tool and the object of this type of research, thorough preparation is central to the whole exercise. Historically it was not confined to qualitative research, being, as Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) assert, frequently used in large-scale psychological testing; the emphasis in this context was on measurement. Opinion polling, a form of interviewing which became popular in the 1930s, was also used to generate statistics; Gallup’s American Institute of Public Opinion was formed in 1935. Becker and Hughes, however, are credited in the 1950s and 1960s with formalising sociological ethnography, which became over the next three decades a major tool in qualitative

research (Fontana and Frey 1994:362). This constituted a radical shift away from what Mills (1987) describes as “the fine little mill of the Statistical Ritual” (Converse 1987:252). Interviewing has been further refined recently to take into account the feelings and experiences of the respondents, their right to privacy and informed consent (in particular, what use is to be made of the findings).

Preparing for the structured interviews was of necessity thorough in every respect. The first task was to locate the respondents; this was achieved by targeting an area of Preston known from experience to comprise a high proportion of ethnic minority communities. Headteachers of the county primary schools in this area were contacted, requesting an interview; their response was overwhelmingly positive. Of the two who declined, one gave as his reason the fact that he had just been appointed and therefore had no real sense of the traditions of worship in his school; the other simply did not reply. It would have been inappropriate to attempt to persuade these heads to change their minds; school worship is a sensitive area and the subject’s right of non-participation is paramount. The remaining interviewees were therefore to a large extent self-selected and all were positively disposed towards worship in their school. A comparison between their attitudes and those of their colleagues who felt less than positive would have been interesting but this issue was peripheral to the investigation. The eventual findings, therefore, although valid, may not be representative of all the headteachers in the area. The interviewees were informed of the purposes of the interview and their right of anonymity safeguarded. They were assured of a transcript of the tape-recording of their interview before the processing of the data began.

### 6.3.1 The Structured Interviews

In this type of interview the questions are pre-established, they are asked in the same sequence and, in theory at least, there is little room for flexibility. (Fontana and Frey 1994) In fact, however, a degree of flexibility was established which did not compromise the validity of the findings. This took the form of allowing the interviewees to spend longer on any theme about which they held particularly strong views; it was not considered either profitable or appropriate to control or accelerate



the pace of the interview. With each interview it was possible to operate on an increasingly impersonal level, as advocated by Fontana and Frey (1994:364), by interjecting less and less and eliciting more valuable data as a result.

### 6.3.2 The Unstructured Interviews

An open-ended (ethnographic) interview offers more flexibility but also holds more potential pitfalls than the structured variety. Malinowski's classic (1989) diary account of a "day in the field", besides eliciting some invaluable information, clearly demonstrates the difference between structured and unstructured interviewing techniques (cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1994:365/366). The former aims to classify the information in terms of pre-set codes, whereas the latter is an attempt to understand complex behaviour without prior classification.

Unstructured interviewing was necessary for the three members of the House of Lords who agreed to be interviewed. Fontana and Frey advise the researcher first to "access the setting", in this case the context of the Lords at the time of the passing of the 1988 ERA. It was decided to contact two members of the House who seemed, from Hansard and other accounts, to have taken opposing views on the direction of RE and CW; they were Baroness Caroline Cox and Dr Graham Leonard, then Bishop of London. Lord Baker of Dorking was approached later. They all agreed to give an interview, Lady Cox in the House of Lords, Dr Leonard at his home, and Lord Baker in his London office. As with the headteacher colleagues, the use of a dictaphone was negotiated to facilitate later transcription. The culture of the House of Lords was unknown territory for me and I was keen to glean from Lady Cox as much contextual information as possible. Spradley, in his 1979 account of an unstructured interview, highlights the importance of the need to understand rather than explain any attitudes expressed (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:366). This was a major objective in all the unstructured interviews; the respondents in this case represented opposite ends of the political spectrum. Their different perspectives, cogently and persuasively expressed, were easier to understand than to explain, making the analysis all the richer for being more demanding.

#### 6.4 Discourse Analysis

Van Dijk (1997) traces the development of the cross-discipline of discourse studies, and identifies the major elements involved in the process of analysis. He argues that the term discourse, used in its technical sense, encompasses far more than the popular understanding of it as simply a form of spoken language or way of speaking. Discourse analysts, while agreeing that discourse is undoubtedly a form of language use, take the definition a stage further by breaking it down into its essential components, namely *who* uses the language, *how*, *why* and *when*. Van Dijk (1997) points out that at least three dimensions can be discerned in a basic study of the concept. They can be identified, first, as *language use*, second, as *the communication of beliefs* (or cognition) and third, as *interaction* in social situations.

In addition to these three basic categories of discourse, Van Dijk identifies a fourth dimension which proved to be particularly relevant to my own inquiry. He names it the *rhetorical* dimension, maintaining that classical rhetoric was the forerunner of the discipline now known as discourse studies (Van Dijk (ed)1997:12). Classical rhetoric focused on the special means employed by skilled communicators to make the discourse memorable and therefore persuasive. An example from Lady Cox's interview (Appendix 1) may serve to illustrate this strategy. She did not agree with the suggestion from one of the Anglican bishops that two or three acts of well prepared worship per week might make for better quality than five hastily prepared acts. Instead of explaining her reservations she merely described the bishop's opinion as 'illogical', thereby shifting the focus from her own views and dismissing without discussion opinions she did not share.

A powerful rhetorical strategy developed by Lord Baker (Appendix 3), also noted by Barber (1994) was that, when challenged on a particular assertion, he would simply repeat his original statement without elaboration but with added emphasis. The implication given by Lord Baker was that he had been mis-heard, or, more uncomfortable still, misunderstood by the listener. The focus is again shifted away from the speaker, who thereby avoids addressing the issues raised. Van Dijk (1997) also discusses the notion of the disinterested or objective analyst as one of the



dominant norms of scholarship. He then raises another possibility, that of the critical analyst, who becomes actively involved “as soon as one studies power abuse, dominance or inequality (ibid p 22) in a given discourse. My own position on the dominance of Christianity in the 1988 legislation was challenged and re-defined during the work of analysis, particularly of the discourse of Lady Cox and Lord Baker.

Empirical research based on personal narratives presents major challenges, particularly in terms of the researcher’s need to interrogate data to “uncover the contradictions and negations embodied in any objective description” (Kincheloe and MacLaren, cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1994:144). Kincheloe in particular argues that the way empirical data are analysed and interpreted is heavily dependent on the way it is theoretically framed. This is where Grounded Theory (see 6.5 below) comes into its own; it evolves as a result of the findings, instead of the findings being fitted into an existing theoretical framework. However, the researcher’s struggle lies in engaging with such contradictions and negations as are exposed by a critical analysis of a given discourse. It was important to decide whether what was heard was what the speaker either wanted her / his listener to hear (e.g. that worship was a totally positive and enriching experience for all participants in that particular school) or imagined the interviewer wanted to hear (e.g. that worship enjoyed an honoured and valued place in the daily life there). Einstein’s early assertion that “what we see is not what we see but what we perceive” is pertinent in this context. All knowledge has to be interpreted by process of human judgement, and any apparent contradictions surfaced, even though few may be resolved. Such an apparent contradiction was exemplified by one headteacher, a confirmed evangelical Christian, who was of the opinion that worship would, and should, eventually disappear from county schools altogether. There would seem to be in this statement a direct conflict between this man’s religious and professional convictions, which serves to highlight the many inconsistencies which characterise human discourse. According to Hammersley (1986) particular perspectives may become institutionalised, thereby rendering invisible fundamental contradictions. In other words “what a speaker ‘means’ will often depend on who he is, when and where he is, and on his relationship to the listener”. (Furlong and Edwards 1986:57)

Lemke's notion of a social theory underpinning all discourse, which develops this theme (Lemke 1995), is an essential caveat for the analyst, whose task, he maintains, is complicated by the fact that:

“Our viewpoints and our habits of action define the historical period in which we live, the cultural traditions that have shaped us, and the typical life experiences within the community of people of our age, gender and social position.” (Lemke 1995:19)

He also stresses that if a social theory is to be of use, it must be *dynamic*, not static, and capable of reflecting the changing patterns in society. Next, it must be *critical*, identifying those elements of discourse which serve to perpetuate injustice disguised as “common sense necessity”. (Lemke 1995:20) Finally, such a theory must be *unitary* in that a link is forged between each social event and the larger patterns of society. IN other words, there must be some connection between the experiences and perceptions of individuals and their significance in the wider society. The difficulty with this, according to Lemke, is that the perspective of each individual is conditioned by her/his position in society, and the ideal of the complete objectivity of the researcher is therefore unattainable. However, given an awareness of the fact that “we are all inside our social system” (ibid p 20) researchers are in a better position to question their own perceptions and assumptions. Bourdieu (1992, cited in Lemke 1995:20), identifies this as the principle of reflexive sociology.

Lemke argues that reflexive sociology is needed to surface some of the fundamental assumptions that lie behind the practices of educating the young. He points out, for instance, that the beliefs, values and practices of certain groups are allowed to predominate. In this connection he maintains that “in our own modern, culturally European societies, the dominant power is held by ... an age-group mainly in its fifties and sixties”. (ibid p 137) The viewpoints of the three respondents in the unstructured interviews, Lady Cox, Bishop Leonard and Lord Baker, serve to illustrate the accuracy of Lemke's assertions. They were all people of maturity, their most formative years having been spent in a settled, relatively affluent environment. Their religious background was a Christianity rooted in Englishness, a faith nurtured by a traditional educational experience. Only one of the three, Dr Leonard, seemed to have discarded (to some extent) the uniquely Anglican traditions which he had



espoused for the greater part of his life, to embrace Roman Catholicism. He was also the only one who displayed a working knowledge of world faiths other than Christianity, although Lady Cox had actively engaged with people of other faiths in her humanitarian missions, which were carried out under Christian auspices. All three were in the fortunate position of being able to choose how to spend their working lives. Lady Cox seemed to find few gender barriers in either her parliamentary career or her extensive journeyings. Lemke's observations on the influence of the environment on an individual's perception of the world are central to an understanding of their discourse.

Interpretation is itself dependent on the researcher's own ideological assumptions. This kind of critical research, set in a post-modern culture, is a complex process. Kincheloe's discussion on postmodernism highlights the lack of consensus as to what it really is (1994:142), although he locates it in the present era which, he claims, is "marked by ... a loss of faith in the power of reason, and a shattering of traditional religious orthodoxies". Post-modern social theory, he argues, rejects what he calls the myth of the autonomous subject, and that "reality is socially constructed". Stronach and MacLure (1997) maintain that post-modernism cannot (and logically should not) be defined, offering instead some examples of the interpretation of interview data. This type of deconstruction is, they claim, characteristic of a post-modernist approach. The account of how their interview with a headteacher, conducted with a democratic approach, was later interpreted and deconstructed in an "imposed, devious and unilateral way" (1997:54) offers salutary reading for anyone engaged in this type of investigation. Warning against the resultant tendency of the post-modern critique to lead to "nihilism and inaction", Kincheloe (1994) maintains that it can, if used proactively, contribute to "new understandings of how power operates". In the context of this present investigation, each participant, the individual teachers and the interviewer may well come to a deeper understanding of the issues discussed, for example the way the law may be used to reinforce rather than reinvent the prevalent culture of a school. This is particularly appropriate in a multifaith environment, where Christianity may be the minority religion and yet accorded 'predominant' status in the legislation. Discourse analysis, therefore, is a complex activity full, not only of potential pitfalls, but also offering valuable insights.

## 6.5 Grounded Theory

According to Richardson (1996), the idea of grounded theory, that is, theory “grounded” in semi-structured interviews, field-work observations and the like, emerged in the 1960s as a counterbalance to the more traditional quantitative inquiry. Glaser and Strauss, who pioneered its development, published a seminal work in 1967 which was designed to close what they called the “embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research”. (Glaser and Strauss 1967:viii) Their main concern was the apparent preoccupation in quantitative research with a few highly abstract ‘grand’ theories which they believed impoverished the findings; researchers saw and recorded only what they were looking for. In grounded theory this process is reversed; the emerging theory is a direct result of the findings, instead of predetermined theory being used to establish their validity. This was by no means the first time concerns about ‘grand’ theories had been expressed, however; Dilthey, for instance, deplored in 1894 the folly of pursuing “causal explanation at the expense of establishing understanding”. (Pidgeon 1996:76) Pidgeon also cites the case-study of the “so-called Chicago school of social psychology in the 1920s and 1930s” as a forerunner of the grounded theory movement. His claims rest on the emphasis placed in case studies on the significance of the particular social context in which the investigation is carried out. This emphasis, according to Pidgeon, results in

“a model that is flexible, that is carried out in everyday contexts and that has as its goal the (co)-construction of participants’ symbolic worlds and social realities”. (Pidgeon 1996:77)

In this particular empirical research, these “symbolic worlds” were the schools and the “social realities” the variety of religious beliefs and values the pupils and teachers represented. Such environments offer a rich potential for social, cultural, moral, spiritual and religious development.

### 6.5.1 Grounded Theory as a research tool



When using this general methodology the researcher may find that the theory is generated initially from the findings, or that any existing theory may be elaborated, modified or perhaps even challenged by them. The relationship between the theory and the findings must be preserved by rigorous analysis; reporting the findings, however, must entail some form of interpretation of what is observed, heard or read. The basic purpose of the investigation was to test the hypothesis that schools in a multifaith area would have difficulty in complying with the requirements of the 1988 Act vis à vis the daily act of worship. The hypothesis was based partly on the findings of the 1994 NAHT conference which reported serious professional concerns. These concerns centred on current legislation, 69% considering the daily requirement of CW “impossible”, and on the right of headteachers and other staff to absent themselves from compulsory worship. These findings, however, appeared to have no relevance for these interviewees; what did emerge, however, was a fundamental ambivalence about the nature and purpose of school worship itself. For this reason I adapted my initial approach as the research progressed. I did, however, pursue some aspects of my original investigation, such as the influence of the leaders of the various local faith communities in an individual school’s act of worship, and the role of the local SACRE in the formulation of the CW policy in the schools visited.

Glaser and Strauss stress the importance of maximum flexibility in the early stages of the project, so that the researcher can develop a basic data corpus. This involves generating codes to classify what they call “low level concepts” (Pidgeon 1996:77) and the more abstract categories. These codes as they applied to this work are addressed below (Section 6.5.3); a typical example of a low level concept was what the speaker was actually referring to when speaking of worship in a given school, and the latter, the more abstract ideas about the nature and function of worship in human activity. To this end, the semi-structured interviews with the teachers were organised around a set of questions, some of which were explored more or less thoroughly depending on the enthusiasm of the speaker. With the members of the House of Lords the questions had a different slant in that they were designed to evoke memories of the occasions when the subject was debated in the House, and how their opinions on the implementation of the law had developed over the years.



However, Glaser and Strauss are at pains to point out that although coding is a key feature of this methodology, it must not be used merely as a tool for content analysis. Content or discourse analysis relies heavily on the related criteria of validity and reliability, which are useful in generating new theory. It has been argued above that the generation of new theory is not the primary aim of grounded theory; rather it is in what Pidgeon calls the “dynamic relation between data analysis and data collection” that the unique nature of grounded theory is found. Data collection, instead of being completed before analysis begins, in fact feeds into the sampling of new data.

### 6.5.2 The application of Grounded Theory

Strauss and Corbin (1990) identify three fundamental elements applicable to any research problem; first, the perceived problem itself, second, the technical literature and third, the personal and professional experience of the researcher. My original intention was to research the impact of the ERA requirements for Collective Worship in schools with a high proportion of non-Christians on roll. During the course of the investigation it became clear that a more fundamental issue was the nature and purpose of worship in a school context; this was a classic example of the Grounded Theory evolving at the data-collecting phase, as outlined above. The first of the three elements, therefore, that of the perceived problem, underwent a gradual shift and the interviews reflect this fact. The interview questions remained the same, however; there was merely a shift in emphasis.

The second element identified by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is that of the body of technical literature on the topic. In spite of the detailed legal demands surrounding school worship, there was little evidence of the large-scale research projects such as those targeting, for instance, the core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science in the National Curriculum, and high-profile foundation subjects such as Information Technology and History. The post-1988 literature and research reports on RE and worship produced, for example, by Hull (1989, 1990 and 1994), the Christian Education Movement (Gent 1989), McCreery (1993) and the Culham College Institute (1996) do, however, address some crucial issues. It was apparent that more



study into the ongoing effects of the legislation would be timely. “A researcher’s reading on a subject may suggest that a new approach is needed to solve an old problem” (Strauss and Corbin 1990:35) accurately reflected my own professional convictions.

The third and final element in the research problem is that of the researcher’s personal and professional experience. My own training in, and regular practice of, personal prayer has given me an insight into its benefits, both spiritual and psychological. This was a fact it was essential constantly to bear in mind, and this for two reasons. First, my experience predisposes me to value worship as a worthwhile activity; second, it could for that very reason give rise to untested assumptions about the experiences and values of others. Clough (1992) speaks of the importance of exposing “biases and taken-for-granted notions,” leading to alternative ways of looking at the data. (Fontana and Frey 1992:372) My professional experience had also been gained almost entirely in RC establishments, as a pupil, as a student and as a teacher, where corporate worship was built into the daily routine. For this reason it was important to make conscious efforts to disregard my own background in the quest for a more informed understanding in my research. Hence the choice of schools in the state sector; in this environment I was the visitor and the inquirer; it was reasonable to assume that I knew nothing of the educational values or priorities of the interviewees. It was possible to take on the traditional role of the ethnographer, whose task, according to Brice Heath, is to describe:

“the ways of living of a social group, usually one in which there is group recognition by the members that they indeed must live and work together to retain group identity”.  
(Hammersley [ed] 1986:105)

### 6.5.3 The Coding Process

Strauss and Corbin maintain that coding is “the central process by which theories are built from data”. (Strauss and Corbin 1990:57) Since Grounded Theory is designed to build rather than simply test existing theory, it is important for the researcher constantly to ask questions if the resultant analysis is to generate new ways of approaching an old problem.

The topics raised in the structured interviews I conducted with the teachers centred around three main areas.

1. The first broad heading in the questioning process was the perceived **purpose(s) of worship** in a state school. This aimed to elicit the respondents’ educational philosophy with regard to school worship, rather than their religious convictions.
2. The second was the **impact of the legal requirements**; this area was further subdivided into the “predominantly Christian” emphasis, the flexibility offered by the 1988 Act and the rights of non-participation of staff and pupils.
3. Under the third heading, the questions explored the role of **Collective Worship** in the curriculum in terms of **spiritual and moral development** and included some speculation on its future in state schools.

The unstructured interviews were more difficult both to conduct and to codify, since they were both given by people skilled in the art of communicating their ideas in a highly persuasive way. It was therefore necessary to codify their responses and group them, again around three main areas.

1. **Their religious convictions and cultural background.**
2. **Their recollections of significant events in the passing of the Bill through the Lords.**
3. **Their perception of the purpose and effects of the legislation.**

There were risks involved in grouping the two sets of responses (in the structured and the unstructured interviews) into the broad categories named above. Strauss and Corbin warn the users of their Grounded Theory methods against the urge to list “hundreds of conceptual labels” which become unmanageable. (Strauss and Corbin



1990:65) The other extreme, that of broad categorisation, carries the danger of oversimplifying the issues. An attempt has been made to steer a course which avoids both these potential pitfalls, by leaving some of the significant discourse to speak for itself but adding explanatory notes, based on personal recollections of the interviews, where the responses seem to require some clarification.

## **6.6 The Structured Interviews**

“Collective Worship and assembly are distinct activities. Although they may take place as part of the same gathering, the difference between the two should be clear.” (DFE Circular 1/94, para 58)

The interviews conducted with headteachers in Preston over a period of three months were designed to surface themes of common concern in the statutory requirements for Collective Worship, especially in a multifaith area. The schools were chosen because of their location; for the most part they were near the centre of the city and had a high proportion of pupils from the ethnic minority communities, notably Muslims. The interviews explored similar themes, although there was a certain degree of latitude exercised where a point was of particular interest to the respondent. All but one of the respondents volunteered the information that they were at least nominal Christians, expressing this fact in terms such as “I have a background of faith”. One described herself as being “about as near to an atheist as you could get”. At least three were regular churchgoers from different Christian traditions; personal faith commitment did not feature in the questioning schedule so some of this information had to be inferential. Because they worked in a multifaith area, however, they made a conscious distinction between their personal faith and their professional practice; they did not consider it appropriate that acts of worship in their schools should be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” as required by law. [ERA 1988 s 7(1) and Education Act 1993 s 138(2)]

## **6.7 Analysis of the Interviews**

Twelve respondents in all were interviewed for about an hour. Nine were headteachers of county primary schools in varying stages of their career; some had been recently appointed and others had been in post well before the advent of the National Curriculum. The tenth was the RE co-ordinator for one of these schools, with a working knowledge of the various religious traditions in the area. “I actually



live within this community,” she said, “and I know the people at the Mosque very well; they lend me books, and we talk and discuss ...” The head of a church school was interviewed by way of comparison, but her approach to Collective Worship was so different in purpose and content as to make meaningful comparison impossible. Last to be interviewed was the head of a single-sex comprehensive school. The perspective of this headteacher was heavily influenced by the fact that there was a high proportion (about 20%) of Muslim girls in her school, drawn from a wide area on account of the parents’ demand for a virtually all-female environment for their daughters. The interviews given by the heads of the church school and the comprehensive school are for the most part analysed separately since their views add another dimension to the issues discussed. For reasons identified in the Introduction (see p. 5 of this work), county primary schools were the main focus of the empirical investigation. Representatives from both the denominational and the secondary sectors were included, as it was considered it might be interesting to compare their perspective with that of the county primary headteachers; this proved indeed to be the case.

### **6.7.1 The purpose(s) of worship in a state school**

All the answers cited some form of community-building as the main justification and purpose. These perceptions were expressed in personal, subjective terms and revealed something of the respondent’s educational philosophy. “It’s to do with growing as a person,” said one, while others expressed the hope that their assemblies gave the children a “feeling of belonging”. The promotion of a common ethos was a major aim, most linking it with their behaviour policy and consideration for others. Only one made an oblique reference to worship; she invited pupils to “take part in their own way” without insisting that they engaged in any form of prayer. However, the same teacher always offered an opportunity for prayer for those participants who wished to pray. Almost all the headteachers operated the kind of weekly gathering where pupils were singled out for achievement of some kind: improvement in work or behaviour was acknowledged and rewarded in a variety of ways, one describing it as her “Superstars’ assembly”. What emerged very clearly was that prayer, if it was there at all, was not a central feature of these gatherings. None of the respondents



referred to the notion of “reverence or veneration paid to a divine being or power” (DFE 1/94 para 57) which was apparently a high priority in the intentions of the legislators. However, what underpinned all the planning and delivery was the intention to create conditions conducive to personal reflection. Thoughts and questions were introduced, asking pupils to consider how they behaved towards one another, and addressing any “matters of school life which need attention”, (presumably unacceptable behaviour of one kind or another) but the practice of using the gathering as an opportunity to harangue the pupils was apparently not given a high priority in their thinking.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of community-building was given tangible expression in one school, where children who had shown sensitivity in this process, either by some kind of care for others or by a general improvement in the desired behaviour, were invited to add a paper brick to an illustration of a wall, above a notice which read “We are building a better school.” Another headteacher described the experience as fostering a “feel-good” factor. Although Circular 1/94 stresses that “Collective Worship and Assembly are distinct activities” (para 58) only one of the respondents alluded to this distinction, and even here the difference between the two was not clear. She implied that worship could be a natural progression from a meeting whose purpose was primarily administrative, asserting that “you can assemble the school just to give out messages, which becomes part of the collective worship of the school”. The implied connection was not developed in her answer. Another respondent expressed an intention to “introduce the children to the existence of something other than the here-and-now”, although she was extremely reluctant to be perceived as evangelising. This was endorsed by another who vigorously resisted the role of surrogate clergyman: “I don’t see it as part of my job to increase the numbers who go to church,” he said.

It is axiomatic that all the headteachers would be at pains to present their school gatherings in a positive light. However, given that this is the case (and there is no obvious means of eliminating this phenomenon) there was remarkable consensus as

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<sup>1</sup> This was sharply contrasted by the headteacher of the church school who admitted that she sometimes corrected inappropriate behaviour by claiming “You’re irritating me so you’re probably annoying God as well.”



to the value of giving the pupils positive messages about themselves and their school environment. The first main fact to emerge from this set of responses was that the clear distinction made in the government circular 1/94 between assembly and collective worship has not permeated the thinking of those directly responsible for the preparation and delivery of both. This is due in no small measure to the ambivalent wording on this matter adopted by the Circular, which, after stressing the difference, goes on to assert that

*“Collective Worship can, nevertheless, be related to the day to day life, aspirations and concerns of the school.”*  
(1/94 para 58, my italics)

The second fact, which is a corollary to this, was the lack of clarity in the matter of prayer as an integral part of the process. It was not seen as an essential element, and although it did feature in some gatherings, there was no discernible pattern as to when it was considered appropriate. This was the clearest evidence that worship in schools like these has evolved into a form which bears no resemblance to a traditional church service, whose whole purpose is corporate prayer. Adult memories of school assemblies in “a story, a hymn and a prayer” format may no longer apply, but the perception persists. Any identification of God’s will with that of the headteacher, implied by an emphasis on obedience and conformity, may go some way to account for the massive rejection of organised religion by most young school leavers, particularly if relationships with teachers have been problematic. There was also some evidence of a mismatch between rhetoric and reality in another respondent’s comments about having a few members of staff with her at assembly “just to crack the whip and hold their attention”.

In summary, the educational purpose of school worship was expressed in essentially practical terms. Those purposes included the promotion of self-esteem, a sense of belonging to the school community and the establishment of acceptable behaviour, the notion of self-improvement and the celebration of success. Ideas of “something other than the here-and-now” and opportunities for prayer were at best optional extras and at worst peripheral to the experience.

