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Changing the Game in English Religious Education: 1971 and 2018

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Schools Council Working Paper 36 and Its Impact on RE in England and Wales (and Me)

Almost 50 years ago, in 1971, a small booklet was published which marked a 'step change' in RE in England and Wales. In 1975, when encountering it on my teacher training course in RE for secondary schools (pupils aged 11–18) it changed my life. I have compared this to a conversion experience, in that it converted me from Theology to Religious Studies, and from being lukewarm about a career in teaching RE to a lifelong passionate commitment to the subject, understood as an integrative, non-confessional, multi-worldview, objective (as far as humanly possible), critical and pluralistic enterprise. The booklet was modest not only in size but in its self-description as 'a working paper, not a report' that did not 'claim to know all the answers' but intended to 'raise questions' (Schools Council 1971: 5). It was also modest in that the

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actual authors are not named, as this was not then the policy of the Schools Council, and it is attributed to 'the thinking of those engaged on the work of the Schools Council Project on Religious Education in Secondary Schools after the first eighteen months'. However, it was actually drafted by the Deputy Director of the Project, Donald Horder (d. 1976), with substantial contributions from the project team of Andre Farrant, Mary Hayward and Roderick McLeod, the overall Director of the Project being Ninian Smart. In an obituary for Donald Horder, Smart writes of Horder's dedication to 'what he liked to call, and rightly, "the New RE"' (Smart and Alves 1976: 53).

Schools Council Working Paper 36 (hereafter WP36) was indeed revolutionary. The paper emerged from a project which surveyed existing practice in RE and recent research, involving academics, practising teachers and other professionals. The most innovative suggestions were changes in both content and approach to the subject. The greatest change of content was from a focus on Christian tradition, especially the Biblical text shared by diverse denominations, to the religious traditions of the whole world. Although some teachers were already starting to teach a range of religions in the late 1960s (p. 62), it is perhaps difficult to realise today how radical a move that was half a century ago, and how welcome it was for young teachers such as myself to have WP36 support this change. Although the focus was mainly on 'religions', WP36 also supported a similar 'sympathetic study' of 'alternatives to religious faith such as secular Humanism, Marxism and Maoism' (p. 66).

Perhaps even more important was the change in approach, from a confessional to a non-confessional one. Categorising the three main approaches as confessional/dogmatic, antidogmatic or phenomenological/undogmatic, it wholeheartedly endorses the third approach, recognising that although this was innovative, there were teachers that were already working this way 'almost by instinct'. This recognition of the ability of classroom teachers to anticipate the findings of experts and researchers is one of the many strengths of WP36, though I would probably refer to 'experience' rather than 'instinct'. What a relief it was to find that the RE teacher was no longer expected to assume or teach pupils that a particular tradition or text was 'true', but could embark on an a exploration, with the students, of a wide range of traditions, with the goal of

trying to know and understand more, rather than gain commitment to a particular tradition.

WP36 manages to cover much ground in a short space. It includes a brief history of how RE came to be included in state-funded education in England and Wales; arguments for including RE in the curriculum; a summary of recent research; a discussion of the nature of the subject, aims, objectives and content; integrated studies; the needs of children from minority groups; the relationship with moral education; requirements for teacher training; objectivity and neutrality; the Christian RE teacher; RE in faith-based schools; school worship and examinations. Many of the issues it deals with are still being debated half a century later, and many of its recommendations are still relevant.

The change from a Christian content to one including a range of religions only affected legislation in 1988, when the Education Reform Act required the local Agreed Syllabuses for RE, used by state-funded schools without a religious foundation and those schools with a religious foundation that were fully state-funded, to 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the principal religions represented in Great Britain'. Even so that represents a compromise between those campaigning for Christian content and those campaigning for a multi-faith approach, and as non-religious worldviews were not mentioned in law, was interpreted by many as excluding such.