## 6.7.2 The impact of the legal requirements

A survey on RE and Collective Worship conducted at the 1994 Easter Conference of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) produced the following statistics:

79% of all schools find the current expectations for both unacceptable

69% did not consider it possible to comply with the law on either

31% of headteachers are considering whether to exercise their right not to lead Collective Worship

45% have staff who exercise their right not to teach RE (*and presumably attend Collective Worship – my italics*)

The NAHT is the preferred teachers' association for most primary heads and deputies, so the implications of these statistics are far-reaching. Questions in the structured interviews were based on the assumption that this situation would be reflected in the targeted schools. Key aspects of the relevant legislation, including the predominantly Christian emphasis, the flexibility offered by the Act and the rights of non-participation of staff and pupils, were explored with the respondents at some length.

### (i) The predominantly Christian emphasis

The 1988 requirement that the majority of acts of Collective Worship each term should be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” (ERA Section 7:1) presented problems which, though significant, were not insurmountable for the respondents. The majority opinion was that such a requirement was inappropriate for their school, given the variety of world religions represented there. One head with a high proportion of nominal Christians in his school, summed up his approach by asserting that “yes, we give them a Christian base, because we are a Christian country, supposedly, but people have to make up their own minds at the end of the



day, and to actually legislate for that, I can't accept that". Others operating in a very different situation, for instance, an RE co-ordinator who had an all-Muslim class, expressed an ambivalence over the form and content of the act of worship. She had addressed this by encouraging the children to write their own prayers. One began, "God, you are known by many names ..." and this was acceptable to all religious groups. The Determination clause (ERA Section 12) which requires an application to the local SACRE to hold worship other than Christian, was rarely invoked in these schools, although this had been perceived by the legislators as a useful tool for multifaith schools. (cf interview with Dr Graham Leonard, Appendix 2) One head expressed it as follows: "We applied to the SACRE and we do have a determination, but ... I'm not sure that we really need it ... the families trust us, and ... we do take a multicultural stance." Another had ethical objections to presenting Christianity as the predominant faith in this country; his focus was the quality of faith commitment rather than on the published percentages of nominal membership of any religious group. He was firm in his conviction that he "wouldn't dream of telling anyone that the only (*or main?*) religious standard to which we should aspire is Christian". Requests for determinations were rare in the other schools surveyed, presumably for similar reasons, even though most had a high proportion of non-Christian pupils on roll; one school community was 91% Muslim.

Although the LEA had acquainted parents of their right to withdraw their children from acts of worship, and had actively encouraged them to exercise this right, the fact was that most parents were satisfied that what the school organised did not constitute a threat to their child's personal faith or that of the family. The only group who were withdrawn on a regular basis were the children of Jehovah's Witnesses. It was obvious during the interviews that this practice was a source of irritation to the headteachers, who were obliged to provide supervision elsewhere for these pupils. Moreover, the children were not allowed by their parents to participate in Nativity or Easter plays, to attend parties or even to celebrate birthdays; the staff were constantly sensitive to the potentially divisive effects of these prohibitions, and for the most part were unsympathetic to them. By contrast there was a healthy balance between the beliefs of Christianity and those of other faiths, exemplified by the practice in one school of celebrating Eid, (a Muslim festival) Diwali (from the Hindu and Sikh traditions) and Christmas in consecutive years. There was



apparently no parental opposition to Muslims taking part in the school Nativity play, or to Christians re-enacting Hanukkah traditions from the Jewish faith. The prevailing culture in these schools was summarised by one head who admitted "... to be honest, I don't bother too much about the [1988] Act; I do what I feel is right for the school". The need to justify their practice in the context of the school was a more compelling need than compliance with the law. One interesting point made in support of this attitude was that the notion of equal opportunities, presented as a priority in the 1988 Act, was in fact undermined by the requirement to allow one faith, Christianity, to be seen to predominate over all the others.

The use of prayer in worship was problematic, and attitudes towards it were demonstrably ambivalent. Firstly it would be unacceptable to place pupils in a position where they would be hypocritical if they had to pretend to pray when they had no personal belief in a god of any kind. Secondly there is always the possibility that prayer, however general its intent, might offend the sensibilities of members of non-Christian faiths. To some, the very idea of God as Father is unthinkable; others would find visual representations of God, Jesus or Mohammed offensive in the secular context of a school. However well one may have researched the sacred tenets and traditions of a faith, one may unwittingly give offence by a basic error in presentation, or by handling religious artefact inappropriately. The presence of parents at school worship is a source of anxiety for this reason. The respondents were all aware of these potentially sensitive areas and took steps to avoid giving offence, either by taking advice from a leader of the particular community in question or inviting adult members in to explain their symbolism to the pupils. Where neither of these options was available, some form of wording was devised, to which all the pupils could subscribe. This strategy enjoyed widespread support among the heads interviewed, and may be another reason why so few applied for a determination for exemption from predominantly Christian worship in their schools.

However, according to the annual SACRE reports, the use of determinations shows a slight increase throughout the country as a whole, but it does not appear to be the high-profile tool, which, according to Dr Leonard (see Appendix 2) it was originally designed to be. Both the 1994 and 1995 analyses of SACRE Reports refer to the fact that very little detail about determinations was supplied by the LEAs. In



1994, 57 SACREs mentioned the subject; in 1995 this had dropped to six. All existing determinations related to the Birmingham and London areas. The major danger is that school worship, in an attempt to value and reflect everyone's beliefs, may degenerate into an insipid experience so bland as to be meaningless. This strategy has been criticised by leaders of faith communities, notably the Chief Rabbi, who argues that such worship could become unrepresentative of the vibrant faith it seeks to portray. Webster, (1990) writing from within the Anglican tradition, sums it up as follows:

“It can often appear that speech about the spiritual is expressed through a jumble of concepts strung together in such a way that anything means everything or nothing at all.”  
(p.357)

(ii) The flexibility offered by the 1988 Act

Sections 6 and 7 of the ERA apply to school worship. Under the 1944 Act, school worship had to take place at the beginning of the day, since it was considered that the pupils were at their most receptive at this time. It was required to be a single act, unless there was no room large enough to accommodate all the pupils at once. The 1988 Act, by contrast, while reinforcing the daily requirement, offered more flexibility in terms of timing; it could take place at any time during the school day and may or may not consist of the whole school. The Act stressed, however, that faith groups, even if they comprised most of the pupils on roll, were not allowed to hold their own act of worship separately, since this would be a potentially divisive arrangement. As Hull (1989) has it:

“One could not, for example, in a school where there was a minority of Muslim pupils treat those pupils as a school group and arrange a daily act of Muslim worship for them, unless those Muslim pupils were already meeting as a school group in some other function of school life.” (Hull 1989:15)

Dr Leonard, in his interview, however, expressed a very different view of the purpose of the legislation, when he spoke of his regret that the SACREs were not more proactive in the matter of determinations. He believed that, in any given school, “several acts of worship could be organised during the day in different places

without in any way compelling people, and yet, on the other hand, not dividing the school". His concluding remarks on this matter are particularly significant in surfacing the different perspectives of the legislator and the educator:

"... if you start with the idea that religion is divisive you're going to communicate that idea right through everything ... *we all worship God, but we don't understand him in the same way* ... you can have your breakdown into smaller groups without communicating a sense of division."

Some of the implications of these assertions are explored in the analysis of his interview. The structured interviews set out to explore the variety of interpretations of the ERA flexibility among the headteachers. While acknowledging the difficulties of assembling all the pupils at the beginning of the day, given the rate of unpunctuality experienced, most reserved some time for it during the early part of the morning. It was also an administrative decision, one head emphasising the potential for disruption if it were to take place at any other time. By far the most compelling reason to retain worship at the start of the day was given by one respondent who had experimented with different times and had come to the conclusion that "we didn't like it very much; we had to change back again. First thing in the morning is the time ... to make the best of the day. At half-past two in the afternoon I think it's too late ..."

The flexibility of timing achieved little support among any of the respondents generally, since their knowledge of the day-to-day demands, of both the pupils' need and curriculum organisation, imposed different priorities. There was a certain latitude in that the timing was less rigid; Friday afternoon gatherings, for instance, featured in the schedule of most but the earlier part of the day was their preferred option. Hull (1989) is of the opinion that the 1988 Act ratified what had become "widespread" practice in schools, namely to allow pupils and staff time to collect their thoughts before gathering together as a group. The practice of a period of reflection at the end of the day, common among religious people, was not generally popular, since one of the main intentions was to focus on the day ahead. This is arguably one of the significant differences between church and school worship. According to Gent (1989) "schools are being challenged to develop a unique kind of experience, one which is analogous to faith-group worship but which still retains the



openness and integrity of learning". (p.9) His argument is that the school is an educational and not a faith community, O'Keefe (1990) similarly asserting that a school is "not a worshipping community but rather a worship-enabling community". It follows that the worship offered, while drawing on religious traditions, must take the participants into what Hughes (1985) calls "areas of real significance for their collective and individual life". The journey to these areas, if it is to have educational potential, has to be a planned exploration of the "spirituality of life and experience". (Gent 1989) He maintains that spirituality concerns the "essence or the inner realities", including the realities of school experience and education generally. Since teachers are required by the 1988 Act to take into account the pupils' ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds, the need for maximum professional flexibility is paramount. Acts of worship which are appropriate, relevant and educationally justifiable can only be prepared and conducted by teachers who know something of the interests, life experiences, abilities and home circumstances of their pupils. Conditions which make worship possible cannot be created in a vacuum.

(iii) The non-participation of staff and pupils

Since the 1994 NAHT survey of conference delegates reported a high percentage (45%) of their staff members exercising their right not to teach RE, the interview questions were based on the assumption that this would be reflected in the targeted schools. Once again, the responses did not support this assumption; only one head reported that one member of her staff had asked not to lead assembly, adding that this was not "because of a religious position; he's just not able to". She did not elaborate. The typical situation was that the head or deputy (one of whom was described by her headteacher as "not a particularly religious person") conducted daily worship, although a variety of arrangements emerged, with most teaching staff leading at some time during the term. In some schools the parents were invited to class assemblies, gatherings which the RE co-ordinator described as "joyous occasions", although Christian commitment was extremely rare among the parents. With regard to pupils being withdrawn, however, the position was very different. Almost all the schools had been approached by Jehovah's Witness parents who did not wish their children to participate in the RE curriculum, Collective Worship, religious plays, school parties or birthday celebrations. The heads complied with

their requests but were for the most part unsympathetic to the underlying reasoning, since they prided themselves on their care to lead a gathering which valued every child's culture and belief. Their main source of irritation, however, was the problem of supervision posed by this arrangement, believing that this should be offered by the Jehovah's Witnesses themselves. Heads who allowed their staff to use the time for non-contact duties were reluctant to impose this supervision.

The NAHT 1994 findings were not mirrored in the schools surveyed, and there was evidence of willing co-operation from staff in the preparation of Collective Worship. Not one headteacher mentioned any personal reluctance to lead the gatherings, in contrast to the 31% cited in the report. It is, of course, possible that some might have expressed views in a secret ballot that were different from those in a recorded interview, although that seems unlikely, given the strong convictions expressed. Most did not appear to be intimidated by law-givers, preferring to keep the need of their school and pupils as their first priority.<sup>2</sup> The matter of the regular non-participation of certain pupils because of their parents' religious beliefs was more problematic, however, and arguably required much sensitivity on the part of their teachers. There were very positive attitudes in these schools towards the needs of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu pupils, and leaders of different faith communities were regularly consulted about how best to serve those needs. Jehovah's Witnesses, however, received scant consideration, mainly because of the administrative and supervisory inconvenience their demands created; their children were treated sensitively by the staff, however, in view of the fact that they could not be included in some of the most enjoyable activities of the school community. Their non-participation could become a source of division, which the legal clauses relating to Collective Worship were at such pains to avoid.

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<sup>2</sup> The head of the comprehensive school interviewed expressed it as follows: "You come to a point in your career where it's all you can do. In the end you say "Well, who's going to sack me or put me in prison?"



### 6.7.3 The Role of Collective Worship in Spiritual and Moral Development

The NCC discussion document “Spiritual and Moral Development” of 1993, and the 1994 OFSTED publication “Spiritual, Moral and Cultural Development” both highlight the role of school worship in heightening the pupils’ awareness of the dimension of human existence which may be termed spiritual. Both documents, however, emphasise that spiritual issues are not addressed solely in RE or Collective Worship but in all aspects of school life. Worship is, nevertheless, a major vehicle in that, at its best, it encourages the pupils to reflect on their responses to life’s challenges, including relationships with other people and, “for believers, with God” (NCC 1993:2). It stimulates questions on encounters with good and evil and offers an introduction to the mystery of life, beauty, suffering and death. The motivation so essential to effective learning and to intellectual development generally, is created and nurtured by this curiosity. The authors of the same document maintain that without this willingness to reflect, a child would live in “an inner spiritual and cultural desert”. They identify three areas in the life of a school which offer opportunities for both spiritual and moral development, namely the school’s ethos, its curriculum and its Collective Worship. The interviews explored the contribution of worship to spiritual and moral development.

#### (i) Spiritual Development

Grimmitt (1987) repeatedly distinguishes spiritual and religious development emphasising that what can be called spiritual awareness can be stimulated by religious consciousness but is not contingent upon it. He also argues that it is wholly indefensible from an educational perspective for the school to be required by law to provide an act of worship. He highlights two inherent dangers in support of his claim. Firstly, it reinforces the much earlier notion that worship(which he sees as a “faith nurturing activity”) is the logical outcome of RE. It has already been established that Religious Instruction before 1944 was seen as a means to enriching the worship in which the pupils were required to engage. Secondly, he argues that while good RE is an open-ended enquiry, worship presupposes the truth of what is presented, a point made earlier by Hull in connection with the claims made by the Durham Report. (Hull 1975:99) Hay (1998) who has researched extensively into the spirituality of young children, identifies at least three levels on which this nebulous



concept can be defined and recognised: firstly, as religious devotion, secondly as (in his words) “being fully aware of one’s species-being,” and finally as being aesthetically or ethically aware. He asserts that all these levels relate to a heightening of awareness or attentiveness (Hay 1998:9). Among the respondents in this investigation, that of religious devotion was given a low priority, if it was considered at all.

Most of the heads interviewed expressed their determination to leave the pupils free to participate in school worship in whatever way they (the pupils) found the most appropriate. The 1994 OFSTED discussion paper maintains that spiritual education “helps pupils to acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth”. The authors are at pains to stress, like Grimmitt, that ‘spiritual’ is not synonymous with ‘religious’, and that in fact all areas of the curriculum can contribute to the pupils’ spiritual development. Music, Art, History and Science spring immediately to mind as powerful stimuli in raising the pupils’ awareness of their own worth and potential. As one headteacher explained: “What I do first is to try to get a sense of wonder and awe. We have a lot of My World music, which is very evocative.” Otto posited the centrality of wonder (or fascination) and awe (or fear) in human experience of the sacred. (Otto 1926). A child’s birthday was an opportunity in school to celebrate the fact that that child has been given life. A sense of stillness and quiet reflection rather than prayer, was a regular feature of the worship described.

In Collective Worship pupils can be directly challenged to question, reflect on, and develop an appreciation of what touches them at a deeper level, or in the words of the OFSTED document, those “questions which are at the heart and root of existence”. One head, however, sounded a note of caution in how these challenges should be presented, saying, on the one hand, “I wouldn’t want the children to identify school worship with a church approach in that sense” and on the other “I think that meditation (*to raise the children’s awareness of what matters to them*) has limited appeal.” This man was seeking to develop a completely different approach which went beyond the time-honoured ‘story, hymn and prayer’ format. He admitted to feeling de-skilled and de-personalised by being required “to conform to other people’s expectations; it tends to undermine what you offer as an individual ...”



Another referred to the potentially negative effects of the kind of worship that was less than honest. Traditional school worship, he argued, presented only the positive side of religion, and he felt there was a place for raising pupil awareness of the harmful effects of religious convictions that degenerate into fanaticism and bigotry. In his work this man aimed for a way of challenging the pupils' thought processes so as to effect a reflective response.

(ii) Moral Development

If the respondents found it difficult to express their thoughts about spirituality they had no such constraints when moral issues were discussed. They seemed in principle to concur with the NCC document which stresses the altruistic aspects of moral development, at the heart of which was the interaction of individuals in the social environment of school. They saw their work as instrumental in helping their pupils to "behave morally as a point of principle" (NCC 1993:4) and respect themselves and others. This respect assumed a variety of forms in the schools studied. For one head, it was addressed by creating for the children "the sort of environment that might influence their decisions later in life". This environment presumably included the quality of their relationships, especially in attitudes to differences of all kinds. Stories were used, again to convey a message in a non-threatening way. "The stories I tell," said one respondent, "are adapted to the children: how we behave, how we treat each other." This mutual respect was part of their commitment to moulding the school into a community, expressed in one school as a prayer: "This is our school; let peace dwell here." The need to appreciate other people's points of view was a universal principle among these respondents, and multifaith worship was valued as giving credence to each person's beliefs. "Otherwise," added another "the school just becomes a place of work, where you go in ... and leave at the end of the day without any awareness of the other people involved."

Every respondent valued the school as a pluralist entity, and stressed the concomitant need for the members to grow together "as a family," irrespective of religious issues. One spoke of his intention to give the pupils experiences and opportunities to develop the relevant skills, "so that by the time they leave school they might be able

to cope with the society in which they find themselves". The stories and songs used at assembly were chosen for their potential for stimulating curiosity and empathy in the children. As one respondent put it "it's to do with ... how we behave, how we treat each other". The notion that the assembly was "something to share" was a recurring theme, and if the exercise led to "some worshipful experience" that was seen as a bonus.

The view among many of the respondents was that while spiritual development was concerned with making sense of one's inner self, the focus of moral development was mainly on the individual's relationship to other people and the environment. Although admittedly this is a gross oversimplification, it goes some way towards identifying the differences as well as the similarities between spiritual and moral development. One of the respondents was strongly convinced that moral education was probably "the most important work that teachers do every day, helping children to be better than they were, in all sorts of ways. But," he added "if they (*the government*) want a better society where there's less crime and so on ... you won't get it through standing in a pulpit in the school hall on a Monday morning." Collective worship usually centred on what was actually happening in the school. Typical responses included statements like "We had a problem with bullying, so my whole theme was bullying. The week before it was greed, so the theme was sharing and greed". This is entirely in accord with an understanding of morality in terms of the 'mores' or norms of a society. While sharing of resources is the norm in a healthy society, intimidation of vulnerable members is seen as a cause for concern. Schools mirror the values of the society of which they are a part.

Pring, (1987) however, sounds a note of caution in his discussion of moral development and the role of teachers in the process. He points out:

"An orderly, well-disciplined school, whose members go through the motions of polite behaviour, might have done very little for the moral education of the pupils; their general intentions and motives may be of a singularly selfish kind and their respect for the needs of others quite immature."  
(Pring 1987:63)



Blasi (1980) summarises the wealth of literature on the relationship between moral thought and moral behaviour, exemplified in the work of Kohlberg, coming to the inevitable conclusion that teachers may change pupils' behaviour without affecting their thought processes. Another difficulty for teachers is the lack of agreement on moral absolutes, namely what constitutes right and wrong in contemporary society. As one respondent, in recalling his upbringing as a practising Christian, pointed out: "It gave me a fundamental awareness of how one should behave. But ... as the English outlook on society becomes much more secular, in some respects we are teaching that which is no longer relevant in school". Another referred with regret to "the morals of some people," and came to the conclusion that she did not believe "we're heading towards a very happy multicultural society, which is sad". But neither did she regard the task of moral education as irrelevant, as her colleague appeared to suggest.

"Faced with the moral confusion of contemporary society, it is helpful to remind ourselves of people's continuing search for ways of living happily and at peace with one another ... It is a dynamic search: moral thinking has developed and is still developing." (From a CES discussion paper "Spiritual and Moral Development across the curriculum" pp19/20)

The majority of the respondents were convinced that school worship, whatever form it might take in the future, would have a role in this 'dynamic search'.

## **Conclusion**

The teachers expressed very clearly what they perceived as the role of Collective Worship in their schools. Their perceptions had apparently little to do with the 1988 legislation, which many seemed to view as irrelevant to their school worship. Chapter 7 compares and contrasts these reflections with those of the legislators responsible for the RE and worship clauses of the Education Reform Act.

## CHAPTER 7 THE UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

### Introduction

The next stage of the empirical aspect of the research was to compare the perspectives of those same teachers with those of the legislators interviewed. Meetings were arranged with two members of the House of Lords involved in the discussions on Religious Education and Collective Worship prior to the 1988 Act. The interview with the former Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker, was arranged some time later. The meeting with him took place in his London office and followed a format similar to the other two. Fontana and Frey (1994) make the point that the key to successful unstructured interviewing is an understanding of the language and culture of the respondent. The first imperative for the interviewer is to establish a rapport with the respondent, and the next is how to present oneself. The writers maintain that the establishment of a presentational self which is acceptable to the respondent is crucial to the success or failure of the exercise. "Do we," they ask "approach an interview as a woman-to-woman discussion ... or do we humbly present ourselves as 'learners'?" (Fontana and Frey 1994:367). A judicious mixture of the two approaches was adopted as potentially the most productive.

Baroness Cox, the first of the respondents in the unstructured interviews, was a practising (i.e. churchgoing) Christian. She undertakes many humanitarian missions, often at risk of her personal safety, and has been instrumental in bringing aid to civilians in countries where war has become part of the daily lived experience. Her practical compassion and respect for human rights were clearly demonstrated in all she said. It was essential to preserve as impersonal an approach as was possible in such an imposing setting as the House of Lords and not to allow the uniqueness of the occasion to dull the critical faculties. The co-interviewer who accompanied me was invaluable in engaging with me in evaluative reflection after the interview.



## 7.1 The interview with Baroness Cox

The Coding Process (for details see Chapter 6.5.3) set out to explore

- (i) the respondents' religious and cultural background,
- (ii) their role during the passage of the Bill through the Lords,
- (iii) their perceptions of the effects of the legislation (i.e. how they hoped it would be implemented).

In addition to these broad categories, the text was analysed in greater detail, using part of a schedule developed for the use of teachers implementing the National Curriculum literacy programme. This framework, Language in the National Curriculum, (hereafter identified as the LINC schedule) was similarly adapted for the purpose. The main focus was on **turn-taking**, especially the length of utterances and the control of the discussion topics, and the **relationships between the speakers**. These relationships were predictably complex; my co-interviewer and I were in the House of Lords by invitation and we approached the visit as a fact-finding exercise rather than an opportunity to express our views. The resultant dialogue contains examples of politeness strategies; some opinions Lady Cox expressed went unchallenged when in a different environment they would have been hotly disputed. Some use is made of phatic talk (LINC defines this as talk used to maintain social relationships rather than to advance understanding). An obvious example of this is when Lady Cox commented on the attractiveness of my colleague's Scottish accent.

The use of this framework to analyse the dialogue offered access to some of the power relations discussed by van Dijk in connection with his research on ethnic dominance (van Dijk 1987). His observations on the "persuasive or manipulatory success of dominant discourse" (1987:91) have particular relevance to the interview given by Baroness Cox.

"One strategy of such dominant discourse is to persuasively define the ethnic status quo as 'natural', 'just', 'inevitable ...' most power elites are themselves white, and their power implies preferential access to the mass means of

communication, political decision-making discourse ... and the legal system” (van Dijk 1987:91).

Lady Cox’s consistent use of “British”, “traditional” and “Christian” throughout the discourse as though they were synonymous is an illustration of how such dominance is established and maintained. Her comments, moreover, are persuasive and apparently reasonable; it is only when the implications are analysed that the inherent illogicalities surface. Her suggestion, for instance, that 97% of school pupils are “entitled to a reasonable appreciation of their Christian heritage” takes no account of the many non-religious life-stances (such as atheist, agnostic and humanist) represented in current society. Three categories identified for analysis of the unstructured interviews, namely

- (i) the religious and cultural background of the speakers,
- (ii) their role during the passage of the Bill through the Lords,
- (iii) their perception of the effects of the legislation,

offered ample scope for the kind of analysis that aims, in linguistic terms, to “render transparent what had previously been hidden” and to expose the “degree of inbuilt deformity which masquerades as reality”. (Connerton 1976:18, 20.) The categories used in the analysis are by no means discrete but they do offer insights which are context-specific.

(i) Religious and cultural background

Lady Cox is a practising Christian from the Anglican tradition. She is concerned to preserve England’s Christian heritage, which she regards as being marginalised in the present educational climate. As an academic with a nursing background, she has first-hand experience of the comfort afforded to many dying people by memories of childhood prayers and hymns. She is a prolific writer in mainstream religious journals; in 1988 she wrote:

“Many of our children are in schools where they are denied the experience of religious worship at all, and where teaching about Christianity has either been diluted to a multifaith



relativism or has become little more than a secularised discussion of social and political issues” (Cox 1988, in Burn and Hart 1988:4)

She elaborated on these opinions in the interview; she deplored what she saw as the prevalent multifaith syncretism, quoting the famous description coined by the late Chief Rabbi as a “mishmash” which destroys the integrity of each faith. In this connection she cited recent examples of questionable practice in Religious Education, where pupils were taught about the occult, taken to a witches’ coven and encouraged to attend a séance. This was not anecdotal evidence; the LEAs and sources of information were identified. She expressed grave concern that the context of some widely used RE text books was, in her opinion, highly questionable in its representation of religion generally and Christianity in particular. On the subject of school worship she quoted with approval a member of the Anglican Synod who was of the opinion that “you don’t have to give very much of yourself in worship”. She went on: “All you need is to have a passage read from the bible ... the bible is the word of God, and it speaks for itself ... The music department can provide a hymn, and then have a prayer. It doesn’t require an enormous amount of individual creativity”. This “story, hymn and prayer” description of assembly is a common misconception among religious adults (laity as well as clergy) of the purpose of school worship, where it is seen as a child-friendly introduction to the more formal experience of church worship. The conviction that the bible “speaks for itself” is equally flawed; the bible was written for adults, and the unskilled and indiscriminate use of biblical texts with children is a major source of misunderstanding and alienation. One of the central contentions of this work is that school worship, if it is to be educationally justifiable, has to be concerned with wider issues than religious liturgy.