Ninian Smart and the 'Phenomenological' Approach to RE

Given that Ninian Smart was the Director of the project, it is perhaps not surprising that WP36 supports what it calls the 'explicit religion' approach, especially the phenomenological approach of Smart. The phenomenology of religion has a long history (see for example Cox 2006) and it would be more accurate to talk of many 'phenomenological approaches' rather than one. Smart's version involved taking an open, methodologically agnostic approach to study, employing the phenomenological tools of 'epoché' (the

attempt to put one's existing preconceptions and prejudices to one side) and empathy (the attempt to understand what the adherents themselves intend, requiring the exercise of sensitivity and imagination). Smart and the Department at Lancaster University pioneered in the late 1960s the discipline of 'Religious Studies' as opposed to 'Theology', which was 'a radically new approach to the study of religion at university level' (WP36, p. 37) involving changes of content, aims and methods. Some of my own favourite quotations from Smart are the following:

> The study of religions is a science, then, that requires a sensitive and artistic heart. (1971: 13)

> religious education must transcend the informative … not in the direction of evangelising, but in the direction of initiation into understanding the meaning of, and into questions about the truth and worth of, religion. (1968: 105)

> religious studies should emphasise the descriptive, historical side of religion, but needs thereby to enter into dialogue with the parahistorical claims of religions and anti-religious outlooks. (1968: 106)

These three quotations cannot do justice to Smart's large body of work but give a flavour of the Smartian version of phenomenology; the attempt to give as far as possible an objective, 'scientific' account of the religions and non-religious worldviews studied, whilst also drawing upon the subjectivity and imagination of the student. It is not merely describing factual information, but about understanding what the material studied, whether beliefs, values or practices mean to the adherent, their sense of identity and of community. Further, it is not uncritical, but invites the student to engage with an evaluation of the material studied, not only intellectually, but also existentially.

Another important contribution of Smart is his well-known 'dimensions' of religion, originally six, later expanded to seven or eight, which feature in different orders in his various publications. To some extent escaping the difficulties of defining 'religion', the stress on the different dimensions of religions/worldviews (however many and exactly which

are identified) attempts to ensure that the pictures painted of religions and quasi-religious worldviews are balanced and well-rounded, including not only the doctrinal/philosophical teachings, narrative/mythological texts and ethical/legal teachings, but also how religions are lived in practice—the ritual/practical, social/institutional, experiential/emotional as well as material products such as art and architecture and involvement with the political.

What I, as a young teacher, appreciated was not so much philosophical phenomenology, but rather the general approach to the traditions and people I was exploring with the students, characterised by Smart as a 'warm distance' (1979: 8). Evaluation and critique were not ruled out, but should not be engaged in prematurely, before knowing as much as possible about the material under consideration, and trying as far as possible to see it from the point of view of the people involved. The term 'phenomenology' was useful, in that it sounded impressively academic (according to Smart, 'Michael Pye used to say that the word phenomenology … was very, very useful when talking to Vice Chancellors and I'm sure he makes it sound very scientific, technical and esoteric at the same time' [1995: 10]), but also that it seemed to give Religious Studies a methodology of its own. Characterised by Smart as a polymethodic subject, drawing as it does upon a wide range of disciplines from the arts, humanities and social sciences, including history, literary criticism, media studies, creative arts, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy and theology, Religious Studies sometimes struggles to be seen as a discipline in its own right. In the next two decades, 'phenomenology' in British RE, became a kind of proxy for 'multi-faith RE' or a 'religious studies' approach, rather than referring to phenomenological theory or methods.

Philip Barnes' Critique of the Approach to RE Recommended by Working Paper 36

A substantial critique of WP36 was provided by Philip Barnes in 2002, 30 years after its publication. Acknowledging that it is 'widely regarded as one of the most influential documents on British religious education in

the post-war era' (Barnes 2002: 61), Barnes criticises the paper on several grounds, mainly its conflation of confessional RE with indoctrination and its advocacy of a phenomenological approach. Agreeing with Barnes that we must re-read WP36 rather than relying on our memories of it, I find myself seeing something in his first criticism, but find that I do not recognise the version of the phenomenological approach attacked.

The criticism that WP36 conflates 'confessional' with 'indoctrination' and makes the former illegitimate does have something in it. The confessional approach is given the alternative name 'dogmatic' and associated with the aim of 'intellectual and cultic indoctrination' (p. 21). Terence Copley points out that this contributed to making 'confessional' a term of abuse when employed by many followers of the New RE (Copley 1997: 104). Confessional, or 'denominational' RE as some prefer to describe it to escape from these pejorative associations, clearly does not necessarily mean indoctrination. A more open confessional RE is possible, such as in the Belgian concept of 'Catholic schools of dialogue', and as practised in many Catholic and Anglican church schools in England. In defence of WP36, in 1971, given the established and dominant nature of Christian theology at universities and confessional RE in schools, and even now looking at RE worldwide, perhaps the argument required an over-statement to make the point. As both Barnes and myself found on re-reading WP36, it argues that in fully state-funded schools in plural societies, a non-confessional, integrative RE is the most appropriate. It does leave room for denominational schools to engage in confessional RE, though given the reality of the actual worldviews of many pupils, and the world in which all pupils must live and work, the non-confessional multi-faith RE proposed by WP36 is also recommended for 'faith-based' school. As Barnes states, 'properly interpreted and assessed, *Working Paper 36* leaves room for a chastened form of confessional religious education in church schools that can claim to be as truly educational as it is truly religious'. However, I would add that this requires funding of this part of the curriculum by the religious body concerned, as with the English category, currently being eroded, of the 'voluntary aided school', and that parents and pupils know what the school stands for and have a real choice about whether to go there.

On phenomenology, I find that I do not recognise the version of a phenomenological approach attacked by Barnes. Although some criticisms are of the followers of WP36 rather than the document itself, the approach is described as often merely learning 'about' religions rather than addressing the existential concerns of pupils, as nearly always involving a thematic treatment, as effectively removing any critical dimension from RE, and as implicitly teaching that all religions are different expressions of the same reality. The claim that 'contemporary advocates of phenomenology are almost unanimous in their support for a thematic rather than a systematic presentation of religious beliefs and practices' (Barnes 2002: 71–2) is presented without evidence or examples. Many RE syllabuses over the decades have utilised a mixture of 'systematic' and 'thematic' units, as recommended by the Westhill Project (Rudge 2000). Moreover, there are different 'thematic' approaches; at worst imposing categories derived from one religion or context on another, but at best focusing on concepts crucial for understanding the complex, diverse and inter-related nature of so-called religions/worldviews and on the questions raised by our shared human experience (see Teece 1993). The phenomenological approach has also conversely been blamed for creating the 'world religions paradigm' (see e.g. Owen 2011: 254) and leading to the presentation of religions in reified silos. The other issues, having also been raised by religious studies scholars, will be dealt with below.

Further Critiques of a Phenomenological Approach, Smart and WP36, in Both Religious Studies at University Level and RE in Schools, and a Case for the Defence

The heyday of the phenomenology of religion in UK universities (not that there were ever many university departments dominated by this approach rather than Theology) and the 'phenomenological' approach to RE in schools was probably from the 1970s to the late 1990s (Sutcliffe 2004: xxii; Jackson 1997).

There have been many criticisms of the phenomenological approach from both Religious Studies scholars (e.g. Flood 1999; Fitzgerald 2000) and from within RE (e.g. Jackson 1997 and Hannam 2019 as well as Barnes). Although appreciating some of the problems identified, I contend that a generally phenomenological approach as championed by Smart and WP36, meaning a methodologically agnostic attempt to acknowledge and put aside prejudices, the effort to be sensitive to the believer's point of view, and a content that includes a range of worldviews is the most appropriate at all levels of education in a world where we are increasingly aware of plurality, and issues of equality and power. Smart himself said that phenomenology 'is a dreadful word of course' (1995: 10) and it may perhaps be that a better name would be a 'study of religions approach' (cf. Alberts 2007), though that would need careful defining so as not to exclude the existential dimension of RE.

The accusation of being merely descriptive and not engaging with issues of meaning and truth (Barnes 2002: 73) might perhaps be true in some RE classrooms but is simply not true of WP36 or Smart (Jackson 1997: 13–14), as illustrated by the quotations from Smart above or any reading of Smart himself. In no way was the critical dimension removed from RE. Rather the student is encouraged to avoid premature evaluation based on inadequate knowledge and failure to attempt to see the insider's viewpoint. Only after gaining knowledge and understanding is one 'in a better position to judge wisely about religious truth' (Smart 1971: 12). As well as intellectual evaluation, WP36 maintained that RE is not just what was later called 'learning about' religions/worldviews, but also contributes to the pupil's 'personal search for meaning … both a dialogue with experience and a dialogue with living religions' (p. 43).

Some have seen the approach as a subtle indoctrination into liberal Christian theology (see Jackson 1997: 21; Barnes 2002: 73). Tim Fitzgerald (2000) takes this further in arguing that 'religious studies' more generally, by endorsing and reifying the idea of a distinct area of human experience called 'religion', is 'covert theology'. It is true that non-confessional, multi-faith RE emerged mostly from within liberal protestant circles, in countries like Sweden and the UK, rather than in self-consciously secular contexts, but it does not necessarily follow that it promotes a view that all religions are different expressions of the same

holy reality, or even that religion in general is a good thing. Chater and Erricker (2013: 71) claim that RE has a tendency to portray religions positively rather than honestly and politically, which they see as a legacy of phenomenology and anthropology. Whether this is true or not, it is certainly not the position of WP36 which states 'a teacher will not use his position to advance any cause other than that of responsible scholarship' (p. 27). Whether a teacher emphasises positive elements of a tradition or negative consequences of some its teachings and practices usually depends on her classroom context, the age of the children and whether the preconceptions they come with from family or media are initially positive or negative.