Baroness Cox spoke of the 1988 Act as “only the beginning” of the reinstatement of RE and worship at the heart of education. Walford (1994) in his discussion of McHugh’s research into RE and school worship in the ERA, describes the role of “traditionalists” in the 1987 Bill. They saw the Bill, he maintains, as an opportunity to re-establish the centrality of Christianity, rather than “the broad diversity of multifaith teaching that had become common in many schools”. He records that in



the subsequent debates the traditionalists met with considerable success (Walford 1994:6). Prior to 1987, the religious climate in schools was what Christian teachers were describing as bleak. The Times Educational Supplement conducted a survey in 1985 which found that only 6% of secondary schools were observing the law on daily Collective Worship. Christian teachers were encouraged by the views of Kenneth Baker, then Secretary of State for Education, when he asserted:

“What the majority of our children have been utterly starved of are the riches of the spirit. Their ignorance of the historic faith of this country, a faith which has inspired so many of its greatest men and women, is a national disgrace.”  
(Extract from a speech given in Crawley, 11 December 1987)

(ii) The passage of the Bill through the House of Lords

Baroness Cox enjoyed a high profile in the House of Lords' debates during the passage of the 1988 Bill; details of these debates are discussed in 5.6 of this work. Alves (1991) in particular refers repeatedly to her insistence on the use of the word Christian in the legislation on RE and worship, although in this she was not supported by the group whose spokesman was the then Bishop of London, Dr Graham Leonard. Eventually, after numerous amendments had been tabled, and introduced or abandoned, Baroness Cox welcomed the resultant clauses in the Act as “historic”, adding that they enshrined “Christianity as the main spiritual tradition of this country and provided young people with opportunities to learn about Christianity and to experience Christian worship, opportunities which have too often been denied to many of them in recent years”. (H11) She also affirmed the right of those other major faiths to *teach and worship* according to those faiths (my italics). Did she mean that only an adherent of a given world faith was competent to teach it or lead an act of worship? Alves (1991) posits a fundamental disagreement in the two phrases, arguing that “learning about Christianity” was educationally justifiable, but that to “teach and worship *according to those (non-Christian) faiths*” carried clear connotations of being nurtured in a faith already established in the learners. The notion of multifaith nurture is a contradiction in terms, equivalent to encouraging a child to bond with different families simultaneously.



Lady Cox was questioned on the concerns she expressed in the House. She divided these concerns into three groups: first, that Christian RE was becoming rare in schools, second that what passed as RE was being presented in a “very political” way, and third that material such as the occult was being included in the RE curriculum. She expressed grave reservations about the value of multifaith RE, arguing that it destroyed the integrity of each faith, thereby undermining all faith. The Baroness reported that she had initiated the debate in February 1988 because of the concerns expressed by anxious parents. She did not identify the source of this information, so it might or might not have been anecdotal. She pointed out that the ERA in its final form acknowledged “the rights of the other faith communities” to have their faith taught by their own religious leaders. Throughout the interview she maintained that the leaders of world faiths other than Christianity were no happier with the multifaith approach than she was herself. In support of this she quoted the experience of the then Chief Rabbi (Lord Jakobovits) who had felt his Jewish identity as a child strengthened by the fact that his parents withdrew him from Christian worship in school. She recalled a “very heated debate” on the primacy of Christianity, acknowledging that “predominant” was not the happiest of terms for the respect and reverence the Lords were seeking to re-establish for religion in English education.

(iii) The effects of the legislation

In her writing Lady Cox expressed the hope that, as a result of the legislation, “Christ should once again be revered in Britain’s schools” (in Burn and Hart 1988:5). She acknowledged that laws do not necessarily change attitudes, but that legislation was at least a beginning. She hoped that the provisions of the Act would enable teachers to respond positively “in good faith”, and to develop something they wanted to do before but “was difficult for them to do”. The question has to be asked: what teachers are being identified in this assertion? Her views on the use of the determination clause were interesting; she saw this as offering headteachers flexibility to “use their discretion” where different faiths were represented in their schools. In the light of her earlier comments it appeared that she had no objection to a leader of a faith community coming in to lead an act of worship in school for the pupils of that faith. She and her husband had chosen to send their children to



schools in Brent, where there are “high proportions of other faith communities and ethnic minorities”, but it would be wrong, she argued, “to shape the whole law for the sake of schools in Brent or Preston”. In her final comments, Lady Cox expressed the view that the divisiveness argument has been used “*ad nauseam*”. The law, she pointed out, “aims to respect, to understand, not to lead to division”.

The press had recently reported the belief expressed by the Archbishop of York, that the quality of worship was more important than the frequency. He was at that time adding his support to the teachers’ unions, who had argued that daily worship was excessive and that two or three times a week would be more realistic. They had pointed out that even the most fervently religious people could not be legally required to engage in daily worship, so it was doubly unrealistic to impose it on school pupils. On being reminded of this, Lady Cox responded by asserting “if it’s possible to get good quality for two days of the week you should be able to get it on five”. Her comment that the bishop’s plea for reduced frequency was “surprisingly illogical for someone who’s normally very logical” was an apt illustration of an observation made by Walford to the effect that someone skilled in controlling the interview process can ensure that “certain topics are discussed and others dismissed”. (Walford 1994:8) She made no attempt to elaborate on this allegedly “illogical” stance.

There were aspects of the reasoning on which her opinions were based which are questionable. From the argument that about 5% of the pupils officially belong to a faith other than Christianity it does not automatically follow that the remainder are either actual or potential Christians, although in 1988 she did assert that 85% of the population currently claim to be Christians (Burn and Hart 1988:5). Alves (1991) also identifies an apparent contradiction in her ideas on teaching and worshipping *according to* those (non-Christian) faiths and *learning about* Christianity and *experiencing* Christian worship. Although, according to Baroness Hooper, “one cannot legally demand the impossible”. (Hansard, July 7 1988, col 447), Circular 1/94 recommends more than simply passive attendance. Since worship is a personal response, freely given, it cannot be imposed by law.



The interview transcript suggests that there was a real meeting of minds, although Baroness Cox consistently controlled the pace and content of the dialogue. There was an abundance of positive affirmation from the three participants (all women), a genuine willingness to listen, and a total absence of competition, confrontation, or what Olesen describes as those “aspects of male control lodged in linguistic and conversational structures” (Olesen 1994:161). The experience offered invaluable opportunities for the interviewers to begin to understand a point of view they could only partially share. A major concern remained, however, in that the words “traditional”, “British” and “Christian”, usually found together in her discourse, were used interchangeably as though synonymous. This perception is not easy to justify; in the absence of consensus or even a working definition of “traditional” (whose tradition?) and “British”, (there are British Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Sikhs, as well as British Christians) such a view is anachronistic and logically untenable. Connerton’s description of that “inbuilt deformity which masquerades as reality” (1976:18) is applicable here. Cookson (1994) speaks of the ethical dilemmas of reporting with objectivity opinions with which one disagrees, and argues the need for “a thorough evaluation of one’s own neutrality” (Walford, ed. 1994:9). This self-evaluation has been one of my major endeavours throughout the investigation.

## **7.2 The interview with Dr Graham Leonard**

As with the first unstructured interview, the analysis focuses on

- (i) the respondent’s religious and cultural background,
- (ii) his role during the passage of the Bill through the Lords
- (iii) how he hoped the legislation would affect RE and school worship.

There were again two interviewers, myself and a professional colleague who is also a Roman Catholic nun, so the conversation was, as with Baroness Cox, a three-way process. Dr Leonard’s recent conversion to Roman Catholicism had been widely publicised in the period immediately prior to the interview; his discourse contains many references to this change of direction in his life. One of the obvious consequences was that as he was no longer an Anglican bishop he was ineligible to



sit in the House of Lords; even as an ordinary RC priest he did not have charge of a parish. He chose to live in retirement but accepted occasional pastoral and academic engagements. His enthusiasm for this new phase of his life was clear; he did not, however, allude to the reasons for his conversion to Roman Catholicism. In establishing a rapport with him both interviewers became conscious of some fundamental differences in attitude between themselves and him, particularly towards authority and the role of women in the Christian church. Atkinson and Hammersley speak of these and similar “masculinist assumptions” in interviews (1994:252) which trivialise the experiences and perspectives of women. The interview was conducted at Father Leonard’s home; it was important to make the best use of the limited time available. Challenge and confrontation would therefore, as with Baroness Cox, have been counterproductive.

(i) Religious and cultural background

Dr Leonard is a scientist by training and brings a sharp analytical mind to his theological discussions. He is an academic with a particular interest in education, and apparently knew very well what he called the “old Teacher Training Colleges”. He regretted the changes which took place there in the 1960s, presumably as a result of the massive expansion programme in these institutions. Like Baroness Cox he too was an Anglican at the time of the 1988 discussions; he was spokesman for the House of Bishops and understandably concerned to keep RE and worship on the curriculum of maintained schools. But in the form and content of worship he held views radically different from those of Lady Cox, based on his first-hand knowledge of the ethnic mix in the diocese of London. He made frequent references in the interview to his personal contacts with the leaders of world faiths other than Christianity. Of these communities, he said at one point, “I got the impression that some of the hard-liners in the House [*i.e. the Christian lobbyists*] didn’t want to know they were in this country at all”. He considered that they were basically “unrealistic” about the situation in today’s schools, drawing on his scientific training to make the analogy of a multi-ethnic society as a living organism. “If I take a cross-section through this organism,” he went on, “what I get is a structured pattern of differentiated cells, each performing its own role. The only time I get a mass of identical cells is if I cut through a carcinoma ... one cell goes wild and reproduces



itself at the expense of the organism, gradually taking it over". He was possibly implying that it was the aggressive promotion of Christianity, rather than Christianity itself, that he saw as carcinogenic in the complex organism of society. He maintained that the House of Bishops' reported resistance to the "predominantly Christian" focus was in deference to other faiths, and an attempt to safeguard religious freedom and diversity. (The Prince of Wales has expressed similar sentiments in his desire to be a "defender of faith" rather than Defender of the Faith, a title bestowed by the pope on the prince's ancestor Henry VIII.) Alluding to the Gospel insistence on religious freedom (e.g. Jn 8:32; Jm 1:25), Dr Leonard asserted that "you cannot take away that freedom and be true to the Gospel".

Developing the concept of freedom and flexibility later in the interview, he referred to his earlier scientific research, which he maintained was underpinned by an acceptance of "the 'givenness' of the things outside me ... I had to accept them for what they were. Once I'd accepted that, that gave me the freedom to explore, to understand, to move further ...". This would at first reading appear to be an endorsement of a multifaith approach to RE and worship to reflect the multicultural reality in schools, but his earlier comments on the value of such an approach are closer to those of Baroness Cox. He described visiting schools where "you'd find a bit of this would be taught, and a bit of that, a bit of Buddhism, a bit about Muslims and so on – all *as if it were* totally reconcilable and *also totally justifiable* ...". It is not clear whether he was referring solely to the quality of the teaching or to the ethics of multifaith teaching *per se*. His regret that in-service training for teachers at that time largely ignored the issues raised by RE and statutory school worship suggests the former, although his use of the word "justifiable" in this context is problematic. He frequently described as "distressing" some of the entrenched attitudes he encountered in the Lords and rejected the implication that "if you didn't do it their way it wasn't Christian at all". He concurred with Baroness Cox, however, in dismissing the divisiveness argument, which she herself described as having been used *ad nauseam*. Dr Leonard developed this theme by asserting that "if you start with the idea that religion is divisive you're going to communicate that idea right through everything". His belief that "*we all worship God, but we don't understand him in the same way*" is reflected in the unclarity of Circular 1/94. Worship is not defined in the legislation but described as being "concerned with reverence or



veneration paid to a divine being or power". (1/94 para 57) Dr Leonard's assumption that "we all worship God" is untested and therefore open to challenge.

(ii) The passage of the Bill through the House of Lords

Dr Leonard's recollection of significant events in 1988 was vivid and detailed; he had also refreshed his memory of the finer points of the debates by re-reading the Hansard accounts in preparation for our interview. This was entirely in character; his official biographer records Dr Leonard's customary strategy of preparing for debates in the House by a careful study of the issues. (Peart-Binns 1988) He put into context certain aspects of the discussions which had been initially puzzling, for instance why the decision was made not to make RE part of the National Curriculum when it was obviously given high status in the Lords. He explained that he valued the organisation of RE and school worship on a local level, tailored to local needs. He had high hopes that in this endeavour the local SACREs would come into their own, but he was disappointed that they were apparently making little use of the new powers given by the legislation. Another intriguing aspect of the debates was that the House of Bishops had resisted the "predominantly Christian" emphasis for school worship. Dr Leonard had tried to explain his objections throughout the debates at the time, although he admitted at one point his doubts that he had been clear enough in his argument. "I said I should have to vote against it," he said, "even though I could see the headlines 'Bishop votes against the word Christian'." On June 29, (in the middle of the night, according to Dr Leonard) an amendment had been tabled by Lord Thorneycroft which appeared to constitute a radical departure from the spirit of the 1944 Act. The amendment would, in effect, allow teachers to coerce or persuade pupils into accepting the claims of Christianity. The entire House of Bishops, with the approval of the Archbishop of Canterbury, was firmly opposed to this development and prepared to vote against it on the grounds of religious freedom.

It was apparently at this point that an anti-religious element in the Lords, notably Lord Houghton of Sowerby and Lord Sefton, added a further dimension to the debate and undoubtedly influenced the course of events. The latter was irritating Dr Leonard by "asking ridiculous questions ... even the virgin birth, the Resurrection and the like". The leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Lords at the time had him



silenced by invoking the motion that “the noble Lord be no longer heard” and arrangements were hastily made for the vote to be taken on Lord Thorneycroft’s amendment. Possibly as a result of Lord Sefton’s public challenging of some of the most cherished beliefs of Christianity, “when the vote was taken ... 17 (*of the Lords*) had voted in favour and nobody voted against”. Dr Leonard’s anxiety about the amendment had therefore been justified, but since fewer than 30 or 50 had voted, the matter remained unsettled. The following Monday when the House reconvened, Dr Leonard and the rest of the members witnessed a complete reversal of the situation. After the call for a division (“in the Lords it’s six minutes” he recalled) to prepare for the vote, he was relieved that “this time (*the amendment*) was defeated without any debate at all, just by a massive majority. It was very strange; I still don’t know how they got the message around”.

Later in the interview, however, he did express scepticism about the motives of the government of the day in surfacing RE and religious diversity as priorities. “I don’t feel that there was any tremendous surge of concern for the content of education,” he admitted. “It was a political matter ... not unconnected ... with the idea of coping with society.” The aims of the 1732 document, already quoted in 2.5 of this work, linking the pupils’ “fear of God” with their usefulness to society, were apparently still being pursued by the establishment. Although he had had little contact with faith groups other than Christianity after his departure from the Lords, Dr Leonard recalled that “they were, I won’t say well content, but they were very grateful” for the way the Act had been re-shaped in the light of their concerns. Leonard’s biographer expresses his admiration for the bishop’s “reconciling hand” in this sensitive process. (Peart-Binns 1988)

### (iii) The effects of the legislation

Dr Leonard’s biggest disappointment, and one to which he alluded frequently, was the role of the Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (hereafter SACREs) when the ERA passed onto the statute books. These bodies, which until then had been discretionary, became mandatory in each local authority. At the time of the interview Dr Leonard believed that in some cases they had never even met.



They were required to include members of each major religious tradition represented in their area [ERA s 11:4 (a)]. They, together with the other SACRE members, were to be consulted as to which aspects of their faith were to be incorporated into the locally Agreed Syllabus. Any headteacher wishing to invoke the Determination Clause (s 12) must apply to the local SACRE for permission to hold acts of worship not predominantly Christian. Dr Leonard regretted the “failure of the SACREs” to make the best use of the powers (“more than they had ever had before”) they had been given. The fact that fewer and fewer local authorities are currently receiving requests for determinations (and my own findings reflect this trend) seems to confirm his misgivings.

The phrase which requires school worship to be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” [ERA Section 7 (1)] Dr Leonard described as “ambiguous”, stressing that it was intended to offer flexibility. He did imply, however, that “a particular school with 90% Sikhs or something” while respecting the rights of those pupils, might provide worship “for Christians who are there”. Circular 1/94, while reaffirming the rights of minority groups, makes it clear that dividing a school into groups “reflecting particular religious beliefs” (para 5) is not the aim of the legislation. So the schools’ dilemma seems to be rooted in the need to preserve unity in diversity.

Dr Leonard’s conviction that worship “should be a normal act in the life of every school” seemed at odds with his perception of the present age as “one of irreligion”, unless he was seeking to reverse the slide into irreligion by raising the profile of school worship. He implied that much of the responsibility for the widespread lack of interest in organised religion in society could be laid at the doors of the former Colleges of Education. “They were places where (*in the 1960s*) all the emphasis was on what you thought and what you felt ...” He saw the ERA as offering a challenge to the relativism which he so deplored. He referred to this relativism again during the interview; his interpretation of the relativist stance is encapsulated in his phrase “judging for yourself all the time, instead of letting the Gospel come to you and hit you”. In other words, the individual’s opinions and feelings should not be the only factors in deciding a course of action. However, it could be argued that those distortions of religion in the past which have required a denial or subjugation



of personal opinions and feelings should also be challenged. The other extreme espouses complete subjectivity of judgement, where the individual's perceptions are the supreme arbiter. He did, however, make a clear distinction between subjectivism and relativism, claiming that in a sense he was himself a relativist. "What I express of it (*i.e. the truth of the Gospel*) is always a relative matter, relative to the truth itself." He did not elaborate on his understanding of truth. He went on to declare himself "not a subjectivist", but repudiated the idea of compelling people to accept religion on account of one's own religious certainty. "You might not be a subjectivist," he explained "and that still wouldn't mean you would try to compel." This may go some way to explaining his concern about irreligion; there is a strong link between this and his view of authority, which he saw as "liberating" if it provided strong leadership. His hope that the legislation would liberate teachers from the tyranny of relativism seems to have remained unfulfilled.

In subsequent discussions, the two co-interviewers became aware of the similarities and differences between the two unstructured interviews. Both respondents expressed a certain dissatisfaction with the outcome of the legislation, Dr Leonard being particularly disappointed with the lack of strong leadership from the SACREs. Both were convinced of the honoured place that Christianity should enjoy in English state education, and of the centrality of worship for learning from, as compared to learning about, religion. Both were practising Christians, albeit from different traditions, but while Baroness Cox saw the Established Church as the embodiment of all things English, Dr Leonard was on his own journey of discovery, having left behind the familiar structures within which he had functioned and worshipped for most of his life. He was arguably in a better position to see the implications of the law, having distanced himself from the establishment. The signs are, however, that the mismatch between what the architects of the ERA intended, and its actual effects in the schools, is at least as marked as under any previous Education Acts; on the basis of these interviews at least, the gap between legal rhetoric and educational reality appears to be unacceptably wide. Laws can establish common principles, which are viable only to the extent that they are based on a working knowledge of the area (in this case the educational environment) to which they relate. The task of teachers is to adapt the legal rhetoric to the educational reality, namely the actual conditions under which they operate. As Dr Leonard acknowledged: "People have



an extraordinary belief in the power of legislation. Legislation is always going to be implemented by people like you and me, fallible human beings.” If the law itself is flawed in that it fails to acknowledge major societal factors such as, in this case, demographic changes and prevalent attitudes towards organised religion, the task of the practitioners in implementing the law is even more problematic.

### **7.3 The interview with Lord (formerly Mr Kenneth) Baker**

A study of the Hansard transcripts for the 1988 debates in the House of Commons reveals an interesting fact. References to religion in the school curriculum are conspicuous by their scarcity. It appears that the whole area was either too contentious or too insignificant to warrant much parliamentary time; the local management of schools, open enrolment, the concept of grant maintained schools and the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority were sufficiently weighty matters for MPs to address without embarking on a detailed analysis of the curriculum. In a 1996 interview Mr Baker recalled that in any case, “the curriculum was considered to be a vineyard in which politicians were not allowed to trample round in their big heavyweight boots.” (Barber 1996) Mrs Thatcher had appointed Mr Baker to replace Sir Keith Joseph in 1986 because Baker was likely to “agonise less and do more” She hoped that his appointment would set in train the radical overhaul of the education system she felt was long overdue. As Education Secretary he presided over the introduction of the National Curriculum, a process described in Chapter 5 of this work ; this curriculum reform became one of the central proposals in the manifesto for the May 1987 election. In his concern to get the reforms in place he antagonised much of the teaching force, by organising token consultations with the teachers’ unions and then ignoring their findings. (Haviland 1988) “They were opposed to the whole idea of a National Curriculum” he recalled in 1996, but we had a mandate, it was in the manifesto.....” According to Barber, he treated his cabinet colleagues in a similarly cavalier manner, bypassing consultative committees on the pretext that “the one subject on which cabinet ministers love to digress in a very ill-informed way is reminiscing about their own school days.” (Barber 1996)



In the light of the low priority generally given to religion in schools around the time of the '88 Act, it was predictable that it would receive scant attention in the House of Commons. However, on a personal level, Baker had more enthusiasm than the rest of his colleagues for reinforcing the provisions of the 1944 Act on RE and Collective Worship in schools. The analysis of the interview he gave in connection with this research centres on the three areas similar (although not identical) to those of the other two respondents, Baroness Cox and Bishop Leonard. These are

- (i) his religious and political background
- (ii) the shaping of the religious clauses in the Education Reform Bill
- (iii) his perception of the effects of the legislation.

The co-interviewers had read Lord Baker's memoirs prior to the interview and were interested to identify any development in his thinking since his entry to the House of Lords.

(i) His religious and political background

Baker was first elected a Conservative MP in 1970 and served as Secretary of State for Education from 1986 to 1989, later becoming Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and party chairman. He described himself as more of a 'doer' than a thinker, and enjoyed an occasional battle with Thatcher on policy issues, asserting on one occasion "I didn't win everything, but basically I did, with support from the Department and the education world, I think. (Barber 1996) Once, after a fairly acrimonious exchange, Thatcher asked him "Why are you still smiling, Kenneth?" He was affable and witty during his interview with us; the analysis was therefore complicated by the fact that some devastating criticisms (of teachers particularly) were uttered in a smiling, almost jocular manner. It was difficult to reconcile his strong political views with his deceptively casual attitude. Possibly Barber's explanation that "people who have been out of power for too long are deceived by their own memories" is applicable here. (Barber 1996) However, now that the "sound and fury of those years in education have begun to fade," Barber expresses his admiration for Baker for the strength of his political instincts, describing him as a "minister of rare political talent." (ibid p 3)



Baker maintained, in his memoirs and in conversation, that the 1944 Act was essentially a religious settlement, and he felt that religious matters had largely been resolved by Butler; RE was therefore not a major issue. It was as though Britain had changed little since 1944, an attitude which was also apparent in the House of Lords debates. He made frequent references to the fact that he was, like “poor Bishop Leonard” of the High Anglican persuasion, affectionately recalling that at his old school the daily act of worship usually began with a Latin prayer. He remembered that during the passage of the Bill the churches remained surprisingly silent on the matter of RE and worship. This, he reasoned, was because there was little or no concern in the church schools about the quality of their provision in these areas at least. They were much more concerned about the future of their Grant Maintained schools. But Baker reserved his most serious criticisms for teachers in the state sector, asserting that RE had become perfunctory because there were “very few teachers capable of doing it.” He was concerned that Collective Worship had also come to be honoured more in the breach than in the observance, largely because of the influx of different groups in certain parts of the country. Once again he deplored the fact that in some schools there were “people who were quite incapable of taking any sort of collective worship.” He did not reveal the source of this information.

He thought it “helped enormously” for RE teachers to have a personal faith, because teaching without some kind of conviction would make it “a bit hollow.” (Another school of thought holds that one does not have to be French in order to teach the language effectively; in fact it might be an advantage for the teacher to have had personal experience of the learners’ difficulties.) Lord Baker made frequent allusions to people of “our generation” (presumably referring to the three of us in the room) who were more likely to have a religious faith, but that “young teachers today” have had little or no religious formation either at home or in school. The suggestion was put to him that the legal requirements for a daily act of worship might therefore pose difficulties for those people who had not experienced it for themselves. His reply was uncompromising: “Well, I would prefer to hang on to it, personally.” Barber’s phrase about how Baker, in his earlier dealings with the teachers’ unions “*swatted away* our best efforts to put whatever the case happened to be” proves to have been apposite. Patten, one of his successors as Education



Secretary, was similarly dismissive of the headteachers who warned him that the law on daily worship was unworkable. He simply insisted that, unworkable or not, it must be obeyed, asserting “it is as simple as that.” (TES 17 Jun 1994)

Baker was warm in his praise for church schools, believing that their programmes for RE and worship were more conscientiously organised and taught than in what he referred to as the ‘secular’ schools. By 1988, he claimed, “the schools had become very secular, and particularly in schools where there was a very large proportion of immigrant communities.” He seemed unaware of the fact that religion plays a major part in the lives of many, although by no means all, immigrants. If there was indeed this apathy towards RE it seems overly simplistic to lay the blame at the door of immigrants.

(ii) The shaping of the religious clauses of the 1988 Act

This interview offered further insights into the controversies surrounding the religious issues. Baker immediately associated himself in terms of religious persuasion with Bishop Leonard who, as the Archbishop of Canterbury’s spokesman in the Lords, had the unenviable task of representing the views of all the Christian churches. Lord Baker recalled that Baroness Cox had made her concerns known at a very early stage in the process. Referring to Leonard’s role, Baker described him as being “pressurised enormously by Caroline Cox” who apparently belonged to the evangelical wing of Christianity and whose exclusively Christian stance therefore differed markedly from that of more liberal Anglicans. He described her pressure group variously as “cranky”, “odd” and (Leonard’s own expression) “the Tribe.” In his determination not to allow such a relatively insignificant issue to develop into what he termed a *cause celebre* he formed an alliance with Leonard and the Department, so that a workable compromise might be reached. He was convinced that “if the Bill had gone back to the Commons in the way that the tribe wanted, it would have been chucked out.” There was no evidence in Baker’s discourse of any liberal conviction in his opposition to the evangelicals’ uncompromising stance, however; it was clear that political expediency alone was the driving force, on his part at least. Bishop Leonard made the same point in his interview (see Appendix 2). Baker recalled that “all the humanist elements, the atheist elements in the



Commons had been quiet so far” and to stir up such a “hornets’ nest” would have been to court disaster. “They would have passed amendments that set us back.” Bishop Leonard’s position, as expressed in his interview, was less utilitarian but the result was the same. School worship was not to be described on the face of the Bill as specifically Christian, and other world faiths were acknowledged for the first time.

Questioned about his reasons for giving RE the unique status of being part of the basic curriculum but not a National curriculum subject, Baker offered two main explanations. First, he wanted to avoid the situation where, if RE had been put on the same basis as the other National Curriculum subjects, “you’d have the religious element taken over by a lot of lay people.....having a view alongside religiously-minded people.” Later in the interview, being pressed on the matter, he added that he considered it inappropriate for RE to be “subject to National Curriculum Review and examined all the time.” (RE and Collective Worship are, of course, routinely inspected by OFSTED teams along with all the other National Curriculum subjects.) When asked about the Determinations clause he appeared to confuse it with the right of non-participation. The latter had its origins in the Cowper Temple clause (see 2.6 of this work) whereby staff and pupils had the right, on conscience grounds, to absent themselves from acts of worship. Determinations, which only came into being in the 1988 Act, gave schools the right to apply to the local SACRE for permission to hold acts of worship not predominantly Christian. Lord Baker’s confusion of these two concepts was instrumental in surfacing some interesting views on parents. He was again, as with his parliamentary colleagues, anxious to avoid confrontation and “intense aggression” by imposing too many structures. He was certain that if worship were to be made obligatory, there would be “passionate, bigoted parents who would cause an awful amount of row.” The intensity of the debate would, he felt, have been out of proportion in comparison with all his other proposed reforms, so again he decided, in his own words, to “take the pressure off .....slightly.” His attitude was “I knew full well some parents would abuse it, but so what?” He apparently saw the exercise of parental rights, a much-publicised feature of the planned reforms, as potentially abusive unless the choices endorsed his own views. The fact is, of course, that the right of withdrawal, far from being an innovation of the 1988 Act, had been ratified by the Forster Act of 1870 and further endorsed by Butler in 1944. There seemed little point in pursuing the matter; Barber,



at his 1996 interview, had already discovered that it was pointless to challenge Baker on any anomaly in his discourse. Apparently, when he had heard enough, Baker “would re-state government policy in that smooth, lucid manner of his.....it was all very polished.....” (Barber 1996)

Another example of Baker’s ‘swatting away’ rather than commenting on, opinions he did not share, was seen in his response to the view that fewer acts of worship in the school week (perhaps two or three instead of five) might make for better quality. This view had been expressed by no less an authority than the former Archbishop of York. On being reminded of this, Lord Baker hesitated a moment, then replied blandly “I think that bishop’s a bit defeatist,” and laughed heartily. It echoed almost exactly Baroness Cox’s response to the same observation; she added, moreover, that the Archbishop’s opinion was “surprisingly illogical for someone who’s normally very logical.” (Appendix 1)

### (iii) The effects of the legislation

The impression given by Baker in 1988 was of a politician whose main concern was to have the proposed reforms of the entire curriculum in place with all possible speed. Barber (1996) describes him as “shallow, a good presenter of policy in public,” and during this interview he seemed to be simply repeating what he had written in his memoirs. This was in sharp contrast with Baroness Cox and Bishop Leonard, who had both gone to great lengths to prepare for the interview. He had apparently taken little interest in the subsequent progress of the SACREs which he claimed to have revived “because they had virtually fallen into disuse.” (It was one of Bishop Leonard’s major concerns that the powers given to SACREs were still apparently under-used.) Such matters as the Model Syllabuses produced in 1994 by SCAA appeared of little interest to Lord Baker, who made it clear that his involvement ended with the passing of the legislation.

On being informed that teachers were still expressing concern about the frequency of acts of worship, his response was simply “Well, they’ll have to persuade the government about that, not me!” It was as though he disclaimed all responsibility for the results of the legislation once it had passed into the Statute Books. There was no

indication that he had any long-term vision for his reforms, and his comments, particularly about school worship, lacked any sense of its educational potential. What was abundantly clear throughout Baker's discourse was that he was looking back with affectionate detachment on his years as Education Secretary, having made significant career moves since then, most recently to the House of Lords. He was an engaging and genial conversationalist, although he did have the unfortunate habit, also noted by Barber, of interrupting the interviewer mid-sentence in order to emphasise a point as it occurred to him. For the purposes of this work, the chief value of this interview was the fact that the same historical events had been recalled from the differing perspectives of the three main protagonists.

#### **7.4 Comparisons and Contrasts**

In subsequent discussions it was possible for the co-interviewers to gain a greater appreciation of Hammersley's 1979 notion of triangulation in ethnographic research, a development of Denzin's principle of methodological triangulation. (Denzin 1970) It facilitated a form of cross-referencing, particularly in terms of checking interpretations of what had been said, and in drawing attention to the similarities and differences surfaced by the three interviews. The first two respondents expressed a certain dissatisfaction with the outcome of the legislation, Dr Leonard being particularly disappointed with the lack of strong leadership from the SACREs. Lord Baker, by contrast, seemed eminently satisfied with the outcome of the legislation; after the passing of the 1988 Act he apparently took no further interest in its implementation. Dr Leonard and Baroness Cox were convinced of the honoured place that Christianity should enjoy in English education, and of the centrality of learning **from**, as compared to learning **about**, religion. For Lord Baker, however, worship in schools was a tradition he recalled with affection from his own schooldays and therefore considered worthy of retention. There was no evidence in his discourse of any philosophy of education or developed theology, although both may indeed have informed his thinking. All three were practising Christians, albeit from different traditions, but while Baroness Cox and Lord Baker saw the established church as the embodiment of all things English, Dr Leonard was on his own journey of discovery, having left behind the familiar structures within which he had



functioned and worshipped for most of his life. He was arguably in a better position to see the implications of the law, having distanced himself from the establishment.

The different environments in which the interviews were conducted were significant factors in the discourse analysis. In the case of Baroness Cox, it was the first visit to the House of Lords for both interviewers, and it was with a real sense of occasion that we prepared for the interview. In the event this preparation was unnecessary in that Baroness Cox was obviously well used to giving interviews and largely followed her own agenda. The interview with Dr Leonard in his home was more interactive; he frequently asked whether he had answered the question to our satisfaction, given his conversational style and his tendency to introduce related but peripheral issues. McHugh, whose research took him into similar environments, suspected that the ease of access he experienced was due partly to the fact that he is a priest. (McHugh 1994) We experienced a similar reaction; as members of a respected religious congregation dedicated to education we were aware that our views and ideas mattered to all the interviewees, although it was apparent that they had made certain assumptions about our support for their particular stance. Lord Baker, who had invited us to meet him in his office, was affable and courteous but less interactive than either of the other two. It was obvious he was well used to being interviewed and controlled the pace and content of the discourse with consummate skill.

I admit to a certain naïveté in imagining that, because all these eminent respondents were Christians, they would hold similar convictions on the function of religion in education. This misconception is difficult to justify on two counts. First, there are as at least many opinions on the subject of Christianity in education as there are Christian traditions; although theoretically *au fait* with the different branches of both Islam and Judaism, I had failed to capitalise on my own working knowledge of the different Christian churches. Second, although I had made a thorough study of the various accounts of the debates in the House of Lords, I continued to imagine before the interviews that the differences in attitude between Baroness Cox and Dr Leonard were minor and superficial; I now recognise them to have been ethically and ideologically fundamental.



One of the central considerations in any kind of discourse analysis is the nature of the relationships between the participants. Walford refers to a growing tendency towards “researching up” instead of the more traditional “researching down”. (Walford 1994:2) By this he means that the researchers, instead of being authority figures themselves, interviewing, for instance, their junior colleagues or the young people they teach, find themselves interviewing key people who hold positions of power in the establishment. In “researching up” the relationships are reversed; the interviewer is in the more vulnerable position if the interview is to be successful. Powerful interviewees can, and do, control the discourse; at one point in her interview Baroness Cox asked me to switch off the dictaphone while she shared with us some intriguing “off-the-record” information. As has been demonstrated, she also politely dismissed, and refused to discuss, opinions she did not share. Dr Leonard had no hesitation in denigrating the former Colleges of Education although he was aware of our professional connections. On the other hand he himself was in a vulnerable position on account of his recent conversion to Roman Catholicism; new converts to an established community, however eminent they were in their previous milieu, are notoriously insecure and anxious to integrate. This fact may account for his silence, at least in his conversation with us, on the controversial topic of women’s ordination, which had apparently precipitated his conversion. He was not sufficiently familiar with the diverse views of RC women on the subject as to risk introducing it into the conversation, even from the masculinist position of being able safely to disregard women’s opinions. Baroness Cox, by contrast, assumed that our views on the primacy of Christianity in English schools would mirror her own; this was an entirely reasonable assumption, given our religious commitment and chosen way of life. Our discourse was unaffected by the complications characteristic of gender issues; we were three women discussing topics that were important to us. So the interplay of power relations in both interviews was different, each, however, being a complex and delicate process. Lord Baker alluded with admiration to a meeting he had with the late Cardinal Hume on the future of Grant Maintained schools, adding wryly that “it’s difficult to argue with a saint!”

What became abundantly clear during this stage of the research is that the positivist notion of the “disinterested” researcher is an illusion (Carr and Kemmis 1994). This particular empirical investigation was conceived and undertaken with strenuous



efforts to observe a degree of neutrality and objectivity. Although, in the event, the findings are to a certain extent “subjective, context-bound and, in an important sense, always political”, underpinned as they are, by “a whole complex of beliefs, values and assumptions” (Carr and Kemmis 1994:73/74), the exercise was productive on several levels. The process offered an insight into the workings of government in a practical context; having met and talked with Baroness Cox, Dr Leonard and Lord Baker at some length it became easier to enter into their reasoning without necessarily agreeing with their stance. In the structured interviews with headteachers it was more difficult to preserve strict neutrality, since as a fellow-professional I had a working and empathetic knowledge of the educational environment in which they were operating. But this knowledge also enabled me to be sceptical of the occasional over-optimistic assertions about the quality of the acts of worship in their schools; in the present climate one would hardly expect any headteachers to admit to a relative stranger any shortcomings in the effectiveness of their management. But the very clear fact emerged that there is little relation between what the legislators envisage in their deliberations and what actually happens in schools. While legislators may view school worship as a means of re-establishing Christianity in society, teachers apparently use it to affirm and celebrate unity in diversity. It seems to me that, in the case of this investigation at least, the reality has more educational potential, and certainly more chance of success, than the rhetoric.

## **CHAPTER 8 ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF SCHOOL WORSHIP**

### **Introduction**

The three legislators interviewed, Baroness Cox, the Bishop of London and Lord Baker, expressed their personal views about the function of school worship. Their views ranged widely, from using worship as a means of emphasising Britain's Christian heritage to re-establishing earlier notions of morality, but none of those aims featured in the thinking of the headteachers. It has been argued in this work that school worship, if it is to be educationally justifiable, has to be different from corporate worship such as that offered in a church, mosque, synagogue or gurdwara. The pupils do not attend voluntarily, and no assumptions may be made about the religious commitment of any of the participants, whether pupils or staff. In this final chapter the work of some specialists, researchers and practitioners in school worship is examined. These have been selected from a considerable body of literature for the variety of their perspectives. As with Chapter 4 on Curriculum Development, it is of necessity an eclectic account, with representatives of each position selected as typical of the various views constantly evolving. I then offer my own reflections, and the chapter concludes with suggestions for incorporating some of these ideas into practice, particularly in the primary sector.

### **8.1 The current legal position**

Since school worship seems set to continue, at least in the foreseeable future, the main task of teachers is to find authentic ways of interpreting the law so that it is educationally appropriate in its application. This would involve offering pupils alternative answers, enshrined in the major world faiths, to some of life's fundamental questions. Gent (1989) points out that while RE, with the core and foundation subjects, together comprise the basic curriculum, the place of Collective Worship remains ambivalent. Although it is traditionally linked with RE, writers such as Cox (1983) and Taylor (1989) report a variety of opinions among RE advisers and teachers as to the nature of this link. The main source of ambiguity was summarised in 1988 by one respondent in Taylor's research as follows:



“The Act is likely to lead to a growing distinction between RE and Collective Worship, since, for the former, it will be easy to derive and continue to practise educational aims. For the latter this will become increasingly difficult unless a broad interpretation is achieved” (Taylor 1989:58).

The educational aims to which the respondent alludes require an attitude of open-ended inquiry to be built into the RE programme, a gathering of information and an awareness of the need for impartiality. Religious worship, by contrast, assumes the existence of God, for instance, as an accepted fact. Hence the need for a “broad interpretation” of what constitutes worship in a school context. The above respondent was apparently right in her/his predictions, but the emerging distinction between RE and worship does not seem to have been recognised to any great extent. Another source of ambiguity (not to say teacher irritation) is that time taken to prepare and lead Collective Worship is not calculated in the overall curriculum time, although it is still subject to OFSTED inspection and evaluation. The OFSTED review of RE inspection findings for 1993/94 makes no mention of Collective Worship, in contrast with earlier reports. The report justifies this omission by claiming that worship “falls outside the remit of religious education alone” (OFSTED 1995:1). Hull (1998) concurs with this; in the context of Circular 1/94 he expresses serious concerns about how this document, the source of so much confusion, seeks to limit the freedom offered by the 1988 wording. He identifies, for instance, the confusion between elements of worship *consonant with* as opposed to *distinctive of* Christianity, claiming that the theological distinctions this surfaces are “an evident embarrassment” to the public servants having to grapple with them. He believes that the spiritual vision of school assembly “has been lost beneath this mass of inquisitorial minutiae” (1988:154). This spiritual vision goes far beyond the confines of religious dogma in its aim to help pupils engage with ultimate questions of good and evil, life and death, in short, what it means to be human. Religion offers valuable insights but is not by any means the complete answer to life’s complexities.

Hull suggests that the link between spirituality and school assembly should be restored, and that schools should be required to hold acts of *collective spirituality*. This would then be an appropriate focus for the quest for spirituality so evident in the



rest of the curriculum. He considers that Section 7 of the ERA, which requires Collective Worship to be of a Christian character, must go, since it is “deeply flawed”. He had argued in 1989 what was meant by the wording “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character” as applied to school worship. His interpretation at that time was that “wholly” or “mainly” are offered as alternatives and that a school may choose one of the other. Therefore either all or most of their acts will be broadly Christian, as opposed to “specifically”, “typically” or even “uniquely” Christian. The wording is so obscure as to admit of almost any interpretation. The subsequent problems experienced by teachers seem to stem from the interpretation given by members of the House of Lords, which apparently saw the implications in simplistic terms involving the re-Christianising of society. This vision, never explicitly articulated by the legislators, was not shared, even implicitly, by any of the headteachers interviewed.

What distinguishes school acts from church worship is, first, they must not be distinctive of any particular Christian denomination and second, they are usually led, not by clergy or ministers, but by teachers. Hull goes on to outline the options open to schools on the basis of these legal requirements. He maintains that it would be within the spirit of the law that on three days in any one week the Collective Worship would be mainly of a broadly Christian character, while on the other two days it would be something else, possibly involving “mutual understanding, celebration and exploration” (Hull 1989:23). His other suggested option is based on the indisputable fact that “religious traditions are not discrete and self-enclosed but mutually mingle and influence each other” (ibid p.18). This is particularly true of the Judeo-Christian traditions. This option, then, would allow schools to hold acts of worship which, while retaining their “broadly Christian” character, could contain material not of a Christian character at all. I have concerns about both these options.

The first carried the implicit message that all religions are basically the same, that they hold similar values and have beliefs that are mutually compatible. I challenge this assumption, and explore it more fully in the context of Watson’s work (see 8.3 below). The second strategy, involving an eclectic mix from two or more sources, would have the effect of confusing the pupils. This approach would be equivalent to attempting to combine in a geography course, for example, farming methods around



the world, or treating in the same way a global theme of battles in history. Tokenism and superficial presentation are poor substitutes for systematic exploration of what is unique to a specific religious tradition. Such an approach would give credence to the dismissive “mishmash” or “mixing bowl” approach, both pejorative descriptions originating in the House of Lords. It is, in my professional judgement, an inefficient way of introducing pupils to the rich variety of life stances, religious and otherwise, they may wish to explore. If, as this work has argued throughout, the main purpose of school worship is to educate, not to convert, the most educationally appropriate use of the time available is essential.

In his 1998 work, Hull continues to express a real concern about the idea of an “exclusive” treatment of RE teaching, with the major world faiths being taught without reference to others. He cites what he calls the “theology of the DfEE” as being overly concerned with notions of integrity, which he interprets as purity or the state of being intact (ibid p 25). In his view, integrity equals purity, which in turn leads to separation is, he believes predominance; his concern is that this predominance promotes competition and the strident self-awareness of adherents of each faith. He takes issue with the government’s emphasis on Christianity as the heritage of this country, although he is himself a practising Christian. He sees it as leading to the division of believers into the **heritage** religious and the **represented** religion, a distinction created by the wording of the 1988 Act. He is vehement in his rejection of the “DfE theology” as the ideology of *purity, power* and *nationhood* (all of which are recurrent themes in the ideology of the New Right movement, discussed above, (Ch 5.2) insisting that “the (1988) Act gives no support whatsoever to Christian supremacy in the classroom” (1998:110).

In support of his notion of a DfEE theology he identifies four very different kinds of Christianity, three of which are incompatible with the educational approach required of state schools. These he distinguishes as follows:

1. The **God** Christianity, which centres upon universal, metaphysical principles, which looks on itself as *a revelation of an eternal trust (italics mine)*
2. A **Jesus** Christianity, where the believer and Jesus gaze on each other. This is the Christianity of loving personal devotion.

3. An ego Christianity, serving the interests of the self, the group or the nation. It is the national Christianity, the European, white Christianity of class consciousness.
4. A Kingdom of God Christianity, which regards itself as the extension of the ministry and mission of Jesus.

As a practising Christian from the Roman Catholic tradition, I can identify with the first, second and fourth interpretations of my faith. As a teacher, however, I could not allow with integrity the second or fourth categories to influence my work in the classroom or assembly hall. The third interpretation, with its echoes of white supremacy and the control exercised by some extremist religious sects, I regard as fundamentally un-Christian. Hull's analysis, however, is particularly useful in the need to distinguish between personal and professional convictions. The only option in an educational context is the first of Hull's categories, the Christianity which takes God as its starting point for an exploration of a Christian view of "eternal truth". This view is of necessity incomplete, being only one of several; like all other religious perspectives, however, it is essentially unique, distinctive and in Hull's terms "self-aware".

## **8.2 Interpreting the legal requirements**

Circular 1/94, whose subject is RE and Collective Worship, is, in summer 2000, the most recent government publication on the religious dimension of the curriculum, replacing Circular 3/89 with minor modifications. Copley (1997) identifies Emily Blatch as the probable main author, pointing out that the circular included some amendments that the pro-Christian lobbyists had tried to incorporate into the 1988 Act. By 1994 Baroness Blatch was a junior minister at the DFE, and as such was able to present the original amendments as "advice" (Copley 1997:177) in Circular 1/94. As a result it puts into sharp focus many of the issues, both ethical and contentious, surrounding school worship. It makes no attempt to offer a working definition of worship in an educational context, contenting itself with the rather unhelpful recommendation that it should be taken to "have its natural and ordinary meaning" (para 57). It was this precise paragraph, perhaps more than any other, that came under the scrutiny of a recent working party reviewing school worship (Rudge 1997). Their report, presented at a subsequent conference of University Lecturers in



RE, expresses the concern of delegates about the ambivalent position of school worship in that, as noted above, although time spent on it is not calculated within the statutory teaching hours, the educational standards are inspected and evaluated during the OFSTED process. At the centre of this concern lies the uncertainty engendered by the lack of any common understanding of worship to which all educators involved might subscribe. This unclarity is compounded by the emphasis placed by the Circular on the need for active participation as opposed to passive attendance at school worship (para 59). Webster's empirical research into current professional practice, much of it evolving since the 1988 legislation, is a useful starting point (Webster 1990). He identifies much ongoing concern and suggests some strategies for its survival. While acknowledging that "worship fits ill with schooling" (1990:151), for reasons already discussed at some length in this work, he discusses the reasons why he nevertheless considers that worship can still be justified in the educational system of a multifaith Britain at the start of the third millennium.

First of all he cites the accumulated professional experience of organising and conducting school worship, particularly over the last 100 years, since the emergence of the dual system. He then focuses on the deeper insights and understanding gained of the religious development of young people, exemplified in the work of Goldman and Fowler (see 4.8.1 and 4.8.3 above) which can form the basis of future planning. The philosophical foundations of education and the emergent ecumenical outlook give him cause for optimism, and mistakes of the past also come under his scrutiny. While in the course of his research he found some imaginative approaches to make worship what he calls "user friendly", less successful attempts were content to celebrate community values without religious reference. Moreover, even given insights into the developing awareness of the young, teachers find that mainstream developmental psychology has little to say about their spiritual development. The perception of worship as a user-friendly form of potential indoctrination is a cause for concern, while an enlightened Christian theology challenges former certainties.

Having raised these crucial issues, Webster identifies five current models of worship which have evolved in schools, outlining what he sees as the advantages and drawback of each. The most common, he found, is the **traditional Christian model**. This is firmly based on a hierarchical notion of the structure of reality. The



universe is seen as sacred, and unanimity of view is presumed. An act of worship based on this model would use archaic language and follow a carefully prescribed format. Allied to this, and a variation of it, there is the **modified Christian model**, where the form and content are adapted to young people, although the underlying convictions remain the same. There is a determined attempt to make worship attractive. In defence of both these models, Webster asserts that Britain is formally and legally a Christian country, and that the majority of pupils are entitled to a systematic celebration of their Christian heritage. This was Baroness Cox's central concern in her interview (Appendix 1).

Webster next evaluates the **Inter-Faith model**, which he claims is 'embryonic as yet. The underlying ethic is that no one faith has the monopoly of religious truth; there are elements of each which could be included to good effect in a multifaith gathering. Such a gathering could be an authentic expression of deepening fellowship in common worship, leading to a closer bond among the religious groups in the school community and beyond. This has an undeniable appeal, but Webster admits to having "widespread reservations" about this model. He suggests that teachers feel ill-equipped to organise such a wide-ranging activity, and that well-meant attempts could be misguided or controversial. On a positive note, however, it could serve to reduce teachers' ignorance about world religions. It is inextricably linked with, and dependent upon, progress made in inter-faith dialogue in the adult community. Schools cannot operate in a vacuum.

He then discusses the **secularised model**, which seeks, in theory, to express the essential unity of the sacred and the secular, for instance in the use of global resources and environmental issues. The main difficulty with this model is that the secular element tends to predominate, and the divine perspective is thereby lost. This kind of worship has as its ultimate aim, not the fostering of political commitment but is intended as an awareness-raising exercise. Baroness Cox expressed similar concerns in her comments about approaches to peace issues which she claimed, without citing examples, were "very little more than a brochure for CND" (Appendix 1). It could also be argued that this is not worship at all but an extension of the Citizenship curriculum.



In the **Other Faiths model**, Webster offers a critique of the variety of interpretations that faith leaders in the community bring to the argument. He claims that each faith has its own views on the nature and purpose of school worship, which may be incorporated into the planning process so long as the following criteria are met:

1. The worship must conform to the present legal framework.
2. It must not undermine existing school values. (Every school is now required to produce a Mission Statement, identifying its particular values and priorities; the acts of worship must therefore be consonant with these.)
3. There is a clear educative purpose.
4. The models adopted allow for flexibility of presentation and approach.
5. The content is adapted to the pupils' needs.

In this way, Webster argues that the core beliefs of each world faith could be presented in a non-indoctrinatory way, as opinions rather than certainties. The legality of adopting any of these models at any given time would depend entirely upon the composition of the school community and its position with regard to the Determinations clause in the law. His final comments are perhaps the most far-reaching, in that he poses the fundamental question "Can pupils worship?" He argues that there is a broad area between a clear affirmation of faith and a direct rejection of it. Both of these positions are documented stages in religious development and are part of maturation. The only acceptable justification for the present legal framework is his assertion that "educational reasons must govern school practice, not theological doctrines". One of his most dynamic and challenging statements is that school worship in the maintained sector cannot be a "joyous celebration of faith, but a wrestling with demanding ideas" (Webster 1990:159).

### **8.3 Interfaith Worship**

The idea that all religions are basically the same and can be examined in terms of minor similarities and differences is, in my opinion, unacceptably superficial and misleading. One of the dilemmas in preparing and conducting acts of worship,

whether in school or elsewhere, in an attempt to incorporate all shades of opinion, is that these acts may compromise the integrity of each faith represented. Baroness Cox made this point very strongly in her interview (Appendix 1). In a school context this approach is even more problematic, both in terms of confusing the pupils and possibly even giving offence to the adherents of the faiths represented. Bookless (1991) asserts that Orthodox Jews and many Muslims would reject such worship outright, although others, such as Sikhs, Buddhists and Hindus would have less difficulty with it, since they believe God to be at work in each faith (Bookless 1991:15). Watson (1993) deplores the kind of gathering at which a prayer may be chosen from one or other world faith, music from another and possibly even an artefact from a third. She is firm in her view that such attempts at multifaith worship are of dubious educational value, in their implication that all religions are saying basically the same thing. In this she concurs with McCreery (1993) who points out that worship as understood by Buddhists will be very different from Muslim understanding.