Several critics, such as Flood (1999) or Hannam (2019) claim that there is too much stress on individual experience. Smart certainly stresses the centrality of the experiential, but this does not require viewing 'religious experience' philosophically as a special and unchallengeable form of knowledge, rather it rescues religions/worldviews from being viewed as merely intellectual propositions.

One of the strongest arguments against phenomenology is that it is 'essentialist'; putting forward the idea that through its methods the scholar can grasp the 'essence' of whatever they are attempting to understand. This 'eidetic vision' was an important part of the philosophical phenomenology of Husserl; that by employing epoché it is possible to intuit what something actually is. Although Husserl gives a fascinating account of how our consciousness works, the existence of universal essences has, as Jackson argues, been contested by 'much recent work in philosophy, the social sciences, cultural criticism and literary theory' (Jackson 1997: 23), and I would add, by feminist theory and much longer ago by Buddhist philosophy ('no-self' and 'emptiness'). In Religious Studies, the claim of any 'essence' to a particular religious phenomenon, tradition or religion per se has largely been discarded. However, I would argue that neither WP36 nor Smart are essentialist. On religion, for example, WP36 says 'no definition is adequate' (p. 16). Although Smart makes use of the denial of the 'possibility of an experience of the invisible world' (1971: 22) as a way of distinguishing between the 'religious' and the 'non-religious', this does not make him an essentialist about religion as further on in the text he sees the division between sacred and secular

something which is a construct of 'western men … today' (p. 49). Eidetic vision did not feature much in the version of the phenomenological study of religions that was employed in RE.

The phenomenological approach has been blamed for the 'World Religions Paradigm' (see e.g. Owen 2011); the creation of a category modelled on the notion of religion derived from Western and Christian presumptions. In RE this has led to the reification of a set of major traditions (in England this became six in the mid-1980s with the addition of Buddhism to Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism) a series of 'isms', ignoring diversity within traditions, the connections between them and the wealth of smaller groups including 'indigenous' traditions and newer religions, and all the complex interactions that occur in real-life 'religions'. WP36 does use the term 'world religions' but I would argue that this was simply shorthand for 'let's study other religions and not just Christianity' rather than intending to construct a hard category. In fact the suggestion is 'the study of the world's religions' (p. 62), in the context of a discussion of the term 'comparative religion' which anticipates some of the objections to imposing presuppositions on the phenomena studied. The 'big five/six' cannot be blamed on Smart, as his list of traditions included Confucianism, Jainism and Latter Day Saints as well as indigenous traditions, and his accounts throughout his many publications stress sheer diversity and change over time and space.

There has been much debate about the meaning and possibility of objectivity or impartiality or neutrality in study, writing and teaching (see e.g. *British Journal of Religious Education* 40.1, 2017). The modernist concept of objectivity has been much criticised, including by feminists. We all bring our own background, assumptions and experience to bear when trying to make sense of an unfamiliar religion/worldview, and in any case there is no unified religion/worldview to understand. What is accepted as 'objective truth' is often the perspective of whoever holds power. The attempt to 'put aside' one's own views, as seems to be recommended by 'epoché', is accused of being both impossible and unethical.

WP36, while recommending an objective approach, spends some time discussing the meaning of objectivity and does not have a naïve view that an absolute objectivity available only to the omniscient can be achieved. It is well aware that there are no '"bare facts" free of all interpretive

elements', and that 'every fact is set within a framework of presuppositions' (p. 23). What is recommended is the recognition of one's own assumptions, now called reflexivity, and the representation of viewpoints other than one's own as impartially as possible with imagination and sensitivity. 'Objective' to WP36 means that the promotion or commendation of one particular worldview is inappropriate for the teacher in the community school.

In conclusion, I would argue that much of WP36 stands the test of time, that many of the criticisms raised against the approach it recommends can be at least in part refuted by a careful re-reading, and that many of the 'questions for public discussion' it raises are still being discussed. These include the lack of clarity or agreement on the nature, aims, purposes of RE, the criteria for selecting content and the impact of the technological revolution and knowledge explosion. WP36 problematises the concept of 'religion' and 'education', the difficulty of separating the religious from the cultural or secular, as well as the confusion of RE with promoting the "'British way of life" (whatever that is)' (p. 27). Although pre-dating Grimmitt's famous 'learning about' and 'learning from', it discusses getting the right balance between 'the study of religion as an historical, social and psychological phenomenon' and 'the personal quest for meaning and purpose' (pp. 19–20), 'a dialogue with experience and a dialogue with living religions' (p. 43). Though focusing on 'religions', WP36 recommends the inclusion in RE of non-religious worldviews, without using that term, still a somewhat controversial suggestion today.

Changes to the Religious Landscape of the UK and Some Trends in Academic Study in the Last Five Decades

However, things have not stood still for the last five decades, in academic religious studies, in religious education or in the world around us. This can only be briefly outlined here. WP36 was written before the Iranian revolution, the fall of the Berlin wall, or 9/11/2001. Religion(s) seem to feature much more in the news media whilst simultaneously playing less

part in the claimed adherence, practice or experience of many in the Western world. Sociologists of religion, such as Linda Woodhead (2016), point to the changing religious landscape in the UK. There is increasing diversity, and familiarity with Christianity, though still the tradition with the most influence on British society, can no longer be assumed. From 2015, Woodhead tells us that those who call themselves 'non-religious', referred to as the 'nones', have tipped over the 50% mark. Similar situations are reported in other European countries, for example in Belgium (Franken 2016) or Finland (Nynäs 2018). Yet in contrast, or perhaps, as Nynäs argues, all part of the same change, some seem to be becoming more entrenched in their religious identities, and more conservative and even 'fundamentalist' forms of religion are attracting followers.

Increasingly people feel free to construct their own 'patchwork' worldviews, drawing upon a number of different traditions. This 'pick and mix' or 'bricolage' approach to religions/worldviews has been characterised by phrases such as 'patchwork religiosity' (Lähnemann 2008: 6); 'existentially interfaith' (Nesbitt 2011: 232); 'whateverism' (ter Avest et al. 2011: 88) or 'religion a la carte' (Franken 2016: 312). The knowledge explosion and communications technology (and perhaps 50 years of multi-faith RE) has made this more practically possible. There has been much discussion of whether there has been a 'spiritual revolution', a move from 'religion' to 'spirituality', where there is more stress on the individual and personal rather than external authorities, as well as debates about the meanings and utility of such terms (see e.g. Heelas 2002). Contemporary Paganism can be viewed as an example of a wider phenomenon which could be called a new paradigm of religiosity (see Cush and Robinson 2020). Here, the individual and her experience is the main authority. Several traditions are drawn upon (many Pagans e.g. talk about karma, and may include deities from different pantheons in their practice). There is not so much stress on creeds, doctrines, beliefs or metaphysical truth claims, and more stress on rituals, stories and mythology. There is a tendency to be the opposite of dogmatic, including in the ethical realm. Groups tend to be connected networks than institutions. The Sea of Faith

Network (see sofn.org.uk) talks about religion as a human creation, which might offend more traditional religious adherents, but within the new religiosity that is not necessarily so.

In academic Religious Studies there has been much more discussion about the very concepts of 'religion' and 'religions', an issue just hinted at in WP36 (p. 16), and a shift from phenomenology to ethnography among other methods (though WP36 does stress the need for encounter with real-life religion, mediated through resource materials if direct first-hand experience is not possible [p. 49]). Feminist, Queer and Postcolonial theories have questioned the concepts of religion and religions as constructions of dominant discourses as well as the methods of study used and the categories employed in analysis (see Cush and Robinson 2014 for a brief summary). The 'World Religions Paradigm' has been identified and much criticised as distorting the complex realities studied (see above), and in part blamed on RE in schools.

An important development is the debate around 'postsecularism'. The sharp division between what is 'religious' and what is 'secular' is becoming harder to maintain, but whether 'postsecularism' is the best term to describe what is happening is also contested. I tend to agree with Woodhead (2012: 7) that the term somewhat problematically suggests that 'religion' went away and now is back again, though have more sympathy with the suggestion of Bowie et al. (2012: 140) that 'postsecularism' describes 'a changing, complicating religious diversity and plurality, where new religious movements, new traditional religions, and contemporary secular sensibilities mix'. Richard Holloway came up with the description of 'non-binary' (in religion/non-religion as in other aspects of identity) for those who experience the problem of the religious/secular divide existentially (Holloway 2016). A useful discussion of how religious change, new religiosity, spirituality, postsecularity, and the influence of the new media are inter-related can be found in Nynäs (2018). He argues that 'neither the category of religion nor the concept of secularity provide sufficient tools for understanding the emerging complexity' (p. 62) which is 'how people combine spiritual and religious positions with secular values into authentic and meaningful subjective positions, and how these provide both public and private agencies' (p. 63).