Watson's notion of what she calls a "trans-religious" approach would at first sight appear to offer a workable compromise. She outlines a model for school worship which "focuses on general themes of deep religious significance, to which various religious traditions can contribute insights" (Watson 1993:163). The idea that this enables religions to "point beyond themselves" to universal truths is compelling, *provided that a basic understanding of two or three faiths has already been established*. Otherwise, pupils are being expected to generalise about religious claims without a working knowledge of the faiths which espouse them. Watson identifies examples of the insights to which different traditions can contribute, including awareness of Mystery (*sic*), the use of symbolism and metaphor, and the inspiration of saints and holy people.

In support of her model, Watson adopts the ideas of Bookless, who, writing for (presumably adult) Christians, advocates that interfaith opportunities should be discussed so that confusions and misunderstandings do not result. He goes on to recommend that differences and difficulties should be acknowledged so that all the participants will realise they are entering "an area of ... openness and discussion" (Bookless 1991). In a primary school context this would be equivalent to discussing



the finer points of calligraphy with a pupil learning to write. It is, of course, essential to discuss with pupils all aspects of religion suitable for their age and ability, including the darker or damaging aspects of religion such as religious bigotry, intolerance and persecution. But discussion belongs in the RE lesson where pupils are learning about religions; worship focuses more on learning from them, and the approach is predominantly experiential. A pupil holding a violin will not be interested at that moment in the life of Stradivarius. When in 1998 the NAHT again expressed their concern about the unworkable requirements for daily worship, Canon John Hall, the current General Secretary of the Church of England Board of Education, drew a practical analogy. He pointed out that sports science was taught in the classroom but that it was meaningless without the playing field or the swimming pool (The Guardian 28.5.98). The relationship between RE and Collective Worship is similar.

#### **8.4 Spirituality and “Standards”**

One of the difficulties faced by teachers in the post-1988 period was that abstract terms appeared regularly in government documents as though a common understanding of such terms had already been established. “Standards”, “values” and “citizenship” were among the first to appear, quickly followed by “morality” and “spirituality”, which were used interchangeably as though synonymous. One of many examples of this unclarity appeared in a banner headline which proclaimed confidently that SPIRITUALITY AND STANDARDS GO HAND IN HAND (The Independent 21.9.99). The sub-title went on to assert that schools can “achieve better results by teaching moral values”. No attempt is made, either here or elsewhere, to identify which standards or moral values are being addressed, or indeed what the writers mean by spirituality. A closer reading of the article, however, establishes the fact that the “standards” in this context are academic, and the “better results” are higher scores in the standardised tests. Moreover, the equation of spirituality with morality merely adds to the confusion. The article describes how a project sponsored by the National Forum for Values in Education had transformed a “struggling” primary school in Birmingham, academic standards had risen and children’s self-esteem enhanced by a structured reward system. Laudable though these developments may be, one has to question the place of spirituality in this



project, or indeed if it is there at all. Coles (1992) is sceptical of any tendency to “give priority to intellectual operations in our attempts to understand children’s spirituality” (in Hay 1998:46). Spiritual development is unique to the individual, and not readily adaptable to models designed to measure cognitive development. Hay (1998) posits a predominantly biological foundation for what he calls “spiritual awareness”. His substantial contribution to the understanding of children’s spirituality and spiritual development is discussed in more detail below (8.5).

The National Forum for Values in Education was established by the government in the belief that the systematic teaching of moral and spiritual values would raise academic standards. The Forum formulated its own set of values, which included an emphasis on the pupils being taught to value themselves, others, society and the environment. Pupils and teachers involved in the pilot scheme were encouraged to produce their own “golden rules” for living and working together in school. The resultant lists predictably included references to “caring for everything and everyone”, listening, telling the truth and working together “as a team”. These issues featured strongly in replies given by the headteachers in the empirical research outlined in Ch 6, one headteacher describing his approach as essentially “un-dogmatic, broadly moralistic ... really it’s about being a good person”. Linking it with the school’s behaviour policy, he welcomed the requirement for daily gatherings, since it gave him a chance to see and be seen by all the children, and to reiterate topical issues affecting the corporate life of the school ... “to plug that message and keep plugging”, as he put it. He saw RE, PSE (Personal and Social Education) and Collective Worship as “part and parcel of the same thing”, each making a contribution to the development of the child. There was a general, albeit unsubstantiated perception among many of the headteachers interviewed that the school provided the only spiritual and moral guidance which offered a challenge to the media and the advertisement culture to which their pupils were constantly exposed.

Erricker, however, (1998) believes that schools have been given inadequate guidance as to what is required of them vis à vis spirituality. He maintains that the OFSTED framework (see 6.7.3 of this work) is incomplete in its concentration on the personal response of individuals to the environment and “the uniqueness of what is meant by



spirituality to each individual” (OFSTED 1994:10). In this he concurs with Astley and Francis (1996) who are equally concerned that the document entirely overlooks the corporate dimension and omits any reference to altruism. I am convinced that peaceful co-existence can be achieved in a pluralist society in which diversity is not merely tolerated but welcomed; a balance between individual freedom and social responsibility is essential to harmony. Before the advent of the National Curriculum, Wright argued that spirituality is founded on national identity, which must recognise and nurture children into “the specific spiritual tradition they bring with them into the classroom” and that without such a reference point schools may be in danger of “indoctrinating (*pupils*) into the spiritual tradition of romanticism” (Wright 1985:16/17). The problem is compounded by the absence of any discussion of what he intended by either a “spiritual tradition” or a “national identity” in the context of this argument. Some of the implications of establishing such an identity, given the diversity of spiritual traditions in a pluralist society, have already been discussed in this work (5.2 ff).

Erricker concludes his discussion on what he calls the “spiritual confusion” in current educational policy by emphasising the importance of supporting children in their search for meaning and purpose to their life. He suggests that this support might take the form of encouraging them “to express, reflect on, and coherently organise an account of their experience” rather than presenting them with a predetermined set of rules or formulae within which they are expected to operate. “You start with the child,” he insists “and you develop the process ... (Erricker 1998:62). His argument is that in this process the spiritual development of the individual is the first priority, after which comes the formation of a moral code. The OFSTED framework, stressing, as it does, the individual dimension of spirituality, loses sight of what is presumably one of the long-term goals of spiritual education, that of social harmony and cohesion. Erricker maintains that the key to this process is a sensitive attention to the diversity of groups and life stances, religious or otherwise, in society.

Carr and Kemmis had earlier expressed a similar view, asserting that the ethics of teaching demand the “pursuit of essentially moral purposes” (Carr & Kemmis 1986:31). In the context of the moral and political implications of this assertions,



they identified those purposes as the fostering of an informed awareness of the ideological forces and institutional structures which impact on teachers' professional practice. In particular the authors stressed the necessity for teachers to become "more enlightened ... about the social and political mechanisms ... which distort or limit the proper conduct of education ... (1986:32). They acknowledged that this view presupposes a willingness to formulate a personal philosophical stance towards their practice and what they called "a self-conscious understanding of basic educational principles" (*ibid* p.30). On this basis, however, McLaughlin (1996) argues that individual theorising, particularly about such a complex issue as spiritual education, is an ambitious enterprise. In his view any attempt on the part of a state school, (identified, in his rather inelegant phrase, as the "common" school) to formulate a universally-agreed programme of spiritual education would "run into problems of legitimacy". He supports this assertion by pointing to the wide variety of opinions held in a pluralist society on what constitutes the "good life". In similar vein, Mott-Thornton (1998) argues that the very attempt to establish universal principles of spirituality will lead *inevitably* to a reduction rather than an enhancement of diversity and pluralism (Mott-Thornton 1998:172). For him this is the essential paradox. However, recent research into children's spirituality, particularly by Hay and Nye in the 1990s, offers useful insights into some of the complex issues involved.

## 8.5 Spirituality and Religion

Throughout his work on the spirituality of primary school children, Hay clearly distinguishes between spirituality and religion; since religion has negative connotations for many, any way in which this negativity can be counteracted is welcome. He offers traditional synonyms for spirituality, including "devotion", "holiness", "piety" and "sanctity", all of which could apply equally to religion. He cites Tanqueray's (1923) reference to spirituality as "human beings' awareness of their relationship with God", but acknowledges that such a definition would have no meaning for an atheist. In positing a biological foundation for his notion of spiritual awareness, based on the work of Hardy (1965), Hay widens the discussion by maintaining that such awareness is of survival value to the individual. A zoologist by training, Hardy developed his ideas on the relationship between biology and



religion, claiming that spirituality is as natural to human beings as breathing or eating. This is in stark contrast to the Freudian view of religion as a neurosis and the Marxist perception of it as an opiate. According to Hardy's hypothesis, spiritual awareness enables human beings to survive in their natural environment by transcending "everyday awareness". A third connotation of spirituality, after the religious and the biological, is contained in the idea of aesthetic or ethical awareness; this would include an appreciation of creation, in terms of both the natural environment and human creativity in literature (particularly poetry), art, music and architecture. Spirituality has its roots in the Latin word *spiritus*, meaning breath of life. It encompasses

"... a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension (*i.e.* one not limited by physical laws) and that is characterised by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be ultimate" (Smith 1990).

On these criteria it is therefore a concept that encompasses religion but also transcends, goes beyond, and occasionally even challenges it. A useful analogy, offered by Hay, is that of a tree, where the roots are labelled "spirituality" and the leaves "religion". He also draws out the interconnectedness of spirituality, religious and moral awareness, and argues that each is nourished and strengthened by the others. In a heightened spiritual awareness the pupils' horizon is widened, their experience enriched and their sense of personal responsibility made clearer. Hay even suggests, somewhat controversially, that people who are in touch with their own spiritual potential are in better mental health than those who are not (Hay 1998:18).

## **8.6 Models of Spirituality**

There are numerous models of spirituality, notably those of Chatterjee (1989), Best (1996), Erricker (1996) and Nye (1998) all of which focus to some extent on similar components by which it can be codified and studied. A sense of the transcendent is always present, whereby an individual has a belief, based on experience, that there is a transcendent dimension to life. This was expressed by one of the interviewees in

my investigation as an awareness of “something more than the ‘here and now’”. The search for **meaning and purpose in life** also develops from a spiritual awakening; the pupils are secure in the knowledge that life and their own existence is significant. Following from this, and allied to it, is a sense of personal destiny, expressed in some cultures as a **mission in life**; one has a sense of a worthwhile role to fulfil, and a conviction that one’s contribution counts.

All life becomes precious (or sacred) to the spiritually aware, and a sense of awe and wonder is experienced even in non-religious settings. **Material wealth and possessions** are not seen as offering complete satisfaction but take their place alongside other, more lasting values, such as health, physical and psychological security, contentment and a sense of belonging (cf Maslow 1970). The spiritually aware are **altruistic** and are moved by the pain and suffering of others. They tend to be **idealists** and prepared to work for the betterment of their environment. No one individual could be expected to exemplify all of these characteristics, but they serve to support Hay’s assertion that the development of spirituality is much more than a cognitive process; in a very real sense it is “rooted in our biological make-up” (Hay 1998:51).

In 1996 Hay and Nye first formulated three interrelated “Categories of Spiritual Sensitivity”, by which they studied the “rich landscape” of children’s spirituality (Hay1998:59). These they describe as **awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing**. This model endorses the sensitivities identified earlier, and proceeds to enlarge on the three broad categories; a comprehensive map of spirituality emerges. Within the category of **awareness sensing**, the writers examine the notion of the “here and now” claiming that much adult consciousness is taken up with either the past or the future. Donaldson (1992) however, maintains that the here-and-now of existence is very powerful in the consciousness of young children, and that it embodies an intensity of experience that is essentially educative.

Another facility in Hay’s awareness sensing category is what he calls “tuning” whereby physical awareness is intensified. He contrasts two very different experiences: listening to someone talking and listening to music. Music is often more eloquent than words in evoking a reflective response. This implies there are



different levels of listening; the deeper the level, the richer the quality. Allied to this tuning is the notion of “flow” where it becomes possible to become totally absorbed in an activity or an experience that normal consciousness is temporarily suspended. Hay’s fourth sub-category in awareness sensing, that of “focusing”, takes up his earlier observations about spirituality encompassing more than the cognitive dimension; it is essentially holistic. He cites Gendlin’s view that some adults develop their intellectual capacities at the expense of their physical awareness (Gendlin 1981). Gendlin deplored what Hay describes as the “cool intellectual detachment” by means of which people can lose touch with their own bodily responses. Young children have a particularly well developed capacity for their own physical awareness. Some religious traditions present as virtue the suppression of, and even contempt for, the body and its needs; this is another instance of where religion and spirituality diverge. St Ignatius, a Spanish nobleman who in the 16th Century founded the Society of Jesus, (known as the Jesuits) a Roman Catholic religious order, exemplified this attitude towards the body in his classic work *The Spiritual Exercises*. He urged those who wished to progress in the love of God to “consider the loathsomeness” of their bodies, and to see themselves as “a source of corruption from which has issued countless evils ...” (Trans Puhl 1951:30). The subjugation of the body was seen by many religious authors as an essential prerequisite to progress in the spiritual life until comparatively recently. St Julie Billiart, a Belgian peasant woman who founded the Sisters of Notre Dame, (the congregation to which I belong) reminded her sisters in the 19th Century of their privilege in educating the children of the poor. The sisters were to be “daunted by nothing; they must ... surmount the repugnance of nature, seek eagerly humiliations and contempt in order to establish contact with the coarsest minds, love the roughest and rudest children in order to ... teach them to know and love God ...” (*Little Treatise of Perfection for the Sisters of Notre Dame p.27*). Physical responses were to be ignored or conquered in the battle for spiritual progress.

Hay’s **mystery sensing** category offers access to children’s innate awareness of the transcendent, occasionally glimpsed in a “wonder and awe” response such as the incidents identified earlier. In Bastide’s account, some city children at a school camp in the country looked up into a starry sky and fell silent at the immensity of what they saw. In halting, unfamiliar language, a boy described how he “got a



funny feeling inside” and how he “never felt like this before” (Bastide 1987:48). I caught a fleeting glimpse of this wonder and awe when I brought into the classroom an incubator containing eggs about to hatch; this was an equally rich experience for all concerned. The pupils again fell silent, stood motionless and seemed to hold their breath as the drama unfolded. It was only when the process of hatching was complete that their reactions to what they had witnessed exploded into something approaching euphoria. It was for me a profound experience of children’s appreciation of mystery. This capacity is linked with “imagination” in Hay’s model; that imagination by which human beings can reach beyond the known and obvious towards another level of reality, the level at which great discoveries are made. Children’s imaginative play witnesses to this ability, and goes some way to explaining why a cardboard box can offer more creative possibilities than the sophisticated toy it contained. It could be argued that imagination is one of the main ways that children come to terms with their lived experience; this is why the implications of neglecting the Arts, potentially the most creative aspects of the curriculum, are so far-reaching in terms of limiting the imagination. Hay suggests that that same imagination is also central to religious activity. This is a powerful argument for retaining some form of school worship in that it has the capacity to develop the imagination needed to make sense of life.

Hay adopts Donaldson’s expression **value sensing** for his final category (Donaldson 1992). By this she means the gradual move away from the self as centre, towards an appreciation of what is intrinsically valuable. In moral terms this might be identified with conscience, an awareness that is often less than comfortable in its demands, but it could also refer to the enriching experience of sharing in the “delight and despair” of others, recalling the altruism of other models. In his research Hay interviewed young children who were intensely concerned about environmental issues, and not simply on account of the immediate implications. He suggests that such awareness is essential to the development of a realistic, unsentimental appreciation of human interdependence. When teachers invite their pupils to reflect on a topical issue it could be expressing much more than a pious hope that “God will put it right”, and that these same children will develop an awareness of their human responsibility for the planet we inhabit. According to one school of thought, we are all ultimately accountable to one another for the choices we make.



The notion of “ultimate goodness”, an expression which Hay uses in connection with value sensing, is communicated first by parents (notably the mother) conveying a sense of “ultimate order and pattern” to counteract the child’s fear of chaos and disharmony. This process of communication is essential if the child is later to be able to engage with people and experiences falling short of some notional ideal. An ancient text expresses this as the “nurturing of a strength of spirit” as a shield against misfortune (Desiderata 1692). Hay finally discusses “meaning in connection with value sensing. It lies in the developing awareness, identified by religious writers such as Fowler (1981) and much earlier by Paley (1825) that there is a purpose to life and that individuals matter; in short, it is the search for identity and personal worth. It is one of the teacher’s most demanding tasks to help pupils develop this strength of spirit; one of the ways of accomplishing this is to foster in them a reflective approach towards their environment and their place in it.

### **8.7 Worship through Story – a Projected Model**

Supporting pupils in their search for this meaning and purpose in their lives, or what Webster (1990) calls “wrestling with ideas”, demands skill and sensitivity on the part of the teacher. In this task, Hull (1998) advocates that the link between spirituality and school assembly should be restored, and that schools should be required to hold acts of *collective spirituality*. The term Collective Worship has never been widely accepted by the teaching profession, partly because of the ambiguity surrounding the meaning and purpose of worship in an educational setting. Perhaps the time has come, not simply for a renaming but for a radical reappraisal of the whole experience, so that it is an accurate reflection of how schools are interpreting the current law to make it educationally appropriate. It could be argued that school worship is educationally appropriate if it seeks to raise questions rather than to provide answers, if it encourages personal reflection rather than conformity to predetermined norms, and if it respects and values unity in diversity. The short period set aside for this part of the curriculum might become known as *School/Class Reflection, Collective Spirituality, Thought for the Day* (this last description is already in use in some schools) or any other term to which the pupils can relate, depending on their age and experience. Skilful handling of the sensitive area of



religion will enable pupils who already have a personal faith to engage in prayer if they so wish, and equally will not exclude those who hold other views. The organisation of the material offered for this reflection in this proposed model is a combination of ideas derived from Hull's 1998 work *Utopian Whispers – Moral, Religious and Spiritual Values in Schools*, observations of teachers in schools, and personal experience. For an outline of the proposed programme, see Appendix 4.

It may be that the daily requirement of collective reflection, still officially identified as worship, will eventually be modified so that twice or three times a week will become the norm. This would go some way to answering those teachers who consider that the current law is excessive in its demands. It might also make for better quality, since in theory at least, more time would become available for imaginative planning and a variety of approaches. In short, fewer acts could conceivably enhance the experience for all involved. Copley however, expresses serious doubts on this point (Copley 2000). If the legal requirement that Christianity must predominate is to remain, and there is no evidence of a widespread conviction that it should not, the concomitant responsibility to ensure that other world faiths are adequately addressed demands careful planning. My proposed multifaith programme would apply equally (and perhaps particularly) to areas which are currently predominantly Christian, even in a nominal sense, since no assumptions can be made about the future social mix of any urban community. Since the ERA seeks to prepare pupils to play a full part in the life in a multicultural society, it would be unwise to assume that all these pupils will remain permanently in the area where they were educated. Long-term planning of RE and spiritual reflection which is educational rather than confessional (*ie* it aims to inform, not to convert) would ensure that pupils have at least a minimal exposure to the traditions and values of the major world religions they may encounter in later life. Ignorance tends to lead to suspicion, and suspicion to hostility; such hostility results in discrimination in all its many forms. Education is one of the major weapons against such ignorance; another is the daily (albeit vicarious) experience of other faiths lived out in many urban communities. Pupils in areas where representatives of faiths other than Christianity are few or absent may have the greater need for a programme of systematic exposure to a rich variety of religious values and practices.



Hull's 1998 analysis of Christian RE in terms of a "single discipline" approach, in which he suggests a different emphasis for teaching at each Key Stage, (hereafter KS) offers several possibilities which schools might adapt to their own perceived needs. Thus KS1 could focus on narrative Christianity, KS2 and 3 on historical Christianity and KS4 on philosophical and ethical Christianity. Since the primary sector is my area of greatest expertise, I propose to restrict myself to outlining a programme of shared reflection for Key Stages 1 and 2, (*ie* the years of primary education) and incorporating a multifaith dimension which treats each faith as a separate entity, thus avoiding the "mishmash" or "mixing bowl" exposure which does justice to none. The narrative (or story) approach to reflection, the most suitable medium for young children, would require a selection of stories from a given tradition, chosen for their potential relevance to the children's lived experience. It is essential to avoid a representation of any religious faith as applicable only to the past, to other people and to other parts of the world. The faith of believers is a "here and now" experience and any representation of it should with integrity reflect this fact. Otherwise it becomes a highly selective exercise in history or geography, serving only to emphasise the exotic, the strange or the different; such an emphasis would do a grave disservice to the faith in question and defeat the purpose of offering the pupils impartial material for their reflection.

If at Key Stage 2 (7-11 year olds) the emphasis is on the historical aspects of a given tradition, strong links need to be made in terms of how historical events impact on the lives of today's believers. In Christianity, the account of the resurrection of Jesus is an example, *par excellence*, of the daily struggle between good and evil which all human beings encounter in themselves and in their environment. Similarly, the events surrounding the Passover, celebrated annually in the Jewish tradition, exemplify for Jews their belief in God's continuing care for his people. By reflecting on this account many of the pupils will become aware, perhaps for the first time, of the human care and concern they experience at home or in school. The fact that some pupils have less than happy experiences in their personal relationships is not sufficient justification, in my opinion, for denying them a glimpse of more positive ways of relating to others. The Christian perception of God as a loving Father, for instance, may be seriously at odds with a child's personal experience of her/his human father as someone to be feared and avoided, but such experiences can



be countered by examples of different models of fatherhood. Life choices can only be made by weighing a series of possible alternatives; pupils exposed to a variety of stances are more likely to make informed choices than those whose experience is limited to the tried and familiar. The primary school is the obvious place to introduce these alternative ideas and experiences, the emphasis being placed firmly on the freedom of the learner to accept, reject or remain undecided about the underlying principles they represent. What matters is to be aware of them.

Webster (1995) maintains that in the modern context of education it is an obsolete view to think of worship as indoctrination. This is not to imply that it has never been so in the past or that it could never become so again in the future. In researching this whole area I have found my own views challenged, not in a destructive, negative sense but in infinitely positive and diverse directions; the experience has been, and continues to be, immensely liberating. I acknowledge that I may in the past have unwittingly engaged in a form of indoctrination, but always from the best of motives. I was convinced that my task was to lead the pupils in a particular direction, based on my own strong faith convictions, which I believed could lead to lifelong happiness and fulfilment for them. The liberating aspect of my present position is the awareness that the learners must find their own "particular direction" and the teacher's role in this search is to facilitate rather than direct the reflective process. This is a much more demanding and complex task, involving the establishment of a broader knowledge base and by definition a wider choice of alternatives. It could be argued that to deny the pupils the opportunity of a reflective experience akin to, but not synonymous with religious worship, out of a fear of indoctrination, is a defeatist position. The teacher's own unwillingness to challenge her/his own perceptions may present, in Grimmit's evocative image, stumbling blocks rather than stepping stones on the road to a deeper understanding of the significance of worship in the lives of believers.

Webster (1995) posits five educational criteria for school worship, all of which he argues make a valuable contribution to the aims of schooling. In discussing them I shall apply these essential criteria to my own proposed programme. His first objective is the **transmissions of new knowledge**. This knowledge would be contained in the stories or historical events chosen for the pupils' consideration;



ideally it would be applicable to their immediate experience. Webster further argues that there should be a **recognition of principles beneath human actions**. This is an extension and a refinement of the phenomenological approach, whereby pupils were familiarised with the externals of religious observance without necessarily understanding the values underpinning that observance. The uncut hair of many Sikhs, and the Jewish and Muslim custom of covering the head, acquires a much deeper significance when the reasons for such practices are explained. Webster's third criterion involves a **questioning of limits in an understanding of human beings**. I interpret this to mean that the search for understanding is a lifelong process, only a fraction of which can be attempted in formal education. The teacher's task is to activate this process, to point beyond the obvious and the measurable and to help the pupils to identify in themselves and others what it means to be truly human. Such reflections are well within the capabilities of young children; I have frequently been surprised by the depth of their spiritual awareness.

The communal aspect of school worship is Webster's next concern; he applies this questioning of limits to reflection on **human experience – alone and in community**. This highlights the role of altruism which Hay (8.6 above) identifies as essential to spiritual awareness. The narrative and the historical approaches to worship advocated in my proposed model each facilitate a reflective awareness of both the uniqueness and the commonality of human experience. At its most basic level this approach makes pupils aware that human needs are remarkably consistent; to be accepted and valued is obviously preferable, on an individual and a communal level, to being ridiculed and marginalised. Ultimately it leads to a perception of apparent difference as something to be valued, not feared, and the conviction that what unites us is our common humanity. This in turn leads on to Webster's final criterion of the educational justification of worship, the **critical interrogation of values and ideals**. This is arguably the most crucial issue for teachers; their role is to facilitate, not to direct, the formation of the values and ideals their pupils will eventually espouse. Undue emphasis in one direction rather than another will limit the freedom of the pupils to interrogate and evaluate the evidence with which they are presented. Many stories central to a religious tradition can elicit a critical response. The story of the enforced exile of Rama and Sita, for instance, raises topical questions about refugees, while many of Christ's parables may be re-told in a familiar urban setting without

losing their original message. Bastide, for instance, sets a version of the Good Samaritan in the context of a National Front meeting (Bastide 1987:149) The constant link with the pupils' lived experience is crucial, together with the added dimension of a religious interpretation of the story which the pupils are free to accept or reject. This would provide a firm basis for the elusive process identified in official documents as spiritual development.