The Commission on RE as a New 'Game-Changer' in English RE?

The Commission on RE was set up in 2016 by the REC to review the state of RE in England (only) and make recommendations for improvement, in a situation where several reports were noting that although some pupils were experiencing high quality RE, too many others were experiencing poor RE or even none at all, in spite of its compulsory legal status for all pupils not withdrawn by parents. The findings of the two-year investigation and the recommendations can be found in the Final Report (CoRE 2018) and an analysis of the main issues arising for an international audience can be found in Cush (2020). Might the Commission be viewed as marking a step-change in RE comparable to WP36? The report puts forward a new vision for RE which responds to the changes in society and developments in the relevant academic disciplines, some of which are outlined above.

One major recommendation is changing the name and focus of the subject to 'Religion and Worldviews'. This is not merely extending the subject content to include non-religious approaches to life, as suggested by WP36, Smart, and found in some classrooms, despite not being included by legislation. The Commission was not suggesting adding a series of non-religious 'isms' to a series of religious ones. It represents a move away from the World Religions Paradigm, and not towards a 'Global Worldviews Paradigm' to invent a name. In English schools from the mid-1980s RE the big six 'world religions' gradually solidified, and the Commission is attempting to move away from the presentation of monolithic traditions that do not reflect the sheer diversity within and interaction between them: 'worldviews are complex, diverse and plural' (CoRE 2018: 12). As well as reflecting a different understanding of religions, this move recognises that as the majority of young people no longer identify with institutional religions, it does not make sense to limit RE to the study of the same, which are increasingly not part of their experience even in the residual form of previous generations.

The new name has 'Religion' in the singular, in order to hint at the need for the subject to include the exploration of 'key concepts including "religion", "secularity", "spirituality" and "worldview"' (p. 12). The

Commission's understanding of 'worldview' is a broad one, covering both institutional worldviews in their complexity and diversity, newer forms of religiosity and non-religion, and the fluid personal world views of individuals. It thus recognises the academic debates about 'religion', 'religions', the 'world religions paradigm', the new forms of religiosity, the rise of the 'nones' and the difficulty of maintaining the religious/secular divide. Religions (plural) are included as worldviews. Some have suggested that the new name should be 'Worldview Studies' (Teece 2017, and for university level in the USA, Taves 2020), which would be an accurate description. However, the Commission decided to retain 'Religion', not out of conservatism, but to indicate the academic field of study to which this 'New new RE' relates. This may of course change. Meanwhile, the REC and TRS-UK (an association of Theology and Religious Studies university departments) are collaborating on a further in-depth exploration of the term 'Worldview'.

The Commission made ten further recommendations, most of which refer to the specific regulatory and organisational frameworks of the subject in England and to the need for improved teacher training, but the proposal of a National Entitlement for all pupils is of particular interest. The Entitlement is not framed in terms of specific content, but the crucial elements or big ideas which students need to explore in order to understand the complex, diverse and plural nature of worldviews. Teaching must focus on matters of central importance to worldviews; key concepts such as 'religion'; acknowledging diversity, change and interaction; the role of ritual, practices and the arts; questions of meaning raised by human experience; the impact of worldviews on individuals, societies and culture and vice-versa; and the many different ways in which religion and worldviews can be studied, including direct encounter with adherents (see CoRE 2018, pp. 12–13 for the statement in full).

Conclusion

The vision offered by the Commission looks forward to an RE which is both academically rigorous and personally inspiring. It responds to both the changing religious landscape and the developments in academic study

of religions and in RE research and teachers' experience in the past 50 years. In reframing the subject as 'Religion and Worldviews', in rejecting the 'World Religions Paradigm', in problematising the religious/secular divide, in being fully inclusive of a wider range of worldviews, in highlighting religions/worldviews as really lived and explored by ethnographers, recognising the new paradigm religiosity and including personal worldviews, it can perhaps claim to be the harbinger of a 'New new RE', and thus a step-change comparable with WP36. As with WP36, it may begin by raising questions, but also start to impact practice before bringing about any legislative change. It could also be seen as a development in the spirit of WP36, which as I have argued above, already contained the seeds of some of the plants which have grown in the new religious landscape.

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