Webster, writing about spiritual experience, maintains

“They are rich in that they offer nourishment amid the aridity and routine of daily life; they are fertile in that the years cannot exhaust their meaning ...” (Webster 1990) (*BJRE Vol 12*)

Such experiences are rare and transient, but I consider that they do enrich life; any worthwhile exposure to what HMI identified in 1989 as “the complexity of the human context” in a reflective environment has an educative potential. Opportunities for such experiences, whether construed by the participants as worship or simply spiritual reflection, address both the etymological roots of education, in their function of nourishing the learners (*educare*) and leading them forward (*educere*) to a fuller understanding. The period of formal education can only be the start of such a lifelong process, but it has the potential to be, not the soft focus blurring reality, but the catalyst or even

“the grit in the oyster of new experience. It will have a grainy, challenging quality, something to make us stop, reflect and pause in the oasis of a busy and noisy world” (Brown and Furlong (1996:7).



## CONCLUSION

This work has explored the experience of worship in terms of its contribution to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It has identified, analysed and assessed its role in the evolving system of England during the second millennium. It has paid particular attention to the political context in which the 1988 Act was generated; the preparations for the imminent General Election dominated the proceedings to have the new Act in place with all possible speed. Educational principles and the accumulated experience of the teaching workforce were given scant attention, resulting in widespread concern within the profession which was virtually ignored. The Act became law and teachers were therefore obliged to implement its requirements; a turbulent period of protest and confusion followed. Gradually there emerged in the schools a form of compromise whereby the law was observed (there were, of course, sanctions in place to deter non-compliance), but it was an observance reflecting more concern for educational integrity than for political principles. What appears to have emerged from the period of uncertainty is a relatively new form of school worship, very different from that envisaged by the legislation but, while still complying with the law, more educationally acceptable in terms of content and approach.

The work is an exploration of the major religious, historical, sociological and demographic influences which have helped to produce the various models of school worship found today in English schools. As a case study in educational policy-making in a multicultural society, the thesis posits the view that the architects of the 1988 Education Reform Act went about their task as though English society had changed little since the end of the war in 1944, the effects of the legislation being therefore a serious mismatch between the perceptions of the legislators and the professional experience of teachers. The final chapter of the work argues that school worship in the future could be a richer and more varied experience for

all participants, but in a form very different from what might have been envisaged in 1988. The entire work is an examination of the educational potential of school worship, presenting a chronological account of its transformation from the overt pedagogical intention to establish Christian principles in the minds of the population as a whole, right through to a recognition that no belief system can claim for its own the totality of truth or wisdom. The thesis ends on an optimistic note, offering a glimpse into the future where the major world faiths represented in this country are explored in a reflective context within the state education system. The findings of the research can be summarised as follows:

## 1 School Worship – the Past

Worship in English schools was originally regarded as central to the educational process. It was the overt intention of all teachers to instil into their pupils a knowledge of, and a respect for, Christian teachings. These teachings were presented in a confessional manner designed to lead the pupils to religious belief and the development of a personal faith in God. Such faith was to be nurtured by the practice of daily prayer and the study of Christian doctrine, first in the Patristic tradition, where religious teachers, who for the most part had sole access to scriptural texts, gave their pupils their own interpretation of significant passages. Later, following the invention of printing, the effects of the Reformation, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the pupils were encouraged to study scripture for themselves. This development, however, was held responsible for increased dissatisfaction, especially among the poor, over the unjust treatment they endured at the hands of their masters. Old Testament accounts of the oppression of the Israelites, and New Testament parables like The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) presumably began to acquire uncomfortably topical overtones. Disaffection with organised religion gained momentum to the point that, by the end of the 19th century, there was a strong call to remove all religious



teaching and practice from the newly-emerged state system of education altogether, This call was successfully resisted by ecclesiastical authorities, and the 1944 Education Act reaffirmed the religious aspects of state education, formalising and making mandatory the daily practice of Christian worship in all maintained schools.

This situation remained unchanged for the next four decades, in spite of an apparent reluctance on the part of the teaching force to support what some may have regarded as an anachronistic system. Many teachers had no personal religious faith themselves, and vigorously resisted government attempts to make them into surrogate clergy. Curriculum development and professional ethics convinced them that they had no right to impose a religious view of life on their pupils and that their task was to 'facilitate' rather than direct the learning process. This conviction was strengthened by the arrival in the country of significant numbers of Commonwealth immigrants who espoused, with varying degrees of commitment, beliefs that were very different from those of the Christian tradition. Professional sensitivity to non-Christian pupils, combined with a rapidly waning interest in the claims of Christianity, created a situation whereby the law on daily worship in schools was regularly disregarded. The 1988 Education Reform Act sought a return to notional 'traditional values' by formulating the clauses on Religious Education and Collective Worship, very much as they had been in the 1944 Act. This move reinforced the views of the New Right, and their perceptions of English society as fundamentally Christian, in belief if not in practice. The architects of the Act demonstrated little awareness of the demographic, social and cultural developments which had radically altered the nature of English consciousness.

## 2 School Worship – the Present

In the aftermath of the 1988 Act and subsequent legislation, school worship became a highly contentious issue, on account of the uncertainty with which it had been surrounded, particularly from the 1960s onwards. However, under the terms of the Act, teachers could no longer ignore with impunity the legal entitlement of all their pupils to a daily act of worship, whatever their personal views on the matter. Different interpretations of the law proliferated, all of which emerged in response to the perceived needs of schools in a given area. Teachers took seriously the injunction to take into account the ages, aptitudes and family backgrounds of their pupils in fulfilling the requirements of the law, ensuring as far as possible that what they offered was educationally justifiable. They could be said to have used their professional skill and experience to make inappropriate legislation at least partially workable, although initially considering it unworkable.

Those responsible for the legislation, however, including the three whose views have been explored at some length in this work, expressed very different priorities, which apparently included an attempt to re-establish Christianity in this country by according it predominant status in the religious curriculum of all maintained schools. There is therefore a significant mismatch between the intentions of the educators and those of the legislators interviewed. In the religious curriculum teachers are ideally concerned, not with re-Christianising the country, but with raising their pupils' awareness of the claims of the religious traditions they are likely to encounter in the course of their lives. It seems reasonable to accept that Christianity, as the majority tradition of this country, (albeit in a nominal sense) should be given a high profile in the religious curriculum; most teachers have expressed no difficulty with this. If compulsory school worship, in whatever form, is to remain on the statute books, it is imperative to develop forms that are appropriate to believers and



non-believers alike, without compromising the freedom of staff or pupils to participate in accordance with their own principles. This process has already begun, as current research indicates, eg Copley (1989, 1994, 1997 and 2000) Gent (1989) Watson (1993) and Webster, (1995) to name some of the major contributors.

### 3 School Worship - the Future

It can be argued that there is an urgent need to replace Circular 1/94 with guidance which acknowledges and affirms the good practice already established in many schools. The empirical research undertaken for this thesis suggests that many teachers have developed their own approaches to school worship based on their professional skills and their knowledge of the local community. It seems logical to assume that such practice can be found elsewhere in the country. Effective ways of sharing good practice in other skills, notably the development of literacy and numeracy, are being used to good effect in the school system as a whole. If there is a serious commitment to helping pupils, in addition to being articulate, literate and numerate, to become 'religiante' (ie familiar with the claims and practices of the major world religions) such co-ordinated strategies might prove equally effective. This would, of course, require adequate funding for in-service provision and appropriate documentation to ensure parity of experience for all pupils.

School worship stands in need of particular attention because of the ambivalence surrounding its nature and purpose in a post-Christian society. If it is to continue, at least for some time to come, new forms will continue to evolve. These forms, while fulfilling the current law in terms of national entitlement, will also take into account the particular needs of the local community. A national curriculum for RE and worship, although previously resisted by RE specialists

for a variety of reasons, becomes a viable option. The 1994 SCAA Model Syllabus documents might be adapted to form the basis for such a curriculum, freeing the local SACREs to incorporate their particular requirements into the Agreed Syllabus for their area. This would have the added advantage of enabling them to assume the higher profile envisaged for them in the 1988 legislation, a role to which Dr Leonard repeatedly referred in his interview (see Appendix 2.) One of the priorities to be considered is the provision of systematic multifaith RE and worship, with appropriate use of religious visitors, in areas where representatives of other faiths are few, thus offering a realistic alternative to the mentality which regards the presence of ethnic and other minorities as a problem rather than an opportunity.

If, as has been argued, social harmony and cohesion is one of the long-term aims of education, religion is a significant curriculum area which readily lends itself to this vital process. Primary school pupils already learn about religious faith by exposure to the stories and history of the different traditions, hence the emphasis on this approach in my own proposed model (see Appendix 4.) Christianity is entitled to an honoured place in that process, not to the exclusion or domination of others but taking its place alongside them. In the course of this research I have come to appreciate in a deeper way, not only the claims of my own Christian tradition but also how other faiths have enriched my personal faith. It has alerted me to the danger of imagining that any tradition has the monopoly of the truth. If I were beginning my teaching career in the 21st century instead of the 20th, my approach to RE and introducing pupils to worship would be very different, more open-ended, more speculative and certainly broader in outlook. The research did not lead me reaffirm the historical beliefs I had held all along and never really challenged. Its main effect was to convince me of the need for educational programmes constantly to adapt to the changing conditions within society and, while retaining what is enriching for the individual learner and



beneficial for society as a whole, to develop a flexible curriculum geared to preparing pupils for life in a multicultural, multifaith community. Such a curriculum would not be bound by former certainties, significant though they may have been in their era, but open to the challenges and opportunities offered by this new century.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Summary of an interview with Baroness Cox in the House of Lords, 27 February 1997

**Participants: Lady Cox (CC),  
Sr Kathleen Bishop (KEB)  
Sr Maureen McKnight (MMc) Co-Interviewer**

- CC I'll just recap very quickly and say that the whole situation began in the spring (*of 1988*). There was a lot of concern that had been brought to my attention by teachers about what was going on (and not going on) up and down the country in the field of Religious Education and Collective Worship. And as a way of airing this issue, and finding out how widespread this concern was, and as a way of checking one's own perception, I initiated this debate in the House of Lords. It was February of this year. As a matter of fact I didn't know the Bill was coming through, so it was sheer serendipity. But there were all sorts of concerns, which formed a very useful prelude to the advent of the debate itself, because when the Bill eventually came through the legislative process into the Lords, there was an awareness of concern amongst the peers about the situation.
- MMc So you raised the issue because of this concern, irrespective of the fact that subsequently a Bill came into the House that you didn't know was coming?
- CC Absolutely. It was total serendipity, divine guidance, whatever you like to call it. Yes, it was entire coincidence.
- KEB What sorts of concerns were being expressed?
- CC In crystallising them out from all the representations I and others received, I found there were three sorts of issues that seemed to be worrying people. One was that in many schools RE was just not being taught. And where it was being taught, it just did not meet the expectations of parents. In this there were three sorts of concerns or worries. One was that Christianity was being omitted entirely, played down or omitted. There was some evidence that young people were leaving school (I'm not talking of people of other faiths, but British-born, with nominal Christian values), who couldn't even name the four gospels. They didn't know who Pontius Pilate was – the most rudimentary aspects of the Christian doctrine and faith – so one wonders what they had been doing for the last ten years of compulsory RE when they didn't even have the basics of Christianity. Instead there was a kind of multifaith syncretism, that the Chief Rabbi at the time called the multifaith mish-mash, which really destroys the integrity of each faith,



and isn't what anybody wants. By destroying the integrity of each faith you can actually destroy all faith, because you undermine the validity of the faith stance. So concern number one was this tendency to teach a relativistic and multifaith syncretistic approach in RE which trivialises all religion. Secondly, there was a tendency to use RE in a very political way. Some examples were the GCSE and CSE syllabuses, with approaches to peace issues which were in fact very little more than a brochure for CND. They didn't touch on the connection between defence and peace; you must maintain a certain balance. This was more in terms of a political than a religious education. This can be taught in a theological context, but even so it must have the integrity of being taught in a balanced way, and not just promoting one very harsh aspect of a very sensitive and complex issue. As I say, the second concern was the politicisation of the RE syllabus,, in ways that (a) secularised it and (b) were in themselves partisan in a political context. And the third was actually the teaching of the occult. There was one, for example, called "Beginning Religion", published by Edward Arnold, and an earlier edition actually recommended for homework that pupils should go and attend a séance, find out about Ouija boards and so on. But what I found most disturbing was the whole tenor of so much of that book, with its emphasis on what was macabre, or sensational or actually horrific. There was a picture, for example, of a dog with its tail burning – that stays with me, adult or not – pictures of human sacrifice, of nightmares, with spiders and horrible things.

KEB This is in an RE textbook?

CC Yes. And it dealt with the Lord's Prayer on the same page as Shamanism. There was another book which was a prime example of this relativistic, syncretistic mish-mash, produced by the Christian Education Movement, of all people. It was one of these thematic books, on Spring Festivals and it began, I think, with a thing on Chinese crackers; we then did Diwali, we then did a lot of Spring Festivals. I think it was page 22 when we eventually came to Good Friday and Easter. But the illustrations for Easter were all on Easter eggs, Easter flowers, Easter bunnies, all secular images of Easter, and there was no way one could get a feeling of the significance of Gethsemane, and Calvary and what Easter means from that very itty-bitty, very trivialised presentation of Easter. And the next page went straight back to Chinese fire-crackers. So in this piece by the Christian Movement, exactly where the sort of significance of Christianity, and indeed the other faiths, was dealt with in its integrity, seems to me to raise questions in a publication like that. So that was the precursor, and at that time, an unwitting prelude, to the Bill coming up through Parliament. But when the 1988 Education Bill did begin to come through the legislative process, it seemed an ideal opportunity to respond to colleagues who had got really worried by this debate and the evidence it had produced, together with other evidence showing that young people were leaving school knowing virtually nothing about our Christian and spiritual heritage. It seemed the time was right to put in an amendment at least to try to reinstate Christianity for our young people to understand their Christian heritage, (a) from the point of view of the spiritual dimension, spiritual resources and Christian heritage,



which are most important, and (b) apart from that, there is no way you can understand our cultural heritage unless you understand Christianity; you can't understand our literature, our music, our art, our architecture, our legal system, our democratic institutions, our British cultural systems unless you understand the basis of Christianity. We were sending them out as young citizens of this land, ignorant of the fundamentals of that part of our heritage, apart from the spiritual resources for them to draw on, to shape their lives and so on. Well, as the Bill started coming up to the Lords, although we felt that the teaching of RE should be predominantly Christian, we did give, for the first time, the right of the other faith communities to have their faith taught by their own religious leaders. Because the Muslims weren't any happier about the multifaith approach – the idea of having Islam being shared with sceptical 14 year-olds who didn't have any idea of what Islam was all about.

**KEB** You said somewhere that faith leaders were in a better position to teach their particular religion than teachers who had to depend only on books for information.

**CC** That's right. And we wanted to respect the rights of other faith groups as well as the Christians. So for the first time we acknowledged the rights of the other faith communities to have their religion taught the way they would like it taught to the younger generation as we would want it for Christianity. And of course we kept the conscience clause of withdrawal. It stayed there because it was already enshrined. If you read the copies of Hansard you will see we had some marvellous support from the then Chief Rabbi, the Lord Jakobovits, who made a very profound speech and said that as a Jew, as a schoolboy he was withdrawn from worship and it didn't worry him at all; he gained more pride, more appreciation of his own Jewish faith to have been in a school where religious values were cherished than if he had been in a school where they were not. He also quoted from a little booklet brought out at that time called "The crisis in RE". I wrote the foreword to it, and it was brought out by the headteacher of a school in Newcastle and another teacher in Newcastle. They were very worried about the decline of teaching in RE and Lord Jakobovitz also quoted from this book in his contribution. He spoke about a "fruit cocktail of world faiths", which doesn't do justice to any faith, and how important it is for a country to keep its spiritual tradition; this country's spiritual tradition is the Judeo-Christian tradition, and we recognise the primacy of Christianity. It was a very powerful speech. It had cross-bench support; peers from all parts of the House agreed with it. Even the Imam from London's biggest mosque, so I was told by a Muslim friend of mine, had the previous weekend led three or four thousand Muslims in prayer that Christ should once again be revered in Britain's schools. So there was marvellous support, and in the end we had a very heated debate, and although "predominant" is perhaps not the best choice of word, I'm happy to change that word; some very powerful speeches were made and it was a very interesting time. So that we how that legislation which we are now very familiar with, came about. Lord Longford, who is on the other side of the House from me, but that doesn't matter, was a very strong supporter of the move to get Christianity back into



the schools. Moving to where we are now, of course, the making of law is only the beginning and not the end, and as I always say, it takes "good faith" to implement the framework that is there, and law in itself won't change anything. It only provides the framework in which people can respond positively, encouraged by the provisions of the Act to develop perhaps something they wanted to do before but it was difficult for them to do, in many cases. Or, looking on the negative side, if parents want recourse, they have something to appeal to, within a legal framework. If they aren't getting what they wanted, there's a framework in which they can operate in trying to get what they hoped for. Quite a lot of teachers have said to me "That law was marvellous, because it really gave us the opportunity to stake our claim to teach RE as before. It was being squeezed out; either it was a dispensable subject or it was a subject that other people looked down on. Now it has a recognised part, and it's given us a much stronger heart to press for the teaching of RE".

**KEB** I've been talking to headteachers in Preston, and they say that RE has been given status by this Act that it never had before; it was always, as you say, marginalised, peripheral to anything that was considered more important. Could I ask you, what is your opinion of people who profess to have no faith at all, having to lead acts of worship?

**CC** I know a lot of people who resent it, and other people who say it puts them in an impossible position, because there are literally not enough people to do the job. There's a lot of hostility to it as well as positive responses. One of the key issues of worship is one you've just raised. There are two answers to that. One I heard put very strongly the other day by someone who's a member of Synod. They said that you don't actually have to give very much of yourself in worship. All you need do is to have a passage read from the bible; the bible is the word of God, and it speaks for itself. You don't have to relate to that. If it is appropriate, the music department can provide a hymn, and then have a prayer. It doesn't require an enormous amount of individual creativity. You can actually fulfil the requirements of the law without having to compromise yourself, unless you are a completely committed atheist. There are lots of people who aren't committed atheists but who don't feel motivated or inspired, but it's not their thing. If you don't want to lead a creative act of worship you don't have to; the word of God will speak for itself.

**KEB** If they provide the opportunity for worship, this would fulfil the law.

**CC** Exactly. Of course you would need somebody to read from the bible or other good book, if possible to sing a hymn, if that seems appropriate. If you don't give children any of these resources they literally have nothing, and I just know this as a nurse when one's been with people in extremis. They will go back to the hymns and psalms of childhood, but if they hadn't even that, what would they go back to? There is a void there, and I think one owes it to them at least to give them a chance to draw on that reservoir of spiritual resources, the timeless prayers or hymns or psalms, a bible reading. It's there if they want to draw on it, and if we deny them that, we



deny them choice. That's a freedom, and although people might say you're forcing it on them, I would say in fact you're denying them freedom of choice if you don't give it to them. As regards teachers feeling equipped or not, as the case may be, to provide whatever this is, again this is a second answer to an earlier question. One was that you could provide a very simple act of worship which doesn't need an enormous amount of creative input, the other is to draw in someone from an outside community. The beleaguered RE teacher, probably over-worked and under-resourced, I think could use a lot more of the local resources. I mean the local faith communities, of course; I'm not suggesting the children should be taken off to witches' covens. But your Christian children could be taken to the churches, maybe on interdenominational visits, a Baptist, a Catholic and Anglican, depending on their age and what have you. Similarly, Muslim children would probably already go to a mosque, but you could draw on those resources wherever they're available. The Muslim religion is very complex; how many non-Muslims really know enough to teach the Qur'an? What's the point of having children being taught a half-baked version of the Qur'an out of a superficial text-book?

KEB No amount of reading would give as rich an insight into a faith tradition as the actual experience of worshipping within that tradition. That's where visiting speakers could do a better job.

CC Yes, and they would have all the enthusiasm to do it effectively. So the main message is, (a) it doesn't have to be complicated and (b) there are resources out there, ready to be used, and I would like to see them used more. There are good religious leaders who communicate well with young people.

KEB Some of the headteachers I've been talking to have a high proportion of Muslim children; in fact one school had 90%, and they have great communication with the local mosque, but they don't seem to go so much into the Christian churches. They take all the children to the mosque sometime during the year, and I don't think they use the local Christian resources nearly as much, because of the predominance of the Muslim children.

CC They could use the Christian resources for the 10%.

KEB But it could be quite divisive, couldn't it? In any case the law doesn't allow the separation of children into faith groups.

CC There are exemptions. That was the idea; the determinations were put in place for precisely that reason. A lot of people have attacked the legal provisions of the Act for the sake of the kind of school you've just mentioned, who have 90% Muslims. We sent our kids to schools in Brent, where there are high proportions of other faith communities and ethnic minorities. But I think it's very important to remember that that's where the flexibility is meant to be built in so headteachers can use their discretion where they have that kind of pupil mix. But, as far as I can remember,



ethnic minorities account for only 3% of the country as a whole. I think it would be wrong to shape the whole law for the sake of schools in Brent or Preston. Very often it's the vocal people who speak against the Bill and against these amendments. If they come from that kind of area I understand the challenge. But there's no reason why you should deny the 97% of the remaining pupils a reasonable appreciation of their Christian heritage. For those schools which are the exceptions, there will be a large number of them in a very small area; there is the flexibility of the determinations, which was meant to give the head and parents the right to provide for those communities in the way they wanted.

**KEB** Very few people seem to have applied for the determinations, even in those areas there's a high proportion of ethnic minorities.

**CC** Yes, well you put the ball back in their court and say, "If you're not happy with the provisions, why didn't you apply for the determinations?". Then they get the freedom to determine, and they produce a SACRE which meets the needs of their pupils and their school. And as far as worship is concerned, similarly they can have the right to have their own worship. It's easier in a school where there are 90% Muslims, it's relatively homogeneous, but it's more difficult where you have in a primary school 50 Muslims, 40 Sikhs, 30 Hindus, 30 Christians and 20 Jews. Then there may be a need for some kind of multicultural, multifaith approach; it's not for me to say, I'm not the headteacher of that school. But that's the whole point of determinations where you have complicated situations which don't really follow the spirit of the Act as it affects the majority. There should be flexibility for the minority.

**KEB** You know how the Archbishop of York said quite recently that the quality of collective worship was more important than the frequency. Do you go along with that?

**CC** No, not at all. If it's possible to get good quality for two days a week you should be able to get it on five, and vice versa. To suggest that it would be better because it's less frequent is a non-argument, surprisingly illogical for someone who's normally very logical.

**MMc** Another area of great concern to students is the area of morality, because the school does carry some responsibility. How far do you think the school should take this responsibility?

**CC** Again it's a question of sensitivity in this case, because when you're dealing with, say Christianity or the major world religions, you've got very clear representations and theological tenets. In the area of morality you're in a much more amorphous area, especially with people who don't adhere to those faiths; they will have different bases for action. There should be a very real sensitivity of the school to what parents want for their children, and the school should not run counter to what parents want for their children in promoting values. That being said, I think we would all agree that the



basic values of this land have been shaped by, and still largely reflect, those of the Christian values. So the great majority of parents would probably (and surveys have indicated this) hope that their children are supported in value systems which are fundamental Christian values. So I think the school should respect that. I think it was Lord Northborne's amendment which said that schools should be specific in the information they provide in their statement on moral values and moral education.

**KEB** So many world religions have similar values, don't they? The same concepts come up again and again.

**CC** Yes. I run a purely informal meeting from time to time – you're very welcome to come – to discuss educational issues. Teachers, parents, academics, literally from all over the country come just to talk about the sorts of things we're talking about this afternoon. We cover a wide range of issues – we cover literacy, numeracy, and other things that people are concerned about in education. It's multifaith, people of all colours and backgrounds, parents and primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, LEA people and academics. I remember one of the colleagues at this meeting, probably from India or Pakistan, he stood up and spoke very very movingly, and said "You Christians have let us down, because you have not kept your moral value systems, and our children in the schools are suffering on account of that". I thought that was very good; it was so true. So many people say we have become so apathetic and so unwilling to take up any kind of stand for our traditional moral values, Christian values, that other faith members feel really let down.

**KEB** It's given me a whole new insight into the legislative procedure and how these things all came about. Obviously there's been development since the Act was passed; how has your thinking moved on in the light of events?

**CC** As we said at the start, the legislation is only the beginning. There have been manifest problems, some of which could have been predicted, and some of which have been surprising. Obviously there's a shortage of RE teachers, but that was a chicken-and-egg situation. You're not likely to get more RE teachers unless there's legal provision; RE was in a downward spiral. Even if you reverse that spiral, things are not going to change overnight. Another major problem was resources. In terms of teaching resources I've seen quite an encouraging introduction of teaching material which reflects the spirit of the Act. That's a good thing, because it not only helps teachers but it also means that the Act was a stimulus. There's been a great improvement since that awful book "Beginning Religion" – I do suggest you take a look at it – and we're also getting what I would regard as positive and spiritual teaching materials. I had an example sent to me the other day – very different from the material prevalent in the 1980s which led to this concern. I think this will lead to an improvement in the teaching of RE. On the down side, it has generated an enormous amount of hostility. What was it somebody accused me of the other day on Radio 5 Live? a primary headteacher in London – of opening the way for a new Holocaust? There was a lot of vitriolic hatred.



**KEB** How do you deal with attacks like that? Do you respond or not?

**CC** Well, in two ways. You've just got to take the big personal hurt, but apart from the personal reaction, which is for the most part irrelevant, I'm sad, because it shows a kind of wilful misinterpretation of the spirit of the Act. And yet the whole idea behind it was that for the first time in history, formal provision was being made for the teaching of the other world faiths, and for them to worship according to their own traditions. Its purpose is to respect the integrity of faith. And as the Chief Rabbi said, pupils are being taught respect not only for their own faith but for other faiths. So it seems an irrational contravention of what the whole thing was meant to be trying to achieve. This shows the strength of feeling, of hostility, and you can pick that up in a lot of other contexts too, both on the RE and the worship side. So that has been sad, I think; it's irrational.

**KEB** Apart from the hurt to yourself, this Act has generated a lot of discussion, which can be no bad thing. It's unfortunate that people do resort to verbal abuse.

**CC** Well, it's important to put that sort of experience, that very bitter attack, into context, and turn it into something as positive as you can.

**MMc** If you were to say to us what you thought was the best service we could offer to student teachers in helping them to come to terms with the whole debate, what would you ask us to do?

**CC** You're more expert in this than I am, but just speaking from a legislative background, and the spirit behind it, my advice would be to think positive. The key ingredients which went through a lot of the debate were (a) the question of choice, giving young people both the knowledge about the Christian faith, or for those of other faiths, their own faith traditions, and the opportunity to express ... because religion is more than knowledge, it's also about relationships and experience. It's giving them the opportunity to develop that relationship, through worship, with God. You're actually forming an openness; it's the opposite of what might be called indoctrination. You're giving choice, they can reject it if they want, but at least they will know what they're rejecting. And (b) they may reject it, but if they ever want to come back to it later in life it's there to fall back on. If they missed the opportunity they would have no basis, so it expands choice. It's because of that that the first clause of the Bill actually used the word spiritual in the objectives of the British education system. Now if you were in a country like America, which has a deliberate separation of religion and state, that wouldn't be there, but we have chosen in this land to include the spiritual dimension in our educational experience. In terms of the spiritual dimension, it's important to see it in its positive light of enhancing choice and freedom of response, to know what one's responding to. The other thing is, if people say, "Why do you need the spiritual? Isn't the American system better?" my answer to that would be you need to look back into the roots of the '44 Act, and if you look at the Hansards of that time I think



you'll find a lot of concern was, (this was at the end of World War Two) that if you left a vacuum in the minds and hearts and souls of young people, then it could be filled by other obnoxious ideologies such as Nazism or Marxism, which came afterwards. If you leave a vacuum something will fill it; far better to choose what the great majority of people would regard as the "good values", the "enduring values". It was better to put those in rather than leave a vacuum, so that's why the spiritual was put in, and the RE and worship were put in in 1944. So if people throw the indoctrination argument back at you, it's important to remember that no education system is value-free, and you might as well have as much explication of those values and as much response to the parents' wishes with regard to those values, as is possible. All the evidence suggests that the great majority in this country actually want their children introduced to Christian values and the Christian heritage. So for those who come from other faith traditions, then compatibility with the values and belief systems of those faiths, although it is only about 3% of the population, well, you respect that 3% but it doesn't mean that you change the whole RE framework around the country. In some parts of the country there are very significant numbers of those other faith communities, but you protect their rights and our own spiritual culture and heritage as well. The other argument I'd bring, as well as think positive, is to say that unless you do educate young people in their Christian heritage, there is really no way they would understand other aspects of our culture, our architecture, art, literature, music, democracy; these are an integral part of the maintenance of our culture as well as our spiritual heritage. I do think the divisiveness argument has been used ad nauseam; the law aims to respect, to understand, not to lead to division. I'll send you a couple of copies of that document I was talking about, that described the state of play at the time, because it was used as a briefing document for amendments. It's called "The crisis in RE". And Hansard will give you a flavour of the debates.



## APPENDIX 2

### Summary of an Interview with Father Graham Leonard, July 1997

**Participants:** Father Leonard (GL),  
Sister Kathleen Bishop (KEB) ]  
Sister Maureen McKnight (MMc) ] Co-Interviewer

**KEB** My particular focus is Collective Worship and its relationship to Religious Education. Could you tell us what is your view of the purpose of collective worship in County Primary schools? What, for instance, was in the minds of the legislators during the discussions?

**GL** Well, could I begin by saying that I was very conscious indeed, because of my position then, of the difficulties. In the Diocese of London we had areas which were substantially Bangladeshi, we had areas which were predominantly West Indian, we had Southall, which was predominantly Sikh. So the problem of collective worship in an area which was predominantly that of some other faith was something of which I was very conscious. The second thing I would want to say by way of introduction was that we were faced with this extraordinary attitude (well, I think it's extraordinary) of some of the advocates of the Christian faith. I mean, the most bizarre amendment was that proposed by Lord Thorneycroft, which you'll have read about, when he proposed that every act of collective worship should be Christian. When it was pointed out to him in the Lords that this would mean a Christian daily act of worship in every Jewish school, he didn't seem to be astonished at all.

**KEB** That was acceptable, then?

**GL** Yes. Extraordinary! Mind you, I had great admiration for the persistence of many of the advocates of Christian teaching and Christian faith, obviously, but nevertheless they were basically unrealistic about the situation in the schools, not only, as it were, doctrinally, but also in terms of the physical situation, over whether you could have a daily act of worship, whether it was physically possible in a particular school. Now, my view at the time was that a daily act of worship should be, and always had been, characteristic of a school. After all, it was built into the 1944 Act. But one of our problems was that, in the Bill as it was originally drafted, there were no references to the requirements of RE or collective worship at all. The answer from the Government was that they were all there in the unrepealed sections of the '44 Act. But I remember getting up and saying "Do you really think that anybody is going to get out the '44 Act to see what they were?" So the first thing we had to do was to get that on the face of the Bill, which we did. I didn't want it particularly as part of the National Curriculum, and we got it in fact mentioned before that, in terms of the Bill itself. So my view was that it should be a normal act in the life of every school. It should be "mainly and broadly Christian – now that was an



ambiguous phrase; everybody recognised that. But I put that forward, not in the sense of any dilution of the Christian position, but rather as a way of providing flexibility in terms of operating that section of the Act in the schools as they actually existed. One point I would make is that one of my disappointments over the operation of the Act was – (or has been – I think it's still true) the failure of the SACREs to respond to the changes we made. We did reckon that the actual working out of the provisions for Christian worship or collective worship should be made locally, because they were aware of what the situations were in different parts of the country, and so on. The SACRE could determine whether some of the provisions should be relaxed. But frankly, with many SACREs, I don't believe they have ever taken this up. Nor do I think that the SACREs have ever actually fulfilled their purpose in the way they've been constructed and in the powers that have been given to them. We gave the SACREs more power than they ever had before, and we also laid obligations on the SACRE which could not be over-ruled by the LEA. On the question of the syllabus, you see, the Local Authority was required to put into effect whatever was agreed by the SACRE, so I'm disappointed in that respect. But let me go back to what I expected. I was hoping that worship would still be regarded as a normal act in the life of any school. It would primarily be Christian; in many cases this would be perfectly natural and proper. But in certain cases, for various reasons, other provisions could be made, which I actually outlined briefly in my speech on the 7th of July in the House, when I set up the five principles which should govern collective acts of worship. You've got Hansard there, have you?

KEB No, this is actually Colin Alves's account. (*indicates document*)

GL We got on extremely well; we're great friends. On the whole I think I agree with his paper; there are certain points where I don't. I don't think his point in the last paragraph about a "fundamental disagreement" actually holds water. I don't see that at all; I don't think there was a fundamental disagreement. I don't think I had a fundamental disagreement with Baroness Hooper, or with Kenneth Baker, or with any of the ministers.

KEB Yes, I was going to ask you about that. But there seems to have been a shift in position during the passage, perhaps at the committee stage?

GL Yes, at the committee stage it was fairly traumatic at times. But I don't think I actually shifted it – but we'll come back to that – you can ask me about it. But what I was saying was that I could envisage cases where the SACRE would say that in a particular school with 90% Sikhs or something, clearly a daily act is ... but that other provision should be made for the Christians who are there; this could be arranged. In the same way you could break up the daily act of worship – it needn't be the whole school, or at the beginning of the day. It could be at other times during the day – that could be arranged. Does that answer your question?

KEB Yes, in a way. But it was the predominantly Christian focus that I was really meaning.



- GL Well, you see, I think people misunderstood that phrase “broadly, mainly”. We tried to find all sorts of other phrases to deal with it. What we were saying, in effect, was not that the content of either the instruction or the worship should be broadly Christian, but in the overall provision that was made within the school, it should be broadly or mainly Christian, although there will be exceptions to this rule. Do you see the difference I’m making? I don’t really think, reading that debate again, that I made that distinction clear enough. It was partly because so often I was trying to answer those who were advocating something which was, I would say, quite unacceptable.
- MMcK You found it unacceptable in terms of ...?
- GL In terms of making a mish-mash of all faiths, if you see what I mean. It certainly was evident before the Act came out, I saw that in schools. I used to go into schools a great deal. There, you’d find a bit of this would be taught, and a bit of that, a bit of Buddhism, a bit about Muslims and so on – all as if it were totally reconcilable and also justifiable, as it were. The real problem, I think (it didn’t come out in the debate, except at one point) it was Lord Macnamara who said it, again on the 7th July when he was talking about the need for a massive programme of training for teachers. I don’t think that’s ever been put into effect but I may be wrong there. Do you remember the phrase he uses? “It’s one thing to work out the formula but quite another to ensure that it has any effect on the lives of our children”.
- KEB I was just reflecting as you were speaking. There is this strong call for the renewal of the act of worship which is apparently not taking place, and yet there is still opposition to it, partly because a lot of teachers now have no personal faith themselves. I know there is the opt-out clause, but that has implications for their colleagues.
- GL You’re right, this is the problem. In 1988 that position had not really been recognised, even if it was already the situation. I think it was already there. I’m not without hope, but I do believe we are faced with a position where the ordinary person is just not conscious of religion in its widest sense but comes to it in moments of acute crisis. Now, how you translate that in terms of teaching in schools, it would take too long to talk about, I think.
- KEB It seems to me that the schools are being given the responsibility for turning the whole thing round, and clearly they’re not either willing or able to take it on.
- GL That’s right. And they’re not willing or able to do it in the way that some people in the Lords wanted them to, at the time of the Bill. This was the very distressing thing. People got up and wanted to force it onto people, and they didn’t really give much thought as to who was going to do it. Some of the things that were said during the debate were very distressing, and they took the line so often that if you didn’t do it in their way it wasn’t Christian at all. There was one moment in the middle of the night, I



remember, when I said I should have to vote against it, even though I could see the headlines "Bishop votes against word Christian", because you see, it was quite contrary to the whole Gospel.

KEB What really worried me when I was studying some of the transcripts from Hansard was that some people seemed to be saying that the whole aim of collective worship was to convert children "of all faiths or of none". I couldn't go along with that.

GL You're absolutely right, and it worried the House. It was on that famous amendment (I think it was Lord Thorneycroft's) in the middle of the night – was it the 29th June? – when he insisted on pressing for something which would have had just that effect. I didn't know what to do, and I still don't know how it happened. I would have to have voted against it.

MMcK Was this Lord Thorneycroft's amendment for a compulsory act of Christian worship?

GL Yes, and I thought whatever do I do? Well, the Leader of the House just rushed across – I used to sit on the front bench – and said "Don't worry, just stay put". And I still don't know how it happened; it couldn't have been through the usual channels because there wasn't time to consult the other parties. But when the vote was taken, only 17 had voted in favour and nobody voted against. This meant that less than 30 or 50 had voted, and so the thing fell. Do you remember the case?

MMcK I remember reading about it.

GL Well, the House then adjourned, and it came up again, the first business after Questions on the next sitting of the House. It was a Monday morning, and the earlier incident was on the Friday night. This time it was defeated without any debate at all, just by a massive majority. It was very strange; I still don't know how they got the message round the House in those few minutes.

KEB Perhaps the Spirit ...?

GL *(laughs)* You may be right. Of course you get a few minutes when they call for a division, you see. In the Lords it's six minutes; I think they all rushed around. We all stayed put and that's what happened. That was an example of the sort of attitude you had in mind, which distressed some of us; people like Lord Elton, who was super in the debate. He gave me enormous help; he acted as a sort of liaison with me, with the Tory side. Funnily enough, what you might call the anti-religious side actually was not very evident. There were a few; there was Lord Houghton of Sowerby who died recently, God rest his soul, and there was Lord Sefton, the one who was told to stop talking ...

KEB He was actually silenced, wasn't he?



GL Yes! That was magnificent. That was the famous ... a very able woman, leader of the Liberal Democrats at the time ... her name will come back to me. Well, she said "Enough of this nonsense!" I'd been trying to remonstrate with him; he was asking ridiculous questions, Lord Sefton, using all sorts of things, even the virgin birth, the Resurrection, and the like. Then she got up and said "Enough of this nonsense" and moved the famous motion "I move the noble Lord be no longer heard" which is the last resort when the House can't get someone to behave themselves. As a matter of fact, the Chairman of the Committees at that time should technically have put that motion to debate, but he didn't. He just said "Those content will say 'content', and those not content will say 'not content'". The contents had it; that was the attitude. This is what made it so difficult. There's a Christian school here, very successful, goodness knows where the money is coming from. People admire some of the things it does, but some are very distressed by the way it tries to manipulate and compel.

MMcK It's this whole thing of free choice. Many of the students who come to our course on curriculum RE assume that we'll be doing exactly what you are describing; that we are about to force them to become Christians so that they will be able to teach Christianity.

KEB And they find it quite a relief when they realise that's not what we're doing. As professional people they should be able to teach something as important as RE, but there is no requirement for a personal faith.

MMcK There is also the fact that the course isn't going to put them under a personal obligation. This is why you found it so distressing that there were people who were trying to impose Christianity.

GL That was exactly the case with the collective act of worship.

MMcK Yes, and you made this distinction between collective worship and RE, saying that collective worship should be seen as part of the normal life of the school, and some people seemed to be hoping that by exposing children to such experiences they would become Christian. Your perception seems to be broader than that.

GL Well, I'm not sure what they really expected. Perhaps I'm being unkind here, or unfair, but it was almost as if somehow the compulsory Christian act of worship for everybody somehow relieved their consciences. I don't think we ever talked much about the effect on the children at the time. My point would be that you cannot teach the Christian faith – teach in the proper sense of the word – without some experience of worship.

KEB Like reading the score of a piece of music without listening to it.

GL Precisely. That is how I would have seen the collective act of worship. That's also why some acts of worship would give me the willies.



- KEB** Well, I've spoken to quite a lot of headteachers who don't think a prayer is appropriate in assembly. I can't take this on board at all. They see the prayer element as being an optional extra, or worse, as irrelevant. This is where I am concerned there is a mismatch between what was in the minds of the legislators and what's actually happening in the schools.
- GL** Well, I hesitate to say this to you, but I feel this is partly the responsibility of the Colleges of Education. I knew the old Teacher Training Colleges very well; I was a governor or chairman of several of them. They were totally different bodies, and I was always amazed at the switch that took place in the early 60s. I think they became – I don't say they were influenced by – some of the strongest influences in the 60s attitudes at the time, and I don't believe they ever really got over it. They were professional bodies. They were places where you were trained professionally for a particular craft, namely that of teaching. They didn't talk much about "education". The changes were dramatic, when I think of some of the old colleges I know so well. All the emphasis was on what you thought and did you felt, and whether you could take this on board - an extraordinary change. Did I answer your question eventually?
- MMcK** Yes; we asked what was the aim and I think you expressed that. I think people were genuinely concerned that Christian values be passed on, and that seemed to be for some people the vehicle. Now, I think that there's a very strong reaction, particularly amongst young people, against having that experience forced upon them, and also for some teachers, for whom that would be a breach of their integrity.
- GL** Yes. Personally I would like to see much more ... it's partly my scientific training ... I should like to see much more of Catholic moral teaching set out in terms of what we actually are as human beings.
- KEB** What I'd like to explore with you now, if I may, is the idea that somehow, moral values could be disseminated by the act of worship or even by RE. Do you see any problem with that?
- GL** I can see a problem if the attempt is made to communicate them in the wrong way. I think that if you try and preach Christian moral values either in a utilitarian way as if they were a way of making the world a bit better, this is simply a way of making life a little more comfortable for everybody. Or on the other hand, if you present them in a wholly impersonal way, then I think it would do great harm to people. What I think has to be done is to preach the gospel of love, and then draw out from that the implications of it in terms of the way we behave, in the way we treat other people, for example, in the way we sue the created world. So I would say that it is very difficult and possibly dangerous to try to teach Christianity and moral values in isolation, as if they were kind of hard and fast rules which were to be rigidly applied and imposed on people. If you do that I think you actually destroy people as people. On the other hand there is another aspect of this, which it would take us too long to get into here, which is the effect of legislation generally. Now this was a point I often spoke about in the



Lords. People have an extraordinary belief in the power of legislation. If you're thinking of having any legislation, it's got to be seen in the context of actually helping people to be responsible, to love, and so on. It cannot compel them; it cannot solve the problems for them. Legislation is always going to be implemented by people like you and me, fallible human beings. So if you're talking of teaching moral values (and I believe that they can be taught and should be taught) they must be derivative from Christian values and Christian doctrine, and not presented as a kind of cut and dried moral code from outside. People react against that, anyway, and I think it's also destructive of what human beings really are.

KEB If you're talking about morality being derived from Christianity, people who are not Christians are inclined to say "Are you saying that I can't behave in a moral way?" So I know our whole system is based on the tenets of Christianity, but isn't it possible to have a moral code without any belief?

GL Well, of course I think it is. One of the more extraordinary habits people have these days is drawing negative conclusions from positive statements, which is a totally unjustified thing to do. In other words, because B follows A, then you can't have B without A; it's not a piece of logic. This raises another major problem of today, which is that people by and large have given up thinking in any way ontologically, and we are now in what is basically a society based on functionalism. I would say that an awful lot has to be done in schools, and I don't mean using technical terms at all, but I think that there's a tremendous amount to be done by way of preamble in getting people to think in the kind of way in which they're going to see where the Gospel makes sense.

MMcK Does that, then, raise questions about the difficulty of teachers without this background being asked to lead acts of collective worship?

GL Yes, I think there's a difficulty in collective worship, not so much in RE teaching, because there's a proper sense in which you can teach the Christian faith or any other faith, objectively. When it comes to collective worship, I think that there's a very real problem, because how can you actually lead worship if you have no sense of dependence on a being or an authority outside yourself. That I think is a very real difficulty, and I think it can do more harm than good if you get round that by translating it into terms of "usefulness to the community". I don't pretend that we solved that problem at all; I don't think we began to tackle it in the Lords' debates.

KEB This is at the heart of my thesis, actually, this mismatch between what was intended and what's actually happening. What's happening in schools bears very little relation to what you're saying, and from what I've read about the purpose of worship.

GL I think Hansard is very illuminating; I'd forgotten parts of things and I was reading bits again in anticipation of your visit. It's very illuminating in what it reveals about people's minds; you see the political element coming in.



- KEB That's right – this is another dimension altogether, the political element. If you perceive collective worship or RE for that matter, as a vehicle for changing behaviour, I think that's trivialising everything that religion stands for.
- GL I quite agree with you. Putting it even lower than that: if you see getting a successful Education Act through as a means of promoting your political party.
- KEB What was the rôle of the government at the time of the Bill was going through? Was there any pressure put on you?
- GL Difficult to answer that one. There was general recognition, coming from outside, that the Education Act of 1944 needed a fresh look at it. There was this attitude that education was one of the things the Government ought to deal with. I don't think I could really assess Margaret Thatcher's interest in education, although I remember her when she was minister for education. I find it very hard to assess what her attitude was. Kenneth Baker, whom I became very fond of, a good man, he is primarily a politician; he was switched from one subject to another as the situation demanded. He's a practising Christian, by the way, there's no question of that. He really wanted to get a good Education Bill through Parliament; I ought to have re-read this chapter in his life on this. What I'm saying is this: I don't feel that there was any tremendous sort of surge of concern for the content of education. It was a political matter, basically, I think, and not unconnected, of course, with the idea of coping with society. Any politician has obviously got a proper concern for that. The Department looked at it initially, I think, in terms of a job they were given by the government to produce the new Education Bill, and which they tried to do. The situation over education did change during this time; when Keith Joseph was minister, if you went to see him, you found yourself embroiled in a philosophical discussion at the drop of a hat. But it's very difficult looking back; I don't think I've ever been asked that question before. Reflecting now, it's not easy to discern what moved the government over this. Am I being very cynical in saying the government thought "Well, education is one of those things we've got to deal with"?
- KEB Well, I know what you mean. It links up with what we were saying earlier about legislation not changing attitudes, but it should be able to change behaviour. It seems to me that some of the legislation has not changed what is happening in the schools.
- GL No, it can only help. I've always thought that legislation can't make people good; it can only make it harder for them to be bad. That, I think, is the rôle of legislation. But people expect, of course, far more than that.
- MMcK It's also something to do with society's whole attitude to authority, and if in fact that legislation doesn't even carry that authority with people, it won't change behaviour or attitudes. With regard to those phrases "broadly and



mainly Christian” (and you said that was to give flexibility) was any account taken of the feeling of the ethnic minority groups or other faith communities towards the Bill as it was subsequently drafted?

GL I haven't had any contact with them since then. All I do know is that when we actually got the Bill through, Lord Jakobovits in the Lords was very generous about what we'd achieved. I remember going to talk to the Imam at the Regent Street Mosque, and the leader of the Sikhs, I remember. They all expressed themselves, I won't say well content, but they were very grateful. They didn't feel that they'd been left with any major problems from the point of view of their faith; and so often I found that their attitude was actually more welcome than the attitude of some Christians. I remember what Lord Jakobovits said, and I remember talking to Jonathan Sacks, the present Chief Rabbi.

MMcK In the collective worship situation, for example, in some areas of London, this is what some teachers are genuinely trying to cope with in terms of the legislation. Here they would be with a class, perhaps with some Hindus, some Muslims, some Sikhs and some Christians. And if the legislation seemed to be requiring acts of collective worship which were mainly Christian (I know there's the possibility of a Determination there) how does the teacher parcel it out? There is a genuine practical difficulty as well as the physical difficulty you mentioned, in fulfilling the Act while respecting the faiths of these children. That would be where people would be genuinely trying to respond to the law.

GL That was where, frankly, we hoped that the SACREs would be able to be of much more help in practical terms. How, for instance, several acts of worship could be organised during the day in different places without in any way compelling people, and yet on the other hand, not dividing the school. What lies behind it, of course, is the attitude towards religion on the part of the school and the teachers. I mean, if you start with the idea that religion is divisive you're going to communicate that idea right through everything. If on the other hand you look for the unifying things – that we all worship God, but we don't understand him in the same way, then you have your breakdown into smaller groups without communicating a sense of division. I'm not pretending it's easy.

KEB You were saying earlier that the different faith communities were pleased with the legislation because it put religion back on the agenda of the school curriculum, whereas before it was beginning to slip out of it altogether. They felt that their religions were being respected in the way that Christianity used to be respected.

GL That's absolutely true.

KEB RE is part of the basic curriculum but not included in the National Curriculum. Could you tell me why this decision was taken?



- GL Because we didn't want it to be thought of as just another subject. Kenneth Baker didn't want it for quite different reasons; he said it would render it liable to inspection. It wouldn't have worried me if it had been.
- KEB Well, of course it is, anyway.
- GL Yes, and always has been. It was one of these cases where I welcomed his views for reasons which weren't the same as his. I welcomed it because it came independently; it didn't just come as yet another subject, but as something that affected the whole life of the school. That's why we got it on the face of the Bill in that way. I said earlier that one of our problems today is the difference between ontology and functionalism, but another difficulty today which affects this is the whole concept that equality must mean identity. My scientific upbringing comes into play again here, because I cannot help but remember that if I take a cross-section through a healthy living organism, what I get is a structured pattern of differentiated cells, each performing its own rôle. The only time I get a mass of identical cells is if I cut through a carcinoma. There's a very good book by an evangelical Christian, called "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made". It's by a doctor, and I've been using that analogy for ages, and he uses it from his own experience as a doctor in India. It would be an enormous help in doing that sort of preamble I was talking about.
- KEB I've been using a similar, if not quite so powerful an analogy with my students. To teach or study various world religions could be like putting together a fruit salad where every element retains its own identity. The difference between that and putting the whole thing through a food processor would have the same effect. It would become bland, totally insipid.
- GL Yes, and in my own analogy, what happens is that one cell goes wild and reproduces itself at the expense of the organism, gradually taking it over.
- KEB This is how many people would perceive the rôle of Christianity within the RE syllabus. This is what concerns me. So many Headteachers say they're not applying for Determinations. Their acts of worship are apparently so insipid to avoid offending anybody that it seems to me that the worship isn't anything like the dynamic experience it could be. I think we're not really exposing children to the reality; what we're giving them is a sugary-sweet version, in which case we're selling them short.
- MMcK Was it part of the thinking of the legislators that pupils should be made aware of the different world faiths represented in this country, many of them on the increase in terms of membership?
- GL I think it was. I don't think it was actually there in the content of the debates, but it was there because of the presence of someone like the Chief Rabbi. I'm trying to remember whether there was any Muslim – I don't think there was – as a member of the House of Lords. It was there implicitly, I would say, but never explicitly.



MMcK It just seems to be something that has been taken on board in a major way, and you referred to that term "mishmash". An ongoing concern for teachers is that they don't know enough about other faiths. One of the responses to this has been the introduction of these new Model Syllabuses brought out by SCAA. Have you seen them?

GL No, but I've heard about them.

KEB The SACREs are supposed to use them as a framework in the formulation of a new Agreed Syllabus.

GL To answer your first question, implicitly, yes. With the exception of some of the hard-liners, (I'm sorry to have to say this) I would have thought that the House recognised the existence of the other religions. I got the impression that some of the hard-liners didn't want to know they were there in this country. That's perhaps a bit hard but I think it's fair. The idea that you only come to the truth in Christ, I think they misunderstood that completely.

KEB There is a school of thought that says if ethnic minorities comprise about 5% of the population, that means that 95% of school pupils have a Christian birthright, and they are the ones we should be targeting.

GL Yes, but what they don't realise is that when you go to places like Southall, or Stepney, or Birmingham, you'll find it's the other way round. You've got to take account of that. Then you get the fringe areas where it's probably 50/50, something like that. This is one reason why I wanted to get extra power and emphasis on the SACREs. They're on the spot, and they could take account of the local situation.

KEB You feel that in the main they haven't fulfilled their proper function?

GL That's my impression. I can't be more specific; I haven't any figures to hand. From other people who've come to talk to me I get the impression that they haven't worked in the way we'd hoped. We really did try to upgrade the SACREs in a sense, but in some cases I don't think they've ever met. The LEAs don't know anything about it and the Department has never tried to bring them to book.

KEB So there is a statutory body because it's mandatory but you could say that it's dysfunctional because there isn't the will to act.

GL Exactly. I haven't read anything about SACREs recently so I don't know how things are at present. It's extraordinary going back over all this; it's like a great chunk out of the past which has sort of disappeared now.

MMcK And yet the ramifications of it are quite significant.

GL Yes, quite so.



### APPENDIX 3

## INTERVIEW WITH LORD BAKER OF DORKING LONDON : AUGUST 2 1999

**Participants:** Lord Baker (KB),  
Sister Kathleen Bishop (KEB) ]  
Sister Sybil Boddington (SB) ] Co-Interviewer

**KB** Let me first say something general, about the religious content of the Bill, because the Butler Act was essentially a religious settlement. If you look at the previous Education Acts of this century, most of them had a very large content on Religious Education; it was THE issue in the Balfour Act. Now that was NOT the position as regards my Act, because the religious issues had been largely resolved by Butler. If you look at the memoirs of Butler and what's been written about the Butler Act, the amount of time that was spent having to deal with the religious aspects of the Act was an important part of taking the Act through. So the 1988 Act was not principally a religious settlement – the settlement had been made. But I WAS concerned with the religious aspect of education, obviously. And that is why Clause One of the Bill clearly stated that the spiritual education of the child is just as important as the mental and physical education of the child. So the beginning of the Act, the importance of its spiritual nature of the child and of education, was recognised. Now when the Bill was going through the House of Commons there was very little debate about Religious Education. If you research Hansard you will find very few references to it in the House of Commons.

**KEB** Yes, I have, and you comment on that in your memoirs.

**KB** Yes; I was very surprised. Two things were clear to me: first, the House of Commons was not particularly interested in this, and if it had become a major debate in the House of Commons I suspect that the Humanist elements would have dominated the debate.

**KEB** Why do you think there was this lack of interest in the Commons?

**KB** I think they were more interested in other aspects of the Bill, particularly the Grant Maintained parts which were very controversial, and the National Curriculum itself, and at that time the churches lay very, very low. There was a movement to try to incorporate Religious Education into the curriculum formulae, but the churches were not for that, particularly the Anglican church which led (the Catholic church made its own representations), but the Anglican church was supposed to lead for the Christian churches, so that job of poor Bishop Leonard was to try to marshal the Catholic church and the Methodists and the Free churches as well as the Anglican church! It wasn't just the Anglican church involved, although that was difficult enough. So the churches didn't say very much. They



were mainly concerned about how the Grant Maintained school system would affect church schools; they felt they were in a defensive position, and they were also worried about the funding of church schools. Those were the main concerns of the churches as the Bill went through the Commons. I was concerned about two things: first, that Religious Education in many schools had become very perfunctory – you know, it had almost disappeared; very few teachers were capable of doing it when I was at school. In our generation, there were many teachers who could actually teach it, because they taught from their own biblical knowledge and an established faith. That is much less common now among the teaching profession; there are teachers capable of doing anything in that line. Secondly, Collective Worship, largely because of the influx of different groups in certain parts of the country, had also largely become more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Again, in some schools, there were people who were quite incapable of taking any sort of collective worship. I'm not talking about the church schools here; obviously the church schools are quite different. The Catholic schools, the Anglican schools, were quite capable of doing it. And so, as the Bill went through, and particularly when it got to the Lords, it gave us an opportunity to debate these issues and to discuss them – I said a lot about this in my memoirs. The initiatives came from various sectors. It's interesting how debates move on and have a slow fuse; I think the religious debate had a slow fuse.

KEB Yes, I gathered that from Hansard; it was very ... it took a long time to take off.

KB It took a long time to take off. Because the Bill was so fundamental and very controversial in other matters, Religious Education was sort of the dog that didn't bark in the night. But I was concerned ... that both these things, Collective Worship and Religious Education itself, were really falling by the wayside. And so this did give me the opportunity in the Lords to examine it again, particularly in view of the interest expressed in the Lords by Caroline Cox, by the Chief Rabbi – but only to some extent by the Catholics – the Catholics on the whole kept quiet, I think generally, on those things.

KEB Why do you think that was?

KB Well, I think ... (you are from a Roman Catholic Order?)

KEB Yes, we are, but we're not uncritical. Please ...

KB No, no ... well, I suspect it was because, in the Catholic schools, they knew what was happening; it was being done properly. I think it was that. I think it was simply that, and no more than that, quite frankly. Bishop Konstant was the man who spoke for the Catholic Church in those days on education matters; I met him a couple of times. I met, of course, the former Archbishop, the Cardinal, on several issues. He was marvellous ...

KEB You made a very interesting comment about him in your memoirs.



- KB Absolutely! It's very difficult to argue with a saint, I can tell you. Very, very difficult. (*general laughter*)
- SB We were amused by your comment about nuns "floating about".
- KB Yes, yes. It was a picture of monastic life, of nunnery life. Um, I didn't, in fact, discuss curriculum matters at all with the Cardinal; I discussed other matters, as I say in the book. But two things turned up: Collective Worship and Religious Education. The group in the House of Lords, led by Caroline Cox, who were really at the evangelical end of Christianity, oh, yes, very much that end, and Malcolm Pearson and his father-in-law, Martin ..., who was the Queen's private secretary and David Renton.
- KEB Peter Thomeycroft was one of them, I gather.
- KB Well, Peter Thomeycroft was very old at that time, and quite ill. Oh yes, and Alec Douglas Home, and a few others. And I think that they all were of an age when there was no doubt about it; you started the day with a hymn and a prayer, and they wanted to go back to a hymn and a prayer. Now that was quite difficult, for the obvious reasons in the secular schools. Many schools had become very secular, particularly those where there was a very large proportion from immigrant communities, where they formed, in some inner-city schools in London, 80% of the school population. Now, you have some of those in Liverpool, I think?
- KEB Well, in the North West generally; in Preston, where I did some research ...
- KB Which is mainly black, I imagine.
- KEB It's mainly Asian; they are mostly Muslims there.
- KB So, therefore, it's very difficult to start with a hymn and a prayer in that situation; you have to accept that fact. First it's difficult because it means nothing to them and second there's no one remotely capable of doing it. So I was trying to find a way through this, trying to retain an element of Christianity in it, and as you will know from my book, the solution we eventually came up with. Bishop Leonard didn't want Christianity on the face of the Bill at all.
- KEB I know; I was fascinated to hear that.
- KB He felt he was being pressurised enormously by Caroline Cox, because on the whole (he's become a Catholic since) he was a very high Anglican, as I am myself. We still have the Ave Maria in Latin – you've given it up, haven't you? But anyway, that's by the by. Leonard came from the high Anglican end of the Protestant faith and therefore he was pretty impatient with the evangelicals – he thought they were a pretty cranky lot and referred to them as the Tribe; he thought they were an odd lot. Well, he had his own agenda. And so the compromise that we came up with, as you know, were the words that are quoted in the Act. It would "take into account the



other faiths”, but it would also reflect the fact that Christianity is the predominant faith in our country, which I thought was the best solution we could get to, I have to say that to you. It was a compromise, there’s no question of that – it was a compromise. I think that ... if the Bill had gone back to the Commons in the way that the Tribe wanted, it would have been chucked out; it would have been seen as outrageous, and it would have become a tremendous *cause célèbre*. I didn’t want that huge firework to go off, so we set about a compromise with Graham Leonard and with the Department, who were very helpful and creative in this. I think we came up with quite a good solution, as it turned out. We also revived the SACREs, because SACREs had virtually fallen into disuse; that was another thing we discovered.

KEB They were discretionary before, weren’t they, but you made them mandatory?

KB That’s right; they’d fallen by the wayside in many cases. They were more honoured again in the breach than in the observance, so we made that mandatory, and I think that it is working reasonably well. It brings in the other faiths as well as other Christian denominations.

KEB I’m not sure how active the SACREs are – I think some of them are beginning to get their act together, but I think these Model Syllabuses will help to structure the locally Agreed Syllabuses.

KB Yes, they’re now coming through, aren’t they? We also placed Religious Education, not under the National Curriculum basis, but alongside the other subjects in the National Curriculum.

KEB It has a unique status, hasn’t it?

KB Unique, yes – it would have to be. If you went through the other system of determining what should form the constituent elements of a subject in the National Curriculum, you’d have the religious element taken over by a lot of lay people, and a lot of lay people having a view alongside religiously-minded people.

KEB So do you think teachers would need to have a religious faith themselves to be able to teach RE and to lead an act of worship?

KB Well, of course, it helps enormously to have a conviction and a belief. And if you don’t, then it’s a bit hollow; that’s my view. We all come from a generation when it was much easier to do that. This is where I think the church schools were in a stronger position, because, being church schools, they can call upon a priest, or they can call upon a local vicar, to play his part. But there are still many teachers who are very committed Christians, whether they are Catholic, Protestant, Methodist, there are also teachers who are committed Muslims and there are teachers who are committed Hindus. I welcome the fact of commitment, but there are many who are just nothing, and to many of the young teachers today, who have not been brought up in



any religious tradition, probably some would know the Lord's prayer and some wouldn't. Whereas our generation would all automatically learn it by heart.

KEB In that case, isn't it making great difficulties for people to insist that they have a daily act of worship, when many of them have no experience of worship themselves?

KB Well, I would prefer to hang on to it, personally. You'll be in a better position to observe – presumably you go and visit schools? You've visited many and you'll go and visit many more ... But I still think it's important for children to come together and have a few moments of spiritual thought once a day. I think that is important.

KEB Sometimes a reflection, sometimes a prayer?

KB Yes, that's right. They can talk about evil in the world, and how one should set about trying to deal with that evil and things of that sort. You know, there are many issues that one can deal with, in that sense, in that situation. If you just get them all together and talk about the sports fixtures and the timetable ... this is what was happening. So I thought I should ... what I provided was a window of opportunity, and I hope that window's still open. That's all I could ... that's all a Minister can do, provide a window of opportunity.

KEB You were saying that the law was being flouted, in effect. You had evidence for this?

KB Not so much flouted, more fallen into disuse. There was lots of anecdotal evidence – talk to some of the older teachers, but not in the church schools. Yes, and I think there wasn't much enthusiasm for it, because in the schools with 60 or 70% non-Christians they said other problems were more pressing, and they let them off. In my school, St Paul's, which was an Anglican school, we had an act of daily worship, starting with a hymn and a prayer ... interestingly, all the prayers were in Latin in those days, yes, so I knew the Pater Noster in Latin ... and we had a daily prayer in Latin. Then there was a reading from the bible or else someone would give a talk for charity – something of that sort, something with a Christian basis. I think they've abandoned the Latin now, but ... (*general laughter*)

KEB Are you in favour of separate acts of worship for different faith groups in the school?

KB I think that probably that is a practice that occurs in schools, and I would not seek to discourage it. If there is a sufficient number of Muslims in a school, whether it's a hundred, fifty, thirty or forty, and there is someone capable of talking about Islam, they should do that. If there are enough Hindus, and somebody came to talk about Hinduism, I would respect that. If there was a certain number of Sikhs in a school, I would call them



together; I would have Sikhs in one area, Muslims in another, in a mixed school.

KEB Don't you think that might possibly be divisive from a community point of view?

KB Well, I think you should try to bring them together for one element of it, or perhaps you could do it in various ways – let them all come together on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays – then on Tuesdays and Thursdays let them go to their respective areas. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays they could talk about a Divine Being – there are sensitivities here and they're very practical. The nature of school populations is changing so dramatically. But in a Catholic school which has a large number of Asians – how are they addressing that?

KEB Well, the parents are aware that they have the right to withdraw their children ...

KB Yes, that was part of the Act, the right of withdrawal.

KEB The parents are informed from the beginning that acts of worship are Catholic-based, and they can withdraw their children or not, just as they wish. Most of them, in fact, choose not to withdraw their children, because they choose to send them to a Catholic school, and they feel that there is nothing their children will be taught that could conflict with their religion.

KB Oh well, that's interesting. And you can only do that in a school where there's a strong Christian belief and someone capable of giving expression to it. You can only do that in church schools. You might be able to do it in some of the secondary schools where there is a strong head or deputy who's capable of doing it and there's a strong Religious Education tradition in the school, and properly qualified teachers of Religious Education. There is a shortage of teachers in this subject.

KEB This is a knotty problem, isn't it? I think there's a great need for In-Service training during Baker Days. They're still called Baker Days in some places ...

KB Oh, good! (*general laughter*)

KEB But very few of them, apparently, are devoted to Religious Education or to Collective Worship and I think that's a pity because it means that ...

KB You should make that part of your thesis.

KEB Yes, I shall. But there really is a great need for In-Service education on it, but who's to do it? There are very few RE specialists at Higher Education level. I was myself involved in teacher training, specialising in RE and there were, I think, three of us in the whole Department who had any expertise in RE.



KB One of my sisters-in-law, who's in her 50s, is taking Theology as a mature student at Edinburgh University. It's a real discipline, three years, this degree course, and she has time to do it. She's an Anglican, and there are all sorts of people on the course, quite a lot of young people in the 19, 20 21 age-group, and some older people as well. So it's not just old people re-treading and doing something different. So, if that's happening, those sorts of people may well find their way into teaching at Further Education level. Because we need a supply coming up.

SB We have lots of students taking Theology in our college.

KEB Yes, it's a popular subject. We're a church foundation anyway, a joint Anglican and Roman Catholic foundation ...

KB Which college is that?

KEB Liverpool Hope.

KB Oh, yes, that's the famous one.

KEB Just a couple of things I need to clarify. You mentioned about the fact that there was little debate on RE in the Commons, but there were fireworks in the Lords. I've read the transcripts of their debates and it was obvious that Bishop Leonard was a very reconciling person, a real diplomat.

KB Oh yes. You see, he had to try to represent and speak for the whole of Christianity in the Lords. That was his function; he was the spokesman for all the Christian churches. He had quite a lot of help from the (*Chief*) Rabbi actually; the Jews are quite wise in these matters, because they've gone through this over the centuries. He was quite a spiritual man, well supported by the Chief Rabbi.

KEB Why was Bishop Leonard so much against including the name Christian?

KB He thought it would provoke a counter-strike to defeat it altogether, and that would lose the ground that we had already gained. He believed that ... and I think he might have been right, in the Commons. I went to him and said, "Look, if you give in to the Tribe on this (the Tribe was so insistent) we risk losing it". There would have been an enormous row in the Commons, because all the humanist elements, the atheist elements in the Commons had been quiet so far; they'd not been stirred up. This could have been a hornets' nest, and they would have passed amendments that would have set us back. No Religious Education in the schools – completely secular, just like France. No Religious Education at all – "old-fashioned and irrelevant". I said, "You know, these are amendments that would be carried against us".

KEB They would have thrown the whole thing out, would they?



- KB Yes, and that's why I didn't want the whole thing ruined by that. So I was a practical politician!
- KEB And you obviously had a good relationship with Bishop Leonard over that. He said in his memoirs how well you two worked together.
- KB Oh yes, very well.
- KEB And it was obviously the reconciling hand of both of you that won the day. Could you say a bit more about why you decided to keep RE and Collective Worship as part of the basic curriculum but not part of the National Curriculum?
- KB I think I've answered that. If it was part of the National Curriculum the procedure under the Act would make it subject to National Curriculum Review and examined all the time. I did not want Religious Education to fall into that category; it would not have been appropriate.
- KEB So you were happy for it to be organised on a local level by the SACREs.
- KB Yes, much better.
- KEB You say in your memoirs, "I was very conscious that the key figure to win over was Alec Douglas Home". Why was he such a key figure?
- KB Because of his standing in the House of Lords. In the House of Lords, certain peers are listened to more than others. If Alec was taking a view, then lots would say "there must be something in that". So I saw Alec and talked it through with him; he's been "got at" by the Tribe.
- KEB But he stood firm, presumably. You go on to say "I then had to persuade the Tribe that this was a victory for them". Was that difficult?
- KB I had to use such political skills as I had! (*general laughter*)
- KEB And you managed to remain friends with Lady Cox?
- KB Oh yes. I think the Tribe realised that they were pushing too hard ... they were asking for more than they could reasonably expect. I was prepared to give them something but not anything like what they wanted. If I'd tried to give them all they wanted that would have been very damaging.
- KEB When you introduced this idea about Determinations, how did you see that working, because it means that people can opt out if they wish. Did you see that as an escape clause or offering flexibility or what?
- KB Well, I didn't want to create local areas of intense hostility. So in order to do that you take the pressure off the boiling kettle slightly. That allowed ... because you could be absolutely certain that there would be passionate, bigoted parents who would cause an awful amount of row if their child had



to attend worship. It would be an intensity of debate and argument out of all proportion to it, which would have built up into an enormous great crisis. "Why should my child ...!!" You know. So I wasn't going to give them the chance to say that. I knew full well that some parents would abuse it, but so what?

KEB In fact very few people choose to withdraw their children – there are fewer and fewer each year. But my concern is that this might be because the act of worship has become so bland it's ineffective. This is the problem. It becomes insipid and in fact doesn't represent the faith of a particular community. But I think this idea of Determinations is good. I was also interested in the fact that you allowed the flexibility of timing; the '44 Act said that it had to be at the beginning of the day.

KB Yes. It suits some but it doesn't suit others. You see, some schools are now starting at 8 o'clock with breakfast for the children. That wasn't known in our time; some are doing that. Others are going straight into their first lesson, and it may be better ... and some schools physically can't fit all the children together – it's impossible, so they have to stagger it a bit. The younger children are brought together at one time, the older children at another time. And moreover there are things that are of interest to younger children that might be different for the older ones. So I don't mind split assemblies.

KEB So long as it's a daily act? One of the bishops originally said, soon after the Act was passed, that perhaps quality would suffer if it was a daily act – that fewer acts would make for better quality. What's your view on that?

KB *(hesitates)* I think that bishop's a bit defeatist. *(general laughter)*

KEB Your description of "a story, hymn and a prayer" really doesn't reflect what goes on in many primary schools. I mean if you do trot out that formula time after time it's going to get tired, and lack interest and lack stimulus.

KB But the very fact that one ... that it's there, even as a phrase, means that people will say "yes, we haven't had that for some time, let's have a story today". Depends on what's happening in the wide and wonderful world – if there's a great tragedy, they may want to have a hymn to that, or if there's a local tragedy they might want to have a prayer. Or if there's something to be very grateful about ... you know ...

KEB Yes, and it's teacher ingenuity that will make for the variety anyway. But as you know there's been quite a lot of concern, particularly from the NAHT, who feel that the law must change; they have been pushing for it for some time. They say that daily worship is excessive, that it demands more of people than perhaps the most strict religion might expect of its followers.

KB Well, they'll have to persuade the government about that, not me! I'm so glad to have met you, and good luck with your thesis.



KB You've obviously done a lot of research in the schools and seen what's happening.

KEB Yes, I have – I've spoken to heads in schools where there are 80% Muslim, and most don't see any difficulty. They want Collective Worship to continue, which is very encouraging.

KB That is very, very encouraging. And you've met some heads who would like to drop it, I imagine.

KEB Interestingly enough, no. They may have been a self-selecting group, because I sent out letters describing the research I was doing, and the ones who replied were all very positive towards it. One or two said they didn't want to talk about it, so they may be ...

KB The ones who want to walk on the other side. *(general laughter)*KEB  
Thank you again for your time.

**APPENDIX 4**

**WORSHIP THROUGH STORY:  
A SUGGESTED APPROACH**

The following is a practical illustration of the proposed programme outlined in Chapter 8.7 above. The programme is sufficiently flexible to be organised around a three, four or five-term year. The world faiths included are Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, as these are generally agreed (in the SCAA Model Syllabuses and most current RE textbooks, for instance) to be the major world faiths represented in this country. A half-term segment is allotted to each faith, so that there is sustained exposure to each. This would mean that in a two-year rolling programme in a three-term year the pupils would have reflected on significant aspects of each faith for approximately six consecutive weeks. The number of sessions would vary; the maximum would be five sessions per week, while the more likely would be two or three. The programme is set out below.

**SUGGESTED PROGRAMME FOR ACTS OF COLLECTIVE WORSHIP**

<b>TERM 1</b>		<b>TERM 2</b>		<b>TERM 3</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Christianity	Christianity	Islam	Christianity	Hinduism	Christianity
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Judaism	Christianity	Buddhism	Christianity	Christianity or Sikhism	Christianity

The predominance of Christianity in this programme is in accordance with the law. In the final term, the possibility of including a sixth world faith such as Sikhism, is offered if it is appropriate in a given area.

Two examples of acts of school worship, the first for KS1 pupils and the second for KS2, adapted from textbooks already in common use in primary schools, are set out below to illustrate this suggested approach. The emphasis is firmly on stimulating the children's personal reflection as a central element of the activity, whereby they will be enabled to learn from, in addition to learning about religion and what it means to be religious.



## Assembly 1

### Malik and the Thirsty Dog – a story from the Muslim faith (Narrative approach suitable for KS1 pupils, 5 – 7 years)

**Background:** The Holy Prophet Muhammad, the last in a long line of prophets of Islam, was especially fond of animals. Once, when a tired dog lay on his cloak with her pups, he cut his cloak in two so as not to disturb the weary mother dog. He told the following story to his friends because he wanted them to know how God would like them to behave towards all living creatures.

The leader tells the story of Malik and the thirsty dog, adapted from *A World of Light* (Price and Parmiter, 1992:50). Children could be involved in the narrative, using mime or scripted drama. The story relates how a weary traveller in the desert, in search of water for himself and his camel, comes across a well with water too deep to reach. Much of the story revolves around how Malik makes an ingenious container, devises ways of reaching the water, and is eventually successful in obtaining the drink he so desperately craves. Just as he is about to take a sip, an old desert dog comes limping towards him, a pathetic sight as it looks longingly at the water. Malik wearily offers it to the dog, which drinks until there is no more water left. Malik then makes another difficult and dangerous foray to the bottom of the well, is again successful and he and his camel at last enjoy their delayed drink of water.

“He will be greatly blessed by God,” Muhammad told his followers, “God loves all animals and wants you to do the same.” Muslims believe that they should care for animals because they are part of God’s creation.

The teacher might follow up this story by inviting the children to reflect on one of the following themes:

- 1 Journeys they have taken: how they travelled, what food and drink (if any) they took. Delays experienced, their feelings on arrival. How did Malik feel as the day wore on? Have the children ever been really thirsty? What happened, and how did it feel when they eventually got something to drink?
- 2 Animals: have any children got a pet at home? Who looks after it? What does it need to survive and be happy? Do animals have the same rights as people?
- 3 Giving things away: Think about something you would find it hard to give away. Have you ever given something away because someone else needed it more? Why do you think Malik gave his own drink of water to the dog?

In this story pupils are encouraged to reflect on notions of empathy – and how sometimes it might be necessary to put the needs of others before their own. The emphasis is on the application of the story’s message to the pupils’ daily lives –



otherwise it stays at the level of a story with no relevance to their experience. The worship could end with a suggestion to decide on one unselfish act they might perform that day, and, if they so wish, to ask for God's help in acting on that decision.

**Assembly 2                      Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur - Jewish Tradition  
(Historical approach suitable for KS2 pupils 7 – 11 years)**

**Text adapted from Activity Assemblies for Multi-Racial Schools (Peirce 1992: 17-21)**

**Background:** the leader describes the activities connected with Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year. It is celebrated in the Hebrew month of Tishri, around September or October, and is a time for Jews to make a fresh start and to ask God's forgiveness for anything they may have done wrong in the previous year. The Day of Atonement, which occurs ten days after Rosh Hashana, is called Yom Kippur. During these ten days, Jews apologise to their friends and neighbours for anything they have done which may have hurt them. They try to make amends for all the wrongdoing and ask God's forgiveness too. Jewish families go to the synagogue where they say prayers and sing Psalms. It is traditional to blow a special musical instrument made from a ram's horn, just as their ancestors have done throughout the ages. Jews have a great respect for tradition. Some go to the seaside or to a river, empty their pockets and throw away any crumbs on the water. It symbolises the throwing away of last year's wrongdoing, bad thoughts and unkind actions. At the end of Yom Kippur, Jews believe that God has forgiven their sins and they can make a fresh start.

This tradition offers many attractive opportunities for pupils to engage with the ideas presented. Musical instruments mentioned in Ps 150 (drums, flutes, cymbals etc) could be displayed and played during the act of worship. Modern versions of Jewish songs, e g Be-Rosh Hashana (Peirce 1992:18-19) could be taught and sung. The pupils' reflection could focus on their own experiences of friendship and quarrels, experiences of reconciliation and starting afresh. They might think of someone they have treated badly or someone who has hurt them – is there a way to start putting the friendship to rights? What ways can they think of to put behind them what has gone wrong in the relationship? If they wish, ask God to help them see ways they might need to make a fresh start in the future, perhaps even today.

These examples illustrate some of the essential elements of this suggested approach. The material selected from each tradition should be

- 1        appropriate to the age and experience of the pupils but capable of interpretation at a variety of levels
- 2        rooted in the tradition to which it belongs, and comparisons and contrasts with other traditions avoided



- 3 presented in an open-ended context, accompanied by questions allowing for a variety of responses
- 4 respectful of the pupils' right to engage in prayer or not, since worship is a voluntary response
- 5 capable of stimulating questions and concerns which may later be explored on an individual and / or communal level, in the RE lesson or elsewhere.

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